

Databook: 2025 Poverty Rates in Historical Perspective

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Every September, the U.S. Census Bureau releases the annual [national statistics on poverty](#) for the preceding year. These numbers are a key indicator of economic well-being, especially when examined relative to historical trends. Understanding historical trends in poverty means contending with decisions on how to best measure poverty over time.

In this databook, we present trends in poverty for different age groups between 1967 and 2025 across three poverty measures, (1) the historical Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM), (2) anchored 2025 SPM, and (3) a fully relative poverty measure. We present estimates for:

- Total U.S. population
- Children (under 18)
- Young adults (18-24)
- Young adults (25-34)
- Working age adults (18-64)
- Older adults (65 and above)

Together, these data are intended to serve as a resource for a more comprehensive understanding of long-term trends in poverty rates and the role of government policies and programs in reducing poverty over time. Our goal in this databook is not to interpret these trends or make the case for one measure over another. Rather, each year, the databook will be updated, combining Columbia's historical poverty rates with the latest Census numbers in order to provide an easy-to-find set of figures documenting the most up-to-date long-term trends on these three measures of poverty.

DATA

Since 2009, the U.S. Census Bureau has released the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) alongside the official poverty measure¹ The Center on Poverty and Social Policy [created a historical version](#) that makes SPM poverty rates available back to 1967 to provide a consistent measure for assessing long-term trends.² The historical SPM construction attempts to mimic the U.S. Census Bureau's and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' SPM measurement decisions with as much fidelity as possible given available data. Full descriptions of the methods used to create the series can be found in Fox et al. (2015) and Nolan et al. (2016).³

¹ Short. 2011. [The Supplemental Poverty Measure: Examining the incidence and depth of poverty in the U.S. taking account of taxes and transfers.](#)

² Fox et al. 2015. [Waging war on poverty: Poverty trends using a historical supplemental poverty measure;](#) for historical SPM data, see Wimer et al., 2024, [Historical Supplemental Poverty Measure data.](#)

³ Fox et al. 2015. [Waging war on poverty;](#) Nolan et al. 2016. [A new method for measuring historical poverty trends.](#)

MEASURING POVERTY

For each of the age groups listed above, the databook presents trends using three measures: (1) the historical SPM; (2) an anchored SPM, anchored in 2025; and (3) a fully relative poverty measure. We describe each measure here.

Historical SPM

In contrast to the official poverty measure, the SPM is “quasi-relative” meaning that poverty thresholds change over time not just by inflation, but also as societal patterns of expenditures shift.⁴ The SPM’s measure of resources include post-tax cash income as well as the value of many in-kind or near-cash benefits (e.g., food assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or housing subsidies), and also subtracts from resources some necessary expenses (e.g., work and medical expenses). These resources are compared to expenditures on a core basket of necessities, which includes food, clothing, shelter, and utilities (and in recent years, internet expenditures) plus a multiplier to account for other necessities.⁵ The housing portion of the SPM threshold is also geographically adjusted to account for variation in housing costs. Our first set of results show the poverty rates for the total U.S. population based on the SPM methodology, which we call the historical SPM, from 1967 to 2025. From 1967 to 2008, historical SPM data is from our Center on Poverty and Social Policy [historical SPM series](#); from 2009 onwards, the data is from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Anchored 2025 SPM

In contrast to a quasi-relative measure like the historical SPM, an anchored poverty threshold is fixed according to the living standards of a specific year and changes over time only with changes in prices (i.e., through inflation alone). In this databook, we show an anchored SPM, anchored to the year 2025. By anchoring the poverty thresholds in 2025, and carrying these back in time adjusted only for inflation, our second set of results in this series implicitly ask “what would poverty rates have been in the past when considered against 2025’s living standards?”⁶ The underlying SPM methodology with respect to the resources counted, as described above, remains the same.

Relative Poverty Measure

A fully relative measure of poverty is more common in international contexts and typically measures poverty relative to a fixed point in the income distribution, usually 50 or 60 percent of the median. Critics of fully relative measures argue that these measures are closer to indicators of inequality rather than poverty, but proponents argue that fully relative measures are useful when thinking of poverty as a measure of people’s ability to fully participate in society.⁷ Our third set of results show poverty rate trends using a fully relative poverty threshold, defined in this

⁴ See Citro and Michael, 1995, [Measuring poverty: A new approach](#), for a comprehensive discussion that laid out the framework that eventually resulted in the creation of the SPM.

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau. 2025. [Supplemental Poverty Measure README](#).

⁶ See Wimer et al., 2016, [Progress on poverty?](#), and Vinh et al., 2025, [2024 Poverty rates in historical perspective series](#).

⁷ Brady. 2003. [Rethinking the sociological measurement of poverty](#); Atkinson. 1998. [Poverty in Europe](#). See Parolin and Filastro, 2023, [The United States’ record-low child poverty rate in international and historical perspective](#), for a recent empirical example.

case as resources that fall below 50 percent of median household resources,⁸ with resources measured using the SPM methodology.

INTERPRETING THE RESULTS

For each measure, we report poverty rates before and after accounting for resources from government taxes and transfers. The difference between pre-tax/transfer and post-tax/transfer poverty rates can be thought of as the extent to which government taxes and transfers are associated with a reduction in the poverty rate. The specific taxes and transfers accounted for include: housing subsidies, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), National School Lunch Program, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), cash welfare assistance, Social Security, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), unemployment insurance, workers' compensation, veterans' payments, and income and payroll taxes (including tax credits such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit). Economic stimulus payments and broadband subsidies are also included in total taxes and transfers in relevant years where these policies were in place.

We begin by presenting results for the total U.S. population and then trends across age groups. For each group, we present results for post-tax/transfer and pre-tax/transfer poverty rates across all three poverty measures, allowing one to compare how poverty trends and the role of government taxes and transfers vary depending on how poverty is defined. Our goal in creating the databook is not to explain these trends, or argue for a particular measure, but rather to be an ongoing resource for those who want to understand long-term trends in income poverty over more than half a century. We will update these figures each year as new data become available.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Ortiz, Rebecca, Sophie Collyer, Christopher Wimer, and Ryan Vinh. 2026. [Databook: 2025 Poverty Rates in Historical Perspective](#). New York: Center on Poverty and Social Policy, Columbia University.

DATA SOURCE

Wimer, Christopher, Liana Fox, Sophie Collyer, Irwin Garfinkel, Neeraj Kaushal, Jennifer Laird, Jaehyun Nam, Laura Nolan, Jessica Pac, Ryan Vinh, and Jane Waldfogel. 2025. [Historical Supplemental Poverty Measure data](#). New York: Center on Poverty and Social Policy, Columbia University. [Public-use data available through IPUMS](#); learn more [here](#) on how to access the data.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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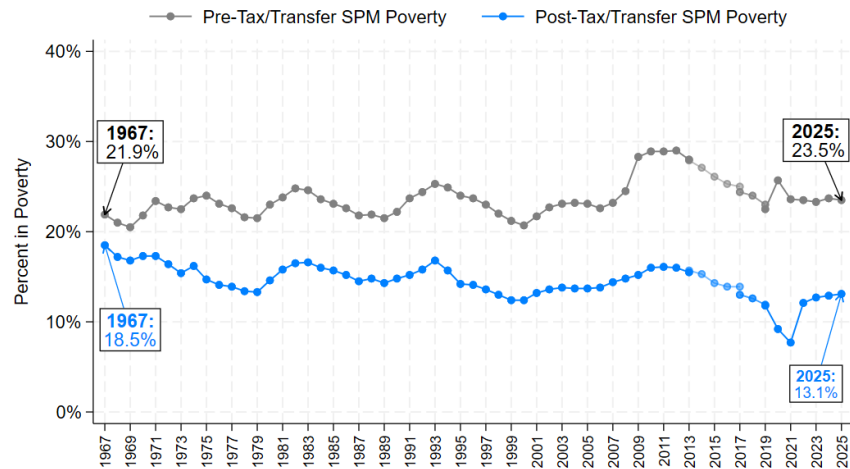
⁸ Note the use of households here is a departure from the resource sharing unit under the SPM series, which is essentially a broader definition of a family unit, but where cohabiting couples are treated equivalently to married couples, alongside other smaller changes. For more detail and discussion on resource sharing units, see NASEM, 2023, [An updated measure of poverty](#). Note also that median household resources under a relative measure are first equalized to account for differences in the number of adults and children in the household.

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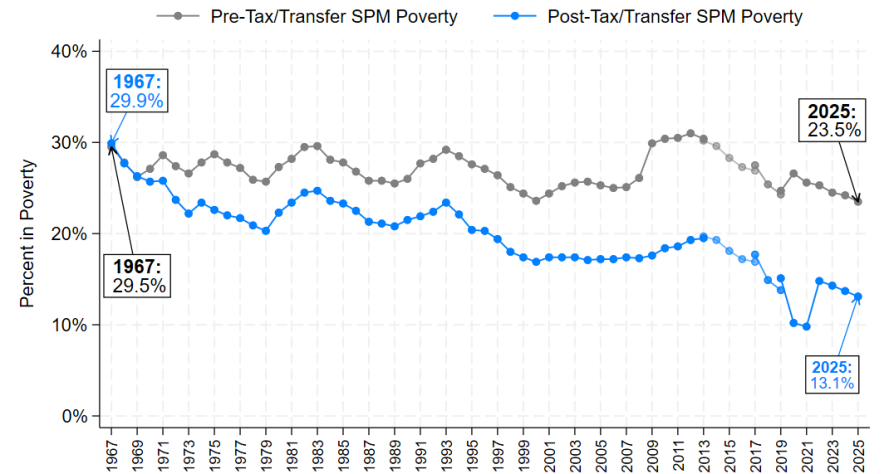
Figure 1. Total population poverty rates under three measures (1967–2025)

Panel A: Historical Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM)



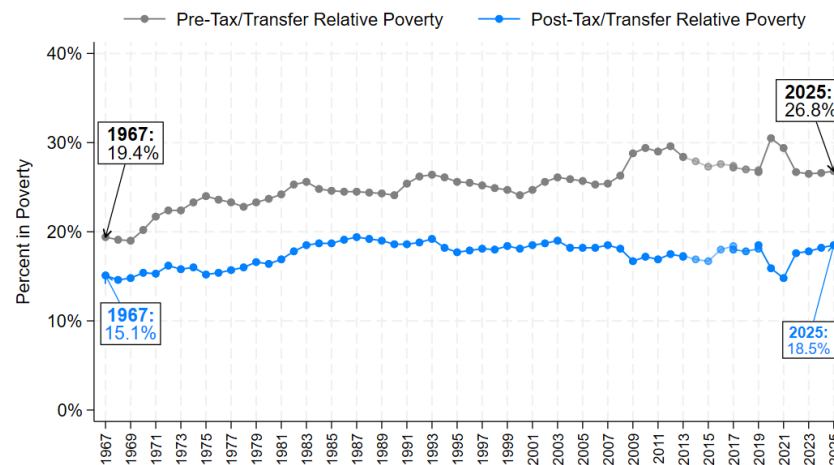
Source: Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University, 2026; analysis of the CPS ASEC (1968-2025) & [historical Supplemental Poverty Measure series](#) (Wimer et al. 2025).

Panel B: Anchored 2025 Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM)



Source: Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University, 2026; analysis of the CPS ASEC (1968-2025) & [historical Supplemental Poverty Measure series](#) (Wimer et al. 2025).

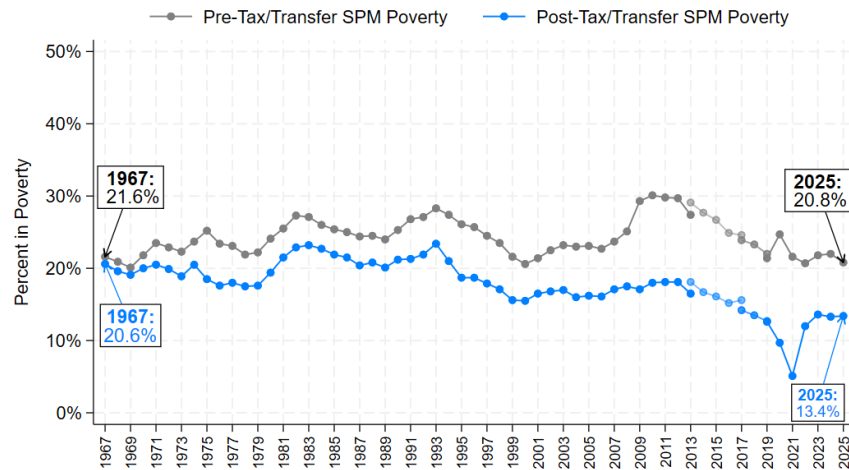
Panel C: Relative Poverty Measure



Source: Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University, 2026; analysis of the CPS ASEC (1968-2025) & [historical Supplemental Poverty Measure series](#) (Wimer et al. 2025).

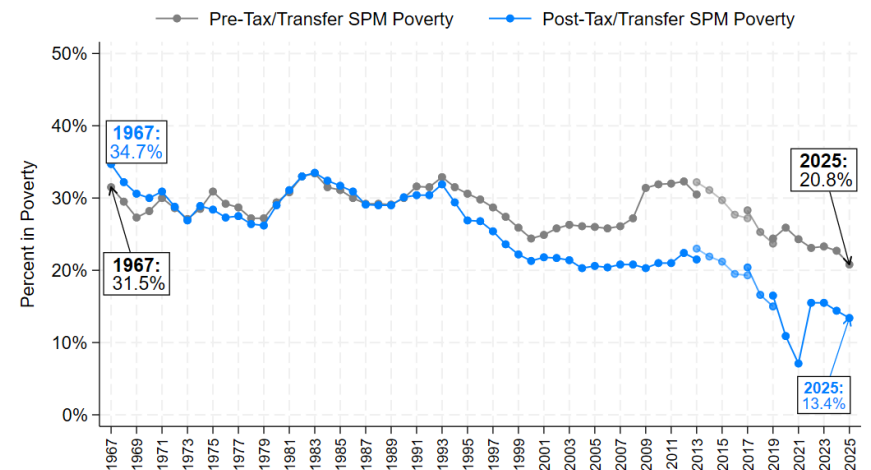
Figure 2. Child (aged under 18) poverty rates under three measures (1967–2025)

Panel A: Historical Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM)



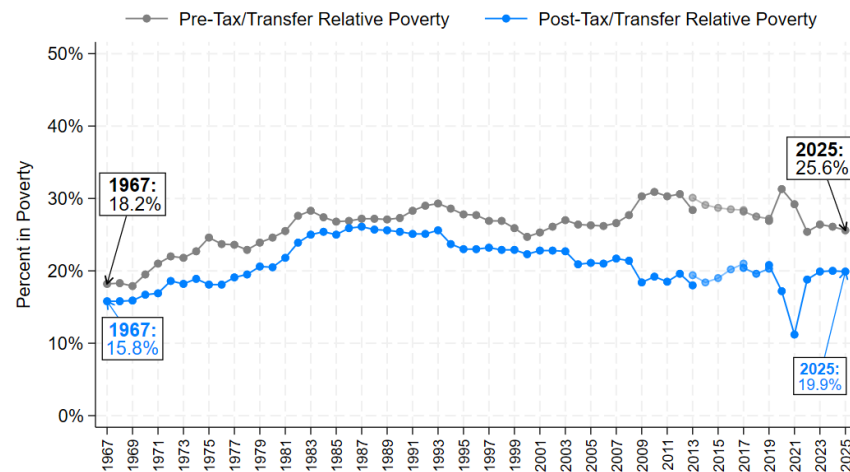
Source: Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University, 2026; analysis of the CPS ASEC (1968–2025) & [historical Supplemental Poverty Measure series](#) (Wimer et al. 2025).

Panel B: Anchored 2025 Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM)



Source: Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University, 2026; analysis of the CPS ASEC (1968–2025) & [historical Supplemental Poverty Measure series](#) (Wimer et al. 2025).

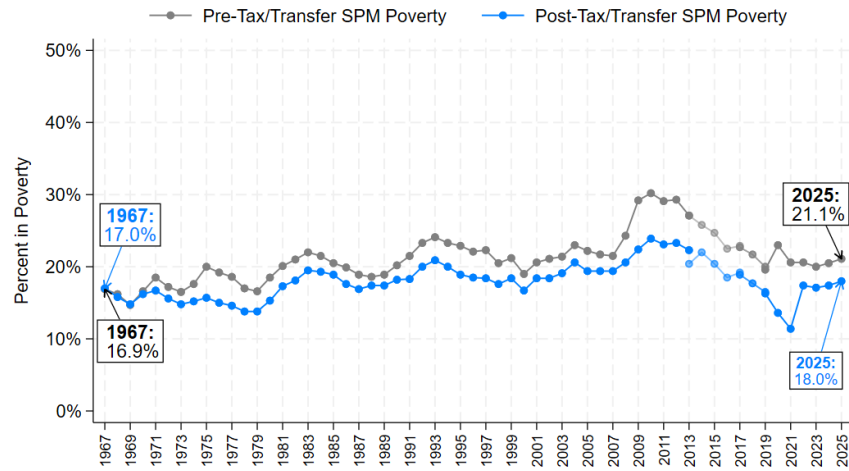
Panel C: Relative Poverty Measure



Source: Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University, 2026; analysis of the CPS ASEC (1968–2025) & [historical Supplemental Poverty Measure series](#) (Wimer et al. 2025).

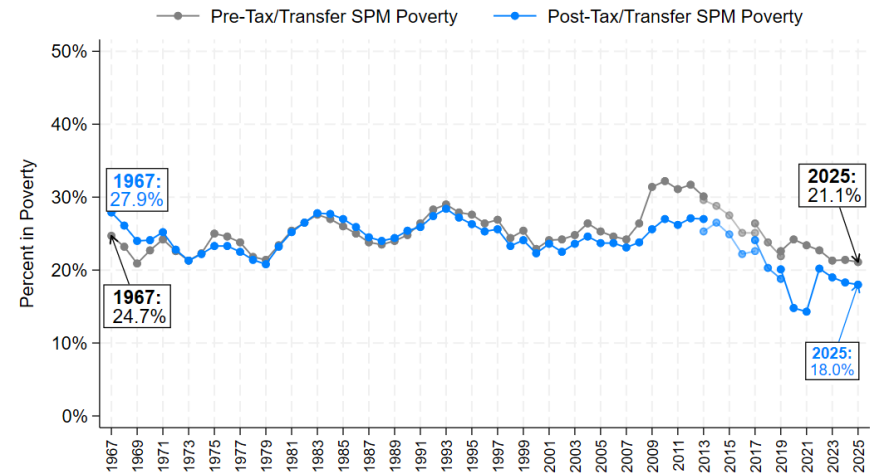
Figure 3. Young adult (aged 18-24) poverty rates under three measures (1967–2025)

Panel A: Historical Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM)



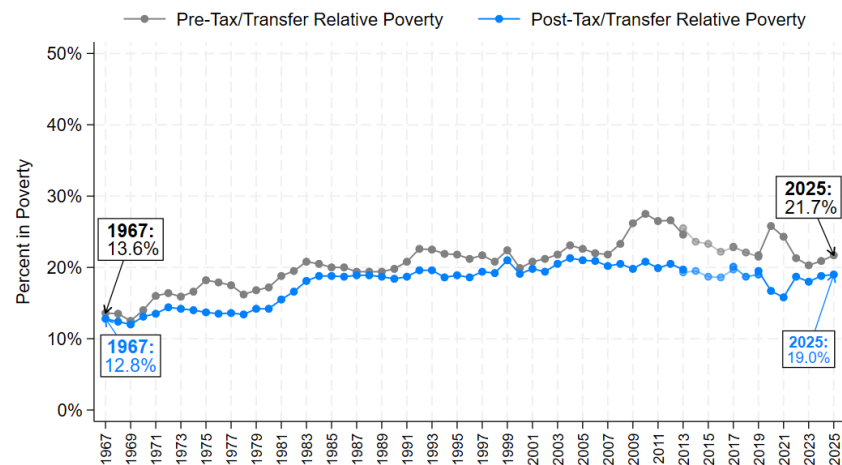
Source: Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University, 2026; analysis of the CPS ASEC (1968-2025) & [historical Supplemental Poverty Measure series](#) (Wimer et al. 2025).

Panel B: Anchored 2025 Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM)



Source: Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University, 2026; analysis of the CPS ASEC (1968-2025) & [historical Supplemental Poverty Measure series](#) (Wimer et al. 2025).

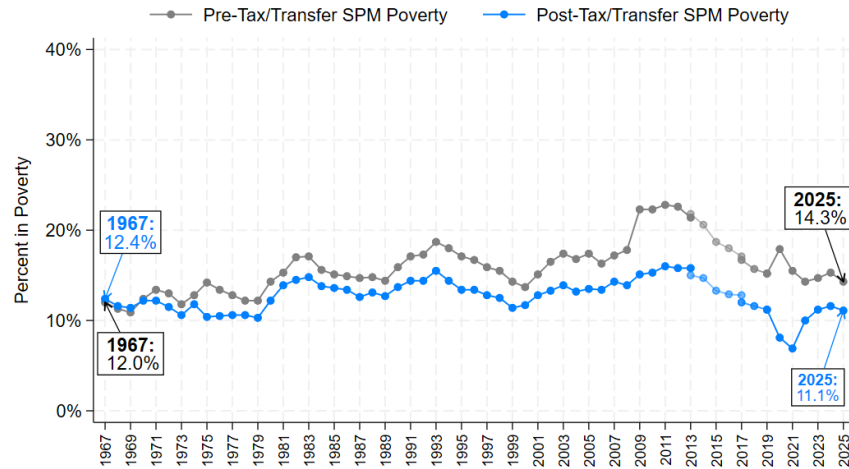
Panel C: Relative Poverty Measure



Source: Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University, 2026; analysis of the CPS ASEC (1968-2025) & [historical Supplemental Poverty Measure series](#) (Wimer et al. 2025).

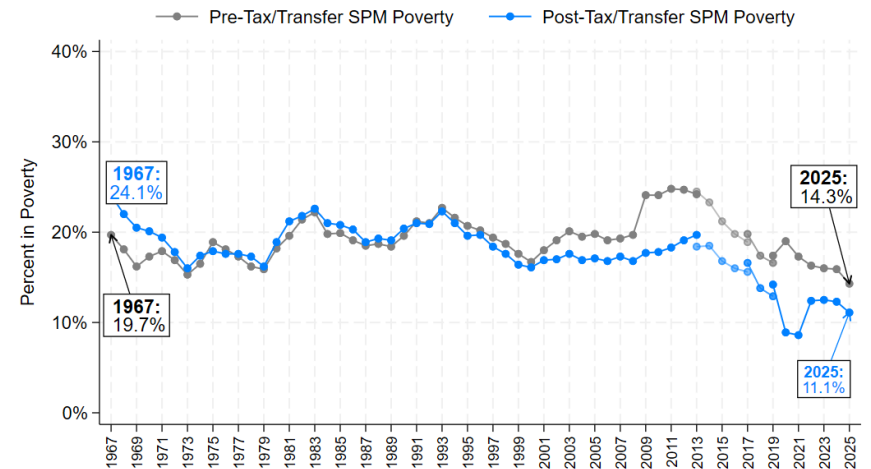
Figure 4. Young adult (aged 25-34) poverty rates under three measures (1967–2025)

Panel A: Historical Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM)



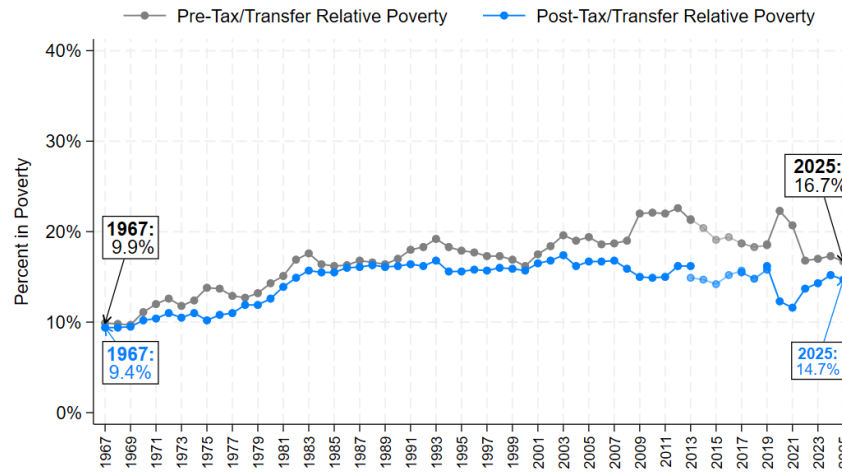
Source: Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University, 2026; analysis of the CPS ASEC (1968-2025) & [historical Supplemental Poverty Measure series](#) (Wimer et al. 2025).

Panel B: Anchored 2025 Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM)



Source: Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University, 2026; analysis of the CPS ASEC (1968-2025) & [historical Supplemental Poverty Measure series](#) (Wimer et al. 2025).

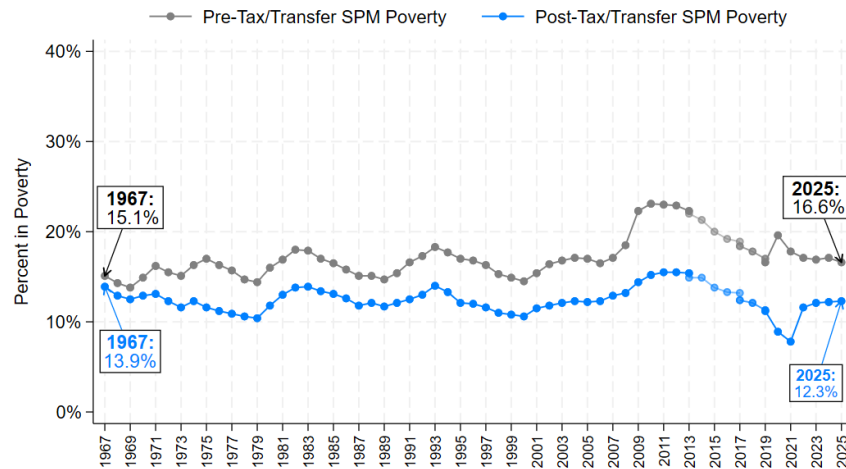
Panel C: Relative Poverty Measure



Source: Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University, 2026; analysis of the CPS ASEC (1968-2025) & [historical Supplemental Poverty Measure series](#) (Wimer et al. 2025).

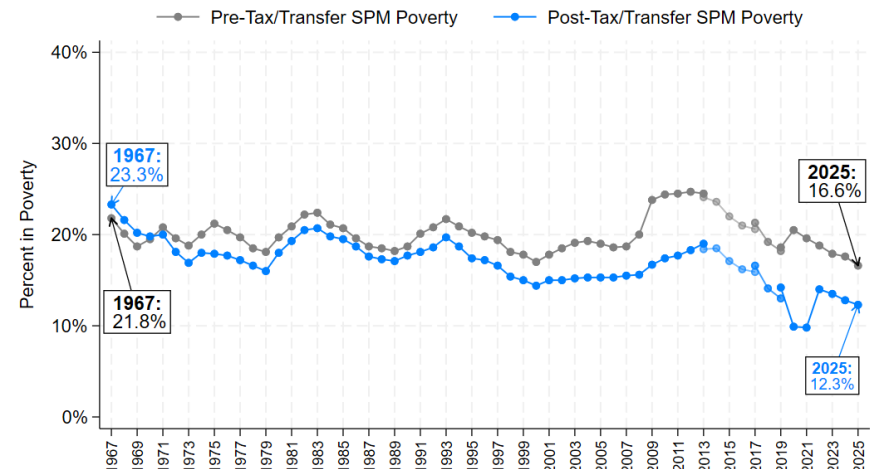
Figure 5. Working-age adult (aged 18-64) poverty rates under three measures (1967–2025)

Panel A: Historical Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM)



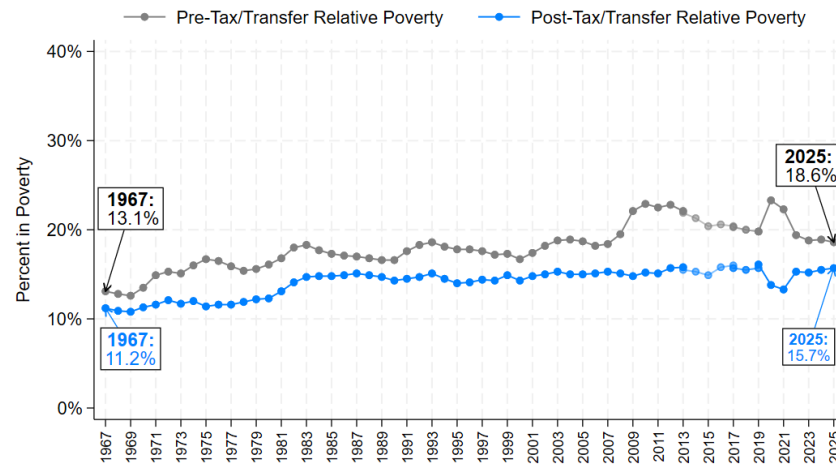
Source: Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University, 2026; analysis of the CPS ASEC (1968-2025) & [historical Supplemental Poverty Measure series](#) (Wimer et al. 2025).

Panel B: Anchored 2025 Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM)



Source: Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University, 2026; analysis of the CPS ASEC (1968-2025) & [historical Supplemental Poverty Measure series](#) (Wimer et al. 2025).

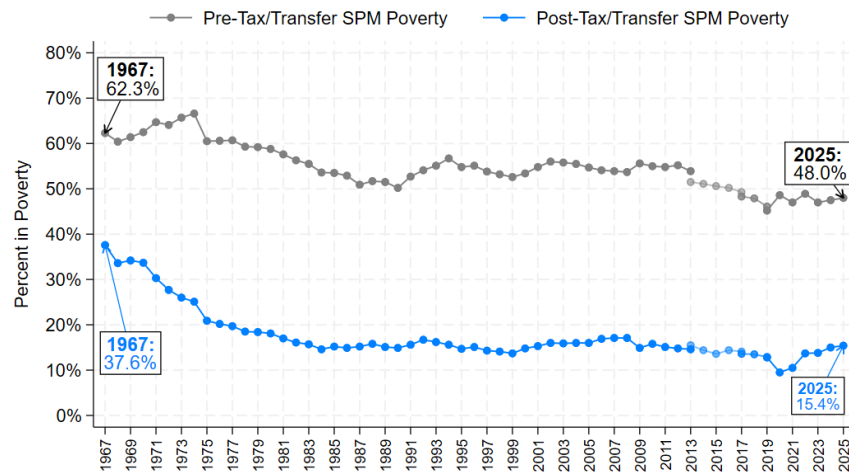
Panel C: Relative Poverty Measure



Source: Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University, 2026; analysis of the CPS ASEC (1968-2025) & [historical Supplemental Poverty Measure series](#) (Wimer et al. 2025).

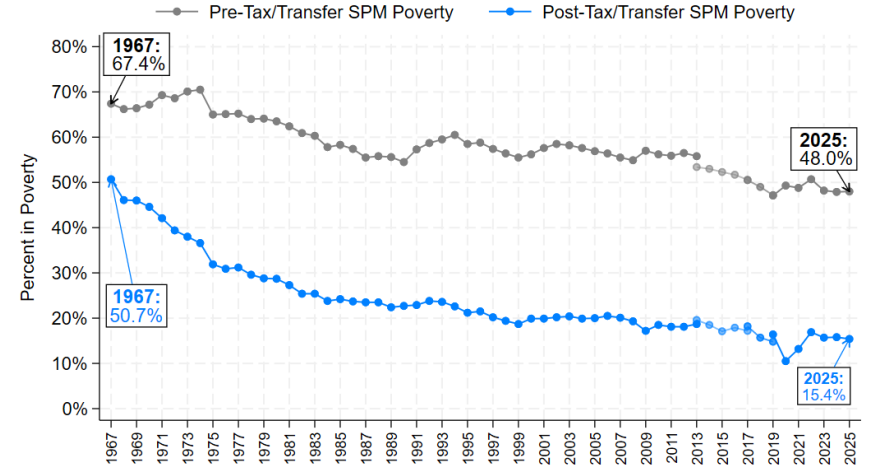
Figure 6. Older adult (aged 65 and above) poverty rates under three measures (1967–2025)

Panel A: Historical Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM)



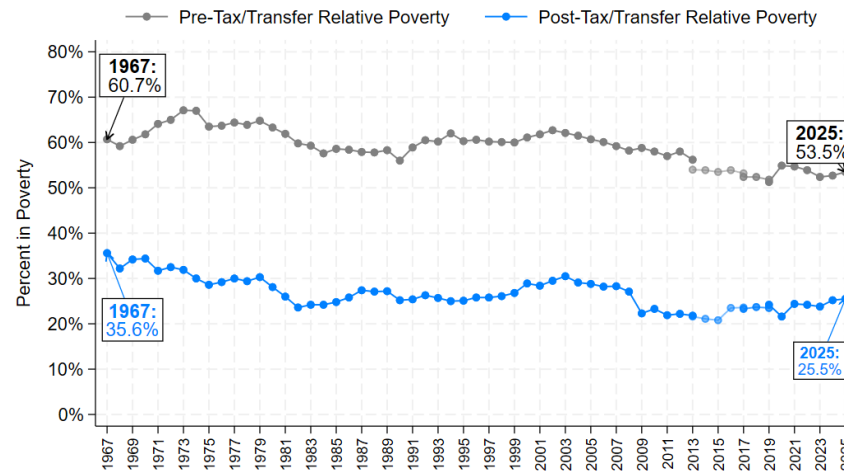
Source: Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University, 2026; analysis of the CPS ASEC (1968-2025) & [historical Supplemental Poverty Measure series](#) (Wimer et al. 2025).

Panel B: Anchored 2025 Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM)



Source: Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University, 2026; analysis of the CPS ASEC (1968-2025) & [historical Supplemental Poverty Measure series](#) (Wimer et al. 2025).

Panel C: Relative Poverty Measure



Source: Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University, 2026; analysis of the CPS ASEC (1968-2025) & [historical Supplemental Poverty Measure series](#) (Wimer et al. 2025).