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CITIZEN CABINET INITIATIVE

AMERICANS ON FIXING SOCIAL SECURITY

A Citizen Cabinet survey nationwide, and in California, Florida, Maryland, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas and Virginia

Conducted by the Program for Public Consultation, School of Public Policy, University of Maryland

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OVERVIEW

Since it was established in 1935, the Social Security program has been very popular among the American people. Among elderly Social Security beneficiaries, 53% of married couples and 74% of unmarried persons receive half or more of their income from Social Security. Further, 22% of married couples and about 47% of unmarried persons rely on Social Security for 90% or more of their income.

However, for some time the program has been in jeopardy. According to the Social Security Trustees' Report, if no steps are taken by Congress to reform Social Security, its trust fund will be exhausted in 2033, and after that the program will only be able to deliver benefits based on current receipts—which would result in a 23% benefit cut to retirees.

A major reason that Social Security has not been addressed is a widespread assumption that the American public is not willing or able to face the issue and thus bringing it up is too politically risky. Social Security has been called a 'third rail,' implying that it is political suicide to address it.

Much of the existing polling data tends to reinforce the belief that the public's attitudes toward Social Security are too conflicted and anxious to support any kind of constructive action. While majorities believe that Social Security is headed for a crisis, when asked, in separate questions, about raising the retirement age, cutting benefits, or raising taxes, majorities often say they do not find these options appealing.

Citizen Cabinet surveys take a different approach that goes beyond initial reactions. Rather than a series of separate questions, respondents go through a process called a 'policymaking simulation' in which they are asked to go into a problem-solving mode. The objective is to put respondents in the shoes of a policymaker. Respondents are given a background briefing, presented arguments for and against policy options, and then finally make their recommendations.

Another unique feature of policymaking simulations is that the content is reviewed for accuracy and balance. In developing this policymaking simulation, it was reviewed by:

- key majority and minority Congressional staffers who deal with Social Security; and
- experts from the National Academy of Social Insurance and the American Enterprise Institute.

Final responsibility for the design and content of the simulation rests entirely with the Program.

Design of the Social Security Policymaking Simulation

Respondents first went through a briefing about the Social Security program[1] which included:

- how the program is structured
- the nature and extent of the Social Security shortfall, along with its multiple causes

Respondents were then presented a series of options for reforming Social Security, including ones that mitigated the shortfall, ones that increased benefits for certain populations, and options for recalculating the annual cost of living adjustment. In addition to a brief explanation of the option, they were told what impact it would have on the Social Security shortfall. For each option respondents then:

- evaluated 1-2 arguments for and 1-2 arguments against the option, in terms of how convincing they found the argument

[1] The content of the briefing, along with many of the graphs respondents were shown, is discussed in Appendix I.

- evaluated each option separately in terms of how tolerable it would be on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being completely unacceptable, 10 being completely acceptable and 5 being just tolerable.

Finally, respondents were presented all the reform options in a spreadsheet enabling respondents to make their own comprehensive and integrated set of recommendations, with an interactive feature that gave respondents feedback on the impact of their choices on the shortfall.

Recruitment and Fielding of the Citizen Cabinet Survey

The policymaking simulation was fielded as a survey with the national Citizen Cabinet, a citizen advisory panel consisting of a probability-based representative sample of registered voters. A total of 8,697 registered voters undertook the policymaking simulation over two waves.

The largest wave was recruited February 16-March 24, 2016 from the larger panel of Nielsen-Scarborough, which is recruited by telephone and mail. This wave had a total of 6,388 registered voters, which included a national sample of 4,591 respondents, plus an oversample of 1,797 for specific states. The national sample has a margin of error of +/- 1.4%. The national sample and the oversamples provided substantial samples in five states as follows.

State	Sample Size	Margin of error
California	566	+/- 4.1%
Ohio:	434	4.7%
Florida:	657	3.8%
Texas:	519	4.3%
New York:	594	4%

An earlier wave was recruited from October 9, 2014 through April 9, 2015 by Communication for Research, the University of Virginia Survey Research Center and the University of Oklahoma's Public Opinion Learning Laboratory.

These included:

State	Sample Size	Margin of error
Oklahoma	506	+/- 4.4%
Maryland	535	4.2%
Virginia	525	4.2%

The sample was subsequently weighted by age, income, gender, education and race with benchmarks from the Census' 2014 Current Population Survey of Registered Voters. Each of the eight states were weighted separately for its gender, race, education, income and age. The questionnaires with frequencies can be found online at:

Oklahoma - http://vop.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/CC_SS_OK_Quaire.pdf
Maryland - http://vop.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/MD-Social-Security-Questionnaire-FINAL.pdf
Virginia - http://vop.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/CC_SS_VA_Quaire.pdf

In addition, in the October 2014-April 2015 wave two Congressional districts—Oklahoma 4 and Maryland 7—were oversampled, yielding respectively samples of 413 (MOE 4.8%) and 438 (MOE 4.7%). The findings from these districts were analyzed separately. The report can be found at http://vop.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/CC_District_Comparison.pdf.

In addition, in the 2016 wave smaller samples were recruited in the states of North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Michigan. The questionnaire with frequencies can also be found at http://vop.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Social-Security-Simulation-Supplemental-Questionnaire.pdf.

KEY CITIZEN CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing the Social Security Shortfall

Nationally and in all eight states, large majorities—overall and for both parties—recommended options that would cover at least two thirds of the Social Security shortfall. More modest majorities made final recommendations that would completely eliminate the shortfall. More specifically:

- Nationally and in all eight states, at least three in four recommended lowering benefits for the top 25% of earners. Less than four in ten lowered monthly benefits for the top 40%, and no more than 1 in 5 lowered them for the top 50%.

- Nationally and in all eight states, about 8 in 10 raised the retirement age at least to 68, and this was the case for both parties. In all jurisdictions less than half raised the retirement age to 69, and less than 1 in 3 raised it to 70.

- Overwhelming majorities, nationally and in all states, raised the amount of salary and wages subject to the payroll tax at least to $215,000. More modest majorities --nationally and in every state, including modest majorities of Republicans—went further and eliminated the cap, making all salary and wages subject to the payroll tax.

- Nationally and in all eight states, three quarters raised the payroll tax rate from 6.2% to at least 6.6%, including at least 3 in 5 Republicans and 3 in 4 Democrats. Less than half raised it to 6.9% or higher.

Raising Benefits

- Nationally and in all eight states, majorities—in most cases nearly six in ten--recommended raising the minimum monthly benefit. However, while Democrats consistently supported this step, views among Republicans varied substantially across states and leaned very slightly negative nationally.

- Increasing benefits to the very old did not get clear majority support nationally or in any state.

Recalculating Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA)

Neither option for modifying COLAs was recommended by a majority. A third or less recommended the Chained CPI method that would likely slow the rate of increases. Three in ten recommended basing the COLAs on a system that would focus on what the elderly tend to buy and which would likely quicken the rate of increase. Partisan differences were minor.

LOWERING MONTHLY BENEFITS FOR PEOPLE WHO HAD HIGHER EARNINGS

FINAL RECOMMENDATION: Nationally and in all eight states, at least three in four recommended lowering benefits for the top 25% of earners. Less than four in ten lowered monthly benefits for the top 40%, and no more than 1 in 5 lowered them for the top 50%.

One idea that has received significant attention from policymakers is to reduce the benefits that are presently scheduled for future retirees whose lifetime average earnings are above a certain level. This idea was introduced to respondents in the following way:

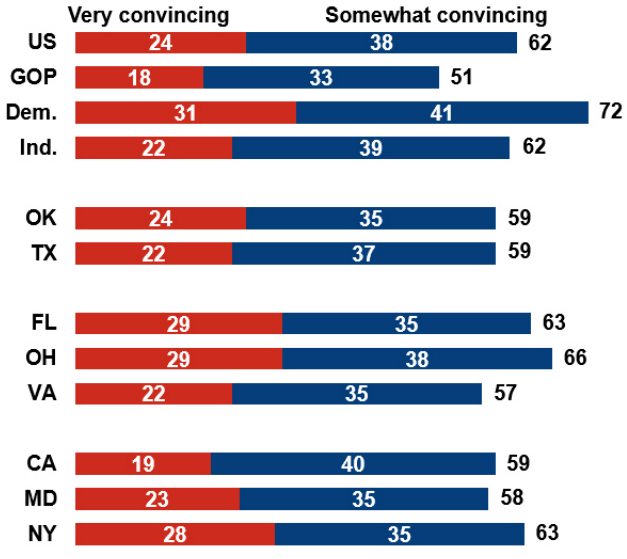
One option for reducing benefits is to reduce the amount of benefits that people with higher earnings will receive when they retire in the future.

Currently, the more people earned while working (up to $117,000), 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 people who had lower earnings, but their benefits would be less than people in that income group are currently scheduled to receive.

Two pro and two con arguments were presented (one of each are shown here). Majorities in all jurisdictions found all arguments convincing, with the con arguments doing somewhat better. [Note: It is common for majorities to find both pro and con arguments convincing.]

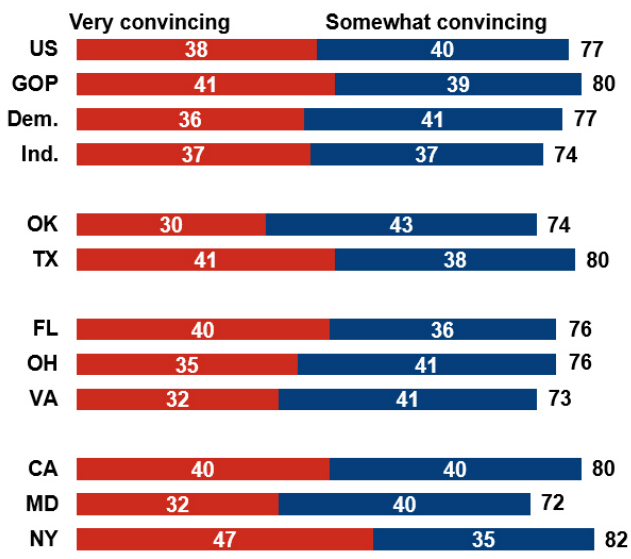
Pro: Reducing Benefits

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.



Con: Reducing Benefits

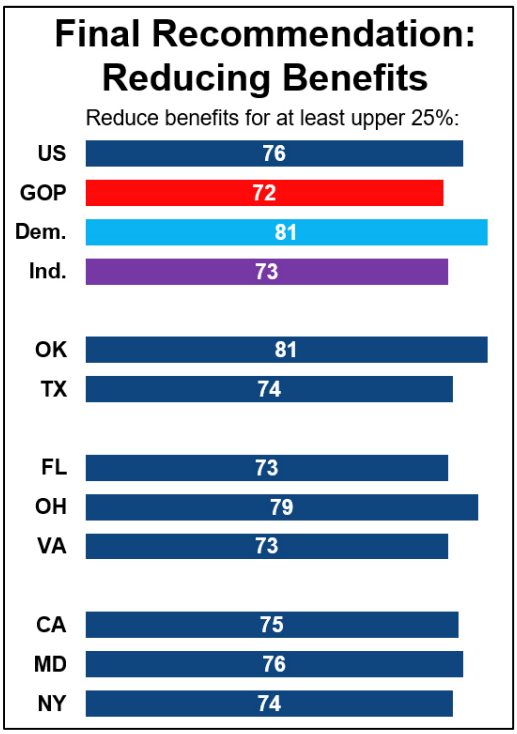
Many of the proposals for reducing benefits based on income would end up hurting some people who are part of the middle class, particularly people who live in areas of the country where the cost of living is high. We should not change Social Security in a way that forces seniors to lower their quality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



However, while there was bipartisan consensus on the arguments against the option, Republicans were much less convinced by the arguments in favor. A bare majority of Republicans nationally, and less than half in Oklahoma, Texas, California and Maryland, found the arguments in favor convincing.

In addition to the arguments shown in the next column, respondents received two other arguments. The pro argument that Social Security was meant to prevent poverty, so that it makes no sense for people with higher incomes to get more was found convincing by 60%, and from 54% in Maryland to 63% in Ohio, New York and Florida. The con argument that reducing benefits was a violation of an understanding with workers who had put money into the program through their working lives was found convincing by 72% nationally, and from 64% in Oklahoma to 77% in California.

Asked to evaluate more specific proposals, majorities found it at least tolerable to reduce benefits for the top 25% of earners (average lifetime earnings of $65,500 a year or more); this would reduce the shortfall 7%. Nationally, 60% found this tolerable; majorities were more modest in Texas (53%) and Maryland (54%), but higher in Ohio (68%). In MD-7, only half of Republicans (50%) found this tolerable, while 58% of Republicans in OK-4 did.



Around a third in the eight states and two districts found tolerable reducing benefits to the top 40% of earners; nationally, this was less than four in ten (38%). Reducing benefits to the top 50% was found tolerable by one in three or fewer in all jurisdictions, with little difference between the parties.

In making their final recommendations, in all jurisdictions, 3 in 4 or more reduced benefits for the top 25% of lifetime earners (see box). This was quite bipartisan, with 73% of Republicans and 81% of Democrats agreeing nationally. Within the states the lowest level of support was among California Republicans, of whom 65% chose this.

Nationally only 31% recommended reducing benefits to the top 40%, and in no state or partisan group did this number reach 4 in 10. Nationally only 13% recommended reducing benefits to the top 50%, and in no state or partisan group did this number reach 2 in 10.

RAISING THE FULL RETIREMENT AGE

FINAL RECOMMENDATION: **Nationally and in all eight states, about 8 in 10 raised the retirement age at least to 68, and this was the case for both parties. In all jurisdictions less than half raised the retirement age to 69, and less than 1 in 3 raised it to 70.**

Respondents were told that another option for reforming Social Security would be to raise the full retirement age, which would reduce the total amount of benefits that a person receives over their lifetime. They were told this would not change the early retirement option, which would remain at age 62, with correspondingly lower benefits.

Existing plans, according to current law, for increasing the retirement age were explained as follows:

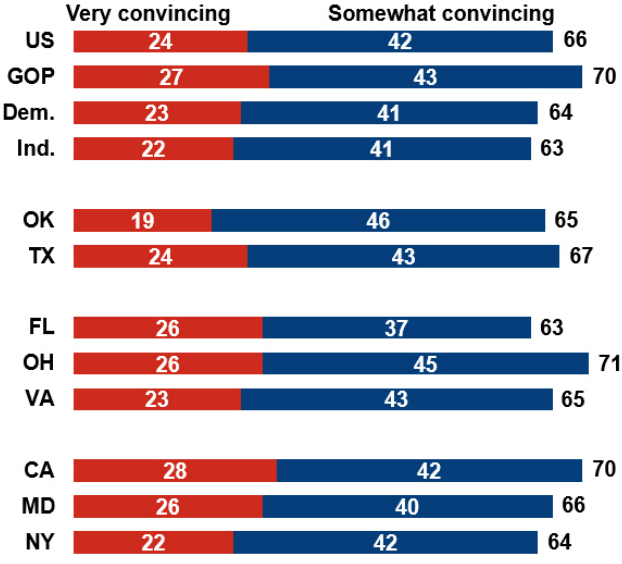
Currently, the full retirement age is 66 years. According to current law, it is scheduled to gradually rise until it reaches 67 by the year 2027 and then will stop rising. This has no effect on those already receiving Social Security. It does affect those born in 1960 or later.

Respondents were then presented with two arguments for and two arguments against increasing the full retirement age. Nationally and in all eight states, substantial majorities found the arguments both for and against convincing.

The pro argument found most convincing (66% nationally; see box) was that people are now healthier and generally have physically less demanding jobs than in the past. Of the con arguments, the one found most convincing (72% nationally; see box) was that raising the age above 67 would be unfair because some jobs are physically demanding.

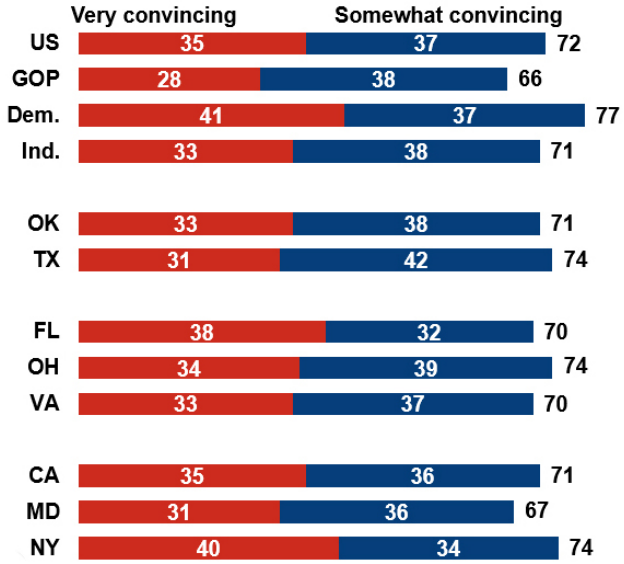
Pro: Raising Retirement Age

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.



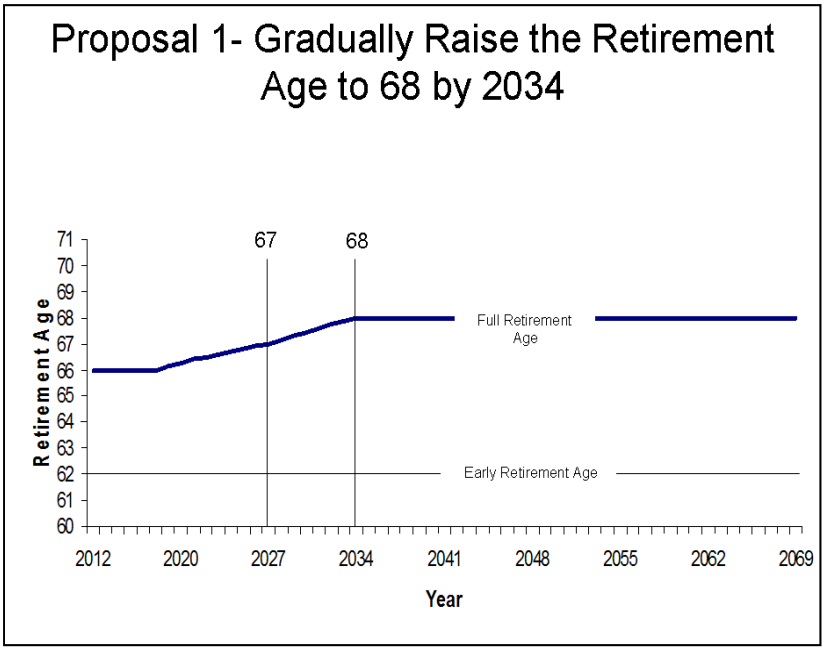
Con: Raising Retirement Age

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.



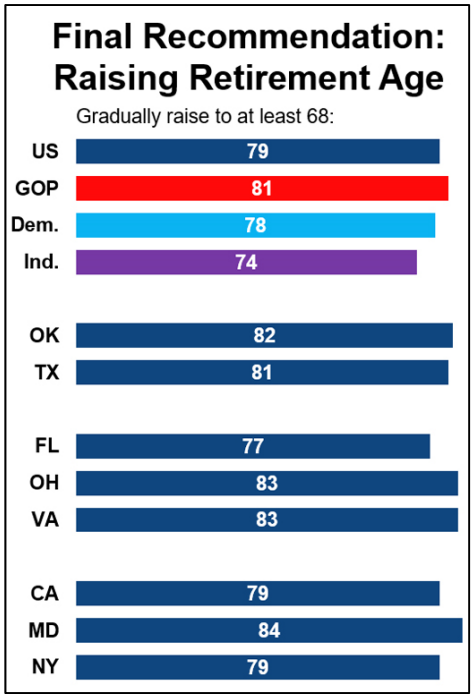
In addition to the arguments shown in the next column, respondents were presented a pro argument that with longer life expectancy the number of retirees is growing, so it is not realistic to maintain the same retirement age. Nationally, six in ten found this convincing, as did majorities in both the states and districts. State majorities from 61% in Oklahoma to 68% in Virginia found this argument convincing.

In addition to the arguments shown in the next column, respondents were presented with a pro argument that with longer life expectancy, the number of retirees is growing, so it is not realistic to maintain the same retirement age. Nationally, 63% found this convincing as did majorities in both the states and districts. Some states were higher (68% in California and Virginia).



Another con argument was also presented: raising the retirement age means workers will get less in benefits over the course of their lifetime, which will disproportionately affect people with lower incomes and minorities, because on average they do not live as long. Nationally, 62% of respondents found this convincing, and in the states this ran from 57% in Maryland and Virginia to 66% in California. Republicans in the states, though, found this the least convincing argument (54% nationally; as low as 43% in Maryland and Virginia; up to 56% among Oklahoma, Florida and Ohio Republicans).

They were then asked to evaluate the tolerability and acceptability three proposals. The first would continue to gradually raise the retirement age until it reached 68 by 2034 (see chart). This would reduce the shortfall 15%. Proposal 2 continued to raise it to age 69 (reduces shortfall 21%) and Proposal 3 to age 70 (reduces shortfall 29%). To illustrate how the potential increases would go into effect over time respondents were shown timelines such as the one shown for the increase to age 68. Timelines for raising it to age 69 and 70 were also shown.



For raising the age to 68, 6 in 10 in all jurisdictions found it at least tolerable—62% nationally, with Californians and Virginians slightly higher (67% and 66%) and Ohio lowest at 60%. About half found tolerable raising the age to 69, with Oklahomans lowest (45%) and Californians highest (55%). For raising the age to 70, less than half nationally (43%), and about four in ten in the eight states, found it tolerable. However, a majority of Republicans in Maryland found this tolerable (54%), as did 52% in Texas and 51% in Ohio.

When making their final recommendation, overwhelming and remarkably similar majorities in all jurisdictions raised the full retirement age to 68 or higher. This was 79% nationally, including 78% of Democrats as well as 81% of Republicans. The lowest state was Florida where 76% approved.

On raising the age to 69, 41% approved nationally. In no state did a majority approve; however, a bare majority of Republicans in Maryland did so. Raising the age to 70 was recommended by about one in four--nationally 23%, with Maryland highest at 28% and Florida lowest at 21%.

RAISING THE AMOUNT OF INCOME SUBJECT TO PAYROLL TAX

FINAL RECOMMENDATION: Overwhelming majorities, nationally and in all states, raised the amount of salary and wages subject to the payroll tax at least to $215,000. More modest majorities--nationally and in every state, including modest majorities of Republicans—went further and eliminated the cap, making all salary and wages subject to the payroll tax.

Respondents were told:
One option is to raise the maximum amount of salary and wages subject to the Social Security payroll tax (also known as raising the cap). Currently the amount of salary and wages that is subject to the Social Security payroll tax includes up to $117,000 per year. By this plan, the cap on salary and wages would rise, thus increasing the amount of taxes paid, but the corresponding benefits would also rise.

In response to arguments, substantial majorities ranging from two thirds to three quarters (from 66% in Texas to 75% in Maryland) found convincing the argument in favor of raising the cap. More modest majorities (from 53% in Maryland up to 65% in Ohio) found the argument against it convincing, though among Republicans these majorities were larger.

Asked to assess the proposal of raising the cap from $113,700 to $215,000 over ten years (reduces shortfall by 27%), nationally 77% found it tolerable, with more than seven in ten in every state. Nationally 73% of Republicans took this position, as did 84% of Democrats. The largest groups finding it unacceptable were Republicans in Maryland and New York (31% in both).

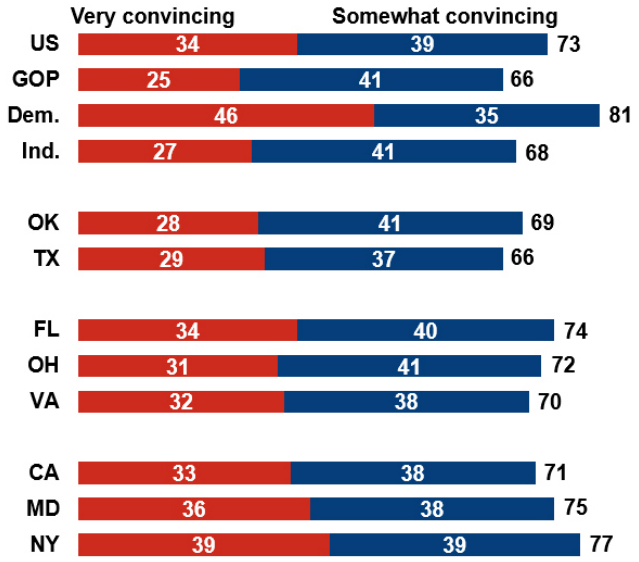
Respondents were then introduced to the option of making *all* salary and wages subject to the payroll tax (i.e. eliminating the cap), with benefits also rising. This would reduce the shortfall by 66%.

They evaluated pro and con arguments for this proposal as well. Interestingly, the argument for eliminating the cap entirely was found more convincing than for raising the cap, with 82% nationally and at least three quarters in all jurisdictions finding it convincing. Nationally, three quarters of Republicans found it convincing, as well as nine in ten Democrats. The lowest number finding it convincing was 66% among Virginia Republicans.

Equally striking, the argument against eliminating the cap was by far the least convincing argument presented in the entire survey, with only minorities finding it convincing in most jurisdictions (Texas was divided). Only among Republicans did majorities find it convincing in some jurisdictions (54% nationally, with the highest being 58% in Texas and Maryland, but dropping as low as 42% in Florida).

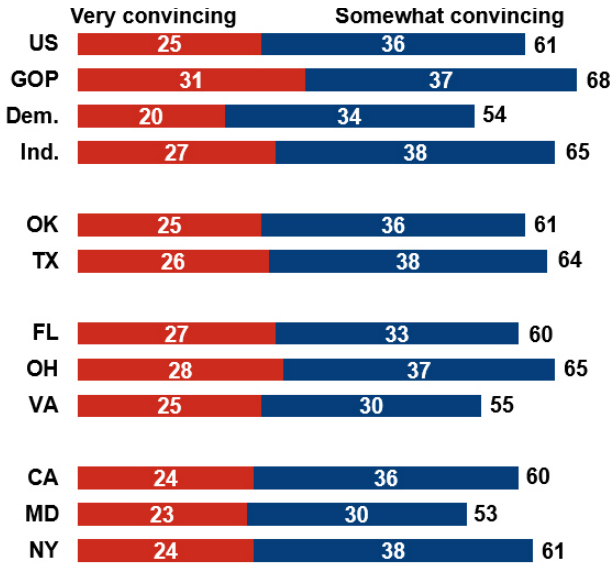
Pro: Raising the Cap

People who are well off have benefited from all the great things about the American economic system. It is only fair that they should contribute more and they can surely afford it. Remember, with this change they will also get higher Social Security benefits.



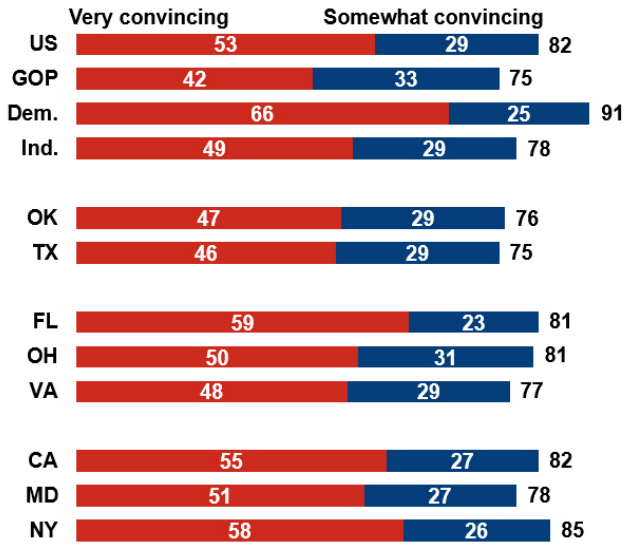
Con: Raising the Cap

In general, increasing taxes is a serious mistake. It reduces the amount that Americans have to spend on their family's food, housing, clothes, education, etc. Over time this would cause a hefty tax increase for some taxpayers, many of whom are not really wealthy. It would especially hurt the self-employed and certain smaller business owners.



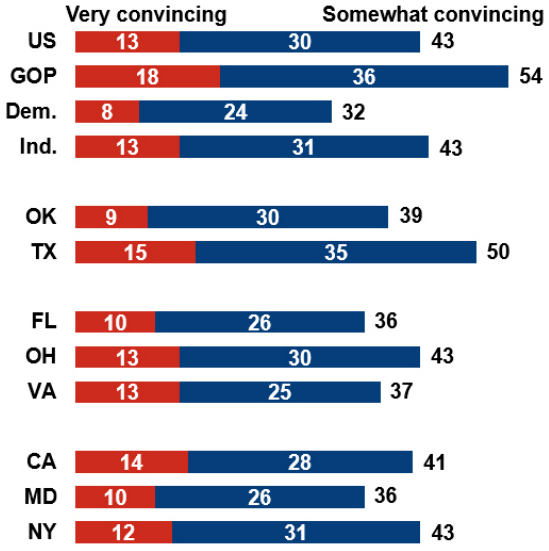
Pro: Eliminating the Cap

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.

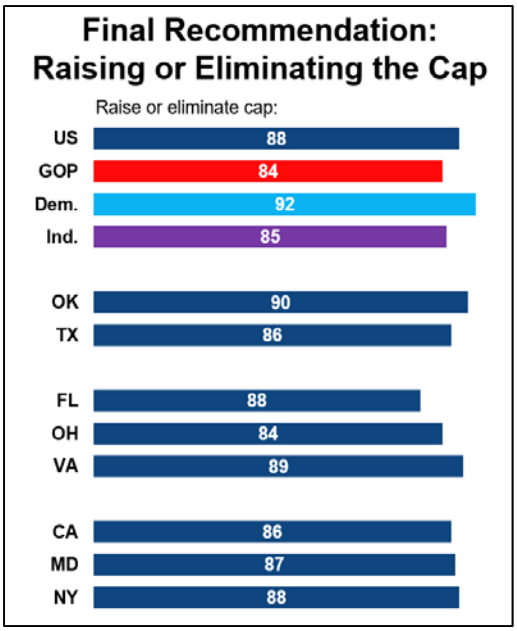


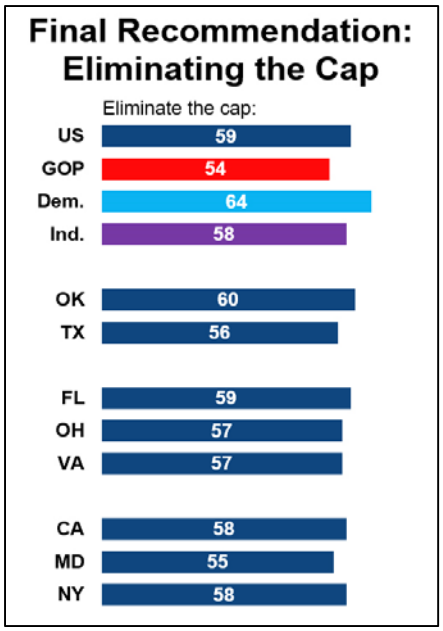
Con: Eliminating the Cap

High earners just saw their income taxes, investment taxes and Medicare taxes increased. Higher taxes will discourage them 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.



Asked to assess how tolerable or acceptable it would be to eliminate the cap, responses were strikingly similar to the proposal of raising the cap—in fact views were slightly *more* favorable. Nationally 79% found it at least tolerable (64% acceptable), with all states having at least seven in ten saying it would be tolerable. Nationally 64% of Republicans found it tolerable, as did 85% of Democrats. The highest number finding it unacceptable was 30% among Maryland Republicans.





In making their final recommendations, 88% nationally and more than eight in ten in every state (84-90%) either raised the cap to $215,000 or eliminated it entirely. This included 85% of Republicans as well as 92% of Democrats. The lowest levels of support were 79% among Republicans in Maryland and New York.

A more modest majority (59% nationally, 55-60% in the states) eliminated the cap entirely. This included 54% of Republicans as well as 64% of Democrats. Majorities of Republicans approved eliminating the cap in all states except Maryland (47%), New York (50%) and Oklahoma (50%), with the highest being 59% in California.

RAISING PAYROLL TAX RATE

FINAL RECOMMENDATION: Nationally and in all eight states, three quarters raised the payroll tax rate from 6.2% to at least 6.6%, including at least 3 in 5 Republicans and 3 in 4 Democrats. Less than half raised it to 6.9% or higher.

Respondents were first reminded that:

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.

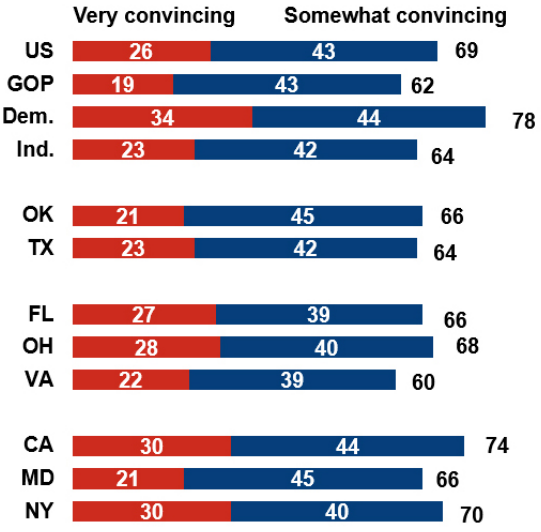
They were then presented options for gradually increasing the tax rate .05% per year for both the employer and the employee, rising ultimately to 6.6%, 6.9% or 7.2%. They were told the impact of these increases on the monthly payroll taxes of an individual with an income of $39,000 would be $13, $22, and $32, respectively.

Large majorities nationally and in all states found convincing both the arguments for and against raising the payroll tax rate, though the argument against did a bit better in most cases. While majorities of Republicans and Democrats found both sides convincing, for Republicans the con argument did consistently better while for Democrats the pro argument did consistently better.

Asked to assess raising the payroll tax rate to 6.6% over a period of 8 years (reducing the shortfall by 17%), two thirds or more, nationally and in all states, found it at least tolerable. While three quarters of Democrats found it tolerable, two thirds of Republicans did so as well. The highest number finding it unacceptable was 46% among Maryland Republicans (53% at least tolerable).

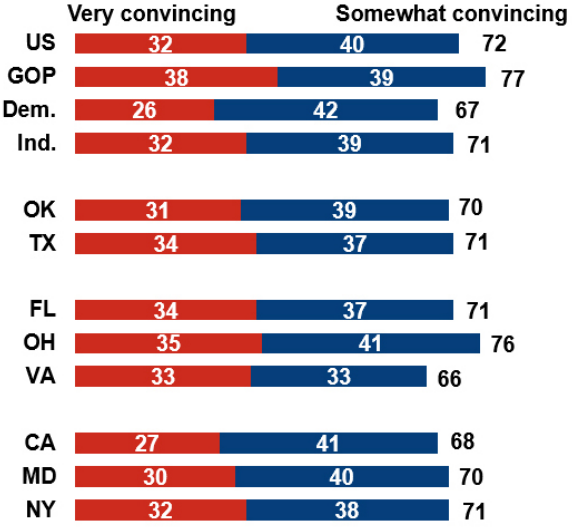
Pro: Raising Payroll Tax Rate

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.



Con: Raising Payroll Tax Rate

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.



Raising the payroll tax to 6.9% (covers 33% of shortfall) was tolerable to 63% nationally, with similar majorities in the eight states. Majorities of both parties found it tolerable (nationally Democrats 70%, Republicans 59%)

with the lowest level being among Republicans in Maryland (49%). Raising the payroll tax to 7.2% was tolerable to modest majorities nationally (55%) and in seven states, but to only 49% in Maryland. Less than half of Republicans found raising it to 7.2% tolerable in Maryland, Oklahoma and New York; Republicans were divided in Virginia and California.

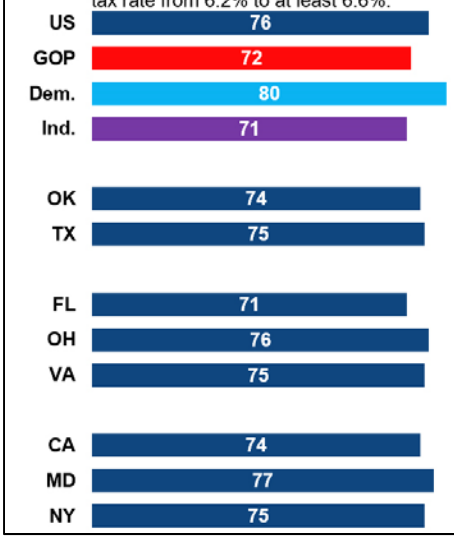
When asked for their final recommendation, three quarters nationally (76%) and 71-77% in the eight states recommended raising the payroll tax rate to 6.6% or higher.

Large majorities of both parties supported the increase to 6.6%. Though Democrats were a bit more supportive (77-86%), large majorities of Republicans were also supportive (64-73%).

Support dropped significantly when it came to raising the rate to 6.9%, with no jurisdiction rising above 45%. Support for raising the rate to 7.2% was just 19% nationally and did not rise above one in four for any state or partisan group.

Final Recommendation: Raising Payroll Tax Rate

Increase current Social Security payroll tax rate from 6.2% to at least 6.6%:



RAISING BENEFITS

FINAL RECOMMENDATION: Nationally and in all eight states, majorities—in most cases nearly six in ten--recommended raising the minimum monthly benefit. However, while Democrats consistently supported this step, views among Republicans varied substantially across states and leaned very slightly negative nationally. Increasing benefits to the very old did not get clear majority support nationally or in any state.

At this point in the exercise, respondents had already considered all the proposals that were expressly meant to help solve the Social Security shortfall. They now turned to proposals directed at other purposes, initially two current proposals to increase benefits for certain groups of retirees.

This shift in the subject matter was introduced in the following way:

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.

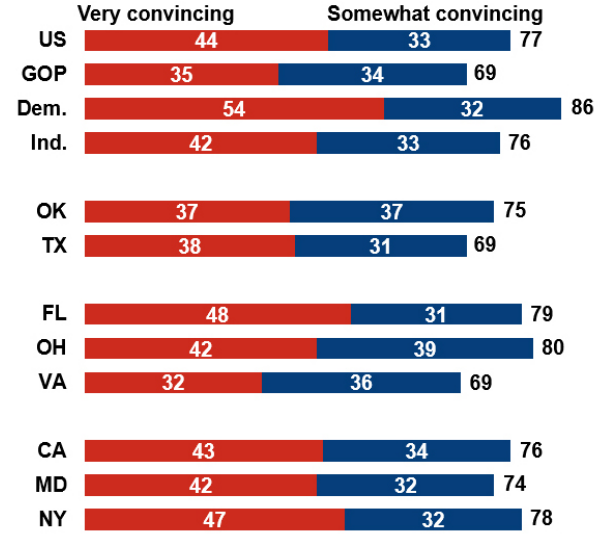
Raising the Minimum Benefit

Told they would evaluate two proposals, respondents were first presented the one focused on low-income 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 $800 a month. The proposal is to raise this minimum to $1,216 a month. This would be 125% of the poverty line.

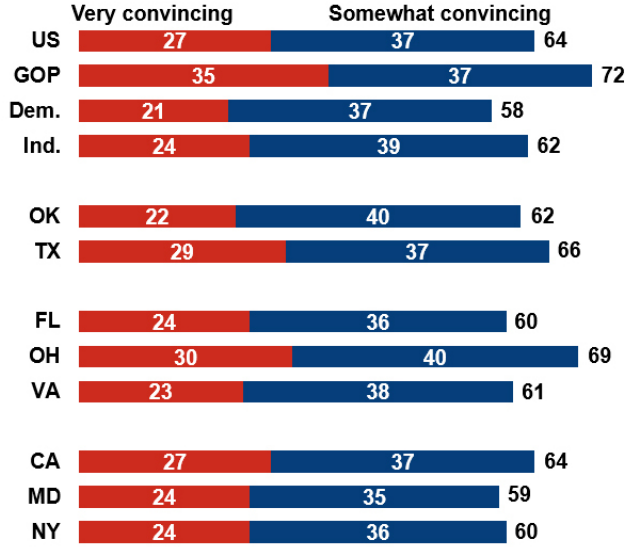
Pro: Raising the Minimum Benefit

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.



Con: Raising the Minimum Benefit

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.



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

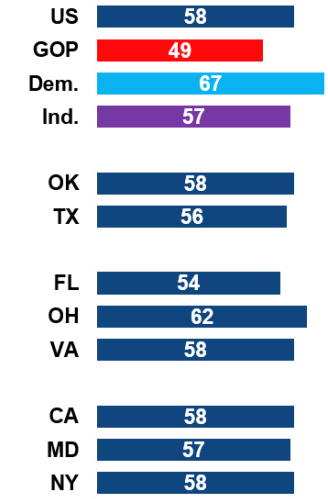
Majorities found arguments both for and against this option convincing; however, nationally and in every state the pro arguments did substantially better. While majorities of Republicans and Democrats in all cases found both arguments convincing, Republicans consistently found the con argument more convincing while Democrats consistently found the pro argument more convincing.

Asked for their initial assessment, in all cases between two thirds and three quarters (63-75%) found the idea tolerable. Nationwide an overwhelming 76% of Democrats found the idea tolerable, as did 62% of Republicans. Majorities of Republicans in six states said the idea was tolerable, but Virginia and Maryland Republicans disagreed (55% and 59% unacceptable, respectively).

In their final recommendations, clear majorities nationally (58%) and in all eight states (54-62%) recommended raising the minimum benefit. Among Democrats large majorities were consistently in favor (67% nationally, 61-80% in the states).

Final Recommendation: Raising Minimum Benefit

Raising the minimum monthly benefit for those who have worked 30 years or more from $800 to $1,216:

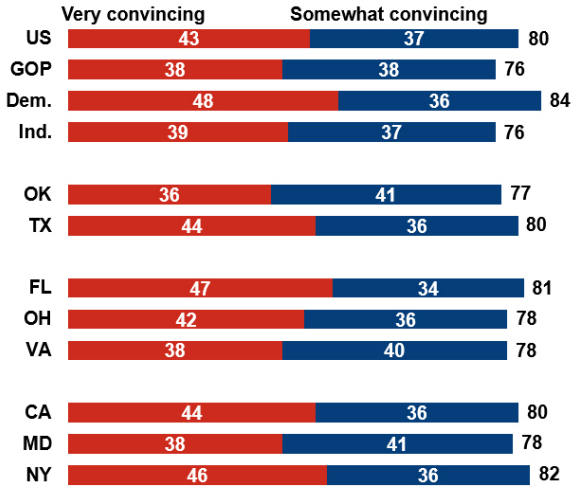


Supplementing Benefits for the Oldest

Respondents then turned to another proposal for increasing benefits, which would provide a supplement for all individuals older than 80 years. Respondents were told that according to the plan "benefits would begin to

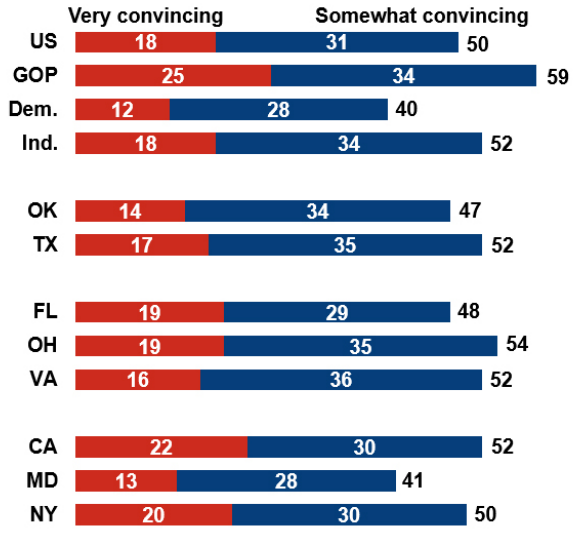
Pro: Supplementing Benefits for the Oldest

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.



Con: Supplementing Benefits for the Oldest

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.



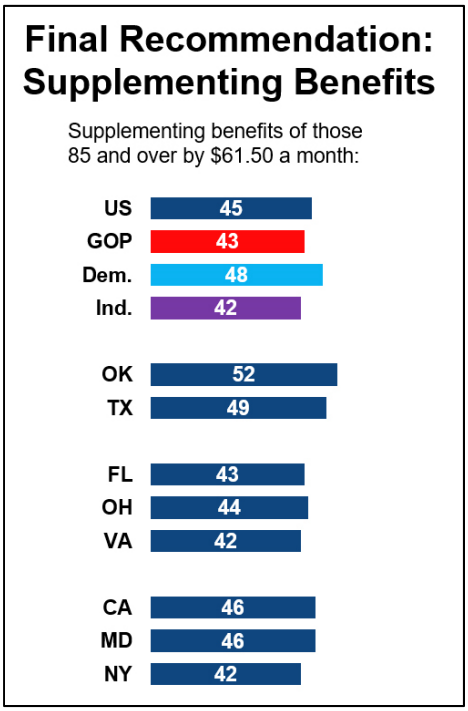
gradually increase at age 81 and by age 85 the increase would be an extra $61.50 a month." They were told that this would increase the shortfall by 5%.

The argument in favor of this idea was found convincing by very large majorities nationally (8 in 10), in all states and in all parties, in every case by 7 in 10 or more. The argument against it did much less well, eliciting a roughly divided response, nationally and in all states except in Maryland, where about 6 in 10 found it unconvincing. Among Republicans though, in all cases majorities (55-72%) found the con argument convincing.

Asked for their initial assessment, large majorities found the idea of increasing benefits to the very old tolerable—70% nationally, with similar numbers in all states. Three quarters of Democrats and two thirds of Republicans said it was tolerable, with similar numbers in all states except Virginia where just half said it was tolerable.

Despite these rather robustly positive responses, in their final recommendations nationally less than half (45%) recommended supplementing the benefits of the very old. Less than half supported it in all states except Oklahoma, where 52% endorsed it. Nationally, less than half of Democrats supported it (48%), but it did elicit majority support among Democrats in Oklahoma (57%), Texas (57%),

California (54%) and Maryland (53%). Forty-three percent of Republicans favored it nationally, with similar numbers in all states.



President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs Social Security Act, August 14, 1935.

COST OF LIVING ADJUSTMENTS (COLAs)

FINAL RECOMMENDATION: Neither option for modifying COLAs was recommended by a majority. A third or less recommended the Chained CPI method that would likely slow the rate of increases. Three in ten recommended basing the COLAs on a system that would focus on what the elderly tend to buy and which would likely quicken the rate of increase. Partisan differences were minor.

The final type of proposal that respondents were asked to consider regarded the cost of living adjustments (COLAs) applied to Social Security benefits. These proposals were not presented as part of the problem of dealing with the shortfall—though their effect on the shortfall was indicated. Instead, the COLA-related proposals were considered in terms of their accuracy and fairness in measuring inflation.

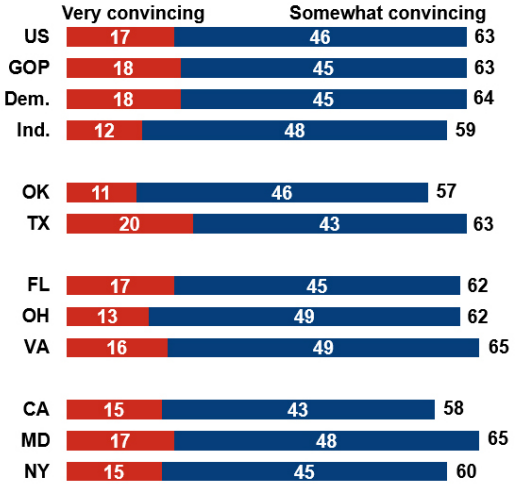
COLA Based on Consumers' Buying Behavior (Chained CPI)

While the chained CPI has received considerable attention as an approach that could contribute to dealing with the Social Security shortfall, respondents were briefed on its underlying premise as a more accurate way of calculating actual price inflation as experienced by the consumer. It was explained this way:

This proposal is to use a measure based on a set of goods that is selected based on what people in general actually buy, because these do change, especially in response to changing prices (this method is known as the chained CPI). Here is an illustration. If benefits are raised based on the prices for the current fixed set of goods, and average benefits go up about $32 a month (or 2.5%), then if benefits are raised based on the prices for the goods people actually buy, average benefits would instead go up about $28 a month (or 2.2%).

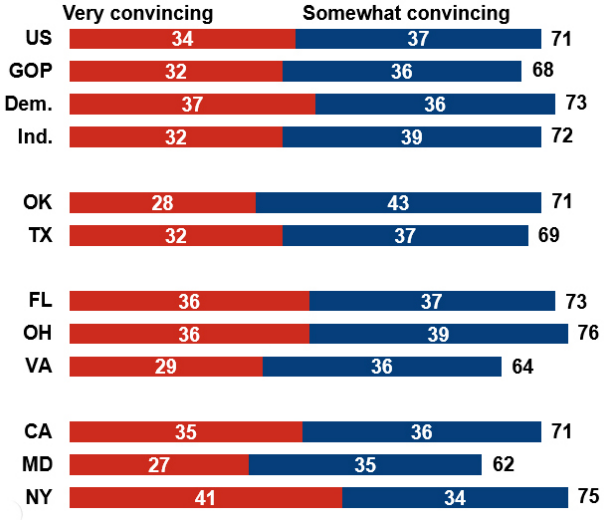
Pro: Chained CPI

Social Security benefits have been going up at a rate that is faster than the real cost of living. The reason is that the current inflation measure does not reflect changes in what people actually buy, which is based in part on what has become more or less expensive. If the adjustment were to reflect this more accurate measure of the cost of living, it would very slightly slow the rate of growth—thus saving money, while still maintaining seniors' purchasing power.



Con: Chained CPI

The idea that senior citizens are going to closely monitor the costs of a wide range of goods and then regularly adjust their established lifestyle and buying patterns is just not realistic. Ultimately, this is a benefit cut, even if it has a complex economic justification. We need to ensure that Social Security benefits keep pace with inflation in the real world, not a theoretical one.



Then the effect on future benefits, in comparison to those currently scheduled, was explained to respondents: *The effect of a lower COLA would compound over time. It is estimated that by making this change, benefits would grow more slowly, so that 10 years after retiring average monthly benefits would be about $35 less than they would be under the current method. After 30 years average monthly benefits would be about $107 less than by the current method.*

This expected slowing of the rate of increase is estimated by the SSA to cover 19% of the shortfall.

The argument in favor of this idea was found convincing by 63% nationally, with very minor differences between the parties and the states (shown). The argument against the idea—that it is unrealistic to think that seniors are going to make these quick adjustments in their buying patterns and thus it is really a benefit cut--was found convincing by a larger 71%, with Democrats being a bit more convinced (73%) than Republicans (68%). State variations were minor.

Assessing the idea, seven in ten found the idea tolerable nationally, and this was true in all states except Florida and New York (65-66%).

Asked for their final recommendation, Chained CPI (presented together with the option of basing COLA on what the elderly tend to buy, discussed below) was endorsed by about 29% nationally and in all states varied only slightly. There were no substantial differences between Republicans and Democrats. While nationally slightly more Republicans favored it, in some states slightly more Democrats did. No partisan group in any state went above one in three.

COLA Based on Goods the Elderly Tend to Buy

Another idea on COLAs that has also received some discussion is to base the inflation measure on the elderly's mix of goods and services purchased. While the previous idea of the chained CPI is—like the current measure—based on the prices of buying patterns of US adult population, this measure would be based on the buying patterns of senior citizens who are the large majority of Social Security recipients.

The proposal was introduced to respondents as follows:

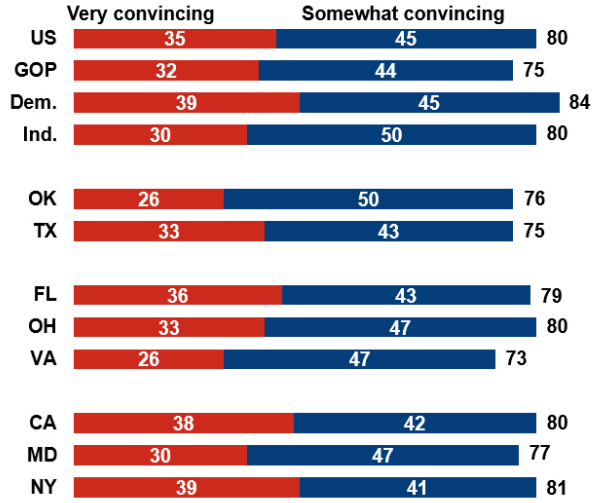
The second proposal for changing the COLA is to use a measure for inflation based on a set of goods that reflects what ELDERLY people tend to buy. Because they spend more than other Americans for out-of-pocket health care costs and those costs rise faster than average inflation, this method would make 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 faster, so that 10 years from now they would be 2% more than they would be according to the current method. After 30 years they would be 5.7% more than by the current method.

This would likely quicken the rate of increase and is estimated by the SSA to increase the shortfall by 13%.

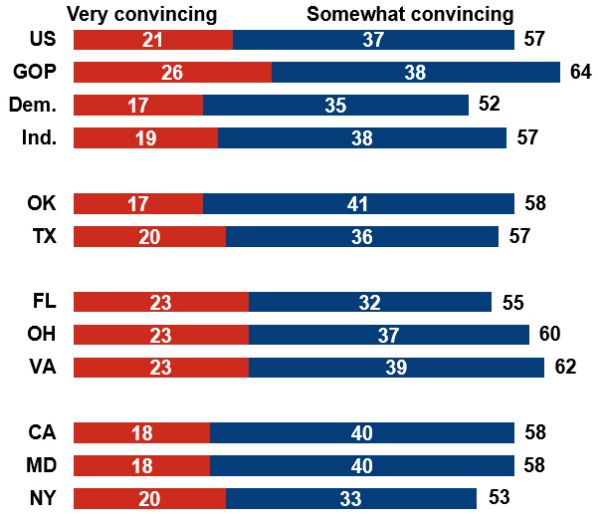
Pro: Basing COLA on What Elderly Buy

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 realitv.



Con: Basing COLA on What Elderly Buy

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.



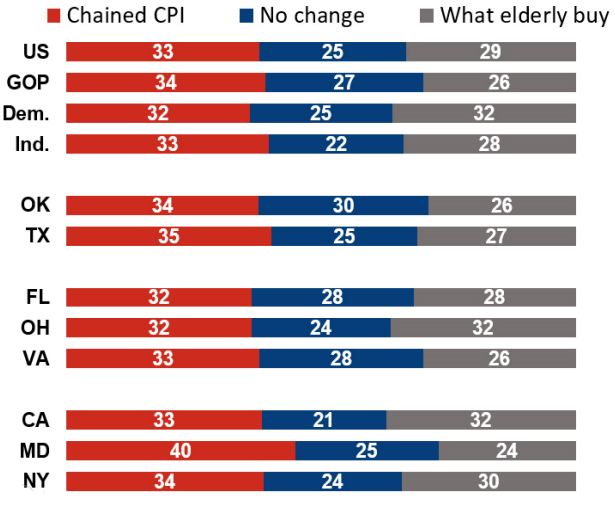
The argument in favor of this idea was found convincing by 80% nationally and 73-81% in the eight states, with Democrats a bit more convinced than Republicans (shown). The argument against—that this would worsen the shortfall--was found convincing by a significantly lower 57% nationally and 53-62% in the states. Republicans were a bit more convinced than Democrats.

Assessing the idea, it was found tolerable by 66% nationally, 60-67% in seven states, and 57% in Virginia. Democrats were consistently more positive (nationally 72% tolerable) than Republicans (nationally 61% tolerable).

Presented together with the Chained CPI option and asked for their final recommendation, basing COLAs on what the elderly tend to buy was recommended by about 3 in 10 nationally (29%) and 24-32% in the states. Democrats tended to be slightly more positive (28% nationally) than Republicans (25% nationally).

Final Recommendation: Recalculating COLAs

Basing annual COLAs on:



SUMMARY OF FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Nationally and in all states, large majorities of both parties made recommendations that would cover at least two thirds of the Social Security shortfall. These included reducing benefits for the top 25% of earners, raising the retirement age to 68, raising the cap on taxable earnings to $215,000, and raising the payroll tax rate by .4%.

Nationally and in all states, more modest (though substantial) majorities went further and completely covered the shortfall, by not just raising, but removing the cap on income subject to the payroll tax. This was a bipartisan majority nationally and in five states, but with less than a majority of Republicans in three states.

Nationally and in all states, majorities, also raised the minimum benefit, bringing the coverage of the shortfall to just under one hundred percent. This did not include a majority of Republicans nationally or in five states.

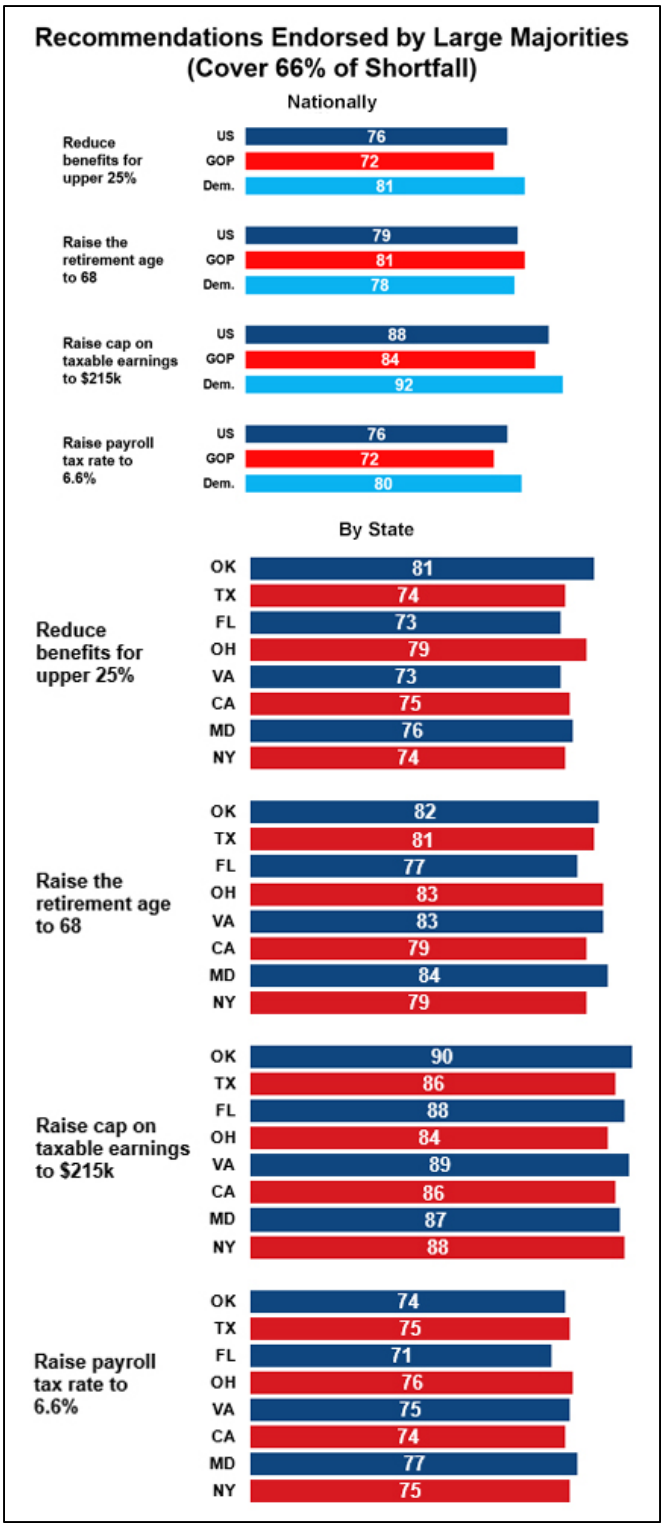
The final recommendations revealed a remarkable level of consensus on steps that would cover at least two thirds of the Social Security shortfall. Nationally and in all eight states, seven in ten or more and two thirds or more of all Republicans and Democrats recommended the following steps:

- Reducing benefits for the upper 25% of earners (reduces shortfall 7%)
- Raising the full retirement age from 67 to 68 (reduces shortfall 15%)
- Raising the cap on taxable income from the current $113,700 to $215,000 (reduces shortfall 27%)
- Raising the payroll tax rate from 6.2% to 6.6% (reduces shortfall 17%)

Republican support for these proposals was lower, but never went below 64% in any state.

In addition, more modest majorities went further and not only raised the cap on income subject to the payroll tax but removed it completely, thereby covering the entire shortfall

(103%). The percentage taking this step was 59% nationally, including 54% of Republicans and 64% of Democrats. Support was highest at 60% in Oklahoma and lowest at 55% in Maryland. This choice was not fully bipartisan: a slight majority of Republicans supported it



nationally (54%) and in California (60%), Texas (53%), Ohio (53%), Virginia (52%), and Florida (51%), but no more than half in Oklahoma (50%), New York (50%), and Maryland (47%).

Majorities also endorsed raising the minimum benefit in all eight states (54-62%), as well as 58% nationally. Together with the other majority positions, this would lower the shortfall covered to 98%. However, this was not bipartisan; raising the minimum benefit did not receive Republican majority support nationally or in five states, though it did in Ohio (52%) and California (55%).

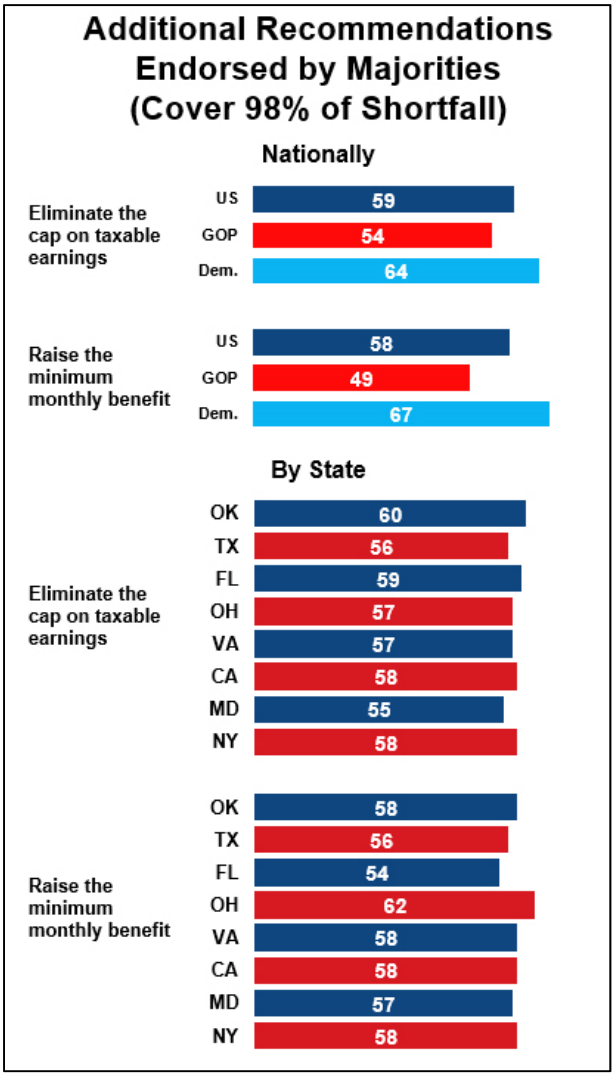
Raising benefits for the very old was not chosen by a majority nationally or in any state except Oklahoma (52%)—a measure that would increase the shortfall 5%.

Based on simple majority positions within each party, both Democrats and Republicans covered all of the shortfall, since majorities in each party chose to eliminate the cap on taxable earnings. Democrats raised the minimum benefit, while just under half of Republicans did; thus Democrats' majority positions covered 98% of the shortfall while those of Republicans covered 105%.

In states where majorities of Republicans did not eliminate the cap on income subject to the payroll tax, they covered a lesser portion (66%) of the shortfall than Democrats, who covered 93%--this included Oklahoma and Maryland. But in Virginia, Republicans' majority positions covered more (105%) than Democrats (98%). These variations all stemmed from whether partisan majorities chose to eliminate the cap on taxable income, and whether they chose to increase benefits. This was also true in Texas, Florida, California and New York, where Republicans covered more of the shortfall. In Ohio both party groups covered an equal 98%.

If respondents did not select enough options in the final recommendations to cover all of the shortfall, they were offered the opportunity to choose other ways for dealing with the shortfall. Alternately, they could return to the final recommendations, or end the survey. Less than 10% of the sample ultimately chose one or more among these other methods for dealing with the shortfall.

The most popular alternate method was to reduce defense spending (5% of the whole sample). This was followed by reducing non-defense spending (4%) and raising income and corporate taxes (3%). Only 1% chose either letting Social Security benefits decrease when the trust fund can no longer pay them in full, or borrowing the funds. (The subgroup answering these questions was too small for state data to be meaningful.)



CHANGES SINCE 2013

As compared to a national survey in 2013 using the same policymaking simulation, support for eliminating the cap on income subject to the payroll tax increased from a modest a majority to six in ten, driven especially by a surge in support among independents. Support for raising the minimum benefit also rose from just under half to nearly six in ten.

This Social Security simulation was previously run with a national sample in summer 2013. The 2016 fielding of the simulation was identical except for minor actuarial updates to figures. Over the three years, there were two key changes in respondents' attitudes, both tending to increase the progressivity of the program's structure:

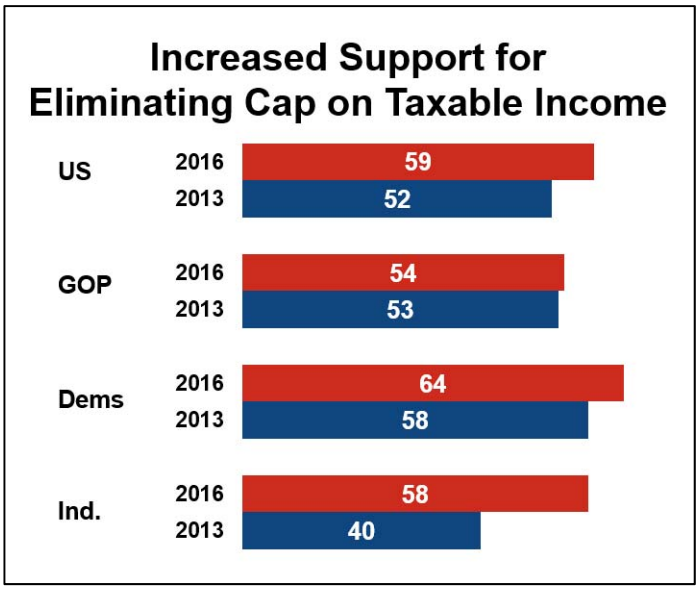
- The choice to eliminate the cap on taxable earnings increased to a robust majority, with a surge among independents;
- Those choosing to raise the minimum benefit grew substantially, and this shift was visible in both parties and among independents.

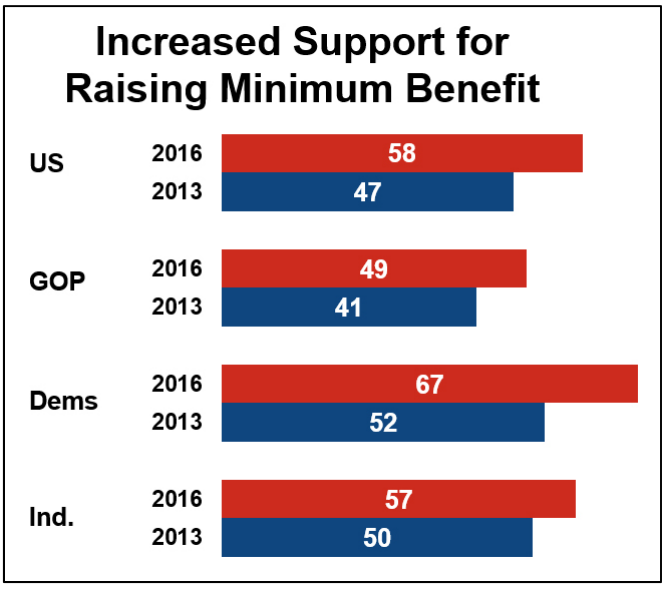
Those choosing to eliminate the cap grew nationally by seven points, from 52% in 2013 to 59% in 2016. This included a modest Republican majority that did not change (53% to 54%), while Democrats increased by six points (58% to 64%). The most important increase, however, was among independents. In 2013 only 40% of independents chose to eliminate the cap; this rose a surprising 18 points to 58%.

The choice to raise the minimum benefit went up nationally by 11 points, from 47% to 58%. This shift in views was bipartisan; though led by Democrats, Republicans went from being opposed to being divided, while independents moved from being divided to a clear majority in favor.

Among Republicans, willingness to raise the minimum benefit rose 8 points (41% to 49%), and among independents this was 7 points (50 to 57%). The greatest increase—15 points--was among Democrats (52% to 67%).

The rest of the range of Social Security choices made by respondents between 2013 and 2016 showed great stability, with no other meaningful differences.



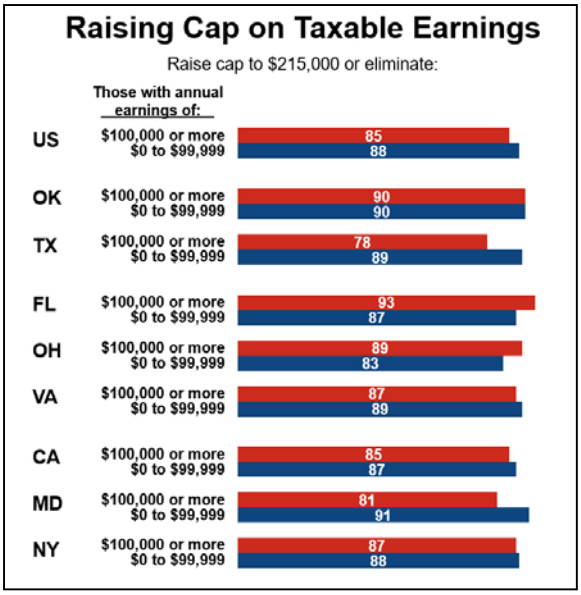


DIFFERENCES BY AFFECTED SUBPOPULATIONS

Among subpopulations that would be directly affected by various Social Security reforms, [large majorities nonetheless supported them, and this was true nationally and in all states.
Since various options to cover the Social Security shortfall involve burdens that fall onto some groups more than others, it is natural to assume that those negatively affected by the reforms would resist them. However, this did not prove to be the case.

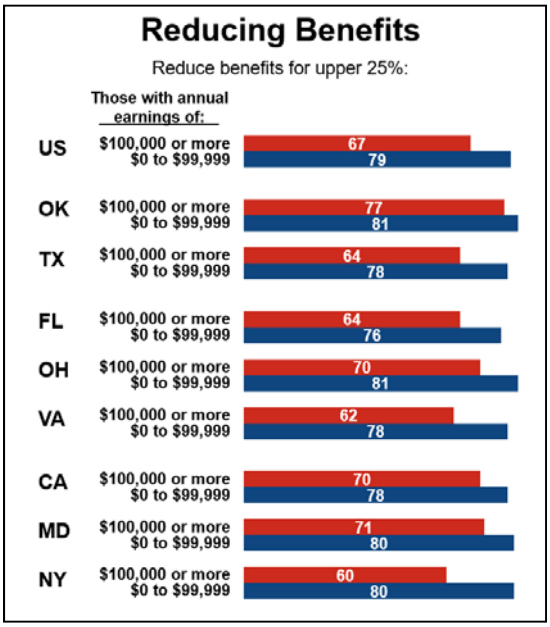
One might assume that those in the top quartile of income (approximately $100,000 and above) would resist reducing benefits for the top 25% of earners. In fact, while those with incomes above $100,000 were a bit lower in their support, large majorities nonetheless still recommend this benefit cut: 67% nationally and ranging from 60% in New York to 77% in Oklahoma.

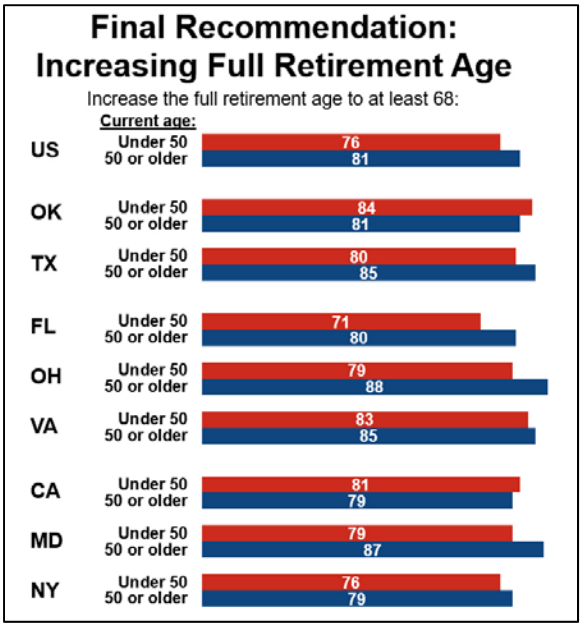
Similarly, one might expect that those with incomes over $100,000 would resist raising the income cap subject to the payroll tax, as they would be much more likely to be affected by it, either immediately or at some point in their earning history. However, nationally as well as in all states eight in ten or more recommended raising the cap from $113,700 to $215,000. In the states this ranged from 78% in Texas to 93% in Florida.



Respondents were told that gradually increasing the full retirement age to 68 would directly affect those born in 1960 or later, but not those born earlier. One might reasonably expect that those whose retirement age would be affected would be less likely to select this option.

In fact, among those under 50, a remarkable three quarters nationally and 71-84% in the eight states raised the age to 68. In all of these cases, this is quite similar to those 50 and older who would not be personally affected—81% nationally. The difference across the eight states stayed within a 2-to-9 point range.





APPENDIX

1. Final Recommendations (National)
2. Oklahoma
3. Texas
4. Florida
5. Ohio
6. Virginia
7. California
8. Maryland
9. New York
10. By Race

Final Recommendations

	Impact on Shortfall	US	GOP	Dem.	Indep.
Benefit Reductions					
Reduce benefits for at least upper 25%	-7%	76%	72%	81%	73%
Gradually raise retirement age to at least 68	-15%	79%	81%	78%	74%
Revenue Increases					
Raising or eliminating the cap on taxable earnings	-27%	88%	84%	92%	85%
Eliminate cap on taxable earnings	-66%	59%	54%	64%	58%
Increase payroll tax rate to at least 6.6%	-17%	76%	72%	80%	71%
Benefit Increases					
Raise the minimum monthly benefit for those who have worked 30 years or more from $800 to $1,216	+7%	58%	49%	67%	57%
Supplement benefits of those 85 and over by $61.50/month	+5%	45%	43%	48%	42%
Recalculate Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs)					
Base COLAs on what people buy (chained CPI)	-19%	33%	34%	32%	33%
Base COLAs on what elderly people buy	+13%	29%	26%	32%	28%
Change to shortfall endorsed by majority:		**-98%**	**-105%**	**-98%**	**-98%**

Oklahoma

	Impact on Shortfall	US	OK	GOP	Dem.
Benefit Reductions					
Reduce benefits for at least upper 25%	-7%	76%	81%	72%	87%
Gradually raise retirement age to at least 68	-15%	79%	82%	81%	80%
Revenue Increases					
Raising or eliminating the cap on taxable earnings	-27%	88%	90%	85%	93%
Eliminate cap on taxable earnings	-66%	59%	60%	50%*	66%
Increase payroll tax rate to at least 6.6%	-17%	76%	74%	68%	80%
Benefit Increases					
Raise the minimum monthly benefit for those who have worked 30 years or more from $800 to $1,216	+7%	58%	58%	47%	69%
Supplement benefits of those 85 and over by $61.50/month	+5%	45%	52%	46%	57%
Recalculate Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs)					
Base COLAs on what people buy (chained CPI)	-19%	33%	34%	39%	26%
Base COLAs on what elderly people buy	+13%	29%	26%	24%	29%
Change to shortfall endorsed by majority:		**-98%**	**-93%**	**-105%**	**-93%**

*50.3%

Texas

	Impact on Shortfall	US	TX	GOP	Dem.
Benefit Reductions					
Reduce benefits for at least upper 25%	-7%	76%	74%	71%	80%
Gradually raise retirement age to at least 68	-15%	79%	81%	83%	81%
Revenue Increases					
Raising or eliminating the cap on taxable earnings	-27%	88%	86%	80%	94%
Eliminate cap on taxable earnings	-66%	59%	56%	53%	64%
Increase payroll tax rate to at least 6.6%	-17%	76%	75%	72%	81%
Benefit Increases					
Raise the minimum monthly benefit for those who have worked 30 years or more from $800 to $1,216	+7%	58%	56%	50%*	62%
Supplement benefits of those 85 and over by $61.50/month	+5%	45%	49%	45%	57%
Recalculate Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs)					
Base COLAs on what people buy (chained CPI)	-19%	33%	35%	32%	39%
Base COLAs on what elderly people buy	+13%	29%	27%	28%	31%
Change to shortfall endorsed by majority:		**-98%**	**-98%**	**-98%**	**-93%**

*50.2%

Florida

	Impact on Shortfall	US	FL	GOP	Dem.
Benefit Reductions					
Reduce benefits for at least upper 25%	-7%	76%	73%	67%	81%
Gradually raise retirement age to at least 68	-15%	79%	77%	75%	81%
Revenue Increases					
Raising or eliminating the cap on taxable earnings	-27%	88%	88%	84%	92%
Eliminate cap on taxable earnings	-66%	59%	59%	51%	65%
Increase payroll tax rate to at least 6.6%	-17%	76%	71%	69%	79%
Benefit Increases					
Raise the minimum monthly benefit for those who have worked 30 years or more from $800 to $1,216	+7%	58%	54%	45%	61%
Supplement benefits of those 85 and over by $61.50/month	+5%	45%	43%	41%	46%
Recalculate Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs)					
Base COLAs on what people buy (chained CPI)	-19%	33%	32%	31%	32%
Base COLAs on what elderly people buy	+13%	29%	28%	22%	32%
Change to shortfall endorsed by majority:		**-98%**	**-98%**	**-105%**	**-98%**

Ohio

	Impact on Shortfall	US	OH	GOP	Dem.
Benefit Reductions					
Reduce benefits for at least upper 25%	-7%	76%	79%	74%	87%
Gradually raise retirement age to at least 68	-15%	79%	83%	86%	86%
Revenue Increases					
Raising or eliminating the cap on taxable earnings	-27%	88%	84%	79%	90%
Eliminate cap on taxable earnings	-66%	59%	57%	53%	61%
Increase payroll tax rate to at least 6.6%	-17%	76%	76%	67%	86%
Benefit Increases					
Raise the minimum monthly benefit for those who have worked 30 years or more from $800 to $1,216	+7%	58%	62%	52%	80%
Supplement benefits of those 85 and over by $61.50/month	+5%	45%	44%	45%	44%
Recalculate Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs)					
Base COLAs on what people buy (chained CPI)	-19%	33%	32%	35%	28%
Base COLAs on what elderly people buy	+13%	29%	32%	27%	38%
Change to shortfall endorsed by majority:		**-98%**	**-98%**	**-98%**	**-98%**

Virginia

	Impact on Shortfall	US	VA	GOP	Dem.
Benefit Reductions					
Reduce benefits for at least upper 25%	-7%	76%	73%	70%	82%
Gradually raise retirement age to at least 68	-15%	79%	83%	82%	84%
Revenue Increases					
Raising or eliminating the cap on taxable earnings	-27%	88%	89%	84%	95%
Eliminate cap on taxable earnings	-66%	59%	57%	53%	60%
Increase payroll tax rate to at least 6.6%	-17%	76%	75%	64%	84%
Benefit Increases					
Raise the minimum monthly benefit for those who have worked 30 years or more from $800 to $1,216	+7%	58%	58%	38%	73%
Supplement benefits of those 85 and over by $61.50/month	+5%	45%	42%	40%	42%
Recalculate Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs)					
Base COLAs on what people buy (chained CPI)	-19%	33%	33%	32%	31%
Base COLAs on what elderly people buy	+13%	29%	26%	17%	30%
Change to shortfall endorsed by majority:		**-98%**	**-98%**	**-105%**	**-98%**

California

	Impact on Shortfall	US	CA	GOP	Dem.
Benefit Reductions					
Reduce benefits for at least upper 25%	-7%	76%	75%	65%	83%
Gradually raise retirement age to at least 68	-15%	79%	79%	77%	80%
Revenue Increases					
Raising or eliminating the cap on taxable earnings	-27%	88%	86%	83%	92%
Eliminate cap on taxable earnings	-66%	59%	58%	60%	64%
Increase payroll tax rate to at least 6.6%	-17%	76%	74%	73%	77%
Benefit Increases					
Raise the minimum monthly benefit for those who have worked 30 years or more from $800 to $1,216	+7%	58%	58%	55%	61%
Supplement benefits of those 85 and over by $61.50/month	+5%	45%	46%	40%	54%
Recalculate Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs)					
Base COLAs on what people buy (chained CPI)	-19%	33%	33%	28%	27%
Base COLAs on what elderly people buy	+13%	29%	32%	31%	39%
Change to shortfall endorsed by majority:		**-98%**	**-98%**	**-98%**	**-93%**

Maryland

	Impact on Shortfall	US	MD	GOP	Dem.
Benefit Reductions					
Reduce benefits for at least upper 25%	-7%	76%	76%	66%	82%
Gradually raise retirement age to at least 68	-15%	79%	84%	85%	85%
Revenue Increases					
Raising or eliminating the cap on taxable earnings	-27%	88%	87%	79%	93%
Eliminate cap on taxable earnings	-66%	59%	55%	47%	60%
Increase payroll tax rate to at least 6.6%	-17%	76%	77%	67%	81%
Benefit Increases					
Raise the minimum monthly benefit for those who have worked 30 years or more from $800 to $1,216	+7%	58%	57%	39%	64%
Supplement benefits of those 85 and over by $61.50/month	+5%	45%	46%	37%	53%
Recalculate Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs)					
Base COLAs on what people buy (chained CPI)	-19%	33%	40%	42%	37%
Base COLAs on what elderly people buy	+13%	29%	24%	23%	27%
Change to shortfall endorsed by majority:		**-98%**	**-98%**	**-66%**	**-93%**

New York

	Impact on Shortfall	US	NY	GOP	Dem.
Benefit Reductions					
Reduce benefits for at least upper 25%	-7%	76%	74%	70%	79%
Gradually raise retirement age to at least 68	-15%	79%	79%	78%	79%
Revenue Increases					
Raising or eliminating the cap on taxable earnings	-27%	88%	88%	79%	93%
Eliminate cap on taxable earnings	-66%	59%	58%	50%*	61%
Increase payroll tax rate to at least 6.6%	-17%	76%	75%	67%	80%
Benefit Increases					
Raise the minimum monthly benefit for those who have worked 30 years or more from $800 to $1,216	+7%	58%	58%	49%	63%
Supplement benefits of those 85 and over by $61.50/month	+5%	45%	42%	44%	43%
Recalculate Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs)					
Base COLAs on what people buy (chained CPI)	-19%	33%	34%	30%	33%
Base COLAs on what elderly people buy	+13%	29%	30%	29%	32%
Change to shortfall endorsed by majority:		**-98%**	**-98%**	**-105%**	**-98%**

*50.3%

By Race

	Impact on Shortfall	US	White/ Caucasian	Black/African-American	Hispanic
Benefit Reductions					
Reduce benefits for at least upper 25%	-7%	76%	75%	78%	79%
Gradually raise retirement age to at least 68	-15%	79%	80%	71%	79%
Revenue Increases					
Raising or eliminating the cap on taxable earnings	-27%	88%	88%	84%	88%
Eliminate cap on taxable earnings	-66%	59%	61%	47%	56%
Increase payroll tax rate to at least 6.6%	-17%	76%	75%	78%	78%
Benefit Increases					
Raise the minimum monthly benefit for those who have worked 30 years or more from $800 to $1,216	+7%	58%	56%	65%	63%
Supplement benefits of those 85 and over by $61.50/month	+5%	45%	45%	41%	44%
Recalculate Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs)					
Base COLAs on what people buy (chained CPI)	-19%	33%	32%	36%	35%
Base COLAs on what elderly people buy	+13%	29%	30%	26%	25%
Change to shortfall endorsed by majority:		**-98%**	**-98%**	**-59%**	**-98%**

Voice Of the People is a non-partisan organization that seeks to re-anchor our democracy in its founding principles by giving 'We the People' a greater role in government. VOP furthers the use of innovative methods and technology to give the American people a more effective voice in the policymaking process.

VOP is working to urge Congress to take these new methods to scale so that Members of Congress have a large, scientifically-selected, representative sample of their constituents—called a Citizen Cabinet—to be consulted on current issues and providing a voice that accurately reflects the values and priorities of their district or state.

The **Program for Public Consultation** seeks to improve democratic governance by consulting the citizenry on key public policy issues governments face. It has developed innovative survey methods that simulate the process that policymakers go through—getting a briefing, hearing arguments, dealing with tradeoffs—before coming to their conclusion. It also uses surveys to help find common ground between conflicting parties. The Program for Public Consultation is part of the School of Public Policy at the University of Maryland.

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