



Allowing President Biden's Child Tax Credit Changes to Expire Helped Flip the House in the 2022 Midterms

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Key Findings

1. Biden’s American Rescue Plan converted the Child Tax Credit into a monthly cash welfare program disconnected from work.
2. Making the changes permanent would have added trillions in new deficit spending and moved millions of parents out of the workforce entirely.
3. Democrats see considerable electoral advantages in adding voters to welfare programs.
4. Allowing the changes to expire in 2021 likely helped flip the House of Representatives back to Republican control.

BOTTOM LINE: Congress should reject future efforts to convert the Child Tax Credit into another cash welfare program.

The Child Tax Credit was created in 1997 as a non-refundable \$500 per-child credit to reduce taxpayers’ tax liability.¹⁻² That credit was expanded over time, with a portion becoming refundable.³⁻¹¹

Before the temporary changes made by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), the tax credit was set at \$2,000 per child.¹²⁻¹³ Up to \$1,400 of that credit was refundable for taxpayers with no income tax liabilities, but only if they had at least \$2,500 in earned income.¹⁴⁻¹⁸ This earnings requirement operated as a work requirement for the refundable portion of the credit, then gradually phasing in as income rose.¹⁹ The credit was also limited to children with Social Security numbers, including citizens and lawfully present aliens.²⁰

But Democrats in Congress and the Biden administration temporarily converted the Child Tax Credit into a cash welfare program. Now they are hoping to reinstate those temporary changes and make them permanent.

ARPA converted the Child Tax Credit into a cash welfare program

For years, supporters have sought to convert the Child Tax Credit into a “universal child allowance” or “universal child benefit” untethered from work or taxes.²¹⁻²² And in 2021, at the Biden administration’s direction, congressional Democrats enacted ARPA, which made several temporary changes to the Child Tax Credit, fully converting it from a tax credit into a cash welfare program.²³ **ARPA increased the amount of the credit for 2021 by up to 80 percent, reaching \$3,600 for children under six and \$3,000 for older children.**²⁴

ARPA also gutted the Child Tax Credit’s work requirements, making the entire credit refundable even for taxpayers with no earnings at all.²⁵ ARPA then converted the credit into a monthly payment, completing the total transformation of a tax-time credit into a monthly cash welfare program.²⁶

Ultimately, ARPA's changes were designed to gut the bipartisan welfare reforms enacted in 1996.²⁷ ARPA supporters celebrated, noting that the changes “finally reversed a 25-year trajectory of welfare reform,” were vital to “undoing welfare reform,” represented the “end of welfare reform as we know it,” and made “government handouts ... respectable again.”²⁸⁻²⁹

The Child Tax Credit more than replaced cash welfare

This new monthly “child allowance” more than replaced cash welfare in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program for parents who refuse to work. Under ARPA, a single, non-working parent with two children could receive \$500 to \$600 per month in Child Tax Credit payments, depending on the age of their children.³⁰

Meanwhile, the TANF program—which has had a work requirement since the 1996 welfare reform law was enacted—provides a maximum benefit of \$485 per month for those same households.³¹⁻³⁴ Due to the new monthly Child Tax Credit payments under ARPA and other welfare expansions, unemployed parents could collect more in government benefits than the wages of a typical full-time job.³⁵

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Democrats failed to make these changes permanent

When Democrats enacted ARPA, they made the Child Tax Credit changes temporary, applying only in 2021, as a ploy to keep the Congressional Budget Office's score of the legislation lower than it otherwise would be. Indeed, even later attempts to extend or revive the ARPA changes used these same budget gimmicks.³⁶

Democrats expected these temporary changes to be perpetually extended, just as the 2001 and 2009 Child Tax Credit changes were extended until they were eventually made permanent. In their “Build Back Better” plan, Democrats proposed extending the ARPA changes through 2025, repealing the requirement that claimed dependents have Social Security numbers, and permanently repealing the Child Tax Credit's work requirement by making it fully refundable regardless of earnings.³⁷⁻³⁸

Not only would these changes weaken program integrity and gut the work requirement, but the Democrats' plan would cost taxpayers between \$1.6 trillion to \$1.9 trillion over a decade.³⁹⁻⁴² Worse yet, the plan would move 1.5 million parents out of the workforce entirely.⁴³

Thankfully, these extensions and further expansions failed to make it through the Senate. But the motives behind the policy change may be even more sinister: renting votes with taxpayer money.

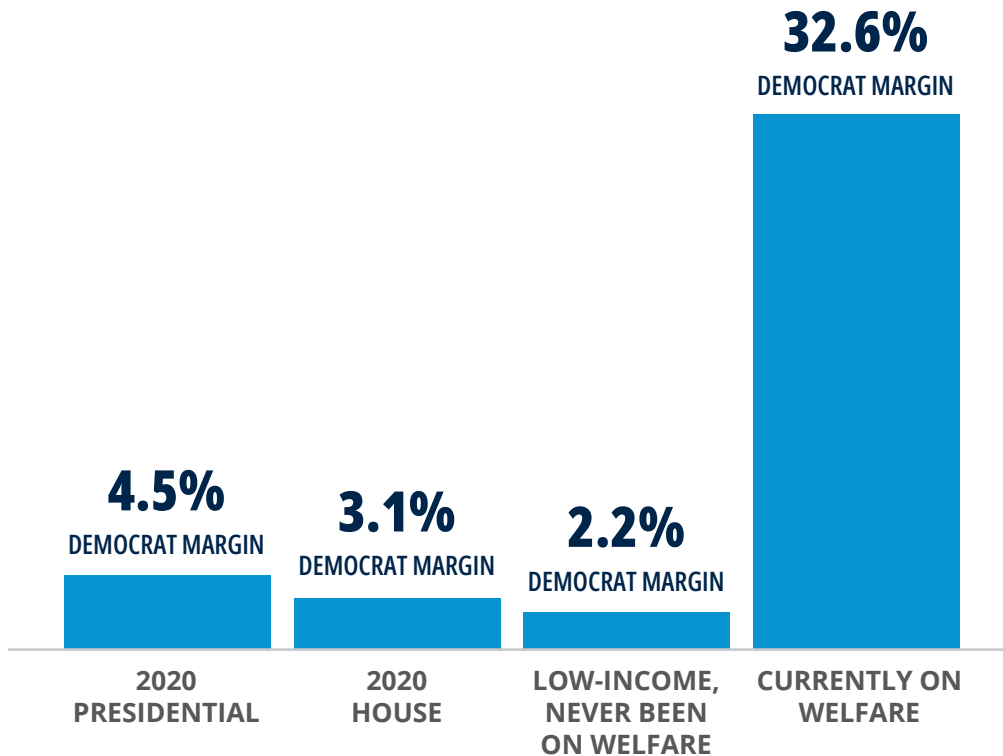
Welfare changes political ideology

Converting the Child Tax Credit into a cash welfare program could profoundly affect ideology and political preferences. Opportunity Solutions Project has conducted several surveys on how welfare receipt affects political preferences, interviewing nearly 18,000 voters across 47 states and the District of Columbia through four election cycles. The results have remained consistent across states and election cycles.

Low-income voters who have never been on welfare are up for grabs. In 2020, for example, Democrats won these voters with just a 2.2 percentage point margin.⁴⁴ For comparison, Democrats won the House of Representatives in 2020 by 3.1 percentage points, and Biden won the popular vote by 4.5 percentage points.⁴⁵⁻⁴⁶

But Democrats see a massive advantage among voters enrolled in welfare programs like food stamps and Medicaid. In fact, Democrats see their margins increase by more than 30 points among voters enrolled in welfare compared to low-income voters who have never been on welfare.⁴⁷⁻⁴⁸

DEMOCRATS SEE BIG GAINS AMONG VOTERS ON WELFARE



Sources: Edison Research; Opportunity Solutions Project

Other research has found similar results. Researchers at the University of Chicago and Massachusetts Institute of Technology explored the impact of expanding Medicaid to a new class of able-bodied adults on voter registration and turnout.⁴⁹ That research found welfare expansions boosted registration and turnout by 10 percentage points among enrollees who lived in Democrat counties.⁵⁰⁻⁵² But there was virtually no change in registration and turnout among enrollees who lived in Republican counties.⁵³⁻⁵⁵ Indeed, nearly 97 percent of the higher turnout was concentrated in Democrat counties.⁵⁶ Another researcher at Vanderbilt University found that ObamaCare’s Medicaid expansion increased Democrats’ vote share between 2012 and 2016.⁵⁷

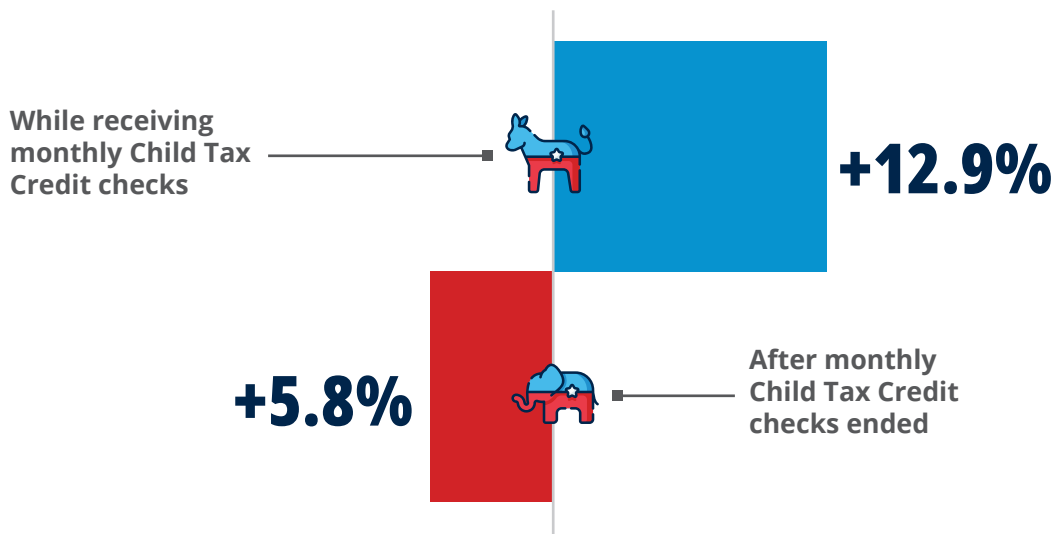
Unsurprisingly, converting the Child Tax Credit into a cash welfare program likely had similar effects on ideology and voter preferences, shifting votes toward Democrats.

Receiving monthly Child Tax Credit checks changed voter preferences

In December 2021, Democrats held a 13-point lead on the generic ballot among voters receiving monthly Child Tax Credit checks, even as the generic ballot was virtually tied among all registered voters.⁵⁸⁻⁵⁹

But as soon as those monthly checks stopped flowing, Democrats’ edge among those groups disappeared. By April 2022, Republicans held a six-point lead among voters who had received the monthly Child Tax Credit payments in 2021, even as the generic ballot remained virtually tied overall.⁶⁰⁻⁶¹

DEMOCRATS’ ADVANTAGE DISAPPEARED WHEN ARPA CHANGES EXPIRED



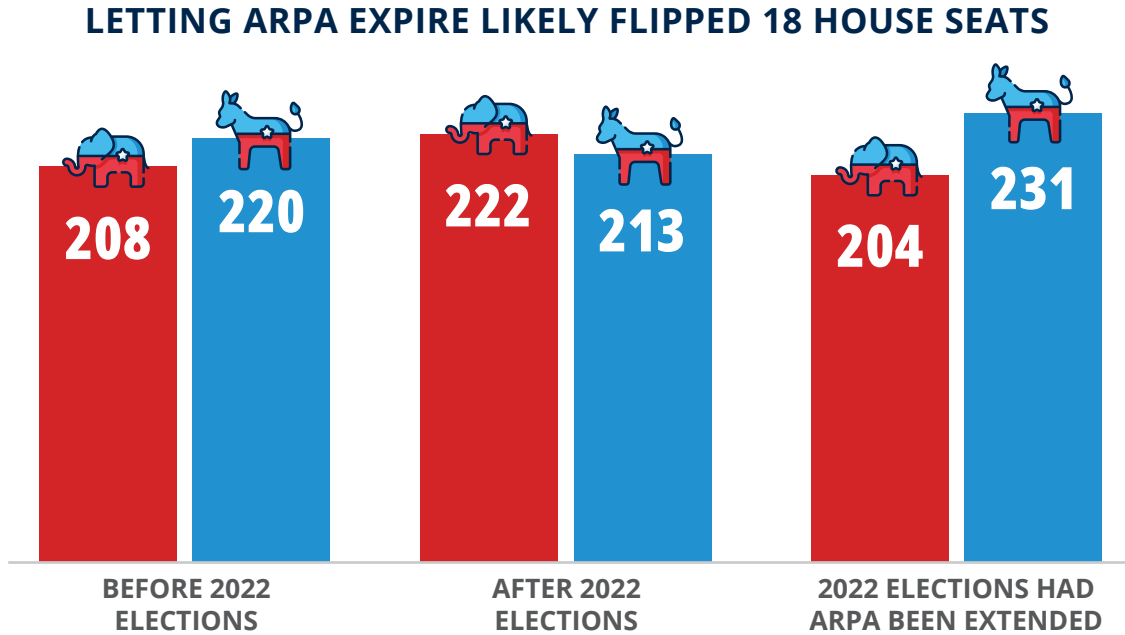
Source: Morning Consult

Given these patterns, it should be no surprise that Democrats spent 2022 attempting to revive the ARPA changes.

Allowing the ARPA changes to expire likely flipped the House

Ultimately, Republicans won the House by a 2.8 percentage point margin nationwide, with exit polls indicating they won parents by four percentage points.⁶²⁻⁶⁴ Republican candidates for the House ended the election cycle with three million more votes than Democrat candidates, winning back control with a 222-to-213 seat majority.⁶⁵ Had Democrats extended or revived the ARPA changes to the Child Tax Credit, they likely would have maintained control of the House and secured an even larger majority in the Senate.

An analysis of data provided by a proprietary microsimulation model developed by Opportunity Solutions Project reveals that the substantial political shift following the expiration of ARPA's Child Tax Credit changes likely led to a 4.7 million vote swing from Democrats to Republicans in the House of Representatives.⁶⁶⁻⁷⁴ **Allowing the ARPA changes to expire as scheduled likely flipped 18 House seats from Democrats to Republicans.**⁷⁵⁻⁷⁶



Source: Opportunity Solutions Project

Congress should reject future efforts to convert the Child Tax Credit into another cash welfare program

Democrats' plan to convert the Child Tax Credit into a monthly cash welfare program would add trillions in new deficit spending and move millions of parents out of the workforce, all in a sinister effort to rent votes with taxpayer money.

Congress should reject these and any future efforts that would undermine the tax credit's work requirements or convert it into a monthly cash welfare program.

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