

## **Who Perceives Government's Role in Their Lives?**

### **Assessing the Impact of Social Policy on Visibility**

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When asked by pollsters if they had “ever used a government social program,” the majority of respondents said they had not, yet when later asked about usage of 21 specific policies, nearly all reported that they had used at least one or more. What explains such widespread denials of government’s role in people’s lives? And, what are the political implications of such attitudes? This paper explores the significance of policy visibility— the extent to people have utilized policies designed in a way that makes government’s role fairly obvious, versus those that obscure it by channeling benefits through the tax code or private organizations. In addition, it examines whether perceptions of government’s role in one’s social provision is influenced by such factors as political knowledge, ideology, or views about the deservingness of recipients of social programs. Finally, it assesses how individuals’ perceptions of government’s role in their lives affect their attitudes toward social policy reform.

If the U.S. government comes to an individual's aid, does he or she know it? If public policies help Americans to purchase health care, afford college, or buy a home, do they later acknowledge government's role in providing such assistance? As absurd as these questions may sound, the answer is less than obvious. We know remarkably little about how people experience public policies and whether they are even aware of or acknowledge government's role in providing them. Surveys rarely ask people about their actual program use, and even when they do—most often on questionnaires focused on social and economic effects—they almost never also include questions that could allow scholars to probe the impact on political attitudes and other forms of behavior. This lack of knowledge hinders our ability to understand how well democracy is actually functioning in the United States—on matters as basic as whether citizens are cognizant of public resources from which they benefit—or to shed meaningful light on the public's views that are relevant to current issues such as the national deficit, tax reform, and spending priorities.

A unique recent survey aimed to correct for these gaps in our knowledge by investigating both respondents' history of social policy usage and their political attitudes and participation. The very first question of the survey asked the following broad question: "Some people, when they think through their life experiences, report that they have at some point used a government social program. Others report that they have never used a government social program. What about you: have you ever used a government social program, or not?" In response to this question, only 43 percent of respondents said that they had "ever used a government social program" and 57 percent said they had not ever done so. Later on, respondents were asked about usage of each of 21 specific social policies, ranging from Social Security retirement and survivors' benefits to Pell Grants to the Earned Income Tax Credit. By contrast to the answers to

the broad question asked at the outset, this battery of questions revealed that only 4 percent of survey respondents had actually used no such policies; in fact, of those who had earlier denied any policy usage, 95 percent had used one or more policies.

Why would so many Americans answer in the negative when asked up front about “government social program” usage, and yet subsequently acknowledge high rates of utilization of specific benefits? This surprising result suggests a paradoxical dimension of Americans’ relationship to government, and one that is politically salient given ongoing debates about the appropriate size and scope of government. This paper aims to explain these seemingly contradictory responses.

We treat responses to the broad question about whether one has used a “government social programs” as the expression of a perception rather than as a measure of actual utilization rates. We examine several hypotheses that might illuminate why a large share of people answered it in the negative but then later admitted to usage of specific programs. Some of the hypotheses we examine involve dynamics that have been investigated elsewhere by political scientists, but not previously applied to the individuals’ perception of government’s role in their lives: these include political knowledge; partisanship and ideology; and views about deservingness of program beneficiaries.

While such hypotheses focus on attributes of individuals, our primary interest is in how policies themselves may influence citizens’ perceptions. Several scholars have observed that policies differ in their designs and delivery, and that government’s role as a provider of social benefits is far more clearly visible in some than in others, and is thus likely to generate different responses on the role of citizens. Such claims have yet to be tested systematically, however. The major contribution of this paper is to assess the importance of government’s visibility in public

policies for recipients' perceptions of government social program usage. We also explore how awareness of social program usage may in turn influence support for social policy reforms that expand the role of the public sector or, alternatively, the private sector.

We find that accumulated experiences of public policies have a highly significant impact on individuals' perceptions, but that effects vary depending on the type of policy design and delivery. Policies that make government's role fairly obvious inculcate in beneficiaries an awareness of it. By contrast, policies channeled through the tax code or private organizations fail to generate such awareness; they may leave beneficiaries with the impression that their well-being owes solely to their own efforts or to the aid of market institutions. These results point to important but previously overlooked form of stratification in American politics, in which some citizens are made cognizant of governments' role, but others—although they too benefit from it—are not. The growing polarization in the United States may be emanating, in part, from divergent experiences of government and the messages those convey to citizens.

### **The Impact of Hidden or Submerged Governance for Policy Visibility**

The American welfare state differs from others not so much in its overall size as in its form: it channels a substantial amount of social provision—more than other nations—through indirect means, including the tax code and subsidies to private actors and organizations, rather than through the more traditional form of direct payments or provision of services (Hacker 2002; Howard 2007; Garfinkel, Rainwater, and Smeeding 2006). Some indirect social policies, such as the Home Mortgage Interest Deduction, date back to the beginnings of the federal income tax in 1913. Policymakers established others, such as the tax-exempt status of federally-regulated employer-provided health and retirement benefits, as well as government guaranteed and

subsidized student loans, in the middle decades of the twentieth century. In recent decades, even as benefits in many direct forms of social welfare for non-seniors atrophied in real value, policymakers created and expanded indirect policies such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and higher education tax credits (Hacker 2002; Howard 1997; Mettler 2009).

“Social tax expenditures”—the largest form of indirect policies, includes tax credits, tax deductions, and other forms of social benefits for families and individuals that carry tax exempt status. Between 1981 and 2010, the number of social tax expenditures grew by 86 percent, from 81 to 151; Americans now use them to lower their cost for purchases ranging from energy-efficient windows and appliances to childcare (U.S. Office of Management and Budget, various years; U.S. Joint Committee on Taxation 1989; U.S. Congressional Budget Office 1981). In combination, such policies now amount to over \$1 trillion annually, which makes them 7.4 percent of GDP—more than Social Security or than Medicare and Medicaid combined (Burman, Toder and Geissler 2008; U.S. Budget, FY 2012).<sup>1</sup>

Indirect social policies offer benefits that are comparable to direct social benefits both in their purposes and in their costs. Both direct and indirect social benefits are targeted to specific groups of people, aimed to reward some kind of activity or some class of persons whom policymakers deem worthy of public support. From an accounting perspective, as well, both types have the same effect: they impose costs on the federal budget, whether incurred through fiscal obligations or lost revenues. Eugene Steuerle, a tax economist at the Urban Institute, commented on the differences between tax expenditures and direct government programs, “One looks like smaller government; one looks like bigger government. In fact, they both do exactly the same thing” (Stevenson 1997).

What differs is the design and delivery of the benefits—in short, their packaging. Direct programs, such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and Medicare, offer people checks or services from government. By contrast, indirect benefits allow them to pay less than what they would otherwise owe—whether in taxes or to private organizations. In the case of tax expenditures, beneficiaries have a reduced tax bill. In the case of goods and services provided by the private sector under terms negotiated and subsidized by government, they pay less than they would otherwise. In either instance, government helps provide for people’s economic security, health, or educational opportunity by reducing their costs.

The prevalence and cost of such policies begs the question, however, of how beneficiaries perceive them—specifically, whether they think of them consciously as social benefits emanating from government. Whether or not people recognize government’s role in the social benefits they receive is critical for their understanding of what government does and of their status as citizens in relationship to it. Such awareness may influence individuals’ other political attitudes as well.

Investigating the determinants of the perception of benefitting from government policies would seem to be a first step in policy feedback analysis. Policy feedback refers to the ways in which established policies, through the resources they offer and messages they convey, shape political behavior, influencing citizens’ attitudes and participation (Skocpol 1992, Pierson 1993). Scholars advancing this approach have suggested that features of policy design, including administrative arrangements, the content of eligibility rules, and financing procedures, influence the substance and strength of the messages conveyed (Schneider and Ingram 1993; Mettler and Soss 2004). Several studies have now explored these propositions empirically, illuminating how policies affect citizens’ sense of political efficacy, their level of interest in politics, and their rates

of participation (e.g. Bruch et al 2010; Campbell 2002; Kumlin 2004; McDonagh 2010; Mettler 2005; Soss 1999; Weaver and Lerman 2010). In examinations to date, however, visibility is taken for granted, and the policies examined are those in which government's role is likely to be quite explicit, for example in allocating Social Security checks or in incarcerating citizens. But the degree of visibility of policies would itself appear to be integral to policies' capacity to "send messages" to mass publics about government, and for such messages to be received.

Paul Pierson suggested as much nearly two decades ago, theorizing that policy designs that make government activity more visible likely elevate citizens' awareness of it, while those that obscure it leave citizens oblivious to government's role (Pierson 1993, 619-20). Subsequent studies—including Christopher Howard's on the "hidden welfare state" of tax expenditures, and Jacob Hacker's on employer-provided, government-regulated retirement and health benefits—illuminated the development and politics of such policies, but they did not examine citizens' perceptions (Howard 1997; Hacker 2002). Suzanne Mettler, using the term the "submerged state" to refer to both of these policy types in addition to other social benefits also channeled through the private sector, conducted some analysis of citizens' awareness of them (Mettler 2011). Yet systematic analysis has yet to be conducted that could explain differences in the rate at which beneficiaries of direct versus submerged policies perceive government's role in their lives.

In exploring that question here, we rely on the development of the concept offered by Paul Pierson who posited that "the specific design of programs may heighten the visibility of some social and political connections while obscuring others" (Pierson 1993, 619). Like occurrences that John Kingdon termed "focusing events," those which help people to interpret the social world, similarly "policy-induced cues may influence an individual's awareness of

government activity” (Pierson 1993, 619-20). Without sufficient visibility, however, feedback effects may be lost. In particular, Pierson suggests that because “tax expenditures,” unlike budget outlays, are not subject to annual legislative scrutiny, therefore they “do not produce focusing events” (620). Drawing on research by Douglas Arnold (1990, 47-50), Pierson suggests that for policies to generate a response from mass publics, two conditions must be present: first, visibility, meaning that people experience a discernable outcome, one that may lead them to inquire about its cause; and second, traceability of that outcome to government action (622).

In addition, we draw on an analytical framework offered by Soss and Schram (2007) that considers mass feedback effects based of both visibility, by which they mean the degree to which a policy is salient to mass publics, and proximity, the extent to which the policy exists as a tangible presence affecting people’s lives (121). According to this framework, policies that are distant and low visibility have limited effects, while we should expect the greatest feedback effects from proximate and visible policies. Soss and Schram classify policies of the hidden welfare state as low visibility and proximate (rather than distant). These policies have “low salience for mass publics,” but their effects are experienced by a larger segment of the population than are more distant policies, like foreign policies (Soss and Schram 2007, 121). Still, the question remains whether proximity is sufficient to influence political behavior when policies are low in visibility. From these analytical tools, we will now derive specific expectations to be explored.

### **Hypothesizing the Determinants of Perception of Government Social Program Receipt**

Our central expectation, articulated as a pair of *policy visibility hypotheses*, pertains to how the policy design and delivery of individuals’ accumulated experiences of social policies

influences their awareness of government's role. In thinking about the expected impact of different policies, we draw on Schneider and Ingram's (1993) proposition that citizens "encounter and internalize" messages about government and citizenship "through their direct, personal experiences with public policy" (340-41). We are concerned with how policies function as sites of political learning, offering citizens experiences that affect their general attitudes about government and its relation to them as citizens, and the extent to which they participate in politics. We would reason that for such learning to occur, policies must be visible to beneficiaries and recognizable as government benefits. We are also building on research by Joe Soss about how individuals may "extrapolate" from their personal experience of government programs and derive larger lessons about government's role in the polity generally (Soss 1999).

While tax expenditure policies are indeed "proximate" (Soss and Schram 2007) – many people claim various credits and deductions on their own tax forms, for example—the impact of these benefits may be imperceptible, not felt or noticed by citizens and/or they may not be traceable, such that citizens do not associate them with government action. We suggest that this is the case – that these policies in which government's role is obscured do not meet these conditions – and that, as a result, they will not promote awareness of government and support for government's redistributive role. This would stand in contrast to experience with social programs delivered fairly directly by government, which have been shown to alter political attitudes toward government and rates of participation (e.g. Soss 1999; Campbell 2003).

Our policy visibility hypotheses, therefore, include two variants. We posit that experiences of social policies that are distributed relatively directly by government (hereafter, "direct" policies) will make beneficiaries cognizant of government's role in social provision. We

also expect that experiences of those that are channeled through the tax code or subsidies to private organizations (hereafter, “submerged” policies) will not.<sup>2</sup>

Individuals’ likelihood of acknowledging government social program receipt is likely to be influenced, in addition, by personal attributes that have been cultivated through their relationship to the political environment. The first such expectation pertains to individuals’ capacity to comprehend government’s role in their social benefits, as well as to understand the terminology used in the survey question about government social programs. While level of education might be an indicator of such capacity, we will test more specifically a *political knowledge hypothesis*. Individuals who possess greater understanding of the political system, who have a larger storehouse of political information, and who pay more attention to politics are thought to have a greater capacity to process policy-relevant messages in meaningful ways (Zaller 1992; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Althaus 1998). Our political knowledge hypothesis anticipates that those who are more informed about politics will be more likely than others to respond accurately that they have utilized government social programs.

Another expectation we will term the *polarized polity hypothesis*. Public opinion scholars show that in forming and updating preferences, individuals often engage in “motivated reasoning,” interpreting new information in ways that reinforce—and do not challenge—their prior beliefs (Gaines et al 2007; Taber and Lodge 2006). Indeed partisan and ideological orientations shape even the interpretation of neutral facts (Gaines et al 2007). In today’s highly polarized political environment, political elites and the increasingly fragmented media, which includes ideologically-slanted choices, facilitate such dynamics by conveying crafted messages or slanted coverage (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000; Baum and Groeling 2008). Policy receipt offers rare experiences for citizens in that they are personal and unmediated; nonetheless, in our

polarized polity, some people may interpret their policy experiences through the prism of their partisan identity and political ideology. To the extent that the media and elite sources to which they pay attention offer disparaging messages about “government social programs,” implying that they are not in sync with a Republican agenda or conservative values, they may be less likely to acknowledge that they are among the beneficiaries. All else equal, we expect that self-identified strong Democrats and liberals will be more likely to provide affirmative responses to the general question, and that strong Republicans and conservatives will be less likely to do so.

In addition, the term “government social programs” may invoke individuals’ attitudes about recipients of particular social welfare policies, influencing the way in which they answer the question about personal receipt of benefits. Scholars have long found that Americans distinguish between what they perceive as “deserving” and “undeserving” recipients of social benefits (Katz 1989; Gilens 1999, Chap. 3). To the extent that some programs are viewed as targeted for “undeserving” beneficiaries, over time their recipients have become stigmatized (Skocpol 1995, Chap. 8; Mettler 1998, Chap. 6). Some may associate the term “government social programs” with policies of which they disapprove—perhaps because they believe that they reward laziness or inappropriate morals, for example—or with people whom they consider to be undeserving, for example because of stereotypes or prejudices about their income group, race, ethnicity, sex, or behavioral attributes. If so, such individuals may be less inclined to associate the term “government social programs” with benefits that they themselves receive. We call these expectations the *undeserving others hypothesis*.

In a variation of this dynamic, some might anticipate that individuals may not think of their own social benefits as “government benefits” because they believe that their particular benefits are an “earned right” that belong to them alone. This assumption became widespread in

the recent health care reform debates, after the *Washington Post* reported that an individual at a South Carolina town meeting hosted by Congressman Robert Inglis said, “Keep your government hands off my Medicare” (Rucker 2009). The statement became repeated frequently by liberal proponents of reform as a way of mocking the anti-government attitudes of opponents, particularly those of the emergent Tea Party. Vanessa Williamson, Theda Skocpol, and John Coggins’s research on Tea Party activists suggests, however, that proponents may dislike other government programs but still be well aware that Social Security and Medicare, which many of them receive, are in fact government programs. They distinguish them from others on the basis that they are an “earned right” (Williamson, Skocpol and Coggins 2011). Combining these insights, our *earned right hypothesis* suggests that recipients of Medicare or Social Security, all else equal, will acknowledge government social program usage.

### **Data and Descriptive Statistics**

We use a novel dataset from the Social and Governmental Issues and Participation Study of 2008 (SGIP), which was designed for the study of both Americans’ experiences with social programs and their political behavior.<sup>3</sup> The SGIP began by asking respondents about their attitudes toward government and toward specific policies, beginning with the question described above that is central to our analysis here. Then interviewers asked respondents specific questions about their utilization of and experiences with 21 different federal social policies over the course of their lifetimes. If respondents hesitated, interviewers provided descriptions of each policy in order to improve recall and accuracy of responses; respondents were also given a “don’t know” option. Because the SGIP asked about usage of both direct policies and those channeled through the tax code and other subsidies, we can examine the effects of accumulated experiences of each

type on recipients' perceptions. In addition, the survey has variables that allow us to test each of the other hypotheses noted above. The SGIP study includes a random national sample (N=1000) as well as an oversample of 200 "young" individuals (18-34 years old) and an oversample of 200 "low income" households (annual household income below \$35,000).

As seen in Table 1, the average respondent in the SGIP reported having used 4.22 social benefits to date, over the course of his or her lifetime.<sup>4</sup> Just four percent of all respondents reported having used none of the social policies listed, five percent have used only one policy, and 65 percent of respondents have used four or more.<sup>5</sup> Dividing policies by type, 96 percent had used at least one direct social benefit, and 80 percent had used at least one submerged benefit. The average respondent responded affirmatively to having received 1.94 direct benefits<sup>6</sup>, and having utilized 2.53 submerged benefits. Notably, usage of submerged benefits appears to be *more common* than use of direct benefits. Disaggregating the submerged benefits further, the average person indicated that he or she had claimed 1.2 of the following five tax expenditures: the Home Mortgage Interest Deduction, HOPE and Lifetime Learning Tax Credits, Child and Dependent Care Tax Credits, 529 (Qualified Tuition Program) or Coverdell Education Savings Account (education IRAs), and Earned Income Tax Credit. By also taking into account usage of student loans and employer subsidized health and retirement benefits, we arrive at the total average rate of 2.53 submerged policies per person.

Now we divide the dataset into those who answered "yes" to the general question, affirming that they had used a "government social program," and those who responded "no." In Figure 1, we compare these two groups in terms of the number of specific government benefits for which they later acknowledged receipt. Certainly the groups differed somewhat from each other—those who said "yes" had used 5.3 benefits on average, and those who said "no" had used

3.8—but the differences were not starkly opposing. In actuality, of those who said “no” up front, only five percent later indicated that they had used none of the 21 specific social policies later asked about, whereas 95 percent acknowledged use of one or more, and 58 percent, 4 or more. Of those who answered “yes,” 80 percent of had used 4 or more. Our overall conclusion from these data is that most Americans have personally experienced government social provision, and a large share has had multiple such experiences.

In Figure 2, we compare the same two groups of respondents, this time according to whether they used only submerged benefits, only direct benefits, or some of each. Here the differences are greater, indicating that differences in the types of actual policy usage are more substantial than in the numbers of policies used overall. Of those who said “no” up front, 35 percent had experienced only submerged policies compared to just 7 percent of those who said yes.”

These differences are apparent in Table 2, which in the first column presents descriptive statistics about those who said “no” when asked about social program usage but later acknowledged receipt of policies, and in the second column, data about all other beneficiaries. In terms of policy experiences, the average number of submerged policies used by the first group was 2.74 compared to 2.3 for the second group; the average number of direct policies were 1.27 and 2.7, respectively. Both of these differences were highly significant. We also note other significant differences: those who said “no” had significantly higher household incomes and levels of education; they were somewhat younger; they were more likely to consider themselves strong Republicans; and they were more likely to consider themselves very conservative. We find it interesting, as well, that these two groups were not significantly different in terms of race,

ethnicity, or gender; these persistent aspects of social stratification in the United States do not appear to be relevant in this regard.

Now we examine the relationship between policy type and visibility in Figure 3, which displays the results of cross-tabulations between a negative response to the general question about social program usage, on the one hand, and respondents' reported use of specific, individual policies, on the other. The percent of beneficiaries responding that they had not used a government social program ranges from 25 percent of Food Stamp recipients to 64 percent of those who claimed tax benefits for educational savings (529 and Coverdell accounts).

Our first observation is the high degree of variation in visibility that appears to exist between policies, and the general trend it indicates. Compared to individuals who have used direct benefit programs, a higher percentage of individuals who have used tax expenditures and other submerged benefits responded that they had never used a government social program. For instance, about 60 percent of those who claimed the Home Mortgage Interest Deduction gave this response compared with 27 percent of those who had used government subsidized housing. Recipients appear more likely to associate direct benefits with government while tax expenditures and benefits that are administered through government subsidization of private entities are less likely to be considered social programs.

Policies appear to vary along a spectrum from most to least visible. The policies of the "submerged state" are clustered at one end of the spectrum, signifying the lowest degree of visibility to beneficiaries. Interestingly, a fairly high percentage of recipients even of more direct policies offered the response that they had never used a government social program. In fact, one-quarter of the beneficiaries even of the most visible program denied having been a social program beneficiary. We reason that in the United States, even these programs have some design

and delivery features that may camouflage government's role. Beneficiaries of Food Stamps, for example, need not shop at government-run food pantries, nor do beneficiaries of Medicaid need to receive care at public health clinics.

The percentage of recipients who claim never to have used a government social program is much higher for other relatively direct programs. In the case of Social Security Retirement and Survivors' benefits and Medicare, for example, 45 and 41 percent of beneficiaries, respectively, replied in the negative to the general "government social programs" usage question. Although Social Security benefits are delivered in the seemingly unambiguous form of checks from government, they were deliberately fashioned by the Roosevelt Administration to resemble private insurance, an image conveyed by financing them through payroll taxes rather than general revenues and by tying eligibility to prior earnings. Such attributes make them appear as an "earned right" rather than part of a redistributive social insurance plan; while this has aided their sustainability, it also makes their status as a government social program less than obvious to some beneficiaries (Leff 1983; Witte 1962, 149-50). Since the 1970s, Medicare beneficiaries have had the option of receiving their benefits through a private health insurance plan, and as of 2010, 24 percent of Medicare beneficiaries—11.1 million people—interacted not with government directly but rather with an insurance company, gaining benefits through what is called "Medicare Advantage" (Kaiser Family Foundation 2010).

Examining more closely the arrangement of policies along this spectrum of visibility, we observe groupings of policies within three tiers: the submerged policies, plus two tiers of visibility, one assortment that we will call "most visible" and another that we will call "partly visible." Considering the characteristics of the policies in each of these latter tiers, at first blush it might appear that the distinction between them pertains to means-testing of policies, as several

policies for the poor appear to be “most visible.” Looking more closely, however, some of the policies that are restricted to those with low household incomes appear not to be highly visible: the Earned Income Tax Credit appears among the “submerged” policies and Pell Grants, among the “partly visible” ones. Conversely, Social Security Disability benefits, which are not means-tested, appear among the “most visible.” We infer that the distinction between policies that are more visible versus more submerged emanates from the extent of interaction with government that beneficiaries encounter when they apply for and obtain benefits. Policies that require frequent, recurring, and more intensive encounters with government in order to secure benefits and to maintain eligibility appear to be most visible. Conversely, policies that are administered with greater automaticity, for which eligibility is established through less invasive procedures or on a one-time basis, and in which private organizations (such as institutions of higher education) may play a larger role as intermediaries, cluster among what we call the “partly visible” policies.

### **Research Design: A Two-Stage Model**

In order to test our central expectations, the policy visibility hypotheses, we must address the challenge of endogeneity: that is, it is possible that some of the same characteristics of individuals that influence the types of policies they utilize may also affect how they answer the question about “government social program usage.” Our approach to managing this is a two-stage analysis. In the first stage we predict individuals’ extent of usage of each policy type, in one model examining the determinants that lead to greater usage of direct policies, and in another model, those that lead to greater usage of submerged policies. Then, in the second stage, we predict the likelihood of answering the “government social program” usage question in the affirmative, controlling for the predicted values of direct or submerged policy usage derived from Stage One.

For the two models in the first stage, the dependent variables are sums indicating the number of specific direct or submerged policies that individuals acknowledged that they utilized. Direct benefits are represented by the sum of all received (ranging from 0-13), including: Head Start, Social Security Retirement and Survivors', Social Security Disability, Medicaid, Medicare, Welfare (TANF), G.I. Bill, other veterans' benefits (aside from the G.I. Bill), Pell Grants, Unemployment Insurance, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Food Stamps, and government subsidized housing. The variable for submerged benefits is the sum of the following (ranging from 0-8): the Home Mortgage Interest Deduction, Hope and Lifetime Learning Tax Credits, Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, 529 (Qualified Tuition Program) or Coverdell Education Savings Account (Education IRAs), the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), tax exempt employer-provided health benefits, tax exempt employer-provided retirement benefits, and student loans. As determinants of usage, in both variants we include several demographic variables: gender (1=male, 2=female), race (1=African-American), ethnicity (1=Hispanic), age (year of birth), income (1-10, less than \$10k to \$150k or more), and education (1-9, less than high school to doctoral or professional). We use ordinary least squares regression.

In Stage Two, we examine the determinants of policy visibility. The dependent variable is the response to the question: "Have you ever used a government social program, or not," coded one for a "yes" response and zero for a "no." We first test two basic models, one to assess the impact of usage of direct benefits and one for the impact of submerged benefits. The independent variables include the predicted values of direct or submerged program usage from Stage One, as well as all other variables included in Stage One with the exception of income, which serves as the instrumental variable.<sup>7</sup> We use logistic regressions.

## **Results: Policy Visibility**

The results for Stage One are presented at the top of Table 3, with separate columns for the sum of direct and submerged benefits. We find that the number of direct social benefits one receives over the course of life is related to race, age, and income. Specifically, African Americans, those with lower incomes, and older individuals are more likely to have received more of these benefits. Submerged benefits go to a generally different demographic population: recipients tend to be younger; to have higher incomes; and to have higher levels of educational attainment; they are also significantly less likely to be of Hispanic origin. These findings are generally consistent with what we know about submerged benefits; they tend to benefit the well-off compared with direct benefit programs, which are more likely to be means-tested or to be more generally accessible to middle income people. Considering that two of the largest direct benefit programs – Social Security and Medicare – are based on age, it comes as no surprise that age is an important predictor. That racial and ethnic minorities are more likely to benefit from direct benefits and less likely to benefit from submerged benefits indicates another set of cleavages in citizens' experiences of social policies.

Overall, these findings illuminate a stratification of social citizenship in the United States that has not been recognized previously: between those whose social benefits emanate mostly from the submerged state and those whose flow mostly from visible governance. Now we can proceed to examine how such different experiences might influence political behavior.

The results for the basic models of Stage Two are shown at the bottom of Table 3, again with separate columns for direct and submerged versions. Consistent with the descriptive statistics, the visibility of benefits received is related to whether an individual responded that they have ever used a government social program. Receiving direct social benefits increases the

likelihood of an affirmative response to “have you ever used a government social program,” indicating that individuals who benefit from these visible benefits are likely to trace them to government. Conversely, receiving a greater number of submerged benefits increased the likelihood of a negative response to the same question. This suggests that, because of the hidden nature of these programs, individuals do not typically perceive them as government social programs or themselves as social program beneficiaries. These basic results provide confirmation for the policy visibility hypothesis; now we will proceed to examine more complex versions of the Stage 2 models.

### **Considering Alternate Hypotheses**

Using the models in Stage 2 as a base, we build more complex versions that allow us to test the several alternate hypotheses we put forward earlier. As a test of the political knowledge hypothesis, we include a variable that is an index of political knowledge derived from correct answers to 4 standard questions used for this purpose (scaled from 0-4, with number of correct answers serving as a scale representing low to high political knowledge.)<sup>8</sup> We expect those with high political knowledge will be more likely to know if they have used government social programs, and thus to answer in the affirmative. The polarized polity hypothesis is assessed through consideration of independent variables for ideology (1-7, extremely conservative to extremely liberal) and party identification (1=Democrat), with the assumption that liberals and Democrats should feel more free to acknowledge that they have used government social programs. The undeserving others hypothesis is tested primarily by including, as a proxy to capture the effects of negative connotations of “government social program,” the variable measuring opinion about welfare, which ranges from very unfavorable to very favorable on a

four point scale. We anticipate that those who associate using government programs with stigma will have unfavorable attitudes towards welfare, which will decrease the likelihood that they will acknowledge that they themselves are beneficiaries of “government social programs.” We also consider the impact of support for aid to the poor (coded 1 for responding that spending is “too much,” 2 for “about right,” and 3 for “too little”), but we do not include it in the general model because of correlation with the welfare support variable ( $r=.33$ ); we report on it separately. As a test of the benefits as earned rights hypothesis, we include acknowledged Medicare receipt (a dummy variable in which 1=usage, 0=non-usage); contrary to the image inherent in the “get the government out of my Medicare” incident in 2009, we anticipate that Medicare receipt will be positively related to acknowledging government social program usage. As an alternate test of this hypothesis, we control for use of Social Security retirement and survivors’ benefits (1=usage, 0=non-usage), but again because of correlation with Medicare receipt ( $r=.50$ ), we test it only in a separate model. We have the same expectations as for Medicare usage.

The results for these Stage 2 full models are found in Table 4. We observe that although numerous additional variables have been included in these models, still the policy visibility hypothesis is confirmed. The results show that predicted values for using a greater number of direct programs is strongly and significantly associated with the likelihood of responding that one has received a government social benefit. By contrast, the predicted values for using a greater number of submerged benefits bear a strong and significant negative relationship to that response. In short, government’s role in providing social assistance appears to be revealed to recipient through direct social policies but obscured by the submerged policies.

We also find strong support for the political knowledge hypothesis. In both models, respondents with high political knowledge were significantly more likely to respond in the

affirmative regarding government social program usage. While those who answered just one political knowledge question correctly had about a .30 predicted probability of responding that they used a government social program, this probability was .37 for those who answered two questions correctly and a .45 probability for those with three correct answers, holding constant all other variables including actual benefit receipt. Respondents who answered all four correctly had a greater than 50 percent probability of responding that they used a social program,

The polarized polity hypothesis garners strong support in one dimension and not in another: perceptions of whether one benefits from government programs appear to be strongly influenced by ideology, but not by partisanship. In both the direct and submerged models, identifying as a liberal strongly increases the likelihood of responding that one has used a government social program, controlling for benefits received; the results for partisan identity are not significant. This suggests that liberals' tendency to support social programs translates into a personal willingness to respond that one has benefited from such programs. More specifically, when we compare individuals with the same actual history of policy usage, those who identify as conservative on a seven point scale from extreme conservative to extreme liberal have about a .35 predicted probability of responding that they have used a government social program. The predicted probability of a positive response increases to .46 for those who are slightly liberal, .50 for liberals, and about .54 for extreme liberals. Evidently in our polarized polity, liberals and conservatives have very different responses to the term "government social program," to the point of answering question about such usage differently even if they have used identical numbers and types of programs.

Testing the undeserving others hypothesis, we find support that the term "government social program" may elicit associations with policies regarded unfavorably. Those with an

unfavorable opinion of welfare are significantly less likely to acknowledge receipt of programs. Among those who have used the same type and number of programs, those with unfavorable views have a predicted probability of about .40 (.35 for very unfavorable) of responding that they have used a social program, while those with a favorable or very favorable opinion have about a .44 and .48 probability of a positive response respectively. We also, in a separate model, substitute support for aid for poor people for welfare support. We find that, like welfare support, this variable is a positive, significant predictor of responding that one has used a social program ( $p < .05$ ). Respondents who thought “too much” was spent on aid to the poor had about a .35 probability of responding that they used a social program, compared with .45 for those who thought “too little” was spent. These results indicate to us that the question about “government social programs” is not heard by all respondents in the same way; some hear it in a way affected by their negative attitudes about particular programs and their recipients, and that influences how they themselves respond.

Finally, we test the earned rights hypothesis. We find that those who have used Medicare are significantly more likely than others to respond, correctly and affirmatively, that they have used “government social programs.” In a separate model, we substitute usage of Social Security retirement and survivor’s benefits; we find that it does not have a significant relationship to responses to the general question about usage. Combined, these findings indicate that the image advanced by the expression “keep the government out of my Medicare” does not help explain why many people fail to acknowledge themselves to be beneficiaries of government social programs. Recipients of Medicare are significantly more likely than others with similar characteristics to acknowledge that they are recipients of government social programs.

Thus, perceptions of whether one has benefited from government's social provisions are not strictly a function of whether one has actually been a recipient. Rather, these perceptions depend on the visibility of government's role in the policy, as well as on factors including individuals' political knowledge, political ideology, and the degree of stigma they associate with government programs, measured by welfare opinion. The likelihood of responding that one has used a government social program increases especially when individuals receive more direct social benefits, when they have a greater comprehension of how government works, and when they identify as liberals. Conversely, the likelihood of responding in the negative increases especially when one receives more submerged benefits, has limited political knowledge, or is a conservative.

### **Comparing Partly and Most Visible Social Policies**

In Figure 3 above, we noted that policies seemed to arrange themselves in three tiers of visibility. While so far we have compared all direct policies with all submerged policies, now we divide the former category into two groups—those that would appear to be “most visible” (Food Stamps, welfare, government subsidized housing, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Social Security disability) and those that appear to be “partly visible” (Head Start, Medicare, G.I. Bill, veterans' benefits, unemployment insurance, Pell Grants, and Social Security retirement and survivors). We analyze the determinants of usage of each type, using the same Stage One model as we did above, and then proceed to analyze determinants of responding affirmatively to “government social program” usage with the same Stage Two model.

Examining the results of the Stage One analysis, at the top of Table 5, it is notable that most of the same factors are associated with having utilized each policy type, including being

older, lower income, and African American. The main difference is education: more highly educated individuals are likely to have benefitted from the less visible programs and less highly educated people from the more visible programs. This is not surprising given that policies aimed to promote education, including Head Start, Pell Grants, and the G.I. Bill, appear among the “partly visible” group. In addition, women are less likely and men more likely to be among the beneficiaries of the “partly visible” group; this difference may result in part from the predominantly male composition of eligible beneficiaries for the veterans’ benefits.

The second stage, presented at the bottom of Table 5, reveals that in each model, the predicted values for usage of direct policies, whether partly or most visible, bears a strong, positive relationship to acknowledging usage of “government social programs.” This analysis provides further support for the policy visibility hypothesis. It reveals that it is not only beneficiaries of means-tested programs or those whose benefit receipt requires high degrees of interaction with government that gain a clear sense of having used a public social program. Rather, the so-called “entitlement” programs such as Medicare and Social Security, as well as many others that benefit large numbers of middle-class people, are likely to register in people’s minds as “government social programs.”

Turning to Table 6 to examine more complex versions of the Stage 2 model, once again the usage of both the partly and most visible programs each possesses a strong, positive relationship to the affirmative answers. All other outcomes are consistent with those seen in Table 4, providing the same levels of support for the alternate hypotheses as well. Here again, the extent to which individuals’ experiences of policy usage affects their acknowledgement of “government social programs” appears to be mediated by their level of political knowledge, their political ideology, and the degree of stigma they attach to other government programs.

## **Effects of Visibility on Attitudes towards Social Spending**

How might policy visibility influence individuals' other political attitudes? While an in-depth analysis is beyond our inquiry here, we will briefly consider whether those who perceive government assisting themselves may extrapolate from that experience to be more supportive of an expanded role for government in other policy areas. By the same token, we can consider whether those who do not recognize government's role in their social benefits may be more opposed to broadening government's role in social provision and more favorable to policy changes based on market principles.

Here we focus on the effects of policy visibility, operationalized as responses to the central question we have focused on throughout this paper, acknowledged usage of "government social programs." Using ordered logistic regression, we examine its relationship to three dependent variables involving attitudes about government's role in social provision: support for private health insurance versus support for government health insurance (on a scale from one to five); support for government guarantee of health insurance even if it means raising taxes (on a scale of one to four, from strongly oppose to strongly support); and support for privatization of Social Security (on a scale of one to four, from strongly oppose to strongly support).<sup>9</sup> We control initially for demographic characteristics, including educational attainment, income, gender, race, ethnicity, and age. Then, in a more complex model, we also control for political ideology and partisan identity.

The results in the basic models presented at the top of Table 7 show that having recognized oneself as the beneficiary of government social programs is positively and significantly associated with support for government health insurance, support for government

guarantee of health insurance even if taxes increase, and opposition to Social Security privatization. In the bottom half of the table, when we also include ideology and partisan identity, those variables emerge as highly significant; liberals and strong Democrats both support government-provided health insurance, including if taxes increase, and they oppose Social Security privatization. Here, policy visibility still emerges as significantly related to the dependent variable in the first and third model, though at a diminished level; it no longer bears a significant relationship to the dependent variable in the second model.

These results indicate to us that while policy visibility may not be a new “silver bullet” to explain divergence in policy views in the United States, that nonetheless it is an important factor in shaping citizens’ views, and one that has been largely overlooked in scholarship. It may not be only political discourse among elites and framing effects by the media that are influencing citizens’ political views; the changing design and delivery of public policy may themselves exert an important impact.

## **Discussion**

Submerged social welfare policies are now more pervasive, particularly among younger Americans, than more visible policies. The average person has utilized more social provision through submerged channels than policies directly delivered by government entities. Given this development, we set out to consider the extent to which these submerged policies are perceived by citizens as social benefits emanating from government, as well as how visibility matters for their “feedback effects” on political attitudes towards social spending. We find that those who have used greater numbers of direct, visible policies are more likely to perceive themselves as beneficiaries of government programs, but that those who used a greater number of submerged

programs are more likely to assert that they have not benefitted from government policies. Despite its impressive size, the submerged state is indeed out of sight and mind for recipients. As well, individuals' pre-existing ideological biases and preferences shape whether they see themselves as beneficiaries; liberals and those with a favorable opinion of welfare are more likely to categorize themselves as such.

These findings provide the first empirical support for previous theoretical claims about policy feedback effects on mass publics, namely that policies must be visible to have such effects and that tax expenditures and other submerged policies on which we increasingly rely do not meet this criterion. In addition, we provide additional evidence for theories of public opinion which posit that individual biases affect the interpretation of information; in this case such biases shape assessment of experiences with government. Together, the low visibility of many of our social policies along with pre-existing beliefs of some recipients may provide one explanation for why, despite benefiting from an extensive and expensive submerged welfare state, Americans are not more supportive of government generally and redistributive policies in particular.

These findings help illuminate why some policies fail to generate feedback effects: even beneficiaries themselves may not perceive them in operation or attribute their effects to government (Patashnik and Zelizer 2009). More specifically, these results may indicate why many Americans benefit from public social provision but nonetheless oppose social spending.

## **Conclusion**

Effective governance has become increasingly difficult in the United States in recent decades, not least because political leaders and citizens themselves have grown increasingly polarized in their views about the appropriate role of government. This divide, paired with the institutional obstacles of the American political system, have stymied efforts to address either

rising economic inequality or budget deficits and the national debt. This paper suggests that citizens' divergent experiences of social welfare policies—in tandem with other cleavages in American society, along the lines of political knowledge and ideology—may help explain the very different ways that citizens think about the role of government.

Over the past thirty years, not only does American political discourse contain a more persistent anti-government message, but also, increasingly, many citizens benefit from expensive government social policies that obscure government's role in subsidizing and regulating them. As a result of both trends, many people fail to recognize government's role in providing for their economic security, health care, and educational opportunities. They may be left under the impression that it is solely through their own efforts or through the largesse of market institutions that they receive various kinds of assistance or lowered financial obligations.

Two decades ago, Gosta Esping-Andersen observed how nations differ from each other in their social welfare policy regimes, with three types each fostering different kinds of social stratification and extending more and less robust forms of social rights. In a related manner, we observe how two forms of the welfare state that both co-exist within the United States foster divergent experiences of government—one making its role apparent to citizens and the other obscuring it. These differences, in turn, bear consequences for citizens' views about government's appropriate role in social welfare policy.

A conundrum of politics in the United States over recent decades, highlighted by the demands of Tea Party activists presently, is that Americans appear to want small government and to reduce spending sharply, but still defend particular programs (Williamson, Skocpol and Coggin 2011). Variation in the visibility of government programs, particularly in the context of a highly partisan political environment, may help to explain this seeming paradox of the co-

existence of what has been called “philosophical conservatism” and of “operational liberalism” (Page and Shapiro 1990). As we have seen, the status of policies of the submerged state as government social programs simply eludes the notice of most beneficiaries. Ironically, most of the policies that are most clearly evident as flowing from government regardless of beneficiaries’ political values are some of the least expensive social programs. The portrait that emerges of the American state is that it is large, expensive, and yet simultaneously often unseen and unappreciated.

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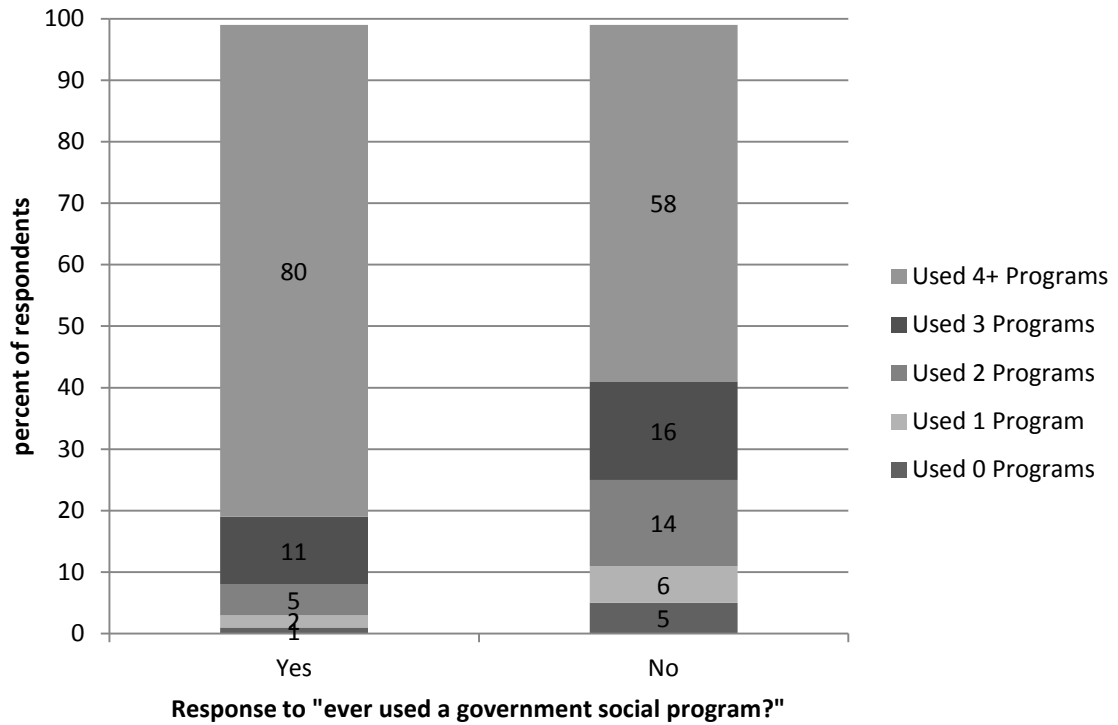
Table 1. Reported Use of Specific Policies and of "Government Social Programs"

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Average Number of All Benefits Received	4.22
Average Number of Submerged Benefits Received	2.53
Average Number of Direct Benefits Received	1.94
 <u>Percentage of people who used:</u>	
0 policies	4%
1 policy	5%
2 policies	11%
3 policies	15%
4 or more policies	65%

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**Figure 1. Perception versus Acknowledged Receipt of Government Benefits, By Number**



**Figure 2. Perception versus Acknowledged Receipt of Government Benefits, By Type**

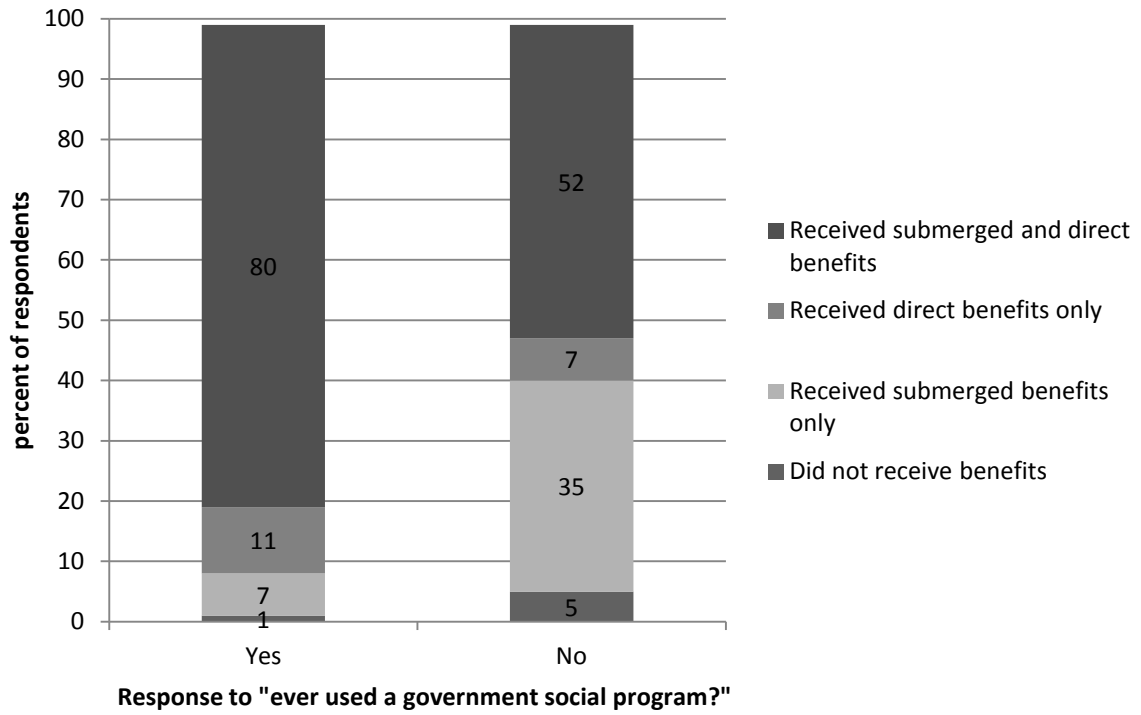


Figure 3. Percent of Beneficiaries Who Respond That They Have Never Used a Government Social Program

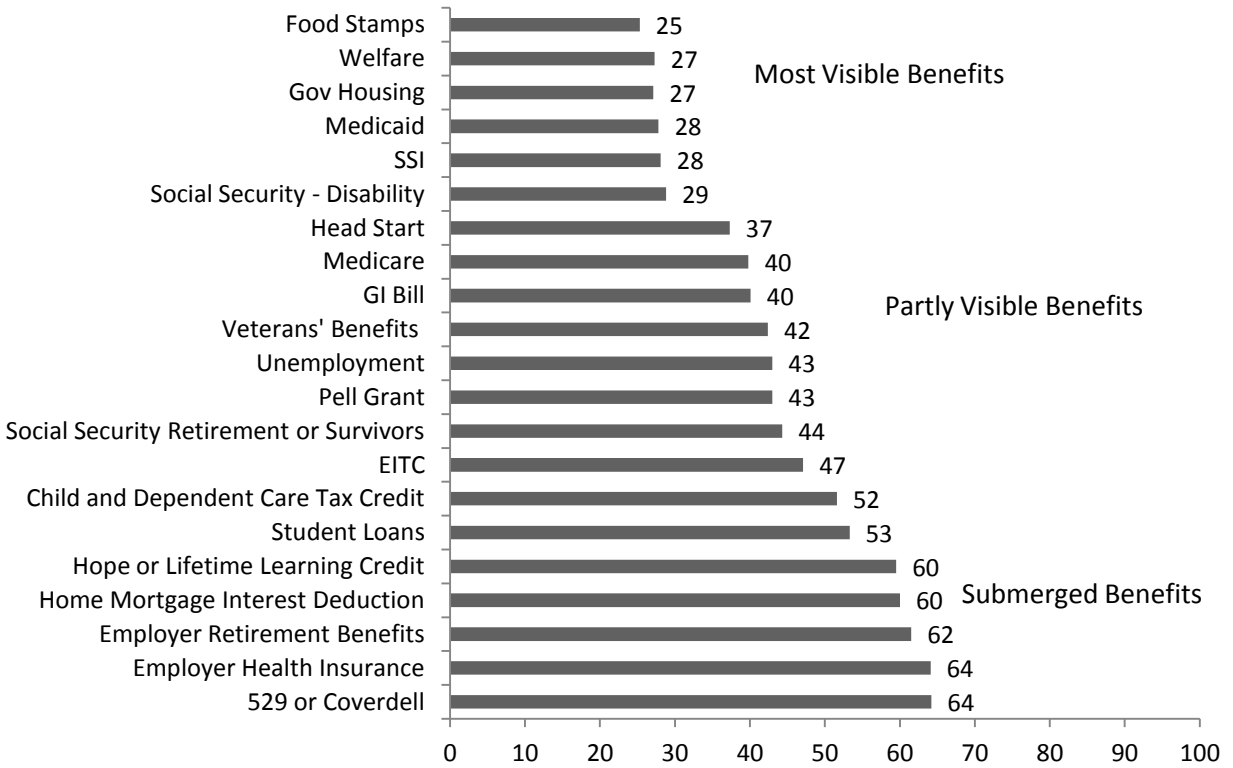


Table 2. Characteristics of Respondents Who Denied Ever Using a "Government Social Program" But Reported Receiving Benefits, Compared To All Other Respondents

	Mean for those who deny using a "government social program"	Mean for all other respondents
Income Category **	\$40,000-\$49,999	\$35,000-\$39,999
Educational Attainment**	4.16 (Some College, No Degree)	3.76 (Technical, trade, or vocational school after high school)
Year of Birth*	1962	1960
Sex (1=male, 2=female)	1.51	1.51
African-American (1=African-American)	0.160	0.174
Hispanic (1=Hispanic)	0.122	0.119
Ideology (7 point scale, V. Conservative to V. Liberal)**	3.62	3.98
Party Identification (7 point scale, S. Democrat to S. Republican)*	3.90	3.49
Direct Programs Used**	1.27	2.7
Submerged Programs Used**	2.74	2.3

\*p<.01, \*\*p<.000

Table 3. Perception of Social Benefit Receipt, Direct Versus Submerged Benefits: Testing the Policy Visibility Hypotheses

Stage One: Predictors of Social Benefit Receipt		
	Sum of Direct Benefits	Sum of Submerged Benefits
Gender (Female)	.045 (.104)	.104 (.090)
Educational Attainment	.019 (.025)	.181*** (.023)
African-American	.823*** (.171)	.096 (.124)
Hispanic	-.217 (.186)	-.394** (.144)
Birth Year	-.021*** (.003)	.013*** (.003)
Income	-.279*** (.024)	.243*** (.019)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.24	0.31
N	1258	1198

Stage Two: Determinants of Positive Response to "Have Ever Used a Government Social Program"

	Direct	Submerged
Predicted Values for Sum of Direct Benefits	.652*** (.010)	
Predicted Values for Sum of Submerged Benefits		-.810*** (.124)
Gender (female)	-.198 (.130)	-.050 (.128)
Educational Attainment	.021 (.031)	.175*** (.046)
African-American	-.568** (.217)	.061 (.186)
Hispanic	-.146 (.234)	-.590* (.246)
Birth Year	.003 (.005)	.007 (.005)
χ <sup>2</sup>	60.32***	60.32***
(df)	(6)	(6)
N	1262	1262

† p<.10, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.000

Table 4. Stage Two Determinants of Positive Response to "Have Ever Used a Government Social Program," Expanded Models for Direct Versus Submerged Benefits: Testing Several Hypotheses

	Direct	Submerged
Predicted Values for Sum of Direct Benefits	.595*** (.110)	
Predicted Values for Sum of Submerged Benefits		-.739*** (.137)
Ideology (Liberal)	.156*** (.048)	.156*** (.048)
Democrat	.013 (.160)	.013 (.160)
Political Knowledge	.326*** (.160)	.326*** (.064)
Favorable Attitude Toward Welfare	.174* (.073)	.174* (.073)
Medicare Recipient	.704*** (.210)	.704*** (.210)
Gender (Female)	.021 (.142)	.156 (.142)
Educational Attainment	-.054 (.037)	.086 (.051)
African-American	-.412 (.250)	.162 (.217)
Hispanic	-.058 (.242)	-.462 (.255)
Birth Year	.014* (.006)	.017* (.006)
$\chi^2$	106.67***	106.67***
(df)	(11)	(11)
N	1193	1193

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

Table 5. Perception of Social Benefit Receipt, Partly and Most Visible Benefits: Testing the Policy Visibility Hypothesis

Stage One: Predictors of Social Benefit Receipt		
	Sum of Partly Visible Benefits	Sum of Most Visible Benefits
Gender (Female)	-.126* (.060)	.062 (.070)
Educational Attainment	.062*** (.014)	-.037* (.016)
African-American	.190* (.092)	.597*** (.120)
Hispanic	-.075 (.099)	-.110 (.125)
Birth Year	-.023*** (.002)	-.013*** (.002)
Income	-.087*** (.013)	-.188*** (.016)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.18	0.28
N	1264	1265

Stage Two: Determinants of Positive Response to "Have Ever Used a Government Social Program"

	Partly Visible	Most Visible
Predicted Values for Sum of Partly Visible Benefits	2.08*** (.317)	
Predicted Values for Sum of Most Visible Benefits		.965*** (.147)
Gender (female)	.094 (.130)	-.229† (.130)
Educational Attainment	-.095*** (.029)	.069* (.035)
African-American	-.427* (.207)	-.607** (.221)
Hispanic	-.131 (.234)	-.181 (.234)
Birth Year	.038*** (.009)	.002 (.004)
χ <sup>2</sup>	60.32***	60.32***
(df)	(6)	(6)
N	1262	1262

† p<.10, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

Table 6. Stage Two Determinants of Positive Response to "Have Ever Used a Government Social Program," Expanded Models for Partly and Most Visible Benefits: Testing Several Hypotheses

	Partly Visible	Most Visible
Predicted Values for Sum of Partly Visible Benefits	1.899*** (.351)	
Predicted Values for Sum of Most Visible Benefits		.880*** (.162)
Ideology (Liberal)	.156*** (.048)	.156*** (.048)
Democrat	.013 (.160)	.013 (.160)
Political Knowledge	.326*** (.064)	.326*** (.064)
Favorable Attitude Toward Welfare	.174* (.073)	.174* (.073)
Medicare Recipient	.704*** (.210)	.704*** (.210)
Gender (Female)	.287* (.145)	-.007 (.143)
Educational Attainment	-.161*** (.036)	-.011 (.040)
African-American	-.282 (.239)	-.447 (.254)
Hispanic	-.044 (.242)	-.090 (.242)
Birth Year	.046*** (.009)	.012* (.006)
$\chi^2$	106.67***	106.67***
(df)	(11)	(11)
N	1193	1193

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

Table 7. Effect of Visibility of Government Program Receipt on Attitudes Toward Policy Reforms

	Support Government Health Insurance	Support Government Health Insurance if Taxes Increase	Support Social Security Privatization
Used a "Government Social Program"	.371** (.125)	.378** (.119)	-.334** (.119)
Educational Attainment	-.006 (.031)	.048 (.029)	-.055 (.030)
Income	-.125*** (.029)	-.044 (.024)	-.002 (.025)
Gender (female)	.350** (.121)	.152 (.114)	-.278* (.116)
African-American	.929*** .177	.302 (.165)	.354* (.175)
Hispanic	.666** (.225)	.428* (.183)	-.088 (.193)
Birth Year	.011** (.004)	.004 (.004)	.017*** (.004)
$\chi^2$ (df)	107.35*** (7)	30.85*** (7)	43.85*** (7)
N	1224	1239	1239

With Ideology and Party

Used a "Government Social Program"	.222† (.132)	.167 (.123)	-.262* (.124)
Ideology (liberal)	.441*** (.051)	.477*** (.048)	-.213*** (.045)
Democrat	.877*** (.156)	.713*** (.150)	-.267† (.144)
Educational Attainment	-.057† (.033)	.006 (.030)	-.033 (.032)
Income	-.133*** (.031)	-.047† (.026)	-.002 (.026)
Gender (female)	.232† (.130)	.045 (.120)	-.186 (.120)
African-American	.628** (.206)	-.047 (.206)	.562** (.197)
Hispanic	.387 (.247)	.217 (.206)	.005 (.199)
Birth Year	.014** (.004)	.006 (.003)	.018*** (.004)
$\chi^2$ (df)	231.77*** (9)	187.19*** (9)	81.29*** (9)
N	1189	1203	1204

† p<.10, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

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<sup>1</sup> They also vastly overshadow corporate tax expenditures, which amount to about 1 percent of GDP. (U.S. Budget, FY 2012).

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that we are examining only the interpretive or cognitive effects related to policy visibility, not the feedback effects of resources that emanate from such policies. Policies do vary from each other in terms of their average benefit levels, and benefit levels also vary considerably even among the recipients of a single policy. As a practical matter, we do not have data indicating individuals' benefit levels. Neither would assigning average benefit levels to individuals suffice, given the high degree of variation in benefits. That said, it is not the case that average benefits of direct benefits are generally larger than those in submerged benefits. A study of the real value of average benefits, in 2002 dollars, in a large number of social policies across time found for example that food stamps, a highly visible direct policy, were worth at most \$1728 per year and that was in 1981; average benefits in submerged policies have peaked more recently and at higher levels, such as the Home Mortgage Interest Deduction at \$2406 in 1996 and Earned Income Tax Credit at \$2023 in 2000 (Mettler and Milstein 2007, 112-113). For these reasons, while we do not measure resource effects, we expect that interpretive effects of policy design are more salient in shaping policy awareness than resources.

<sup>3</sup> The SGIP was conducted by the Survey Research Institute at Cornell University. The data are weighted.

<sup>4</sup> Calculation includes: Head Start, Social Security Disability, Social Security Retirement, SSI, Medicaid, Medicare, Welfare (TANF), GI Bill, Veterans' Benefits, Pell Grants, Unemployment Insurance, Food Stamps, and Government Subsidized Housing, Home Mortgage Interest Deduction, Hope and Lifetime Learning Tax Credits, Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, 529 (Qualified Tuition Program) or Coverdell Education Savings Account (Education IRAs), Earned Income Tax Credit, employer subsidized health insurance, employer subsidized retirement benefits, and student loans.

<sup>5</sup> Even with a majority of respondents using multiple programs, correlations between programs used are generally low, though there are a few exceptions. As one might expect, there is a moderate, positive correlation both between welfare and Food Stamp usage (.61) and between Social Security Retirement and Medicare usage (.50). Weaker but noteworthy positive correlations exist between Food Stamps and government housing (.41), Medicaid and Food Stamps (.44), employer health and retirement benefits (.46), and Pell Grants and student loans (.45). These correlations point to the shared target populations of some social programs, such as those based on income (welfare, Food Stamps, Medicaid) and those targeted to older citizens (Social Security Retirement and Medicare).

<sup>6</sup> Of Head Start, Social Security Retirement, Social Security Disability, SSI, Veterans' Benefits, Medicaid, Medicare, Welfare (TANF), GI Bill, Pell Grants, Unemployment Insurance, Food Stamps, and Government Subsidized Housing.

<sup>7</sup> We find that income, though a significant determinant of using greater numbers of direct social benefits and greater numbers of submerged social benefits, is not significant as a predictor answering the question about usage of "government social programs" in the affirmative. This is confirmed by a single-stage model and also by alternate models that we explored that used variables indicating whether individuals were disabled or whether they were unemployed as instrumental variables, and included income. We ultimately decided that income is the appropriate instrumental variable compared to these two because it identifies all respondents on a broad range with several gradations rather than isolating a small group of them who may be idiosyncratic and on the basis of a condition that is more likely to shape responses to the dependent variable.

<sup>8</sup> These four questions include: Do you happen to know what job or political office is now held by Dick Cheney? Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional or not? How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a presidential veto? Do you happen to know which major political party currently has the most members in the House of Representatives?

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<sup>9</sup> The question wording for these three dependent variables are: Support for government health insurance: "There is much concern about the rapid rise in medical and hospital costs. Some people feel there should be a government insurance plan which would cover all medical and hospital expenses for everyone. Others feel that all medical expenses should be paid by individuals through private insurance plans like Blue Cross or other company paid plans. Which is closer to the way you feel: Do you feel there should be a government insurance plan or do you feel individuals should pay medical expenses through private insurance plans?"; Support for government health insurance if taxes increase: "All in all, do you favor or oppose the United States government guaranteeing health insurance for all citizens, even if it means raising taxes?"; Support for Social Security privatization: "There's also concern about Social Security. Some people feel that workers should not be allowed to invest part of their Social Security taxes in the stock market or in bond because it would reduce guaranteed retirement benefits from government. Other people feel that workers should be allowed to invest part of their Social Security taxes in the stock market or in bonds because it would give them more control over their money. Which is closer to the way you feel? Do you feel workers should not be allowed to invest part of Social Security taxes in the stock market or bonds or do you feel workers should be allowed to invest part of Social Security taxes in the stock market or bonds?" Response order for support for government health insurance and support for Social Security privatization were randomized in the original survey such that half of the respondents received the responses in reverse order. These were then recoded to be consistent for the analysis.