

Why conservatives are able to pass such harsh restrictions on the poor



Americans generally agree.

Christopher Ingraham: June 1, 2015

Welfare restrictions have lately become fashionable in certain states, especially red ones. Missouri Republicans are trying to keep food stamp recipients from buying steak and seafood. Kansas wants to keep the poor from going to movies or the swimming pools. It also recently enacted cash withdrawal limits on welfare recipients that could drastically increase the amount of ATM fees the poor will have to pay.

A new survey from YouGov helps explain why legislators may be able to enact such harsh restrictions. As you can see in the results below, Americans generally are uncomfortable with limits like the ban on steak and seafood or the ATM withdrawal caps. But they do support, by and large, limits on spending on adult businesses, movie theaters and alcoholic beverages. More than 40 percent of Americans even oppose low-income Americans using their welfare benefits to bring their kids to a swimming pool during the summer.

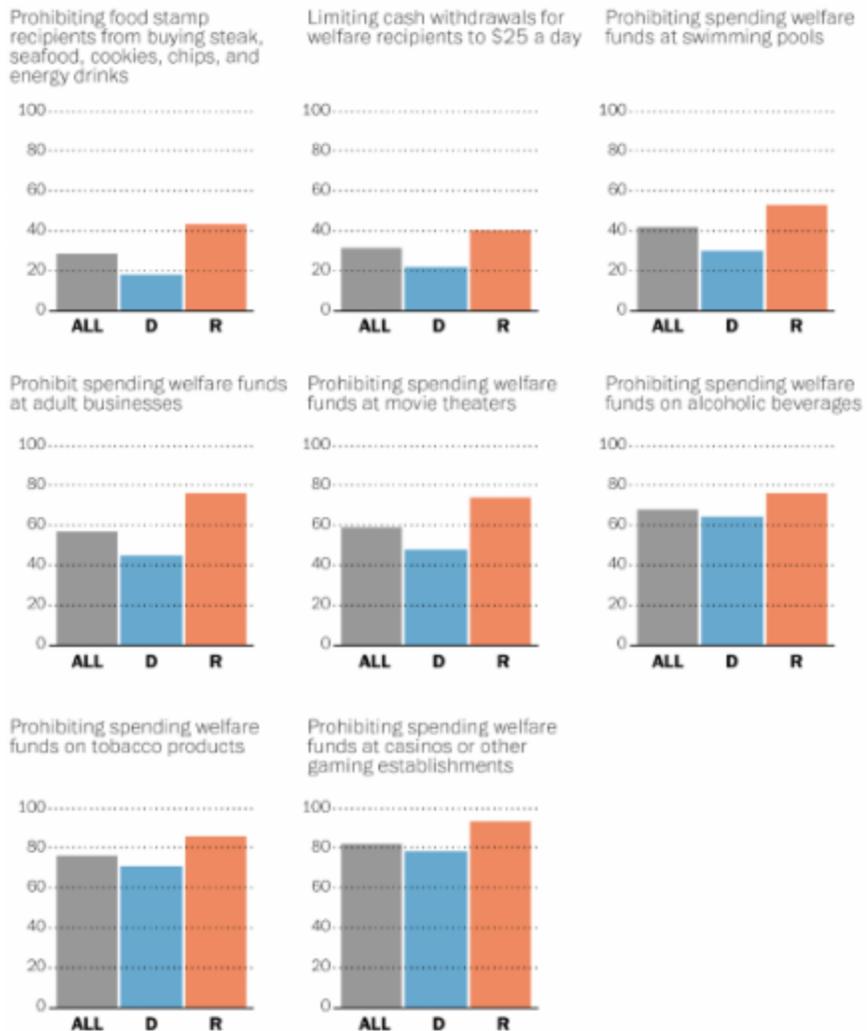
And in all cases, Republicans support the limits more than Democrats or the general population. So when legislators in red states advance these types of policies, if they frame it as working to stop wasteful spending (and don't mention the most restrictive policies), they may actually get quite a bit of support. After all, when YouGov asked people if the poor should be ashamed for applying for or using welfare

benefits, 1 in 5 Republicans said "yes," while another third of them said they weren't sure. Among Democrats those numbers were 9 and 12 percent, respectively.

Take a more detailed look at the survey results below:

Mixed feelings on welfare restrictions

% of all Americans, Democrats and Republicans saying they support...



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Source: April 2015 YouGov survey

Among the eight types of welfare restrictions YouGov polled on last month, limits on food purchases were by far the least popular. Only 28 percent of Americans overall thought these were a good idea. That figure fell to 18 percent for Democrats, and rose to 43 percent among Republicans.

ATM withdrawal limits were similarly unpopular among all three groups. Interestingly, Americans said that welfare recipients shouldn't be able to use their funds at movie theaters and adult businesses (eg, strip clubs and the like) by nearly identical amounts -- 59 and 57 percent, respectively.

There was widespread agreement that the poor shouldn't use welfare money to buy booze or cigarettes. And the most popular restriction was a ban on spending welfare checks at casinos.

The gap between Republicans and Democrats was widest on the question of adult entertainment: 45 percent of Democrats supported a ban on welfare recipients spending their money at these establishments, versus 76 percent of Republicans.

By contrast, the gap was the smallest -- 12 percentage points -- on the question about the alcohol ban.

Overall the results suggest that conservative lawmakers supporting some of the more controversial restrictions, on cash withdrawals and food purchases, may be overplaying their hands. On the other hand, elements of their policies do have broad support.
