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Texas bullet train and Amtrak routes to be connected

Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

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Inside C2

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Protests staged for gun control, gun rights outside NRA meeting

DALLAS (Reuters) - Protesters on both sides of the U.S. gun debate took to the streets on Saturday outside the National Rifle Association's annual meeting in Dallas after the latest in a long series of mass shootings put the issue back in the spotlight.

Activists shout slogans while taking part in a protest march against the National Rifle Association (NRA) in Dallas, Texas, U.S., May 4, 2018. REUTERS/Adrees Latif
Across the street from the convention center where President Donald Trump addressed NRA members on Friday, a "Rally4Reform" drew about 200 demonstrators demanding tighter restrictions on firearms sales. Many were dressed in the orange that has become the color of the gun control movement.

They watched as Manuel Oliver, whose 17-year-old son, Joaquin, was killed in the Feb. 14 massacre of 17 people at a high school in Parkland, Florida, spray painted a mural of kids running and a backpack-wearing student in a rifle's crosshairs.

Many flinched and some sobbed as he hit the wall with a hammer to simulate the sound of gunfire.

"You were in the wrong room yesterday," Oliver said of Trump, who enthusiastically embraced the NRA on Friday. "You should be talking to the people we are now."

Two hours later, about 150 people attended a counterprotest at the same site in support of the NRA, many of them carrying sidearms and with rifles slung over their shoulders.

An activist gives a peace sign while taking part in a protest march against the National Rifle Association (NRA) in Dallas, Texas, U.S., May 4, 2018. REUTERS/Adrees Latif
One of the organizers, Open Carry Texas President C.J. Grisham, said he has criticized the NRA in the past but wanted to show his support for fellow gun owners who have been vilified during gun control protests.

"When you've got groups who have no idea what they're talking about, going after the largest organization dedicated to preserving liberty, then I feel like we have a duty to stand up," Grisham said.

Carrying a "Don't Tread On Me" flag, a rifle at her side and a pistol holstered on her hip, Texas resident Teri Horne, 55, engaged in a debate with two male gun control activists. After 20 minutes of spirited discussion, everyone shook hands and went their separate ways.

Horne said she supports the NRA, with a few recent exceptions.

"The bump stocks gave me pause because that's an open door, a slippery slope, to way more infringements," she said, referring to the NRA's support for restrictions on the devices, which let semiautomatic rifles fire almost like an automatic weapon.

"They do great work, and I support them but sometimes there's just things we don't agree on," Horne said.

An estimated 80,000 people were expected in Dallas for the NRA's three-day meeting, which began on Friday. The debate over access to guns took center stage after a 19-year-old former student used a semiautomatic rifle to gun down 17 students and staff members at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, a suburb of Fort Lauderdale.

Students who survived became national figures, demanding tighter firearms controls and a check on the power of the NRA.



Gun enthusiasts stand below a large handgun advertisement during the annual National Rifle Association (NRA) convention in Dallas, Texas

Gun rights advocates cite the right to bear arms guaranteed by the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

About 100 protesters gathered at a second gun-control demonstration across town on Saturday, wearing orange ribbons and carrying signs that said "Shame on you NRA!" One NRA member dressed in a suit and black cowboy hat briefly scuffled with protesters as the rally began, but was quickly escorted away by police.

Actress Alyssa Milano said she created the organization NoRA, which organized the second rally, to combat the influence that the gun lobby wields with U.S. politicians.

"It debilitates our lawmakers from implementing common-sense gun reform," Milano said in an interview.

Reporting by Lisa Maria Garza; writing by Daniel Wallis; editing by Jonathan Oatis



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(By Tina Huang / Southern Daily)

For the added convenience, dependability and enjoyment for our global audience, mobile cell phone users can now simply scan the QR code printed in our newspaper and they will be directly connected to our digital television station STV15.3 on their mobile cell phones. Users can then enjoy immediate access to a wide range of broadband television programming including breaking news, entertainment and education which can be reached non-stop,



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listen to radio stations from television broadcasts while driving, an experience which can be even more greatly enhanced when users' mobile cell phones are connected with a Bluetooth device in their cars.

Texas bullet train and Amtrak routes to be connected

Passengers on the proposed Texas bullet train would have access to connections with Amtrak's national routes as part a new agreement between the national train service and Texas Central.

Tickets for both Amtrak trains and the Texas bullet train will be available for purchase on Amtrak's reservation system.

Amtrak has not operated service between Dallas and Houston since 1995.

"This agreement is another important step in the progress of the Texas Bullet Train," said Tim Keith, president of Texas Central, in a statement. "It gives both local and interstate travelers more options and ease of travel not previously available by intercity passenger trains in Texas."

The Federal Railroad Administration is completing a final environmental study of the bullet train's 240-mile route.

The project is expected to pump more than \$36 billion directly into the state economy over the next 25 years.



Houston enters 'Internet of Things' partnership with Microsoft

By Andrea Rumbaugh

Microsoft will provide STEM education at schools, teach computer literacy skills to adults and transform Houston into a "Smart City" as part of a new partnership announced Friday.

"These sort of efforts become infectious and contagious," said Mayor Sylvester Turner. "Because of their presence, and the strength of their presence ... I would venture to say that others will be motivated to do the same."

Microsoft's educational efforts will help boost the existing workforce while fostering the next generation of technology innovators. The Smart Cities element will look at improving city functions by adding sensors, collecting data and finding more efficient solutions.

Sensors, for instance, could be used to track buses and find more optimal routes that would have less congestion while being convenient for more people.

It could also be used to determine if a bus is being driven too aggressively and consuming more gasoline than it otherwise would, said Cameron Carr, director of Internet of Things and Solutions for Microsoft.

After events like Hurricane Harvey, drones could be used to find people needing assistance or to determine areas that are flooded and impassible.

"We are right on the edge of creating this bold new world," Carr said.

The Microsoft announcement is the latest in a string of technology developments as Houston seeks to become a hub for high-tech startups and venture capital.

View image on TwitterView image on TwitterView image on Twitter

This announcement comes as Houston gains momentum in its efforts to become a destination for high-tech startups and venture capital. Last month, Rice University announced that it will transform the former Sears property in Midtown into an innovation center for technology companies.



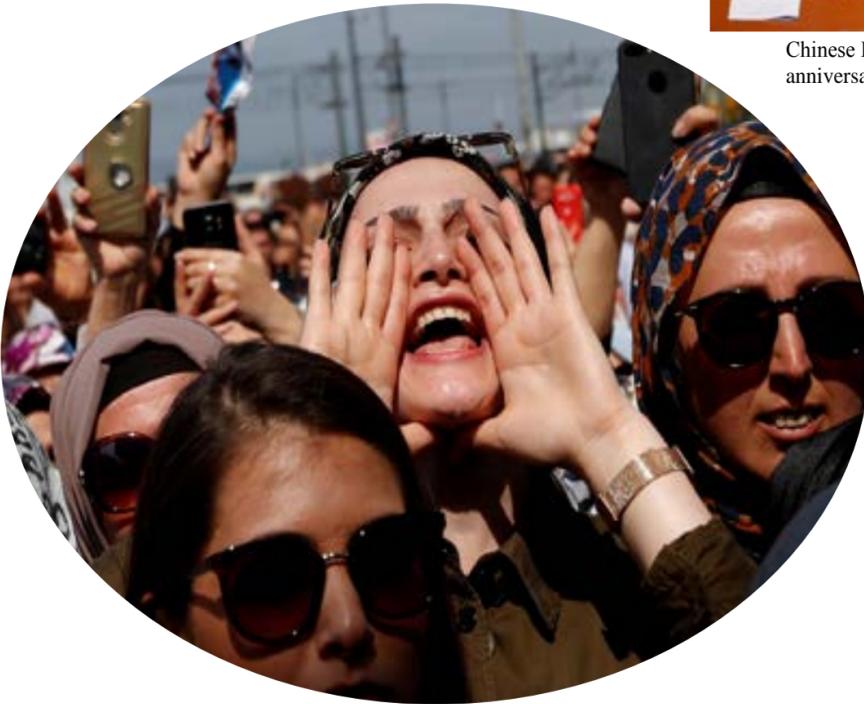
Editor's Choice



Campaigners hold placards and posters during a rally organised by the London-Irish Abortion Rights Campaign ahead of the forthcoming Irish abortion referendum, London, Britain



Chinese President Xi Jinping walks to deliver his speech at an event commemorating the 200th birth anniversary of Karl Marx, in Beijing



Supporters of Turkish President Erdogan cheer as he makes a speech during a ceremony in Istanbul



Media members work at the site of a fire at a recycling centre in Ciudad Juarez



Relatives mourn during the funeral of Palestinian Anas Abu Aser, who died of wounds he sustained during a protest at the Israel-Gaza border, in Gaza City



Participant sprays water on an honour guard before the ceremony of laying flowers in Stavropol



U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is sworn in at the State Department in Washington



A British Airways passenger plane flies in front of the moon above London



Members of a caravan of migrants from Central America enter the United States border and customs facility, where they are expected to apply for asylum, in Tijuana



Diet sodas are popular beverages all over the world, especially among people who want to reduce their sugar or calorie intake. This article presents the scientific facts about diet sodas and includes the following topics: Diet soda in Nutrition, Weight Loss, Diabetes and Heart Disease, Kidney Health, Preterm Delivery and Childhood Obesity, Other Effects and the Bottom Line.

Instead of sugar, diet sodas are sweetened with artificial sweeteners like aspartame, cyclamate, saccharin, acesulfame-k or sucralose.

Almost every popular sugar-sweetened beverage on the market has a "light" or a "diet" version -- Diet Coke, Coke Zero, Pepsi Max, Sprite Zero, etc. Diet sodas were first introduced in the 1950s for people with diabetes, though they were later marketed to people trying to control their weight or reduce their sugar intake.

Despite being free of sugar and calories, the health effects of diet drinks and artificial sweeteners are controversial.

Diet Soda Is Not Nutritious

Diet soda is essentially a mixture of carbonated water, artificial or natural sweetener, colors, flavors and other food additives.

It usually has very few to no calories and no significant nutrition. For example, one 12-ounce (354-ml) can of Diet Coke contains no calories, sugar, fat or protein and 40 mg of sodium.

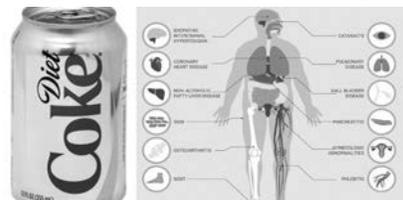
However, not all sodas that use artificial sweeteners are low in calories or sugar-free. Some use sugar and sweetener together. For example, one can of Coca-Cola Life, which contains the natural sweetener Stevia, contains 90 calories and 24 grams of sugar.



While recipes differ from brand to brand, some common ingredients in diet soda include:

• Carbonated water:

While sparkling water can occur in nature, most sodas are made by dissolving carbon dioxide into water under pressure; **Sweeteners:** These include common artificial sweeteners, such as aspartame, saccharin, sucralose or an herbal sweetener like Stevia, which are 200–13,000 times sweeter than regular sugar; **Acids:** Certain acids, such as citric, malic and phosphoric acid, are used to add tartness to soda drinks. They are also linked to tooth enamel erosion; **Colors:** The most commonly used colors are carotenoids, anthocyanins and caramels; **Flavors:** Many different kinds of natural juices or artificial flavors are used in diet soda, including fruits, berries, herbs and cola; **Preservatives:** These help diet sodas last longer on the supermarket shelf. A commonly used preservative is potassium benzoate; **Vitamins and minerals:** Some diet soft drinks add vitamins and minerals to market themselves as healthier no-calorie alternatives; **Caffeine:** Just like regular soda, many diet sodas contain caffeine. A can of Diet Coke contains 46 mg of caffeine, and Diet Pepsi contains 34 mg.



Results of a 10-year study of Diet Coke

Is Diet Soda Good Or Bad For You?

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

SUMMARY Diet soda is a mixture of carbonated water, artificial or natural sweeteners, colors, flavors and extra components like vitamins or caffeine. Most varieties contain zero or very calories and no significant nutrition.

WEIGHT LOSS

Effects on Weight Loss Are Conflicting

Because diet soda is usually calorie-free, it would be natural to assume it could aid weight loss. However, research suggests this solution may not be so straightforward.

Several observational studies have found that using artificial sweeteners and drinking high amounts of diet soda is associated with an increased risk of obesity and metabolic syndrome.

Scientists have suggested that diet soda may increase appetite by stimulating hunger hormones, altering sweet taste receptors and triggering dopamine responses in the brain.

Because diet soft drinks have no calories, these responses may cause a higher intake of sweet or calorie-dense foods, resulting in weight gain. However, evidence of this is not consistent in human studies.

Another theory suggests that diet soda's correlation to weight gain may be explained by people with bad dietary habits drinking more of it. The weight gain they experience may be caused by these existing dietary habits, not diet soda.



Experimental studies do not support the claim that diet soda causes weight gain. In fact, these studies have found that replacing sugar-sweetened drinks with diet soda can result in weight loss.

One study had overweight participants drink 24 ounces of diet soda or water per day for a year. At the end of the study, the diet soda group had experienced an average weight loss of 13.7 pounds (6.21 kg), compared to 5.5 pounds (2.5 kg) in the water group.

However, to add to the confusion, there is evidence of bias in the scientific literature. Studies funded by the artificial sweetener industry have been found to have more favorable outcomes than non-industry studies, which may undermine the validity of their results.

Overall, more high-quality research is needed to determine the true effects of diet soda on weight loss.

SUMMARY Observational studies link diet soda with obesity. However, it's not clear whether diet soda is a cause of this. Experimental studies show positive effects for weight loss, but these might be influenced by industry funding.

DIABETES AND HEART DISEASE

Some Studies Link Diet Soda to Diabetes and Heart Disease

Although diet soda has no calories, sugar or fat, it has been linked to the development of type 2 diabetes and heart disease in several studies.

Research has found that just one serving of an artificially sweetened drink per day is associated with an 8–13% higher risk of type 2 diabetes.

An observational study in 64,850 women found that artificially sweetened drinks were associated with a 21% higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes. However, the risk was still half that of regular sugary drinks. Other studies have found similar results.



Conversely, a recent review found that diet soda is not associated with an increased risk of diabetes. Also, another study concluded that any association

could be explained by the existing health status, weight changes and body mass index of participants.

Diet soda has also been linked to increased risks of high blood pressure and heart disease.

A review of four studies including 227,254 people found that for each serving of artificially sweetened beverage per day, there is a 9% increased risk of high blood pressure. Other studies have found similar results.

Additionally, one study has linked diet sodas to a small increase in the risk of stroke, but this was only based on observational data.

Because most of the studies were observational, it may be that the association could be explained another way. It's possible that people who were already at risk of diabetes and high blood pressure chose to drink more diet soda.



More direct experimental research is needed to determine if there is any true causal relationship between diet soda and increased blood sugar or blood pressure.

SUMMARY Observational studies have linked diet soda to type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and an increased risk of stroke. However, there's a lack of research on possible causes for these results. They may be due to preexisting risk factors such as obesity.

KIDNEY HEALTH Diet Soda and Kidney Health

Intake of diet soda has been linked to an increased risk of chronic kidney disease.

A recent study analyzed the diets of 15,368 people and found that the risk of developing end-stage kidney disease increased with the number of glasses of diet soda consumed per week.

Compared to those who consumed less than one glass, people who drank more than seven glasses of diet soda per week had nearly double the risk of developing kidney disease.

A suggested cause for the kidney damage is the high phosphorus content of sodas, which may increase the acid load on the kidneys.

However, it has also been suggested that people consuming high amounts of diet soda may do so to compensate for other poor dietary and lifestyle factors that may independently contribute to the development of kidney disease.

Interestingly, studies investigating the effects of diet soda on the development of kidney stones have found mixed results.

One observational study found that diet soda drinkers have a slightly increased risk of kidney stone development, but the risk was much smaller than for regular soda. In addition, this study has not been supported by other research.



Another study reported that the high citrate and malate content of some diet sodas may help

treat kidney stones, particularly in people with low urine pH and uric acid stones. However, more research and human studies are needed.

SUMMARY Observational studies have found an association between drinking a lot of diet soda and the development of kidney disease. If diet soda does cause this, a potential reason could be increased acid load on the kidneys due to its high phosphorus content.

PRETERM DELIVERY AND CHILDHOOD OBESITY

Diet Soda Is Linked to Preterm Delivery and Childhood Obesity

Drinking diet soda while pregnant has been linked to some negative outcomes, including preterm delivery and childhood obesity.

A Norwegian study in 60,761 pregnant women found that intake of artificially sweetened and sugar-containing drinks was associated with an 11% higher risk of preterm delivery.

Earlier Danish research supports these findings. A study in almost 60,000 women found that women who consumed one serving of diet soda per day were 1.4 times more likely to deliver preterm than those who did not.

However, recent research in 8,914 women in England did not find any association between diet cola and preterm delivery. However, the authors admitted that the study may not have been big enough and had been limited to diet cola.

It's important to note that these studies were only observational and offer no explanation of exactly how diet soda may contribute to preterm birth.

WARNING:
Drinking beverages
with added sugar(s)
contributes to obesity,
diabetes, and tooth decay.



Another troubling finding is that consuming artificially sweetened drinks while pregnant is significantly associated with an increased risk of childhood obesity.

One study found that the daily consumption of diet drinks during pregnancy resulted in a doubled risk of a baby being overweight at one year of age.

Further research is needed to analyze the underlying biological causes and long-term health risks for children exposed to artificially sweetened sodas in the womb.

SUMMARY Large studies have found associations linking diet soda to preterm delivery. However, a causal link has not been found. Additionally, infants of mothers who drank diet soda while pregnant are at an increased risk of being overweight.

OTHER EFFECTS Other Effects

There are several other documented health effects of diet sodas, including:

- **May reduce fatty liver:** Some studies have shown that replacing regular soda with diet soda can reduce fat around the liver. Other studies have found no effect.

- **No increase in reflux:** Despite anecdotal reports, carbonated drinks have not been found to make reflux or heartburn worse. However, the research is mixed, and more experimental studies are needed.

- **No strong links to cancer:** Most of the research on artificial sweeteners and diet soda has found no evidence it causes cancer. A slight increase in lymphoma and multiple myeloma in men was reported, but the results were weak.

- **Changes to the gut microbiome:** Artificial sweeteners alter the gut flora, leading to reduced blood sugar control. This may be one way diet soda increases the risk of type 2 diabetes, but more research is needed.

- **Increased risk of osteoporosis:** Diet and regular cola is associated with bone mineral density loss in women, but not in men. The caffeine and phosphorus in cola might interfere with normal calcium absorption.



- **Tooth decay:** Like regular soda, diet soda is associated with dental erosion due to its acidic pH level. This comes from the addition of acids, such as malic, citric or phosphoric acid, for flavor.

- **Linked to depression:** Observational studies have found higher rates of depression among those who drank four or more diet or regular sodas per day. However, experiments are needed to determine if diet soda is a cause.

While some of these results are interesting, more experimental research is needed to determine whether diet soda causes these issues, or if the findings are due to chance or other factors.

SUMMARY Diet soda may improve fatty liver and does not appear to increase heartburn or the risk of cancer. However, it may reduce blood sugar control and increase the risks of depression, osteoporosis and tooth decay. However, more research is needed.

BOTTOM LINE

Should You Drink Diet Soda?

Research on diet soda has produced a lot of conflicting evidence.

One explanation for this conflicting information is that most of the research is observational. This means that it might observe trends, but there is a lack of information about whether diet soda intake is a cause or result of those trends, or just a coincidence.

Therefore, while some of the research sounds quite alarming, more high-quality experimental studies are needed before concrete conclusions can be drawn about the health effects of diet soda. Regardless, one thing is certain: diet soda does not add any nutritional value to your diet.

So, if you're looking to replace regular soda in your diet, other options may be better than diet soda. Next time, try an alternative like milk, coffee, black or herbal tea, or water infused with fruits. (Courtesy <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition>)



People wait in line for an emergency food pantry. (Photo/Getty Images)

President Donald Trump is making a big push to expand work requirements in the nation's social safety net, calling on his administration to propose tougher rules for America's most vulnerable population to benefit from welfare programs.

Trump quietly signed the Reducing Poverty in America by Promoting Opportunity and Economic Mobility executive order privately Tuesday, ordering secretaries across the government to review their welfare programs — from food stamps to Medicaid to housing programs — and propose new regulations, like work requirements.

The executive order calls on federal agencies to enforce current work requirements, propose additional, stronger requirements, and find savings (in other words, make cuts), and to give states more flexibility to run welfare programs.



“Since its inception, the welfare system has grown into a large bureaucracy that might be susceptible to measuring success by how many people are enrolled in a program rather than by how many have moved from poverty into financial independence,” the executive order reads.

The order calls on the Treasury, Agriculture, Commerce, Labor, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, and Education departments to use the next 90 days to submit a report with their recommended policies to the White House.

The order doesn't yet set any new policy, but it does reflect a headline conservative view of the nation's entitlement system — one that welfare experts say relies on faulty arguments and could cut off the nation's neediest from lifesaving safety net programs.

Trump's executive order implies tougher requirements for safety net programs

The text of the executive order calls for a review of all welfare programs across agencies, something a senior White House

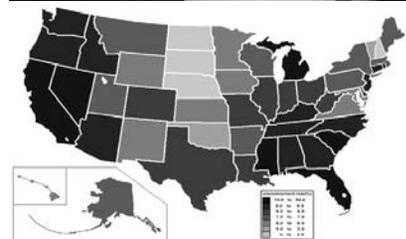
official calls a push for a “coordinated” effort across federal and state agencies to reform the welfare system.



But the result could be recommendations that propose drastic changes to programs like Medicaid, which offers health care for low-income individuals; food stamps; and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which gives poor families financial aid. The administration is also looking at housing programs, the White House official said.

Agencies are ordered to follow nine “Principles of Economic Mobility” to guide their proposed policy changes, including adding work requirements, giving states more flexibility — usually in the form of block grants — consolidating duplicative programs, and encouraging involvement from the private sector.

Put together, this order outlines much of the conservative welfare agenda, which has long promoted cutting welfare programs, either through pushing people off the federal rolls with harsher work requirements or block-granting funding to the states, giving them more purview over how to allocate money to welfare programs.



The President And His Cabinet Propose Stronger Work Requirements For Welfare Across The Board

Trump Wants To Slash Welfare With Stricter Work Requirements

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

Trump has long called for tougher requirements to receive welfare benefits but hasn't been specific on what policies he would like to see and which programs he'd like to target. His order is now calling on his administration to iron out the specifics. The White House is citing faulty evidence that work requirements work

Trump signed a welfare executive order on April 10. Mark Wilson/Getty Images White House adviser Andrew Bremberg told reporters that Trump's executive order is meant to “highlight the success” of President Bill Clinton's 1996 reforms to TANF. Those reforms added work requirements to TANF and fundamentally adjusted how the program's funding worked, giving money to states in a lump sum and allowing the states to allocate their funding as they saw fit. In the early years, Clinton's TANF reforms were extremely popular.

But over the past decade, poverty experts have reached a consensus that TANF no longer works, because states stopped using the money for the safety net programs. “TANF is not an effective program,” James Ziliak, director of the University of Kentucky's Center for Poverty Research, told Vox last year — it's served fewer and fewer families over the years.

This is a common misunderstanding of the longstanding effects of the 1996 welfare reform effort — and one that conservatives continue to push when proposing cuts to entitlement programs.



A misunderstanding of '90s welfare reform is not the only faulty evidence the White House used when promoting the order signed on Tuesday. In a fact sheet sent to reporters, the White House cites the effec-

tiveness of food stamp work requirements implemented in Kansas and Maine — the case studies often used to promote work requirements.

“Studies conducted after reforms in Maine and Kansas show that individuals who left welfare and went back to work saw their incomes increase, more than doubling on average; this increase more than offset the welfare benefits they lost. Welfare enrollment also dropped by 75 to 90 percent,” the White House said.

But a decrease in welfare enrollment isn't an indication of much other than the federal government spending less money.

And a Center on Budget and Policy Priorities audit of the reports on Maine and Kansas found that when actually taking into account the loss of SNAP benefits after being cut off, the difference in income before and after reinstating the work requirements is much less stark than what the White House cited. The total resources (including earnings and SNAP benefits) available to SNAP participants who were cut off was 3 percent lower a year after the cutoff.

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

In other words, there is no clear indication that reimposing the three-month time limit reduced poverty levels. While CBPP did find some increase in wages, the slight differences aren't necessarily because of the policy changes.

The CBPP notes that the economy was getting better in 2014 — the same time those work requirements were put into place. These safety net programs are the last resort for millions of Americans. Republicans have long demanded reforms to the American welfare system, decrying bloated federal handout programs that they claim disincentivize Americans from working. They argue that additional work requirements would encourage more people to get out of the cycle of poverty.

While poverty and welfare experts will point out there's always room for reforms, the statistics paint a very different picture of how some of these conservative reforms actually play out.

For example, food stamp recipients are mostly children and elderly or disabled people. The number of able-bodied adults without dependents is slim, and not nearly enough to make up the numbers in savings that the projections for this proposal indicate. Waste and fraud in the program are also relatively inconsequential.

There is strong evidence that SNAP reduces food insecurity and improves health outcomes, especially among children, who make up the majority of SNAP beneficiaries. But the evidence from randomized studies of work requirements shows that they have little or no effect on poverty — and leave many people who aren't induced to work without a safety net.



“It's a false narrative,” Ziliak told me last year of a conservative proposal to cut food stamps. “The evidence shows that the program actually works. Not all programs work. But SNAP actually is one of those that does what it is supposed to be doing.” As is, SNAP and TANF, which provide services like child care or income assistance, already have work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents. Those requirements are often waived when the economy is doing poorly and reinstated when the job market is more stable, which is what Maine and Kansas did.

Already conservative lawmakers — like Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH) have proposed harsher requirements at the federal level, like tightening the window individuals have to find a job from three months to one month, increasing the number of hours they have to work per month from 80 hours to 100, and extending the requirements to able-bodied adults with dependents. It's not clear what the Trump administration plans to propose, but they said reforms to SNAP and Medicaid are front and center. (Courtesy <https://www.vox.com/>)