

New and Recurring Food Insecurity During and After the COVID-19 Pandemic in a Nationally Representative Sample

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Introduction

Food insecurity affected roughly 10% of US households in 2019 and 2021 and rose to 12.8% in 2022.¹ Prior studies of food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic have been cross-sectional; no longitudinal study has examined transitions into and out of food insecurity during this time.

Study Objective

Examine food security status transitions among households in the US from 2019-2023 and differences by income and participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

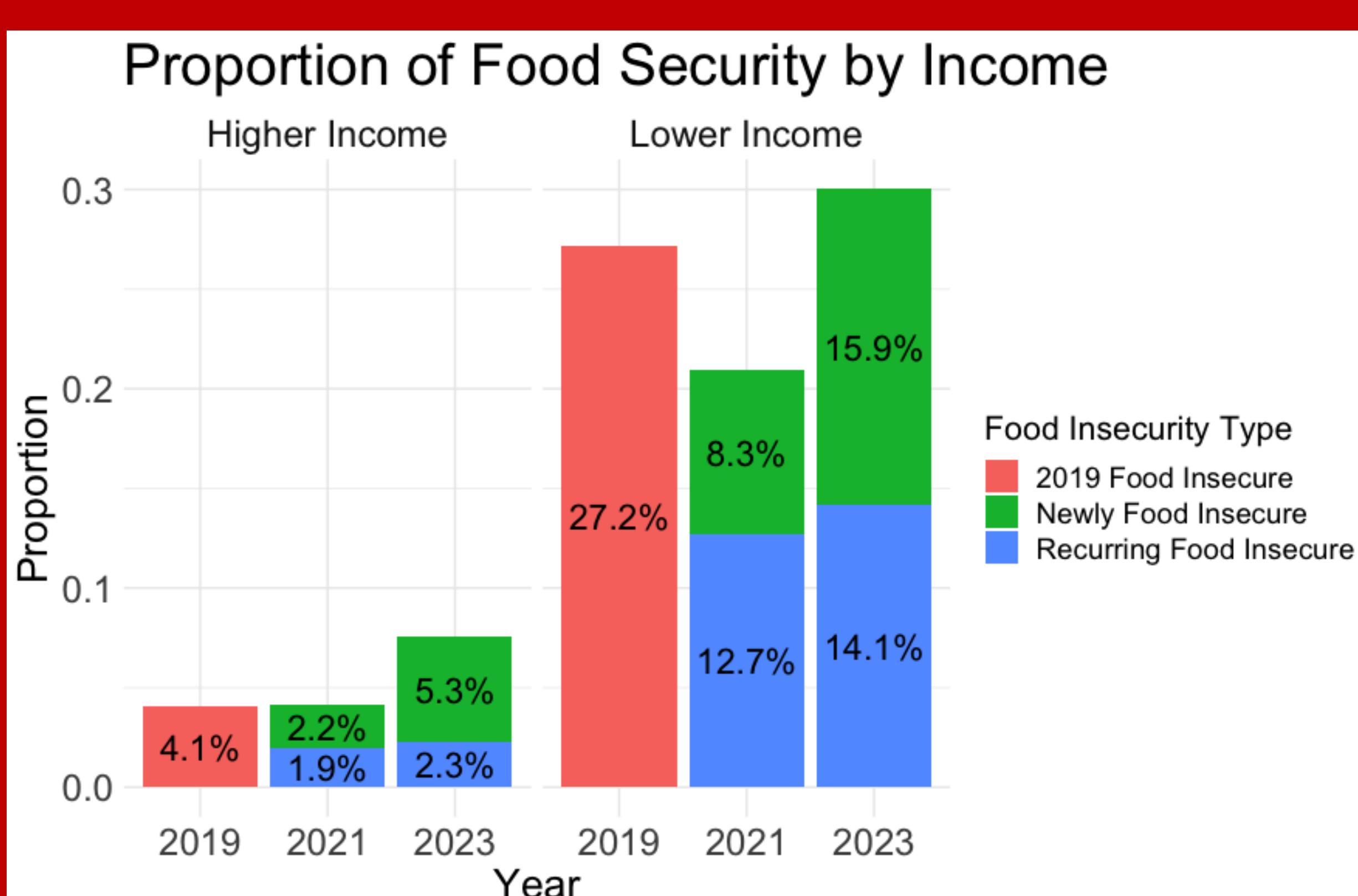
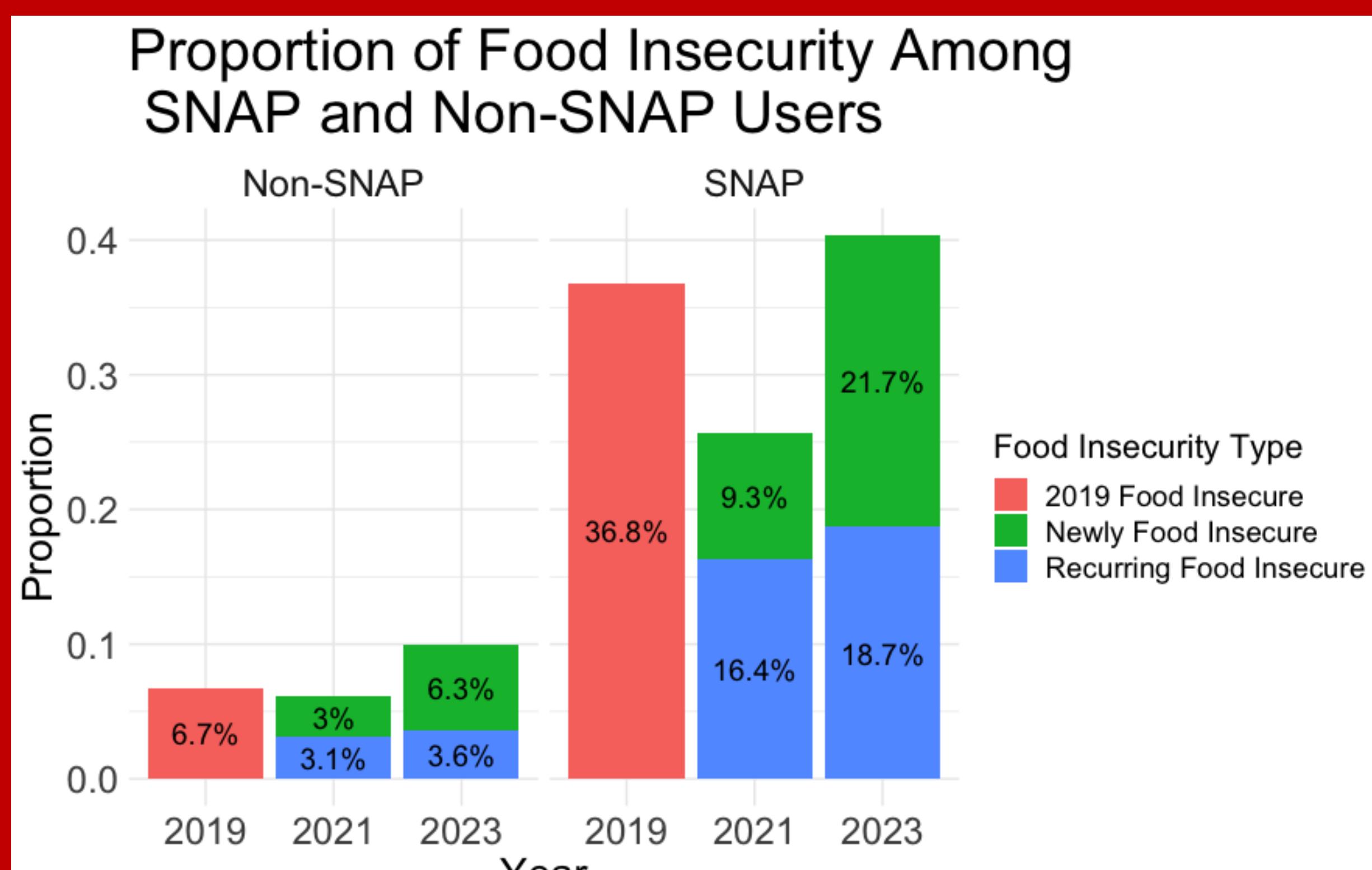
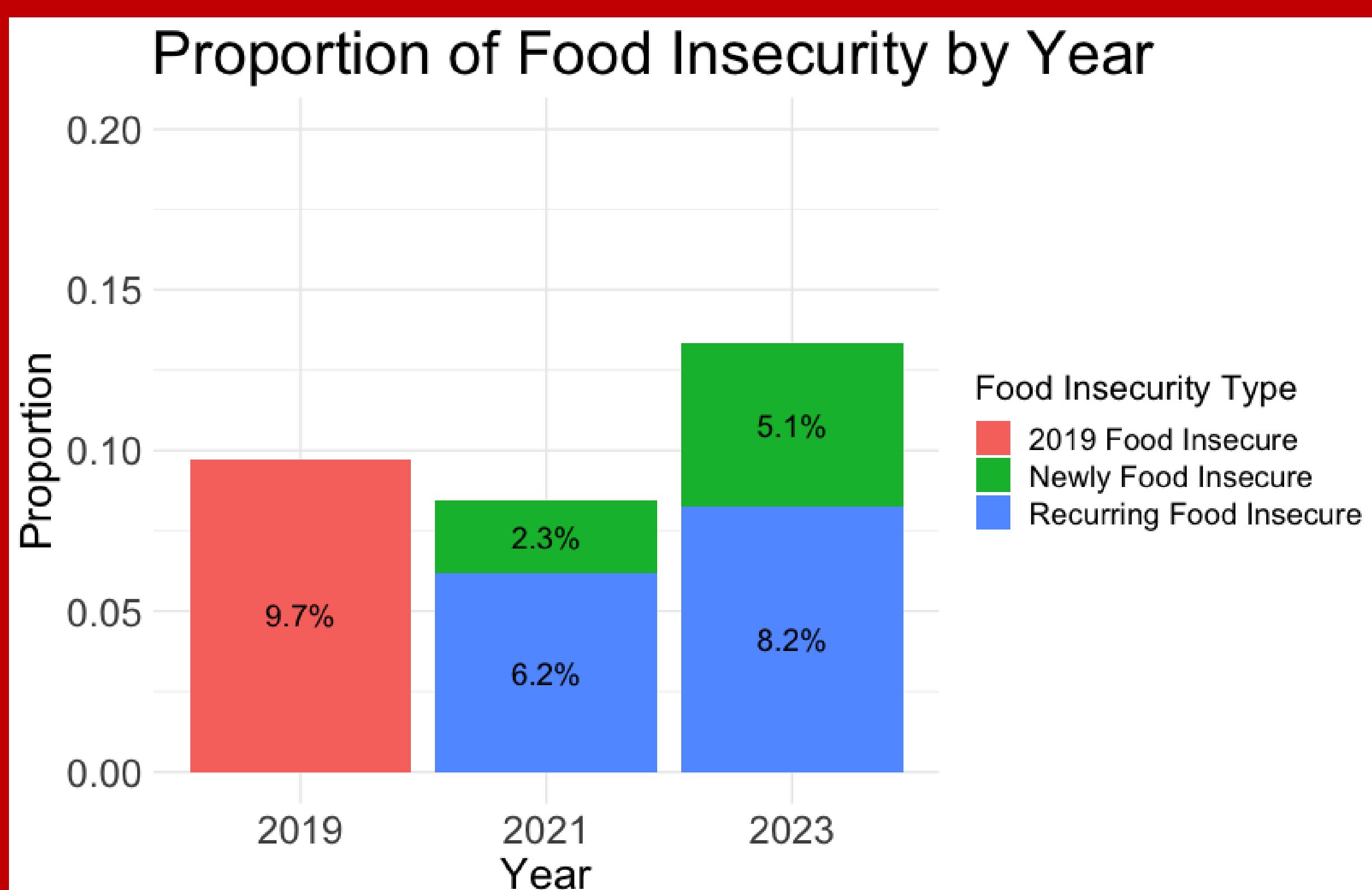
Methods

Study design and population:

- 2019, 2021, and 2023 waves of Panel Survey of Income Dynamics (PSID)
- Balanced panel of 21,653 individuals from 7,475 households
- Lower income: Below 200% of the Federal Poverty Line

Food Insecurity:

- Assessed with the USDA 18-item Household Food Security Module
- Newly food insecure: if not food insecure in the previous survey wave
- Recurring food insecure: if food insecure during the last survey wave
- Stratified by SNAP participation and household income



Results

- Overall:** The prevalence of food insecurity (FI) in our sample was 8.5% in 2021 and 13.33% in 2023. In 2021, more than 1 in 4 households experiencing FI (26.8%) were newly FI, and 73.2% had recurring FI. In 2023, 38.2% of households experiencing FI were newly FI, and 61.8% had recurring FI.
- SNAP:** Among SNAP-participating households, FI was 25.7% in 2021 and 40.4% in 2023. Over one-third of households who used SNAP and were FI were newly FI in 2021 (36.2%) and two-thirds had recurring FI (63.6%) compared with 53.7% being newly FI and 46.3% having recurring FI in 2023.
- Poverty:** Among households with low incomes, in 2021, 20.9% of households were FI, and in 2023, 30.0% were FI. Among individuals with higher incomes, the prevalence of FI nearly doubled from 4.2% in 2021 to 7.6% in 2023. In 2023, 70.5% of higher-income households who experienced FI were newly FI.

Implications

- A substantial proportion of individuals in 2023 were newly food insecure, particularly among SNAP participants.
- The expiration of multiple SNAP policies that increased benefits and facilitated participation during the pandemic may explain the increase in food insecurity among SNAP participants.
- Higher-income households also experienced food insecurity. They are not routinely screened for food insecurity by ongoing national surveys, efforts are needed to obtain more accurate measures of food insecurity in the future and to prevent households from falling into cycles of food insecurity.

References:

- Rabbitt, M.P., Hales, L.J., Burke, M.P., & Coleman-Jensen, A. (2023). Household Food Security in the United States in 2022 (Report No. ERR-325), U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.