

# Voters Overwhelmingly Support Strengthening Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

Finds TCF and Data for Progress Poll

MAY 2021

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) provides vital income assistance to roughly eight million of the nation's poorest people with disabilities and older adults. But due to decades of federal neglect, SSI has been left to wither on the vine—and the program now consigns millions of disabled people and older adults to deep and enduring poverty when it should instead give them a lifeline out of it. During the campaign, President Biden pledged that disabled people and seniors should never have to live in poverty in America, and committed to make several long-overdue improvements to

SSI to ensure its beneficiaries are able to live in dignity.

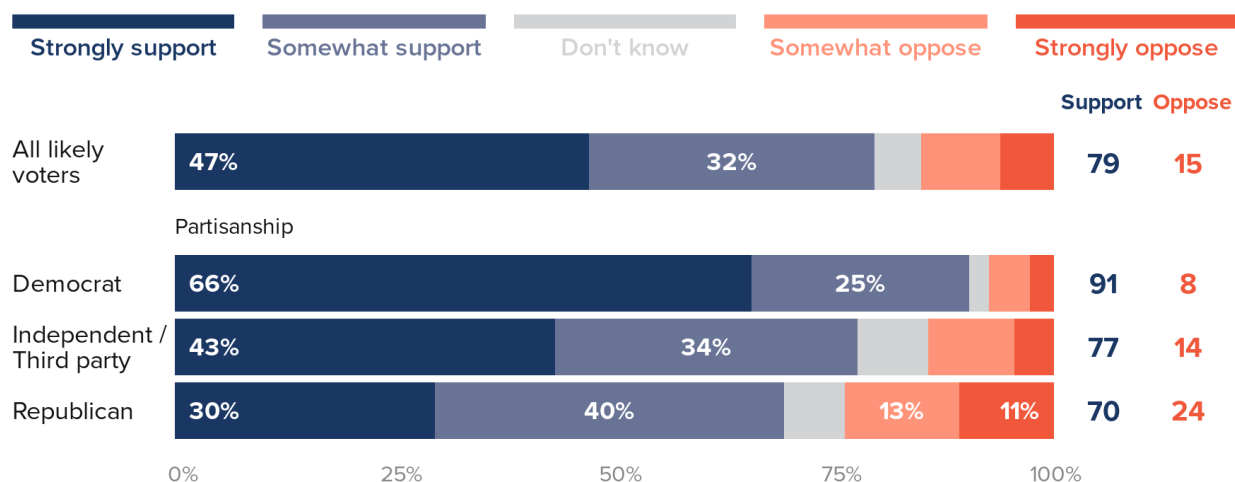
New polling conducted by Data for Progress and The Century Foundation shows that voters support congressional action to finally bring SSI into the 21st century. As part of a May survey conducted by Data for Progress and The Century Foundation of 1,250 likely voters nationally, we measured public attitudes on President Biden's proposals to update SSI. **The findings reveal overwhelming bipartisan support for each of President Biden's proposals to improve SSI.**

- First, we asked about President Biden's proposal to **increase monthly SSI benefits** to at least the federal poverty level—\$1,073/month—so that people with disabilities and seniors do not live in poverty. Nearly 8 in 10 voters support this proposal, with broad support extending across party lines.

## Voters Across Parties Overwhelmingly Support Increasing Monthly SSI Benefits

The Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program provides cash assistance to about 8 million people with disabilities and seniors who have little to no other income. SSI recipients receive a maximum of \$794/month from the federal government. During the presidential campaign, President Biden proposed to increase monthly benefits to the federal poverty level - \$1,073/ month - so that people with disabilities and seniors do not live in poverty.

Would you support or oppose this proposal?



May 21–23, 2021 survey of 1,250 likely voters

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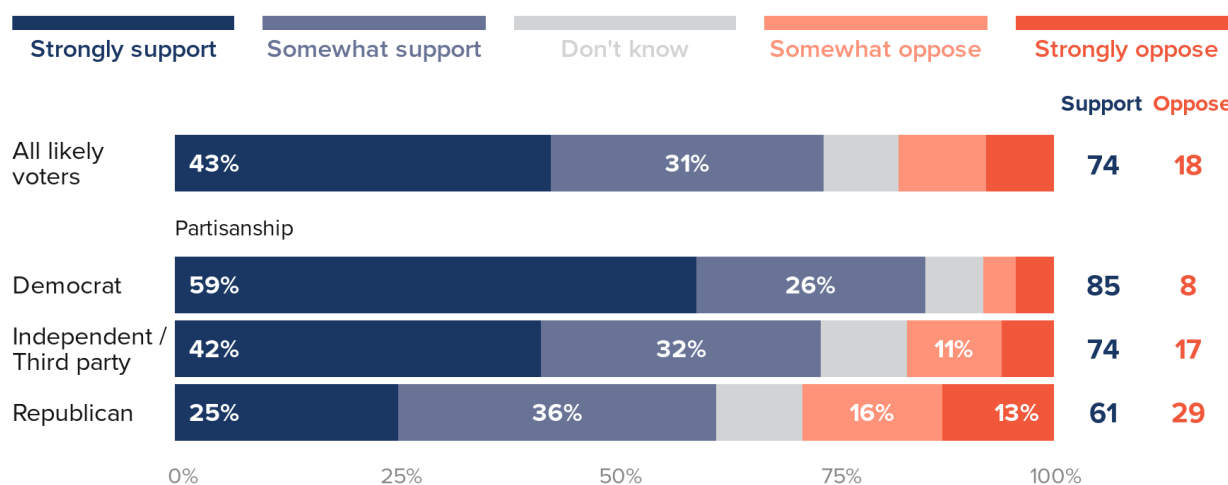
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- Next, we asked about President Biden's proposal to **update SSI's asset limits**, which have been stuck at \$2,000 since 1989. Seventy-four percent of voters—including 85 percent of Democrats, 74 percent of Independents, and 61 percent of Republicans—support increasing SSI's asset limit to at least \$10,000.

## Increasing SSI Asset Limits is Popular Among Likely Voters

The Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program has an asset cap, prohibiting people with disabilities and seniors from having more than \$2,000 in resources at any time. This asset cap has not been updated since 1989, and because of inflation, has lost over half its value. During the presidential campaign, President Biden called for the asset limit to be increased and indexed to inflation moving forward. Legislation has been introduced to raise the asset limit to \$10,000.

Would you support or oppose this proposal?



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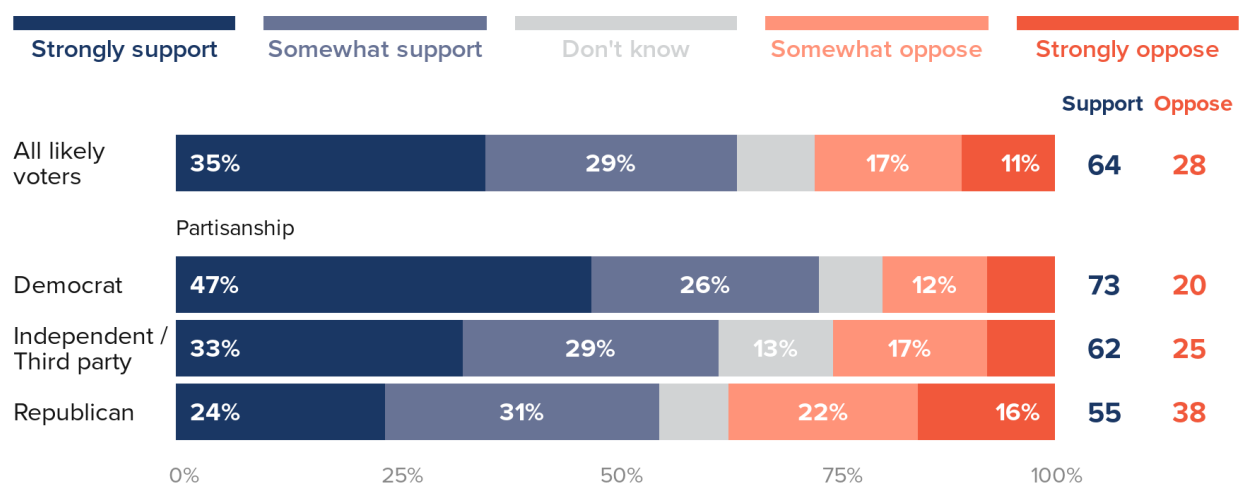
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- **Eliminating SSI's asset limit altogether** is also popular among voters of all political stripes, with 64 percent overall support—including 73 percent of Democrats, 62 percent of Independents, and 55 percent of Republicans.

## A Majority of Voters Support Eliminating SSI Asset Caps Altogether

Some advocates argue that Supplemental Security Income (SSI) shouldn't have any asset cap at all, meaning that people with disabilities and seniors would be able to save as much as they are able to do without losing benefits.

Would you support or oppose eliminating Supplemental Security Income asset limits altogether?



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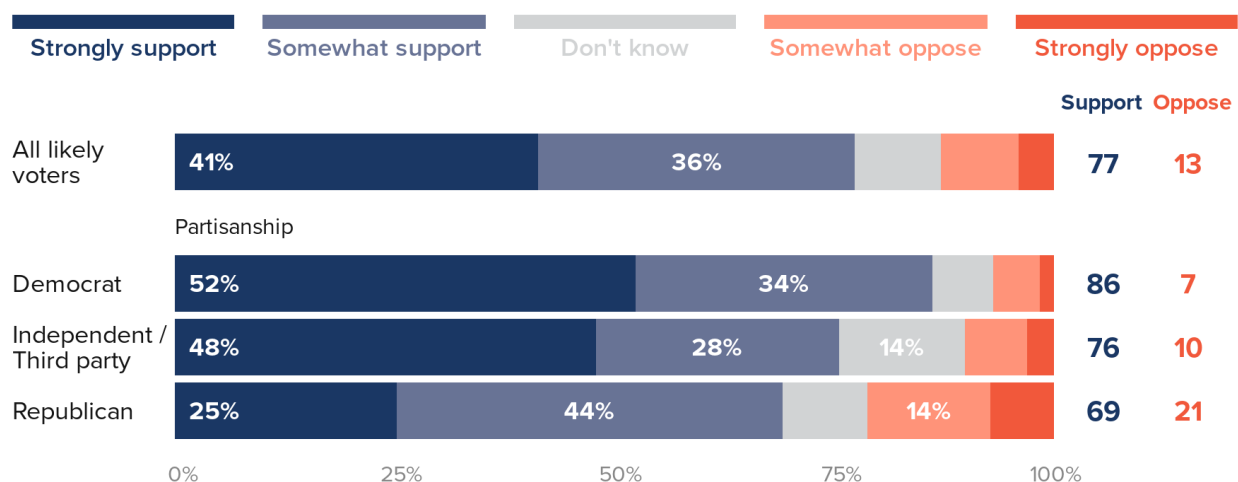
- We then asked about **updating SSI's outdated income rules**, which have not been adjusted since 1972 when the SSI program was signed into law. Updating SSI's income rules for inflation garners 77 percent overall support—including 86 percent of Democrats, 76 percent of Independents, and 69 percent of Republicans.

## Voters Across Parties Support Updating SSI's Income Rules

Supplemental Security Income recipients can receive \$65 per month in "earned" income and \$20 per month in "unearned" income without any change in their monthly benefits. These amounts were set in 1972 when the SSI program was signed into law. If someone receives more than these amounts from other sources of income, such as earnings from work or Social Security benefits, they will receive a lower amount of monthly benefits.

A current proposal would adjust the monthly levels for inflation, so that recipients can receive \$407 in earned income and \$125 in unearned income per month, before SSI benefits are reduced.

Would you support or oppose this proposal?



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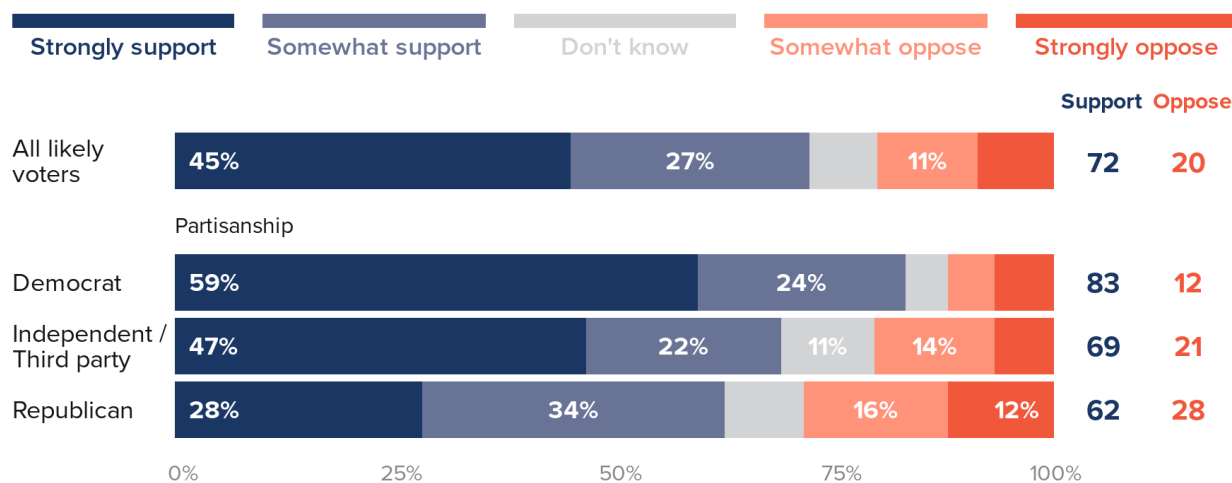
- Next, we asked about President Biden's proposal to **eliminate an archaic policy that slashes monthly benefits by one-third for SSI beneficiaries who receive in-kind help**—such as food or shelter—from loved ones to make ends meet. Seventy-two percent of voters—including 83 percent of Democrats, 69 percent of Independents, and 62 percent of Republicans—support eliminating this rule.

## Likely Voters Support Eliminating Cuts to Monthly Benefits for SSI Beneficiaries Who Receive In-Kind Help

Currently, people who qualify for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) who receive in-kind support, like food or shelter, from friends, family, or loved ones have their monthly SSI benefits cut by one-third. This means someone who receives the full SSI amount of \$794 would see their monthly benefits cut to \$531 as a penalty for things like getting help with groceries for a week or a place to stay to avoid homelessness.

During the presidential campaign, President Biden proposed eliminating this rule so that SSI recipients who receive in-kind help no longer see their monthly benefits cut.

Would you support or oppose this proposal?



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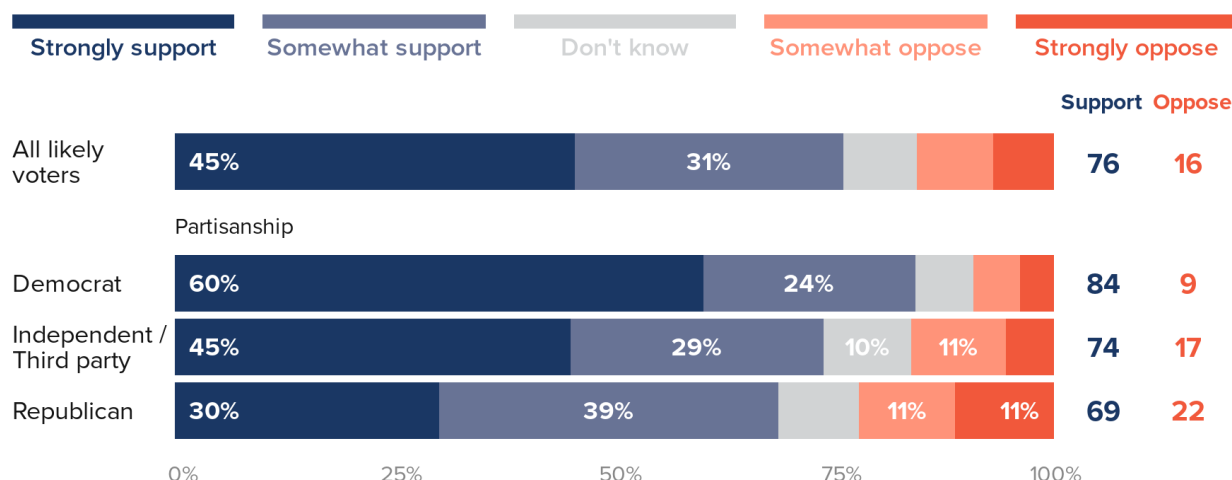
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- Finally, we asked about President Biden's proposal to **eliminate SSI's marriage penalties**, which cut benefits by one-quarter for SSI beneficiaries who marry another SSI beneficiary—and can lead to outright loss of benefits for those who marry someone not receiving SSI. Seventy-six percent of voters support eliminating these marriage penalties—including 84 percent of Democrats, 74 percent of Independents, and 69 percent of Republicans.

## Voters Support Eliminating Marriage Penalties Which Reduce or Lead to a Loss of SSI Benefits

Other Supplemental Security Income program rules reduce benefits by one-quarter for SSI recipients who marry someone else receiving SSI benefits, and can lead to outright loss of benefits for those who marry someone not receiving SSI. During the presidential campaign, President Biden proposed to eliminate these marriage penalties so that people with disabilities aren't forced to choose between maintaining survival benefits and marrying the person they love.

Would you support or oppose this proposal?



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### METHODOLOGY

From May 21 to May 23, 2021, Data for Progress, in partnership with The Century Foundation, conducted a survey of 1,250 likely voters nationally using web-panel respondents. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely voters by age, gender, education, race, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is  $\pm 3$  percentage points.