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Federal EITC Kept 2 Percent of the Population Out of Poverty

Greatest Poverty Reductions in Texas, North Carolina, and Arizona

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This brief documents the proportion of Americans who would have been poor absent the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), all else being equal, across 2010–2014. We examine Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) rates as well as hypothetical increases in the rates of SPM poverty in the absence of federal EITC benefits. It is important to note that we do not model behavioral changes that might result from the removal of EITC benefits, so the analyses presented here are a simplified representation of such a hypothetical scenario. The SPM is an obvious choice for this analysis because unlike the Official Poverty Measure (OPM), which only accounts for before-tax cash income, the SPM also considers in-kind benefits, tax credits, and out-of-pocket work and medical expenses when estimating resources. We present SPM rates for all individuals (Table 1) as well as for children only (Table 2), analyzing trends across regions, metropolitan status, and by state. Importantly, geographic differences in the cost of housing are accounted for in the SPM rates, and consequently the analyses presented here give a more accurate sense of the poverty reducing impact of EITC benefits.¹

Data

This brief consists of a pooled sample using the Current Population Survey (CPS) Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) between the years of 2011–2015. The CPS ASEC is sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Census Bureau, and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), providing annual income, migration, benefits, and insurance information for a nationally representative sample of Americans. The CPS uses a tax model calculator to simulate tax income instead of collecting tax information directly from respondents. Payroll taxes for individuals with earned income are simulated first, and then tax-filing units are estimated based on marital status and household relationship structure.

KEY FINDINGS

1/8

The proportion of people who are poor in the United States as measured by the SPM would increase by one-eighth, from 15.9 percent to 17.9 percent, without federal EITC dollars.



Children are especially at risk of becoming poor without EITC benefits, as 4.3 percent more children nationwide, or 1 out of every 25, would become poor without the EITC. The impact of the EITC is particularly strong in the South, where rates of child poverty would increase by nearly a third, from 18.0 percent to 23.1 percent, absent EITC dollars.

3%

In the states of Texas, North Carolina, and Arizona, at least 3 percent more of the overall population would become poor under the SPM absent federal EITC benefits. This contrasts considerably with the states of Minnesota, New Hampshire, and North Dakota, where 1.0 percent or less of the population would change poverty status.

6.0

Differences among states are even more dramatic when looking at how children would fare without the federal EITC. Four states—Arizona, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Texas—would see at least a 6.0 percentage point increase in child poverty rates. The change in poverty rates in these states would be nearly three times those in Minnesota, New Hampshire, North Dakota, and South Dakota, where the child poverty rate would increase 2.3 percentage points or less.



On average, the EITC keeps a similar share of people out of poverty in metropolitan and non-metropolitan places.

TABLE 1: OVERALL POVERTY (SPM) BY REGION, STATE, AND PLACE TYPE, 2010–2014

	ALL PLACES				METROPOLITAN AREAS				NON-METROPOLITAN AREAS			
	Percent Poor	+/-	Percentage Point Increase in Poor, absent EITC	+/-	Percent Poor	+/-	Percentage Point Increase in Poor, absent EITC	+/-	Percent Poor	+/-	Percentage Point Increase in Poor, absent EITC	+/-
United States	15.9%	0.1%	2.1%	0.0%	16.4%	0.1%	2.0%	0.0%	13.4%	0.2%	1.9%	0.1%
Northeast	14.9%	0.2%	1.6%	0.1%	15.4%	0.3%	1.7%	0.1%	10.4%	0.6%	1.2%	0.2%
Midwest	12.7%	0.2%	1.6%	0.1%	13.2%	0.2%	1.6%	0.1%	11.0%	0.4%	1.5%	0.1%
South	16.1%	0.2%	2.4%	0.1%	16.3%	0.2%	2.4%	0.1%	15.5%	0.4%	2.3%	0.1%
West	19.3%	0.2%	2.1%	0.1%	19.8%	0.2%	2.0%	0.1%	15.2%	0.6%	2.3%	0.2%
Alabama	13.8%	0.8%	2.4%	0.3%	13.5%	0.9%	2.2%	0.4%	14.6%	1.6%	3.0%	0.7%
Alaska	12.9%	0.8%	1.3%	0.2%	12.8%	0.9%	1.2%	0.3%	13.3%	1.4%	1.7%	0.5%
Arizona	19.2%	0.8%	3.0%	0.3%	18.8%	0.9%	2.8%	0.4%	21.9%	2.3%	4.3%	1.0%
Arkansas	15.5%	0.9%	2.4%	0.4%	14.6%	1.1%	3.1%	0.5%	17.3%	1.6%	1.2%	0.4%
California	23.4%	0.3%	2.0%	0.1%	23.6%	0.3%	2.0%	0.1%	16.8%	2.4%	2.3%	0.8%
Colorado	13.1%	0.6%	1.8%	0.2%	13.4%	0.6%	1.9%	0.2%	13.3%	3.3%	1.5%	0.9%
Connecticut	12.3%	0.6%	1.3%	0.2%	12.3%	0.6%	1.3%	0.2%	12.8%	2.6%	0.5%	0.6%
Delaware	13.8%	0.7%	2.0%	0.3%	13.8%	0.8%	1.8%	0.3%	13.6%	1.5%	2.7%	0.7%
District of Columbia	22.6%	0.9%	1.5%	0.2%	22.6%	0.9%	1.5%	0.2%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Florida	19.4%	0.5%	2.1%	0.2%	19.6%	0.5%	2.0%	0.2%	15.0%	2.2%	3.7%	1.0%
Georgia	17.9%	0.6%	2.6%	0.2%	18.4%	0.7%	2.6%	0.3%	15.4%	1.6%	2.9%	0.7%
Hawaii	17.6%	0.7%	2.5%	0.3%	17.1%	0.8%	2.0%	0.3%	18.8%	1.4%	3.6%	0.7%
Idaho	11.4%	0.7%	2.8%	0.3%	11.0%	0.9%	3.0%	0.4%	12.1%	1.3%	2.4%	0.5%
Illinois	15.2%	0.5%	2.2%	0.2%	15.5%	0.5%	2.2%	0.2%	12.6%	1.5%	2.5%	0.6%
Indiana	13.4%	0.7%	1.8%	0.2%	13.8%	0.8%	1.9%	0.3%	12.3%	1.3%	1.7%	0.4%
Iowa	8.6%	0.5%	1.6%	0.2%	9.1%	0.7%	1.8%	0.3%	7.8%	0.8%	1.4%	0.3%
Kansas	11.6%	0.7%	1.5%	0.2%	12.0%	0.8%	1.5%	0.3%	10.9%	1.1%	1.7%	0.4%
Kentucky	13.9%	0.7%	2.7%	0.4%	13.0%	1.0%	3.1%	0.5%	15.0%	1.1%	2.1%	0.4%
Louisiana	18.8%	1.0%	2.1%	0.4%	19.4%	1.1%	2.1%	0.4%	20.9%	3.1%	3.0%	1.4%
Maine	10.9%	0.6%	1.3%	0.2%	10.9%	0.9%	0.7%	0.2%	10.8%	0.9%	1.9%	0.4%
Maryland	13.6%	0.6%	1.3%	0.2%	13.5%	0.6%	1.2%	0.2%	15.9%	3.3%	2.3%	1.4%
Massachusetts	14.1%	0.7%	1.4%	0.2%	14.2%	0.7%	1.4%	0.2%	9.3%	3.7%	omitted	omitted
Michigan	13.8%	0.6%	1.4%	0.2%	13.8%	0.6%	1.3%	0.2%	14.1%	1.5%	1.5%	0.5%
Minnesota	10.3%	0.5%	1.0%	0.1%	10.5%	0.6%	1.0%	0.2%	9.7%	1.0%	0.9%	0.2%
Mississippi	16.0%	0.9%	2.2%	0.3%	15.0%	1.4%	2.5%	0.5%	16.9%	1.3%	1.9%	0.4%
Missouri	12.5%	0.7%	1.6%	0.2%	12.9%	0.8%	1.6%	0.3%	11.0%	1.4%	1.9%	0.5%
Montana	12.0%	0.9%	1.4%	0.3%	9.8%	1.4%	1.9%	0.6%	13.2%	1.1%	1.1%	0.3%
Nebraska	10.2%	0.6%	1.6%	0.2%	10.2%	0.8%	1.9%	0.3%	10.1%	1.0%	1.2%	0.3%
Nevada	20.1%	0.8%	2.4%	0.3%	20.6%	0.9%	2.3%	0.3%	13.3%	5.4%	omitted	omitted
New Hampshire	10.3%	0.6%	0.9%	0.2%	10.5%	0.7%	0.8%	0.2%	10.0%	0.9%	1.0%	0.3%
New Jersey	15.5%	0.6%	1.8%	0.2%	15.5%	0.6%	1.8%	0.2%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
New Mexico	15.7%	1.0%	2.1%	0.4%	16.3%	1.1%	2.0%	0.5%	13.9%	1.8%	2.5%	0.7%
New York	17.7%	0.4%	2.1%	0.2%	18.5%	0.5%	2.1%	0.2%	9.3%	1.2%	1.3%	0.4%
North Carolina	15.0%	0.6%	3.0%	0.3%	13.9%	0.7%	3.0%	0.3%	17.4%	1.2%	3.1%	0.5%
North Dakota	9.4%	0.7%	0.6%	0.2%	8.7%	1.0%	0.5%	0.2%	10.1%	1.0%	0.7%	0.3%
Ohio	12.8%	0.5%	1.5%	0.2%	13.4%	0.6%	1.6%	0.2%	10.7%	1.0%	1.4%	0.3%
Oklahoma	13.0%	0.8%	1.9%	0.3%	13.0%	0.9%	1.7%	0.4%	12.9%	1.3%	2.3%	0.6%
Oregon	14.4%	0.8%	2.0%	0.3%	14.5%	0.9%	2.2%	0.3%	14.2%	1.6%	1.6%	0.4%
Pennsylvania	12.5%	0.5%	1.2%	0.1%	12.8%	0.5%	1.2%	0.2%	11.0%	1.1%	1.1%	0.3%
Rhode Island	13.6%	0.7%	2.0%	0.3%	13.6%	0.7%	2.0%	0.3%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
South Carolina	15.9%	0.8%	2.0%	0.3%	15.1%	1.0%	2.5%	0.4%	17.7%	1.5%	0.7%	0.3%
South Dakota	9.8%	0.6%	1.1%	0.2%	8.6%	0.9%	0.8%	0.2%	11.1%	0.9%	1.5%	0.3%
Tennessee	15.9%	0.8%	2.2%	0.3%	15.8%	1.0%	2.2%	0.4%	16.2%	1.6%	2.3%	0.5%
Texas	16.1%	0.4%	3.3%	0.2%	16.5%	0.4%	3.4%	0.2%	12.5%	1.0%	2.6%	0.4%
Utah	11.0%	0.7%	2.1%	0.3%	10.4%	0.7%	2.2%	0.3%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Vermont	9.6%	0.7%	1.6%	0.2%	10.0%	1.2%	2.1%	0.5%	9.4%	0.8%	1.3%	0.3%
Virginia	13.3%	0.6%	1.4%	0.2%	12.8%	0.6%	1.5%	0.2%	16.8%	1.8%	0.8%	0.4%
Washington	12.5%	0.6%	1.4%	0.2%	12.5%	0.7%	1.4%	0.2%	12.3%	2.4%	1.2%	0.6%
West Virginia	12.9%	0.8%	1.5%	0.3%	11.4%	1.0%	1.6%	0.4%	15.1%	1.4%	1.5%	0.4%
Wisconsin	10.9%	0.6%	1.4%	0.2%	11.2%	0.7%	1.4%	0.2%	9.9%	1.1%	1.2%	0.3%
Wyoming	9.3%	0.7%	1.2%	0.2%	8.3%	1.1%	0.8%	0.3%	9.8%	0.8%	1.3%	0.3%

Source: The Current Population Survey (CPS) Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC), 2011–2015.
Note: Margins of error (“+/-”) refer to the 95 percent confidence intervals.

TABLE 2: CHILD POVERTY (SPM) BY REGION, STATE, AND PLACE TYPE, 2010–2014

	ALL PLACES				METROPOLITAN AREAS				NON-METROPOLITAN AREAS			
	Percent Poor	+/-	Percentage Point Increase in Poor, absent EITC	+/-	Percent Poor	+/-	Percentage Point Increase in Poor, absent EITC	+/-	Percent Poor	+/-	Percentage Point Increase in Poor, absent EITC	+/-
United States	17.7%	0.2%	4.3%	0.1%	18.3%	0.2%	4.3%	0.1%	14.6%	0.5%	4.3%	0.3%
Northeast	16.4%	0.5%	3.7%	0.3%	17.0%	0.5%	3.8%	0.3%	10.9%	1.2%	3.0%	0.6%
Midwest	14.0%	0.4%	3.5%	0.2%	14.6%	0.4%	3.6%	0.2%	11.7%	0.7%	3.2%	0.4%
South	18.0%	0.3%	5.1%	0.2%	18.1%	0.4%	5.1%	0.2%	17.4%	0.8%	5.1%	0.4%
West	21.5%	0.4%	4.1%	0.2%	22.2%	0.4%	4.1%	0.2%	15.4%	1.2%	5.0%	0.7%
Alabama	16.5%	1.7%	5.2%	1.0%	16.1%	1.9%	4.8%	1.1%	17.8%	3.6%	6.8%	2.2%
Alaska	15.7%	1.6%	2.6%	0.7%	15.2%	1.8%	2.4%	0.8%	16.8%	3.1%	2.9%	1.3%
Arizona	22.8%	1.7%	6.0%	1.0%	22.9%	1.9%	5.5%	1.0%	22.4%	4.2%	8.2%	2.6%
Arkansas	17.4%	1.7%	5.0%	1.1%	15.3%	1.9%	6.1%	1.4%	21.2%	3.3%	2.9%	1.4%
California	26.8%	0.6%	4.0%	0.3%	26.9%	0.6%	3.9%	0.3%	20.1%	4.7%	5.7%	2.7%
Colorado	13.5%	1.0%	4.0%	0.6%	14.2%	1.1%	4.3%	0.7%	12.4%	5.8%	2.7%	2.7%
Connecticut	12.8%	1.1%	2.8%	0.6%	12.6%	1.1%	2.9%	0.6%	17.9%	5.6%	0.6%	1.1%
Delaware	16.6%	1.4%	4.0%	0.7%	16.7%	1.6%	3.4%	0.7%	16.4%	3.1%	6.6%	2.3%
District of Columbia	28.9%	2.2%	4.1%	1.0%	28.9%	2.2%	4.1%	1.0%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Florida	21.5%	1.0%	5.0%	0.5%	21.7%	1.0%	4.8%	0.5%	18.2%	5.1%	10.5%	3.7%
Georgia	20.1%	1.2%	5.4%	0.7%	20.6%	1.3%	5.1%	0.7%	16.6%	3.1%	7.1%	2.1%
Hawaii	18.1%	1.5%	5.2%	0.9%	17.7%	1.8%	4.1%	0.9%	19.0%	2.7%	7.4%	2.0%
Idaho	10.9%	1.2%	5.3%	0.9%	11.4%	1.6%	5.7%	1.1%	10.1%	1.9%	4.8%	1.3%
Illinois	17.1%	1.0%	4.8%	0.5%	17.5%	1.0%	4.7%	0.6%	14.2%	3.2%	5.5%	1.9%
Indiana	15.8%	1.3%	3.8%	0.7%	16.5%	1.5%	3.8%	0.8%	14.0%	2.5%	3.5%	1.3%
Iowa	8.1%	0.9%	3.6%	0.6%	8.3%	1.2%	3.9%	0.9%	7.8%	1.4%	3.0%	0.9%
Kansas	14.9%	1.4%	3.2%	0.7%	14.6%	1.6%	3.0%	0.8%	15.4%	2.6%	3.7%	1.1%
Kentucky	15.4%	1.4%	6.3%	1.1%	14.1%	2.0%	7.5%	1.7%	17.0%	2.2%	4.9%	1.3%
Louisiana	21.1%	1.9%	4.7%	1.1%	21.8%	2.2%	4.9%	1.2%	25.6%	6.2%	8.2%	4.5%
Maine	11.7%	1.3%	3.1%	0.6%	12.3%	1.9%	1.7%	0.6%	11.2%	1.8%	4.6%	1.2%
Maryland	14.1%	1.1%	2.7%	0.5%	14.1%	1.1%	2.6%	0.5%	14.1%	6.3%	5.4%	4.0%
Massachusetts	14.3%	1.4%	3.1%	0.7%	14.4%	1.4%	3.2%	0.7%	8.6%	6.8%	omitted	omitted
Michigan	15.4%	1.1%	2.9%	0.5%	15.7%	1.2%	2.8%	0.5%	13.8%	2.6%	3.3%	1.4%
Minnesota	9.8%	0.9%	2.3%	0.4%	10.6%	1.1%	2.5%	0.5%	7.7%	1.5%	1.7%	0.7%
Mississippi	16.3%	1.8%	4.0%	0.9%	14.5%	2.5%	5.0%	1.5%	18.0%	2.5%	3.2%	1.1%
Missouri	14.5%	1.3%	3.9%	0.7%	14.9%	1.5%	3.7%	0.8%	13.0%	2.9%	4.5%	1.7%
Montana	12.1%	1.8%	2.7%	0.8%	9.0%	2.9%	3.2%	1.4%	13.8%	2.2%	2.4%	0.9%
Nebraska	10.7%	1.2%	3.4%	0.7%	11.3%	1.5%	3.8%	1.0%	9.4%	1.7%	2.5%	0.9%
Nevada	23.3%	1.6%	4.9%	0.8%	23.6%	1.7%	4.7%	0.8%	2.5%	4.8%	omitted	omitted
New Hampshire	10.2%	1.0%	2.2%	0.5%	9.6%	1.3%	1.9%	0.7%	11.1%	1.8%	2.7%	0.9%
New Jersey	18.0%	1.4%	3.8%	0.7%	18.0%	1.4%	3.8%	0.7%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
New Mexico	16.0%	1.8%	4.4%	1.1%	17.0%	2.1%	4.1%	1.3%	13.1%	3.3%	5.2%	1.9%
New York	20.2%	0.9%	4.8%	0.5%	21.2%	1.0%	4.9%	0.5%	8.5%	2.1%	3.0%	1.3%
North Carolina	16.6%	1.3%	6.3%	0.8%	13.6%	1.4%	6.1%	1.0%	22.7%	2.5%	6.6%	1.4%
North Dakota	9.7%	1.3%	1.4%	0.5%	7.0%	1.6%	1.4%	0.6%	12.3%	2.1%	1.4%	0.8%
Ohio	12.9%	1.0%	3.3%	0.5%	13.5%	1.2%	3.6%	0.6%	11.1%	1.7%	2.7%	0.9%
Oklahoma	15.0%	1.5%	4.2%	0.9%	15.1%	1.8%	3.7%	1.1%	14.8%	2.6%	5.0%	1.6%
Oregon	14.6%	1.4%	4.7%	0.8%	14.8%	1.6%	4.9%	1.0%	14.1%	2.9%	4.3%	1.5%
Pennsylvania	12.9%	1.0%	2.7%	0.4%	13.0%	1.1%	2.7%	0.5%	12.5%	2.2%	2.9%	1.0%
Rhode Island	15.9%	1.4%	4.6%	0.8%	15.9%	1.4%	4.6%	0.8%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
South Carolina	17.5%	1.7%	4.5%	0.9%	17.3%	2.0%	5.4%	1.2%	18.0%	3.2%	2.1%	1.1%
South Dakota	9.5%	1.1%	2.2%	0.5%	8.4%	1.5%	1.5%	0.6%	10.8%	1.6%	3.0%	0.9%
Tennessee	16.5%	1.6%	4.6%	0.9%	16.2%	1.9%	4.4%	1.1%	17.3%	3.1%	5.0%	1.5%
Texas	18.6%	0.7%	6.3%	0.4%	19.4%	0.8%	6.4%	0.5%	12.1%	1.7%	5.4%	1.2%
Utah	11.0%	1.0%	3.3%	0.6%	9.9%	1.1%	3.5%	0.6%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Vermont	9.9%	1.3%	3.8%	0.8%	12.4%	2.5%	4.7%	1.6%	8.5%	1.5%	3.3%	0.9%
Virginia	14.4%	1.1%	2.9%	0.6%	14.0%	1.2%	3.0%	0.6%	17.3%	3.6%	2.1%	1.4%
Washington	12.8%	1.2%	2.8%	0.6%	13.1%	1.3%	2.9%	0.6%	8.5%	3.4%	1.8%	1.6%
West Virginia	13.0%	1.6%	3.1%	0.8%	11.2%	1.9%	3.1%	1.1%	15.5%	2.7%	3.1%	1.3%
Wisconsin	12.4%	1.2%	2.8%	0.5%	13.0%	1.4%	2.8%	0.6%	10.5%	2.2%	2.9%	1.1%
Wyoming	8.3%	1.1%	2.5%	0.6%	6.7%	1.6%	2.0%	0.8%	9.0%	1.4%	2.7%	0.8%

Source: The Current Population Survey (CPS) Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC), 2011–2015.

Note: Margins of error (“+/-”) refer to the 95 percent confidence intervals.

Box 1: The Federal EITC

The federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) supplements the wages of the nation's low and moderate earners, with nearly one in ten Americans receiving this credit.² The amount of EITC benefits vary by earnings and the number of dependent children in a family.³ Beginning with the first dollar earned, the credit increases as a percentage of total earnings until it plateaus at a threshold that is based on the number of dependent children. With additional earnings above the plateau level, the credit decreases until, eventually, it reaches zero. If the value of the credit is greater than the tax liability, the excess is paid out to the recipient. The EITC is considerably more generous towards families with children: in 2014 the maximum federal EITC subsidy for a family with three children was \$6,242 compared to only \$503 for a childless couple, and 97 percent of all EITC funds went to families with children.⁴ Ultimately, EITC benefits represent a very considerable proportion of resources for low-income families with children; for a married couple with three children and earnings of less than \$14,000, the credit can be almost a third of family income.

Once the potential tax-filing units have been determined, state and federal taxes and credits are simulated for each unit (for more information, see <https://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/publications/oharataxmodel.pdf>). Because tax credits are simulated, it is possible that some families who receive the EITC may not be included and others who are not eligible for EITC benefits (for example, undocumented immigrants) may be assigned a value due to errors in the tax model.

The ASEC data are asked every March and questions about income refer to the previous calendar year, so results can be interpreted as the average over the 2010–2014 time period. Roughly 200,000 individuals are included each year, resulting in a final sample of 1,007,595 observations analyzed in this brief. The 2014 CPS ASEC utilized a probability split panel design to test a new set of income questions. Approximately 3/8 of the sample were randomly assigned to be eligible to receive the redesigned income questions, and the remaining 5/8 of the sample were eligible to receive the set of ASEC income questions that had been in use since 1994. We combined these two subsets to create a single, harmonized 2014 data set. The redesigned income questions were then used for the entire 2015 CPS ASEC sample.⁵ All differences discussed in text are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$)

Endnotes

1. Of course, many more families benefit from the EITC. Some move from deeper poverty into higher income poverty, while others move from just above poverty to higher, but still lower-income, family incomes.
2. See <https://www.eitc.irs.gov/EITC-Central/abouteitc>.
3. See <http://www.taxpolicycenter.org/briefing-book/key-elements/family/eitc.cfm> for EITC benefit parameters according to income and number of children.
4. See <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/the-avenue/posts/2015/10/13-local-data-eitc-benefits-children-kneebone>.
5. Because this sample uses data from traditional and redesigned income questions, we also examined SPM trends by year. Doing so reveals relatively little variation, and therefore we are confident in using this pooled data to understand how SPM rates are impacted by EITC receipt.

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