

Stockton's Hughes Center Research Asks: Do You See the Invisible Hand of Government?

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Contact: Maryjane Briant
News and Media Relations Director
Galloway, N.J. 08205
Maryjane.Briant@stockton.edu
(609) 652-4593
www.stockton.edu/media

Galloway, N.J. - Against the backdrop of campaign debates concerning the size and direction of government, many New Jerseyans do not recognize the government benefits they receive, according to a study released today by the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University.

Nearly 60 percent of the New Jerseyans surveyed denied ever having used the services of a government social program. Yet 68 percent of those who denied receiving such benefits had participated in one or more programs, the study found.

These benefits are often invisible, either because recipients view them as entitlements or because they are delivered indirectly rather than through government bureaucracies. "Your government social program is my entitlement," summarized David Carr, author of the study, and director of Research and Policy Analysis for the Hughes Center.

The report is based on a survey of 812 New Jersey residents and its findings are consistent with a 2008 national survey conducted by Suzanne Mettler, a professor in the government department at Cornell University.

Survey results suggest that respondents' understanding that they are participating in a "government social program" varies widely by program characteristics and means of implementation. New Jersey residents were most aware of the traditional social support programs targeting the needs of the economically disadvantaged. They were much less likely to identify programs such as Social Security, Unemployment Benefits, Student Loans, or the Home Mortgage Interest Deduction as government social programs.

"Major social programs are invisible to many Americans either because they are attached to

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universal entitlement or contributory systems, or because the government acts indirectly, through private intermediaries or through indirect instruments such as the tax code,” explained Carr. “As the debates raging in the current presidential primaries remind us, our perceptions of whether or not we benefit from support may shape our position in the continuing debate about the proper scope of government.”

The full report, [The Invisible Hand of Government](http://stockton.edu/hughescenter), is available at stockton.edu/hughescenter, along with other research and resources.

About the Hughes Center

The William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy (stockton.edu/hughescenter) at Stockton University serves as a catalyst for research, analysis and innovative policy solutions on the economic, social and cultural issues facing New Jersey, and promotes the civic life of New Jersey through engagement, education and research. The Center is named for William J. Hughes, whose distinguished career includes service in the U.S. House of Representatives, Ambassador to Panama and as a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Stockton. The Hughes Center can be found at facebook.com/StocktonHughesCenter and can be followed on [Twitter@hughescenter](https://twitter.com/hughescenter).

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