

For America's poor, life expectancy statistics resembles those in developing countries Yet Another Conservative Argument About Poverty Appears To Be Wrong

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/poverty-us-world_us_57a4bad8e4b021fd98786aa8

Two prominent scholars are calling B.S. on a popular conservative argument about poverty. The argument comes up anytime the political discussion turns to anti-poverty programs, and whether to strengthen or weaken them. It goes like this: Sure, poor people in America may struggle to pay for necessities like rent, gas and health care. Even so, they're still pretty well off by international standards, because they have running water and air conditioning – and cell phones and televisions, too. Last year, for example, Rep. [Darrell Issa](#) (R-Calif.) called America's poor “the envy of the world.” (He later reaffirmed that position in an op-ed for [The Hill](#).)

Now two of the nation's leading scholars on poverty, [Kathryn Edin](#) from Johns Hopkins University and [Luke Shaefer](#) from the University of Michigan, are weighing in. Edin and Shaefer are the authors of *\$2.00 Dollars a Day*, an award-winning 2015 book on deep poverty that got a lot of attention inside Washington and beyond. In a new working paper, out this week at Michigan's [National Poverty Center](#) website, the two researchers (along with doctoral student Pinghui Wu) draw on a variety of data to compare specifically how low-income groups in America fare relative to the population of poorer countries.

Their focus is four simple indicators of well-being: life expectancy, infant mortality, homicide and incarceration. The results don't reflect favorably on the U.S.

In America's poorest counties, life expectancy turns out to be roughly the same as it is in Bahrain, Mexico and the United Arab Emirates. For infant mortality, Edin, Shaefer and Wu looked specifically at racial and ethnic groups with lower-than-average incomes in the U.S. The most striking finding: Among non-Latino black Americans, infant mortality rates are only slightly better than in Grenada, and worse than in Sri Lanka.

The numbers for homicide and incarceration yield similar results: Statistics for low-income groups in the U.S. look a lot like those for people living in countries with economies that, per person, generate far less wealth.

International comparisons like these are inevitably crude, in part because poorer countries don't have the infrastructure to collect statistics as reliably as the U.S. does. And to make their comparisons, Edin and Shaefer couldn't always use the exact same years. But the paper's conclusion is consistent with other data showing that the standard of living for America's poor is way behind that of peer countries in Europe and Asia. A big reason for that is that safety net programs in the U.S. provide a lot less protection than those overseas.

It doesn't have to be that way. Studies have shown that programs like [Medicaid](#) and [WIC](#) (the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children) reduce infant mortality. [Research](#) also suggests that initiatives to improve early childhood care, when designed properly, can yield health benefits in adults, potentially allowing people to live longer.

The key is bolstering those programs, or perhaps trying some new approaches – which, more or less, is what Democrats like [Hillary Clinton](#) have proposed doing for some time now. But such efforts typically run into resistance from Republicans.

They have their reasons. Conservatives tend to oppose bigger government on principle. They think that government spending, and the taxes to finance it, weaken the economy. They also think anti-poverty programs are inefficient and, in some cases, encourage dependency.

Some of these arguments are defensible. Some are not. The idea that America's poor have it good appears to belong in the latter category.

Comments



Jim Rutledge ·

Lebanon, Oregon

Facts facts facts facts facts - people like Darrell Issa couldn't care less about facts. If they "feel" something is true, that's good enough for them, and sadly, good enough for their supporters.

Like · Reply ·  34 · 2 hrs



Eric John

Because when you FEEL something, you have FAITH. And faith trumps facts.

Like · Reply ·  4 · 1 hr



Kevin Kendall ·

University of Miami

Eric John ...did you seriously just say "trumps"???

Like · Reply · 5 mins



Kevin Kendall ·

University of Miami

LOL

Like · Reply · 4 mins



Garth Haygood ·

Chief Engineer at Retired

Bottom line. Are any Republican policies good for anything except the donor class? I really feel sorry for the base. Everything they hate about government has been brought about by Republican policies and they just can't see it or refuse to see it.

Like · Reply ·  12 · 2 hrs



Donald Fields ·

American University

It is called "cutting off your nose to spite your face" and the conservatives have always been experts at it. The plantation system of the South was a perfect conservative society, with everyone in poverty except the planters. This is what the GOP would have us adopt, if they could design a nation.

Like · Reply ·  4 · 34 mins



Fran Anton

Donald Fields They do this by continually cutting education funding since the stupider people are the more they buy into Republican ideology.

Can you say Scott Walker - Wisconsin?

Like · Reply ·  1 · 13 mins



Jo Nol ·

Michigan State University

Well, Republicans don't want big government unless it's big military. They love their weapons and their wars, which tend to divert our tax dollars away from programs for helping people to programs that both kill or maim people and enrich the military industrial complex.

Like · Reply ·  32 · 3 hrs



Sam Ohio ·

Maastricht University

Or until a sector of the economy (like finance) implodes and comes looking for welfare

Like · Reply ·  19 · 2 hrs



Jeff Jackson ·

Principal Engineer at Allen Systems Group (ASG)

Sam Ohio

Republicans voted against the bank bailout. Facts are fun.

Like · Reply · 8 · 1 hr



Nancy Weavers ·

UC Davis

Sam Ohio which happened under Mr Bush.

Like · Reply · 10 · 1 hr

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Greensboro Police Public Abuse

Can you guess which race is disproportionately affected by poverty, here is a hint, they are a bit darker than donald trumps lilly white "real american" utopia. Economic racism is a real issue too.

Like · Reply · 5 · 1 hr



Lewin Wickes

Can you guess which races are richer by far than America's white households? They are Asian Americans and Indian Americans (not American Indians)? They are 25% to 30% richer. Is there some kind of Asian American privilege at work in this country? Asian Americans generally surpass white Americans in almost every area of human endeavor. Are they just better and smarter than white and black Americans? Are white and black Americans simply incapable by nature of matching the achievements of Asian Americans?

Like · Reply · 1 · 16 mins



Mike Fisher ·

Charlotte, North Carolina

Lewin Wickes it's a matter of monetary privilege. Like someone once said "don't work for your money make your money work for you" along with "make money the old fashion way, inherit it". There are a billion Indians and Asians, the wealthy ones can choose to come here, the poor ones stay behind. The color of money outweighs the color of skin very often. But back to the point, many many asian/Indian wealthy people here in America came from generational wealth.

Like · Reply · 6 mins



Ramon Rhodes ·

Founder, President at Cobra Ball International LTD

"Their focus is four simple indicators of well-being: life expectancy, infant mortality, homicide and incarceration. The results don't reflect favorably on the U.S."

These benchmarks don't matter (claim republicans) just as long as you have a refrigerator and cellphone. You know, life's primary necessities.

For most (white) millionaire Congresspeople, which is pretty much all of Congress, poverty has a brown female face raising multiple children from different fathers. The reality, as those of us who aren't fact adverse know, is that of a white single mother with children statistically.

We already know that as long as the poverty myth is centered around racial identity politics, there's no REAL pressure to do anything about it. And in fact, it makes it easier to deny there is even a problem in the first place like (multimillionaire) Darrell Issa, who's net worth is over \$300 million claims.

Like · Reply ·  1 · 33 mins



David Dagenais ·

Works at Retired

It is a fact that economists have predicted for decades what is now occurring throughout the world. Additionally, entrenched parties, especially politicians and policymakers, have resisted changes that could assist not just the poor, but the middle class as well. The transfer of vast savings in the manufacture and provision of goods has steadily inclined toward those at the top of the income scales in almost every country. While incomes in many poorer countries has improved minimally, the profit resulting from these savings has transferred to the wealthy while effectively decreasing incomes for the middle class in traditionally first-world countries.

Like · Reply ·  2 · 1 hr



Donald Fields ·

American University

The good thing about it is that there is this huge reservoir of wealth that can be tapped, and will be tapped, to repair some of the damage. Together with our allies in Europe and Asia, we are making it harder and harder to hide the ill-gotten gains, and with a few changes in the tax code, we could bring it all in to the national treasury. The rich have had a good run, and they can now show their patriotism by yeilding to the taxman.

Like · Reply · 37 mins



Joshua Crawford

And yet the last several budgets proposed by Republicans all had trillions in cuts to programs that help those poorest, most vulnerable Americans while at the same giving trillions in tax cuts to the richest Americans AND hundreds of billions in increased military spending.

After all, that's what Jesus would do, right? Smh....

Like · Reply ·  19 · 2 hrs



Bill Brinkman ·

Dublin, Ohio

Tax cuts are not give aways because you're limiting what you're taking from someone. If I make \$100 & you tax me at 45% & then change the tax rate to 35% the govt is not giving me \$10. They're allowing me to keep \$10 that I produced. Liberals just don't understand that concept or intellectually allowing individuals to be non dependent on the Govt is a scary concept.

Like · Reply ·  3 · 29 mins



Rebecca Gross

Bill Brinkman

But people never consider what they TAKE from the government for that \$100. The courts, the safety, the infastructure, the energy reliability. . . "Taxes are the price we pay for civilization."

Like · Reply ·  5 · 22 mins



John R Jaeger

Trillions of cuts to programs? Trillions in tax cuts? Hundreds of billions in increased military spending? Want to provide a reliable reference to any of this? You do know, I assume, that the entire non-defense discretionary budget is less than \$500

Billion. Hard to squeeze 'trillions' out of it, even if 'trillions' represented a ten year total of just \$2 Trillion. A 40% across-the-board reduction in all non-defense discretionary spending would gut just about every program (science, energy, transportation, foreign aid, agriculture, health etc.). However, since you claimed that it would hurt p...[See More](#)

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Bert Love

"They think that government spending, and the taxes to finance it, weaken the economy. They also think anti-poverty programs are inefficient and, in some cases, encourage dependency." What really proves the conservatives' argument to be B.S. is their total lack of any alternative proposals. The fact is that poor people cost us money in terms of healthcare, welfare, crime, incarceration and other areas. Why not design an efficient, well managed program to create jobs for the poor that produces tax income to offset the cost? The conservatives don't propose such programs for two reasons: 1) they're happy just cutting anti-poverty programs; and 2) they need to use the cost of anti-poverty programs as a blunt instrument against the liberals. How dispicable is that -- beating up poor people strictly for political gains?

Like · Reply · 1 · 1 hr



Tom Allison

Government has a poor track record of really helping people. They help the people they design to help but they are demographically segregated from others who simply don't have the money to live a healthy life. The issue around conservatives hating big government is legitimate when you consider no one will ever revamp welfare programs from the ground up (liberals or conservatives so don't go all political on me). They can't rebuild the IRS tax code but only add on more conditions and provisos and complexity in hopes that someone (political interests) benefits. But they simply can't start ove...[See More](#)

Like · Reply · 4 · 2 hrs



CJ Mikkelsen ·

Northlake College

Ok. Now that you've blocked everything government does, what are your proposals for something getting done? Or are you willing to let millions suffer and die because you decided a blank slate is the only way to help?

Like · Reply · 2 · 1 hr



David Dagenais ·

Works at Retired

So, poverty and misery until it gets so bad we have a revolution resulting in. . . ?

Like · Reply · 31 mins



Fran Anton

"Government has a poor track record of really helping people"

This is because Republicans continually cut funding for social programs and then blame the programs for not working.

Like · Reply · 7 mins



Dawnmarie Lesaldo ·

Florida Atlantic University

Republicans' version of the poor is anyone who has to drive themselves around rather than their chauffeur. They are out of touch and refuse to change.

Like · Reply ·  10 · 3 hrs



Carol Rinehuls Schindler ·

Brookville, Pennsylvania

Oh, ok, lol. The Dems version of the poor, is they want everyone to be poor and dependent, well except for the political elites of course. Then they can rush in to give you your daily crumb pretending to be your savior while you continue to vote for their ilk.

Like · Reply ·  10 · 2 hrs



Nelson Vega

Carol Rinehuls Schindler and the republicans is not even crumbs and they called themselves evangelical Christians..

Like · Reply ·  8 · 2 hrs



Matthew Grober ·

Atlanta, Georgia

Carol Rinehuls Schindler I keep looking for the 'we want everyone to be poor' plank in the D platform... No luck. Can you point me to a link?

Like · Reply ·  14 · 2 hrs

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