

**AMERICANS' USE OF THE U.S.
POSTAL SERVICE: AN
AARP BULLETIN SURVEY**

APRIL 2013

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AMERICANS' USE OF THE U.S. POSTAL SERVICE: AN *AARP BULLETIN* SURVEY

**Report Prepared by
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Research & Strategic Analysis
601 E Street NW
Washington, DC 20049
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<https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00067.001>**

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Acknowledgments

This survey was conducted on behalf of the *AARP Bulletin*. The author would like to thank Barbranda Walls and Jim Toedtman for their input on questionnaire design; AUS Marketing Research/SSRS for collecting and tabulating the data; and Kathi Brown for reviewing the report for publication. For additional information, contact Alicia Williams at arwilliams@aarp.org.

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this brief Bulletin Poll was to examine the extent to which adults 18 years of age and older use the services of the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) and whether or not they would support various options geared towards helping the USPS reduce or offset its expenses. The survey was conducted for AARP by AUS Marketing Research/SSRS via its telephone omnibus survey service. Interviews were conducted February 20-24, 2013, among a nationally representative sample of 1,021 adults ages 18 and older. This report presents the survey's findings.

Key Findings

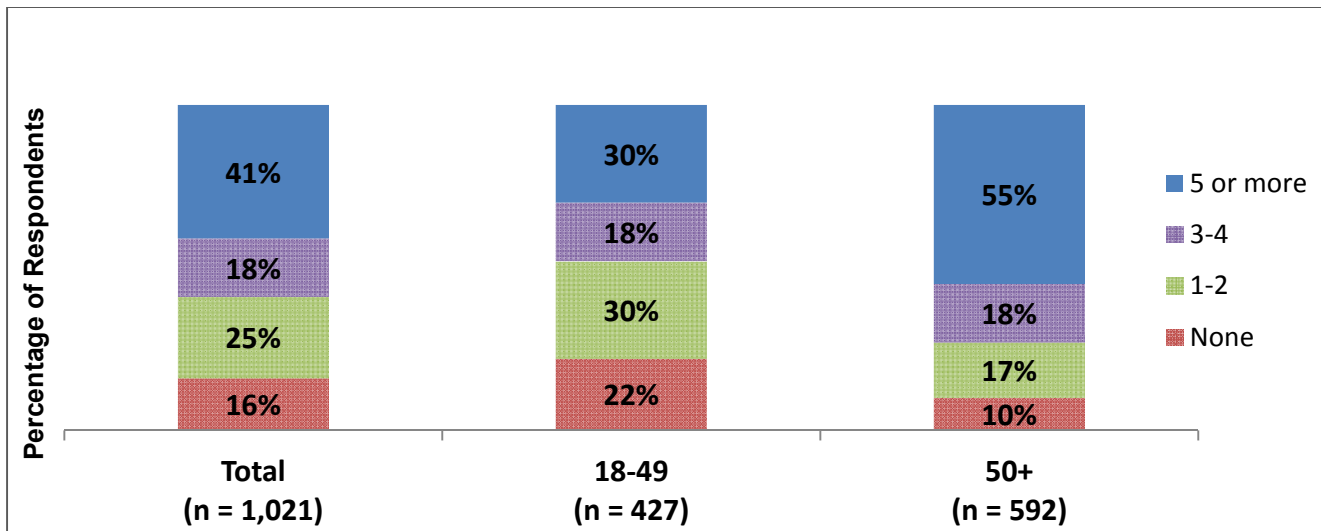
- Overall, four in five adults age 18 years and older report sending, on average, at least one item of mail (e.g., letters, bill payments, packages) per month.
- Those age 50 and older tend to send more mail per month, on average, than their counterparts under 50.
- Older adults also send mail more frequently than those under 50. Nearly half (47%) of adults 50+ report sending mail four or more times a month, compared with nearly a quarter (23%) of those under 50.
- Sending mail has declined over the years, however. Although older adults send more mail than younger adults do, both groups acknowledge that the amount of mail they send nowadays is less than the amount they used to send five years ago.
- The amount and frequency of mailings vary by household income level as well. Respondents with incomes of \$50,000 or more report sending more mail (and sending it more frequently) than those with lower levels of income.
- Understandably, the declining use of mailing services among Americans has caused some financial woes for the U.S. Postal Service. Respondents were asked which of the following options they would choose to help reduce or offset the USPS's expenses: increase postage stamp prices, increase parcel prices, end Saturday mail deliveries, close some local post offices two additional days per week and/or close some local post offices permanently. Ending Saturday deliveries was most-often cited as the option of choice for respondents overall (59%)—an option most favored by both younger (53%) and older (63%) respondents alike—as well as by respondents across income levels.
- In contrast, the least-favored option among respondents was closing some local post offices permanently (28%). This was also the least-favored option across age groups and income levels as well.

Detailed Findings

Number of Items Mailed per Month

Four in five respondents (83%) reported sending, on average, one or more items of mail (e.g., letters, bill payments, packages) per month. Respondents 50 and older tend to send more items per month than those under 50. For example, a majority (53%) of those 50 and over sent five or more items, on average, per month (compared to slightly under a third (30%) of those under 50 who sent that amount). Respondents under 50 also were twice as likely as their older counterparts to report not sending any mail, on average, per month.

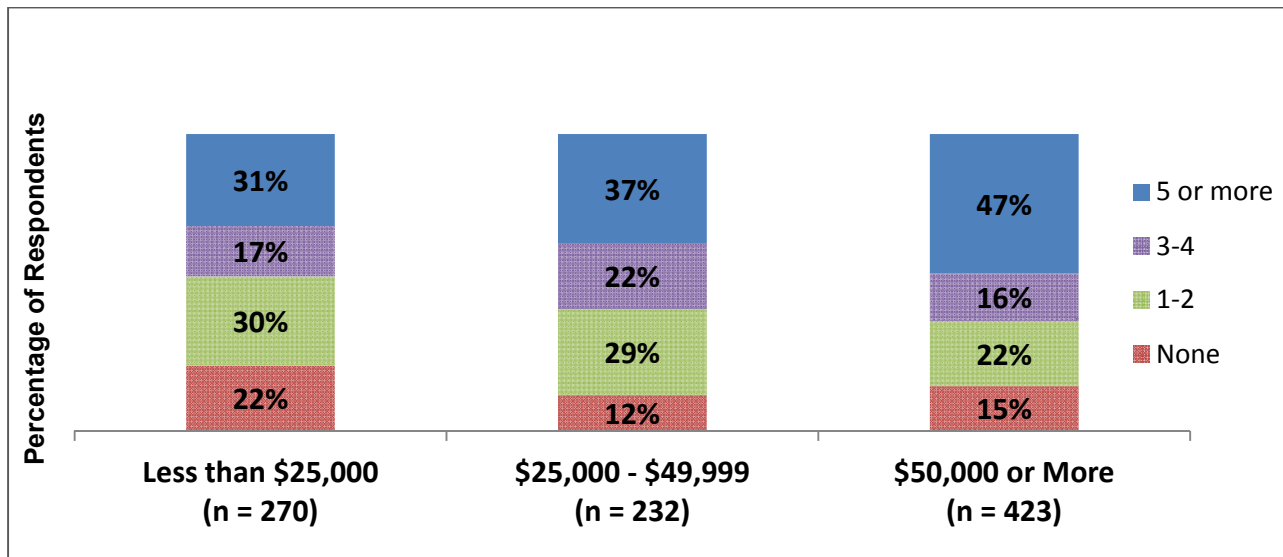
Figure 1.
Average Number of Items Mailed per Month, by Age



The number of items sent by mail per month increases with household income. Among respondents with incomes of less than \$25,000, 48 percent mailed three or more items per month, on average (compared with 59% of respondents with incomes of \$25,000-\$49,999 and 63 percent of respondents with incomes of \$50,000 or more).

Figure 2.

Average Number of Items Mailed per Month, by Household Income

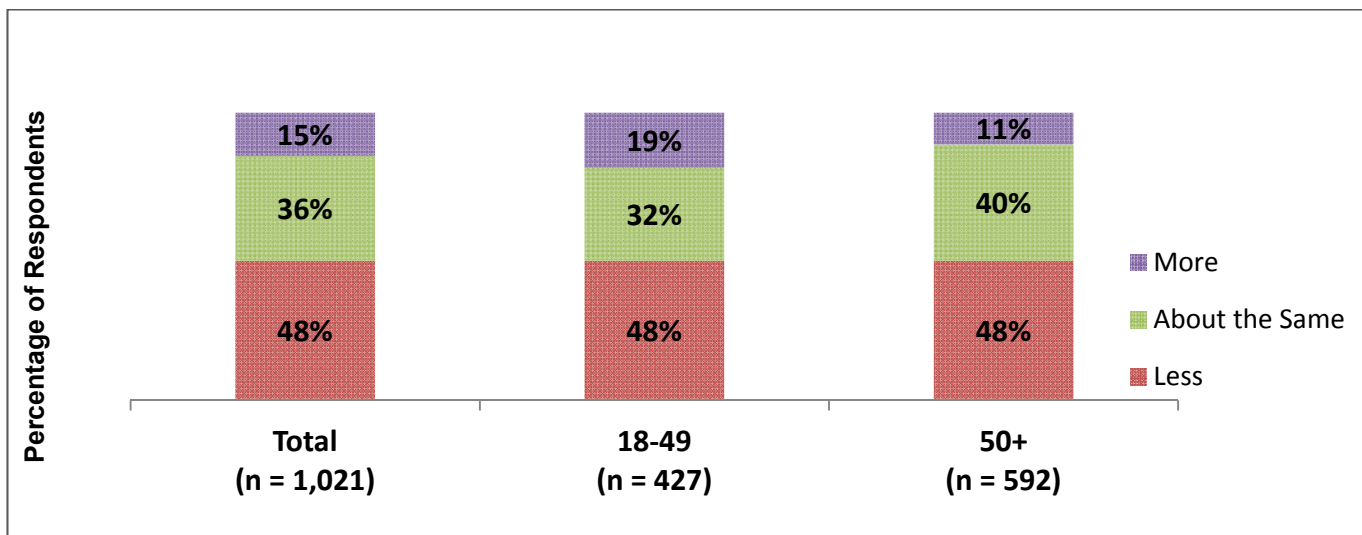


Amount Mailed Today Compared with Five Years Ago

Respondents were asked how the amount of mail they currently send compares with the amount they sent five years ago. Overall, the most-frequent response was that they are sending less mail today than they did five years ago. This was reported by nearly half (48%) of respondents under 50 as well as 50+. In contrast, less than a fifth of respondents across the age groups indicated sending more mail now than five years ago (although those under 50 were more likely to send more mail than those 50+).

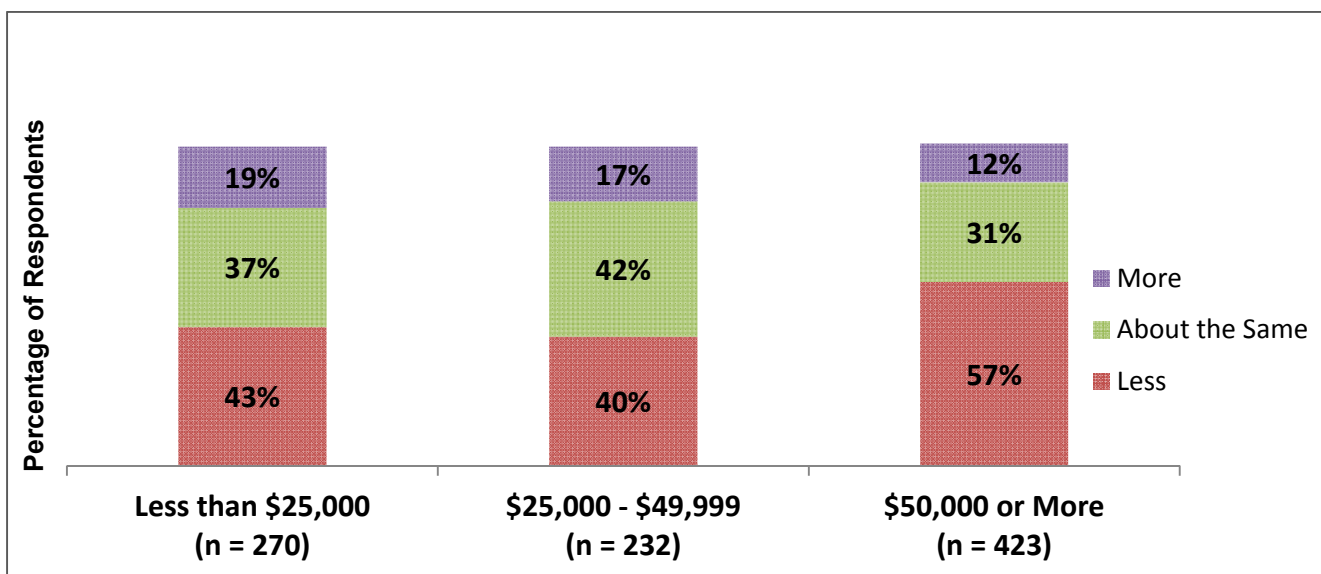
Figure 3.

Amount Mailed Today Compared with Five Years Ago, by Age



Perceptions about the amount of mail being sent today also vary with household income. Respondents with household incomes of \$50,000 or more were more likely than those with lower incomes to say they send less mail today than five years ago; however, those with incomes of less than \$25,000 were more likely than respondents earning \$50,000 or more to say they send more mail now than they did five years ago.

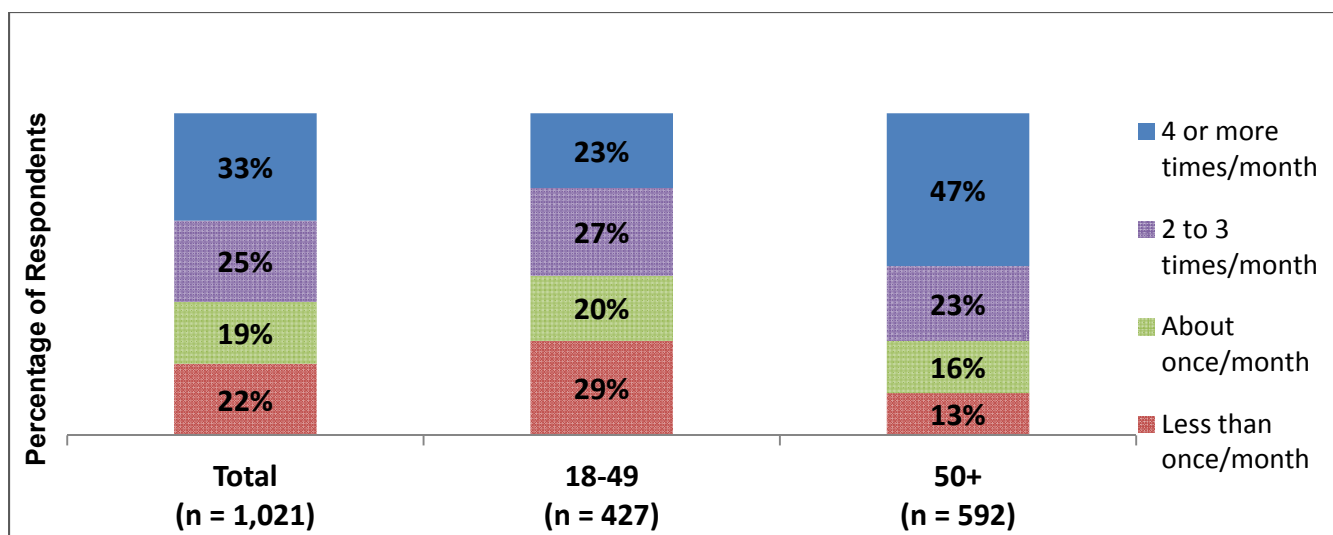
Figure 4
Amount Mailed Today Compared with Five Years Ago, by Household Income



Frequency of Sending Mail

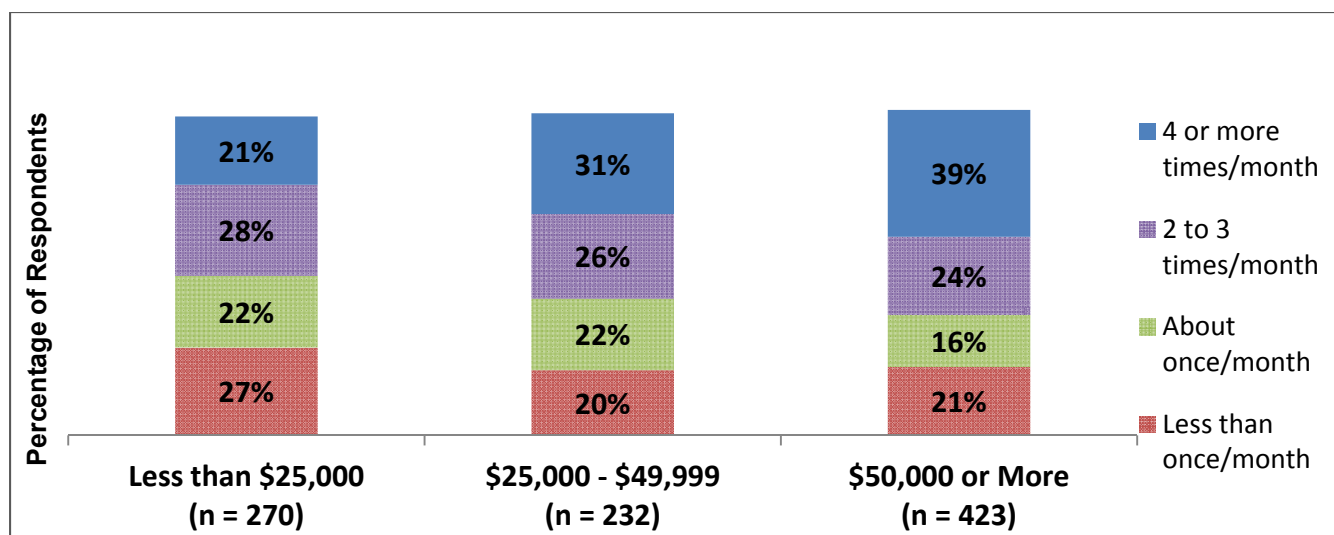
Respondents 50 and older send mail more frequently than those under 50. Nearly half of respondents 50 and older (47%) reported sending mail four or more times per month, compared with nearly a quarter (23%) of respondents under 50. In contrast, about three in 10 respondents (29%) under 50 reported sending mail less than once a month, compared with slightly more than 10 percent of older respondents.

Figure 5.
Frequency of Sending Mail, by Age



Just as the amount of mail sent increases with household income, this is also the case in terms of the frequency in which mail is sent. Just under half of respondents with incomes of less than \$25,000 (49%) report sending mail two or more times per month. This compares to 57 percent of those with incomes of between \$25,000 and \$49,999, and 63 percent of those with incomes of \$50,000 or more.

Figure 6.
Frequency of Sending Mail, by Household Income



Options for Cutting/Offsetting the U.S. Postal Service’s Expenses

For several years now, the U.S. Postal Service has been on the brink of financial insolvency. Respondents were asked which of several options they would choose if they were given decision-making authority to institute an approach for cutting or offsetting the U.S. Postal Services’ expenses. The specific options that were presented to respondents included the following: increase postage stamp prices, increase parcel prices, end Saturday mail deliveries, close some local post offices two additional days per week and close some local post offices permanently.

Among the five options, ending Saturday mail deliveries was the most-popular choice—selected by nearly six in 10 respondents overall. This option was also chosen most by respondents under 50 as well as those 50+.

Ending Saturday mail deliveries was also the most popular option across the various income levels examined, although respondents with incomes of less than \$25,000 were less likely than those with incomes of \$25,000 or more to choose this option.

The least-favored option chosen by respondents (28%) was closing some post offices permanently. This was also the least-favored option across the various age groups and income levels examined.

Table 1.
Options for Reducing/Offsetting the USPS's Expenses, by Age and Household Income

	Increase Postage Stamp Prices	Increase Parcel Prices	End Saturday Mail Deliveries	Close Some Local Post Offices Two Additional Days per Week	Close Some Local Post Offices Permanently
All (<i>n</i> =1,021)	42%	38%	59%	43%	28%
18-49 (<i>n</i> =567)	42%	40%	53%	45%	24%
50+ (<i>n</i> =454)	43%	36%	68%	40%	33%
Income Less than \$25,000 (<i>n</i> =270)	40%	35%	50%	37%	18%
Income \$25,000 - \$49,999 (<i>n</i> =232)	41%	36%	63%	45%	30%
Income \$50,000 or more (<i>n</i> =423)	46%	42%	65%	46%	34%

Summary

The findings from this survey show four in five adults send, on average, at least one item of mail, per month. Adults 50 and older and those with household incomes of \$50,000 or more tend to send more mail—and send it more often—than their counterparts; but mail usage has declined compared to five years ago. Given this decline and its impact on the solvency of the U.S. Postal Service, respondents considered several options for cutting or offsetting the USPS's expenses. Among the five options considered, the most-favored was ending Saturday

deliveries—chosen by 59 percent of respondents overall. In contrast, the least favored was closing some local post offices permanently (28%). These most- and least-favored options were the same across the age groups and income levels examined.

Survey Methodology

This survey was conducted for AARP via a telephone omnibus survey conducted by AUS Marketing Research/SSRS, an independent research company. Interviews were conducted February 20-24, 2013, among a nationally representative sample of 1,021 respondents 18 years of age or older. The data have been weighted to reflect the demographic composition of the 18+ population. The overall margin of error for percentages based on these 1,021 responses is ± 3.1 percent at the 95 percent confidence level. This means that, if the survey were conducted 100 times, in 95 of those times, the percentages obtained would range within 3.1 percentage points above or below the percentages stated in this report.

APPENDIX
Annotated Questionnaire

n=1,021 Respondents Age 18+ (427 ages 18-49; 592 ages 50+)

The margin of error for total respondents is +/-3.1% at the 95% confidence level

US-1. On average, how many items for example, letters, bill payments, and packages do you send by mail per month?

	ONE OR MORE				None	Don't know	Refused
	NET	1-2	3-4	5 or more			
Total	83	25	18	41	17	*	--
18-49	78	30	18	30	22	1	--
50+	90	17	18	55	10	*	--

US-2. And, on average, how often do you send mail? Would you say...?

	Less than once a month	MONTHLY				Don't know	Refused
		NET	About once a month	2-3 times a month	4 or more times a month		
Total	22	77	19	25	33	1	*
18-49	29	70	20	27	23	1	*
50+	13	86	16	23	47	1	*

US-3. Compared to five years ago, do you send (READ LIST), on average?

	More mail	Less mail	About the same amount of mail	Don't know	Refused
Total	15	48	36	1	*
18-49	19	48	32	1	1
50+	11	48	40	1	*

US-4. The U.S. Postal Service has had severe financial difficulties over the years, and is looking for ways to reduce expenses. If the decision on how to reduce expenses was yours to make, which of the following options would you choose? Would you (INSERT ITEM)?

2/24/13 Total	Yes	No	Don't know	Refused
a. Increase postage stamp prices	42	56	1	*
b. End Saturday mail deliveries	59	39	1	*
c. Increase parcel prices	38	59	3	*
d. Close some local post offices two additional days per week	43	55	2	*
e. Close some local post offices permanently	28	70	2	*
18-49	Yes	No	Don't know	Refused
a. Increase postage stamp prices	42	57	1	*
b. End Saturday mail deliveries	53	46	1	*
c. Increase parcel prices	40	58	2	*
d. Close some local post offices two additional days per week	45	53	1	*
e. Close some local post offices permanently	24	75	1	*

50+	Yes	No	Don't know	Refused
a. Increase postage stamp prices	43	55	2	*
b. End Saturday mail deliveries	68	30	2	*
c. Increase parcel prices	36	61	4	--
d. Close some local post offices two additional days per week	40	57	3	*
e. Close some local post offices permanently	33	63	4	*