



SOCIAL SECURITY - MICHIGAN QUESTIONNAIRE -

Field Dates:	August 2-17, 2024	
Sample Size:	Michigan: 601 Adults	National: 1,224 Adults
Confidence Interval:	Michigan: +/- 4.5%	National: +/- 3.2%

Sample Provided by: Multiple online opt-in panels, including Cint, Dynata and Prodege. Sample collection and quality control was managed by QuantifyAI under the direction of the University of Maryland's Program for Public Consultation.

This survey is going to address policies regarding Social Security.

You will be provided background information, as well as arguments for and against each policy. This survey will take about 20 minutes to answer. Your answers will remain completely anonymous.

First, we are going to ask you a few questions about yourself, such as your age, ethnicity, income, and education.

This information is important because it allows us to make sure we have a representative sample.

PRIVACY NOTICE: The answers to these questions and all of your personal information will be kept **completely anonymous and confidential**. We are both ethically committed to protecting your privacy, and as part of the University of Maryland we are legally required to do so.

Thank you for taking part in this policymaking simulation on Social Security. Social Security is facing some major challenges that Congress is having serious trouble resolving. So, who better to turn to for advice than the American people?

You will now go through a process that simulates the process a Member of Congress goes through in making a policy decision. You will:

- get a background briefing on Social Security;
- weigh a range of proposals that Congress is considering, together with pro and con arguments for each; and
- finally, make a set of recommendations that make the most sense to you.

Everything you will see has been reviewed by experts and congressional staffers, both Democrats and Republicans, so you can be assured that it is factual and balanced.

If at any time you find that you do not want to answer a question, feel free to skip it and move on to the next one.

So, let's get started with your briefing. Here are some basic facts about Social Security.

- All workers are required to pay 6.2% of all of their wages and salaries up to a certain maximum amount, called a cap, which is currently \$169,000 a year. Their employer pays a matching amount. These are called payroll taxes. Earnings above the cap are not subject to the payroll tax.
- Provided that workers have paid payroll taxes into Social Security for a total of at least 10 years, when they retire they receive monthly benefits for the rest of their lives.
- The level of benefits a person receives is related to his or her average earnings, and thus the amount of payroll taxes they have paid.

Q1. Overall, would you say your view of Social Security is:

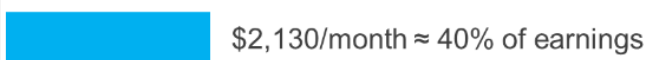
	Very positive	Somewhat positive	Total positive	Somewhat negative	Very negative	Total negative	Ref/DK
Michigan	32%	53%	85%	11%	4%	15%	0%
GOP	28%	56%	83%	12%	4%	17%	0%
Dem.	37%	51%	88%	10%	2%	12%	0%
National	42%	44%	86%	13%	2%	14%	0%
GOP	37%	45%	82%	16%	3%	18%	0%
Dem.	51%	41%	92%	8%	1%	8%	0%
Indep.	27%	53%	80%	18%	2%	20%	0%

Currently, the average monthly benefit amount is \$2,130 a month for a person who retires at the normal retirement age.¹ This is the benefit that goes to someone whose average lifetime earnings were about \$5,520 a month (adjusted for inflation). Thus, such a person receives about 40% of those earnings.²

Average Lifetime Earnings



Average Monthly Benefits



Q2. Does the monthly benefit seem:

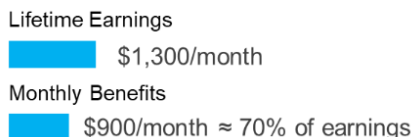
1. Higher than you expected
2. About the same as you expected
3. Lower than you expected

	Higher than you expected	About the same as you expected	Lower than you expected	Ref/DK
Michigan	18%	51%	31%	0%
GOP	18%	53%	29%	0%
Dem.	18%	50%	32%	0%
National	27%	46%	27%	0%
GOP	24%	46%	29%	0%
Dem.	32%	44%	24%	0%
Indep.	22%	51%	26%	1%

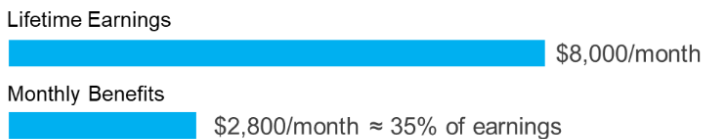
Benefits are progressive. This means that lower-income workers receive a higher benefit relative to their earnings before they retired than higher-income workers do. Here is an example. If Person A's average lifetime earnings were \$1,300 a month, their Social Security monthly benefit would be about \$900 or about 70% of prior earnings. For comparison, if Person B's average lifetime earnings were about \$8,000 a month, Person B's monthly benefit would be about \$2,800, or about 35% of prior earnings.

Social Security Benefits are Progressive

Person A



Person B



We are now going to address three issues about Social Security that are under consideration in Congress.

The first issue we will address is that the Social Security trustees have projected that in 2033 the Social Security Trust Fund will not have enough funds to pay the level of benefits that are scheduled to be paid by present law. Benefits would then be financed from current payroll taxes only and would drop by 21%. We will call this the Social Security shortfall. You will be asked to consider approaches for dealing with this shortfall that include both reducing benefits and increasing revenues.

¹ [2024 Annual Trustees Report, Table V.C7](#). This is different than the average benefit for all retired workers, which according to [SSA, Beneficiary Data: April 2024](#) is \$1,830. It is lower because it includes those who retired before the normal retirement age. According to the [Congressional Research Service](#), of all new SS beneficiaries, about 60% retired before the normal retirement age, which substantially drags down the average benefit.

² [2024 Annual Trustees Report, Table V.C1](#), career-average earnings at normal retirement age, intermediate 2021.

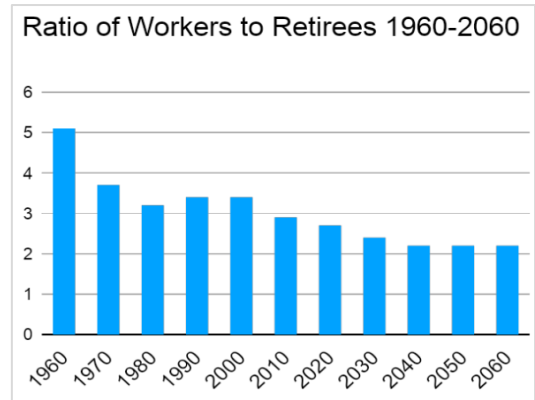
The second issue is whether Social Security benefits are adequate for certain groups. You will be asked to consider proposals for increasing benefits for certain groups. The third issue is how cost of living adjustments (or COLAs) for inflation should be calculated. You will be asked to consider two different proposals for changing this calculation.

We will first address the **Social Security shortfall**—the shortage of funds projected for the year 2033.

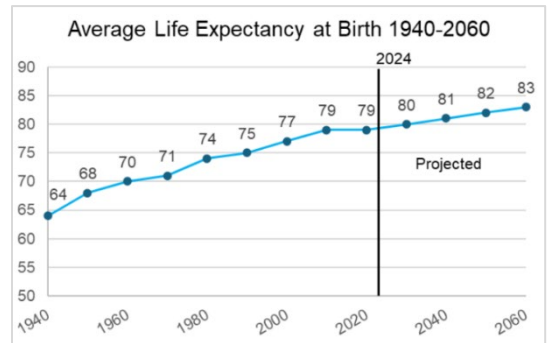
Q3. How much have you heard or read about the Social Security shortfall?

	A lot	Some	A lot - Some	A little	Nothing	A little - Nothing	Ref/DK
Michigan	17%	35%	52%	30%	18%	48%	0%
GOP	17%	37%	55%	28%	17%	45%	0%
Dem.	18%	34%	52%	32%	16%	48%	0%
National	22%	34%	56%	27%	17%	44%	0%
GOP	21%	34%	55%	27%	18%	45%	0%
Dem.	26%	35%	61%	26%	13%	39%	0%
Indep.	10%	33%	43%	34%	23%	57%	0%

The Social Security shortfall has several major causes. One of these is that **Americans have been having fewer children**. This means that the ratio of workers contributing to Social Security as compared to the number of retirees receiving Social Security benefits is going down. In the figure below you can see how this has changed over time and how it is projected for the future.

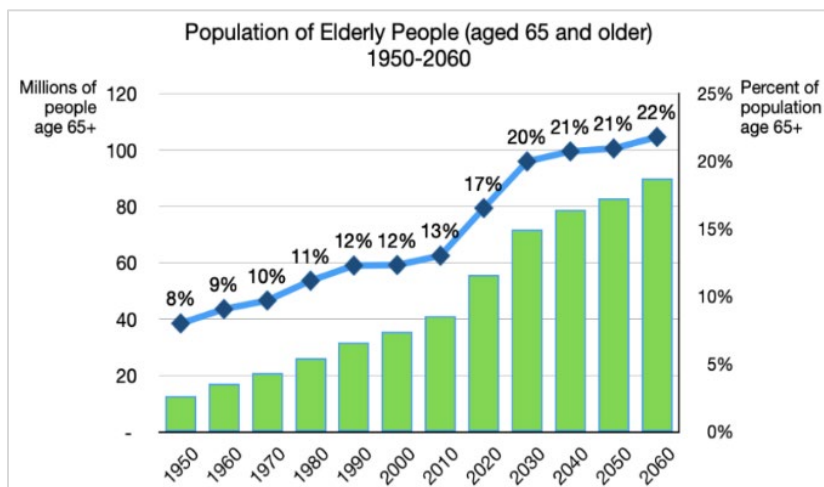


Another factor contributing to the shortfall is that **Americans are living longer** and thus receiving benefits for more years.



Another factor contributing to the shortfall is that **wages for middle and lower-income workers have not been growing** as much as was expected, decreasing the amount of payroll taxes flowing into the Social Security Trust Fund.

Another factor contributing to the shortfall is that the large baby boom generation is entering retirement and **increasing the percentage of the population that is eligible for Social Security**. This will put more demands on Social Security.³



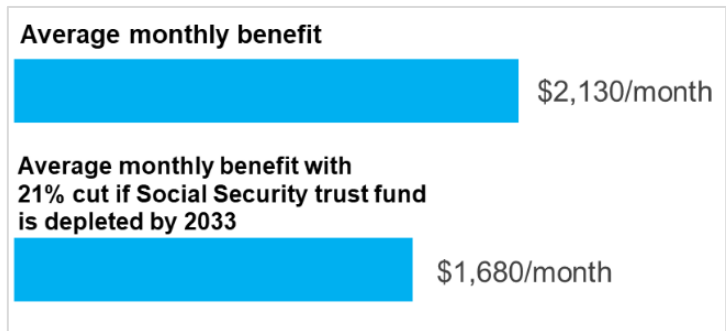
³ 2024 Annual Trustees Report, Table V.A3

Finally, contributing to the shortfall is the fact that **Congress has not taken action** for some decades to adjust revenues and benefits to keep the program in long-term balance. The last such legislation was passed in 1986.

The impact of the Social Security shortfall, if no action is taken, would be as follows:

Average monthly benefits, in current dollars, would go down from \$2,130 to \$1,680.

The percentage of seniors living under the poverty line would double. Assuming the same level of poverty as today, the poverty level for seniors would rise from 9% to 18%.⁴



We are now going to look at policy options for dealing with the Social Security shortfall. The government has two possible approaches: it can:

- reduce Social Security benefits --or--
- Increase revenues.

We will first explore the approach of reducing Social Security benefits, which would reduce the shortfall by reducing expenses.

One option for reducing benefits is to reduce the amount of benefits that people with higher earnings will receive when they retire in the future.

Currently, the more people earned while working (up to \$169,000), the more they receive in monthly benefits. One option --for new retirees only--is to gradually lower benefits for people who had higher earnings. Their benefits would still be higher than for people who had lower earnings, but their benefits would be less than people in that income group are currently scheduled to receive.

You are now going to evaluate arguments **in favor** of and **against** this option. Later you will assess some specific proposals. For each argument, please select whether you find the argument convincing or unconvincing.

Here are two arguments **in favor of** lowering monthly benefits for people who had higher earnings. For each, please select whether you find it convincing or unconvincing:

Q4. We have to cover the Social Security shortfall in one way or another. Wealthier retirees have other ways to fund their retirement, such as pensions and savings. But right now they get benefits that are higher than other people. This gap should be reduced so that their benefits are more like others. It's only fair.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref/DK
Michigan	23%	45%	68%	19%	12%	32%	1%
GOP	17%	45%	62%	19%	19%	38%	0%
Dem.	29%	46%	75%	17%	7%	24%	1%
National	29%	45%	75%	15%	9%	23%	2%
GOP	25%	44%	69%	17%	11%	29%	2%
Dem.	37%	45%	82%	10%	7%	17%	2%
Indep.	19%	51%	70%	22%	6%	28%	2%

⁴ [The Distributional Consequences of a "No-Action" Scenario](#) estimates that letting the reserves run out would double the poverty rate among seniors; [U.S. Census Bureau Poverty Tables POV01](#)

Q5. Social Security was established with the express purpose of ensuring that older or disabled Americans would not fall into poverty. It really makes no sense that people with higher incomes even get higher benefits than people with lesser incomes.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref/DK
Michigan	33%	34%	67%	20%	12%	32%	0%
GOP	29%	28%	58%	25%	17%	42%	0%
Dem.	39%	36%	75%	16%	8%	24%	0%
National	36%	39%	75%	16%	9%	25%	0%
GOP	33%	36%	69%	19%	12%	30%	0%
Dem.	41%	39%	81%	13%	6%	19%	0%
Indep.	28%	47%	74%	19%	7%	26%	0%

Here are two arguments **against** lowering monthly benefits for people who had higher earnings.

Q6. Many of the proposals for reducing benefits based on income would end up hurting some people who are part of the middle class, particularly people who live in areas of the country where the cost of living is high. We should not change Social Security in a way that forces seniors to lower their quality of life.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref/DK
Michigan	33%	43%	76%	16%	6%	23%	1%
GOP	34%	42%	76%	17%	7%	24%	0%
Dem.	34%	44%	77%	17%	5%	21%	2%
National	34%	42%	77%	17%	4%	22%	2%
GOP	32%	44%	76%	17%	4%	22%	2%
Dem.	39%	39%	78%	16%	4%	20%	2%
Indep.	27%	48%	74%	21%	4%	24%	2%

Q7. American workers have been paying Social Security payroll taxes for all their working lives on the promise that they would be getting this money back in the form of benefits. Reducing expected benefits to people who make more money is a violation of this understanding and changes Social Security from a retirement program into a welfare program.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref/DK
Michigan	37%	39%	76%	17%	8%	24%	0%
GOP	40%	39%	78%	16%	6%	22%	0%
Dem.	37%	37%	74%	18%	8%	26%	0%
National	37%	42%	79%	15%	6%	21%	0%
GOP	41%	39%	80%	15%	5%	20%	0%
Dem.	38%	42%	80%	14%	6%	20%	0%
Indep.	23%	50%	73%	18%	8%	26%	1%

Now that you have considered all these arguments, we would like you to evaluate two proposals for reducing benefits for people with higher lifetime earnings. All of these proposals would only apply to the benefits of new retirees. Their benefits would still be higher than people who had lower earnings, but their benefits would be less than people in that income group currently receive.

Q8a. The first proposal is to reduce the monthly benefits for **the top 20 percent of earners**. This would **reduce** the Social Security shortfall by **11%**.⁵

Please select how acceptable this proposal is to you on the scale below.

(0-4)	5	(6-10)	Ref/DK
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⁵ Extrapolated from SSA's [Detailed Single Year Figures](#) for Provision B1.5, aligning with the estimate by [Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget](#) Social Security Reformer tool

Michigan	24%	19%	57%	1%
GOP	31%	18%	50%	1%
Dem.	17%	17%	66%	0%
National	19%	18%	63%	1%
GOP	23%	17%	59%	0%
Dem.	13%	15%	71%	1%
Indep.	23%	30%	47%	0%

Q8b. Another proposal is to reduce the monthly benefits for **the top 40 percent of earners**. This would **reduce** the Social Security shortfall by **23%**.⁶

	(0-4)	5	(6-10)	Ref./DK
Michigan	40%	15%	45%	1%
GOP	46%	14%	39%	0%
Dem.	35%	14%	50%	1%
National	30%	17%	53%	1%
GOP	34%	16%	49%	1%
Dem.	24%	14%	61%	1%
Indep.	34%	29%	36%	2%

Q8c. Another proposal is to reduce the monthly benefits for **the top 50 percent of earners**. This would **reduce** the Social Security shortfall by **31%**.⁷

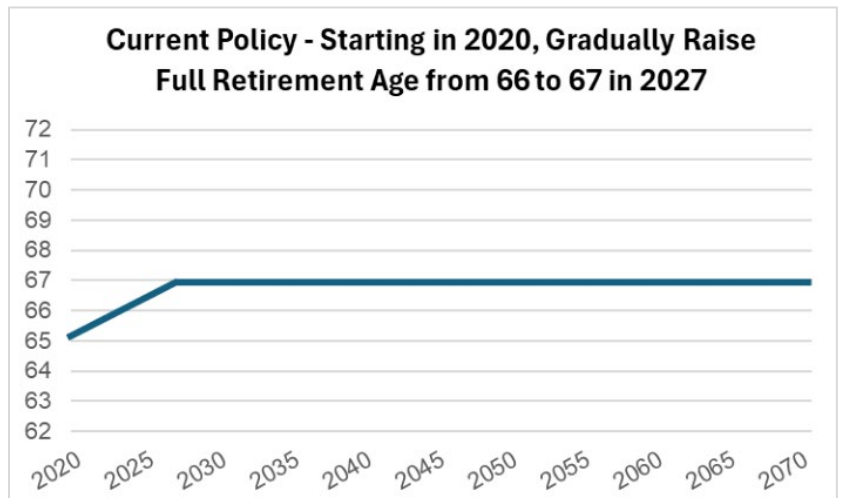
	(0-4)	5	(6-10)	Ref./DK
Michigan	45%	13%	37%	5%
GOP	50%	11%	35%	4%
Dem.	43%	13%	39%	6%
National	38%	12%	46%	4%
GOP	40%	12%	44%	4%
Dem.	34%	11%	52%	3%
Indep.	41%	20%	33%	6%

Another policy option is to reduce benefits by raising the full retirement age, which would reduce the total amount of benefits people would receive over their lifetime. (Note: This option does NOT change people's ability to take early retirement—with correspondingly lower monthly benefits—which would still start at 62.)

Currently, the full retirement age is 66 years. According to current law, it is scheduled to gradually rise until it reaches 67 by the year 2027 and then will stop rising. This has no effect on those already receiving Social Security. It does affect those born in 1960 or later. The graph below shows how the current law increases the full retirement age.

One policy option is to continue to gradually increase the retirement age beyond the age of 67, so that it eventually reaches a higher age.

Here are **two arguments in favor** of this option.



Q9. With people living longer, the number of retirees receiving benefits is growing. At the same time birth rates are lower, diminishing the

⁶ SSA. Solvency Provisions. B1.5

⁷ SSA. Solvency Provisions. B1.4

number of workers who contribute revenue to Social Security. Thus, it is not affordable and simply not realistic to have people retire as early as they have.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref/DK
Michigan	16%	47%	62%	25%	12%	37%	1%
GOP	13%	49%	61%	27%	11%	38%	1%
Dem.	20%	46%	67%	21%	11%	32%	1%
National	21%	46%	67%	22%	11%	32%	1%
GOP	20%	44%	64%	23%	12%	35%	1%
Dem.	25%	45%	70%	19%	10%	29%	1%
Indep.	10%	54%	65%	25%	9%	34%	2%

Q10. People at 66 are now much healthier than in the past and most of the work people do is much less physically demanding, so it is appropriate for people to work a little bit longer before retiring. Raising the retirement age is a common-sense response to how life has changed in the modern era.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref/DK
Michigan	21%	43%	64%	23%	13%	36%	0%
GOP	18%	44%	62%	23%	14%	37%	0%
Dem.	24%	43%	67%	20%	13%	33%	0%
National	23%	43%	67%	21%	12%	33%	0%
GOP	22%	45%	67%	21%	12%	33%	0%
Dem.	28%	41%	69%	18%	13%	31%	0%
Indep.	13%	47%	60%	29%	11%	40%	0%

Here are **two arguments against** gradually raising the full retirement age beyond 67.

Q11. Raising the retirement age is unfair because many workers in their 60s still hold physically demanding jobs--blue-collar jobs, or retail jobs where they are on their feet all day. For them, it is already a stretch for the retirement age to rise to 67 as planned; it should not rise any further.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref/DK
Michigan	37%	40%	78%	17%	5%	22%	0%
GOP	37%	39%	76%	17%	8%	24%	0%
Dem.	40%	42%	83%	13%	4%	17%	0%
National	36%	41%	76%	17%	6%	23%	1%
GOP	34%	44%	78%	18%	4%	22%	0%
Dem.	41%	36%	77%	15%	7%	22%	1%
Indep.	26%	44%	70%	23%	5%	28%	2%

Q12. Raising the retirement age is just a benefit cut by another name--in fact each worker will get less over their lifetime. It is particularly unfair to people with lower incomes and minorities. Because on average they do not live as long, they get less back in Social Security benefits over their lifetime for the amount they put in; thus, raising the retirement age will cut a disproportionately large percentage of their average lifetime benefits.

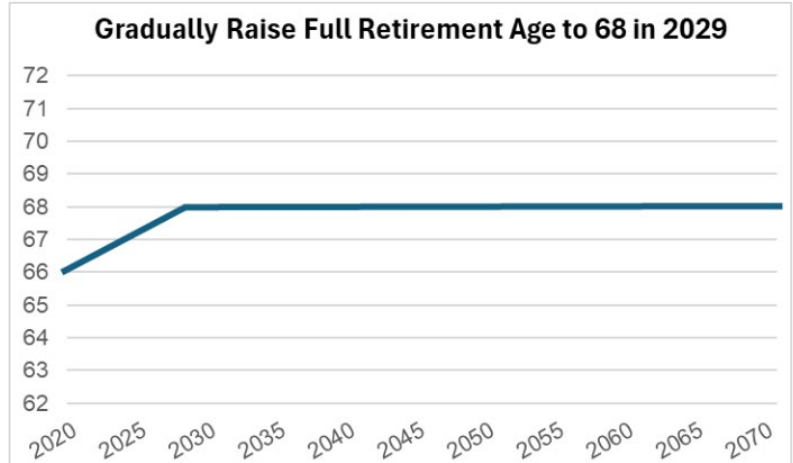
	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref/DK
Michigan	30%	42%	72%	20%	8%	28%	0%
GOP	26%	41%	67%	23%	10%	33%	0%
Dem.	36%	42%	78%	16%	6%	22%	0%
National	33%	42%	76%	18%	6%	24%	0%
GOP	32%	42%	74%	20%	6%	26%	0%
Dem.	38%	41%	79%	15%	7%	21%	0%



Now that you have considered all the arguments, here are three proposals for raising the retirement age.

Q13a. One proposal is to continue gradually raising the full retirement age until it reaches 68 for people retiring in 2029. This step would **reduce** the Social Security shortfall by **15%**.⁸

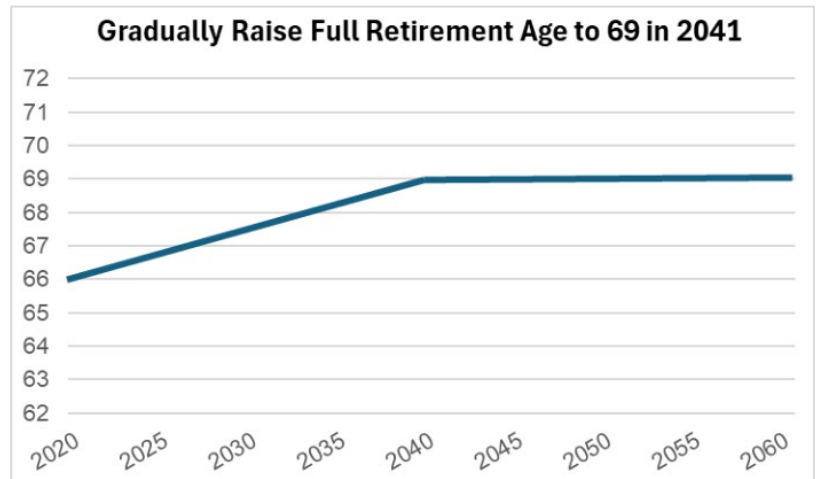
Please select how acceptable this proposal is to you on the scale below.



	(0-4)	5	(6-10)	Ref./DK
Michigan	32%	19%	48%	1%
GOP	32%	19%	49%	0%
Dem.	35%	17%	48%	0%
National	30%	16%	53%	1%
GOP	31%	15%	54%	0%
Dem.	26%	14%	58%	2%
Indep.	38%	26%	36%	1%

Q13b. Another proposal is to continue to gradually raise the full retirement age until it reaches age 69 for people retiring in 2041. This step would **reduce** the Social Security shortfall by **21%**.⁹

Please select how acceptable this proposal is to you on the scale below.



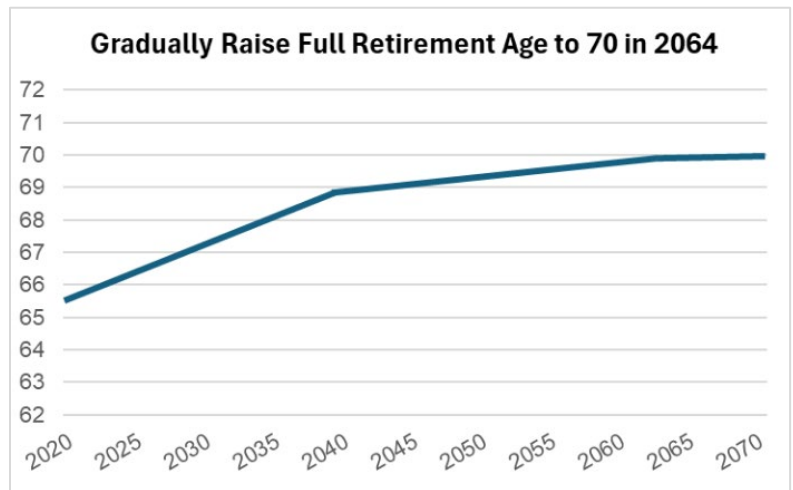
⁸ SSA. Solvency Provisions. C1.2

⁹ Solvency provision from the original Fixing Social Security survey ([S.804 - Social Security Solvency and Sustainability Act](#) by Sen. Graham (112th Congress))

	(0-4)	5	(6-10)	Ref./DK
Michigan	44%	15%	41%	1%
GOP	45%	16%	39%	0%
Dem.	46%	12%	42%	0%
National	38%	14%	47%	1%
GOP	40%	13%	46%	2%
Dem.	35%	12%	53%	0%
Indep.	42%	25%	32%	1%

Q13c. Another proposal is to continue to gradually raise the full retirement age until it reaches age 69 in 2041 and then slow the pace, raising it until it reaches age 70 in 2064. This step would **reduce** the Social Security shortfall by **29%**.¹⁰

Please select how acceptable this proposal is to you on the scale below.



	(0-4)	5	(6-10)	Ref./DK
Michigan	47%	14%	40%	0%
GOP	51%	13%	36%	0%
Dem.	46%	11%	43%	0%
National	40%	14%	46%	1%
GOP	39%	13%	48%	1%
Dem.	40%	11%	49%	0%
Indep.	46%	24%	30%	1%

Now we will explore the approach of **increasing revenues** that go to the Social Security fund, in order to deal with the projected Social Security shortfall.

Currently, the amount of wages that are subject to the Social Security payroll tax includes all wages up to a cap of \$169,000 per year.

One policy option is to make all wages over \$400,000 taxable as well, effective immediately. This would not include income from dividends or capital gains.

Wages between \$169,000 and \$400,000 would not be taxable initially. But, over time the cap of \$169,000 would rise with inflation, as it currently does. At some point, decades in the future, this cap could reach \$400,000 so that all wages would be taxed.

By this plan, the amount of taxes paid by people with very high wages would rise. Their benefits would also rise, but only slightly.

This step would **reduce** the Social Security shortfall by **60%**.¹¹

Here are arguments in **favor** of and **against** making all income above \$400,000 subject to the subject to the Social Security payroll tax. Q14. The incomes of the wealthy have been growing by leaps and bounds, while the incomes of the middle class have been stagnating. It is time for the wealthy to step up and do their part by helping to make Social Security secure. Besides, all it means is that they pay the payroll tax all year (like everybody else), not just the first part of the year.

¹⁰ Solvency provision from the original Fixing Social Security survey

¹¹ [SSA, Solvency Provisions, E2.13](#); [TaxPolicyCenter Analysis of Biden's Social Security Plan](#) and [Social Security 2100 Act by Sen. Blumenthal and Rep. Larson](#) from the 118th Congress.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref/DK
Michigan	47%	34%	81%	13%	6%	19%	1%
GOP	37%	36%	74%	17%	9%	25%	1%
Dem.	57%	30%	87%	9%	5%	13%	0%
National	47%	36%	83%	11%	4%	15%	1%
GOP	41%	40%	81%	13%	5%	17%	1%
Dem.	56%	31%	87%	10%	3%	12%	1%
Indep.	37%	43%	80%	14%	6%	20%	1%

Q15. Higher taxes will discourage high income earners from working and encourage tax evasion. They will also have less money to make investments that create jobs and promote economic activity. This will hurt the economy.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref/DK
Michigan	16%	31%	46%	33%	21%	54%	0%
GOP	17%	32%	49%	34%	18%	51%	0%
Dem.	16%	31%	46%	31%	23%	54%	0%
National	19%	35%	54%	29%	17%	45%	1%
GOP	20%	36%	56%	30%	13%	43%	1%
Dem.	21%	33%	54%	25%	21%	45%	1%
Indep.	9%	39%	47%	39%	14%	53%	0%

Here again is the proposal:

Q16. Make all wages over \$400,000 subject to the Social Security payroll tax as well, effective immediately. This step would **reduce** the Social Security shortfall by **60%**.

	(0-4)	5	(6-10)	Ref/DK
Michigan	14%	10%	75%	0%
GOP	17%	10%	73%	1%
Dem.	12%	9%	79%	0%
National	12%	11%	75%	1%
GOP	14%	12%	72%	2%
Dem.	9%	7%	82%	2%
Indep.	18%	20%	62%	0%

Another possible option for increasing revenues is to gradually increase the payroll tax rate paid to Social Security.

At present both workers and employers pay a tax of 6.2% on the amount of an employee's salary and wages subject to the payroll tax. Self-employed people pay both the employer and employee share.

This option would increase the payroll tax rate very gradually, so that in the first year the rate would go up from 6.2% to 6.25% for both the employer and the employee. In the second year it would go up to 6.3%-- and so on for a number of years.

Here are arguments in **favor** of and **against** increasing the Social Security payroll tax rate.

Q17. Social Security is a good investment because it provides a foundation for Americans' retirement, as well as protection in the event of worker disability or a spouse's death. Paying a little more now will shore up Social Security and make all Americans more secure later. It is also appropriate for employers to make slightly higher contributions to their employees' retirement, since fewer and fewer offer any pensions.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref/DK
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Michigan	24%	50%	74%	20%	6%	26%	1%
GOP	19%	49%	68%	22%	9%	31%	1%
Dem.	29%	50%	78%	19%	2%	21%	1%
National	29%	49%	78%	15%	5%	20%	2%
GOP	28%	48%	77%	16%	6%	22%	2%
Dem.	34%	47%	81%	13%	5%	17%	2%
Indep.	18%	58%	76%	18%	6%	24%	1%

Q18. Raising the tax rate is bad for employees, especially people who are living paycheck to paycheck. Any increase leaves them with less to spend and less to save for retirement. It is also bad for employers because it increases their costs, leading them to cut back their employees, and makes it harder to create new jobs. And it is bad for the self-employed, who pay both the employer's and employee's share of the payroll tax.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref/DK
Michigan	28%	44%	71%	23%	6%	29%	0%
GOP	26%	44%	70%	23%	7%	30%	0%
Dem.	30%	44%	74%	22%	4%	26%	0%
National	31%	43%	74%	20%	6%	26%	0%
GOP	31%	42%	72%	21%	6%	27%	1%
Dem.	33%	44%	77%	18%	5%	23%	0%
Indep.	22%	46%	68%	27%	6%	32%	0%

As mentioned, in the first year the rate would go up 0.05% from 6.2% to 6.25% for both the employer and the employee. In the second year it would go up to 6.3%--and so on for a number of years.

Please evaluate the following proposals that appear on the next three screens for gradually increasing the payroll tax rate:

Q19a. The first proposal raises the payroll tax rate 0.05% a year for 6 years so that it would ultimately rise to 6.5%. For example, a full-time worker earning about \$39,000 a year would see their monthly payroll tax go up by \$9, from \$202 to \$211. This would **reduce** the Social Security shortfall by **15%**.¹²

	(0-4)	5	(6-10)	Ref/DK
Michigan	25%	20%	55%	1%
GOP	26%	19%	55%	0%
Dem.	22%	20%	57%	1%
National	20%	19%	60%	1%
GOP	23%	19%	58%	0%
Dem.	17%	16%	66%	1%
Indep.	24%	32%	44%	0%

Q19b. A second proposal raises the payroll tax rate 0.05% a year for 14 years so that it would ultimately rise to 6.9%. A person earning \$39,000 a year would see their monthly payroll tax go up by \$22, from \$202 to \$224. This would **reduce** the Social Security shortfall by **28%**.¹³

	(0-4)	5	(6-10)	Ref/DK
Michigan	27%	20%	52%	2%
GOP	31%	18%	50%	1%
Dem.	24%	19%	55%	2%
National	25%	17%	56%	2%
GOP	26%	17%	55%	3%
Dem.	23%	12%	63%	1%

¹² SSA, Solvency Provisions, E1.8

¹³ Author's calculations: in between previous and subsequent proposal.

Indep.	31%	29%	37%	3%
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Q19c. A third proposal raises the payroll tax rate 0.05% a year for 20 years so that it would ultimately rise to 7.2%. A person earning \$39,000 a year would see their monthly payroll tax go up by \$32, from \$202 to \$234. This would **reduce** the Social Security shortfall by **41%**.¹⁴

	(0-4)	5	(6-10)	Ref/DK
Michigan	34%	15%	49%	2%
GOP	36%	17%	45%	2%
Dem.	32%	12%	53%	2%
National	30%	14%	53%	3%
GOP	30%	15%	51%	5%
Dem.	27%	10%	61%	3%
Indep.	37%	26%	36%	2%

We will now turn to the second major issue of whether Social Security benefits are adequate for certain groups. Proposals have been made by people who believe that benefits for certain groups need to be increased. This, in turn, would increase the Social Security shortfall.

We will now consider two such proposals for raising Social Security benefits for certain groups of retirees.

The first proposal is to raise the benefit for those receiving the minimum benefit. Currently, the minimum Social Security benefit for someone who has worked 30 years or more is about \$1,066 a month.¹⁵ The proposal is to raise this minimum to \$1,341 a month. This amount would continue to rise with inflation, but would always be 125% of the official poverty line.

This proposal would **increase** the Social Security shortfall by **7%**.¹⁶

Here are arguments in **favor** of and **against** this proposal.

Q20. The current minimum benefit is below the poverty line. It should be a basic principle that if you work for 30 years and pay your Social Security taxes, your benefits should assure that you can retire with dignity and not be condemned to live in poverty.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref/DK
Michigan	39%	42%	81%	15%	5%	19%	0%
GOP	35%	39%	75%	17%	8%	26%	0%
Dem.	46%	42%	88%	10%	2%	12%	0%
National	42%	42%	83%	12%	5%	16%	0%
GOP	36%	42%	78%	15%	6%	21%	0%
Dem.	50%	38%	88%	9%	3%	12%	0%
Indep.	32%	52%	84%	11%	5%	15%	1%

Q21. Given the difficulty of reducing the Social Security shortfall, we should not be considering any additional benefits. The main problem of covering the shortfall should be solved first and only then should we consider raising the minimum benefit.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref/DK
Michigan	22%	46%	68%	23%	9%	32%	0%
GOP	23%	43%	67%	25%	9%	34%	0%
Dem.	23%	47%	70%	20%	9%	30%	0%
National	25%	43%	68%	23%	9%	31%	1%
GOP	25%	45%	71%	21%	7%	28%	1%

¹⁴ SSA. Solvency Provisions, E1.4; Social Security 2100 Act by Sen. Blumenthal and Rep. Larson from the 118th Congress.

¹⁵ SSA. Special Minimum Benefits

¹⁶ SSA. Solvency Provisions, B5.3; Social Security 2100 Act by Sen. Blumenthal and Rep. Larson from the 118th Congress.

Dem.	28%	38%	66%	23%	11%	34%	1%
Indep.	18%	51%	69%	25%	6%	31%	0%

Now that you have considered all the arguments, here again is the proposal:

Q22. Raise the minimum Social Security benefit to \$1,570 for those with 30 years of work history. This would **increase** the Social Security shortfall by **7%**.

Please select how acceptable this proposal is to you on the scale below.

	(0-4)	5	(6-10)	Ref./DK
Michigan	26%	19%	54%	1%
Dem.	23%	16%	61%	0%
National	22%	18%	59%	1%
Dem.	19%	12%	67%	1%
Indep.	24%	27%	47%	2%

Here is another proposal for **increasing benefits**.

This proposal focuses on Social Security recipients who are in their eighties, sometimes called “the oldest old.” Benefits would begin to gradually increase at age 81 and by age 85 the increase would be an extra five percent, or about \$100 a month on average in current dollars.¹⁷

Here are arguments in **favor** of and **against** this proposal.

Q23. People in their 80s are often at the point of exhausting their savings and any other resources they may have. They are often quite frail and vulnerable, and need special services and assistance to help them cope with living. Their benefits are modest to begin with, and while people early in retirement can supplement their income by working part-time, this is unrealistic for people at this age.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref/DK
Michigan	32%	45%	77%	15%	7%	22%	1%
Dem.	39%	44%	83%	10%	5%	15%	2%
National	36%	43%	79%	13%	5%	18%	3%
Dem.	43%	40%	83%	10%	3%	14%	3%
Indep.	19%	53%	72%	21%	5%	26%	3%

Q24. This idea is yet one more example of thinking that people should not be considered responsible for planning for their financial needs. If we go down this path, it will make people more dependent, discourage them from saving, and contribute to an overly big and unaffordable government.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref/DK
Michigan	17%	40%	57%	28%	15%	43%	1%
Dem.	15%	38%	53%	29%	18%	47%	0%
National	21%	40%	60%	27%	13%	40%	0%
Dem.	20%	38%	58%	24%	18%	42%	0%

¹⁷ SSA, Actuarial Provisions, B6.3; and President Biden’s plan (see Tax Policy Center’s Analysis of Biden’s Social Security Plan).

Indep.	11%	45%	57%	34%	9%	43%	0%
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Now that you have considered all the arguments, here again is the proposal:

Q25. Benefits would begin to gradually increase at age 81 and by age 85 the increase would be an extra five percent, or about \$100 a month on average in current dollars. This proposal would **increase** the Social Security shortfall by **4%**.

	(0-4)	5	(6-10)	Ref/DK
Michigan	28%	20%	51%	1%
GOP	33%	19%	48%	1%
Dem.	25%	21%	54%	0%
National	25%	16%	58%	1%
GOP	31%	15%	52%	2%
Dem.	17%	13%	69%	1%
Indep.	32%	28%	39%	1%

There is an ongoing debate about how cost of living adjustments should be calculated for Social Security benefits.

The annual cost of living adjustments (or COLAs) are calculated to keep pace with inflation.

Since 1975, Social Security has based such annual adjustments on the consumer price index, which measures changes in the prices of a fixed list of consumer goods and services.

There is a proposal for changing the COLA is to use a measure for inflation based on a set of goods that reflects what ELDERLY people tend to buy.¹⁸ Because they spend more than other Americans for out-of-pocket health care costs and those costs rise faster than average inflation, this method would make the cost-of-living adjustments go up faster than the present method.

As an illustration, it is estimated that if prices for the current fixed set of goods goes up 2.5% a year, the amount that prices go up for the goods ELDERLY people buy would be 2.7%.

The effect of a higher COLA would compound over time. It is estimated that by making this change, benefits would grow more quickly, so that 10 years after retiring, average monthly benefits for a person retiring at the full retirement age would be about \$50 more than they would be under the current method. After 30 years average monthly benefits would be about \$300 more than by the current method.¹⁹

This proposal would **increase** the Social Security shortfall by **12%**.²⁰

Here are arguments in **favor** of and **against** the proposal for a COLA based on what the elderly tend to buy.

Q26. The whole idea of making cost of living adjustments is that Social Security recipients should not be hurt by inflation. The current system for calculating inflation does not really keep up with inflation for what seniors actually buy, thus reducing their purchasing power. The only fair thing to do is to change the method to reflect reality.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref/DK
Michigan	30%	49%	79%	15%	5%	20%	2%
GOP	25%	49%	74%	16%	8%	23%	3%
Dem.	35%	47%	82%	15%	2%	18%	1%
National	32%	45%	77%	17%	4%	21%	2%
GOP	28%	46%	74%	18%	6%	24%	2%
Dem.	39%	43%	82%	13%	3%	17%	1%
Indep.	21%	52%	73%	22%	3%	25%	2%

¹⁸ TaxPolicyCenter Analysis of Biden's Social Security Plan; [Social Security 2100 Act by Sen. Blumenthal and Rep. Larson](#) from the 118th Congress.

¹⁹ Author's calculations using the current average benefit of \$2,130 for those retiring at full retirement age, the COLA in 2023 (3.2 percent), and the proposed proposal to use CPI-E which would increase COLA by an estimated 0.2 percentage points (to 3.4 percent).

²⁰ [SSA. Actuarial Provisions. A6; Social Security 2100 Act by Sen. Blumenthal and Rep. Larson](#) from the 118th Congress.

Q27. People can come up with all kinds of arguments for why this group or that group needs to get higher benefit payments. The reality we have to face is that Social Security is in trouble because it will not have the means to meet its obligations. We should be thinking of ways to reduce the shortfall, not make it worse by increasing the cost-of-living adjustment.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref/DK
Michigan	24%	42%	66%	23%	11%	34%	0%
GOP	22%	46%	68%	22%	10%	32%	0%
Dem.	27%	39%	65%	23%	11%	34%	1%
National	26%	43%	69%	21%	10%	31%	0%
GOP	26%	45%	71%	22%	8%	29%	0%
Dem.	29%	39%	68%	20%	12%	32%	0%
Indep.	19%	49%	69%	23%	8%	32%	0%

Now that you have considered all the arguments, here again is the proposal:

Q28. Basing the annual cost of living increases for benefits (COLAs) on the inflation rate for a set of goods that reflect what elderly people tend to buy. This proposal would **increase** the Social Security shortfall by **12%**.

	(0-4)	5	(6-10)	Ref/DK
Michigan	29%	21%	50%	1%
GOP	33%	21%	46%	0%
Dem.	28%	20%	52%	1%
National	22%	18%	59%	1%
GOP	26%	18%	54%	1%
Dem.	18%	14%	67%	1%
Indep.	23%	31%	46%	1%

Congratulations, you have completed evaluating the series of proposals for reforming Social Security. You're almost done.

We would now like you to complete the most important part of this exercise. On the next screen you will see all of the proposals you just evaluated, including the impact each proposal has on the Social Security shortfall. You will then select your own final recommendations.

As you will see, some proposals overlap each other. Thus, in these cases, you will only be able to choose one of them.

At the end of each section, you will see the impact of the choices you have made on the Social Security shortfall.

- When you make changes that reduce benefits or increase revenue, this will cover a percentage of the shortfall. This number will go up as you make more choices.
- When you increase benefits, this will lower your coverage of the shortfall and this number will go down.

You may select **ONLY ONE** (or **NONE**) of the following two proposals:

[Q29a.] Reducing benefits for the upper 20 percent of earners	11%
[Q29b.] Reducing benefits for the upper 40 percent of earners	23%
[Q29c.] Reducing benefits for the upper 50 percent of earners	31%

	29a) Reduce benefits for upper 20% of earners	29b) Reduce benefits for upper 40% of earners	29c) Reduce benefits for upper 50% of earners	Not chosen	At least 20%	At least 40%
Michigan	42%	30%	20%	9%	92%	49%
GOP	45%	25%	21%	9%	91%	46%
Dem.	43%	32%	19%	7%	94%	51%
National	39%	34%	20%	8%	92%	53%
GOP	39%	32%	21%	8%	92%	53%

Dem.	38%	35%	20%	7%	93%	56%
Indep.	44%	33%	14%	9%	91%	47%

Demographic Findings for Michigan						
	29a) Reduce benefits for upper 20% of earners	29b) Reduce benefits for upper 40% of earners	29c) Reduce benefits for upper 50% of earners	Not chosen	At least 20%	At least 40%
Men	37%	32%	22%	9%	91%	54%
Women	47%	28%	17%	8%	92%	45%
18-29	47%	34%	14%	5%	95%	48%
30-49	47%	28%	18%	8%	92%	45%
50-64	31%	31%	25%	13%	87%	56%
65 or older	43%	28%	22%	8%	92%	49%
Less than \$50,000	28%	41%	26%	5%	95%	67%
\$50-100,000	41%	28%	22%	9%	91%	50%
\$100-150,000	42%	31%	17%	11%	89%	48%
More than \$150,000	61%	16%	12%	11%	90%	28%
High School or less	40%	29%	26%	5%	95%	55%
Some college	40%	34%	18%	8%	92%	52%
College degree	48%	25%	15%	12%	88%	40%

Raising the Full Retirement Age

You may select ONLY ONE (or NONE) of the following three proposals:

[Q30a.] Gradually raise to age 68 by 2033, and stop there	15%
[Q30b.] Gradually raise to age 69 by 2041, and stop there	21%
[Q30c.] Gradually raise to age 70 by 2064, and stop there	29%

	30a) Gradually raise to age 68 by 2033, and stop there	30b) Gradually raise to age 69 by 2041, and stop there	30c) Gradually raise to age 70 by 2064, and stop there	Not chosen	At least 68	At least 69
Michigan	48%	22%	20%	10%	90%	42%
Dem.	50%	20%	20%	11%	89%	40%
Indep.	50%	24%	20%	6%	94%	44%
National	47%	23%	20%	11%	89%	43%
Dem.	45%	25%	21%	9%	91%	46%
Indep.	48%	20%	21%	12%	88%	41%
Other	47%	27%	13%	14%	86%	39%

Demographic Findings for Michigan						
	30a) Gradually raise to age 68 by 2033, and stop there	30b) Gradually raise to age 69 by 2041, and stop there	30c) Gradually raise to age 70 by 2064, and stop there	Not Chosen	At least 68	At least 69
Men	45%	22%	23%	10%	90%	45%
Women	51%	22%	17%	10%	90%	40%
18-29	53%	30%	10%	8%	92%	39%
30-49	53%	24%	14%	9%	91%	38%
50-64	52%	13%	21%	14%	86%	34%
65 or older	36%	22%	34%	8%	92%	56%
Less than \$50,000	49%	25%	19%	7%	93%	44%
\$50-100,000	45%	22%	20%	13%	87%	42%
\$100-150,000	51%	22%	21%	7%	93%	43%
More than \$150,000	47%	19%	20%	13%	87%	39%

High School or less	54%	24%	12%	10%	90%	35%
Some college	43%	23%	25%	10%	90%	48%
College degree	48%	20%	23%	9%	91%	43%

INCREASING REVENUES

Raising the Amount of Wages Subject to the Payroll Tax

You may select OR not select the following proposal:

[Q31.] All wages above \$400,000 would be subject to the payroll tax (but not income from dividends or capital gains)	60%
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All wages above \$400,000 would be subject to the payroll tax (but not income from dividends or capital gains)		Not Chosen
Michigan	89%	11%
GOP	89%	11%
Dem.	91%	9%
National	87%	13%
GOP	86%	14%
Dem.	89%	12%
Indep.	83%	17%

Demographic Findings for Michigan		
	All wages above \$400,000 would be subject to the payroll tax (but not income from dividends or capital gains)	Not Chosen
Men	91%	9%
Women	88%	12%
18-29	88%	12%
30-49	88%	12%
50-64	92%	8%
65 or older	90%	10%
Less than \$50,000	90%	10%
\$50-100,000	87%	13%
\$100-150,000	89%	11%
More than \$150,000	91%	9%
High School or less	90%	10%
Some college	89%	11%
College degree	89%	11%

Increasing the Payroll Tax Rate

These proposals raise the Social Security payroll tax rate from 6.2% for both employees and employers.

You may select ONLY ONE (or NONE) of the following three proposals:

[Q32a.] Increase by 0.05 per year for 6 years up to 6.5%	15%
[Q32b.] Increase by 0.05 per year for 14 years up to 6.9%	28%
[Q32c.] Increase by 0.05 per year for 20 years up to 7.2%	41%

32a) Increase by 0.05 per year for 6 years up to 6.5%	32b) Increase by 0.05 per year for 14 years up to 6.9%	32c) Increase by 0.05 per year for 20 years up to 7.2%	Not chosen	At least 6.5% tax	At least 6.9%

Michigan	37%	27%	19%	17%	83%	46%
GOP	36%	28%	20%	17%	83%	47%
Dem.	41%	26%	19%	14%	86%	45%
National	34%	31%	22%	14%	86%	53%
GOP	33%	28%	26%	13%	87%	54%
Dem.	34%	33%	19%	14%	87%	52%
Indep.	32%	35%	16%	18%	82%	50%

Demographic Findings for Michigan						
	32a) Increase by 0.05 per year for 6 years up to 6.5%	32b) Increase by 0.05 per year for 14 years up to 6.9%	32c) Increase by 0.05 per year for 20 years up to 7.2%	Not Chosen	At least 6.5% tax	At least 6.9%
Men	32%	30%	22%	16%	84%	52%
Women	41%	25%	17%	17%	83%	42%
18-29	40%	25%	17%	18%	83%	42%
30-49	38%	31%	15%	16%	84%	46%
50-64	36%	25%	22%	17%	83%	47%
65 or older	34%	26%	24%	16%	84%	50%
Less than \$50,000	38%	30%	22%	9%	91%	52%
\$50-100,000	30%	25%	25%	21%	79%	50%
\$100-150,000	36%	28%	14%	22%	78%	43%
More than \$150,000	44%	25%	13%	17%	83%	39%
High School or less	37%	28%	20%	16%	84%	47%
Some college	36%	28%	21%	15%	85%	48%
College degree	38%	26%	17%	19%	81%	44%

MODIFYING BENEFITS

Increasing Benefits

You may select OR not select the following proposal:

[Q33.] Raise the minimum monthly benefit for those who have worked 30 years or more from \$1,066 to \$1,570	-7%
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Raise the minimum monthly benefit for those who have worked 30 years or more from \$1,066 to \$1,570		Not Chosen
Michigan	73%	27%
GOP	70%	30%
Dem.	74%	26%
National	71%	29%
GOP	71%	29%
Dem.	73%	27%
Indep.	68%	33%

Demographic Findings for Michigan		
	Raise the minimum monthly benefit for those who have worked 30 years or more from \$1,066 to \$1,570	Not Chosen
Men	69%	31%
Women	76%	24%
18-29	79%	21%
30-49	73%	27%
50-64	74%	26%
65 or older	67%	33%
Less than \$50,000	78%	22%
\$50-100,000	75%	25%
\$100-150,000	71%	29%
More than \$150,000	66%	34%
High School or less	77%	23%
Some college	76%	24%
College degree	64%	36%

You may select OR not select the following proposal:

[Q34.] Increase benefits of those 85 and over by five percent, or about \$100 a month	-4%
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Increase benefits of those 85 and over by five percent, or about \$100 a month		Not Chosen
Michigan	66%	34%
GOP	65%	35%
Dem.	67%	33%
National	68%	32%
GOP	67%	33%
Dem.	70%	30%
Indep.	65%	35%

Demographic Findings for Michigan		
	Increase benefits of those 85 and over by five percent, or about \$100 a month	Not Chosen
Men	66%	34%
Women	66%	34%
18-29	75%	25%
30-49	66%	34%
50-64	64%	36%
65 or older	63%	37%
Less than \$50,000	76%	24%
\$50-100,000	66%	34%
\$100-150,000	58%	42%
More than \$150,000	62%	38%
High School or less	71%	29%
Some college	65%	35%
College degree	63%	37%

Recalculating Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs)

You may select OR not select the following proposal:

[Q35.] Base annual COLAs on the inflation rate for a set of goods that reflect what elderly people tend to buy	-12%
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	Base annual COLAs on the inflation rate for a set of goods that reflect what elderly people tend to buy	Not Chosen
Michigan	66%	34%
GOP	64%	36%
Dem.	67%	33%
National	68%	32%
GOP	70%	30%
Dem.	67%	33%
Indep.	66%	35%

Demographic Findings for Michigan		
	Base annual COLAs on the inflation rate for a set of goods that reflect what elderly people tend to buy	Not Chosen
Men	64%	36%
Women	68%	32%
18-29	70%	30%
30-49	65%	35%
50-64	62%	38%
65 or older	67%	33%
Less than \$50,000	72%	28%
\$50-100,000	64%	37%
\$100-150,000	64%	36%
More than \$150,000	63%	37%
High School or less	69%	31%
Some college	67%	33%
College degree	61%	39%

Q38. Here are some of the other ways that the government can deal with the shortfall. Which of the following do you think the government should do? Please select all that apply.

- a. Borrow the funds
 - b. Reduce defense spending
 - c. Reduce non-defense spending (such as transportation, veterans' affairs, homeland security, the environment, and other areas)
 - d. Raise other taxes, such as income and corporate taxes
 - e. Let Social Security benefits decrease when the trust fund can no longer pay them in full
-

Methodology

Fielding and Sample Size

The Michigan survey was fielded online August 2-17, 2024 by the Program for Public Consultation (PPC) at the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy, with a representative non-probability sample of 601 adults in Michigan. Sample was obtained from multiple online opt-in panels, including Cint, Prodege and Dynata. The confidence interval is +/- 4.5%. The response rate was 3.6%.

Pre-Stratification and Weighting

The sample was pre-stratified and weighted by age, race, ethnicity, gender, education, household income, metro/non-metro status, marital status and home ownership, using benchmarks from the Census Bureau's 2022 American Community Survey and 2023 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement. The sample was also weighted by partisan affiliation to ensure a roughly equal distribution of Republicans and Democrats. The maximum weight applied was 3.9.

Sample Collection

Sample collection was managed by QuantifyAI with oversight from PPC. Samples were drawn from multiple large online panels, including Cint, Prodege, and Dynata, whose members are recruited using non-probability sampling methods. The selected sample was invited to participate via email invitation, push notification, or SMS for cell phone users. Respondents were offered cash or cash-equivalent incentives to participate in the survey.

Data Collection and Privacy

Survey responses were collected directly on the Qualtrics platform. Only respondents with a provided link could take the survey, using their computer or mobile phone.

Security and privacy measures were taken to ensure that data was collected in adherence to the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation policies, as well as the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA).

Quality Control

Quality control measures in the sample collection process to disqualify duplicate respondents and survey bots included:

- checking respondents' IP addresses to determine if there are duplicate respondents
- employing an "operating system & Web browser check" to determine if there are any cross-panel duplicates
- using hCaptcha to detect and disqualify survey bots.

Quality control measures within the survey disqualify dishonest or mischievous respondents, as well as survey bots, included:

- an attention-check question, e.g. Select the word that does not belong. [Tuesday]; [Friday]; [April]; [Wednesday]
- an honesty question, e.g. What have you done in the past week? Select all that apply. [Won a gold medal at the Olympics]; [Watched TV]; [Got a license to operate a Class SSGN submarine]; [Read a book]
- a speed limit, which disqualified respondents who moved through the first quarter of the survey at a pace roughly triple the average reading speed.

Lastly, respondents were removed from the sample who answered less than half the substantive questions, or who engaged in straight-lining.