



# **AARP Election Watch: Pulse of a Generation**

**October 9, 2006**



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## Executive Summary

In late September 2006, AARP commissioned a national telephone survey (titled AARP Election Watch: Pulse of a Generation ) of a representative sample of boomer+ (people ages 42 and older), who constitute the segment of the population who are most likely to vote. In fact, 93 percent of respondents in the current survey report they are already registered to vote and 86 percent are likely voters. A total of 1,501 interviews were conducted.

### Issue of the Week: Healthcare Coverage

More than three-quarters of likely voters (77%) said they are either *very likely* (41%) or *somewhat likely* (36%) to vote for a candidate who supports a plan for national healthcare coverage.

Nearly 8 in 10 respondents ages 42+ (78%) agree that the federal government should see that everyone has at least minimum healthcare benefits, including 61 percent who strongly agree.

### Voting Participation

Self reported voter registration is very high (93%). Respondents say that they are also *very likely* to vote this November (86%).

This boomer+ age segment report voting with regularity – 56 percent say they *always* vote and 31 percent say they *nearly always* vote. Sixty-five percent of those over 60 say that they *always* vote compared to 44 percent of younger boomers (ages 42 to 50) and 50 percent older boomers (ages 51 to 60).

Interest in the upcoming election is high. More than one-half (57%) say they are *very interested* in this year's election.

As of October 2<sup>nd</sup>, with just weeks before the election, only 47 percent say they have given *quite a lot* of thought to the upcoming election, and a majority say they have not yet decided which candidates they will vote for in their House of Representatives race (60%) and half in their U.S. Senate race (50%).

Americans are narrowly divided between basing their vote for congressional candidates on “bringing home the bacon” to their congressional district (43%) and agreement with the candidate's position on major national issues (46%).

On the other hand, more say a candidate's position on one or two key issues (46%) matters most when they vote rather than the personal qualities of the candidates (34%).

## **AARP Election Watch: Pulse of a Generation October 9, 2006**

As the upcoming mid-term elections draw near, AARP wanted to take the pulse of the public's opinion on issues that our members have indicated they want to hear about in the national and state public discourse. AARP also wanted to determine how much attention people are paying to the elections and what they consider when making their voting decisions.

This *AARP Election Watch: Pulse of a Generation* survey is the fifth in a series of 9 surveys scheduled for release each week leading up to the mid-term elections. The first four reports dealt with the issues of ID theft, affordability of prescription drugs, Social Security and consumer privacy. This report is about healthcare coverage. A different issue will be featured in each of the surveys, in addition to consistent weekly tracking of changes in boomer+ voters' level of interest and opinions up to Election Day. The current schedule is below:

Week of 9/11	Identity Theft **RELEASED
Week of 9/18	Rx Affordability **RELEASED
Week of 9/25	Social Security **RELEASED
Week of 10/2	Privacy **RELEASED
Week of 10/9	Healthcare Coverage **CURRENT
Week of 10/16	Long-term Care
Week of 10/23	Social Security
Week of 10/30	Government Spending/Fiscal Responsibility
Week of 11/6	Medicare

In late September 2006, AARP commissioned a national telephone survey of a representative sample of people ages 42 and older, who constitute the segment of the population who are most likely to vote. In fact, 93 percent of respondents in the current survey report they are already registered to vote and 86 percent are likely voters. Moreover, 56 percent say they *always* vote and another 31 percent say they *nearly always* vote. A total of 1,501 interviews were conducted.

The survey methodology is described at the end of this report, and a tabulated questionnaire is appended.

AARP is non-partisan and we do not support, oppose or give money to any candidates or political parties. We educate Americans on peace-of-mind issues important to our families so that they can make informed choices when they vote.

## Key Findings

### Healthcare Coverage

Healthcare coverage is a serious concern for likely voters and will be a consideration in their voting decisions for this mid-term election. More than three-quarters of likely voters (77%) said they are either *very likely* (41%) or *somewhat likely* (36%) to vote for a candidate who supports a plan for national healthcare coverage (see Figure 1).

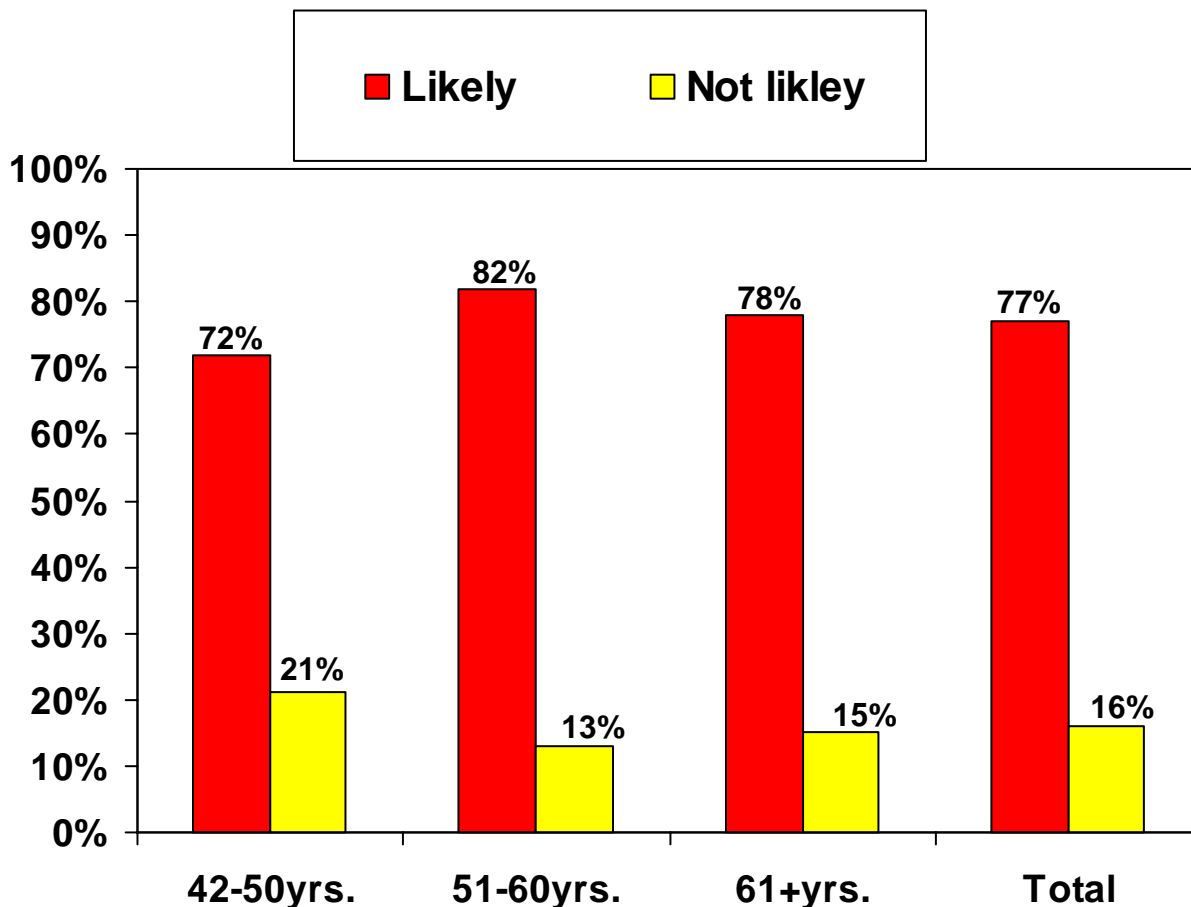
Respondents ages 51 and older (46% ages 51-60 and 43% ages 61+) were more likely than younger boomers (32% ages 42-50) to report they are *very likely* to vote for a candidate who supports a plan for national healthcare coverage.

A greater percentage of younger boomers, ages 42 to 50 (40%) than older age groups (36% ages 51-60 and 35% ages 61+) report they are *somewhat likely* to vote for a candidate who supports a plan for national healthcare coverage. A small percentage of respondents across all age groups report they are *not very likely* to vote for a candidate who supports a plan for national healthcare coverage (9% ages 42-50, 6% ages 51-60, and 9% ages 61+) or *not at all likely* (12% ages 42-50, 7% ages 51-60, and 6% ages 61+).

**Figure 1**

**\*\* Includes only likely voters  
(n=1,383)**

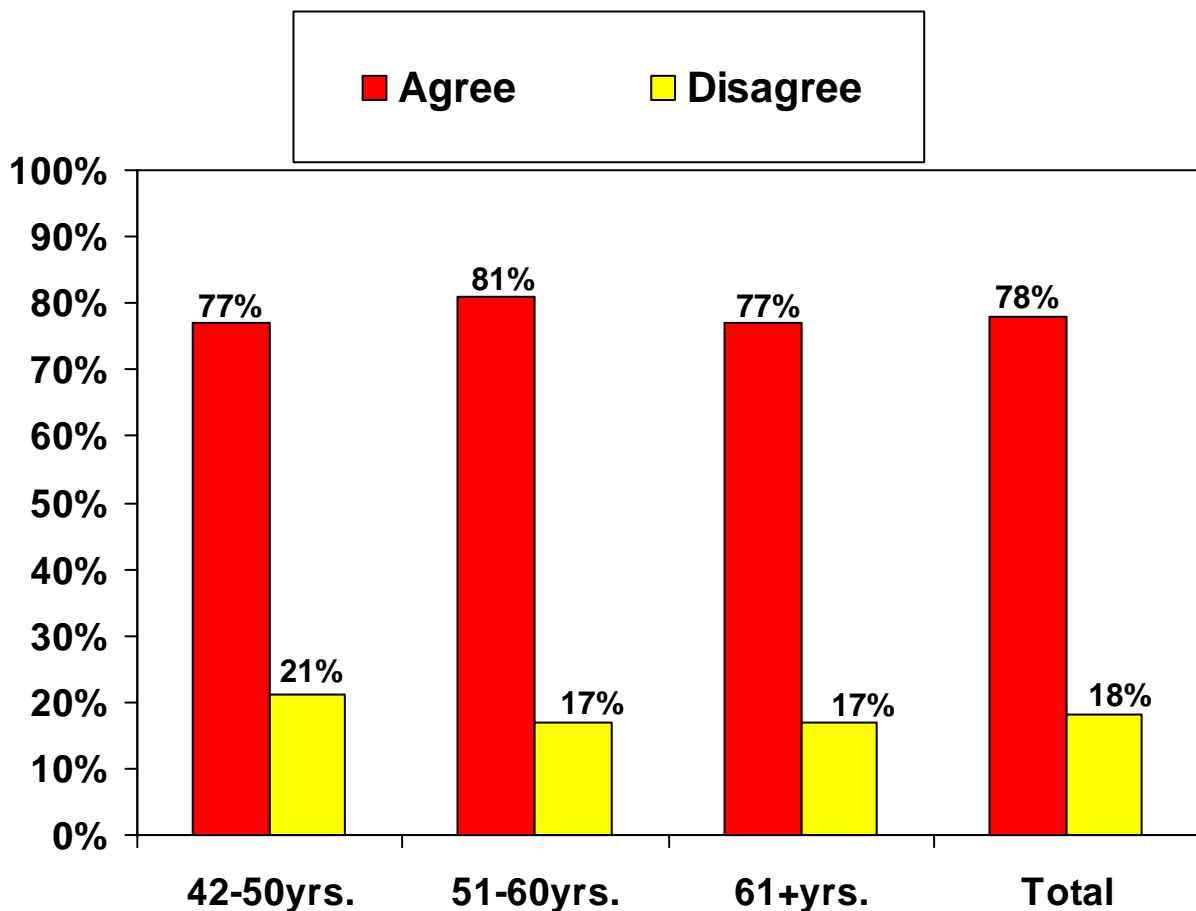
#### **How Likely Are You to Vote For a Candidate Who Supports a Plan For National Healthcare Coverage?**



Nearly 8 in 10 respondents ages 42+ agree that the federal government should see that everyone has at least minimum healthcare benefits (78%) (see Figure 2). Approximately 6 in 10 respondents across all age groups *strongly agree* (58% ages 42-50, 66% ages 51-60, and 59% ages 61+). Less than one-fifth of respondents in each age group *somewhat agrees* (19% ages 42-50, 14% ages 51-60, and 18% ages 61+). A small percentage of respondents across all age groups report they *somewhat disagree* that the federal government should see that everyone has at least minimum healthcare benefit (8% ages 42-50, 7% ages 51-60, and 9% ages 61+) or *strongly disagree* (13% ages 42-50, 10% ages 51-60, and 9% ages 61+).

Income and education both have an impact on respondents' opinions of the federal government's role in providing minimum healthcare coverage. Seven in 10 respondents with a high school diploma or less (70%) and respondents with incomes less than \$30K (69%) say they *strongly agree* the federal government should see that everyone has at least minimum healthcare benefit. A lesser percentage of respondents with incomes above \$30K (55%) and respondents with some college or more (55%) *strongly agree*.

**Figure 2**  
(n=1,501)  
**Should The Federal Government See  
That Everyone Has at Least Minimum Health Insurance Benefits?**

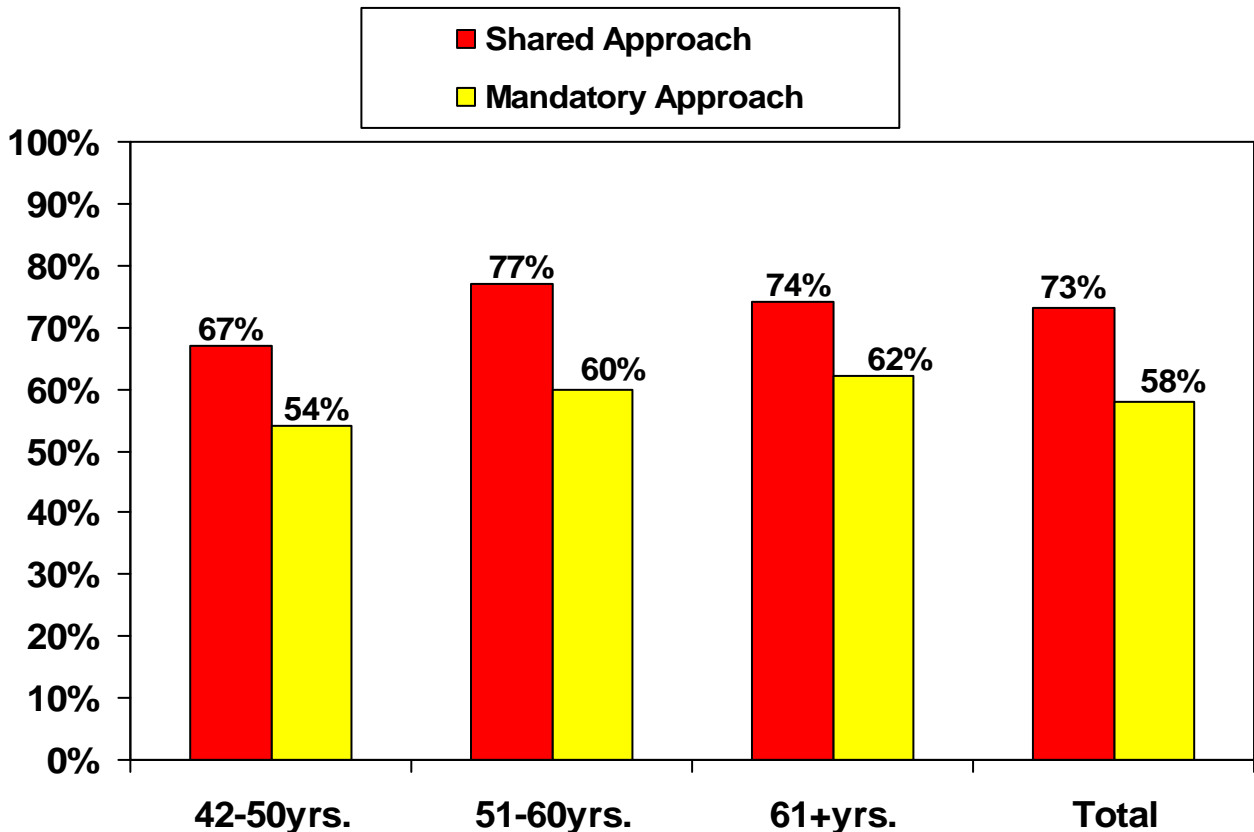


While a substantial percentage of respondents want the government to do more to provide healthcare coverage for everyone, there are some differences of opinion as to how this might be achieved. Respondents were asked in separate questions to rate their agreement with two different descriptions of healthcare coverage. One statement describes a more shared approach to healthcare coverage in which both workers and businesses contribute, every American is provided guaranteed insurance coverage and the government is allowed to use its buying power to negotiate lower healthcare prices. The other statement describes a mandatory approach in which people with higher incomes who do not have health insurance are required to buy it and the government helps pay for those who cannot afford it.

A greater percentage of respondents *strongly agree* (54%) with the shared approach to national healthcare coverage than with the mandatory approach for national healthcare coverage (36%). A majority across all age groups *strongly agree* with the shared approach (52% ages 42-50, 58% ages 51-60, and 53% ages 61+). A greater percentage of respondents 61 and older (21%) *somewhat agree* with this approach than younger respondents (15% ages 42-50 and 19% ages 51-60).

One-third or more of all age groups *strongly agree* with the mandatory approach for health insurance (33% ages 42-50, 38% ages 51-60, and 38% ages 61+). Slightly more than one-fifth of respondents across all age groups *somewhat agree* with this approach (21% ages 42-50, 22% ages 51-60, and 24% ages 61+).

**Figure 3**  
(n=1,501)  
**Agreement With Two Different Approaches to National Healthcare**





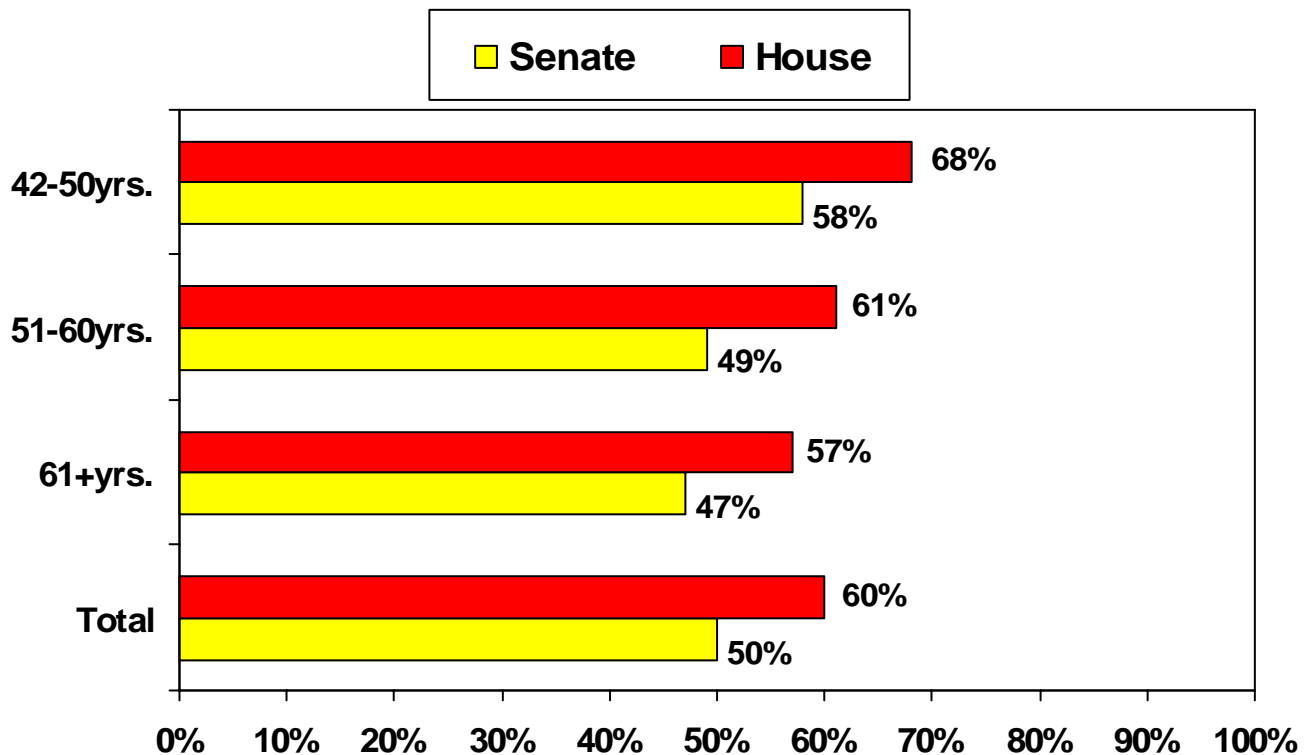
## Interest in the Mid-Term Elections

There is a considerable amount of interest in the mid-term elections given they are still weeks away. Nearly 9 in 10 respondents (87%) are interested in the upcoming elections. More than half are *very interested* (57%) and 3 in 10 are *somewhat interested* (30%). Respondents ages 51 and older are more likely to say they are *very interested* in the upcoming election than younger respondents (49% ages 42-50, 58% ages 51-60, and 61% ages 61+). Furthermore, a greater percentage of respondents report they have given *quite a lot* of thought (47%) to these upcoming elections than those who have given *only a little* thought (37%) or no thought at all yet (14%) to the elections.

While there is a sizeable level of interest in the mid-term elections, findings suggest that a significant percentage of people have not made up their minds about for whom to vote. Exactly 6 in 10 respondents (60%) have not yet decided for which U.S. House candidate to vote and 50 percent have not yet settled on a U.S. Senate candidate (see Figure 4).

Boomers are more likely than respondents 61+ to be undecided in their voting decisions. Sixty-eight percent of younger boomers, ages 42 to 50 and 61 percent of older boomers ages 51 to 60 have not yet decided for which U.S. House candidate to vote compared to 57 percent of respondents 61+ (see Figure 4). For U.S. Senate, 58 percent of younger boomers and 49 percent of older boomers have not yet decided for which candidate to vote compared to 47 percent of respondents ages 61 and older.

**Figure 4**  
**\*\* Includes only likely voters**  
**(Senate: n=1,016; House: n=1,383)**  
**Likely Voters Who Have Not Yet Decided for Whom to Vote**  
**in the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate.**



## **Candidate Attributes Considered**

While there are numerous things voters will consider before casting their vote in the mid-term elections, findings suggest that a key consideration will be whether or not voters agree with a candidate's position on major issues. When compared to other attributes such as a candidate's political party (12%), or even personal qualities of the candidate (34%), agreement on key issues (46%) is what matters most to a greater percentage of respondents. In fact, when compared to a more pertinent attribute such as a candidate's ability to help people in their own congressional district (43%), agreement with a candidate's position on major issues still came out slightly ahead (46%).

## **Conclusions**

National healthcare coverage is likely to be an important election issue this year for boomers and older Americans, given the high percentage of those who agree the federal government should see that everyone has at least minimum health insurance benefits.

Boomer+ voters will likely play a key role in this year's elections, and are certainly worth paying attention to. They are the most likely of any age group to be registered to vote, to always vote, to be the most interested in this year's election, and to have given quite a lot of thought to the upcoming elections for Congress.

## **Methodology**

AARP commissioned Woelfel Research, Inc., a national survey research firm, to conduct a national random digit dial (RDD) telephone survey of 1,501 people ages 42 and older. Interviews were conducted between September 25<sup>th</sup> and October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006. This survey has a sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points. This means that in 95 out of 100 samples of this size, the results obtained in the sample would fall in a range of 3 percentage points of what would have been obtained if every person in the continental United States ages 42 and older had been surveyed.

For presentation purposes, percentage points have been rounded off to the nearest whole number. As a result, percentages in a given table column may total slightly higher or lower than 100%. For questions that permit multiple responses, columns may total to significantly more than 100%, depending on the number of different responses offered by each respondent. Similarly, when only selected responses are shown, percentages may total less than 100%.

**AARP Takes the Pulse of the Public:  
2006 Frontrunner Election Survey  
October 9, 2006  
(n= 1,501)**

**AARP Weekly Election “Pulse” Surveys – Waves 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5**

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. The survey should take about 5 minutes of your time.

QSA. Are you between the ages of 18-41, or are you 42 or older?

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>	<b>Wave 4</b>	<b>Wave 5</b>
	Base:	1502	1003	1504	1500	1501
		%	%	%	%	%
1	18-41	0	0	0	0	0
2	42 or older	100	100	100	100	100
3	Under 18	0	0	0	0	0
4	Refused	0	0	0	0	0

GENDER. [INTERVIEWER -- RECORD GENDER]

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>	<b>Wave 4</b>	<b>Wave 5</b>
	Base:	1502	1003	1504	1500	1501
		%	%	%	%	%
	Male	46	46	46	46	46
	Female	54	54	54	54	54

1. These days, many people are so busy they can't find time to register to vote, or move around so often they don't get a chance to re-register. Are you already registered, do you plan to register, or do you not plan to register to vote in your precinct or election district?

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>	<b>Wave 4</b>	<b>Wave 5</b>
	Base:	1502	1003	1504	1500	1501
		%	%	%	%	%
1	Already registered	89	90	90	90	93
2	Plan to register	4	4	4	3	3
3	Do Not Plan to register	6	5	5	6	4
4	Don't Know	1	1	1	1	1

1A. How likely are you to vote this November?

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>	<b>Wave 4</b>	<b>Wave 5</b>
	Base:	1417	953	1429	1414	1501
		%	%	%	%	%
1	Very Likely	84	87	86	85	86
2	Somewhat Likely	9	8	8	9	8
3	Not Very Likely	3	2	2	2	2
4	Not At All Likely	2	2	2	2	2
5	Don't Know	2	1	2	1	2
6	Refused	0	0	0	0	0

2. In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or Independent? [READ]

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>	<b>Wave 4</b>	<b>Wave 5</b>
	Base:	1502	1003	1504	1500	1501
		%	%	%	%	%
1	Republican	29	28	30	31	29
2	Democrat	32	34	34	32	33
3	Independent	30	29	28	26	29
4	Don't Know	5	6	5	6	5
5	Refused	4	4	4	5	3

3. In general, would you describe your political views as... [READ]

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>	<b>Wave 4</b>	<b>Wave 5</b>
	Base:	1502	1003	1504	1500	1501
		%	%	%	%	%
1	Conservative	38	37	38	37	37
2	Moderate	40	42	41	38	40
3	Liberal	15	14	12	15	14
4	Don't Know	6	6	7	8	7
5	Refused	2	2	2	2	2

4. How often would you say you vote? Is it ...[READ]

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>	<b>Wave 4</b>	<b>Wave 5</b>
	Base:	1502	1003	1504	1500	1501
		%	%	%	%	%
1	Always	54	56	57	57	56
2	Nearly Always	29	30	28	28	31
3	Some of the time	8	7	8	9	7
4	Seldom	4	3	2	3	2
5	Never	5	4	4	4	4
5	Don't Know	0	1	0	0	0
6	Refused	0	0	0	0	0

5. This November there will be elections for Congress and other offices. Right now, how interested are you in this year's elections? Are you ...[READ]

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>	<b>Wave 4</b>	<b>Wave 5</b>
	Base:	1502	1003	1504	1500	1501
		%	%	%	%	%
1	Very Interested	53	57	56	56	57
2	Somewhat Interested	33	29	31	30	30
3	Not Very Interested	8	8	7	7	7
4	Not At All Interested	6	6	5	5	4
5	Don't Know	1	0	1	1	1
6	Refused	0	0	0	0	0

6. How much thought have you given to the upcoming elections for Congress? Is it ...[READ]

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>	<b>Wave 4</b>	<b>Wave 5</b>
	Base:	1502	1003	1504	1500	1501
		%	%	%	%	%
1	Quite a lot	38	45	44	44	47
2	Only a little	40	36	36	36	37
3	Not at all yet	22	17	18	18	14
4	Don't Know	1	1	1	1	1
5	Refused	0	0	0	1	1

7. Have you already decided for whom to vote in your House of Representatives election? [SKIP IF Q1=3, OR IF Q1A=3 or 4]

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>	<b>Wave 4</b>	<b>Wave 5</b>
	Base:	1356	914	1500	1358	1383
		%	%	%	%	%
1	Yes	28	36	35	39	39
2	No	70	63	64	59	60
3	Don't Know	2	1	1	2	1

8. (If applicable) Have you already decided for whom to vote in your Senate election? [SKIP IF Q1=3, OR IF Q1A=3 or 4]

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>	<b>Wave 4</b>	<b>Wave 5</b>
	Base:	960	643	976	946	1016
		%	%	%	%	%
1	Yes	39	44	44	46	48
2	No	60	56	55	52	50
3	Don't Know	1	1	1	2	2

9. When you vote for a candidate for the House of Representatives [or Senate – if applicable], which is more important to you ... [READ]  
(ROTATE)

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>	<b>Wave 4</b>	<b>Wave 5</b>
	Base:	1502	1003	1504	1500	1501
		%	%	%	%	%
1	His or her ability to do things that help people in your congressional district	43	41	43	41	43
2	That you agree with his or her positions on major national issues	45	45	46	45	46
3	Don't Know	10	12	9	12	9
4	Refused	2	2	2	2	3

10. Which of the following matters most when you vote for a candidate for a national office... [READ]  
(ROTATE)

		Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5
	Base:	1502 %	1003 %	1504 %	1500 %	1501 %
1	The candidate's political party	10	14	11	11	12
2	The candidate's position on one or two key issues	44	43	46	48	46
3	The personal qualities of the candidate	37	34	36	33	34
4	Don't Know	7	7	6	7	7
5	Refused	2	1	1	1	2

11. Do you think elected officials in Washington care about your opinions when they make decisions or vote on legislation?

		Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5
	Base:	1502 %	1003 %	1504 %	1500 %	1501 %
1	Yes	29	28	27	30	30
2	No	62	63	64	62	62
3	Don't Know	8	8	8	7	8
4	Refused	1	1	1	1	1

### Healthcare Coverage – WAVE 5 ONLY

12. Please tell me if you Agree or Disagree with the following statement: The federal government should see that everyone has at least minimum health insurance benefits. . Is that strongly or somewhat?

		Wave 5 only
		1501 %
4	Strongly Agree	61
3	Somewhat Agree	17
2	Somewhat Disagree	8
1	Strongly Disagree	10
5	(DO NOT READ) don't know	4
6	(DO NOT READ) refused	1



13. Please tell me if you Agree or Disagree with the following statement: The United States should have a national healthcare plan in which every worker and every business contributes, every American is provided guaranteed insurance coverage and the government uses its buying power to negotiate lower health care prices. Is that strongly or somewhat?

		Wave 5 only
		1501 %
4	Strongly Agree	54
3	Somewhat Agree	19
2	Somewhat Disagree	7
1	Strongly Disagree	13
5	(DO NOT READ) don't know	6
6	(DO NOT READ) refused	1

14. Please tell me if you Agree or Disagree with the following statement: The United States should have mandatory health insurance in which people with higher incomes who do not have coverage would have to buy insurance and the government would help pay for insurance for those who cannot afford it. Is that strongly or somewhat?

		Wave 5 only
		1501 %
4	Strongly Agree	36
3	Somewhat Agree	22
2	Somewhat Disagree	13
1	Strongly Disagree	20
5	(DO NOT READ) don't know	8
6	(DO NOT READ) refused	1

15. How likely are you to vote for a candidate who supports a plan for national healthcare coverage? [SKIP IF Q1=3, OR IF Q1A=3 or 4]

		Wave 5 only
		1383 %
4	Very likely	41
3	Somewhat likely	36
2	Not very likely	8
1	Not at all likely	8
5	(DO NOT READ) don't know	6
6	(DO NOT READ) refused	1

16. How clear have candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives in your district been or U.S. Senate (state) about where they stand on the issue of healthcare coverage?

		Wave 5 only
		1501 %
4	Very clear	9
3	Somewhat clear	35
2	Not very clear	28
1	Not at all clear	16
5	(DO NOT READ) Don't know	11
6	(DO NOT READ) Refused	0

Now, just a few questions for classification purposes only.

QD1. What is your age as of your last birthday?

		Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5
	Base:	1502 %	1003 %	1504 %	1500 %	1501 %
1	Under 50	20	19	21	19	19
2	50 – 59	26	27	27	29	29
3	60 – 74	32	32	32	31	32
4	75+	19	19	17	17	17
5	Refused	3	3	4	3	3

QD2. What is your current marital status?

		Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5
	Base:	1502 %	1003 %	1504 %	1500 %	1501 %
1	Married	59	64	58	59	60
2	Not married, living with a partner	2	2	2	2	2
3	Separated	1	1	2	2	1
4	Divorced	13	12	13	14	12
5	Widowed	16	15	17	15	17
6	Never Married	7	6	8	7	8
7	Refused	1	1	1	2	1

QD3. Are you/Are you or your spouse a member of A-A-R-P formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons? [PROGRAMMING: DISPLAY 'Are you' OR 'Are you or your spouse' DEPENDING ON THE ANSWER FROM QD2]

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>	<b>Wave 4</b>	<b>Wave 5</b>
	Base:	1502	1003	1504	1500	1501
		%	%	%	%	%
1	Yes	43	43	42	40	41
2	No	57	56	57	59	59
3	Don't Know	1	1	0	1	0
4	Refused	0	0	0	1	0

QD4. What is the highest level of education that you completed?  
{READ LIST IF NEEDED}

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>	<b>Wave 4</b>	<b>Wave 5</b>
	Base:	1502	1003	1504	1500	1501
		%	%	%	%	%
1	Less than high school	9	8	8	7	7
2	High school grad or equivalent	29	28	29	30	29
3	Some college or technical training beyond high school	20	19	18	21	20
4	College Graduate (2 year degree)	10	11	10	9	11
5	College Graduate (4 year degree)	17	17	19	17	17
6	Post-Graduate or Professional degree	14	16	15	16	15
7	Refused	1	2	1	1	0

QD5. What is your race? {READ LIST IF NEEDED}

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>	<b>Wave 4</b>	<b>Wave 5</b>
	Base:	1502	1003	1504	1500	1501
		%	%	%	%	%
1	White or Caucasian	86	86	84	86	86
2	Black or African American	8	7	9	6	7
3	Asian	1	1	1	1	1
4	American Indian or Alaskan Native	1	1	1	1	2
6	Other	2	2	2	3	1
7	Refused	2	3	4	3	3

QD6. Are you of Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino origin?

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>	<b>Wave 4</b>	<b>Wave 5</b>
	Base:	1502	1003	1504	1500	1501
		%	%	%	%	%
1	Yes	3	4	4	4	3
2	No	96	95	94	94	95
3	Don't Know	1	2	2	2	1

QD7. We realize income is a private matter and so rather than ask anything specific about your income, I'd like to ask you to please stop me when I get to the category that includes your annual household income before taxes in 2005? {READ LIST UNTIL RESPONDENT ANSWERS}

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>	<b>Wave 4</b>	<b>Wave 5</b>
	Base:	1502	1003	1504	1500	1501
		%	%	%	%	%
1	Less than \$10,000	7	7	6	5	7
2	\$10,000 but less than \$20,000	11	11	10	11	11
3	\$20,000 but less than \$30,000	10	10	11	11	11
4	\$30,000 but less than \$40,000	12	10	12	10	9
5	\$40,000 but less than \$50,000	8	8	9	10	9
6	\$50,000 but less than \$75,000	15	14	13	13	15
7	\$75,000 Or more	21	20	21	23	22
8	Don't Know	4	4	5	3	4
9	Refused	13	17	13	16	13

QD8. What is your zip code?

\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for participating! Your opinion counts