

The Impact of the SNAP Drug Felon Ban on SNAP Caseloads: A State-Level Analysis

by

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Abstract

The late twentieth century ushered in a new era of mass incarceration and increases in non-violent, drug-related arrests in the United States (Diaz Pascual, 2021). This was accompanied by sweeping reductions of welfare programs, and the majority of people affected by these trends have been those living in poverty (Looney & Turner, 2018). A prominent policy from this era was The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), which made major changes to welfare, including establishing a new lifetime ban on SNAP for anyone convicted of a drug felony on or after the law was passed. Since then, many states have chosen to modify or opt out of this policy. The purpose of this paper is to explore the effects of state variation in the lifetime SNAP ban. We employ a linear probability model to determine if state political ideology influences SNAP ban policy, how caseloads are impacted by changes in SNAP ban policy, and the additional impacts of political ideology and SNAP work requirements on caseloads. Our findings suggest that SNAP caseloads increase significantly when states opt out of the SNAP ban and that very liberal states are more inclined to opt out. Lastly, in states that modify the ban rather than opt out, SNAP work requirement waivers can have additional positive impacts on caseloads.

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List of Abbreviations

SNAP Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

USDA United States Department of Agriculture

PRWORA The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act

ABAWD Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents

Chapter 1

Introduction

Mass incarceration is a pressing issue in the United States, with the U.S. ranking first in incarceration rates globally (Fair & Walmsley, 2021). The U.S. spends about \$182 billion on prison systems annually (Wagner & Rabuy, 2017), and by the end of 2022 around 1.2 million people were incarcerated (Carson & Kluckow, 2023). When President Nixon declared the “War on Drugs” in 1971, a new era of harsher drug sentencing began (Diaz Pascual, 2021). The incarceration rate skyrocketed, and the number of people incarcerated for non-violent, drug-related crimes rose from 50,000 to over 400,000 between 1980 and 1997 (Diaz Pascual, 2021). The majority of the population affected by the rise in sentencing has been those who live below the federal poverty line. Roughly two-thirds of people who enter the criminal justice system were living in poverty before incarceration (Alexander, 2012). Post-incarceration, economic opportunity does not get better, with nearly half of ex-prisoners earning less than \$500 in their first year after release (Looney & Turner, 2018).

Social safety nets are crucial for financial stability and well-being after being incarcerated. The Boston Reentry Study conducted by Western et. al (2014) revealed that, of the recently released prisoners surveyed, over half were involved with or applying to assistance programs within the first day of release, and within two months, 70% were receiving public assistance. This is just one example that demonstrates the critical need for safety nets among this population and how quickly it is sought out when it is accessible. Consequently, removing social safety nets can increase crime and recidivism rates, with increases driven mainly by financially motivated crimes (Deshpande & Mueller-Smith, 2022; Tuttle, 2019).

One notable instance of removing safety nets for the formerly incarcerated has been the lifetime ban on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for people with prior drug convictions. This law placed a federal lifetime ban on SNAP for anyone convicted of a drug felony on or after the legislation was enacted on August 22, 1996. However, one stipulation of this law can provide some flexibility. States were given the option to change their respective legislation to modify or fully lift the ban. All but one state, South Carolina, has chosen to change the SNAP ban since 1996. However, states have varied significantly in the timing of the legislation change and whether they modify the ban or lift it entirely. Concurrently, states have also had to decide whether to waive work requirements that were imposed as eligibility requirements for SNAP in the same legislation that the ban was created. The lifetime SNAP ban and related legislation like work requirements may have major influences on access to SNAP for the formerly incarcerated, particularly those convicted of a drug felony.

Several studies have looked at the impacts of the ban as well as the state variation in changing the legislation. Tuttle (2019) and Mueller-Smith et al. (2023) used the cutoff date – August 23, 1996 – to employ regression discontinuity analyses that investigate trends related to the SNAP ban. Using data from the Florida Department of Corrections, Tuttle (2019) analyzed recidivism rates for the affected population as it pertains to the law change in Florida when it was initially passed. The results showed that recidivism in the affected population significantly increased when the ban was implemented. Similar to our paper, Mueller-Smith et al. (2023) studied SNAP caseload changes related to the ban and additionally looked at other spillover effects. Mueller-Smith et al. (2023) included eight states in their analysis to find the initial impacts on caseloads from the cutoff date. Their study found that SNAP caseloads were negatively impacted by the SNAP ban in the first stages of the legislation. This trend has had

lasting negative impacts on caseloads and unintentional spillovers. Finally, Sheely (2020) evaluated the impact of the ban on poverty as well as state variation in the choice to implement a full or partial ban. Sheely (2020) developed an analysis that is similar to ours, using a linear regression model with time-fixed effects and differentiating between states with full, partial, and no bans. Sheely (2020) examines the effects the ban could have on the likelihood of living in poverty for individuals with a prior drug conviction and finds that poverty is lower in states that have chosen to opt out of the ban.

This paper explores how changes to the lifetime SNAP ban can impact SNAP participation rates and how variations in political ideology and the presence of SNAP work requirements may impact the effects of these changes. We created a novel dataset that documents each time a state has modified or fully lifted the lifetime ban and combined it with data from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) that reports SNAP state-level caseloads from 1996 to 2023. We use a linear regression model with state-fixed effects to analyze each of our objectives. Our paper seeks to answer four research questions. First, is there a relationship between state political ideology and the choice to implement a modification or a full lift of the ban? Second, how are caseloads affected by modifying or fully lifting the lifetime SNAP ban for former drug felons, and are the effects different under a modified ban versus a full lift of the ban? Third, what is the additional influence of whether states enforce work requirements? Fourth, what is the additional influence of state political ideology on SNAP caseloads when a modified ban or full lift of the ban is implemented?

Chapter 2

Background

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act

During Bill Clinton's presidency, access to SNAP was hindered when The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) was passed. According to President Clinton, PRWORA was created to repair the "broken" United States welfare system by incentivizing employment and lowering welfare dependency. To do this, PRWORA increased welfare eligibility restrictions and made significant cuts to SNAP, which were aspects of the legislation that Clinton openly renounced in his signing statement (Clinton, 1996). PRWORA introduced dramatic modifications to a wide scope of welfare programs. Among some of these changes were: new time limits on how long people can receive assistance, work requirements for Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs), and new welfare restrictions for former drug felons, fleeing felons, and undocumented immigrants.

The controversial law has sparked an ongoing conversation about its effectiveness. Many scholars argue that PRWORA serves as an institutional reinforcement of mass incarceration, racism, and gender inequality. Morgan et. al (2022) highlight how women and people of color are incarcerated at higher rates than their white male counterparts and that punitive policies have disproportionate impacts on socially disadvantaged groups. O'Connor (2000) suggests that investigating welfare reforms such as PRWORA calls for a research agenda that focuses on social stratification and economic inequality. Additionally, O'Connor (2000) recommends that reforms should not be based on changing the behavior of people living in poverty. Instead, we should aim to shift culture and move away from the traditional political economy we see today.

The literature on the impacts of PRWORA contains varying results. One of the most consistent findings in the literature is that PRWORA created a substantial and persistent decline in welfare recipients (Boushey & Gundersen, 2001; Chamlin & Denney, 2019; Mueller-Smith et al., 2023). PRWORA may also have increased employment and caused slight declines in poverty rates for children and single mothers (Danziger, 2010; Lichter & Jayakody, 2002). However, these trends are disputed, with the evidence that PRWORA's impact on labor force participation or poverty being modest at best. Some scholars believe that quantitative analysis has not been able to capture the full effects of PRWORA (Pimpare, 2012). Because of this, PRWORA may be better analyzed by its parts, rather than attempting to find its total impacts.

The Lifetime SNAP Ban

An aspect of PRWORA that is highly contested is the implementation of a lifetime ban on receiving SNAP for people convicted of drug felonies. Many people have criticized this part of the bill for limiting access to SNAP. The hardships of life after incarceration can be further exacerbated by food insecurity, which makes SNAP an important resource post-release (Thompson & Burnside, 2022; Hirsch, 1999; Dong & Feng, 2021). Greater access to SNAP may also lower crime rates and promote successful parole completion (Zhang, 1997; Foley, 2011; Sohoni & Piatkowska, 2021). Punitive policies like the SNAP ban may have significant negative impacts and can increase poverty for people with prior drug convictions, hindering their ability to achieve economic stability. Sheely (2020) documents changes to the ban for each year and measures how poverty changes with each type of SNAP ban change. The results of this study found that the likelihood of living in poverty is lower among individuals with a prior drug conviction in states that fully lift the SNAP ban, displaying how the ban on SNAP can hinder economic mobility for those affected.

Denied access to SNAP can increase recidivism and caseloads as well, leaving room for unintended spillover effects. Tuttle (2019) assesses the effects of the SNAP ban on recidivism rates as it pertains to the law change in Florida. Tuttle (2019) found that former drug felons who were convicted on or after August 23, 1996, and thus did not have access to SNAP, had a significantly higher rate of recidivism than the former felons convicted before August 23, 1996. Tuttle (2019) also found that the increase in recidivism was largely due to financially motivated crimes, suggesting that people without access to SNAP are returning to crime as a way to support themselves or their families. Mueller-Smith et al. (2023) employ a similar discontinuity model across eight states, examining a range of impacts such as SNAP take-up, labor market outcomes, and family spillover effects. They find that for those who had a drug conviction after the cutoff date, former drug felons are 11.6 percentage points less likely to participate in SNAP compared to people with convictions before the cutoff. They also found significant declines in SNAP receipt for households with former drug felons, reducing the benefits for children and other household members. The findings from the literature on the lifetime SNAP ban have largely shown negative overall effects, potentially leading to increased crime, poverty, and less take-up when in effect.

SNAP Work Requirements

There is a substantial amount of literature that focuses on the SNAP work requirements that PRWORA imposed on ABAWDs. Similar to the SNAP ban, the new law gave states the option to waive the work requirement, and many researchers have investigated the impacts of work requirements and the option to waive them. Imposing work requirements decreases SNAP caseloads for ABAWDs, and there is no significant evidence that they lead to an increase in employment (Ku, Brantley, & Pillai, 2019; Gray et al. 2023). Work requirements have even been

shown to worsen outcomes for vulnerable populations such as the disabled or the long-term unemployed (Cuffey, Beatty, & Mykerezi 2021; Han 2022). Finding work can be a major challenge for the formerly incarcerated, and work requirements can have consequences on access to welfare for this population. For people who have a prior drug conviction, the double impact of the SNAP ban creates even greater barriers to accessing SNAP relative the formerly incarcerated individuals with no prior drug conviction (Dong & Feng, 2021).

Political Ideology

Since PRWORA was passed in 1996, states have shown great variation in how they change the federal SNAP ban. Some states lift the ban entirely, with no stipulations, while others modify the ban, allowing some access, but not without meeting requirements like drug testing or undergoing rehabilitation services. Variations like this could be explained by the different political ideologies in each state. State politics have been shown to have a large impact on the nature of laws that are passed within a state, with Democratic governors passing more expansionary economic policies than Republican governors (Potrafke, 2017). Additionally, ideological party divergence has grown rapidly in recent decades, and partisanship can have important ramifications for the types of policies passed in each state (Caughey, Yiqing Xu, and Warshaw, 2017; Kleinfeld, 2023). This partisanship has led to differing approaches to PRWORA changes among states as well. Cuffey, Newby, and Smith (2023) find that counties in very conservative states are nearly 17% less likely to have a waived work requirement than counties that are in very liberal states. Similar to the work requirement waivers, states have the option to modify or completely remove the SNAP drug felon ban, and politics may play a large role in that decision.

Our paper adds to the literature in several ways. First, we use a novel dataset that tracks the month and year of every change made to the SNAP ban across the states and then distinguishes between the type of change made (i.e. a modification or full lift) for our analysis. This is similar to Sheely (2020), but it has not yet been done at the monthly level. Second, we employ a linear regression model to see how each type of change to the ban affects SNAP caseloads compared to when the ban was in full effect over time. Finally, we consider the legislative and political context in which changes to the ban were made. To do this, we first predict the relationship between states' political ideologies and whether they choose to modify or fully lift the SNAP ban. We then return to the question of SNAP caseloads to see how SNAP work requirement waiver laws and political ideology may interact with the ban and additionally influence caseloads.

Chapter 3

Data

SNAP Drug Felon Ban Policies

We obtained a state-month-level dataset of prevailing SNAP drug felon policies by hand-coding state legislation pertaining to the SNAP drug felon ban. We used the “50-State Survey: Effects of Denial of SNAP Benefits on Persons with Felony Drug Convictions” by the Network for Public Health Law as a reference point (NPHL, 2020). This survey reports the legislation on the SNAP ban current as of April 2020 and identifies where the statute is codified. From there, we traced the legislative history of that statute in every state and recorded any significant change to the ban made since PRWORA was passed in 1996 through 2021. We recorded the date each law change was enacted and classified each type of change as either a modification or a full lift of the SNAP ban. A modification is an expansionary change that allows former drug felons access to SNAP but has stipulations such as time limits, mandatory drug testing, or successful completion of rehabilitation treatment. A full lift of the ban is a sweeping change where a state opts out of the ban without any stipulations. We excluded Washington D.C., the U.S. territories, and two states from our dataset. Oregon was dropped because they did not have the online resources that provide the month in which legislation was enacted or passed, and since our time variable is on a month-year level, we could not include it. We also dropped New York from our analysis. The 2023 USDA SNAP Options Report states that New York has opted out of the ban, but this decision is not codified into New York law, so we could not track the month or year it was enacted (Benvie et al., 2023). The final dataset used for this analysis documents legislative changes to the SNAP ban across 48 states, using each month and year from the ban’s enactment

in August 1996 to the latest change that was made in October 2021. However, we will have to restrict this dataset to include other data for our analysis.

SNAP Caseloads

We obtained USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) state and national-level monthly reports on SNAP caseload levels and information on the amount of benefits distributed (USDA, 2023). This data is publicly available beginning in fiscal year 1969 up until the most current month available, which was July 2023 at the time of our data collection. We use state-level data on the number of persons and households participating in SNAP and the ratio of persons per household in each month. For our analysis, we log our outcomes for the number of individuals and households since the raw numbers can be very high and vary greatly between states.

Unemployment and Population Data

Unemployment data comes from the Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2023). We use state-level monthly unemployment rate estimates that are not seasonally adjusted from 1995 through 2023. We obtained population data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program (PEP). PEP provides annual population estimates derived from the U.S. Census population estimates, and we extracted these at the state level from 1996 through 2019.

Political Ideology Data

Finally, we also obtained annual data on state ideology from Shor and McCarty (2011). They combine survey data from the Project Vote Smart National Political Awareness Test and roll call votes to develop a political ideology score for each state. The state ideologies are separated into state Senate and state House indexes, ranging from "Very Conservative" to "Very

Liberal”. Following Cuffey, Newby, and Smith (2023), we average Senate and House scores to create a categorical variable that classifies each state as “Very Conservative”, “Conservative”, “Liberal”, and “Very Liberal”. In our analysis, we focus on an indicator variable for whether the state-year displayed “Very Conservative” ideology. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics with the mean coefficients and standard deviations for each dependent variable of interest under a full ban, modified ban, and full lift.

SNAP Work Requirement Data

Data for states’ SNAP work requirement waiver status comes from Cuffey, Newby, and Smith (2023). This dataset combines survey data from state SNAP program representatives, FNS data on waiver requests, and information from every state’s SNAP policy manual to create a record of work requirement waiver status for nearly every county in the U.S. from 2005 to 2018. For our purposes, we will be using state waiver status as a binary control variable and interaction term. This dataset also defines the range of dates we could use for our analysis, limiting our timeline to between the years of 2005 and 2018. This only allows us to examine outcomes from January 2005 to December 2018 as opposed to beginning when PRWORA was passed in August of 1996 and ending with a more recent date. In order to remove biases from before January 2005, we removed states that made changes to the ban before that date¹. Therefore, our final dataset includes 24 states that made changes to the SNAP drug felon ban between January 2005 and December 2015.

¹ In the final dataset we did not include the states Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New England, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	Full Ban	Modified Ban	Full Lift
SNAP households	372744.7 (420528.4)	373771.5 (440810.4)	234246.1 (340276.3)
SNAP persons	857191.1 (980979.9)	796084.6 (947879.1)	483014.7 (699814.6)
SNAP persons per household	2.297 (0.154)	2.152 (0.127)	2.139 (0.192)
State unemployment	6.240 (2.252)	5.444 (2.174)	4.890 (1.936)
Population estimate	10738364.9 (14765252.6)	7802423.0 (7981382.2)	3714066.5 (4952094.8)
Whether very conservative	0.491 (0.500)	0.391 (0.488)	0.342 (0.475)
Whether waiver implemented	0.602 (0.425)	0.535 (0.446)	0.398 (0.469)
<i>N</i>	2232	1369	431

Note: Table 1 displays the mean coefficients for our outcome variables (SNAP households, persons, and persons per household) and our controls (state unemployment, population estimates, whether a state is very conservative, and whether a state has implemented a work requirement waiver) for each status of SNAP ban (full ban, modified ban, and full lift of the ban) in our month-level sample. *N* displays how many state-months are represented for each status of SNAP ban; standard deviations in parentheses

Chapter 4

Methods

We have four research goals: whether there is a relationship between political ideology and the type of ban change that is passed, how SNAP caseloads react to different changes to the SNAP ban, whether SNAP work requirement waivers will influence the relationship between caseloads and the SNAP ban, and whether state political ideology influences the relationship between caseloads and the SNAP ban. For each of these objectives, we use a linear model that includes state-fixed effects over time. Our results are relative to the time period that the full ban is still in effect for each state.

To investigate our first research goal, we aim to see if there is a relationship between state political ideology and implementing a full lift or modification. We use a linear probability model to predict whether a state is very conservative or very liberal depending upon whether they have implemented a full lift or modification of the SNAP ban relative to when the full ban is in effect. We have two outcomes which are either the probability of being very conservative or the probability of being very liberal. Here we use the following model:

$$P(Y_{it} = 1) = \alpha + \beta_1 I(\text{Full Lift})_{it} + \beta_2 I(\text{Modified})_{it} + \gamma x_{it} + \delta_i + \tau_t + \delta_i \times \tau + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

where Y_{it} represents either the binary for whether a state is “Very Conservative” or the binary for whether “Very Liberal”, following our categorizations of Shor and McCarty’s (2011) index. β_1 represents the probability that a state is very conservative or the probability that a state is very liberal when a full lift is implemented relative to when the full ban is in effect. β_2 is the change in the probability that a state is very conservative or the change in the probability that a state is

very liberal when the ban is modified relative to when the full ban is in effect. We control for the time fixed effects represented by τ_t , and state fixed effects represented by δ_i . We also include the interaction term $\delta_i \times \tau$ to control for state-specific linear time trends. The term X_{it} controls for the state population, unemployment, SNAP work requirement waiver status, and political ideology for each state i in month t .

For our second research objective, we use a linear regression model with state-fixed effects to find the impact of each type of legislation change (i.e. a full lift or modification of the ban) on SNAP caseloads:

$$Y_{it} = \alpha + \beta_1 I(\text{Full Lift})_{it} + \beta_2 I(\text{Modified})_{it} + \gamma X_{it} + \delta_i + \tau_t + \delta_i \times \tau + \varepsilon \quad (2)$$

where Y_{it} denotes one of our three SNAP caseload outcomes for state i and month t . These outcomes include the natural log of the number of Households ($\ln(\text{Households})$), the natural log of Persons ($\ln(\text{Persons})$), and the proportion of Persons per Household. Here we log our persons and household outcomes because the raw caseload numbers are large and potentially more difficult to interpret, so rather than displaying the full numbers we show the change in caseloads over time by logging these outcomes. $I(\text{Full Lift})_{it}$ is a binary variable for whether state i has fully lifted the SNAP ban during month t , and $I(\text{Modified})_{it}$ is a binary variable for whether state i has modified the ban during period t . β_1 represents the change in SNAP caseloads when a state chooses to fully lift the ban compared to when the full ban is in effect. β_2 represents the change in SNAP caseloads when a state chooses to modify the ban relative to the full ban. We again control for time-fixed effects represented by τ_t , state fixed effects represented by δ_i , and the interaction term $\delta_i \times \tau$, and the term X_{it} containing a vector of controls for the state

population, unemployment, SNAP work requirement waiver status, and political ideology for each state i in month t .

For our third objective, we add to our previous linear regression model from the second objective. We add to this model by including interactions between an indicator variable for whether the state had SNAP work requirement waivers and indicator variables for full SNAP ban lifts and SNAP ban modifications.

$$Y_{it} = \alpha + \beta_1 I(\text{Full Lift})_{it} + \beta_2 I(\text{Full Lift})_{it} \times (Waiver)_{it} + \beta_3 I(\text{Modified})_{it} + \beta_4 I(\text{Modified})_{it} \times (Waiver)_{it} + \gamma X_{it} + \delta_i + \tau_t + \delta_i \times \tau + \varepsilon \quad (3)$$

where β_1 is the change in SNAP caseloads for a full lift for states with no work requirement waiver compared to the time period when the full ban was in place, β_2 is the additional effect on SNAP caseloads for states that fully lift the ban and waive work requirements relative to when a full ban is in effect, β_3 is the change in SNAP caseloads when a state chooses to modify the ban relative to the full ban for state-months with no work requirement waiver, and β_4 is the additional effect on SNAP caseloads when states modify the ban and waive work requirements relative to when a full ban is in effect.

To answer our fourth objective, we use another linear model with interacted variables, but the interaction terms now represent the influence of state political ideologies rather than work requirement waivers. We use a binary for whether states fall into the “Very Conservative” category as our indicator for ideology to find the additional influence of state ideology on SNAP caseloads

$$Y_{it} = \alpha + \beta_1 I(\text{Full Lift})_{it} + \beta_2 I(\text{Full Lift})_{it} \times (\text{Very Conservative})_{it} + \beta_3 I(\text{Modified})_{it} \\ + \beta_4 I(\text{Modified})_{it} \times (\text{Very Conservative})_{it} + \gamma x_{it} + \delta_i + \tau_t + \delta_i \times \tau_t + \varepsilon \quad (4)$$

where β_2 is the additional effect on SNAP caseloads for states that fully lift the ban and hold a very conservative ideology relative to when a full ban is in place for states that are not “Very Conservative”, β_3 is again the change in SNAP caseloads when a state chooses to modify the ban relative to the full ban, and β_4 is the additional effect on SNAP caseloads for states that modify the ban and hold a very conservative ideology relative to when a full ban was in place for states that are not “Very Conservative”.

Chapter 5

Results

The results for our first objective are presented in Table 2. We find that if a state fully lifts the SNAP ban, the probability of being very liberal increases by about 5%. Meanwhile, when a state fully lifts the ban, the probability of being very conservative shows modest but insignificant decreases. There is no significant difference in the probability of being very liberal or very conservative when a state chooses to modify its ban.

Table 2. Relationship between Ban Change and Ideology

	Very Liberal	Very Conservative
Full Lift	0.0488*** (.0081212)	-0.0599 (.0316111)
Modified Ban	0.00493 (.0046445)	0.0215 (.0180781)
<i>N</i>	3784	3784

Note: Table 2 shows the relationship between the type of change made to the SNAP ban and the probability that a state will be either very liberal or very conservative. The independent variables of interest ($I(\text{Very Liberal})$ and $I(\text{Very Conservative})$) were calculated with two separate regressions for each respective outcome. The column labeled “Very Liberal” shows the probabilities that a state will classify as “Very Liberal” if a state fully lifts the ban and if the state modifies the ban relative to when the ban is in full effect. Similarly, the column labeled “Very Conservative” shows the probability that a state will classify as “Very Conservative” if a state fully lifts its ban and the probability if the state modifies the ban relative to when the ban is in full effect. Regressions control for time fixed effects, state fixed effects, state linear time trends, state population, unemployment, SNAP work requirement waiver status, and political ideology for each state i in month t . Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The results for our second objective are displayed in Table 3. We find that a full lift of the ban results in an increase in the number of households, persons, and persons per household compared to when the ban is in full effect. Our estimates imply that the number of SNAP households increases by about 4.71%, persons increase by 6.22%, and the proportion of persons per household increases by 0.0308. Modified bans produce a different result compared to before

it is changed. SNAP households and persons do not show significant increases. The outcome for persons per household, on the other hand, still increases by about 0.0072.

Table 3. SNAP Caseload Changes for Full Lifts and Modifications

	<i>ln</i> (Households)	<i>ln</i> (Persons)	Persons per Household
Full Lift	0.0460*** (.0080246)	0.0603*** (.008519)	0.0308*** (.0040634)
Modified Ban	0.0021 (.0049964)	0.0051 (.004856)	0.0072** (.0023816)
<i>N</i>	3784	3784	3784

Note: Table 3 holds the results for how SNAP caseloads change when states fully lift or modify the SNAP ban for former drug felons. The results for “Full Lift” show the average change in the logged outcomes of SNAP households and SNAP persons and the change in persons per household when states fully lift the ban relative to when the ban is in full effect. The results for “Modified Ban” show the average change in the logged outcomes of SNAP households and SNAP persons and the change in persons per household when states modify the ban relative to when the ban is in full effect. Regressions control for time fixed effects, state fixed effects, state linear time trends, state population, unemployment, SNAP work requirement waiver status, and political ideology for each state *i* in month *t*. Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Regression results from our third objective are displayed in Table 4. When we include an interaction term for whether states have implemented work requirement waivers, we see noticeably positive effects. In states that have a waiver, a full lift leads to a 3.94% increase in households, an 6.13% increase in persons, and an increase in the persons per household ratio by 0.0466, relative to when those states have a full ban in place. States with a waiver that modify the ban will show a full lift leads to a 1.37% increase in households, an 1.87% increase in persons, and an increase in the persons per household ratio by around 0.0129, all relative to when those states have a full ban in place. For non-waiver states that fully lift the ban, there is an increase in households of about 5.87%, and a 6.18% increase in persons, relative to when the full ban is in effect. For non-waiver states that modify the ban, there is a modest decrease in persons of about 1.29%, and a decrease in persons per household by 0.0067, relative to when the full ban is in effect.

Table 4. SNAP Caseload Changes with Waiver Status

	ln(Households)	ln(Persons)	Persons per Household
A: Impact in waiver states			
Full Lift	0.0386*** (0.0083568)	0.0595*** (0.0088857)	0.0466*** (0.0043353)
Modified	0.0137* (0.0058894)	0.0185** (0.0057206)	0.0129*** (0.0027734)
B: Impact in non-waiver states			
Full Lift	0.0570*** (0.0105)	0.0600*** (0.0109)	0.0037 (0.0051)
Modified	-0.0111 (0.0060)	-0.0130* (0.0061)	-0.0067* (0.0031)
C: Difference between waiver and non-waiver states			
Full Lift × Waiver	-0.0184 (0.0095)	-0.0005 (0.0101)	0.0429*** (0.0045)
Modified × Waiver	0.0248*** (0.0069)	0.0315*** (0.00697)	0.0196*** (0.0034)
<i>N</i>	3784	3784	3784

Note: Table 4 shows the difference in outcomes when states pass a ban change in waiver states versus non-waiver states where work requirements are still in full effect compared to a full ban being in effect. Results in Panel A represent a linear combination of the coefficients for the change in SNAP caseloads for a full lift or modification for state-months with no work requirement waiver plus the additional change in caseloads for a full lift or modification without a waiver. Panel B is the result of the coefficients representing the impact of a full lift or a modification in states that have not implemented a waiver relative to the full ban. Panel C is the result of the coefficient which represents the difference between passing a full lift or a modification in waiver states compared to passing the respective laws in non-waiver states. Regressions control for time fixed effects, state fixed effects, state linear time trends, state population, unemployment, SNAP work requirement waiver status, and political ideology for each state i in month t . Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The results for our fourth and final objective are presented in Table 5. Compared to a full ban, states with a very conservative ideology see a significant difference in households and persons per household when they choose to fully lift the ban. Very conservative states have an increase in households by 7.2% with a full lift and an increase of persons per household by 0.0267, compared to when the ban is in full effect. For states that are not very conservative, we

find that a full ban lift results in an increase in persons and persons per household compared to when the ban is in full effect. SNAP persons increase by about 3.16% and the proportion of persons per household increases by 0.0367. For not very conservative states with modified bans, SNAP households increase by 1.68%, and persons increase by 1.82%, relative to when the full ban is in place.

Table 5. SNAP Caseload Changes with Ideology

	ln(Households)	ln(Persons)	Persons per Household
A: Impact in very conservative states			
Full Lift	0.0695*** (0.0076)	0.0813 (0.0069)	0.0267*** (0.0047)
Modified	-0.0062 (0.0053)	-0.0021 (0.0052)	0.0087** (0.0031)
B: Impact in other states			
Full Lift	0.0133 (0.0108)	0.0311* (0.0126)	0.0367*** (0.0059)
Modified	0.0167* (0.0066)	0.0180** (0.0064)	0.0045 (0.0028)
C: Difference between very conservative and other states			
Full Lift × Very Conservative	0.0562*** (0.0115)	0.0503*** (0.0124)	-0.0100 (0.0064)
Modified × Very Conservative	-0.0229*** (.0090071)	-0.0202*** (.0089124)	0.00424 (.0035)
<i>N</i>	3784	3784	3784

Note: Table 5 represents the difference in SNAP caseloads between passing a ban change in a “Very Conservative state versus a not “Very Conservative” state. Results in Panel A represent a linear combination of coefficients to represent the total impact on SNAP caseloads of a full lift or a modification in states that have a very conservative ideology relative to the full ban. Panel B is the result of the coefficients representing the impact of a full lift or a modification in states that do not have a very conservative ideology relative to the full ban. Panel C is the result of the coefficients that represent the difference between passing a full lift or a modification in a very conservative state compared to passing those laws in states that are not very conservative. Regressions control for time fixed effects, state fixed effects, state linear time trends, state population, unemployment, SNAP work requirement waiver status, and political ideology for each state *i* in month *t*. Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Chapter 6

Discussion and Conclusion

Our findings have important implications for understanding how SNAP caseloads change when the lifetime SNAP ban for former drug felons is modified or lifted. They also highlight the importance of considering state variation in ideology and related legislation. When the ban is fully lifted, we see significant increases in the number of SNAP households, persons, and persons per household compared to when the full ban is in effect. When the ban was modified, there were no significant increases in the number of SNAP households and persons, although persons per household still increased. Our findings could indicate that modifying the ban instead of fully lifting it may not show significant take-up rates for individuals with a prior drug conviction and the households associated with them. Additionally, the ratio of persons per household increasing may be the result of individuals who do not qualify for SNAP joining households that do qualify, potentially affecting the distribution of funds within those households.

Results for the total impact in states that have waivers for SNAP work requirements are positive overall. While we do not see a significant difference in households or persons between waiver and non-waiver states when states fully lift the ban, we still see a significant positive change in caseloads for both types of states. Additionally, waiver states have additional significant positive increases in SNAP caseloads when a ban is modified relative to a full ban and compared to states without a waiver. Future research should continue to investigate the interaction between the SNAP ban and work requirements in order to better understand this relationship.

Political ideology has significant effects on caseloads as well. Partisanship may play a role in the type of SNAP ban policy carried out in each state, and our results support that claim. We find that states that fully lift the SNAP ban are more likely to be very liberal compared to when the full ban is in place. We also find interesting results for the effects of political ideology on SNAP caseloads after different policies are passed. When very conservative states fully lift the ban, they have a greater increase in households and persons than other states relative to when the ban is in full effect. However, if a modified ban is passed in very conservative states, the additional change in households and persons is negative. These results may be impacted by the distribution of ideology within our sample. Two-thirds of the states used in our analysis are classified as “very conservative”, whereas an eighth of our sample is categorized as “very liberal”. Thus, liberal states may have additional influences that may not be captured here. However, our outcomes still reinforce the idea that fully lifting the ban can have greater positive impacts than modifying the ban, compared to when the full ban is in place. Caseloads can also be negatively influenced when a modified ban is passed in a very conservative state relative to other states, which supports the notion that state variation in political ideology can still impact caseloads.

Due to our restricted sample and other factors that may contribute to changes in SNAP caseloads, our results are not considered causal. However, these results not only provide insight into how the SNAP ban could affect participation but also how the variation in state laws and political ideologies may be impactful to the effectiveness of lifting or modifying the SNAP ban. Lifting the SNAP ban could enhance access to the program, especially compared to modifying or leaving the ban in place. Reducing some variation across states by universally lifting the lifetime SNAP ban would likely have positive outcomes for access to SNAP and economic mobility

following life after a drug conviction. Further discussion and research on the effects of punitive SNAP policies must take place to promote stability and well-being among formerly incarcerated individuals and food-insecure households nationwide.

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Appendix 1

Descriptive Statistics

	Full Ban	Modified Ban	Full Lift
SNAP households	372744.7 (420528.4)	373771.5 (440810.4)	234246.1 (340276.3)
SNAP persons	857191.1 (980979.9)	796084.6 (947879.1)	483014.7 (699814.6)
SNAP persons per household	2.297 (0.154)	2.152 (0.127)	2.139 (0.192)
State unemployment	6.240 (2.252)	5.444 (2.174)	4.890 (1.936)
Population estimate	10738364.9 (14765252.6)	7802423.0 (7981382.2)	3714066.5 (4952094.8)
Whether very conservative	0.491 (0.500)	0.391 (0.488)	0.342 (0.475)
Whether waiver implemented	0.602 (0.425)	0.535 (0.446)	0.398 (0.469)
<i>N</i>	2232	1369	431

Note: Table 1 displays the mean coefficients for our outcome variables (SNAP households, persons, and persons per household) and our controls (state unemployment, population estimates, whether a state is very conservative, and whether a state has implemented a work requirement waiver) for each status of SNAP ban (full ban, modified ban, and full lift of the ban) in our month-level sample. *N* displays how many state-months are represented for each status of SNAP ban; standard deviations in parentheses

Appendix 2

Relationship between Ban Change and Ideology

	Very Liberal	Very Conservative
Full Lift	0.0488*** (.0081212)	-0.0599 (.0316111)
Modified Ban	0.00493 (.0046445)	0.0215 (.0180781)
Waiver	0.00934* (.0044794)	0.101*** (.0174357)
Population Estimate	-4.64e-11 (4.42e-10)	4.17e-09* (1.72e-09)
State Unemployment	-0.00184 (.0012289)	0.0284*** (.0047834)
<i>N</i>	3784	3784

Note: Table 2 shows the relationship between the type of change made to the SNAP ban and the probability that a state will be either very liberal or very conservative. The independent variables of interest (*I(Very Liberal)* and *I(Very Conservative)*) were calculated with two separate regressions for each respective outcome. The column labeled “Very Liberal” shows the probability that a state will classify as “Very Liberal” if a state fully lifts its ban and the probability if the state modifies the ban relative to when the ban is in full effect. Similarly, the column labeled “Very Conservative” shows the probability that a state will classify as “Very Conservative” if a state fully lifts its ban and the probability if the state modifies the ban relative to when the ban is in full effect. This table also includes the outcomes for our control variables (“Waiver”, Population Estimate”, and “State Unemployment”) as well. The result for “Waiver” represents the probability that a state is “Very Liberal” or “Very Conservative” when a state has a work requirement waiver relative to the time period when the full ban was in effect. “Population Estimate” represents the change in probability that a state is “Very Liberal” or “Very Conservative” when the annual population estimate increases by one standard deviation. Finally, “State Unemployment” represents the change in probability that a state is “Very Liberal” or “Very Conservative” when state unemployment increases by one standard deviation. Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Appendix 3

SNAP Caseload Changes for Full Lifts and Modifications

	ln(Households)	ln(Persons)	Persons per Household
Full Lift	0.0460*** (.0080246)	0.0603*** (.008519)	0.0308*** (.0040634)
Modified Ban	0.00208 (.0049964)	0.00511 (.004856)	0.00718** (.0023816)
Waiver	0.0632*** (.0053378)	0.101*** (.0054217)	-0.0358*** (.0025383)
Population Estimate	1.45e-09*** (3.98e-10)	1.86e-09*** (4.18e-10)	1.03e-09*** (1.85e-10)
State Unemployment	0.0182*** (.0016557)	0.0193*** (.001737)	0.00205** (.000716)
<i>N</i>	3784	3784	3784

Note: Table 3 holds the results for how SNAP caseloads change when states fully lift or modify the SNAP ban for former drug felons. The results for “Full Lift” show the average change in the logged outcomes of SNAP households and SNAP persons and the change in persons per household when states fully lift the ban relative to when the ban is in full effect. The results for “Modified Ban” show the average change in the logged outcomes of SNAP households and SNAP persons and the change in persons per household when states modify the ban relative to when the ban is in full effect. The Appendix table also includes controls for “Waiver”, “State Unemployment”, and “Population Estimate”. “Waiver” contains the outcomes for the change in SNAP caseloads when a state has a waiver relative to when a state does not have a waiver. “State Unemployment” shows the coefficients for the change in SNAP caseloads for each 0.1 unit increase in the unadjusted state unemployment rate. “Population Estimate” shows the change in SNAP caseloads when there is a one unit—in this case, one person—increase in the average state population in the sample. Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Appendix 4

SNAP Caseload Changes with Waiver Status

	ln(Households)	ln(Persons)	Persons per Household
Full Lift	0.0570*** (.01052)	0.0600*** (.0109365)	0.00368 (.0051364)
Full lift × Waiver	-0.0184 (.0094971)	-0.000533 (.01014)	0.0429*** (.0045081)
Modified Ban	-0.0111 (.0060063)	-0.0130* (.0060708)	-0.00666* (.0030623)
Modified × Waiver	0.0248*** (.0068502)	0.0315*** (.0069761)	0.0196*** (.0033967)
Waiver	0.0566*** (.0079339)	0.0343*** (.0083055)	-0.0510*** (.0036021)
State Unemployment	0.0178*** (.0017244)	0.0192*** (.001802)	0.00288*** (.0006986)
Population Estimate	1.47e-09*** (3.90e-10)	1.85e-09*** (4.07e-10)	9.55e-10*** (1.81e-10)
<i>N</i>	3784	3784	3784

Note: Table 4 shows the difference in outcomes when states pass a ban change in waiver states versus non-waiver states where work requirements are still in full effect. The coefficients for “Full Lift” are the change in SNAP caseloads when a full lift takes effect in states that do not have a work requirement waiver compared to caseloads when the full ban is in place. “Full lift × Waiver” represents the additional change in caseloads when a state passes a full lift in a waiver state relative to when the full ban is in effect. The “Modified Ban” result is the change in SNAP caseloads when a modification to the ban takes effect in states that do not have a work requirement waiver relative to caseloads when the full ban is in place. “Modified × Waiver” shows the additional change in caseloads when a state passes a modification to the ban in a waiver state relative to when the full ban is in effect. This also includes controls for “Waiver”, “State Unemployment”, and “Population Estimate”. “Waiver” contains the outcomes for the change in SNAP caseloads when a state has a waiver relative to when a state does not have a waiver. “State Unemployment” shows the coefficients for the change in SNAP caseloads for each 0.1 unit increase in the unadjusted state unemployment rate. “Population Estimate” shows the change in SNAP caseloads when there is a one unit—in this case, one person—increase in the average state population in the sample.

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Appendix 5

SNAP Caseload Changes with Ideology

	ln(Households)	ln(Persons)	Persons per Household
Full Lift	0.0133 (.0107895)	0.0311* (.0125911)	0.0367*** (.0059167)
Full lift × Very Conservative	0.0562*** (.0115334)	0.0503*** (.0123678)	-0.0100 (.006423)
Modified Ban	0.0167* (.0066201)	0.0180** (.0063677)	0.00449 (.0027707)
Modified × Very Conservative	-0.0229*** (.0065753)	-0.0202** (.0065478)	0.00424 (.0035411)
Waiver	0.0627*** (.0054977)	0.0463*** (.0056047)	-0.0357*** (.0025397)
State Unemployment	0.0179*** (.0016641)	0.0190*** (.0017465)	0.00210** (.0007142)
Population Estimate	1.59e-09*** (3.96e-10)	1.98e-09*** (4.17e-10)	1.00e-09*** (1.85e-10)
<i>N</i>	3784	3784	3784

Note: Table 5 displays the results of the interaction between ban change and ideology. The results for “Full Lift” are the coefficients that represent the change in SNAP caseloads in states that implement a full lift and do not classify as very conservative, relative to caseloads when the full ban is in place. The results for “Full lift × Very Conservative” are the additional change in caseloads when the ban is fully lifted in very conservative states, compared to when the full ban is in place. “Modified Ban” shows the coefficients for the change in caseloads in states that modify the SNAP ban and do not classify as very conservative, relative to caseloads when the full ban is in place. The results for “Modified × Very Conservative” are the additional change in caseloads when the ban is modified in very conservative states, compared to when the full ban is in place. This also includes controls for “Waiver”, “State Unemployment”, and “Population Estimate”. “Waiver” contains the outcomes for the change in SNAP caseloads when a state has a waiver relative to when a state does not have a waiver. “State Unemployment” shows the coefficients for the change in SNAP caseloads for each 0.1 unit increase in the unadjusted state unemployment rate. “Population Estimate” shows the change in SNAP caseloads when there is a one unit—in this case, one person— increase in the average state population in the sample. Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$