

# Why Is So Much Redistribution In-Kind and Not in Cash? Evidence from a Survey Experiment

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**Abstract:** Economists often point to the superiority of cash transfers over in-kind assistance as a means of redistribution because recipients can choose how to use these resources. However, among the trillions of dollars of annual U.S. transfers, redistribution is mostly in-kind. We conducted a survey experiment to help explain why. We show that the general population overwhelmingly prefers in-kind redistribution (in the survey, a transfer that can be spent only on a bundle of “necessities”) to cash, largely for paternalistic reasons. This preference was common to a majority of virtually all segments of the general population, though not to a sample of educational elites. A persuasion treatment on the value of choice, while impactful, did not change this overall preference for in-kind. Below-poverty respondents preferred *receiving* cash. But, the general population was willing to support a larger in-kind than cash transfer, and below-poverty respondents appeared to prefer this larger in-kind transfer, suggesting that an in-kind transfer may be preferable to both recipients and the general population.

**Keywords:** redistribution, survey experiment, social economics, cash vs. in-kind, universal basic income, paternalism

**JEL Classification:** D91, D64, H53, I38

## I. Introduction

Economists often point to the benefits of cash transfers over in-kind assistance as a means of redistribution (Atkinson and Stiglitz 1976; Hylland and Zeckhauser 1979; Kaplow and Shavell 1994). Cash is seen as superior because recipients can choose how to spend their resources, thereby maximizing their own well-being. Yet, despite this oft-repeated maxim, a majority of transfers in the United States are in-kind, not in cash.<sup>1</sup> Every year, the U.S. federal government spends over \$1 trillion on in-kind assistance (USAspending 2021; Hembre 2018), including on Medicaid, food assistance, housing support, and public education—resource expenditures that could otherwise be

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<sup>1</sup> The U.S. spent 9.7 percent of GDP on public in-kind transfers in 2015, compared to 9.0 percent on public cash transfers (OECD 2019). Other OECD countries also spend large amounts in-kind. In total, OECD countries spent 7.4 percent of their combined GDP on in-kind redistribution in 2015, compared to 11.1 percent in cash.

transferred to individuals directly, in the form of cash payments. What drives this divergence between theory and reality?

The theoretical economic literature offers some potential answers. Some reasons to redistribute in-kind include market failures like asymmetric information (as in health care), good-specific externalities such as those from education (Coate et al. 1994), and improved targeting of low-income groups (Akerlof 1978; Nichols and Zeckhauser 1982).<sup>2</sup> Empirical evidence has emerged on these theories. For example, Lieber and Lockwood (2019) find that aid can be effectively targeted with in-kind Medicaid home care.<sup>3</sup>

A separate line of theoretical literature suggests that non-standard preferences, such as other-regarding preferences, could drive in-kind redistribution. People may believe that access to certain goods is a right (Besley 1988; Kelman 1986) or believe, paternalistically, that the poor should spend their money on particular goods or services (Musgrave 1959). Ultimately, the question may be whether society trusts recipients to make “good” choices, and what value people place on freedom of choice. These sorts of preferences may derive from personal and cultural attitudes about redistribution, rather than from rational market behaviors. However, there is little empirical evidence about these attitudes (Currie and Gahvari 2008).

To help fill this evidentiary void, we conducted a survey experiment to measure attitudes about cash versus in-kind redistribution and understand what underlies those attitudes. A survey is especially helpful in this context because it provides a way to help learn about attitudes that do not reveal themselves in market settings.

Respondents answered questions about their views in a concrete policy setting regarding a cash transfer versus a “necessities account,” a transfer that can be spent only on certain goods. This setup allows us to understand attitudes about how resources are used, thus putting aside issues of direct government production or provision of goods and services.<sup>4</sup> Although in principle the funds from the necessities account could be fungible with other expenses, empirical evidence strongly indicates that targeted transfers “stick” to their intended purpose, maintaining the distinction between the two programs (Beatty et al. 2014; Hastings and Shapiro 2018). The setup also reflects that much U.S. in-kind redistribution — like food stamps, school vouchers, and

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<sup>2</sup> Interest group politics (Simon 2012) and the Samaritan’s Dilemma (Buchanan 1975) may also partially explain in-kind transfers.

<sup>3</sup> Allcott et al. (2019) similarly find that the optimal sin tax on sugary drinks should be reduced to avoid targeting low-income individuals.

<sup>4</sup> This specific type of restricted cash transfers differs from the term “in-kind” as it is used in other areas of study, such as development economics, in which government provision of goods is often considered.

housing vouchers — is of a restricted cash variety.<sup>5</sup>

We recruited a large set of roughly demographically representative respondents, who provided reasoning for their decision-making through both free-form questions and multiple-response questions. Some respondents received one of three randomized treatments to gauge whether simple manipulations would be sufficient to change respondents' views.

We also surveyed two other groups. First, in a novel complement to a survey of general population attitudes, we surveyed Americans living below the poverty line to understand the value that potential aid recipients place on these same programs. Second, we surveyed Yale Law School students, as a proxy for a subset of educational elites, with the goal of understanding how this group's perspectives on cash versus in-kind redistribution might track or diverge from the perspectives of Americans generally.

We have three main results. First, respondents overwhelmingly (72 percent) preferred that the government adopt in-kind instead of cash redistribution. These preferences were largely driven by paternalistic reasoning; many respondents thought that recipients would spend cash assistance inappropriately. These views were common to a majority of virtually all segments of the general population, including those Americans living below the poverty line. Only a minority of respondents relied on reasoning based on economic ideas like externalities and efficient targeting, highlighting the importance of empirical research in producing accurate and nuanced understanding of the public's attitudes. By contrast, respondents in the Yale sample were much more likely to prefer cash redistribution, and this group relied on quite different reasoning as compared to the general population. This raises a cautionary note about elites consulting their own intuitions on these issues.

Second, explaining the basic economic efficiency argument for preferring cash over in-kind transfers had a large impact on respondents' choices, reducing the preference for in-kind by 12 percentage points. By contrast, informing participants about how much the poor spend on necessities had no impact on respondents' choices. None of the treatments, however, affected the overall results: A significant majority of respondents still preferred in-kind over cash redistribution regardless of the persuasion or information treatment.

Third, most (77 percent) below-poverty respondents preferred to receive cash when the values of the cash and in-kind programs were equal. The sizable minority (23 percent) who

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<sup>5</sup> Another possible challenge for an in-kind transfer of this variety is that recipients might sell their in-kind benefits for cash, a behavior sometimes documented in other benefits contexts. However, this type of fraud is rare. For example, fraud accounts for less than one percent of total Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits (Constable 2018).

preferred to receive assistance in-kind largely explained this preference by referencing the built-in self-control mechanism inherent in the in-kind program, which respondents in this group intended to use to prevent themselves from spending the money on unnecessary purchases. The presence of this sizable minority of program recipients who themselves think that they suffer from self-control problems may provide some grounding for paternalism in the general population. Overall, in part because of this minority, the average below-poverty respondent demanded only a modest (13 percent) premium for redistribution in-kind instead of in cash. Paired with data we collect that the median general population respondent is willing to support considerably (33 percent) more in-kind than cash redistribution, our results suggest that an in-kind program can offer a better outcome for both poor recipients and the general public.

At the end of the paper, we consider external and internal validity concerns. For example, we asked respondents how the outbreak of Covid-19 affected their views. Even using the most conservative estimate—that every respondent whose views were affected in some way by the pandemic actually changed their views regarding redistribution—most of the difference (52 percent) in support for in-kind and cash remains.

Though our main goal is to describe public attitudes, this work is also potentially valuable for a few other reasons. One reason is explanatory. The results help explain the policies that we see arising through the political process by exploring one input into that process: the social attitudes of voters (Caughey and Warshaw 2018; Kingdon 1995). In particular, strongly paternalistic and pro-in-kind attitudes may help explain why U.S. policies have tended to favor in-kind over cash redistribution.

Our work is also instructive. In showing that below-poverty respondents prefer the larger in-kind transfer that the general population is willing to provide to a smaller cash transfer, the results can help provide policy design guidance for those who wish to achieve more redistribution and do it in ways that the poor value. The “necessities account” form of our in-kind program, which allows quite flexible spending across necessities, may hold particular appeal. On the other hand, discussions about the political feasibility of a universal basic income—whatever its other merits—should be tempered by our results, which suggest a reluctance among the general population to support unrestricted cash transfers. Depending on one’s view of the legitimacy of the public’s redistributive preferences, our results may also hold normative weight for policy makers.

*Related Literature.* This paper relates to two literatures, in addition to the theoretical literature referenced above. First, it relates to empirical work exploring other aspects of social

preferences concerning redistribution. The literature includes work on the personal characteristics that correlate with support for redistribution (Alesina and Giuliano 2011; Luttmer and Singhal 2011; Margalit 2013), factors that influence the total amount of redistribution (Charité et al. 2016; Gilens 1996), and the elasticity of preferences for redistribution (Kuziemko et al. 2015). Social economics and survey experiment papers have similarly studied preferences regarding taxation (e.g., Stantcheva 2020; Weinzierl 2017). A political science literature has documented factors that correlate with popular support for various current social welfare programs (Cook and Barrett 1992). And sociologists have documented the correlation between national welfare regimes and redistribution (Esping-Andersen 1990; Martin and Prasad 2014).

Second, and more specifically related, is a literature that studies what drives in-kind redistribution. Hessami and Uebelmesser (2013) find, in a cross-country regression, that progressive-leaning governments globally are more likely to give in cash than conservative-leaning governments. Lehmann and Matarazzo (2019) find evidence from a natural case study of mayoral elections in Brazil that voters prefer in-kind to cash redistribution. Others have studied whether paternalism influences individual giving to charity (Gangadharan et al. 2018) and gift-giving in-kind (Batista et al. 2015; Waldfogel 1993). Cross-country comparisons of welfare systems have concluded that the United States as a whole differs from other rich nations in its high ratio of in-kind to cash benefits (Garfinkel et al. 2006).

This paper differs by studying policy preferences in a carefully controlled setting, in which all that differs between the cash and in-kind options is how transfers can be spent by recipients. It pairs the general public's preferences with the preferences of below-poverty recipients, as well as elites, regarding the same programs. It uses natural language processing techniques to help explain why the parties hold those preferences. And it collects detailed demographic information from respondents, allowing us to explore how preferences vary across the population.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. Section II describes the survey design. Section III presents the results. Section IV examines internal and external validity.

## **II. Survey Design**

To target different demographic groups and test the effects of three persuasion and information treatments, we created six versions of the survey. We distributed the survey through Respondi, a commercial survey company that specializes in producing high-quality responses

representative of their target populations through screening potential participants and repeated contact of individuals to complete various surveys.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to panel quality, we included features in the survey to ensure data quality.<sup>7</sup> Before beginning the survey, respondents saw a consent form that used language that invoked their social responsibility and explained that careless answers would be flagged. To ensure that participants understood the programs presented, we asked about support for each program individually and asked two comprehension questions before asking about which program respondents preferred. And we asked free-form questions before multiple-response questions to avoid biasing those free-form answers. We phrased questions about respondents' policy preferences to be able to verify that respondents were generally careful in their responses.<sup>8</sup> At the end of the survey, we also asked if respondents thought any of the questions were biased or confusing.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, though it had little impact on results, we dropped from our sample the 3 percent of respondents who completed the survey in under four minutes (the median respondent completed the survey in ten minutes).<sup>10</sup>

We review here the various versions of the survey.

### **A. Control Survey**

This section describes the control survey, which was the primary survey issued to respondents and the model on which the other five versions of the survey were based.<sup>11</sup> The full surveys are reproduced in Appendix A. We began by asking demographic information.<sup>12</sup> Then, to familiarize respondents with the possibilities for cash versus in-kind assistance to the poor, we asked about their support for a \$2,000 program distributing cash and a \$2,000 program that

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<sup>6</sup> Respondi worked with a U.S. partner to collect data. See <https://www.respondi.com/EN/access-panel>. Responses were largely high-quality, partly due to the fact that respondents have an incentive to carefully complete the survey to ensure that they are invited to participate in future panels. As one indication of high-quality responses, when we asked respondents why they preferred in-kind or cash, the average answer length of the free response among the general-population samples was a rather lengthy 22 words. See note 8 for other quality checks.

<sup>7</sup> Following Stantcheva (2020).

<sup>8</sup> Respondents were generally logical in their responses. Only 3 percent of both the control survey group and below-poverty survey group responded that they strongly disagreed with or strongly agreed with both of the following two statements: "We should take from the rich to give to the poor," and "The rich deserve to keep all the money they earn." And only 2 percent in the control survey expressed inconsistent views about in-kind and cash, either (1) "supporting" cash and not in-kind but "preferring" in-kind to cash or (2) "supporting" in-kind but not cash but "preferring" cash.

<sup>9</sup> Very few respondents said that questions were confusing or biased.

<sup>10</sup> Appendix Figure A1 has the distribution of time to complete the control survey, and Appendix Figure A2 has time to complete the below-poverty survey.

<sup>11</sup> The control survey can be accessed at [https://yalesurvey.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_eFEbpLcirsoZJOZ](https://yalesurvey.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eFEbpLcirsoZJOZ).

<sup>12</sup> We asked for demographic information at the beginning of the survey to screen out participants early, as respondents who did not qualify demographically were not paid.

distributed in-kind, randomizing which program was shown first. The cash program was described as follows:

Please consider the following program that the federal government is considering adopting permanently to help low-income Americans. The program would be funded by an across-the-board income-tax rate increase.	
<b>Benefit Offered</b>	Every year, each American below the poverty line receives \$2,000 in cash to spend on whatever they choose.
<b>Total Cost</b>	\$2,000 per year per American below the poverty line.

Respondents were asked whether they supported the government adopting this program.<sup>13</sup>

The in-kind program was posed identically as the above except that the “benefit offered” was \$2,000 in-kind rather than in cash. It was described as: “Every year, each American below the poverty line receives \$2,000, in a separate account, that can be used to pay for healthcare, housing, and food costs only.” So, the only difference was that one program offered unrestricted cash and the other program offered funds that could only be spent on three specific categories.

The next screen supposed that the government decided *not* to adopt the initially presented program, presented the other program, and asked respondents whether they supported it.

Both programs then appeared side-by-side, and two comprehension questions tested respondents’ understanding of how the benefits of each could be used. They were told whether they understood correctly.

Then, with the options again side-by-side, respondents were asked which of the two programs they preferred if they “had to choose for the government to adopt” one of the two options. This side-by-side question is the focus of our analysis.

By using a necessities account for the in-kind program, our results are most directly relevant for in-kind redistribution designed as restricted cash transfers. It is possible that support for unrestricted cash compared to, say, a government-sponsored public housing project, would differ from our results. However, the same attitudes about recipient spending are presumably present even in that case, making the results more generally applicable.

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<sup>13</sup> Some respondents might have been averse to an across-the-board income tax rate increase or wondered about the size of the tax increase. However, it is unclear a priori why these concerns would differentially affect respondents’ preferences for cash versus in-kind, and furthermore, the free-form responses revealed almost no concerns along these lines.

The contents of the necessities account (healthcare, food, and housing) were carefully curated. Each of these three goods is essential for maintaining an individual's wellbeing, but by focusing on three goods instead of just one, we nudged respondents to think about what would make the poor better off overall rather than simply better able to access one particular good. In addition, none of the goods selected are uniquely targeted toward children or families with children (such as elementary education) because including them could have introduced a confounding variable. Furthermore, we wanted to have a program that is somewhat familiar (like food stamps or a retirement account), but also distinct from what exists today; this differentiation helps make it clearer to participants that the program we ask about is intended to supplement other programs that already exist.

Having three goods and a modest, \$2,000 amount ensured that virtually all individuals would spend at least \$2,000 annually on these categories, even in the absence of the program, so that respondents would not be concerned about wasteful excessive spending on any certain necessity. A potential drawback to this approach is that basic economic theory suggests that the in-kind program would free up money that the recipient is already spending on these goods, making the in-kind program functionally equivalent to cash.

However, empirical evidence strongly indicates that recipients internalize the intended use of money labeled a particular way, rendering such programs “sticky.” Such results have been found with food stamps (Hastings and Shapiro 2018) and cash transfers labeled as being for winter fuel (Beatty et al. 2014). Budget labels even matter when they are self-imposed, as with “gas money” (Hastings and Shapiro 2013), or are imposed experimentally (Abeler and Marklein 2017). Given that the in-kind program we describe in the survey mandates spending on three particular categories, this “stickiness” likely applies here. Respondents' stated reasoning (discussed below) supports the idea that respondents thought that the money would stick. This all suggests that, while still allowing fungible spending, the “necessities account” option would likely affect overall spending behavior differently among recipients versus the cash option, and that respondents also assumed this.

Once respondents' preferences were established for either in-kind or cash, follow-up questions probed why respondents had this particular preference. Respondents first gave a free-form response explaining their choice. A multiple-response question then listed potential reasons that might explain their thinking; respondents were asked to choose as many as applied to them.

The survey then sought to find the largest program that respondents would support for each of cash and in-kind options to understand the extent to which respondents preferred one over the



other. Respondents who indicated a preference for in-kind assistance were first asked to fill in the blank in the following:

The **largest amount** I would support each American below the poverty line receiving in a separate account is \$\_\_\_\_\_. I might prefer less, but I would still support the program up to this amount. If the amount were any more than this, I would not support the program.

These respondents were then told that the government had chosen instead to adopt the cash program. They were asked to fill in the blank in a parallel sentence, which replaces “separate account” with “cash.” Respondents who preferred cash assistance were presented with the sentences in the opposite order.

Finally, respondents answered inquiries about their general policy preferences.

After conducting four pilots that allowed us to hone our questions and options for reasoning, we collected data from 1,029 control respondents from April 9 through April 21, 2020, simultaneously with the other surveys. We paid \$2.20 per response.<sup>14</sup> As Appendix Table A1 shows, respondents for the control survey were, by design, roughly representative of the U.S. population in terms of age, race, gender, income, political affiliation, and education. None of the categories had a statistically significant difference from population estimates, except for those with at least a college education, who were over-represented by four percentage points, and the “other” racial category, which were under-represented by 1.5 percentage points.

## **B. Persuasion and Information Treatment Surveys**

General population participants not randomized into the control survey were randomized into three different versions of the survey. These were identical to the control, except for the addition of persuasion and information treatments at the beginning of the survey.<sup>15</sup> Two persuasion treatments explored the malleability of respondents’ preferences. The “economics treatment” (N = 505) presented respondents with the economic logic that giving people cash allows them to choose how to spend the money, making them better off. This treatment presumed that respondents would not see the in-kind and cash options as fungible. The “rights” treatment (N = 519) encouraged participants to think about goods that many consider to be “rights.”

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<sup>14</sup> We were not told the exact payment each respondent received, but we were told that respondents are generally paid the same amount unless they are part of a “hard to reach” group, such as males aged 18 to 24 or the elderly.

<sup>15</sup> The economics prime can be accessed at [https://yalesurvey.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_a9jN12zHgKNn3bn](https://yalesurvey.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_a9jN12zHgKNn3bn). The rights prime can be accessed at [https://yalesurvey.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_3mXCiamE7WBhPwh](https://yalesurvey.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3mXCiamE7WBhPwh). The spending prime can be accessed at [https://yalesurvey.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_eUShmWMT1oUhG29](https://yalesurvey.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eUShmWMT1oUhG29).

The third treatment was meant to test for misinformation as a source of the general population's preferences. This "poor spending treatment" (N = 527) informed respondents that the poor spend a very large share of their income on necessities (85 percent).<sup>16</sup> We hypothesized that this treatment would increase support for cash, since respondents would know that the money would largely be spent on necessities regardless. If this information treatment changed respondents' views, the prevalence of in-kind redistribution could be at least partially attributable to misinformation among the general population regarding spending habits among the poor.

Like the control, treatment survey respondents were representative of the U.S. population (Appendix Table A1). None of the categories had a statistically significant difference from U.S. population estimates or from the control sample.<sup>17</sup>

### **C. Below-Poverty Survey**

In addition to uncovering preferences of the general population for *providing* transfers, we collected responses from respondents who would actually likely benefit from such transfers to understand preferences for *receiving* the transfers. Our sample was, by design, broadly demographically representative of the below-poverty U.S. population — in particular, those who were not full-time students and who would meet federal poverty guidelines for 2020,<sup>18</sup> as defined by a combination of income and household size (ASPE 2020). None of our demographic categories had a statistically significant difference from estimates of the below-poverty U.S. population, with the exception of those who are at least 65 years old, who were under-represented by five percentage points (Appendix Table A2). For this sample, we paid \$3.00 per respondent. Details of how this survey differed from the other surveys are discussed alongside the below-poverty results below.

Respondents for the below-poverty survey overwhelmingly (70 percent) received government assistance targeted toward the poor. In particular, 53 percent of respondents below the poverty line reported being Medicaid recipients, 44 percent received food assistance, 13 percent lived in public housing, and 10 percent were housing voucher recipients.

### **D. Yale Law Student Survey**

The final version of the survey was meant to target those who think like educational elites, to help suggest the extent to which academics, policy analysts, and other similar groups can rely on their own preferences or reasoning on these issues as a stand-in for general population preferences. We approximated this target group by surveying students from Yale Law School.

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<sup>16</sup> The data source is the Consumer Expenditure Survey, as analyzed by Goldstein and Vo (2012).

<sup>17</sup> Results are available upon request for statistical comparisons with the control sample.

<sup>18</sup> The below-poverty survey is available at [https://yalesurvey.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_dgpCnkScZEWJTDv](https://yalesurvey.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_dgpCnkScZEWJTDv).

Yale is recognized as a leading law school (Ward 2019), and it is the top producer of legal academics (Lempert 2020). A large number of its graduates go on to work on policy issues, broadly construed;<sup>19</sup> Yale Law graduates make up nearly a quarter of President Biden’s senior staff (Han and Rosen 2021). Of course, the responses from Yale Law students are unlikely to be fully generalizable.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the results may be meaningful in suggesting important differences in attitudes between elite groups and the population as a whole.

The Yale Law student survey was identical to the control survey, except that students were asked for their parents’ income and household size rather than their own.<sup>21</sup> Student responses were collected via an email sent to the entire student body, and students were offered the chance to win one of ten \$25 gift cards. In all, 184 students, just under one-third of the student body, completed the survey. Appendix Table A1 shows the demographics of the Yale student body. Yale students are younger, more well-educated, and come from wealthier families than the general population. Although only 30 percent of the general population have incomes over \$100,000, 72 percent of Yale respondents’ parents have incomes over \$100,000.

### **III. Results**

#### **A. General Population Preferences**

Surveys of the general population yielded three main results. First, there is a much stronger preference for in-kind than cash assistance among the general population, and this pattern persists across all demographic categories. Second, paternalism appears to be the key driver of the preference for in-kind. And third, the treatment explaining the economic logic of giving cash was the only treatment that significantly affected respondents’ choices.

##### **1. Preference for In-Kind Assistance – Control Survey**

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<sup>19</sup> Since the school began collecting information about Yale Law alumni careers ten years after graduation, the percent of alumni who indicate that they work for the government has been as high as 24 percent and has never dipped below 10 percent. <https://law.yale.edu/student-life/career-development/employment-data/10th-year-career-development-survey>. There are currently six sitting members Congress who hold degrees from Yale Law. <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/us-law-week/insight-law-school-popular-for-congress-with-harvard-georgetown-topping-list>. Two Yale Law graduates, Gerald Ford and Bill Clinton, went on to become presidents of the United States. <https://news.yale.edu/2009/03/27/yale-alumni-us-politics>.

<sup>20</sup> First, this cohort is limited to a particular age range that does not represent other elites. Second, while their views likely reflect the views of current elites, current law students may be more properly considered “potential future members” of the elite, rather than current members of such an elite themselves. Finally, there are, of course, many pathways to the educational and policy elite that do not involve law school. Graduate from business schools, PhD programs, and others who take non-academic routes may all have views that differ from those expressed by Yale Law students.

<sup>21</sup> The survey is available at [https://yalesurvey.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_5bveda23fVUD1e1](https://yalesurvey.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5bveda23fVUD1e1).

Our first key result is that the general population strongly prefers the program that redistributes in-kind rather than in cash. When choosing between the two, 72 percent of respondents preferred the in-kind option (Figure 1).<sup>22</sup> Much of what follows will try to unpack this finding.

This strong preference for in-kind held across demographic and ideological lines, including age, race, education, gender, income, political ideology, and political party affiliation (Table 1).<sup>23</sup> And the differences across demographic groups were not very large. The largest differences between demographic groups were a 16 percentage point difference ( $p < 0.01$ ) between the percent of conservatives (20 percent) and liberals (36 percent) who preferred the cash program, and a 15 percentage point difference ( $p < 0.01$ ) between whites (25 percent) and Blacks (40 percent). But even liberals and Blacks still overwhelmingly preferred the in-kind option. Furthermore, younger, Democratic, and male respondents, as well as those with an income under \$100,000 per year, were more likely to favor cash redistribution (all  $p < 0.01$ , except for sex, for which  $p < 0.05$ ).<sup>24</sup> But again, for all of these demographic groups, the in-kind program remained by far the more popular option. Appendix Figure A3 shows this relationship with the full income distribution. Despite a clear relationship with income, all income groups but the very poorest (those earning less than \$13,000 per year) prefer in-kind. Among those in the top income bracket, who are likely the most politically influential (Gilens 2014), 87 percent preferred the in-kind program.

Respondents' perception about how the poor spend their money also correlated with program preference, as shown in Figure 2.<sup>25</sup> Among respondents who thought that poor Americans would spend under 40 percent of a cash transfer on necessities, only about 10 percent preferred cash redistribution. After this roughly flat portion, which could result from censoring as the support for cash approaches 0 percent, the share preferring cash then increases roughly linearly. Among respondents who thought that the poor spend over 90 percent of their income on necessities, about 40 percent preferred cash — a considerable increase, though still with a large majority preferring in-kind.<sup>26</sup>

## 2. Reasoning Among Those Who Preferred In-Kind Transfers

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<sup>22</sup> The results on the questions asking about support for in-kind and cash sequentially are qualitatively similar to the head-to-head results and are discussed in Appendix C.

<sup>23</sup> There was no relationship between voting behavior and respondent preference.

<sup>24</sup> There is not a statistically significant difference for education.

<sup>25</sup> Note that the relationship is quite similar in the poor spending treatment. Results available upon request.

<sup>26</sup> Correlations with respondents' policy preferences are shown in Appendix Table A10 and discussed in Appendix D.

Respondents who preferred the in-kind program largely indicated they were driven by paternalism. This is apparent first through the multiple-response question. Figure 3.a shows what respondents selected when presented with multiple-response options to explain what drove their program preference. Of those who preferred in-kind, 72 percent of respondents gave paternalism as a reason: they agreed that the in-kind program “will make sure poor people spend the money only on things that will make them better off.”<sup>27</sup> Rights drove 60 percent of respondents, who agreed that “at least one of the goods (healthcare, housing, food) is a right to which everyone should have access.” The shares listing paternalism and rights are statistically different at the 1 percent confidence level.

As Table 2 summarizes, a large share (44 percent) of respondents chose both paternalism and rights, significantly more than chose each of paternalism (28 percent) or rights (16 percent) alone or neither of those two options (12 percent).<sup>28</sup> Although these positions may appear incongruous to some — paternalism diminishes the agency of the poor while increased protection of rights increases their agency — this incongruous overlap is commonly noted among human rights theorists (Gourevitch 2009; Sadurski 2004).<sup>29</sup> Here, it could be that rights, which impose obligations on others, also obligate the individual to use funds in ways consistent with those rights.

Other reasons were less popular. Under half (42 percent) indicated a belief that the in-kind program would better target the poor, and only 29 percent considered potential positive externalities of the in-kind program. Relatively few (32 percent) respondents chose the in-kind program for others because they would have chosen in-kind for themselves. We call this “reciprocity,” though it is only a partial conception, since it does not also capture the idea that the respondent might wish that *others* would choose the program for her if the situation were reversed.<sup>30</sup> Only 20 percent chose in-kind because they thought the poor would prefer this option. Political feasibility, which some respondents may have assumed away as a concern, was the least

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<sup>27</sup> Paternalistic reasoning was common even among those who thought that the poor would spend at least 90 percent of a cash transfer on necessities: 58 percent selected this option.

<sup>28</sup> The prosociality literature, including Batson et al.’s (2015) empathy-altruism hypothesis, might describe both the paternalistic reasoning and the rights-related reasoning as evidence of empathic concern among the general public.

<sup>29</sup> Others may not find this overlap incongruous at all. For example, a parent may believe that their child has a right to have certain basic needs met and that the parent has a responsibility to meet those needs. And the child’s right to clothing, for example, does not preclude the parent from insisting that this clothing must include a winter coat and boots, if the climate calls for it.

<sup>30</sup> In particular, we asked respondents whether their choice was driven by the idea that, “If the situation were reversed, I would choose this program for myself.” However, another idea of reciprocity would reflect agreement with: “If the situation were reversed, I would have others choose this program for me.” In this alternative formulation, the line between paternalism and reciprocity is quite fuzzy, since respondents might wish for others to be paternalistic *to them*. This alternative prompt may have garnered more support by tapping into paternalistic impulses. So our measure of reciprocity might underestimate the appeal of a more general notion of reciprocity.

popular choice among the general population, with only 18 percent of respondents indicating it as a reason. The low popularity of reasons based on standard preferences, like externalities and targeting, is worth emphasizing because it highlights the importance of having an accurate and nuanced understanding of the public’s attitudes about redistribution.

The emphasis on paternalism was similarly apparent in the free-form responses. Although largely sympathetic to the poor’s needs, respondents were concerned that recipients would spend the money on “alcohol, drugs, [or a] new tv;” on “cigarettes or gambling;” or on a “weekend in Vegas.” Respondents thought people in need should be “protect[ed] . . . from their own poor decisions” and “guided on what to do.” As one respondent put it, “If you are below the poverty line, you are probably there because you cannot handle money well. Handing you free money would be irresponsible.” Otherwise, according to another, the money might “go to the dope man.”

Textual analysis of respondents’ word choice underscores this strong pattern of paternalistic answers. This analysis ignores common words with no relevant meaning, such as “and,” “to,” and “I,” and lemmatizes the remaining words (for example, by converting “is” to “be,” or “drugs” into “drug”). Figure 4.a presents the most common two-word phrases, or “bigrams,” for those who preferred in-kind. Larger font size, proximity to the center of the image, and colors closer to the blue end of the color spectrum indicate a higher frequency of use. This analysis suggests that respondents’ preferences for in-kind were motivated by concerns that aid recipients would waste taxpayer money on non-essential purchases. The most common phrases largely related to spending or behavioral outcomes that respondents feared might result from unrestricted access to cash (e.g., “drug alcohol,” “whatever want,” “unnecessary item”) as well as areas that respondents thought merited spending (e.g., “basic need,” “real need,” “healthcare house”).

Comparing the words used by respondents preferring each program yields similar insights. Table 3 shows the 25 most distinctive words for each of in-kind and cash, ranked by the largest (in absolute value) t-statistics associated with the coefficient resulting from regressing the presence of each word on an indicator for an individual’s program preference.<sup>31</sup> Again, concerns over specific purchases featured prominently (e.g., “drug,” “frivolous,” and “cigarette,” or even “stuff,” which implies excess or low utility), as did respondents’ notions of “correct” recipient behavior (e.g., “basic,” “necessary,” “responsible”).<sup>32</sup> Verbs emphasizing an auditing function — such as “ensure,” “sure” (as in “make sure,” a common bigram in Figure 4.a), and “see” — were also more

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<sup>31</sup> These are the t-statistics on  $\beta_j$  for each word  $j$  in the regression  $1(\text{word}_j)_i = \alpha + \beta_j \cdot 1(\text{cash})_i + \varepsilon_i$ .

<sup>32</sup> These results conform with research by Hagerty and Barasz (2020), who suggest that people prefer to allocate only “necessary” items to poorer recipients.

common among people preferring in-kind than people preferring cash. And respondents' view of themselves as stakeholders in the program design was suggested by the prominence of "taxpayer" among those preferring in-kind.

Of course, "paternalism" is not a monolithic concept. In our multiple-response options, we offered a specific meaning of paternalism: Deciding to make choices on behalf of poor people out of a concern that the poor will not spend money "on things that will make them better off" — that is, a decision driven by the perceived well-being of the poor. But affiliated reasons may also be at play. For example, concern about "taxpayer" money is less clearly about the well-being of recipients and may be more about the appropriate use of government funds. This language could reflect a desire for taxpayer control, which has been documented in the context of the ultra-wealthy setting up charitable trusts (Fisch et al. 1974). Nevertheless, it is notable that, of the respondents who list "tax" or "taxpayer," 78 percent check the box on well-being-based paternalism. A fruitful area for future research is assessing the importance of these other paternalistic reasonings, beyond the well-being-based paternalism this survey finds.<sup>33</sup>

Although the general patterns just described hold among all groups, reasoning did vary by political views and race (Appendix Tables A3 and A4). Although liberals were roughly equally as likely as their conservative counterparts to prefer in-kind for paternalistic reasons, liberal respondents were over 30 percentage points ( $p < 0.01$ ) more likely to indicate that they thought that the goods in question were rights — nearly 80 percent of liberal respondents preferring in-kind thought the goods were rights. Results are similar, though less stark, for race. Black and white respondents were equally likely to list paternalism as a reason, but Blacks were 17 percentage points more likely to list rights than whites.

Finally, respondents' free-form responses suggest that they believe that the in-kind account will be spent largely on the targeted necessities. Virtually none of the respondents mentioned fungibility, whereas reasonings such as paternalism and rights that presumed that the money would stick in the stated categories were overwhelmingly mentioned. This all suggests that respondents assumed that in-kind assistance would affect spending behavior differently than cash assistance.

### 3. Reasoning Among Those Who Preferred Cash Transfers

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<sup>33</sup> Also notable are reasons that respondents did *not* give for their preferences. Only a handful of respondents gave reasons that had racial overtones. For example, one white respondent chose the in-kind option because he was concerned that cash might be spent on, among other things, "hair weaves," a hairstyle most commonly worn by Black women. Three other respondents were concerned that cash would go to support "illegals." Of course, this lack of overt racism does not mean that race did not factor into respondents' decisions — prior research suggests that race almost certainly impacts respondents' choices (Shaw 2009) — but this was rarely a stated reason for participants' preferences.

Respondents who preferred the cash option were largely driven by concerns for individual freedom, as shown in Figure 3.b. The belief that “each individual should be free to choose how to use their own resources” contributed to 74 percent of respondents’ preference for cash. There was also an anti-paternalistic bent, with 55 percent answering that the cash program “will allow poor people to spend money on the things that will make them the best off.” Compared to the respondents who chose in-kind, those who chose cash were more likely to believe this was what the poor would prefer (41 percent, compared to 20 percent). And 37 percent said that they chose cash because they themselves would prefer this option if they were the beneficiary. Only 24 percent of this group was influenced by possible externalities of the program, and only 21 percent preferred the cash program for its probable lower administrative costs. Again, political feasibility was the least popular reason, with only 17 percent of respondents selecting this option.

The free-form responses highlighted some of these trends. Values relating to individual freedom were particularly salient. One respondent stated that “freedom is the defining characteristic of a democracy.” Others balked at what they perceived as the paternalism of the in-kind option, noting that “people deserve more dignity than limiting what they can buy with money given to them.” One respondent rejected the idea of “putting strings on things just because they are for ‘poor people,’” while another thought the limits of the in-kind program made it “too close to a shaming or disciplinary technique.” Another wrote, “Most people under the poverty level don’t just go wasting money on designer handbags. . . . Many people tend to act like people below the poverty level just want to spend [money] on steak and lobster, when they just want to live.” A number of below-poverty respondents had a similar anti-paternalistic reaction, with one noting, “I’m [in] that group and I don’t want to be told how to spend my money.” Finally, the flexible nature of a cash transfer drove many responses, as exemplified by one respondent who noted, “Things that people need do not always fit into a rigid category.”

Textual analysis again highlights the differences between those who chose in-kind and cash. Figure 4.b, a word cloud of the most common bigrams among this group, shows respondents’ emphasis on freedom and anti-paternalism. The most common bigram by far, “may need,” suggests that respondents both consider themselves unable to predict recipients’ financial situations and also believe that recipients are likely to use the money wisely.

Table 3 reinforces this impression. The 25 words most distinctive of respondents who preferred cash compared to in-kind revolve around choice and the freedom to pay for necessities not covered by the in-kind option. Respondents often pointed to examples of such necessities (e.g., “clothe,” “school,” “car”). They also used words that suggest the unpredictability of each



recipient's needs, such as "may," "flexibility," "sometimes," and "maybe," significantly more often than those preferring in-kind. People preferring cash seem to picture recipients' spending more generously (e.g., "bill," "need") and have more overall regard for recipients' autonomy (e.g., "freedom," "choice," "decide") than those preferring in-kind.

Finally, there were no major differences between the reasons liberal and conservative respondents gave for preferring cash (Appendix Tables A3 and A4). The only significant variation was that liberal respondents were slightly more likely to prefer cash out of a concern for administrative costs, though this concern was not top of mind for either group.

#### 4. Effects of Treatments

All three treatments left considerable majorities preferring in-kind, suggesting durability in the in-kind preference. At the same time, some respondents are persuadable: the economics treatment significantly increased preference for cash. Informing respondents that the poor overwhelmingly spend their money on necessities had little effect on preferences, as did the rights treatment. Table 4 shows the treatment effects, with the control means at the bottom of the table.

The economics treatment,<sup>34</sup> in which we tried to persuade respondents about the value of choice, increased the preference for cash by 12 percentage points (Column (1),  $p < 0.01$ ), compared to a control cash preference of 28 percent.<sup>35</sup> However, even after a strong prompt with a

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<sup>34</sup> These participants were presented with the following:

Imagine that Alice's job pays minimum wage. She is happy living in a small apartment and cooking inexpensive foods at home, and she has few healthcare expenses. But her commute to work by bus takes two hours round-trip. She cannot afford a car, which would considerably shorten her commute.

Now imagine that the government decides to provide support to low-income Americans like Alice, but only to help them afford housing, food, or healthcare. Though she may rent a bigger apartment and spend more on food with the support, Alice will not benefit very much from this help. She is already happy with her apartment, food, and healthcare.

Instead, what Alice really needs is money to buy a car. If the government had decided to provide cash to low-income Americans, Alice could have bought a car, the thing that would have most improved her situation.

The central idea is that individual people know what is best for themselves and are in the best position to make financial choices that affect their own lives.

<sup>35</sup> This treatment could raise the concern that respondents were primed about the non-fungibility of in-kind transfers. However, there is no evidence in respondents' free-form responses that the economics treatment influenced their thinking in this way. Rather, it appears that people tend to assume non-fungibility across the treatments. For example, across the control and economics treatments, only 6 participants use variants of "freeing up" (the best indicator of fungibility we can find), and 4 of those are actually in the economics treatment, which has half the sample size. (No one outside of the Yale sample uses "fungibility" itself.) This is in line with the literature described in Section II.A that suggests that individuals do not tend to treat money as fungible (e.g., Abeler and Marklein 2017).

sympathetic individual, the preference for cash remained low, at about 40 percent.<sup>36</sup>

We also produced median regressions of the impact of the treatment on the largest amount supported for cash (Column (4) and in-kind (Column (5)). We produced median regressions both because median political support holds most significance in the context of this paper and to reduce the influence of outliers. The economics treatment increased the median largest amount support for cash by \$500 ( $p < 0.01$ ). This is a large increase — of one-third — off a base of \$1,500 in the control. The economics treatment also increased the percent of the poor that respondents thought would prefer cash by 3 percentage points (Column (2),  $p < 0.10$ ). There was no impact on the amount of a cash program that respondents believed the poor spend on necessities (Column (3)).<sup>37</sup>

Respondents exposed to the economics treatment gave considerably different reasoning than respondents in the control sample, in ways consistent with considering the value of choice and becoming less paternalistic. These impacts are shown in Table 5 (for in-kind) and Table 6 (for cash).<sup>38</sup> Respondents in this treatment who nonetheless preferred in-kind were 7 percentage points less likely to choose paternalism as a motivation. They were also 6 percentage points less likely to say that they chose in-kind for reciprocity reasons and 5 percentage points less likely to do so because they thought the in-kind program would make society better off. Respondents who were shown this treatment and chose the cash option were much more likely to give anti-paternalism and reciprocity reasons, by 13 and 20 percentage points, respectively, and somewhat less likely to include political feasibility as a reason.<sup>39</sup>

The significant impact of the economics treatment on the preference for in-kind, along with the changes in reasoning, suggest that control participants had not fully thought through the benefits of being able to flexibly choose how to spend funds. Evidence elsewhere shows that individuals are more likely to change their minds if presented with reasoning that affirms values they already hold (Kahan 2010). The treatment might have been persuasive in part because its implicit framing of the cash program as prioritizing individual freedom, flexibility, and adaptability may have appealed to values that are key for many Americans (Kohls 1984).

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<sup>36</sup> Although we did not administer the economics treatment to the purely below-poverty sample, there is no evidence that respondents in our economics treatment who were below the poverty line were disproportionately impacted by the treatment (Appendix Table A5).

<sup>37</sup> These economics treatment results were similar after adding demographic controls, as shown in Appendix Table A6, though the increase in median support for cash was more modest.

<sup>38</sup> Of course, especially for the economics treatment, there may be differential selection into the in-kind and cash samples versus the control.

<sup>39</sup> Results on reasoning with demographic covariates, presented in Appendix Tables A7 and A8, were very similar to results with no covariates.

The treatment informing participants how the poor spend their money had little impact, with no statistically significant impact on the preference for cash.<sup>40</sup> It also did not affect the share of a cash program that respondents thought the poor would spend on necessities (estimated impact is 0, SE = 1.38), staying at the 62 percent found in the control, despite the prompt explaining that the poorest Americans spend 85 percent of their income on necessities. The support for the largest amount of cash also declined by \$500, though controls eliminated the effect (Appendix Table A6). The treatment did not have a significant effect on other variables.

The spending information treatment's only impact on reasoning was among those who chose in-kind, who were 7 percentage points less likely to choose reciprocity. In other words, some did seem convinced that they would not want this option for themselves.

One interpretation for why this information treatment has little effect comes from the finding that, once a person has developed an entrenched belief, simply providing contrary information often fails to change opinions, particularly if the information contradicts an idea with a strong cultural valence (Kahan 2010). People instead tend to be intrinsically motivated to evaluate evidence in ways that bolster their own prior beliefs (Mercier and Sperber 2017), helping explain why simply providing information about how much the poor tend to spend on necessities did not affect outcomes.

Another interpretation is that these results may indicate some intuitive reasoning among respondents about the difference between marginal and average allocation. Respondents may not have understood how many of these poor households have consumption that exceeds earnings today, as their current consumption comes in significant part out of government transfers; if they did understand this, respondents might have been more sympathetic to further cash transfers, since low-income people might appear to already be spending transfers “wisely.” Whether they were thinking about existing government transfers or not, the knowledge that a poor person typically spends 15 percent of their budget on non-necessary items might suggest to respondents that, at the margin, poor individuals would spend extra resources largely on non-necessary items because their needs are taken care of with resources they already have, especially since they are already spending a considerable amount on non-necessary items. But, if so, this belief is likely unfounded. Recent evidence suggests that cash transfers do not increase expenditures on alcohol and tobacco (Evans

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<sup>40</sup> These participants were presented with the following:

According to government surveys, the poorest Americans spend about 85% of their income on housing, transportation, food at home, clothing, utilities, healthcare, and education. By comparison, the wealthiest Americans spend about 65% of their income on these same categories. “The wealthiest Americans” refers to households with incomes above \$150,000, which is a little above the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile of the income distribution. See Table A-2 in DeNavas-Walt et al. (2013).

and Popova 2017) or recreation (West et al. 2020). And, in our survey, the poor themselves said that they would spend 77 percent of a cash transfer on necessities.

The rights treatment caused no statistically significant impacts in Table 4.<sup>41</sup> And it had almost no effect on reasoning: none for respondents who preferred the in-kind program, and — among those who preferred cash — it just increased the share who thought that it would help society (by 9 percentage points). This lack of impact could be because people had already thought about rights or because respondents might not have been accustomed to thinking in these terms. For example, in the free form responses, almost no respondents (only about 1 percent) used the words “right” or “rights.” In addition, individuals may have believed that justice demands that the government provide necessities to its citizens for the sake of maintaining its population’s dignity, but they may not have believed that access to these necessities is a right. In addition, with support for the in-kind program already so high, there were fewer people to persuade to support in-kind and thus less scope for an impact.

### **B. Preferences of the Below-Poverty Sample**

We turn now to the below-poverty sample and begin by describing the ways in which this survey’s questions differed from those asked of the general population. Respondents were presented with the same two programs, except that respondents were asked to consider themselves as recipients, with the programs presented as “a separate account that I can spend” only on the three categories or cash “to spend however I choose.” Respondents were told: “Please assume that **you will personally benefit** from either program.” Respondents were then asked which of the program benefits they would prefer to receive personally. As with the control survey, respondents were asked to give a free-form response explaining their choice and were asked to indicate which, if any, among a number of offered reasons explained their reasoning.

We also sought to find respondents’ indifference point between the cash and in-kind options. Respondents who indicated a preference for in-kind assistance were asked to fill in the blank in the following sentence: “I would need \$\_\_\_\_\_ in **cash** to be as satisfied with the cash

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<sup>41</sup> These participants were presented with the following:

People generally agree that there are certain rights to which everyone is entitled, no matter how rich or poor they might be. Some examples include the right to housing, the right to food, and the right to healthcare. People cannot be denied these rights simply because of their financial situation.

For example, imagine that Alice is poor. Just because Alice is poor does not mean that she should have to live in substandard housing, go hungry, or have diseases go untreated. Housing, food, and healthcare are rights that do not depend on income, and the government should help make sure that everyone has access to these goods.

program as I would have been with \$2,000 in a separate account.” Respondents who indicated a preference for cash were asked to fill in the blank in the parallel sentence for in-kind, with “cash” and “separate program” reversed.

The below-poverty survey yielded results that are almost exactly opposite those of the general population. While 72 percent of the general population preferred that the in-kind program be adopted, 77 percent of the below-poverty sample preferred to receive the cash benefits, as shown in Figure 5. At the same time, 23 percent of below-poverty survey respondents preferred in-kind. To help consider the extent to which respondents answered the question as recipients rather than just giving their general policy preferences, we compared the policy preferences of below-poverty respondents in the control survey with the preferences for receiving the program themselves in the below-poverty survey. In the control survey, 58 percent of below-poverty respondents preferred cash,<sup>42</sup> considerably lower than the 77 percent as recipients, suggesting that respondents did understand the questions differently.

Reasoning among the below-poverty respondents who preferred cash was quite similar to the reasoning among the general population who preferred cash, as shown in Figure 6.b. In the below-poverty survey, 74 percent of those preferring cash selected from among the multiple-response options, “I should be free to choose how I use my resources.” This corresponds exactly to the 74 percent of the general population who also emphasized the importance of individual freedom (Figure 3.b). Anti-paternalism was the second most common choice in the below-poverty survey, with 58 percent selecting the option “I am in the best position to know what things will make me better off.” The other options of making society better off (21 percent), reciprocity (12 percent), administrative costs (11 percent), and political feasibility (9 percent) resonated with relatively few respondents. This suggests that a desire for autonomy and independence from government or outside interference were the primary drivers of respondents’ choice in selecting the cash option.

Although the cash option was by far the more popular choice in the below-poverty survey, nearly a quarter (23 percent) of respondents opted for in-kind (Figure 5). The presence of this sizable minority may provide some grounding for paternalism in the general population. Table 7.a shows that respondents aged under 35 and respondents who identify as Latino were significantly more likely to choose the in-kind option.

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<sup>42</sup> There were 92 respondents in the control survey who are living below the poverty line. We define income as the midpoint of income categories. This may induce some mismeasurement, but the amount would be small because the income categories are narrow and, in any case, the vast majority of below-poverty respondents indicated incomes in the lowest bracket, which automatically places these respondents below the poverty line.

Figure 8.a shows the reasoning among those who chose in-kind. The most popular reason for people who chose the in-kind program, at 61 percent, was a desire for a self-control mechanism: that “having rules about how I can spend the money would help me make better financial choices.” This is analogous to the most chosen reason in the general survey, paternalism. In addition, 52 percent chose that the spending categories are rights. The other options of making society better off (27 percent), political feasibility (17 percent), and reciprocity (13 percent) were less common.

The free-form question supports the interpretation that below-poverty respondents who prefer in-kind often do so out of a desire for a self-control mechanism. One respondent wrote, “I would prefer this because I know that I can only spend the money on necessary things. This way I won’t have to worry about impulse buying.” Another thought the in-kind program would “help keep me from spending money on things we don’t really need.” Yet another acknowledged that “it would be really tempting to spend the money on clothes or luxuries” and preferred the restrictions imposed by the in-kind program to ensure that the money was instead “spent on necessities.”<sup>43</sup>

Table 7.b shows the share of the below-poverty sample that not only preferred the in-kind option but also chose this program as a self-control mechanism. Those younger than 35 and those who identify as Black or Latino were significantly more likely to prefer the in-kind program for this reason. Though even in these subcategories fairly few people expressed a desire for a self-control mechanism, these results suggest that, to the extent that in-kind programs are used, they may be most welcomed among the young, who have the least experience making financial decisions.

### **C. Comparing Preferences Between the General Population and the Below-Poverty Sample**

We can now compare the preferences of the general population with those in the separate survey of below-poverty potential recipients. Recall that we asked the general population what the largest amount is that they would be willing to provide to the poor in-kind and in cash, and we asked the below-poverty sample how much they would need in their dispreferred form of redistribution (typically in-kind) to be indifferent with their preferred kind (typically cash). These types of comparisons have long been used in economics when good alternatives are not available (e.g., Feldstein and Poterba 1984). Although the analysis should be taken with a large grain of salt,

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<sup>43</sup> The reasons that respondents did *not* give are also interesting. The free response section did not indicate that any of the respondents thought the in-kind program would be better for their children, nor did they say they chose the in-kind option out of a desire to avoid having to transfer cash to family members and friends.

there seems to be signal in the noise: magnitudes are sensible, and answers correlate with those given elsewhere in the survey.<sup>44</sup>

When we asked the general population about the largest amount of redistribution they would support under the in-kind program, respondents gave a mean answer of \$2,373. For the cash program, that answer dropped to \$1,564, a difference of \$809.<sup>45</sup> Respondents in the general population were thus, on average, willing to spend 52 percent more on an in-kind program than on a cash program.<sup>46</sup>

The average ratio between respondents' willingness to provide in-kind versus cash at various income brackets is presented in Figure 7 (shown in light blue circles). As respondent income increased, so did the ratio of willingness to provide in-kind versus cash; the average respondent in each household income bin below \$50,000 was willing to provide between 23 percent and 48 percent more on an in-kind program than on a cash program, while respondents with income over \$200,000 were on average willing to provide 85 percent more on an in-kind program.

This calculation can also be done using the median response, which could matter more given that this is likely closer to the view of the median voter (Meltzer and Richard 1981). General population respondents gave a median answer of \$2,000 for the maximum amount they would support for the in-kind program. For cash, that answer dropped to \$1,500. So, the median voting member of the general population was willing to redistribute one-third more in-kind.

The question then becomes: Would people below the poverty line prefer \$2,000 in-kind instead of \$1,500 in cash — in other words, a program that is one-third larger, but in-kind instead of in cash? Among the 77 percent of respondents in the below-poverty survey who preferred the cash option, respondents were, on average, willing to switch to the in-kind program if it were increased in size by \$440, a demanded increase of 22 percent. Among the 23 percent who preferred in-kind assistance, respondents were willing to switch to the cash program for an extra \$393,<sup>47</sup> a

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<sup>44</sup> For example, those who prefer in-kind are willing to support a larger in-kind than cash program on average. Those who preferred in-kind said they were willing to support on average \$2,232 in-kind and \$1,213 in cash. Those who preferred cash were willing to support on average \$2,973 in cash and \$2,044 in-kind.

<sup>45</sup> These distributions are winsorized at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile.

<sup>46</sup> This result of more willingness to give in-kind is consistent with “lab-in-the-field experiment” results on inter-household transfers (Batista et al. 2015).

<sup>47</sup> Literature from behavioral economics suggest that, in addition to “sophisticates” who are aware of their self-control problems, there may additionally be “naifs” who have self-control problems but are unaware of them (O’Donoghue and Rabin 1999). If so, then even more below-poverty individuals would benefit from in-kind transfers.

demanded increase of 20 percent.<sup>48</sup> In aggregate, then, the below-poverty respondents demanded only a 13 percent premium for redistribution in-kind instead of in-cash (shown as the green X in Figure 7).<sup>49</sup> This is less than half the 33 percent increased willingness to support in-kind versus cash for the median general population member, and it is much less than the 52 percent increased willingness to support in-kind for the average general population member. Comparing the preferences of the general population to those of below-poverty survey respondents thus suggests that the in-kind program offers a better potential outcome for both poor recipients and the general public.

#### **D. Yale Student Survey Preferences**

Yale Law School students, whom we surveyed to provide a sample of an educational elite perspective, displayed preferences that were wildly different from those of the general population. As the second-to-bottom row in Table 4 shows, 69 percent of Yale students indicated a preference for the cash program, well over twice the 28 percent cash preference in the control sample. This preference was also much higher than the 34 percent cash preference among 18-34-year-olds in the control sample. Moreover, the students supported much larger amounts for both the in-kind and cash programs: almost seven times as much in cash (\$10,000 versus the \$1,500 in the control) and five times as much in-kind (\$10,000 versus \$2,000 in the control). The average ratio of willingness to provide in-kind versus cash was about 1 (shown as a dark blue triangle in Figure 7), well below any income group in the general population.

Yale students also had considerably different views of preferences and spending habits of people living below the poverty line. Compared to the control, Yale students thought that a higher percentage of the poor (81 percent) would prefer the cash option, a 14 percentage point difference. And they thought that the poor would spend 77 percent of the cash program on necessities, 15 percentage points more than the control. Although this 77 percent estimate is still below the 85 percent of overall consumption people below the poverty line actually spend on necessities, it is far closer than the estimate of any other group—except for the poor themselves, who gave exactly

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<sup>48</sup> To combat the possibility that some respondents in the below-poverty survey did not understand our question, we asked them for the reasoning behind the number they chose. We also redid the analysis excluding respondents who may not have understood the question. That analysis yielded similar results.

<sup>49</sup> To calculate this, we multiply the shares of the below-poverty population preferring cash and in-kind by the tradeoff that they are willing to make in the form of redistribution as the ratio (in-kind dollars / cash dollars):  $0.77 * (1.22 / 1) + 0.23 * (1 / 1.20)$ . This analysis assumes that, within the range of values considered, the below-poverty population has a constant ratio of willingness to trade off cash and in-kind.



the same answer (77 percent) when asked how much of a cash transfer they would spend on necessities.

Observable demographic characteristics explain very little of the results. The results with controls are qualitatively similar (Appendix Table A6). Although the Yale students are far from demographically representative, their demographic features should tend to pull their answers in opposite directions. For example, they are both rich (predicting less support for cash) and young (predicting more support for cash). More importantly, the views of the Yale students are so strong that demographic controls were unlikely to make much difference, especially given the relatively modest differences across demographic groups shown in Table 1.

The Yale students' reasoning for these preferences was very different from that of the general population (Table 5). Among students who chose in-kind, the most common reasoning was political feasibility: 64 percent gave this reason, far more than in any other sample. This suggests that many Yale students who chose in-kind may not have preferred this option absent political constraints, but may have recognized the public's majority preference. The second most common reason was a belief that access to the goods in question is a right (52 percent). Economics reasoning based on standard preferences was relatively common among this group, with 52 percent citing the positive externalities of the in-kind option and 40 percent citing targeting. The paternalistic reasoning that largely drove the general population's preference for in-kind was significantly less prevalent among the students, at 43 percent. Only 3 percent said they thought the poor themselves would prefer the in-kind option. Few students (13 percent) indicated that reciprocity considerations influenced their choice. It is notable that fewer of those preferring in-kind in the Yale sample, as well as the economics and poor spending treatments, chose reciprocity versus the control sample, perhaps because these groups had an enhanced understanding of the benefits of choice for themselves (Yale and economics treatment) or of how much of the cash program they would be spending on necessities in any case if they were program recipients (Yale and poor spending treatment).

Among students who preferred cash, anti-paternalistic reasoning was almost a universal draw (95 percent). Concern for individual freedom also played a key role (87 percent), as did reciprocity (70 percent) and the perceived preference of the poor for cash (69 percent). Administrative costs were cited by 55 percent, and 31 percent cited externalities. Only 2 percent of students who chose the cash program thought this option would be more politically feasible. Yale students were more likely than the control group to choose the "other" category, at nearly 14 percent compared to 4 percent in the control survey, but there was not a clear pattern in their free-

form explanations for this choice. The results with controls are qualitatively similar (Appendix Tables A7 and A8).<sup>50</sup>

Two implications follow from the large differences in preferences between the Yale students and the general population. First, to the extent that many educational elites hold views like those of Yale Law School students, the very different attitudes of this sample compared to the general population provide a cautionary note about elites assuming that their intuitions track those of the general population as they consider political constraints, policy design, or the social welfare function underlying optimal policy (Saez and Stantcheva 2016). Second, the results provide a kind of test of external validity of surveys on abstract preferences done in laboratory settings. For example, Fisman et al. (2015) find that Yale Law School students are very efficiency-oriented and not very equality-oriented in their laboratory setting of sharing between two people. An important question is the extent to which these laboratory results reflect policy preferences. While our question is not exactly the same, we also find a striking emphasis on efficiency with the preference for cash on grounds of anti-paternalism. But there is little evidence here of a lack of orientation toward equality.

#### **IV. Internal and External Validity**

A number of concerns may arise regarding the study's internal and external validity. One potential concern, which affects both internal and external validity, is population validity and sampling bias. Although our samples are largely demographically representative of the American population, our respondent pools are not random samples. There is likely some selection bias in terms of which people chose to complete the survey. For instance, those who are more altruistic or have more free time may have been more likely to take the survey. This may have been especially true among respondents who reported higher incomes, who almost certainly did not take the survey out of financial need. However, given the magnitude of respondents' difference in preference between cash and in-kind, the overall results of the survey are likely suggestive of the population's preferences more broadly, even assuming some sampling bias exists. We do note

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<sup>50</sup> One might be concerned that the fact that respondents were told that the government did not adopt the first program presented might have biased attitudes in a way that differs across programs. This might be a particular concern for reasoning related to administrative costs and political feasibility aspects. It could be the case, for example, that if a respondent was presented first with the cash program and was told that this program was not adopted, they might be induced to think that the cash program was politically unfeasible, and thus be more inclined to support in-kind. However, both control and Yale respondents were no more or less likely to cite either administrative costs or political feasibility depending on the order in which the programs were presented. Results available upon request.

though that our survey's validity is limited to the preferences of Americans for redistribution within the United States to other Americans.

Second, internal and external validity questions may also arise given the coincidence of the Covid-19 pandemic with the distribution of the survey. To distinguish our program from the cash payments to many Americans in the CARES Act, we emphasized that it was “permanent” and that payments would be made “every year.” It is possible that the emphasis on health because of Covid could have increased support for the in-kind program, while the bipartisan support for and experience with cash payments could have increased support for cash.<sup>51</sup> We cannot know for sure the impacts of these events on results. That said, we did ask participants about the impact of Covid on their views. Even making extreme assumptions about how views changed because of the pandemic, the results hold. Among the people who support in-kind but not cash, 41 percent say Covid increased their support of in-kind but not of cash, and another 7 percent say that Covid made them less supportive of cash but not less supportive of in-kind. Even assuming that Covid caused all of these people to support in-kind or not support cash, most of the difference (52 percent) in support for in-kind and cash remains. Another reason to believe that pandemic circumstances did not greatly alter responses was that words related to the pandemic and the CARES Act cash payments rarely appeared in the free-form responses explaining the choices that respondents made. Furthermore, other work comparing similar analyses before and during Covid confirms the usual generalizability of surveys conducted during Covid (Peyton et al. 2021).

Third, it is possible that respondents exhibited status quo bias in favor of in-kind transfers, since a majority of current transfers are in-kind. However, it is also possible that respondents exhibited status quo bias in the other direction, in favor of cash. Given that some people's most tangible encounters with transfers are in the form of cash (such as the Earned Income Tax Credit or Social Security checks), it is not clear to us whether status quo bias would lead to increased preference for in-kind or for cash. Regardless of the direction of the status quo bias, however, this bias is an important part of the political and social landscape in which any redistribution program would be implemented. It is possible, in fact, that an attempt to counter status quo bias might produce results that would be less applicable to the real world. That said, this is an interesting area for future research: for example, participants could be presented with counterexamples of policy regimes that use cash transfers, offsetting the impression that they are generally not preferred in reality.

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<sup>51</sup> As well, hardship may have increased overall preference for redistribution (Margalit 2013).

Fourth, it is possible that different effects might have arisen if the respondents believed that they would be required to financially contribute to whatever program they chose. These effects might differ according to respondents' income; more research would be needed to determine what these effects (if any) might be. However, Stantcheva (2021) recently conducted an incentivized version of a study using a Respondi sample, and answers on her factual questions were virtually unchanged. It therefore seems reasonable to rely on the results on our survey, despite this potential shortcoming.

Finally, the Hawthorne effect — in which respondents, knowing they are being observed in a low-stakes setting, give answers that reflect what they think is socially desirable or what the researchers want to hear rather than their true beliefs — may have distorted some of our results. However, these potential effects are unlikely to have seriously undermined our conclusions. There is no generally conceived “correct” or “socially appropriate” response to the best method of redistribution (in-kind or cash), so there is no reason to think that respondents would have answered relying on anything other than their true preferences for the survey. And our questions about the programs were worded symmetrically, leaving little space for respondents to infer which choice would be more desirable to us. Social desirability may have influenced the amount that respondents were willing to tolerate spending on both the in-kind and cash programs, possibly resulting in larger program sizes than respondents might otherwise have supported. However, it is unlikely that this effect would be limited to just the cash or just the in-kind programs; therefore, the difference between the amounts is still relevant.

## **V. Conclusion**

This study presents evidence that the public, as a whole, overwhelmingly prefers to redistribute using in-kind methods, but that the poorest members of the public prefer to receive assistance in the form of cash. Despite this difference, in-kind redistribution appears to be a good deal not only for the general population but also for poor recipients because — based on their own preferences — they would be better off with the considerably larger amount that the public is willing to redistribute in-kind than with the smaller amount in cash.

The economic maxim that cash transfers are best does a poor job of tracking the realities of redistribution. In-kind redistribution is ubiquitous, while cash redistribution is the exception. Our results indicate that the pattern may be in part due to an overwhelming preference among the general population for redistribution using in-kind methods. Paternalism appears to drive this preference, highlighting the importance of having an accurate and nuanced understanding of the

public's attitudes. This is especially so given the great divergence in attitudes between the Yale sample and the general population, suggesting that educational elites should be cautious in consulting their own intuitions on these issues. General population preferences are strongly correlated with beliefs about how the poor spend their money. These preferences and the underlying paternalistic reasoning can be changed somewhat by giving economic explanations about the value of choice, but an information treatment did little to change expressed preferences.

Greater knowledge about not only what most people think but also why they think it may help give guidance to scholars and policymakers. These views can help explain the policy that we see, give indications about what policies are feasible, suggest where misconceptions lie, and possibly provide normative guidance. This study suggests that those who wish to redistribute more, or who wish to follow public preferences to the extent that they are legitimate, might want to consider bolstering in-kind programs rather than pushing for more cash redistribution. In-kind programs appear to garner considerably more approval, and individuals who benefit from redistribution are better off for this increased support. Policymakers may want to consider the very "necessities accounts" that we use in the survey, which allow flexible spending but attract considerably more public support than unrestricted cash transfers, reflecting appeals to both beliefs about the rights that liberals support and beliefs about paternalism that all groups support. More generally, policymakers and others who wish to pursue cash redistribution (such as a universal basic income) should realize the headwinds that they will likely face, and that survey experiments like this one can help explain what underlies such policy views.

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## TABLES

Table 1. Percent Preferring Cash by Respondent Attribute – General Population

	Age		Race			Education		Gender		Income	
	18-44	45+	White	Black	Other	< BA	BA+	Male	Female	< \$100,000	> \$100,000
Percent	33	23	25	40	28	28	26	31	24	32	18
se	2	2	2	4	3	2	2	2	2	2	2
N	460	539	584	141	272	673	326	491	508	699	300

	Political Ideology			Political Party		
	Conservative	Neither	Liberal	Republican	Independent	Democrat
Percent	20	27	36	23	24	36
se	2	3	3	3	2	3
N	359	289	351	275	402	296

Notes: This table shows the percent choosing the cash option over the in-kind option in the head-to-head question. The sample is from the control survey only. Respondents who said they were “slightly,” “moderately,” or “strongly” conservative were classified as conservative. Respondents who said they were “slightly,” “moderately,” or “strongly” liberal were classified as liberal. Dependent variables are percentages. Standard errors are robust. See Appendix B.ii for more details on demographics construction.

Table 2. Percent Choosing Combinations of Paternalism and Rights as Reasons for Preferring In-kind – General Population

		Paternalism	
		Yes	No
Rights	Yes	44	16
	No	28	12

Notes: This table lists the percent choosing each combination of reasons among respondents who preferred in-kind. The sample is from the control survey only.

Table 3. Most Distinctive Words Among Explanations for Preferring Each Program – General Population

In-Kind		Cash	
Word	T-Statistic	Word	T-Statistic
necessity	-6.94	may	4.40
basic	-6.65	clothe	4.13
essential	-6.46	freedom	4.12
drug	-6.16	bill	3.32
alcohol	-6.13	gas	3.27
frivolous	-5.39	choice	3.26
waste	-5.13	decide	3.22
ensure	-4.90	school	2.84
rather	-4.87	different	2.71
item	-4.76	car	2.50
nonessential	-4.29	repair	2.47
unnecessary	-4.25	much	2.38
cigarette	-4.17	situation	2.34
taxpayer	-4.14	cash	2.32
necessary	-3.77	able	2.31
life	-3.69	sometimes	2.29
see	-3.65	maybe	2.29
stuff	-3.65	tell	2.29
system	-3.63	example	2.25
sure	-3.49	need	2.09
tax	-3.36	end	2.05
prevent	-3.34	flexibility	2.05
responsible	-3.18	buy	2.05
enough	-3.18	benefit	2.02
specific	-3.18	think	2.01

Notes: This table shows the words used in free-form questions asking why the respondent prefers that program. The sample is from the control survey only. Negative t-statistic values indicate that a word is more characteristic of those preferring in-kind than those who prefer cash. We remove common words with no relevant meaning (“stop words”), such as “and,” “to,” and “I.” We also lemmatize the words by converting them to their dictionary entry form (e.g., “is” to “be,” “drugs” to “drug”). See main text and Appendix B.iii for more details on textual analysis methods.

Table 4. Effect of Samples on Program Preferences and Beliefs

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Prefers cash	Percent of the Poor that Respondents Think Would Prefer Cash	Percent Respondents Believe the Poor Spend on Necessities	Largest Amount Supported for Cash	Largest Amount Supported for In-Kind
Economics treatment	12.49*** (2.62)	2.87* (1.49)	0.14 (1.39)	500.00*** (108.79)	0.00 (79.97)
Rights treatment	-0.64 (2.43)	-0.38 (1.46)	1.41 (1.38)	0.00 (118.50)	0.00 (86.39)
Poor spending treatment	-2.04 (2.40)	0.28 (1.50)	-0.03 (1.38)	-500.00*** (113.28)	-0.00 (81.77)
Yale sample	41.77*** (3.69)	14.25*** (1.52)	14.96*** (1.21)	8500.00*** (346.47)	8000.00*** (253.66)
Control	27.63*** (1.42)	66.61*** (0.84)	62.11*** (0.81)	1500.00*** (68.69)	2000.00*** (46.72)
Observations	2690	2683	2684	2685	2683
$R^2$	0.058	0.019	0.022		

Notes: This table shows how various responses in the survey change with the three persuasion treatments and the Yale sample. The outcome in Column (1) is an indicator variable multiplied by 100. Columns (4) and (5) are median regressions. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ . Because the questions posed to the below-poverty sample were different from those posed to the general population and to the Yale students, results from that survey are not included here.

Table 5. Effect of Samples on Reasons for Preferring In-Kind

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Paternalism	Basic Rights	Targets Needed	Reciprocity	Helps Society	Poor Prefer	Politics
Economics treatment	-7** (3)	-4 (3)	-3 (3)	-6* (3)	-5* (3)	1 (3)	-1 (3)
Rights treatment	0 (3)	-4 (3)	2 (3)	-2 (3)	-3 (3)	-0 (3)	2 (3)
Poor spending treatment	1 (3)	-2 (3)	-3 (3)	-7** (3)	-4 (3)	1 (3)	2 (3)
Yale sample	-29*** (7)	8 (7)	2 (7)	-19*** (5)	23*** (7)	-17*** (3)	46*** (7)
Control	72*** (2)	60*** (2)	42*** (2)	32*** (2)	29*** (2)	20*** (1)	18*** (1)
Observations	1822	1822	1822	1822	1822	1822	1822
R <sup>2</sup>	0.014	0.003	0.002	0.008	0.011	0.006	0.038

Notes: This table shows how the amount of support for each reason for preferring in-kind changes in each sample. Coefficients are relative to the control sample, for which the percent selecting each option is shown in the bottom row. Dependent variables are indicators for choosing a reason multiplied by 100. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. \* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01.

Table 6. Effect of Samples on Reasons for Preferring Cash

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Freedom	Anti-Paternalism	Poor Prefer	Reciprocity	Helps Society	Admin. Costs	Politics
Economics treatment	-5 (4)	13*** (4)	2 (5)	20*** (5)	7 (4)	3 (4)	-6* (3)
Rights treatment	-2 (5)	3 (5)	6 (5)	8 (5)	9* (5)	3 (4)	-6 (4)
Poor spending treatment	-2 (5)	5 (5)	0 (5)	-1 (5)	4 (5)	0 (4)	-1 (4)
Yale sample	13*** (4)	40*** (4)	28*** (5)	33*** (5)	7 (5)	34*** (5)	-15*** (3)
Control	74*** (3)	55*** (3)	41*** (3)	37*** (3)	24*** (3)	21*** (2)	17*** (2)
Observations	868	868	868	868	868	868	868
$R^2$	0.017	0.077	0.036	0.059	0.006	0.068	0.023

Notes: This table shows how the amount of support for each reason for preferring cash changes in each sample. Coefficients are relative to the control sample, for which the percent selecting each option is shown in the bottom row. Dependent variables are indicators for choosing a reason multiplied by 100. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

Table 7.a. Percent Preferring In-Kind by Respondent Attribute – Below-Poverty Survey

	Age			Education		Race			
	18-34	35-44	45+	HS-	Some College+	White	Black	Latino	Other
Percent	30	16***	20**	24	22	19	26	30**	18
se	3	4	3	2	3	3	4	4	6
N	198	91	225	339	175	213	125	143	44
	Political party			Gender					
	Republican	Independent	Democrat	Male	Female				
Percent	26	25	21	20	25				
se	3	4	3	3	2				
N	101	159	227	211	304				

Table 7.b. Percent Preferring In-Kind Because of Self-Control by Respondent Attribute – Below-Poverty Survey

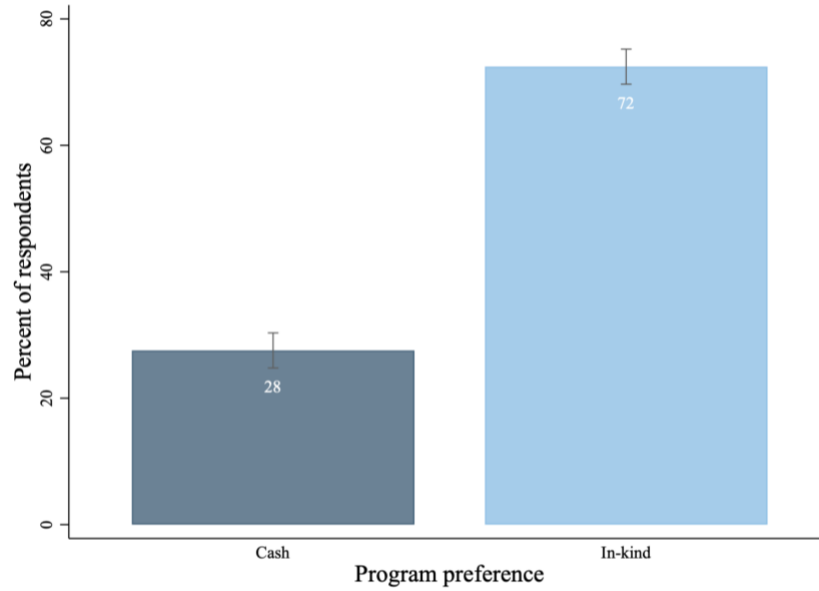
	Age			Education		Race			
	18-34	35-44	45+	HS-	Some College+	White	Black	Latino	Other
Percent	20	9***	12**	14	15	10	18*	20**	11
se	3	3	2	2	3	2	3	3	5
N	198	91	225	339	175	213	125	143	44
	Political party			Gender					
	Republican	Independent	Democrat	Male	Female				
Percent	15	13	15	13	15				
se	2	4	3	2	2				
N	101	159	227	211	304				

Notes: Table 7.a shows the percent preferring in-kind by demographic subcategory in the below-poverty survey. Table 7.b shows the percent that both prefer in-kind and do so because of a desire to impose control on themselves by demographic subcategory in the below-poverty survey. “HS-” includes those with a high school education or less. “Other” as a racial demographic includes people of two or more races, except for those who mark Hispanic/Latino, all of whom are included in the Latino category. Significance refers to difference versus the first subcategory within each characteristic. See Appendix B.ii for more details on demographic construction. Standard errors are robust. \* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01.



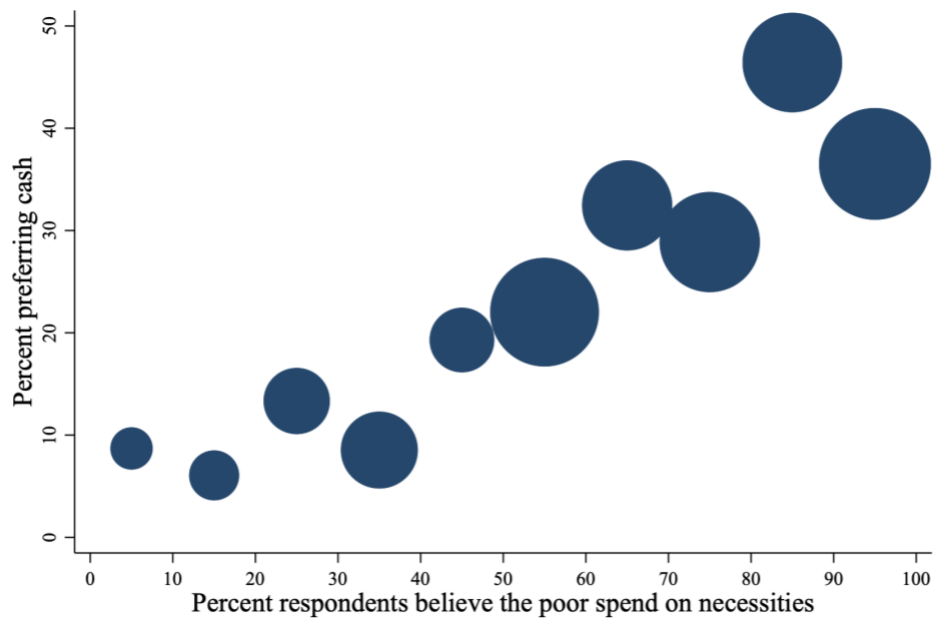
## FIGURES

Figure 1. Preference Between Cash and In-Kind Programs – General Population



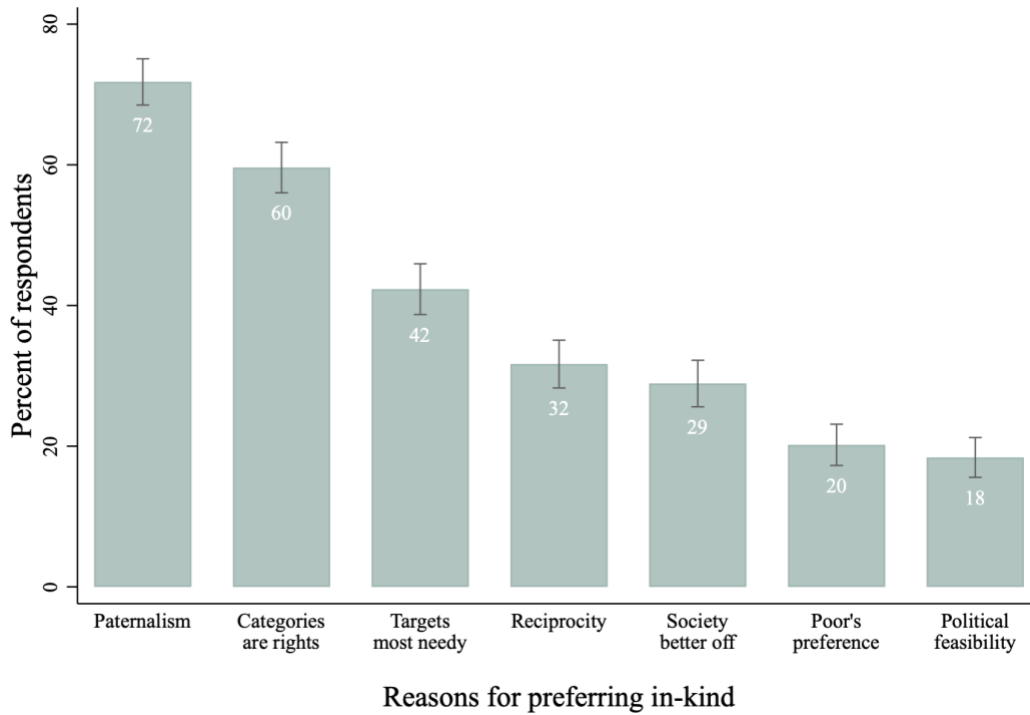
Notes: The figure shows the percent of respondents preferring each of the cash and in-kind programs, when respondents are asked to choose between them. The thin bars mark 95 percent confidence intervals. Data are from control survey.

Figure 2. Relationship Between Program Preference and Perception of the Poor's Spending Habits – General Population



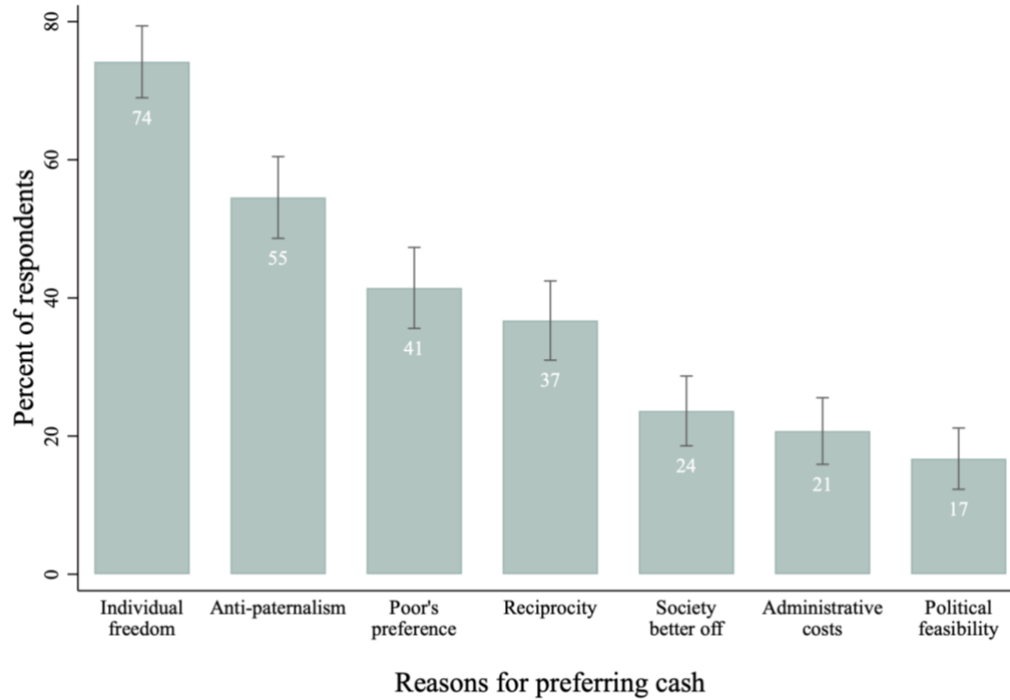
Notes: This graph shows the preference for the cash program, by respondents' perception of how much out of a cash transfer the poor would spend on necessities. Marker size is proportional to the number of observations in each decile of perceived spending on necessities. The coefficient from the regression of preferring cash on perceived spending is 0.42 (SE = 0.05). Data are from control survey.

Figure 3.a. Reasons Given for Preferring In-Kind – General Population



Notes: This figure shows the percentage of respondents who selected each reason for preferring in-kind, by order of popularity. “Other (please specify)” was also displayed as an option; it was chosen by 3 percent of respondents. The thin bars mark 95 percent confidence intervals. Observations are respondents preferring in-kind in the control survey.

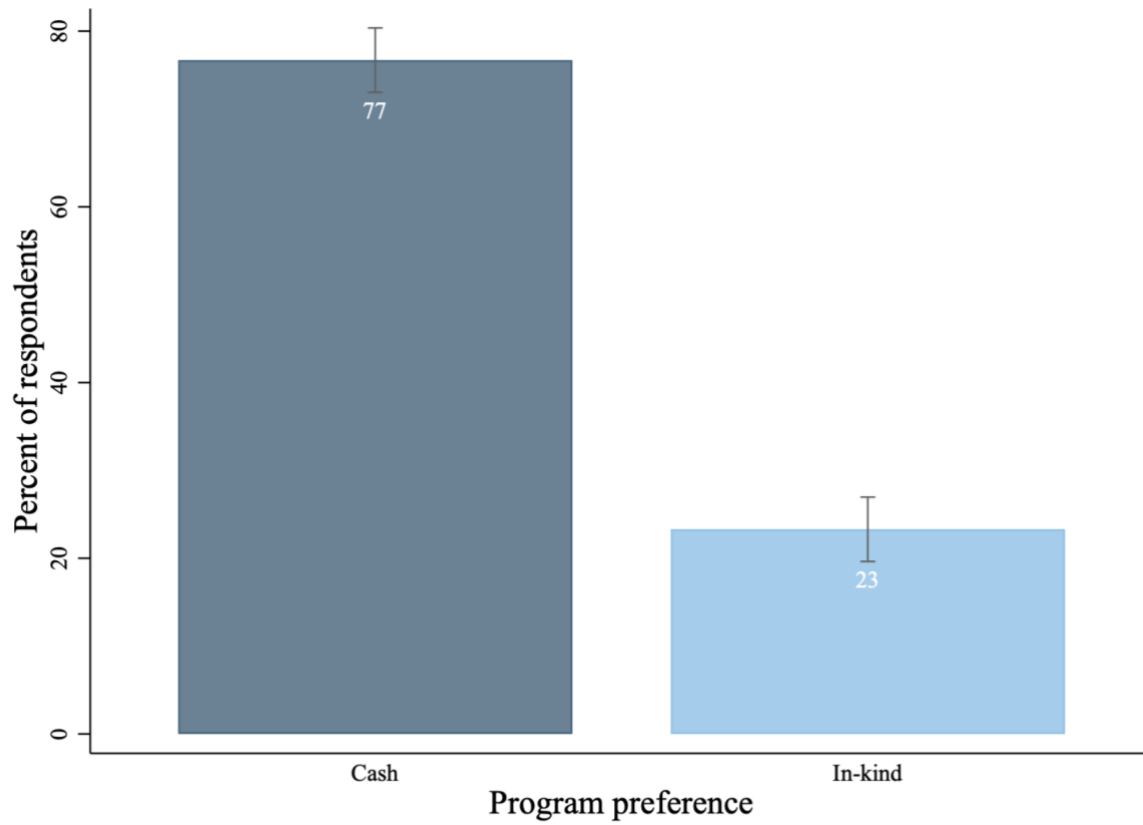
Figure 3.b. Reasons Given for Preferring Cash – General Population



Notes: This figure shows the percentage of respondents who selected each reason for preferring cash, by order of popularity. “Other (please specify)” was also displayed as an option; it was chosen by 4 percent of respondents. The thin bars mark 95 percent confidence intervals. Observations are respondents preferring cash in the control survey.

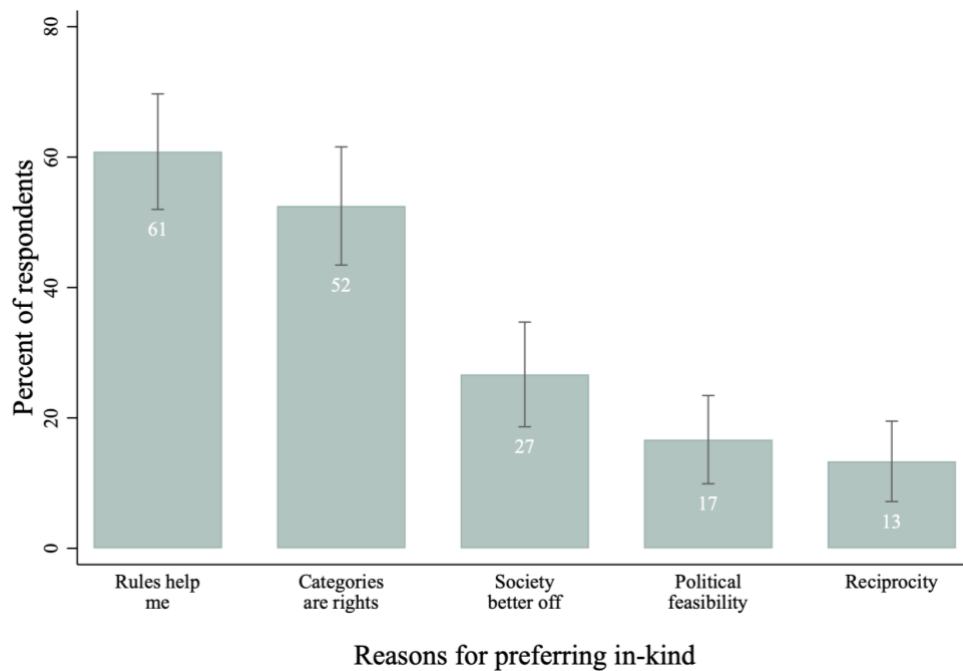


Figure 5. Preference Between Cash and In-Kind Programs – Below-Poverty Survey



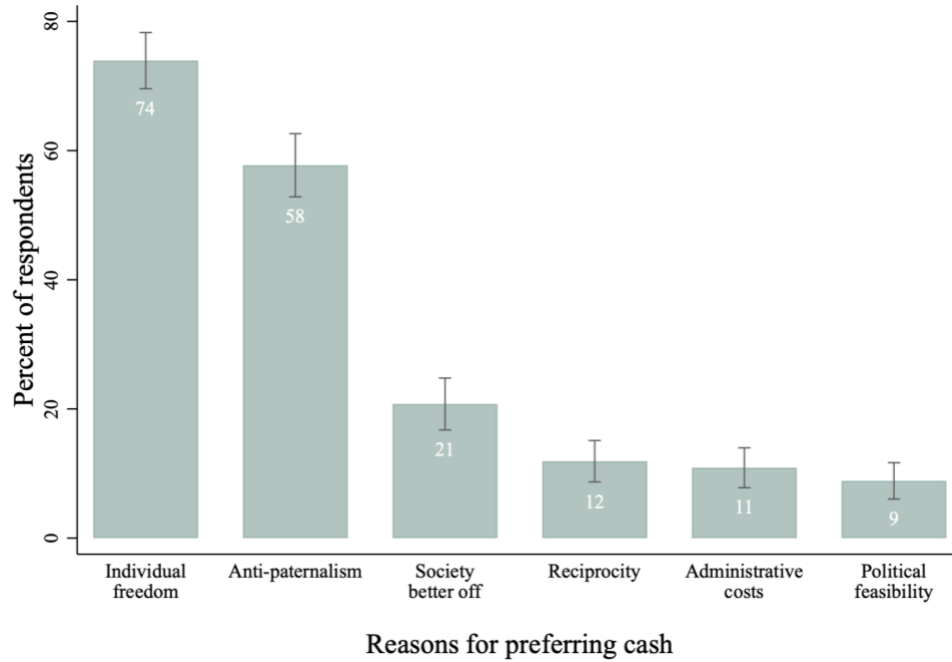
Notes: The figure shows the percent preferring each of the cash program and the in-kind program, when respondents in the below-poverty survey are asked to choose between them. The thin bars mark 95 percent confidence intervals.

Figure 6.a. Reasons Given for Preferring In-Kind as Recipient – Below-Poverty Survey



Notes: The figure shows the support for each of the reasonings offered in the below-poverty survey for preferring in-kind, in order of popularity. “Other (please specify)” was also displayed as an option; it was selected by 5 percent of respondents. The thin bars mark 95 percent confidence intervals.

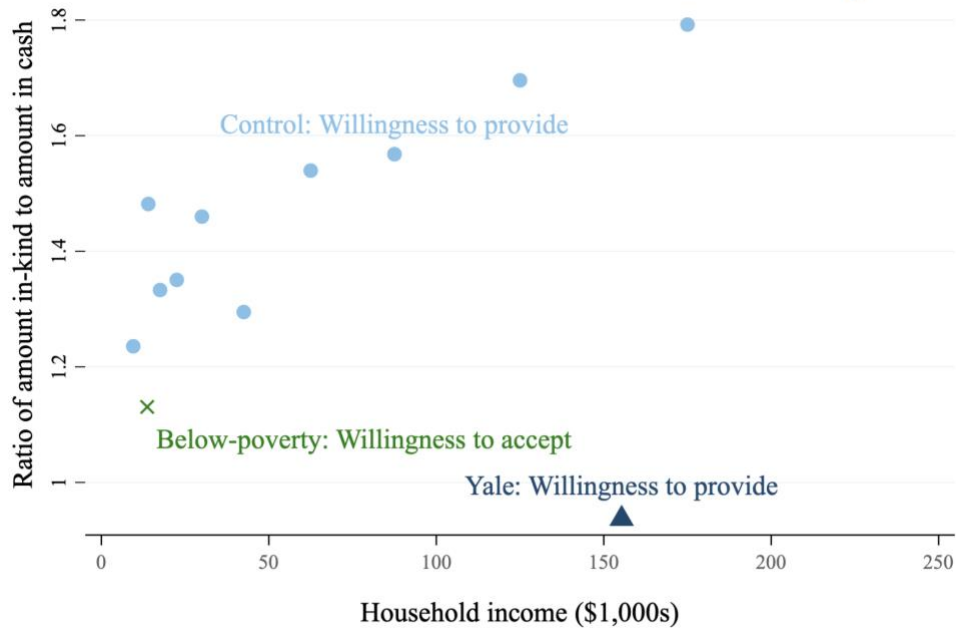
Figure 6.b. Reasons Given for Preferring Cash as Recipient – Below-Poverty Survey



Notes: The figure shows the support for each of the reasonings offered in the below-poverty survey for preferring cash, in order of popularity. “Other (please specify)” was also displayed as an option; it was selected by 4 percent of respondents. The thin bars mark 95 percent confidence intervals.



Figure 7. Willingness to Provide or Accept In-Kind vs. Cash Transfers



Note: This figure shows, for the control sample, the average ratio between the dollar amounts of respondents' willingness to provide in-kind versus cash, by participant household income bin. These are shown with light blue circles. It shows the same measure for the Yale Law School sample with a dark blue triangle. The average premium participants in the below-poverty sample need to accept in-kind instead of cash is shown with a green X; exact calculations are shown in footnote 53. Placement on the x-axis is at the midpoint of the control group's income bins and at the average household income for the Yale and below-poverty samples. Respondents' willingness to provide or accept for each of in-kind and cash are winsorized at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile.

## Online Appendix – Tables

**Table A1. Survey Demographics: Survey Percentages and Test of Difference with US Population**

	US Population	Treatment				Yale Sample
		Control	Economics	Rights	Poor Spending	
<b>Age</b>						
18-34	30	30 (0.98)	30 (0.81)	30 (0.95)	29 (0.63)	98 (0.00)
35-44	16	17 (0.55)	17 (0.84)	16 (0.85)	16 (0.82)	2 (0.00)
45-54	16	17 (0.92)	16 (0.98)	16 (0.80)	17 (0.95)	0 (0.00)
55-64	17	17 (0.88)	17 (0.97)	16 (0.84)	18 (0.43)	0 (0.00)
65+	21	20 (0.59)	21 (0.92)	22 (0.52)	20 (0.95)	0 (0.00)
<b>Race</b>						
White	60	58 (0.31)	61 (0.65)	61 (0.64)	62 (0.45)	63 (0.48)
Hispanic/Latino	18	20 (0.05)	18 (0.92)	18 (0.80)	17 (0.76)	16 (0.19)
Black	12	12 (0.98)	12 (0.85)	12 (0.88)	11 (0.99)	5 (0.01)
Asian/Pacific Islander	6	6 (0.42)	6 (0.90)	6 (0.61)	6 (0.94)	11 (0.00)
Other	4	3 (0.00)	3 (0.09)	4 (0.23)	4 (0.12)	5 (0.11)
<b>Gender</b>						
Female	51	50 (0.72)	51 (0.83)	51 (0.84)	49 (0.31)	57 (0.00)
<b>Income</b>						
Under \$25,000	19	19 (0.72)	19 (0.95)	19 (0.84)	19 (0.77)	6 (0.00)
\$25,000-\$50,000	21	21 (0.94)	21 (0.91)	21 (1.00)	21 (0.72)	4 (0.00)
\$50,000-\$75,000	17	17 (0.93)	17 (0.92)	17 (0.88)	17 (0.85)	8 (0.00)
\$75,000-\$100,000	13	13 (0.68)	13 (0.80)	13 (0.88)	12 (0.91)	9 (0.07)
\$100,000+	30	30 (0.90)	30 (0.96)	30 (0.87)	31 (0.87)	72 (0.00)
<b>Political affiliation</b>						
Republican	28	28 (0.99)	28 (0.99)	27 (0.74)	29 (0.70)	5 (0.00)
Democrat	29	30 (0.70)	29 (0.91)	30 (0.48)	28 (0.61)	80 (0.00)
Independent	41	40 (0.49)	41 (0.97)	40 (0.67)	40 (0.58)	9 (0.00)
<b>Education</b>						
HS graduate or less	40	36 (0.00)	37 (0.10)	36 (0.07)	40 (0.87)	1 (0.00)
Some college+	60	64 (0.00)	63 (0.10)	63 (0.07)	60 (0.87)	99 (0.00)
<b>Sample Size</b>		1029	505	519	527	184

Notes: The table lists the percent in each demographic subcategory of each of several samples, listed at the top. The number in parenthesis is the p-value of a test that the percent is different from that in the US population. The table includes all respondents, including those not used in later analysis due to spending less than four minutes on the survey. “Other” as a racial demographic includes people of two or more races and Native Americans. Respondents were asked for their income in 2019. Respondents in the Yale survey were asked about their parents’ income rather than their own.

Source: See Appendix B.i for details on sources for statistics on the U.S. population. See Appendix B.ii for more details on our demographic categorization.

Table A2. Demographics of Respondents in Below-Poverty Survey

	US Population	Below-Poverty Survey
<b>Age</b>		
18-34	38	40 (0.32)
35-44	16	17 (0.49)
45-54	14	15 (0.57)
55-64	16	16 (0.90)
65+	16	12 (0.00)
<b>Race</b>		
White	43	41 (0.27)
Hispanic/Latino	27	29 (0.43)
Black	21	23 (0.26)
Asian/Pacific Islander	5	5 (0.61)
Other	4	3 (0.31)
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	55	59 (0.05)
<b>Political Affiliation</b>		
Republican	20	19 (0.66)
Democrat	43	44 (0.59)
Independent	34	31 (0.16)
<b>Education</b>		
HS graduate or less	62	66 (0.07)
Some college+	38	34 (0.07)
<b>Sample Size</b>		<b>531</b>

Notes: The table lists the percent in each demographic subcategory of our survey to people below the poverty line. The number in parentheses is the p-value of a test that the percent is different from that in the U.S. population that is below the poverty line. The table includes all respondents in the below-poverty survey, including those not used in later analysis due to spending less than four minutes on the survey. Respondents were asked for their income in 2019. "Other" as a racial demographic includes people of two or more races and Native Americans. See Appendix B.ii for more details on our demographic categorization.

Source: See Appendix B for details on sources for statistics on the U.S. population.

Table A3. Percent Listing Paternalism Among Those Choosing In-Kind, by Respondent Attribute

	Age		Race			Education		Gender		Income	
	18-44	45+	White	Black	Other	< BA	BA+	Male	Female	< \$100,000	> \$100,000
Percent	70	71	70	67	72	71	68	67	74	69	73
se	3	2	2	5	3	2	3	3	2	2	3
N	322	417	450	87	200	493	246	350	389	486	253

	Political Ideology			Political Party		
	Conservative	Neither	Liberal	Republican	Independent	Democrat
Percent	75	68	67	69	70	70
se	3	3	3	3	3	3
N	289	217	233	218	309	195

Table A4. Percent Listing Rights Among Those Choosing In-Kind, by Respondent Attribute

	Age		Race			Education		Gender		Income	
	18-44	45+	White	Black	Other	< BA	BA+	Male	Female	< \$100,000	> \$100,000
Percent	65	54	53	72	67	58	61	54	63	60	58
se	3	2	2	5	3	2	3	3	2	2	3
N	322	417	450	87	200	493	246	350	389	486	253

	Political Ideology			Political Party		
	Conservative	Neither	Liberal	Republican	Independent	Democrat
Percent	47	57	76	49	57	74
se	3	3	3	3	3	3
N	289	217	233	218	309	195

Notes: Table A3 shows the percent of each demographic subcategory, among those choosing in-kind, who checked “*This program will make sure poor people spend the money only on things that will make them better off*” as a reason for supporting in-kind transfers. Table A4 shows the percent of each demographic subcategory, among those choosing in-kind, who checked “*At least one of the goods (healthcare, housing, food) is a right to which everyone should have access.*” The sample is those in the control survey who chose in-kind transfers over cash transfers. Respondents who said they were “slightly,” “moderately,” or “strongly” conservative were classified as conservative. Respondents who said they were “slightly,” “moderately,” or “strongly” liberal were classified as liberal. Dependent variables are percentages. Standard errors are robust.

Table A5. Effect of Economics Treatment on Preference for Cash for Below-Poverty Participants

	(1)
	Prefers Cash
Econ treatment	13.57*** (2.69)
Below poverty line	27.19*** (4.60)
Econ. treatment * Below poverty line	-7.15 (8.78)
Control	24.72*** (1.44)
Observations	1534
$R^2$	0.045

Notes: This table shows how the economics treatment changes the preference for the cash program for respondents who are below the poverty line. The sample is respondents in the control and economics treatment surveys. “Econ treatment” is an indicator for being in the economics treatment (and 0 if in the control treatment). “Below poverty line” is an indicator for being below the poverty line based on federal criteria. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. \* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01.

Table A6. Effect of Samples on Program Preferences and Beliefs, Controlling for Demographics

	(1) Prefers cash	(2) Supports Cash	(3) Supports In-Kind	(4) Percent of the Poor that Respondents Think Would Prefer Cash	(5) Percent Respondents Believe the Poor Spend on Necessities	(6) Largest Amount Supported for Cash	(7) Largest Amount Supported for In-Kind
Economics treatment	12.96*** (2.53)	4.80* (2.62)	-4.43* (2.44)	3.26** (1.49)	-0.01 (1.38)	260.00** (101.54)	0.00 (88.21)
Rights treatment	-0.44 (2.34)	-1.15 (2.59)	-0.11 (2.37)	-0.02 (1.45)	1.31 (1.36)	140.00 (101.04)	0.00 (91.29)
Poor spending treatment	-2.22 (2.27)	-4.48* (2.58)	-1.82 (2.40)	0.04 (1.49)	0.21 (1.36)	-90.00 (91.80)	0.00 (86.73)
Yale sample	35.08*** (4.44)	17.10*** (4.17)	3.56 (3.64)	15.70*** (2.18)	9.67*** (1.74)	7970.00*** (430.13)	7500.00*** (317.90)
Observations	2685	2686	2686	2680	2680	2680	2678
$R^2$	0.150	0.124	0.079	0.046	0.066		

Notes: This table shows various responses in the survey across different samples. Columns (1) – (3) are indicator variables multiplied by 100. Columns (6) and (7) are median regressions. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. All columns include controls for education, age, gender, income, and political affiliation. The omitted group is the control sample. The table parallels Table 4 and Appendix Table A9, which do not have demographic controls. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ . Because the questions posed to the below-poverty sample were different from those posed to the general population and to the Yale students, results from that survey are not included here.

Table A7. Effect of Sample on Reasons for Preferring In-Kind, Controlling for Demographics – General Population

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Paternalism	Rights	Targets Needy	Reciprocity	Helps Society	Poor Prefer	Politics
Economics treatment	-7**	-4	-3	-5*	-5*	1	-1
	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)
Rights treatment	0	-5	2	-3	-3	-1	2
	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)
Poor spending treatment	0	-1	-2	-6**	-3	2	2
	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)	(3)
Yale sample	-30***	-5	-9	-19***	13*	-16***	42***
	(8)	(7)	(8)	(5)	(7)	(4)	(7)
Observations	1820	1820	1820	1820	1820	1820	1820
R <sup>2</sup>	0.032	0.050	0.024	0.041	0.035	0.038	0.081

Notes: This table shows how the amount of support for each reason for preferring in-kind changes in each sample. Only respondents who prefer the in-kind program over the cash program are included. See Appendix A for full wording of each reason. The omitted group is the control sample. Dependent variables are an indicator for choosing a reason multiplied by 100. All columns include controls for education, age, gender, income, and political affiliation. The table parallels Table 5, which does not have demographic controls. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01.

Table A8. Effect of Sample on Reasons for Preferring Cash, Controlling for Demographics – General Population

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Freedom	Anti-Paternalism	Poor Prefer	Reciprocity	Helps Society	Admin. Costs	Politics
Economics treatment	-6	12***	2	17***	7	1	-5*
	(4)	(5)	(5)	(5)	(4)	(4)	(3)
Rights treatment	-3	2	8	7	10**	3	-5
	(5)	(5)	(5)	(5)	(5)	(4)	(4)
Poor spending treatment	-1	7	1	-2	4	-0	-3
	(5)	(5)	(5)	(5)	(5)	(4)	(4)
Yale sample	20***	40***	37***	40***	13*	30***	-19***
	(6)	(6)	(7)	(7)	(7)	(7)	(4)
Observations	865	865	865	865	865	865	865
R <sup>2</sup>	0.077	0.118	0.071	0.109	0.030	0.141	0.046

Notes: This table shows how the amount of support for each reason for preferring cash changes in each sample. Only respondents who prefer the cash program over the in-kind program are included. See Appendix A for full wording of each reason. The omitted group is the control sample. Dependent variables are an indicator for choosing a reason multiplied by 100. All columns include controls for education, age, gender, income, and political affiliation. The table parallels Table 6, which does not have demographic controls. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01.

Table A9. Effect of Samples on Program Preferences and Beliefs

	(1)	(2)
	Supports Cash	Supports In-Kind
Economics treatment	5.02* (2.71)	-4.02 (2.51)
Rights treatment	-1.28 (2.73)	0.24 (2.42)
Poor spending treatment	-5.04* (2.72)	-2.70 (2.46)
Yale sample	25.64*** (3.35)	14.87*** (2.77)
Control	54.25*** (1.58)	73.17*** (1.40)
Observations	2691	2691
$R^2$	0.021	0.010

Notes: This table shows how treatments change the amount of support for each program, when respondents are asked about their support for each separately. Outcome variables are indicator variables multiplied by 100. Results are relative to the control sample, for which percent support is shown in the bottom row. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ . Because the questions posed to the below-poverty sample were different from those posed to the general population and to the Yale students, results from that survey are not included here.



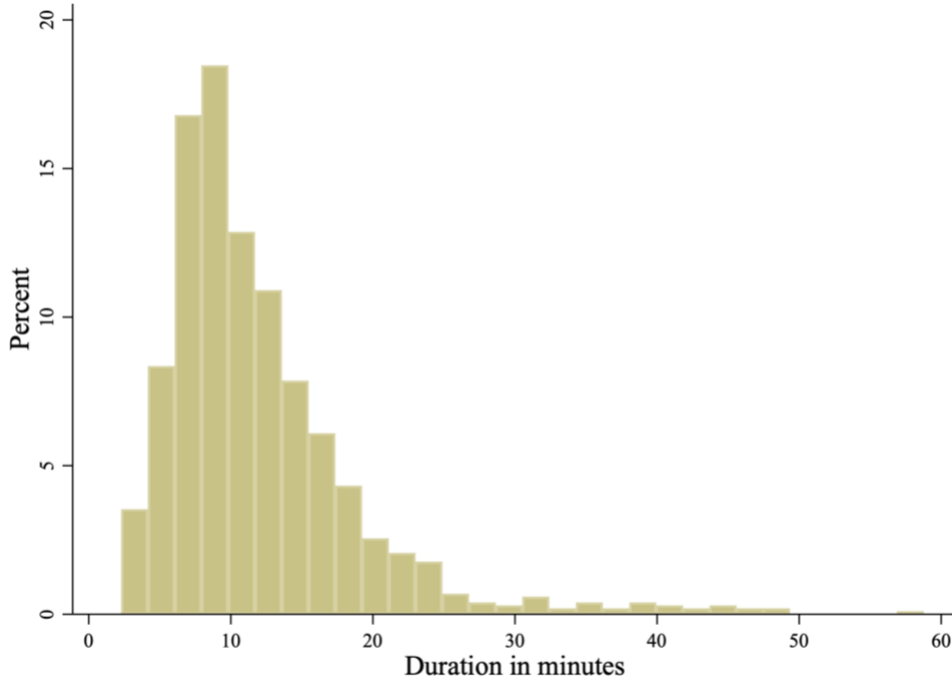
Table A10. Relationship Between Policy Beliefs and Program Preference – General Population

Agrees that ...	Prefers cash		
	Bivariate (1)	+ Ideology (2)	+ Demographics (3)
People make good financial decisions	16.40*** (3.58)	15.18*** (3.58)	14.50*** (3.43)
We should take from the rich and give to the poor	15.25*** (2.96)	12.25*** (3.14)	8.72*** (3.06)
Government does enough to help poor	-13.92*** (2.82)	-11.63*** (2.96)	-9.92*** (2.90)
It's worth sacrificing econ. growth for more equality	15.90*** (2.97)	12.81*** (3.12)	10.12*** (3.11)
People tend to be poor because they don't work hard enough	-5.26 (3.27)	-3.03 (3.27)	-2.47 (3.22)
The rich deserve to keep all the money they earn	-4.10 (2.94)	-1.67 (2.98)	0.37 (2.97)
Access to healthcare is a right	13.18*** (2.94)	9.47*** (3.08)	9.23*** (3.00)
Access to food is a right	8.77*** (3.29)	5.51 (3.36)	4.96 (3.29)
Access to housing is a right	9.29*** (2.90)	5.73* (3.02)	4.84* (2.89)

Notes: This table shows how the agreement with each policy belief correlates with different support for the cash program. Each independent variable is a dummy for somewhat or strongly agreeing with the phrase (policy belief) on the left. The regressions in Column (1) show the results of bivariate regressions of a preference for cash on each policy belief. Column (2) adds to each regression in Column (1) indicators for holding liberal and conservative views. Column (3) further adds indicators for income, education, political party affiliation, age, and gender variables. The dependent variable in all columns is an indicator for preferring cash, multiplied by 100. Data are from the control survey. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. \* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01.

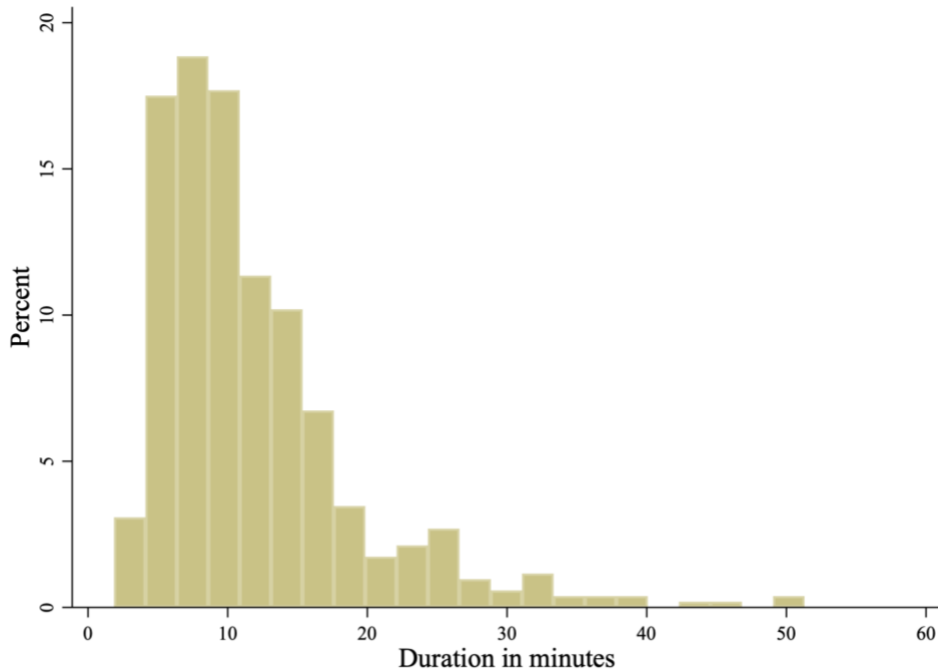
## Online Appendix – Figures

Figure A1. Histogram of Time Spent on the Survey – Control Survey



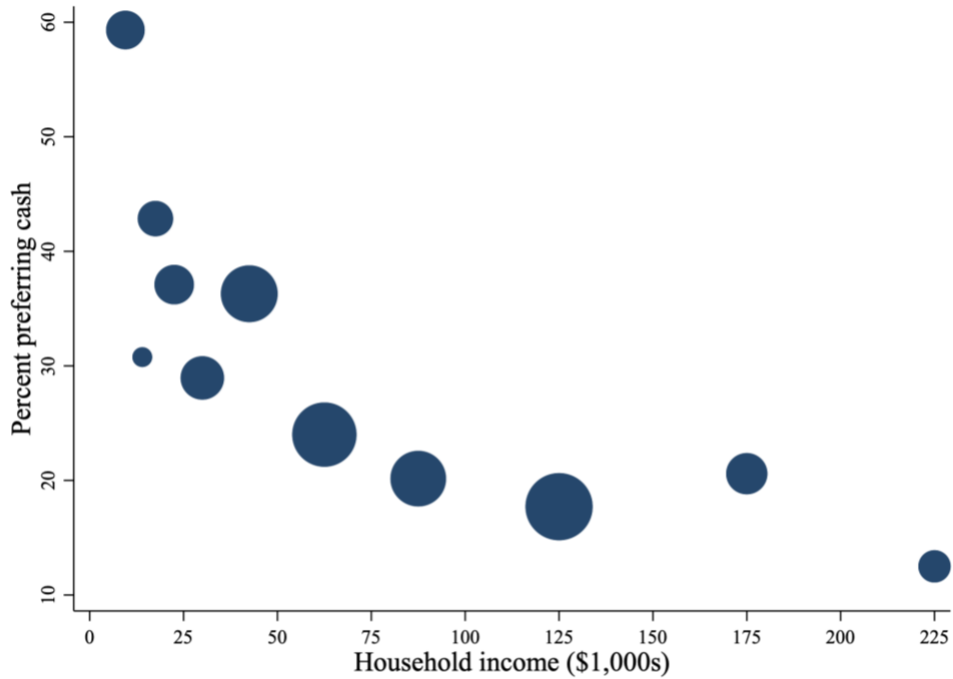
Notes: This figure shows the distribution of time that respondents spent on the control survey. The x-axis is truncated at 60 minutes for readability.

Figure A2. Histogram of Time Spent on the Survey – Below-Poverty Survey



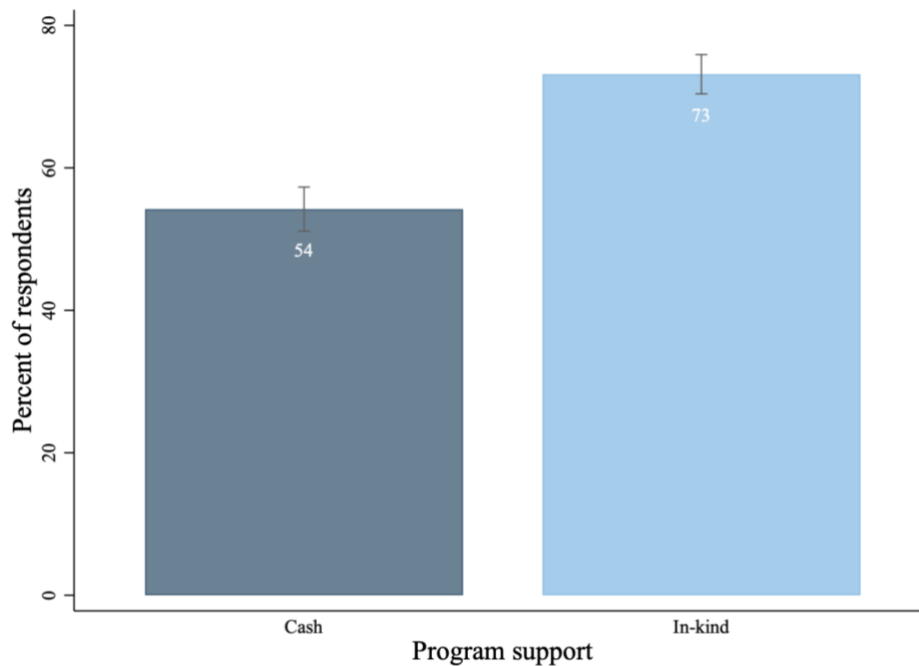
Notes: This figure shows the distribution of time that respondents spent on the below-poverty survey. The x-axis is truncated at 60 minutes for readability.

Figure A3. Preference for Cash by Income – General Population



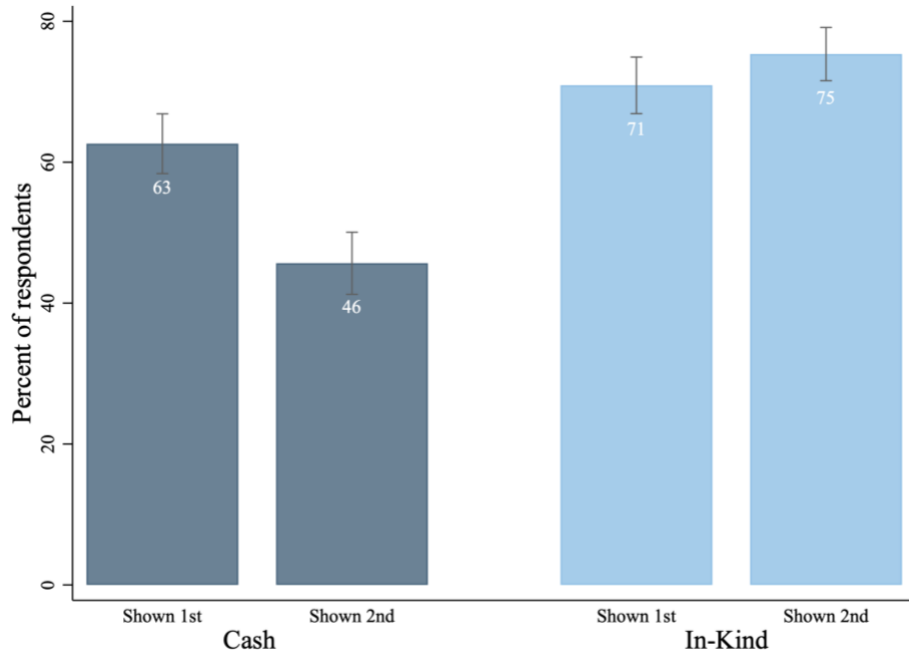
Notes: This figure illustrates the percent preferring cash in each income bracket. Marker size is proportional to the number of observations in the income bracket, and markers are located at the midpoint of each income bracket. The coefficient of this regression is -0.16 with standard error = 0.02 (-12.53 and 1.71 respectively when using  $\log(\text{income})$ ). Data are from the control survey.

Figure A4. Support for Cash and In-Kind Programs – General Population



Notes: The figure shows support for the cash program and support for the in-kind program. The thin bars mark 95 percent confidence intervals. Data are from control survey.

Figure A5. Support for Cash and In-Kind by Order Questions Presented – General Population



Notes: The figure shows support for each program based on the order the programs were individually shown to the respondent. The thin bars mark 95 percent confidence intervals. Data are from control survey.

## Online Appendix A – Survey Language

### **Yale University Consent Form**

You are being invited to take part in a research study. The following information explains why the research is being done and what the research will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully.

#### **Purpose of the Research:**

This study will examine preferences among U.S. residents concerning public spending decisions and how those preferences may be affected depending on what information is presented beforehand. Your answers will help contribute to our knowledge as a society about redistribution preferences. You must be eighteen (18) years of age or older to participate.

#### **Study Procedures:**

Participation in this study will involve completing a survey online. Completing the survey will take approximately twelve (12) minutes. You will be compensated according to the amount agreed upon with the panel administrator through their normal compensation procedures. The most important factor for the success of our research is that you **read each question carefully and answer honestly**. If you don't know the answer, take your best guess. Your responses will be subject to quality control methods, and low-quality responses will be flagged.

#### **Potential Risks:**

There are no known or anticipated risks to you for participating other than a possible loss of confidentiality.

#### **Confidentiality:**

All of your responses will be anonymous. Only the researchers involved in this study and those responsible for research oversight will have access to the information you provide. Your responses will be recorded and stored online. The researchers will not know your name, and no identifying information will be connected to your survey answers in any way. The survey is therefore anonymous. However, your account is associated with a number that the panel administrator must see in order to compensate you, and in some cases these numbers may be associated with public profiles which could, in theory, be searched. For this reason, though the researchers will not be looking at anyone's public profiles, the fact of your participation in the research (as opposed to your actual survey responses) is considered confidential rather than truly anonymous.

#### **Contact Information:**

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact:

**Professor Zachary Liscow**  
**Principal Investigator**  
**Yale Law School**  
**zachary.liscow@yale.edu**

If you would like to talk with someone other than the researchers to discuss problems or concerns, to discuss situations in the event that a member of the research team is not available, or to discuss your rights as a research participant, you may contact:

**Yale University Human Subjects Committee**  
**203-785-4688**  
**human.subjects@yale.edu**

Additional information is available at <https://your.yale.edu/researchsupport/human-research/research-participants/rights-researchparticipant>.

**Voluntary and Informed Consent:**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to participate, to end participation at any time for any reason, or to refuse to answer any question without penalty.

Do you agree to participate in this study?

***YES, I would like to participate in the study, and I confirm that I am a U.S. resident and that I am at least 18 years old.; NO, I would not like to participate.***

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey. Please click the arrow below to continue.

**Demographic Questions [asked in all surveys, with differences noted]**

1. (Household size)
  - a. [All but Yale student survey] How many people are in your household? Please include yourself in the count.  
*1 (Just me); 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8+*
  - b. [Yale student survey only] How many people are in your parents' household(s)? Please include only people who currently live with your parents. If your parents live separately, please include everyone currently living with either parent.  
*1 (Just my parent); 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8+; Not applicable*
2. (Household income)
  - a. [Control and information treatment surveys only] What was your total household income, before taxes, last year?  
*Less than \$13,000; \$13,000 to \$14,999; \$15,000 to \$19,999; \$20,000 to \$24,999; \$25,000 to \$34,999; \$35,000 to \$49,999; \$50,000 to \$74,999; \$75,000 to \$99,999; \$100,000 to \$149,999; \$150,000 to \$199,999; \$200,000 and over*
  - b. [Below-poverty survey only] What was your total household income, before taxes, last year?

*Up to \$12,700; \$12,701 to \$17,200; \$17,201 to \$21,700; \$21,701 to \$26,200; \$26,201 to \$30,700; \$30,701 to \$35,200; \$35,201 to \$39,700; \$39,701 to \$44,100; Over \$44,100*

- c. [Yale student survey only] What was your parents' combined total annual income, before taxes, last year? If you don't know, please take your best guess.

*Less than \$13,000; \$13,000 to \$14,999; \$15,000 to \$19,999; \$20,000 to \$24,999; \$25,000 to \$34,999; \$35,000 to \$49,999; \$50,000 to \$74,999; \$75,000 to \$99,999; \$100,000 to \$149,999; \$150,000 to \$199,999; \$200,000 or more; Not applicable*

3. [All but Yale student survey] Are you currently a student?

*Yes, enrolled full time; Yes, enrolled part time; No*

4. What is your age?

*18-24; 25-34; 35-44; 45-54; 55-64; 65-74; 75+*

5. (State of residence)

- a. [All but Yale student survey] In what state or territory do you live?

*Alabama; Alaska; American Samoa; Arizona; Arkansas; California; Colorado; Connecticut; Delaware; District of Columbia; Florida; Georgia; Guam; Hawaii; Idaho; Illinois; Indiana; Iowa; Kansas; Kentucky; Louisiana; Maine; Maryland; Massachusetts; Michigan; Minnesota; Mississippi; Missouri; Montana; Nebraska; Nevada; New Hampshire; New Jersey; New Mexico; New York; North Carolina; North Dakota; Northern Mariana Islands; Ohio; Oklahoma; Oregon; Pennsylvania; Puerto Rico; Rhode Island; South Carolina; South Dakota; Tennessee; Texas; U.S. Virgin Islands; Utah; Vermont; Virginia; Washington; West Virginia; Wisconsin; Wyoming; Other*

- b. [Yale student survey only] What state or territory do you consider to be "home"? If you are an international student and do not consider any U.S. state or territory to be home, please select "international student" at the end of the list.

*Alabama; Alaska; American Samoa; Arizona; Arkansas; California; Colorado; Connecticut; Delaware; District of Columbia; Florida; Georgia; Guam; Hawaii; Idaho; Illinois; Indiana; Iowa; Kansas; Kentucky; Louisiana; Maine; Maryland; Massachusetts; Michigan; Minnesota; Mississippi; Missouri; Montana; Nebraska; Nevada; New Hampshire; New Jersey; New Mexico; New York; North Carolina; North Dakota; Northern Mariana Islands; Ohio; Oklahoma; Oregon; Pennsylvania; Puerto Rico; Rhode Island; South Carolina; South Dakota; Tennessee; Texas; U.S. Virgin Islands; Utah; Vermont; Virginia; Washington; West Virginia; Wisconsin; Wyoming; Other U.S. location; International student*

6. (Zip code)

- a. [All but Yale student survey] In what zip code do you live?

*Free response*

- b. [Yale student survey only] What zip code do you consider to be “home”? If you are an international student and do not consider any U.S. zip code to be home, please type “N/A.”

*Free response*

7. Do you consider yourself Hispanic or Latino/a?

*Yes; No*

8. How would you describe yourself? Please pick all that apply.

*American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; White or Caucasian; Other; Prefer not to say*

9. What is your gender?

*Male; Female; Other; Prefer not to say*

10. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed? If you are currently enrolled, please indicate the highest degree you have received.

*Less than a high school diploma; High school degree or equivalent (e.g. G.E.D.); Some college, no degree; Associate degree; Bachelor’s Degree; Master’s degree; Professional degree (e.g. M.D., J.D.); Doctorate*

11. [All but Yale student survey] Do you currently receive Medicaid assistance? Medicaid is a federal healthcare program for some low-income Americans.

*Yes; No; Unsure*

12. [All but Yale student survey] Do you currently live in public housing?

*Yes; No; Unsure*

13. [All but Yale student survey] Do you currently receive housing voucher assistance (sometimes called “Section 8 housing”)?

*Yes; No; Unsure*

14. [All but Yale student survey] Do you currently receive any federal food assistance benefits (sometimes referred to as “food stamps,” “SNAP,” or “WIC”)?

*Yes; No; Unsure*

15. [All but Yale student survey] Have you filed for unemployment benefits since March 23, 2020?

*Yes; No*

16. What do you consider to be your political affiliation?

*Republican; Democrat; Independent; Other*

17. In general, how would you describe your political ideology?

*Strongly liberal; Moderately liberal; Slightly liberal; Neither liberal nor conservative; Slightly conservative; moderately conservative; Strongly conservative*

18. Did you vote in the presidential election in 2016?



*Yes; No; Unsure*

**Persuasion and Information Treatments [asked in the persuasion and information treatment surveys only]**

[Respondents are randomized into one of the following three treatment categories.]

19. [Economics treatment] Imagine that Alice's job pays minimum wage. She is happy living in a small apartment and cooking inexpensive foods at home, and she has few healthcare expenses. But her commute to work by bus takes two hours round-trip. She cannot afford a car, which would considerably shorten her commute.

Now imagine that the government decides to provide support to low-income Americans like Alice, but only to help them afford housing, food, or healthcare. Though she may rent a bigger apartment and spend more on food with the support, Alice will not benefit very much from this help. She is already happy with her apartment, food, and healthcare.

Instead, what Alice really needs is money to buy a car. If the government had decided to provide cash to low-income Americans, Alice could have bought a car, the thing that would have most improved her situation.

The central idea is that individual people know what is best for themselves and are in the best position to make financial choices that affect their own lives.

20. [Rights treatment] People generally agree that there are certain rights to which everyone is entitled, no matter how rich or poor they might be. Some examples include the right to housing, the right to food, and the right to healthcare. People cannot be denied these rights simply because of their financial situation.

For example, imagine that Alice is poor. Just because Alice is poor does not mean that she should have to live in substandard housing, go hungry, or have diseases go untreated. Housing, food, and healthcare are rights that do not depend on income, and the government should help make sure that everyone has access to these goods.

21. [Poor spending treatment] According to government surveys, the poorest Americans spend about 85% of their income on housing, transportation, food at home, clothing, utilities, healthcare, and education. By comparison, the wealthiest Americans spend about 65% of their income on these same categories.

**Support for Cash and In-Kind Programs [asked in all but the below-poverty survey]**

22. Please consider the following program that the federal government is considering permanently adopting to help low-income Americans. The program would be funded by an across-the-board income-tax rate increase. [Half of respondents are randomly assigned Figure A-1; the other half are randomly assigned Figure A-2.]

Figure A-1

<b>Benefit Offered</b>	Every year, each American below the poverty line receives \$2,000, in a separate account, that can be used to pay for healthcare, housing, and food costs only.
<b>Total Cost</b>	\$2,000 per year per American below the poverty line.

Figure A-2

<b>Benefit Offered</b>	Every year, each American below the poverty line receives \$2,000 in cash to spend on whatever they choose.
<b>Total Cost</b>	\$2,000 per year per American below the poverty line.

Would you support the government adopting this program?

*Yes; No*

23. Please assume that the federal government has decided NOT to adopt the program just described. Now, please consider another option that the federal government is considering permanently adopting to help low-income Americans. This program would also be funded by an across-the-board income-tax rate increase. [Respondents assigned Figure A-1 in question 22 are shown Figure A-2; respondents assigned Figure A-2 in question 22 are shown Figure A-1.]

Would you support the government adopting this different program?

*Yes; No*

**Comprehension Questions [asked in all but the below-poverty survey]**

24. Here are the two program options presented side by side. [Respondents assigned Figure A-1 in question 22 are shown Figure A-3; respondents assigned Figure A-2 in question 22 are shown Figure A-4.]

Figure A-3

	<b>Option 1</b>	<b>Option 2</b>
<b>Benefit Offered</b>	Every year, each American below the poverty line receives \$2,000, in a <b>separate account</b> , that can be used to pay for healthcare, housing, and food costs only.	Every year, each American below the poverty line receives \$2,000 in <b>cash</b> to spend on whatever they choose.
<b>Total Cost</b>	\$2,000 per year per American below the poverty line.	\$2,000 per year per American below the poverty line.

Figure A-4

	Option 1	Option 2
<b>Benefit Offered</b>	Every year, each American below the poverty line receives \$2,000 in <b>cash</b> to spend on whatever they choose.	Every year, each American below the poverty line receives \$2,000, in a <b>separate account</b> , that can be used to pay for healthcare, housing, and food costs only.
<b>Total Cost</b>	\$2,000 per American below the poverty line.	\$2,000 per American below the poverty line.

Under [Option 1 in Figure A-3/Option 2 in Figure A-4], a recipient may choose to spend some of the money from the separate account to send their child to summer camp.

*True; False*

[Respondents are then informed whether their answer was correct or incorrect and the reasoning for the correct answer is explained.]

25. Under [Option 2 in Figure A-3/Option 1 in Figure A-4], a recipient may choose to spend the \$2,000 on healthcare, housing, or food costs, but the recipient may instead choose to spend the \$2,000 on gas or to buy clothes.

*True; False*

[Respondents are then informed whether their answer was correct or incorrect and the reasoning for the correct answer is explained.]

**Comprehension Questions [asked in the below-poverty survey only]**

26. The federal government is considering ways to help the lowest-income Americans. The government plans to spend \$2,000 per year per American below the poverty line. The government is considering two new permanent programs. No current programs will be affected. Please assume that **you will personally benefit** from either program. [Half of respondents are randomly assigned Figure A-5; the other half are randomly assigned Figure A-6.]

Figure A-5

	Option 1	Option 2
<b>Benefit Offered</b>	Receive \$2,000, in a separate account, that I can spend on healthcare, housing, and food costs only.	Receive \$2,000 in cash to spend however I choose.
<b>Total Value</b>	\$2,000 per year.	\$2,000 per year.

Figure A-6

	Option 1	Option 2
Benefit Offered	Receive \$2,000 in cash to spend however I choose.	Receive \$2,000, in a separate account, that I can spend on healthcare, housing, and food costs only.
Total Value	\$2,000 per year.	\$2,000 per year.

Under [Option 1 in Figure A-5/Option 2 in Figure A-6], I may choose to spend some of the money from my separate account to send my child to summer camp.

*True; False*

[Respondents are then informed whether their answer was correct or incorrect and the reasoning for the correct answer is explained.]

27. Under [Option 2 in Figure A-5/Option 1 in Figure A-6], I may choose to spend the \$2,000 on healthcare, housing, or food costs, but I may instead choose to spend the \$2,000 on gas or to buy clothes.

*True; False*

[Respondents are then informed whether their answer was correct or incorrect and the reasoning for the correct answer is explained.]

**Program Preference [asked in all but the below-poverty survey]**

28. The federal government is now reconsidering both program options. Whichever program is chosen will be funded by an across-the-board income tax rate increase. [Respondents assigned Figure A-1 in question 22 are again shown Figure A-3; respondents assigned Figure A-2 in question 22 are again shown Figure A-4.] If you had to choose for the government to adopt either Option 1 or Option 2, which would you prefer that the government permanently adopt?

*Option 1; Option 2*

29. (For respondents who preferred the separate account program in question 28)

- a. Why do you prefer this program?

*Free response.*

- b. Which of the following describe your reasoning for preferring this program?

*Pick all that apply.* [Order of options was randomized.]

- i. This program will make sure poor people spend the money only on things that will make them better off.
- ii. At least one of the goods (healthcare, housing, food) is a right to which everyone should have access.

- iii. This program will do more to make the rest of society better off (for example, by saving taxpayers money in the long term).
  - iv. This is the more politically feasible option.
  - v. Aid will be targeted to those who need it most.
  - vi. If the situation were reversed, I would choose this program for myself.
  - vii. Most people who are poor would probably prefer to receive the benefits this program offers.
  - viii. Other (please specify).
- c. The government is willing to change the size of the separate account program. Please keep in mind that a larger program will result in higher income-tax rates for taxpayers, and a smaller program will result in lower income-tax rates for taxpayers.

*Fill in the blank.*

The **largest amount** I would support each American below the poverty line receiving in a **separate account** is \$\_\_\_\_\_. I might prefer less, but I would still support the program up to this amount. If the amount were any more than this, I would not support the program.

- d. Now, please imagine that the government has NOT chosen to adopt the separate account program. Instead, the government has adopted the program in which each American below the poverty line will receive **cash** to spend however they choose. However, the government is willing to change how much cash each recipient will receive under this program. Again, please keep in mind that a larger program will result in higher income-tax rates for taxpayers, and a smaller program will result in lower income-tax rates for taxpayers.

*Fill in the blank.*

The **largest amount** I would support each American below the poverty line receiving in **cash** is \$\_\_\_\_\_. I might prefer less, but I would still support the program up to this amount. If the amount were any more than this, I would not support the program.

30. (For respondents who preferred the cash program in question 28)

- a. Why do you prefer this program?  
*Free response.*
- b. Which of the following describe your reasoning for choosing this program?  
*Pick all that apply. [Order of options was randomized.]*
- i. This program will allow poor people to spend money on the things that will make them the best off.
  - ii. Each individual should be free to choose how to use their own resources.
  - iii. This program will do more to make the rest of society better off (for example, by saving taxpayers money in the long term).

- iv. This is the more politically feasible option.
- v. This program will have lower administrative costs.
- vi. If the situation were reversed, I would choose this program for myself.
- vii. Most people who are poor would probably prefer to receive the benefits this program offers.
- viii. Other (please specify).

- c. The government is willing to change the size of the cash program. Please keep in mind that a larger program will result in higher income-tax rates for taxpayers, and a smaller program will result in lower income-tax rates for taxpayers.

*Fill in the blank.*

The **largest amount** I would support each American below the poverty line receiving in cash is \$\_\_\_\_\_. I might prefer less, but I would still support the program up to this amount. If the amount were any more than this, I would not support the program.

- d. Now, please imagine that the government has NOT chosen the cash program. Instead, the government has adopted the program in which each American below the poverty line will receive access to a **separate account**, to be spent on healthcare, housing, and food costs only. However, the government is willing to change how much each recipient will receive in a separate account under this program. Again, please keep in mind that a larger program will result in higher income-tax rates for taxpayers, and a smaller program will result in lower income-tax rates for taxpayers.

*Fill in the blank.*

The **largest amount** I would support each American below the poverty line receiving in a **separate account** is \$\_\_\_\_\_. I might prefer less, but I would still support the program up to this amount. If the amount were any more than this, I would not support the program.

31. Please consider both program options one more time. [Respondents assigned Figure A-1 in question 22 are again shown Figure A-3; respondents assigned Figure A-2 in question 22 are again shown Figure A-4.]

- a. [Respondents shown Figure A-3] What percent of Americans below the poverty line do you think would prefer to **receive** access to a **separate account** rather than cash?

*Slider from 0 to 100*

- b. [Respondents shown Figure A-4] What percent of Americans below the poverty line do you think would prefer to **receive** access to **cash** rather than a separate account?

*Slider from 0 to 100*

**Program Preference [asked in the below-poverty survey only]**

32. As a reminder, the government is considering the following two programs. [Respondents assigned Figure A-5 in question 26 are again shown Figure A-5; respondents assigned Figure A-6 in question 26 are again shown Figure A-6.] Which of the following program benefits would you prefer to receive?

*I would prefer to receive Option 1 benefits; I would prefer to receive Option 2 benefits*

33. (For respondents who preferred the separate account program in question 32)

a. Why do you prefer [separate account] benefits for yourself?

*Free response*

b. Which of the following describe your reasoning for choosing [the separate account program]?

*Pick all that apply.* [Order of options was randomized.]

- i. Having rules about how I can spend the money would help me make better financial choices.
- ii. At least one of the goods (healthcare, housing, food) is a right to which I should have access.
- iii. This program will help me in a way that will make sure the rest of society is better off, too.
- iv. This is the more politically feasible option.
- v. I would choose to give a separate account to others, so I chose a separate account for myself.
- vi. Other (please specify).

c. Now, please imagine that the government has decided NOT to adopt the separate account program. Instead, you will receive **cash** that you can spend on whatever you choose. However, the government is willing to change the amount of cash you will receive.

*Please fill in the blank.*

I would need \$\_\_\_\_\_ in **cash** to be as satisfied with the cash program as I would have been with \$2,000 in a separate account.

34. (For respondents who preferred the cash program in question 32)

a. Why do you prefer [cash] benefits for yourself?

*Free response*

b. Which of the following describe your reasoning for choosing [cash]?

*Pick all that apply.* [Order of options was randomized.]

- i. I am in the best position to know what things will make me better off.
- ii. I should be free to choose how I use my resources.
- iii. This program will help me in a way that will make sure the rest of society is better off, too.

- iv. This is the more politically feasible option.
  - v. This program will have lower administrative costs.
  - vi. I would choose to give cash to others, so I chose cash for myself.
  - vii. Other (please specify).
- c. Now, please imagine that the government has decided NOT to adopt the cash program. Instead, you will receive access to a **separate account** that can be spent on housing, healthcare, and food costs only. However, the government is willing to change the size of the separate account.

*Fill in the blank.*

I would need \$\_\_\_\_\_ in a **separate account** to be as satisfied with the separate account program as I would have been with \$2,000 in cash.

35. Please explain your reasoning for choosing this amount.

*Free response*

36. What percent of a \$2,000 cash benefit from the government would you spend on necessities? Please assume that “necessities” means housing, transportation, food at home, clothing, utilities, healthcare, and education.

*Slider from 0 to 100*

### **Covid-19 Questions [asked in all surveys, with differences noted]**

37. (Change in views since the outbreak of COVID-19)
- a. [All but below-poverty survey] How has the recent outbreak of Coronavirus (COVID-19) influenced your support for permanent transfers to Americans below the poverty line?

*Pick all that apply.*

- i. It has made me MORE supportive of cash transfers.
- ii. It has made me LESS supportive of cash transfers.
- iii. It has made me MORE supportive of transfers to a separate account that can be used to pay for healthcare, housing, and food costs only.
- iv. It has made me LESS supportive of transfers to a separate account that can be used to pay for healthcare, housing, and food costs only.
- v. The recent outbreak has not influenced my support for permanent transfers to Americans below the poverty line.

- b. [Below-poverty survey only] How has the recent outbreak of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) affected the type of transfer you would prefer to receive?

*Pick all that apply.*

- i. It has INCREASED my preference for cash transfers.
- ii. It has DECREASED my preference for cash transfers.
- iii. It has INCREASED my preference for transfers to a separate account that I can use to pay for healthcare, housing, and food costs only.



- iv. It has DECREASED my preference for transfers to a separate account that I can use to pay for healthcare, housing, and food costs only.
- v. The recent outbreak has not changed the type of transfer I would prefer to receive.

38. (Reasons for change in views)

- a. [All but the below-poverty survey]
  - i. [Respondents who selected 37(a)(i)-(iv)] Why has the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak changed your opinion about transfers to Americans below the poverty line?  
*Free response.*
  - ii. [Respondents who selected 37(a)(v)] Why has the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak not changed your opinion about transfers to Americans below the poverty line?  
*Free response.*
- b. [Below-poverty survey]
  - i. [Respondents who selected 37(b)(i)-(iv)] Why has the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak affected the type of transfer you would prefer to receive?  
*Free response.*
  - ii. [Respondents who selected 37(b)(v)] Why has the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak not affected the type of transfer you would prefer to receive?  
*Free response.*

**Other Policy Questions [same for all surveys]**

39. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

*Strongly agree; Somewhat agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Somewhat disagree; Strongly disagree*

- a. In general, people make good personal financial decisions.
- b. We should take from the rich to give to the poor.
- c. The government does enough to help low-income Americans.
- d. It is worth sacrificing economic growth to have greater equality.
- e. People tend to be poor because they do not work hard enough.
- f. The rich deserve to keep all the money they earn.

40. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

*Strongly agree; Somewhat agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Somewhat disagree; Strongly disagree*

- a. Access to healthcare is a right.
- b. Access to food is a right.

- c. Access to housing is a right.

**How Respondents Think the Poor Spend Money [asked in all but the below-poverty survey]**

- 41. What percent of a cash benefit from the government do you think Americans below the poverty line would spend on necessities? Please assume that “necessities” means housing, transportation, food at home, clothing, utilities, healthcare, and education.

*Slider from 0 to 100*

**Confusion/Bias [same for all surveys]**

- 42. Please let us know if there was anything in the survey you thought was confusing or biased. We appreciate your help!

*Free response.*

## Online Appendix B – Data Appendix

### i. Sources of demographic information for U.S. Population (used to create quotas):

Variable	Source	Notes
<b><i>General population</i></b>		
Age	U.S. Census Bureau (2018). <i>Age and Sex</i> . 2018: American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables. Retrieved from <a href="https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=S0101%3A AGE">https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=S0101%3A AGE</a> .	Data from 2018.
Race	Kaiser Family Foundation (2018). <i>Population Distribution by Race/Ethnicity</i> . Retrieved from <a href="https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/distribution-by-raceethnicity">https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/distribution-by-raceethnicity</a> .	Data from 2018.
Gender	U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program (2019). <i>QuickFacts</i> . Retrieved from <a href="https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045219">https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045219</a> .	Data from 2019.
Education	National Center for Education Statistics (2017). <i>Table 104.40. Percentage of Persons 18 to 24 Years Old and Age 25 and Over, by Educational Attainment, Race/Ethnicity, and Racial/Ethnic Subgroups: 2010 and 2016</i> . Digest of Education Statistics, 2017. Retrieved from <a href="https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_104.40.asp">https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_104.40.asp</a> .	Data from 2016, weighted using ACS age data cited above.
Politics	Gallup (2020). <i>Party Affiliation</i> . In Depth, Topics A to Z. Retrieved from <a href="https://news.gallup.com/poll/15370/party-affiliation.aspx">https://news.gallup.com/poll/15370/party-affiliation.aspx</a> .	Data averaged from 3/1/19 through 3/22/20.
Income	U.S. Census Bureau (2019). <i>Table A-2. Income and Poverty in the United States: 2018</i> . [Excel]. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2019/demo/income-poverty/p60-266.html">https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2019/demo/income-poverty/p60-266.html</a> .	Data from 2018.
<b><i>Below poverty</i></b>		
Age	U.S. Census Bureau (2018). <i>Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months by Sex by Age</i> . 2018: ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables. Retrieved from <a href="https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=poverty%20by%20Age%20and%20Sex&amp;hidePreview=false&amp;tid=ACSDT1Y2018.B17001&amp;t=Age%20and%20Sex%3Apoverty&amp;vintage=2018">https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=poverty%20by%20Age%20and%20Sex&amp;hidePreview=false&amp;tid=ACSDT1Y2018.B17001&amp;t=Age%20and%20Sex%3Apoverty&amp;vintage=2018</a> .	Data from 2018.

Race	Kaiser Family Foundation (2018). <i>Poverty Rate by Race/Ethnicity</i> . Retrieved from <a href="https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/poverty-rate-by-raceethnicity">https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/poverty-rate-by-raceethnicity</a> .	Data from 2018.
Gender	Semega, J.L., Kollar, M.A., Creamer, J., and Mohanty, A. (2019). Figure 8, p. 21. <i>Income and Poverty in the United States: 2018</i> . Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2019/demo/p60-266.pdf">https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2019/demo/p60-266.pdf</a> .	Data from 2018.
Education	U.S. Census Bureau (2018). <i>Current Population Survey, 2018</i> . Retrieved from <a href="https://www.census.gov/cps/data/cpstalecreator.html">https://www.census.gov/cps/data/cpstalecreator.html</a> .	Used dataset Persons in Poverty Universe, with Education and Poverty Status variables. Data from 2018.
Politics	Pew Research Center (2016). <i>2016 Party Identification Detailed Tables</i> . Retrieved from <a href="https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2016/09/13/2016-party-identification-detailed-tables">https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2016/09/13/2016-party-identification-detailed-tables</a> .	Data from 2016.

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Notes: All demographics categories use national-level data and specifically refer to the adult population, with the exception of gender for the general population, which refers to the total U.S. population. National below-poverty estimates of political party affiliation refer to people with a family income under \$30,000.

## ii. Notes on definitions of demographic categories

1. Race
  - a. “Asian” includes Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian.
  - b. “Other race” includes two or more races, except when the respondent chose Hispanic/Latino as one of the races, in which case we categorized the respondent as Hispanic/Latino.
2. Gender
  - a. “Female” includes 4 respondents in the control group (0.4%) and 2 respondents in the below-poverty group (0.4%) who either did not indicate their gender or who selected “other gender” as their response.
3. Income
  - a. Where we use income in regressions, we use the midpoint of the respondent’s reported income bracket. The lowest bracket (less than \$13,000) and highest (greater than \$200,000) we code as \$9,500 and \$225,000, respectively.

### iii. Textual analysis

We undertook the following steps to clean the written responses:

1. Convert all text to lowercase.
2. Standardize some common words, e.g., “tax payer” to “taxpayer,” “non-essential” to “nonessential,” so that different spellings are not treated differently and so that concepts like “healthcare” are treated as single words.
3. Remove special characters, numbers, punctuation and consecutive spaces.
4. Remove “stop words” (i.e., very common words). These words, such as “my” and “have,” are from the “stopwords” list in the “tm” package in R.
5. Remove additional words without informative meanings, such as “people,” “money,” and “option.”
6. Lemmatize the words — that is, convert them to their dictionary entry form — to reduce the number of variants. This is done in two steps: first with the Mechura dictionary in the textstem package in R, then with the Hunspell lemma dictionary, which we use to lemmatize adverbs only.
7. Parse the remaining text into bigrams (the most common two-word combinations).
8. Remove from the bigrams any repeated words (e.g., “food food”) and any uninformative (e.g., “poverty line”) or nonsensical (e.g., “line need”) combinations. If the order does not affect the meaning of the bigram, we combine inverses into one entry (e.g., “food house” and “house food”).

### Online Appendix C – Results from Sequential Presentation of Support for Cash & In-Kind

In addition to asking respondents to choose between cash and in-kind programs, we also asked simply whether respondents approved or disapproved of the in-kind and cash programs independently.

As expected, support in the control sample was considerably stronger for in-kind redistribution. As Appendix Figure 4 shows, 73 percent of respondents said they approved of the in-kind program whereas only 54 percent of respondents said they approved of the cash program (a difference significant at the 1 percent level).

Support varied considerably with respondent income. Of those with an income under \$13,000 per year, 86 percent supported the in-kind program and 76 percent supported the cash program.<sup>52</sup> For those with incomes over \$200,000 per year, who may be more politically influential (Gilens 2014), support for in-kind fell modestly to 70 percent, while support for cash fell considerably more, to 43 percent.

Although approximately the same number of respondents supported the in-kind option regardless of whether it was presented first or second, support for the cash program dropped dramatically when the cash program was presented second. As Appendix Figure 5 shows, 63 percent of respondents supported the cash program when presented first but only 46 percent supported it when it was presented second, after being made aware of the in-kind option — a drop

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<sup>52</sup> Results available upon request.

of 17 percentage points.<sup>53</sup> Conversely, support for the in-kind program was 71 percent when it was presented first, and support increased by 4 percentage points to 75 percent when it was presented second.<sup>54</sup>

We are agnostic about which difference in support for cash versus in-kind is more policy-relevant: that based only on support for the first program respondents were shown, or the difference after participants were able to consider both options. Perhaps more importantly, the apparently tenuous support for cash redistribution among the general population — with a large drop in support for cash redistribution after the mere mention of a possible alternative in-kind program — may hold weight in future discussions about redistribution.

The treatment effects produced mixed results on respondents' support for cash and in-kind programs presented separately, as shown in Appendix Table A9. The economics treatment increased the support for cash by 5 percentage points ( $p < 0.10$ ) but had no statistically significant effect on support for in-kind. The treatment informing participants how the poor spend their money actually reduced support among respondents for the cash program by 5 percentage points ( $p < 0.10$ ), but had no effect on support for in-kind. The rights treatment had no effect on support. These treatment results were similar after adding demographic controls, though, as shown in Appendix Table A6, the decline in support for in-kind became statistically significant at the 10 percent level with the economics treatment.

Among the Yale sample, support for both the cash and in-kind programs was higher than in the control group or in any of the three treatment groups. Students were 26 percentage points more likely to support the \$2,000 cash program at all (Column (1)). Support for in-kind was also significantly higher (by 15 percentage points) than in the control sample (Column (2)).

#### **Online Appendix D – Correlations with General Policy Preferences**

Policy preferences also correlate with respondents' choices, as shown in Appendix Table A10. Column (1) shows bivariate results of the relationship between the preference for cash and the policy variables. Respondents who agreed that people generally make good financial decisions, that society should transfer wealth from the rich to the poor, and that it is worth sacrificing economic growth for more equality, and who disagreed that the government does enough to help the poor, were more likely to prefer cash. Perhaps surprisingly, the belief that access to healthcare, food, or housing is a right was also associated with a preference for cash. Even controlling for political ideology (Column (2)) and demographics (Column (3)), relationships remain between believing that access to healthcare or housing is a right and support for cash.

One explanation for this relationship is based on the typical American “hierarchy” of rights, which tends to place civil and political rights (including individual autonomy and freedom) above economic and social rights (including housing and healthcare) (Moyn 2018). Thus, although a set of respondents may believe that access to healthcare, food, and housing are all rights, those same respondents may think these rights are outweighed by individuals' rights to control their own lives (an outcome promoted through the cash program).

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<sup>53</sup> Results are essentially identical with controls and are significant at the 1 percent level with and without controls.

<sup>54</sup> Respondent demographics largely did not change the interaction effect, with the exception of those making over \$100,000 who, when shown the in-kind program first, were slightly more likely to support the cash program.

## **Appendix References**

Moyn, Samuel, 2018. "Economic Rights Are Human Rights." *Foreign Policy*. April 9, 2018.