



**AARP Election Watch:  
Pulse of a Generation  
September 18, 2006**



September 2006



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AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization that helps people 50+ have independence, choice and control in ways that are beneficial and affordable to them and society as a whole. We produce *AARP The Magazine*, published bimonthly; *AARP Bulletin*, our monthly newspaper; *AARP Segunda Juventud*, our bimonthly magazine in Spanish and English; *NRTA Live & Learn*, our quarterly newsletter for 50+ educators; and our website, [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org). AARP Foundation is our affiliated charity that provides security, protection, and empowerment to older persons in need with support from thousands of volunteers, donors, and sponsors. We have staffed offices in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

## Executive Summary

In late August 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, 89 percent of respondents in the current survey report they are already registered to vote and 84 percent are likely voters. A total of 1,502 interviews were conducted.

### Issue of the Week: The Cost of Prescription Drugs

Almost 65 percent of baby boomers and older Americans, ages 42 and older, consider paying for prescription drugs to be either a *major* (43%) or a *minor* (21%) financial problem.

The cost of prescription drugs is likely to be a voting issue in the November 2006 elections for nearly three-quarters of this age group, especially for minorities, the less educated and those with lower incomes.

### Voting Participation

Self reported voter registration is very high (9 in 10), and is highest for those over 60 (91%). Respondents are also very likely to vote this November (84%).

This boomer+ age segment report voting with regularity – 54 percent say they *always* and 29 percent say they *almost always* (29%). Six in 10 of those over 60 say that they *always* vote.

Interest in the upcoming election is high. More than one-half (53%) say they are *very interested* in this year's election. Again, even higher numbers of Americans over 60 (56%) say they are *very interested*.

As of September, however, with less than two months before the election, only 38 percent say they have given *quite a lot* of thought to the upcoming election. Once more, more Americans over 60 say they have given this much thought to the upcoming election.

Interestingly, solid majorities say they have not yet decided how they will vote for candidates in their House of Representatives race (70%) or their U.S. Senate race (60%).

Americans are evenly 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 (45%).

On the other hand, slightly more say they base their vote on the candidate's position on one or two key issues (44%) rather than the personal qualities of the candidate (37%).

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

### **September 18, 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 second in a series of 10 surveys scheduled to release each week leading up to the mid-term elections. The first report dealt with the issue of ID theft. This report is about affordable prescription drugs. 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
Week of 9/25	Social Security
Week of 10/2	Privacy
Week of 10/9	Healthcare Coverage
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 August 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, 89 percent of respondents in the current survey report they are already registered to vote and 84 percent are likely voters. Moreover, 54 percent say they *always* vote and another 29 percent say they *nearly always* vote. A total of 1,502 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.

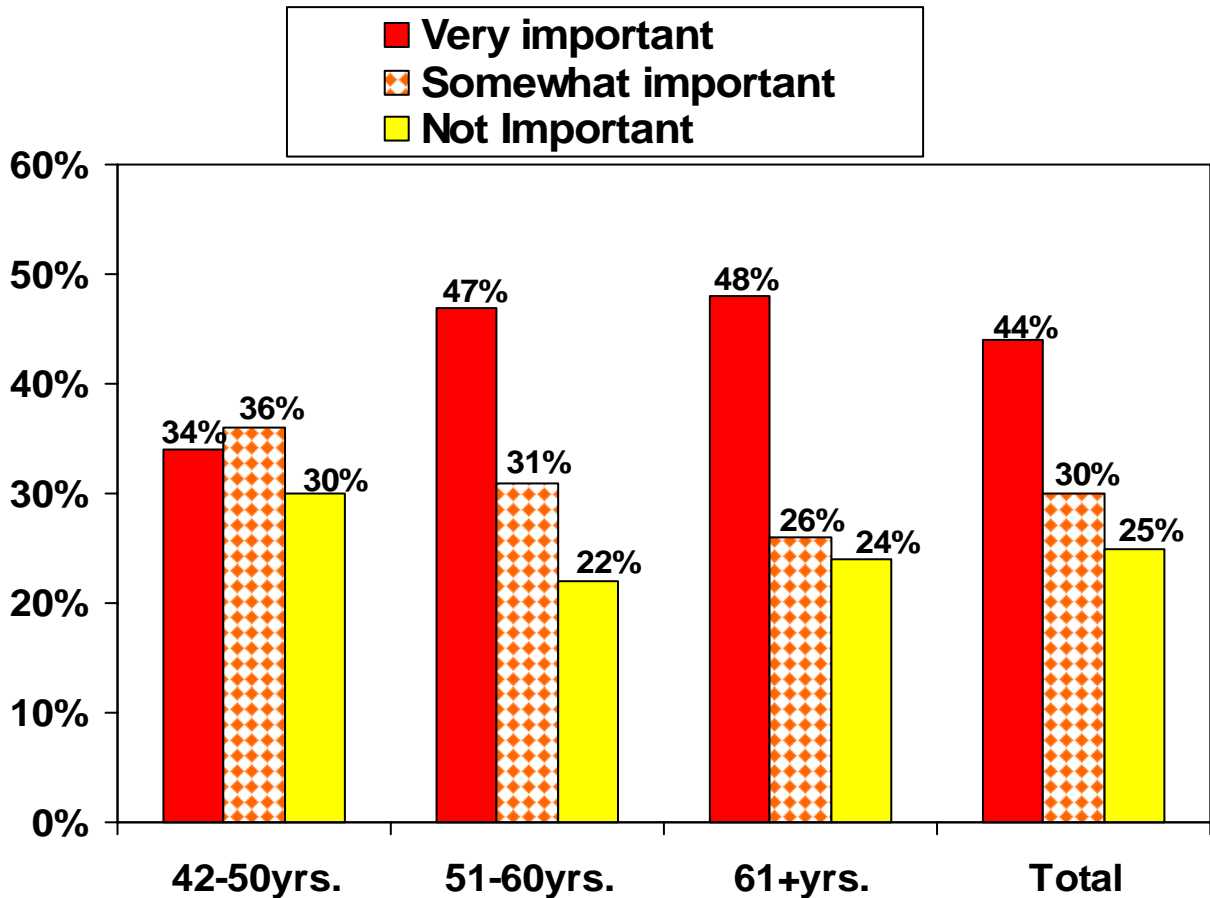
## Key Findings

### Problems Paying for Prescription Drugs

Paying for prescription drugs will be an important voting consideration for this mid-term election. Approximately three-quarters of all respondents (74%) consider the cost of prescription drugs an important issue in determining who to vote for in the November elections (see Figure 1). Older respondents (47% of ages 51-60; 48% ages 61+) were more likely than younger respondents (34% ages 42-50) to report this issue as *very important* to their voting decision (see Figure 1).

Majorities of people with a high school diploma or less (59%), minorities (70%), and with incomes less than \$30K (63%) all report the cost of prescription drugs will be a *very important* consideration in their voting decision. While less than half of people with incomes above \$30K (34%), some college or more (32%) and Whites (41%) consider this issue *very important* to their voting decision.

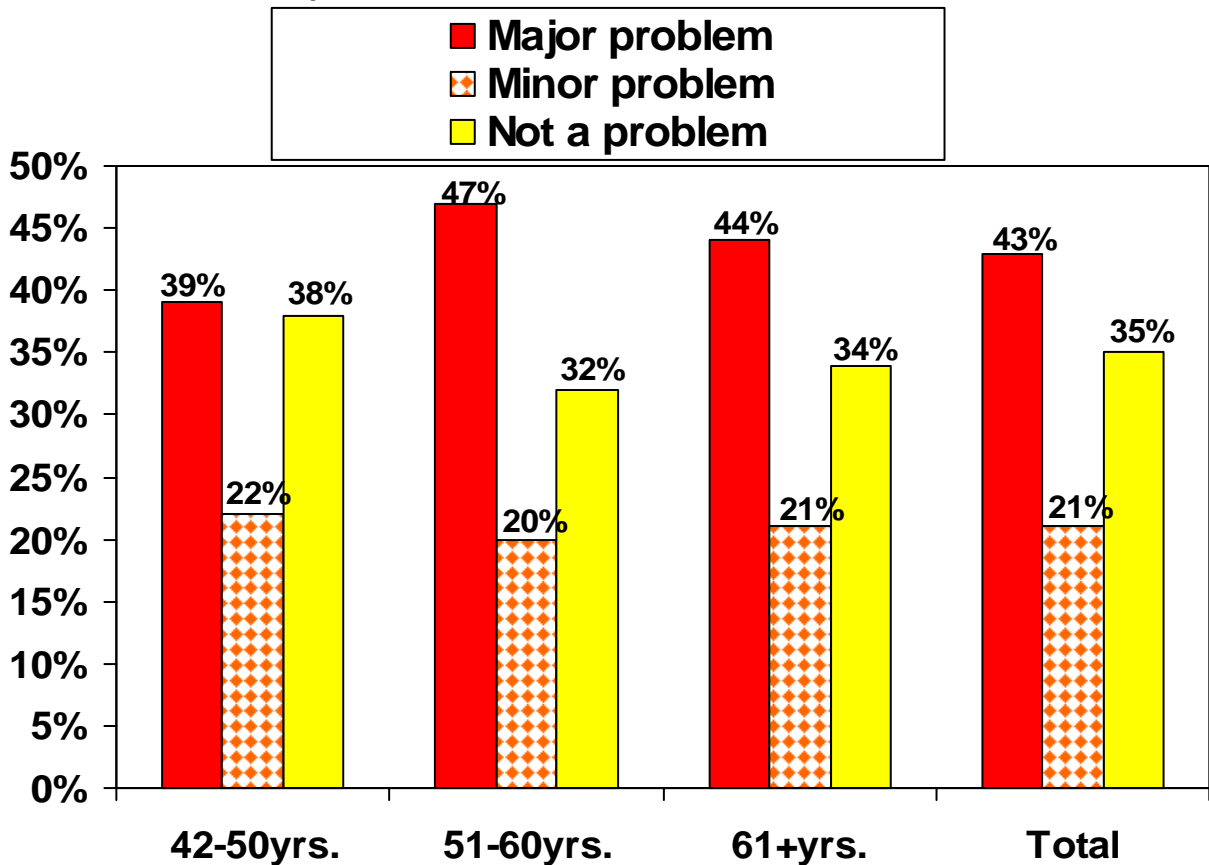
**Figure 1**  
(n=1,502)  
**How Important is the Cost of Prescription Drugs  
to Your Voting Decision?**



Nearly two-thirds of all respondents express concern over paying for their prescription medications (64%) (see Figure 2). Slightly more than 4 in 10 respondents (43%) report that paying for prescription medications is a *major* financial problem. A greater percentage of older boomers ages 51 to 60 (47%) than younger boomers ages 42 to 50 (39%) find paying for their medications is a *major* problem.

Majorities of less educated people, with a high school diploma or less (56%), minorities (63%) and with incomes less than \$30K (63%) all consider paying for prescription drugs a *major* problem. While less than half of people with incomes above \$30K (34%), some college or more (36%) and Whites (41%) consider this a *major* problem. An additional one-fifth of all respondents (21%) consider this a *minor* financial problem.

**Figure 2**  
(n=1,502)  
**Paying for Prescription Medications is a Major, Minor or not a Problem for You?**



## Interest in the Mid-Term Elections

There is a considerable amount of interest in the mid-term elections given they are still a couple of months away. Nearly 9 in 10 respondents (86%) are interested in the upcoming elections. More than half are very interested (53%) and one-third are somewhat interested (33%). Furthermore, there is almost an even split between respondents who report they have given *quite a lot* of thought (38%) to these upcoming elections and those who have given *only a little* thought (40%) to the elections.

While there is a sizeable level of interest in the mid-term elections, findings suggest that people have not made up their minds about for whom to vote. Exactly 7 in 10 respondents (70%) have not yet decided for which U.S. House candidate to vote and 6 in 10 (60%) have not yet settled on a U.S. Senate candidate. (see Figure 3).

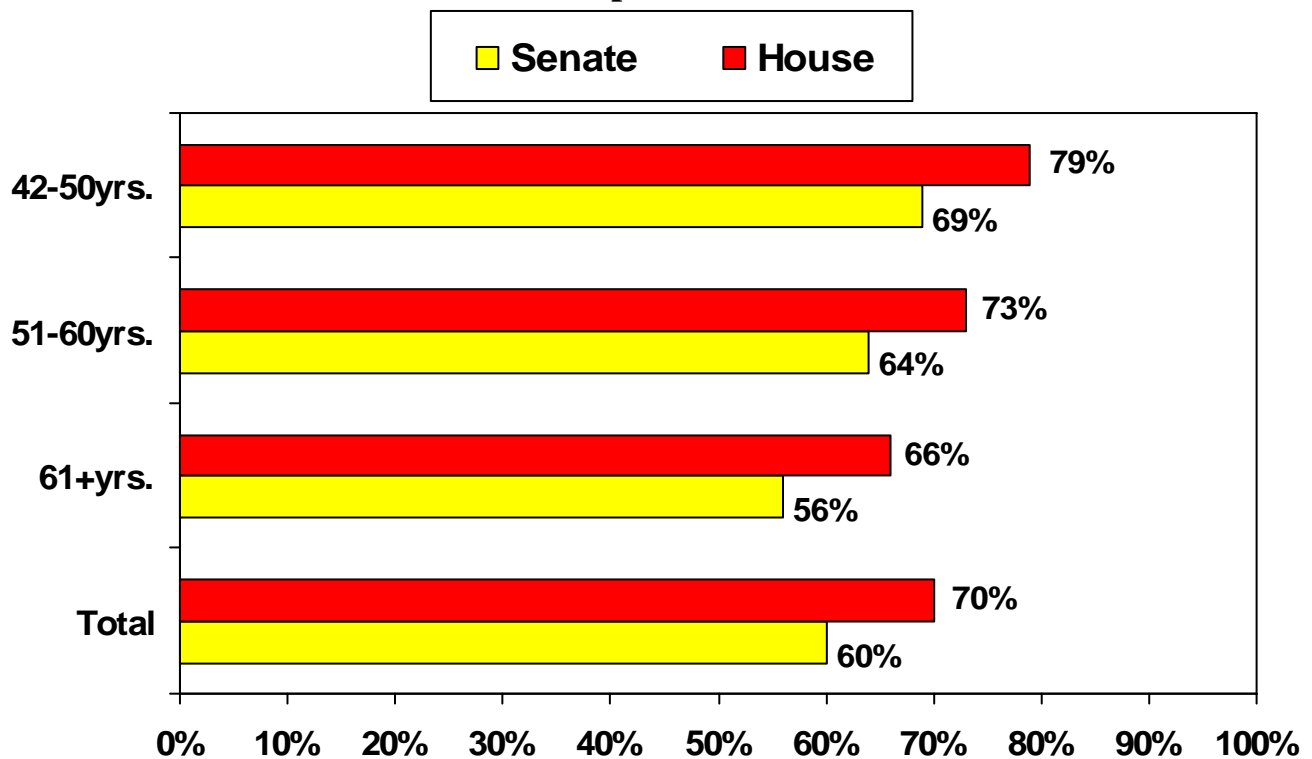
Younger boomers are more likely than other age groups to be undecided in their voting decisions. Approximately 8 in 10 younger boomers, ages 42-50 (79%) have not yet decided for which U.S. House candidate to vote compared to 73 percent of older boomers ages 51-60 and 66 percent of respondents ages 61 and older (see Figure 3). For U.S. Senate, 69 percent of younger boomers have not yet decided for which candidate to vote compared to 64 percent of older boomers and 56 percent of respondents ages 61 and older.

**Figure 3**

**\*\* Includes only likely voters**

**(Senate: n=960; House: n=1,356)**

### **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 (10%), or even personal qualities of the candidate (37%), agreement on key issues (44%) 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 (45%).

## **Conclusions**

The cost of prescription drugs is likely to be an important election issue this year for boomers and older Americans, given the high percentage of those who indicate having financial problems paying for medications.

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 1,502 people ages 42 and older. Interviews were conducted between August 22<sup>nd</sup> and August 27<sup>th</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  
September 18, 2006  
(n= 1,502)**

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?

	Base:	1502
		%
1	18-41	0
2	42 or older	100
3	Under 18	0
4	Refused	0

GENDER. [INTERVIEWER -- RECORD GENDER]

	Base:	1502
		%
1	Male	46
2	Female	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?

	Base:	1502
		%
1	Already registered	89
2	Plan to register	4
3	Do Not Plan to register	6
4	Don't Know	1

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

	Base:	1417 %
1	Very Likely	84
2	Somewhat Likely	9
3	Not Very Likely	3
4	Not At All Likely	2
5	Don't Know	2
6	Refused	0

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

	Base:	1502 %
1	Republican	29
2	Democrat	32
3	Independent	30
4	Don't Know	5
5	Refused	4

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

	Base:	1502 %
1	Conservative	38
2	Moderate	40
3	Liberal	15
4	Don't Know	6
5	Refused	2

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

	Base:	1502 %
1	Always	54
2	Nearly Always	29
3	Some of the time	8
4	Seldom	4
5	Never	5
5	Don't Know	0
6	Refused	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]

	Base:	1502 %
1	Very Interested	53
2	Somewhat Interested	33
3	Not Very Interested	8
4	Not At All Interested	6
5	Don't Know	1
6	Refused	0

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

	Base:	1502 %
1	Quite a lot	38
2	Only a little	40
3	Not at all yet	22
4	Don't Know	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]

	Base:	1356 %
1	Yes	28
2	No	70
3	Don't Know	2

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]

	Base:	960 %
1	Yes	39
2	No	60
3	Don't Know	1

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

	Base:	1502 %
1	His or her ability to do things that help people in your congressional district	43
2	That you agree with his or her positions on major national issues	45
3	Don't Know	10
4	Refused	2

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

	Base:	1502 %
1	The candidate's political party	10
2	The candidate's position on one or two key issues	44
3	The personal qualities of the candidate	37
4	Don't Know	7
5	Refused	2

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

	Base:	1502 %
1	Yes	29
2	No	62
3	Don't Know	8
4	Refused	1

## Rx Affordability

12. Would you say that paying for prescription medications is a major financial problem, a minor financial problem, or not a financial problem for you?

	Base:	1502 %
1	Major financial problem	43
2	Minor financial problem	21
3	Not a financial problem	35
4	Don't Know	1
5	Refused	0

13. As an issue in the November elections, how important will the cost of prescription drugs be to your decision about who to vote for? [SKIP IF Q1=3 OR Q1A=3 or 4]

	Base:	1356 %
1	Very Important	44
2	Somewhat Important	30
3	Not Very Important	14
4	Not At All Important	11
5	Don't Know	1
6	Refused	0

Now, just a few questions for classification purposes only.

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

	Base:	1502 %
1	Under 50	20
2	50 – 59	26
3	60 – 74	32
4	75+	19
5	Refused	3

QD2. What is your current marital status?

	Base:	1502 %
1	Married	59
2	Not married, living with a partner	2
3	Separated	1
4	Divorced	13
5	Widowed	16
6	Never Married	7
7	Refused	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]

	Base:	1502 %
1	Yes	43
2	No	57
3	Don't Know	1

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

	Base:	1502 %
1	Less than high school	9
2	High school grad or equivalent	29
3	Some college or technical training beyond high school	20
4	College Graduate (2 year degree)	10
5	College Graduate (4 year degree)	18
6	Post-Graduate or Professional degree	14
7	Refused	1



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

	Base:	1502 %
1	White or Caucasian	86
2	Black or African American	8
3	Asian	1
4	American Indian or Alaskan Native	1
6	Other	2
7	Refused	2

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

	Base:	1502 %
1	Yes	3
2	No	96
3	Don't Know	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}

	Base:	1502 %
1	Less than \$10,000	7
2	\$10,000 but less than \$20,000	11
3	\$20,000 but less than \$30,000	10
4	\$30,000 but less than \$40,000	12
5	\$40,000 but less than \$50,000	8
6	\$50,000 but less than \$75,000	15
7	\$75,000 Or more	21
8	Don't Know	4
9	Refused	13

QD8. What is your zip code?

\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for participating! Your opinion counts