

50+ Americans and the Future of Medicare and Social Security

Background

AARP conducted a survey of adults age 50+ to look at public views about potential changes to Medicare and Social Security in a post-election session, cuts to benefits to reduce the deficit, and approaches to reducing Medicare costs. The survey also examined the level of interest Americans 50+ having a say in the future of Medicare and Social Security and the importance of access to information about how changes will impact them.

Survey Findings

- **No Last-Minute Deals on Medicare and Social Security:** The majority of 50+ adults (70%), across party lines, believe a separate public debate about the future of Medicare and Social Security is needed and changes should not be part of any end-of-year deal (71% Democrat, 67% Republican, 71% Independent). Furthermore, two-thirds (67%) believe changes to Medicare and Social Security should be made based on the needs of the people and not just their impact on the budget (75% Democrat, 59% Republican, 67% Independent).
- **Americans Want Their Voices Heard:** Almost all of adults age 50+ (92%) believe it is very important that Washington listen to ordinary citizens when it comes to decisions about Medicare and Social Security (92% Democrat, 93% Republican, 92% Independent).
- **No Cuts to Medicare and Social Security to Reduce the Deficit:** Across party lines, the majority of adults age 50+ (76%) oppose reducing Medicare benefits to reduce the deficit (84% Democrat, 70% Republican, 74% Independent). Similarly, a majority (75%) oppose reducing Social Security benefits to reduce the deficit (79% Democrat, 70% Republican, 76% Independent).
- **No Cuts to COLA to Reduce the Deficit:** The majority of adults age 50+ (61%) oppose changing the Social Security cost of living adjustment (63% Democrat, 62% Republican, 59% Independent).
- **Keep Promise to Seniors:** An overwhelming majority of 50+ adults (78%) believe it is very important not to reduce Social Security benefits for current recipients (80% Democrat, 73% Republican, 80% Independent). Likewise, more than seven in ten (76%) believe it is very important not to reduce Medicare benefits for current beneficiaries (80% Democrat, 70% Republican, 75% Independent).

Survey Findings, continued

- **Reduce Health Costs Not Benefits:** When it comes to reducing Medicare costs, 50+ adults would prefer changes in payment policy for healthcare providers to encourage greater effort to contain costs rather than discouraging health care use by changing seniors' payments such as higher deductibles and co-pays (71% compared to 12%). These findings hold across party lines (81% Democrat, 64% Republican, 68% Independent).
- **Taxes Priority for Lame Duck Session:** Public opinion was probed for various decisions Congress could make during the post-election session to address expiring tax cuts and automatic spending cuts. Extending tax cuts for middle income taxpayers (74%) garners the most support while extending the tax cuts for all taxpayers is supported by slightly less than half (48%). There is mid-level support for extending unemployment benefits (56%) and preventing payment cuts to doctors in Medicare (46%). Less support is seen for replacing automatic cuts to defense and other government spending (41%) and for enacting reductions in Medicare (19%) and Social Security (15%).
- **Voters Want to Know What Changes Mean for Them:** Less than half of 50+ adults felt President Obama provided enough information about his plans for Medicare (45%) and Social Security (43%) so that they could understand how it may impact them personally. Democrats were much more likely than Republicans to feel they had enough information about President Obama's plans for Medicare (76% Democrat, 19% Republican, 38% Independent) and Social Security (78% Democrat, 14% Republican, 38% Independent).
- **Confidence is Weak about Getting Facts:** Half of 50+ adults (55%) are confident that they will have enough information about any proposed changes to Medicare and Social Security, although intensity of confidence is weak and driven by political party (88% Democrat, 25% Republican, 52% Independent).
- **Confidence about Changes Reflecting Views is Mixed:** Confidence that any changes made to Medicare and Social Security will reflect respondents' views varies strongly by party. (80% Democrat, 17% Republican, 44% Independent).

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Methodology: 800 interviews of adults age 50+ were conducted by Woelfel Research, an independent research firm, on November 7th and 8th, 2012. This survey has a margin of sampling error of +/- 3.5%.

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ELECTION ISSUES/VOTER GUIDE SURVEY

(N=800, sampling error = ±3.5%)

- National sample of 800 adults age 50+
- Fielding 11/7 and 11/8 using age-assisted list

SCREENER

Hello, this is _____ calling from Woelfel Research, a national opinion research firm. We are not telemarketers and are not trying to sell you anything. We would like to find out your opinions on some important issues. Your views are important and we would greatly appreciate your participation. All of your responses will be kept entirely confidential.

S1. Are you 50 years of age or older?

Yes

No [TERMINATE]

S2. Did you vote in the recent presidential election?

Yes

No [TERMINATE]

Social Security, Medicare, & the election –External module

1. Do you consider yourself – a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent or none of the above?

Base: Total Respondents	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
	N=800	N=272	N=268	N=171
	%	%	%	%
Democrat	34	100	-	-
Republican	33	-	100	-
Independent	24	-	-	100
None of the above	7	-	-	-
[DNR] Don't know	<0.5	-	-	-
[DNR] Refused	2	-	-	-

2. Who did you vote for in the 2012 Presidential election? (Rotate 1 and 2)

Base: Total Respondents	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
	N=800	N=272	N=268	N=171
	%	%	%	%
Mitt Romney	48	7	92	45
Barack Obama	43	90	3	41
[DNR] Other	1	1	-	3
[DNR] Refused	8	3	4	11

3. In the election for U.S. Senate, did you vote for the democratic candidate, the republican candidate (ROTATE TWO), another candidate, or did you not vote for a senate candidate?

Base: Total Respondents	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
	N=800	N=272	N=268	N=171
	%	%	%	%
Democratic candidate	39	82	4	32
Republican candidate	39	3	81	36
Other	4	3	1	6
Did not vote for senate candidate	10	8	9	12
[DNR] Don't know	3	3	2	5
[DNR] Refused	5	1	2	9

4. In the election for U.S. House of Representatives, did you vote for the democratic candidate, the republican candidate (ROTATE TWO), another candidate, or did you not vote?

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800	Dem N=272	Rep N=268	Ind N=171
	%	%	%	%
Democratic candidate	38	83	3	29
Republican candidate	42	4	86	38
Other	3	2	1	7
Did not vote for house candidate	7	7	5	10
[DNR] Don't know	4	3	3	8
[DNR] Refused	5	1	2	8

5. During the campaign, did President Obama provide enough information about his plans for Medicare for you to understand how it may affect you, personally?

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800	Dem N=272	Rep N=268	Ind N=171
	%	%	%	%
Yes	45	76	19	38
No	48	18	75	53
[DNR] Don't know	7	6	5	9
[DNR] Refused	1	-	1	<0.5

6. During the campaign, did President Obama provide enough information about his plans for Social Security for you to understand how it may affect you, personally?

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800	Dem N=272	Rep N=268	Ind N=171
	%	%	%	%
Yes	43	78	14	38
No	50	15	79	53
[DNR] Don't know	7	6	6	9
[DNR] Refused	1	1	1	-

7. As you may know, legislative changes to Medicare and Social Security may be proposed next year. How confident are you that you will have enough information about how these changes may impact you personally?

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800	Dem N=272	Rep N=268	Ind N=171
	%	%	%	%
Very confident	25	50	6	20
Somewhat confident	30	38	19	32
Not very confident	18	6	28	19
Not at all confident	24	2	44	28
[DNR] Don't know	3	4	3	1
[DNR] Refused	<0.5	<0.5	<0.5	-

8. How confident are you that any changes made to Medicare and Social Security will reflect your views?

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800 %	Dem N=272 %	Rep N=268 %	Ind N=171 %
Very confident	17	30	6	13
Somewhat confident	30	50	11	31
Not very confident	20	8	28	26
Not at all confident	27	7	48	23
[DNR] Don't know	6	5	7	7
[DNR] Refused	<0.5	-	-	<0.5

9. As you may know, Social Security and Medicare reductions are on the table, along with expiring tax cuts and reductions in other government spending, in the post-election congressional session to address our nation's budget. Given this, which of the following statements do you agree with more? (READ AND ROTATE)

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800 %	Dem N=272 %	Rep N=268 %	Ind N=171 %
"We need to address our nation's budget now, and reducing Social Security and Medicare benefits must be part of any end-of-year budget agreement in Washington."	20	19	24	20
"We need a separate, public debate about the future of Medicare and Social Security and we shouldn't cram changes to these programs into an end-of-year budget agreement."	70	71	67	71
[DNR] Don't know	10	10	9	9
[DNR] Refused	-	-	-	-

10. When it comes to the future of Medicare and Social Security, lawmakers in Washington often have differing opinions and priorities. Given this, which statement do you agree with more?

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800 %	Dem N=272 %	Rep N=268 %	Ind N=171 %
"Any changes to Medicare and Social Security should be made based on the needs of people who've paid into the programs, not just their impact on the federal budget."	67	75	59	67
"We need to get our federal budget under control, even if it impacts the needs of people who've paid into the Medicare and Social Security programs."	24	18	30	24
[DNR] Don't know	9	7	11	9
[DNR] Refused	-	-	-	-

11. Which of the following do you think would do more to reduce Medicare costs?

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800 %	Dem N=272 %	Rep N=268 %	Ind N=171 %
Changes in payment policy for doctors, hospitals, drug companies and other health care providers to encourage greater effort to contain costs.	71	81	64	68
Changes to seniors' payments, such as higher deductibles and co-payments, to encourage use of fewer health care services.	12	7	17	14
[DNR] Don't know	17	12	19	18
[DNR] Refused	-	-	-	-

12. How much do you support or oppose reducing Social Security benefits as a means to reduce the budget deficit?

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800 %	Dem N=272 %	Rep N=268 %	Ind N=171 %
Strongly support	4	2	7	4
Somewhat support	15	17	15	16
Somewhat oppose	16	16	16	18
Strongly oppose	59	62	54	58
[DNR] Don't know	4	3	5	3
[DNR] Refused	1	-	3	2

13. How much do you support or oppose reducing Medicare benefits as a means to reduce the budget deficit?

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800 %	Dem N=272 %	Rep N=268 %	Ind N=171 %
Strongly support	4	2	5	4
Somewhat support	14	11	18	15
Somewhat oppose	19	21	17	22
Strongly oppose	58	64	53	53
[DNR] Don't know	5	3	6	5
[DNR] Refused	1	1	1	1

14. Many candidates promised during the campaign that any proposed changes to Social Security would not affect current Social Security recipients. How important is it to you that (INSERT Obama/Romney) ensures benefits are not reduced for current Social Security recipients?

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800 %	Dem N=272 %	Rep N=268 %	Ind N=171 %
Very important	78	80	73	80
Somewhat important	16	15	18	15
Not very important	3	3	4	3
Not at all important	1	0	1	2
[DNR] Don't know	1	1	2	<0.5
[DNR] Refused	1	-	2	-

15. Many candidates promised during the campaign that any proposed changes to Medicare would not affect current Medicare beneficiaries. How important is it to you that (INSERT Obama/Romney) ensures benefits are not reduced for current Medicare beneficiaries?

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800	Dem N=272	Rep N=268	Ind N=171
	%	%	%	%
Very important	76	80	70	75
Somewhat important	18	16	20	20
Not very important	3	1	5	3
Not at all important	2	1	3	2
[DNR] Don't know	1	1	2	<0.5
[DNR] Refused	1	-	1	-

16. One proposal on the table in Washington to help reduce the deficit would be to change the way the Social Security cost of living adjustment is calculated for current seniors and future retirees. This change would reduce the expected benefit increase each year and benefit reductions would get larger over time. How much do you support or oppose such a proposal?

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800	Dem N=272	Rep N=268	Ind N=171
	%	%	%	%
Strongly support	7	8	7	9
Somewhat support	21	19	19	25
Somewhat oppose	16	19	11	21
Strongly oppose	45	44	51	39
[DNR] Don't know	10	10	10	6
[DNR] Refused	1	-	3	1

17. When it comes to decisions about Social Security and Medicare, how important is it that Washington listen to ordinary citizens like you?

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800	Dem N=272	Rep N=268	Ind N=171
	%	%	%	%
Very important	92	92	93	92
Somewhat important	7	8	5	7
Not very important	1	<0.5	1	1
Not at all important	1	<0.5	1	<0.5
[DNR] Don't know	<0.5	<0.5	<0.5	-
[DNR] Refused	<0.5	-	-	<0.5

18. As you may know, Congress is scheduled to return to Washington for a short post-election session to address expiring tax cuts and automatic spending cuts. Would you support or oppose Congress acting on the following issues during a short post-election session?

Extend tax cuts for middle income taxpayers

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800	Dem N=272	Rep N=268	Ind N=171
	%	%	%	%
Strongly support	52	47	57	51
Somewhat support	23	23	20	23
Somewhat oppose	9	11	6	9
Strongly oppose	12	14	11	14
[DNR] Don't know	4	4	5	2
[DNR] Refused	1	<0.5	1	1

18. (continued) As you may know, Congress is scheduled to return to Washington for a short post-election session to address expiring tax cuts and automatic spending cuts. Would you support or oppose Congress acting on the following issues during a short post-election session?

Extend tax cuts for all taxpayers

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800	Dem N=272	Rep N=268	Ind N=171
	%	%	%	%
Strongly support	29	18	42	28
Somewhat support	19	13	25	21
Somewhat oppose	17	21	13	18
Strongly oppose	30	45	14	32
[DNR] Don't know	4	3	6	1
[DNR] Refused	<0.5	<0.5	<0.5	<0.5

Extend unemployment benefits

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800	Dem N=272	Rep N=268	Ind N=171
	%	%	%	%
Strongly support	32	52	20	24
Somewhat support	24	29	18	25
Somewhat oppose	13	6	18	17
Strongly oppose	24	9	38	24
[DNR] Don't know	5	4	5	8
[DNR] Refused	1	1	1	1

Replace automatic, across the board cuts to defense and other government spending

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800	Dem N=272	Rep N=268	Ind N=171
	%	%	%	%
Strongly support	23	26	19	20
Somewhat support	18	20	15	21
Somewhat oppose	18	18	17	20
Strongly oppose	31	24	41	29
[DNR] Don't know	9	11	7	8
[DNR] Refused	1	2	1	1

Prevent payment cuts to doctors in Medicare

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800	Dem N=272	Rep N=268	Ind N=171
	%	%	%	%
Strongly support	21	19	26	17
Somewhat support	25	27	20	29
Somewhat oppose	22	22	19	25
Strongly oppose	22	21	25	22
[DNR] Don't know	8	9	9	5
[DNR] Refused	1	1	1	1

18. (continued) As you may know, Congress is scheduled to return to Washington for a short post-election session to address expiring tax cuts and automatic spending cuts. Would you support or oppose Congress acting on the following issues during a short post-election session?

Enact reductions to Medicare

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800	Dem N=272	Rep N=268	Ind N=171
	%	%	%	%
Strongly support	6	6	10	3
Somewhat support	13	10	12	18
Somewhat oppose	21	22	19	21
Strongly oppose	52	55	49	50
[DNR] Don't know	7	7	9	6
[DNR] Refused	1	1	2	2

Enact reductions to Social Security

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800	Dem N=272	Rep N=268	Ind N=171
	%	%	%	%
Strongly support	3	5	3	1
Somewhat support	12	10	12	17
Somewhat oppose	17	16	15	16
Strongly oppose	61	65	61	57
[DNR] Don't know	6	5	7	6
[DNR] Refused	1	1	2	3

DEMOGRAPHICS

D1. Record Gender

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800	Dem N=272	Rep N=268	Ind N=171
	%	%	%	%
Male	46	40	47	55
Female	54	60	53	45

D2. Record Age

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800	Dem N=272	Rep N=268	Ind N=171
	%	%	%	%
50 – 64	59	62	55	64
65 – 74	23	20	24	25
75+	18	18	21	11

D3. Which of the following ethnic groups describes you? You can stop me when I've read your group. READ LIST IN ORDER

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800 %	Dem N=272 %	Rep N=268 %	Ind N=171 %
White or Caucasian	85	73	94	89
Black or African-American	8	18	1	4
Latino, Hispanic or Mexican	2	3	2	3
Asian or Pacific Islander	1	1	1	1
Native American	1	2	-	-
Mixed Race	1	2	1	1
[DNR] Other	1	1	<0.5	1
[DNR] Don't know	1	1	1	1
[DNR] Refused				

D4. Do you consider yourself to be of Hispanic descent?

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800 %	Dem N=272 %	Rep N=268 %	Ind N=171 %
Yes	4	5	4	2
No	95	94	95	96
[DNR] Don't know	<0.5	1	-	-
[DNR] Refused	1	1	1	1

D5. Do you generally consider yourself to be: READ, ROTATE 1-3/3-1

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800 %	Dem N=272 %	Rep N=268 %	Ind N=171 %
Liberal	21	46	4	13
Moderate	31	35	15	49
Conservative	42	15	77	29
[DNR] DK/None specified	5	4	5	9

D6. Are you or your spouse a member of AARP?

Base: Total Respondents	Total N=800 %	Dem N=272 %	Rep N=268 %	Ind N=171 %
Yes	46	56	33	47
No	53	43	65	52
[DNR] Don't know	1	-	1	1
[DNR] Refused	<0.5	<0.5	1	-

AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, with a membership of more than 37 million, that helps people 50+ have independence, choice and control in ways that are beneficial to them and society as a whole. AARP does not endorse candidates for public office or make contributions to either political campaigns or candidates. We produce **AARP The Magazine**, the definitive voice for Americans 50+ and the world's largest-circulation magazine; **AARP Bulletin**, the go-to news source for the 50+ audience; **AARP VIVA**, a bilingual lifestyle multimedia platform addressing the interests and needs of Hispanic Americans; and national television and radio programming including *My Generation* and *Inside E Street*. The **AARP Foundation** is an affiliated charity that provides security, protection, and empowerment to older persons in need with support from thousands of volunteers, donors, and sponsors. **AARP** has staffed offices in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Learn more at www.aarp.org.