

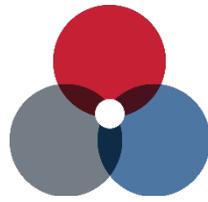
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Who Receives Food Assistance in Ohio? Implications of Work Requirements for SNAP Enrollment across Racial, Ethnic and Geographic Divisions

Adam White
Policy and Planning Assistant

October 8, 2018



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Who Receives Food Assistance in Ohio? Implications of Work Requirements for SNAP Enrollment across Racial, Ethnic and Geographic Divisions

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The majority of families receiving food assistance in Ohio are white, but African-American families are overrepresented.
- SNAP enrollment rates exceed poverty rates for most racial/ethnic groups across Ohio. Counties exempt from SNAP work requirements have even wider margins between poverty and SNAP enrollment rates, particularly among minority populations.
- Counties that are exempt from SNAP work requirements have higher rates of SNAP enrollment among African-Americans, but lower rates of African-American poverty compared to the rest of the state. This suggests that the exemption from work requirements is not reaching counties where African-American families are more likely to experience poverty.
- Ohio counties exempt from SNAP work requirements are disproportionately white. Ohio's minority populations are much more concentrated in urban areas that are not granted this hardship exemption, despite municipal unemployment rates that are equally high or higher than those in the exempt counties.

Introduction

A prevailing misconception among the general public in the United States has been that participation in public assistance programs is dominated by racial minorities.¹ In fact, minority groups have historically accounted for no more of the public assistance caseloads than white families. However, racial and ethnic minorities do have higher rates of participation in these programs than white families do, as these groups face higher rates of poverty than white families. The higher percentage of racial and ethnic minorities receiving assistance may fuel the perception that these groups are overrepresented in government benefit programs. A comprehensive study dating back to 2001 found that most differences in the receipt of public benefits across racial and ethnic groups could be explained by measurable risk factors, including earnings, education and family structure, rather than differences in cultural and social norms.² While it is

¹ Moffit, R. & Gottshalk, P. (2001). Ethnic and racial differences in welfare receipt in the United States. In *America becoming: racial trends and their consequences, volume II*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
<https://www.nap.edu/read/9719/chapter/8>

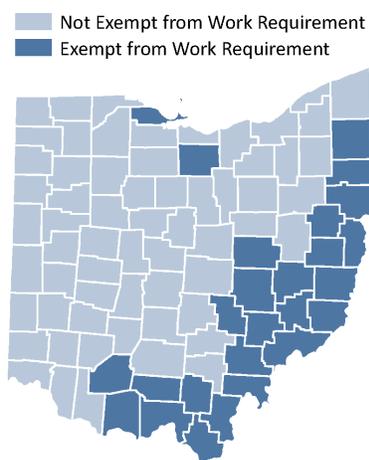
² Ibid

beyond the scope of this paper to comment on the societal structures and historical inequities that have led to racial disparities in poverty rates, it is important to acknowledge that these disparities are systemic in nature, requiring solutions that are bigger than any single policy decision. The purpose of this paper is merely to provide an understanding of how access to food assistance varies across race and ethnicity, and the effects of recent state policy decisions in the context of existing disparities.

Participation in food assistance in the U.S. appears to follow similar trends. Nearly one in four African-Americans are food insecure, making them almost twice as likely as the overall population to experience food insecurity.³ Correspondingly, about 26 percent of African-American households received federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits in 2016. In Ohio, African-Americans' share of total SNAP enrollment resembles their share of the population in poverty (29 percent and 26 percent, respectively).⁴ However, this statewide comparison may mask disparities that exist within smaller communities and regions.

From a policy perspective, it is important to acknowledge the fact that geographic differences in SNAP enrollment may be influenced by the fact that SNAP requirements are not uniform across the state. Federal law requires able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) to work, or participate in certain work-related activities, for at least 80 hours a month in order to receive SNAP benefits for more than three months within a three-year period. This requirement was waived nationwide during the years of recovery following the 2008 recession, but was reinstated in 2014. However, states are permitted to waive the work requirement for jurisdictions with unemployment rates that are higher than 120 percent of the national average over a recent 24-month period.⁵ In Ohio, the Kasich administration implemented this waiver at the county level, initially granting exemptions from the work requirement to 16 counties in 2014, before expanding to 26 counties on October 1, 2017. As illustrated in the map below, the counties exempt from the ABAWD work requirement are largely concentrated in Ohio's rural Appalachian region.

Figure 1: Counties Exempt from SNAP Work Requirements as of October 1, 2017



³ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (2018). Snap helps millions of African Americans.

<https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-helps-millions-of-african-americans>

⁴ American Community Survey. 5-year estimates, 2012-2016. Food stamps/SNAP.

⁵ Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. (2017). Family assistance letter #165. <http://uhcanohio.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Counties-Where-Work-Requirements-Are-Waived.pdf>

Studying the impact of work requirements in the context of food assistance disparities is not only critical for evaluating the racial equity of current SNAP policy, but may have implications that extend to Medicaid policy discussions as well. Ohio is currently awaiting a decision from the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) on the state’s 1115 demonstration waiver application that would, if approved, implement work requirements for Ohio’s Medicaid program.⁶ The Medicaid proposal would exempt the same counties that are exempt from work requirements in SNAP on the basis that high unemployment rates make it harder for Medicaid recipients in those counties to find work. Some advocates have raised civil rights concerns with this selective application of the exemptions, given that the populations of the exempt counties are predominantly white.⁷ A compounding factor is that racial and ethnic minorities often face employment discrimination, making it more difficult for them to find work and comply with work requirements in public assistance programs. A recent Harvard Business Review study found that white job seekers are substantially more likely to be called back by employers than African-American or Latino applicants, and that this trend has remained unchanged for the past 25 years.⁸ Challenges presented by hiring discrimination are amplified by the fact that racial and ethnic minority populations tend to be concentrated in areas of high unemployment – a topic that will be explored further later in this report.

Measuring SNAP Enrollment and Eligibility by Race and Ethnicity. This research was conducted in partnership with R4 Workforce.⁹

A central objective of this analysis was to gauge the relationship between poverty statistics and SNAP enrollment across racial and ethnic groups. The federal income ceilings for SNAP eligibility are set at 130 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) for gross income, and 100 percent of FPL for net income.¹⁰ In other words, **every household receiving SNAP benefits is either in or near poverty**. However, numerous other factors affect SNAP eligibility, meaning census data on poverty cannot offer a precise estimate of how many people in a given area are actually eligible for SNAP. Therefore, this analysis simply uses the American Community Survey (ACS) estimate for number of families living below 100 percent of FPL as a proxy for the number of households that are SNAP-eligible. While this is an imperfect measure, it still provides a useful tool to gauge the degree to which food assistance is reaching families living in poverty.

The subsequent sections provide snapshots of variation in SNAP enrollment across racial and ethnic groups using two measurements:

- The racial and ethnic makeup of the population receiving SNAP compared to the population living below FPL
- SNAP enrollment rates compared to poverty rates within each racial and ethnic group

The geographic units of analysis for this report are the state as a whole, the counties exempt from SNAP work requirements and the counties that are not exempt. Except where otherwise specified, the exempt

⁶ Anthes, Loren. (2018). Public Comment to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. <https://www.communitysolutions.com/research/public-comment-centers-medicare-medicaid-services/>

⁷ Corlett, John. (2018). Proposed Ohio Medicaid Waiver Raises Civil Rights and Bias Concerns. <https://www.communitysolutions.com/proposed-ohio-medicare-waiver-raises-civil-rights-bias-concerns/>

⁸ Harvard Business Review. (2017). Hiring discrimination against black Americans hasn’t declined in 25 years. <https://hbr.org/2017/10/hiring-discrimination-against-black-americans-hasnt-declined-in-25-years>

⁹ For more information on R4 Workforce, please visit r4workforce.com

¹⁰ United States Department of Agriculture. (2018). Supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP). <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/eligibility>

counties are defined as the 16 counties that were exempt from the work requirement prior to October 1, 2017, since this report relies on five-year estimates from 2012-2016. A possible limitation of this data is that it is inclusive of two years before SNAP work requirements were reinstated in 2014.

The counties included in the exempt group are: Adams, Clinton, Coshocton, Gallia, Highland, Huron, Jackson, Jefferson, Meigs, Monroe, Morgan, Noble, Ottawa, Perry, Pike and Scioto. Population sizes and the demographic makeup of each county grouping are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Family Demographic Makeup of Ohio Counties by SNAP Work Requirement Exemption Status

	Total Families	White	% White	Black/African American	% Black/African American	Asian American	% Asian American	Two or more races	% Two or more races	Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	% Hispanic or Latino (of any race)
Ohio	2,940,153	2,500,332	85.0%	322,630	11.0%	51,218	1.7%	39,735	1.4%	78,693	2.7%
Exempt	155,310	150,578	97.0%	2,040	1.3%	382	0.2%	1,691	1.1%	1,761	1.1%
Not Exempt	2,784,843	2,349,754	84.4%	320,590	11.5%	50,836	1.8%	38,044	1.4%	76,932	2.8%

Source: American Community Survey. 5-year estimates, 2012-2016. Demographic and housing estimates.

Ohio's SNAP Population

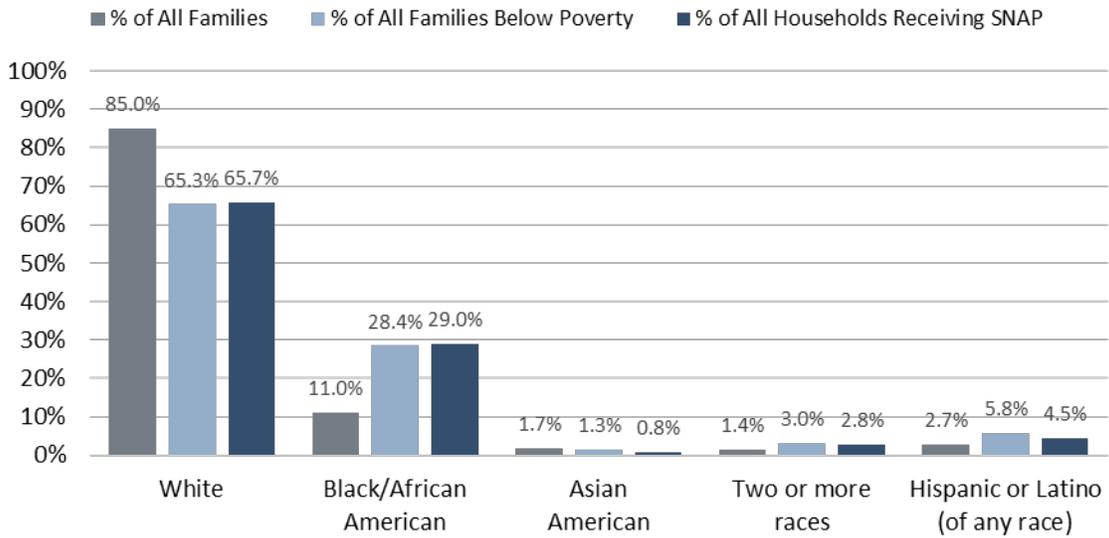
Statewide demographics of SNAP participation do not necessarily indicate racial disparities in enrollment, but rather are reflective of the disproportionate share of the population of racial minorities who live in poverty. As seen in Figure 2, African-Americans appear to be overrepresented in the SNAP population (29 percent) compared to their share of Ohio's total families (11 percent). However, African-Americans are similarly overrepresented in the Ohio's population living in poverty, representing 28 percent of families in this group. Despite the disproportionate share of African-Americans in poverty who receive SNAP, the large majority (66 percent) of SNAP recipients in Ohio are white, closely matching the proportion of Ohioans living in poverty who are white (65 percent).

Asian-Americans, Hispanic and Latinos, and multiracial Ohioans all appear to be slightly underrepresented in Ohio's SNAP population compared to their respective shares of Ohio's families living in poverty. However, these three groups combined account for under 6 percent of the state's total number of families, making it difficult to draw statistically meaningful conclusions. Estimates for each of these groups are included throughout this report, but the analysis will refrain from drawing many conclusions about them. Further, all estimates reported in this analysis carry margins of error, meaning small differences between populations may not be statistically significant and should be interpreted with caution.

When looking at poverty rates and SNAP enrollment within each racial/ethnic group (Figure 3), each group has an estimated SNAP enrollment that is 3 to 6 percentage points higher than its poverty rate, with the exception of Asian-Americans. This is a sign that SNAP enrollment encompasses those living near the poverty line, in addition to those living below it. County-by-county data indicates that SNAP enrollment rates almost always exceed family poverty rates, however the margins between the two may be indicative of geographic or racial disparities in SNAP access.

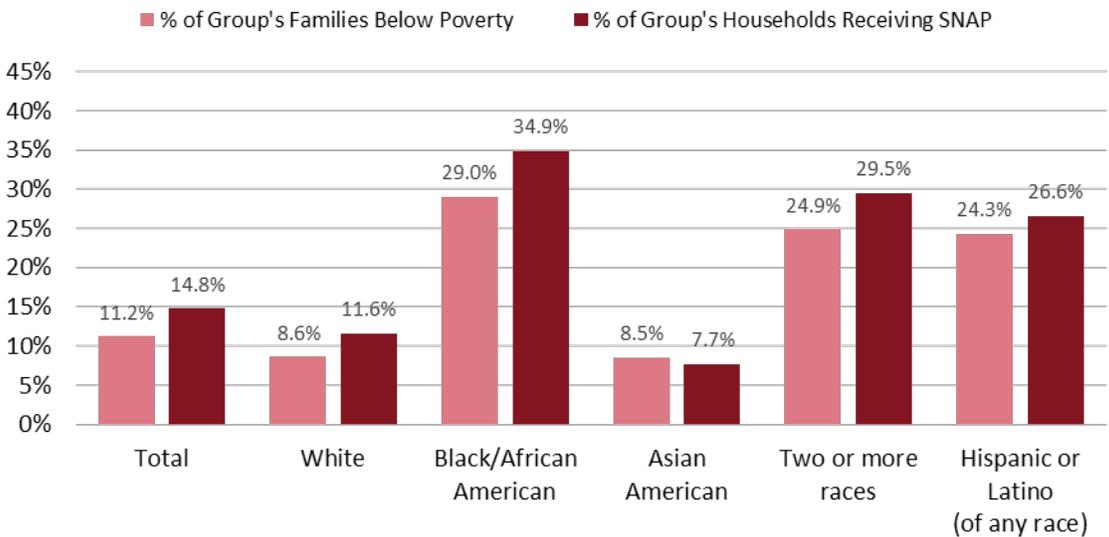
These statewide demographics for the poverty and SNAP populations provide a basis for which to compare the counties that are exempt and not exempt from SNAP work requirements. The following section provides a summary of poverty and SNAP demographics for both county groups. The full data sets for each group and the state as a whole can be viewed in the Appendix.

Figure 2: **STATE OF OHIO** – Racial and Ethnic Makeup of Families in Poverty vs. Households Receiving SNAP



Source: American Community Survey. 5-year estimates, 2012-2016. Poverty status in the past 12 months of families; food stamps/SNAP.

Figure 3: **STATE OF OHIO** – Percentage of Race/Ethnic Group's Families Living in Poverty vs. Receiving SNAP



Source: American Community Survey. 5-year estimates, 2012-2016. Poverty status in the past 12 months of families; food stamps/SNAP.

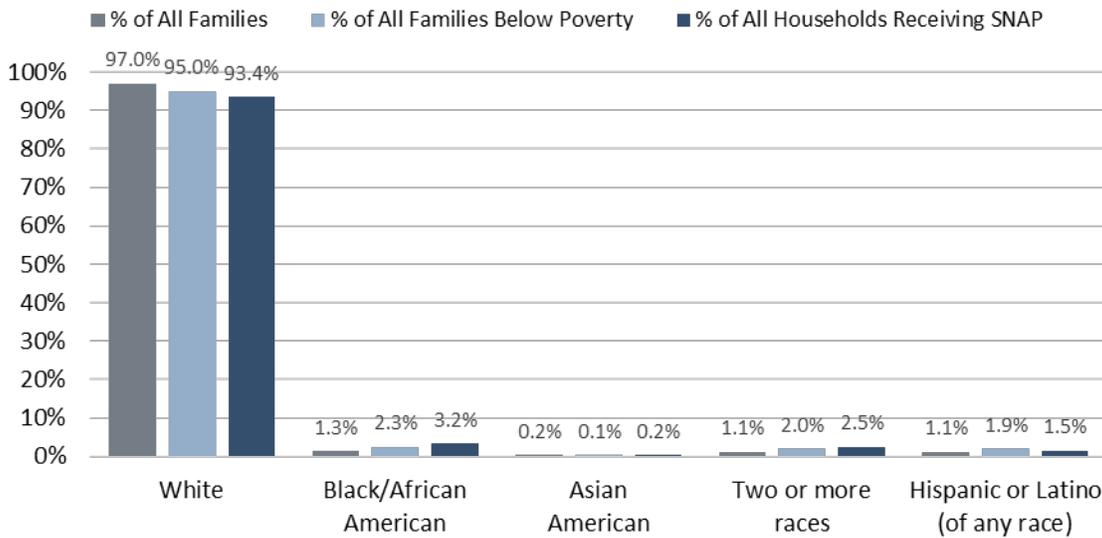
Counties Exempt from SNAP ABAWD Work Requirement vs. Non-Exempt Counties

Ninety-seven percent of families in Ohio counties that are exempt from the SNAP work requirements are white (Figure 4). In fact, prior to 2017, only about 0.6 percent of all of Ohio's African-Americans, or just more than 2,000 families, lived in one of the 16 counties that were exempt from work requirements.

When looking at the 26 counties that were declared exempt from the work requirement in 2017, still only 5 percent of Ohio’s African-American population live in an exempt county, with about three-quarters of those who do, living in the newly exempt Youngstown area – the only urban area to fall in an exempt county. White Ohioans are three times more likely than African-Americans to be exempt from SNAP work requirements, with about 15 percent of Ohio’s white population currently living in an exempt county.

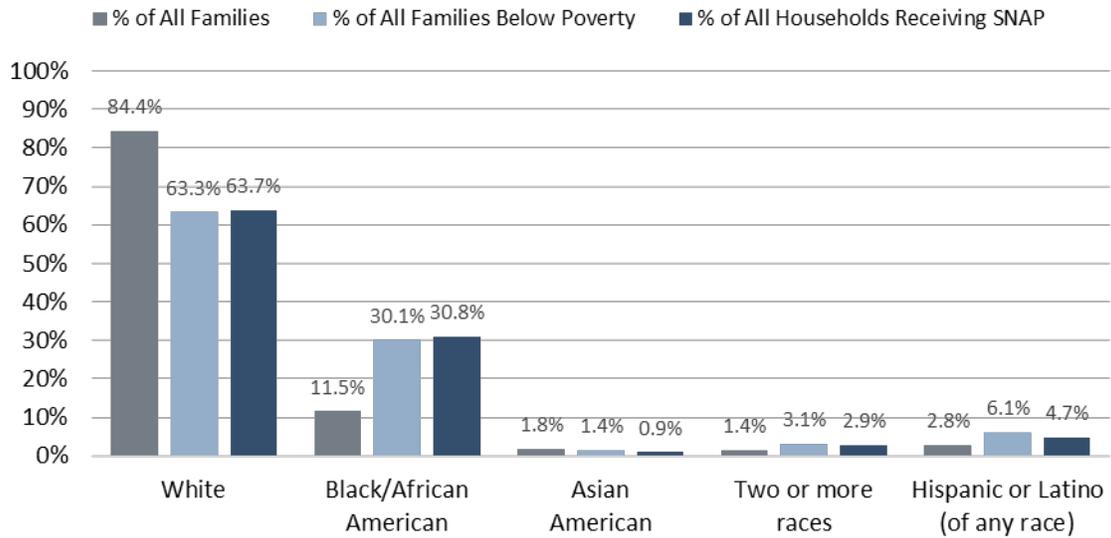
In counties that are exempt from SNAP work requirements, African-Americans have higher SNAP enrollment rates than those who live in counties who are not exempt (39 percent and 35 percent, respectively), as shown in Figures 6 and 7. Interestingly, African-Americans in exempt counties actually have lower poverty rates than they do in non-exempt counties (24.5 percent and 29 percent, respectively). In other words, the exemption from work requirements is not reaching counties where African-American families are more likely to experience poverty. Correspondingly, African-American families in higher poverty, non-exempt counties have lower SNAP enrollment rates.

Figure 4: **EXEMPT COUNTIES** – Racial and Ethnic Makeup of Families in Poverty vs. Households Receiving SNAP



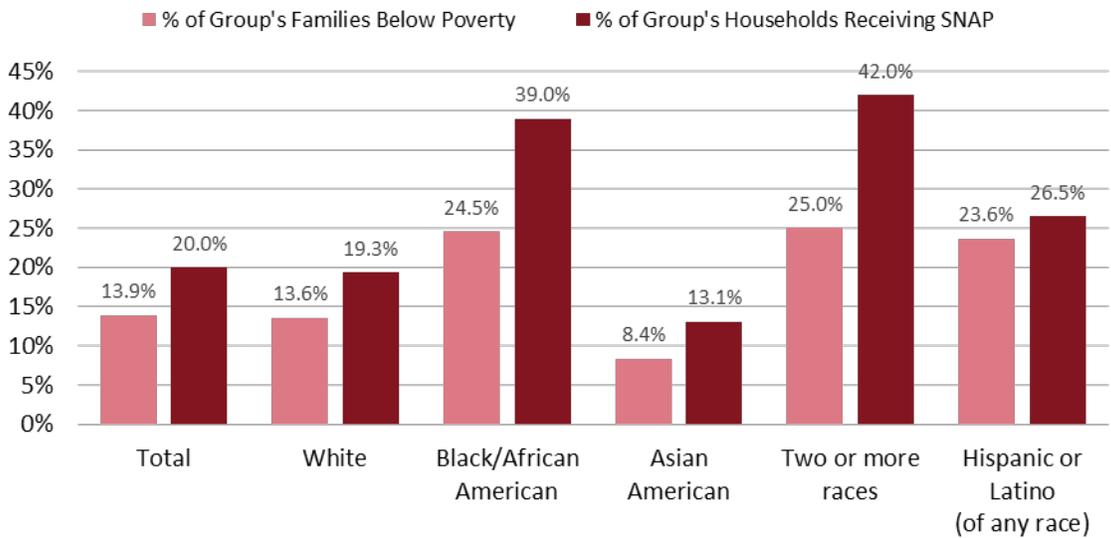
Source: American Community Survey. 5-year estimates, 2012-2016. Poverty status in the past 12 months of families; food stamps/SNAP.

Figure 5: **NON-EXEMPT COUNTIES** – Racial and Ethnic Makeup of Families in Poverty vs. Households Receiving SNAP



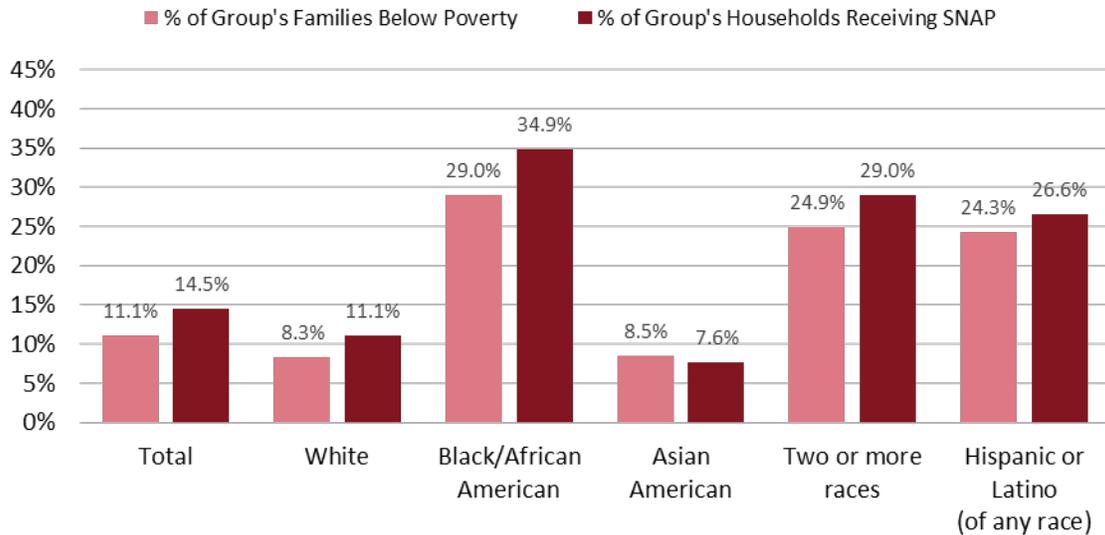
Source: American Community Survey. 5-year estimates, 2012-2016. Poverty status in the past 12 months of families; food stamps/SNAP.

Figure 6: **EXEMPT COUNTIES** – Percentage of Race/Ethnic Group's Families Living in Poverty vs. Receiving SNAP



Source: American Community Survey. 5-year estimates, 2012-2016. Poverty status in the past 12 months of families; food stamps/SNAP.

Figure 7: **NON-EXEMPT COUNTIES** – Percentage of Race/Ethnic Group's Families Living in Poverty vs. Receiving SNAP



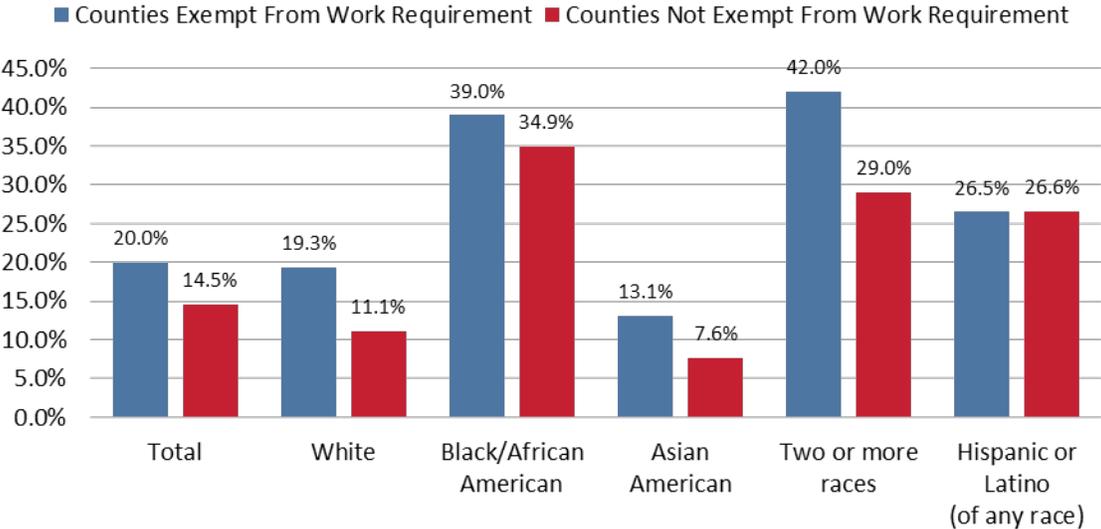
Source: American Community Survey. 5-year estimates, 2012-2016. Poverty status in the past 12 months of families; food stamps/SNAP.

Discussion on Work Requirements

As illustrated in Figure 8, white, African-American, Asian-American and multiracial families all appear to have higher rates of SNAP participation in counties exempt from work requirements than in non-exempt counties. However, this conclusion is misleading in that the vast majority of families (97 percent) in exempt counties are white. Correspondingly, white families account for 93 percent of households receiving SNAP benefits in these counties, as shown in Figure 9. Meanwhile, 95 percent of African-Americans, 97 percent of Asian-Americans and 92 percent of Hispanic and Latinos, live in counties that are not exempt from SNAP work requirements, compared to 85 percent of white Ohioans.¹¹ This suggests that Ohioans of color are less likely to maintain SNAP eligibility should they have difficulty maintaining stable employment.

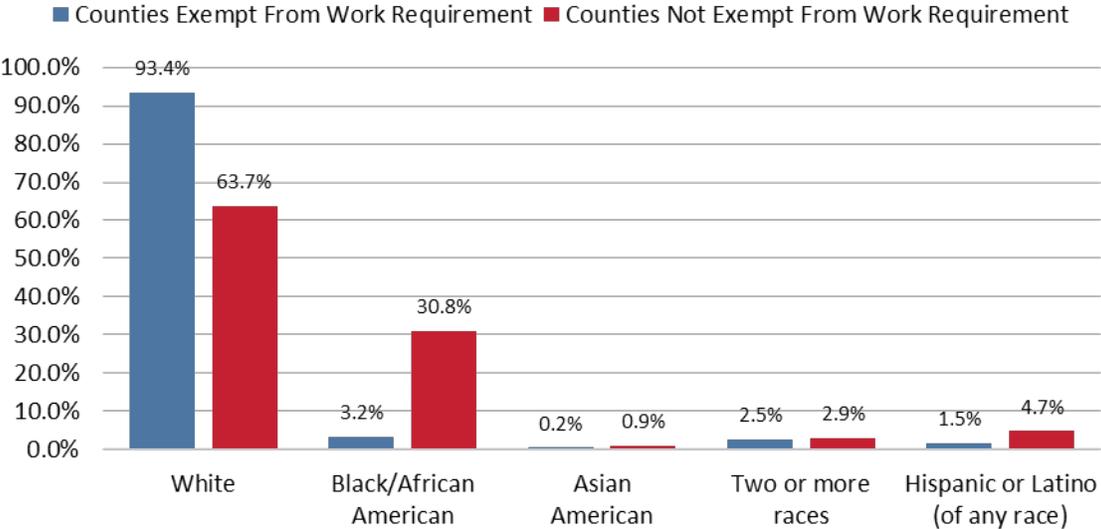
¹¹ American Community Survey. 5-year estimates, 2012-2016. Demographic and housing estimates.

Figure 8: Percentage of Each Racial/Ethnic Group Receiving SNAP Benefits – Work-Exempt vs. Non-Exempt Counties



Source: American Community Survey. 5-year estimates, 2012-2016. Food stamps/SNAP.

Figure 9: Racial Makeup of SNAP Population – Work-Exempt vs. Non-Exempt Counties



Source: American Community Survey. 5-year estimates, 2012-2016. Food stamps/SNAP.

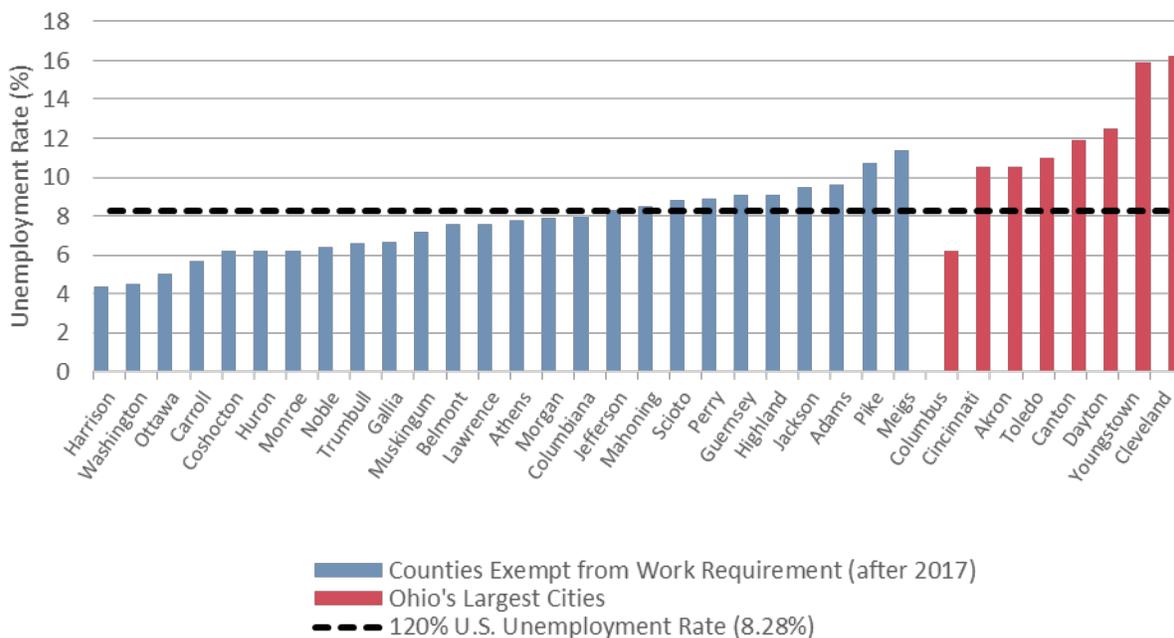
The counties in Ohio that are exempt from the SNAP work requirement are determined by their unemployment rate relative to the national average. Federal criteria is less restrictive, in that exemptions can apply to other types of state subdivisions, such as cities, as long as these jurisdictions have an unemployment rate higher than 120 percent of the U.S. unemployment rate over the past 24-month period, as measured by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). However, this figure varies based on how it is

measured. If measured using ACS five-year estimates (2012-2016), rather than BLS data, most of Ohio's exempt counties would fall below the required unemployment threshold of 120 percent of the national rate. The ACS five-year estimates (2012-2016) show that:

- The average unemployment rate for counties currently exempt from SNAP work requirements was 7.6 percent
- The U.S. unemployment rate was 6.9 percent, meaning the threshold of 120 percent of this figure is 8.3 percent
- The average unemployment rate for Ohio's eight largest cities was 11.8 percent

Figure 10 uses ACS data to show that seven of Ohio's eight largest cities have unemployment rates that are substantially higher than 120 percent of the U.S. unemployment rate. Further, each of these seven cities have unemployment rates that are higher than nearly all of the 26 counties now exempt from SNAP work requirements as of 2017. These seven cities (Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dayton, Toledo and Youngstown) contain 40 percent of Ohio's African-American population, and more than half of Ohio's African-Americans who live in poverty. However, because Ohio bases its SNAP work requirement exemptions on unemployment rates at the county level, rather than the city level, only one of these cities (Youngstown/Mahoning County) is exempt. None were exempt prior to 2017. When looking at African-American unemployment alone, each of these seven cities have African-American unemployment rates that are significantly higher than 120 percent of the overall U.S. unemployment rate (8.3 percent), with a median rate of 20 percent.¹²

Figure 10: Ohio Unemployment Rates - Counties Exempt from SNAP Work Requirements vs. Large Cities



Source: American Community Survey. 5-year estimates, 2012-2016. Employment status.

¹² American Community Survey. 5-year estimates, 2012-2016. Employment status.

Conclusions

In the context of race, the defining characteristics of Ohio's families receiving SNAP benefits are that the large majority are white, but African-Americans make up a disproportionate share due to their higher poverty rates in communities across the state. When looking at the counties where the SNAP work requirement has been waived, it becomes apparent that minority households, particularly African-Americans, are more likely to receive SNAP benefits despite lower poverty rates in these counties compared to those not exempt from work requirements. A caveat to this conclusion is that the five-year estimates studied (2012-2016) include two years in which all counties remained exempt from work requirements before they were reinstated in 2014. Five-year estimates released in the coming years may provide a more complete picture of disparities generated by Ohio's application of work requirements in SNAP. A clearer observation is that the current exemption of certain counties from SNAP work requirements implicitly favors rural white families, while minority families in areas with comparably high unemployment rates are not afforded this hardship forgiveness. As Ohio moves forward in its proposal to implement work requirements using the same exemption criteria in its Medicaid program, policymakers and advocates can look toward the data around SNAP work requirements to understand potential racial and geographic inequities created by such proposals.

APPENDIX

Table 2: Racial and Ethnic Makeup of Families below Poverty vs. that of Households Receiving SNAP

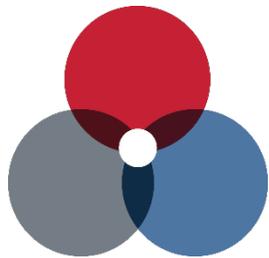
	White			African American			Asian American			Two or More Races			Hispanic or Latino		
	Total Families	Families Below Poverty	Households Receiving SNAP	Total Families	Families Below Poverty	Households Receiving SNAP	Total Families	Families Below Poverty	Households Receiving SNAP	Total Families	Families Below Poverty	Households Receiving SNAP	Total Families	Families Below Poverty	Households Receiving SNAP
Ohio	85.0%	65.3%	65.7%	11.0%	28.4%	29.0%	1.7%	1.3%	0.8%	1.4%	3.0%	2.8%	2.7%	5.8%	4.5%
Exempt	97.0%	95.0%	93.4%	1.3%	2.3%	3.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.2%	1.1%	2.0%	2.5%	1.1%	1.9%	1.5%
Not Exempt	84.4%	63.3%	63.7%	11.5%	30.1%	30.8%	1.8%	1.4%	0.9%	1.4%	3.1%	2.9%	2.8%	6.1%	4.7%

Source: American Community Survey. 5-year estimates, 2012-2016. Poverty status in the past 12 months of families; food stamps/SNAP.

Table 3: Percentage of Each Race/Ethnic Group Living Below Poverty vs. Receiving SNAP

	Total		White		African American		Asian American		Two or More Races		Hispanic or Latino	
	Families Below Poverty	Households Receiving SNAP										
Ohio	11.2%	14.8%	8.6%	11.6%	29.0%	34.9%	8.5%	7.7%	24.9%	29.5%	24.3%	26.6%
Exempt	13.9%	20.0%	13.6%	19.3%	24.5%	39.0%	8.4%	13.1%	25.0%	42.0%	23.6%	26.5%
Not Exempt	11.1%	14.5%	8.3%	11.1%	29.0%	34.9%	8.5%	7.6%	24.9%	29.0%	24.3%	26.6%

Source: American Community Survey. 5-year estimates, 2012-2016. Poverty status in the past 12 months of families; food stamps/SNAP.



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