



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

**September 25, 2006**



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**Washington, DC 20049**  
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## Executive Summary

In early 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, 90 percent of respondents in the current survey report they are already registered to vote and 86 percent are likely voters. A total of 1,504 interviews were conducted.

### Issue of the Week: Social Security

Seven in 10 respondents oppose private accounts (71%). The percentage of respondents who *strongly oppose* private accounts (57%) is six times greater than those who *strongly support* private accounts (9%).

Nearly two-thirds of likely voters (64%) said they are either *not at all likely* (38%) or *not very likely* (26%) to vote for a candidate who supports using Social Security taxes to fund private accounts.

When given the choice, an overwhelming 79 percent of all respondents want candidates for both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate to work to strengthen the existing Social Security program rather than work to create private accounts (12%).

### Voting Participation

Self reported voter registration is very high (9 in 10). Respondents say that they are also *very likely* to vote this November (86%).

This boomer+ age segment report voting with regularity – 57 percent say they *always* vote and 28 percent say they *almost always* vote. Six in 10 of those over 60 say that they *always* vote compared to 48 percent of younger boomers (ages 42 to 50) and 54 percent older boomers (ages 51 to 60).

Interest in the upcoming election is high. More than one-half (56%) say they are *very interested* in this year's election.

As of September, however, with just weeks before the election, 44 percent say they have given *quite a lot* of 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 (64%) or their U.S. Senate race (55%).

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 (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 (36%).

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

### **September 25, 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 for release each week leading up to the mid-term elections. The first report dealt with the issue of ID theft. This report is about Social Security. 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 **CURRENT
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 early 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, 90 percent of respondents in the current survey report they are already registered to vote and 86 percent are likely voters. Moreover, 57 percent say they *always* vote and another 28 percent say they *nearly always* vote. A total of 1,504 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

### Opposition to Private Accounts

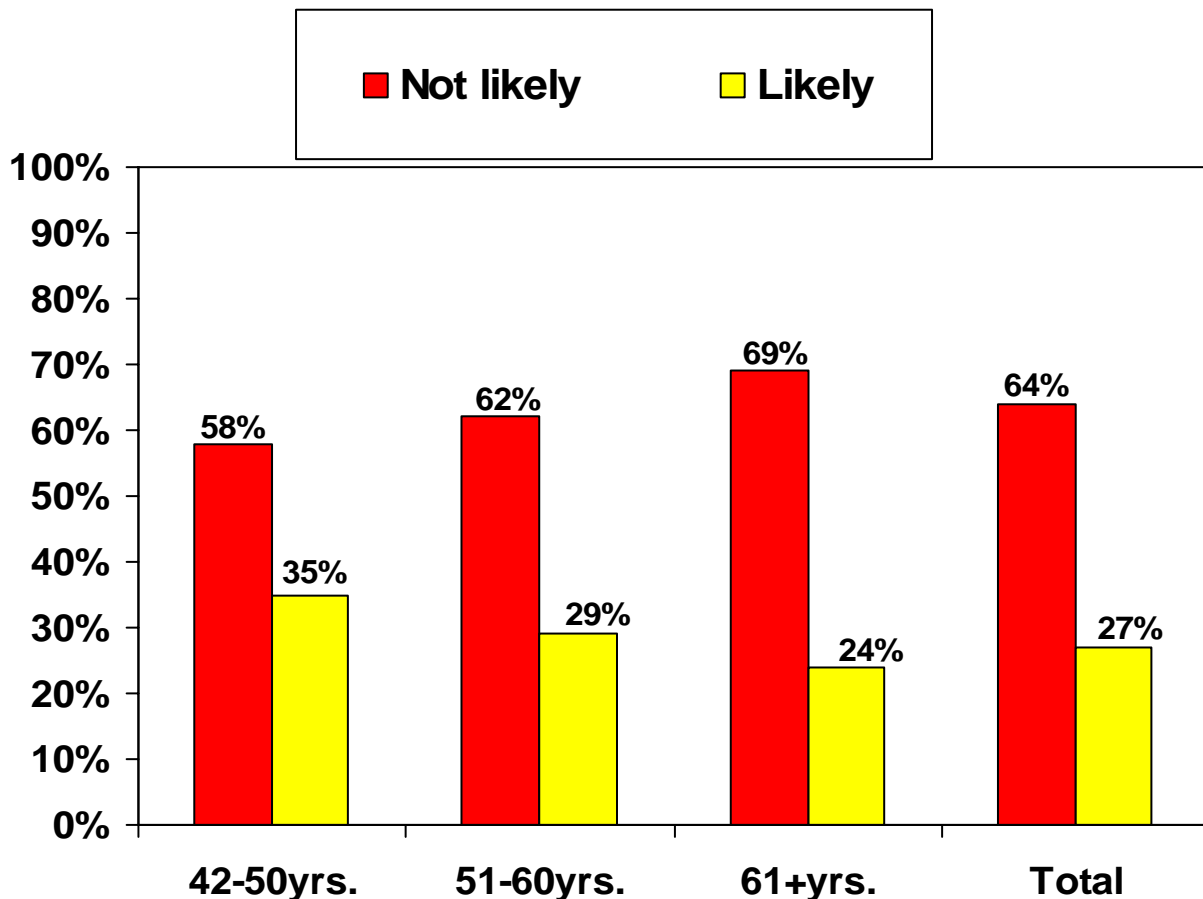
Opposition to private accounts is high among likely voters and will be a consideration in their voting decisions for this mid-term election. Nearly two-thirds of likely voters (64%) said they are either *not at all likely* (38%) or *not very likely* (26%) to vote for a candidate who supports using Social Security taxes to fund private accounts (see Figure 1). Older respondents (43% ages 61+) were more likely than younger respondents (34% ages 42-50 and 35% ages 51-60) to report they are *not at all likely* to vote for a candidate who supports private accounts.

A greater percentage of younger boomers (25%) than older age groups (20% ages 51-60 and 15% ages 61+) report they are *somewhat likely* to vote for a candidate who supports using Social Security taxes to fund private accounts. A small percentage of respondents across all age groups report they are *very likely* to vote for a candidate who supports private accounts (10% ages 42-50, 9% ages 51-60, and 9% ages 61+).

**Figure 1**

**\*\* Includes only likely voters  
(n=1,367)**

#### How Likely Are You to Vote For a Candidate Who Supports Private Accounts?

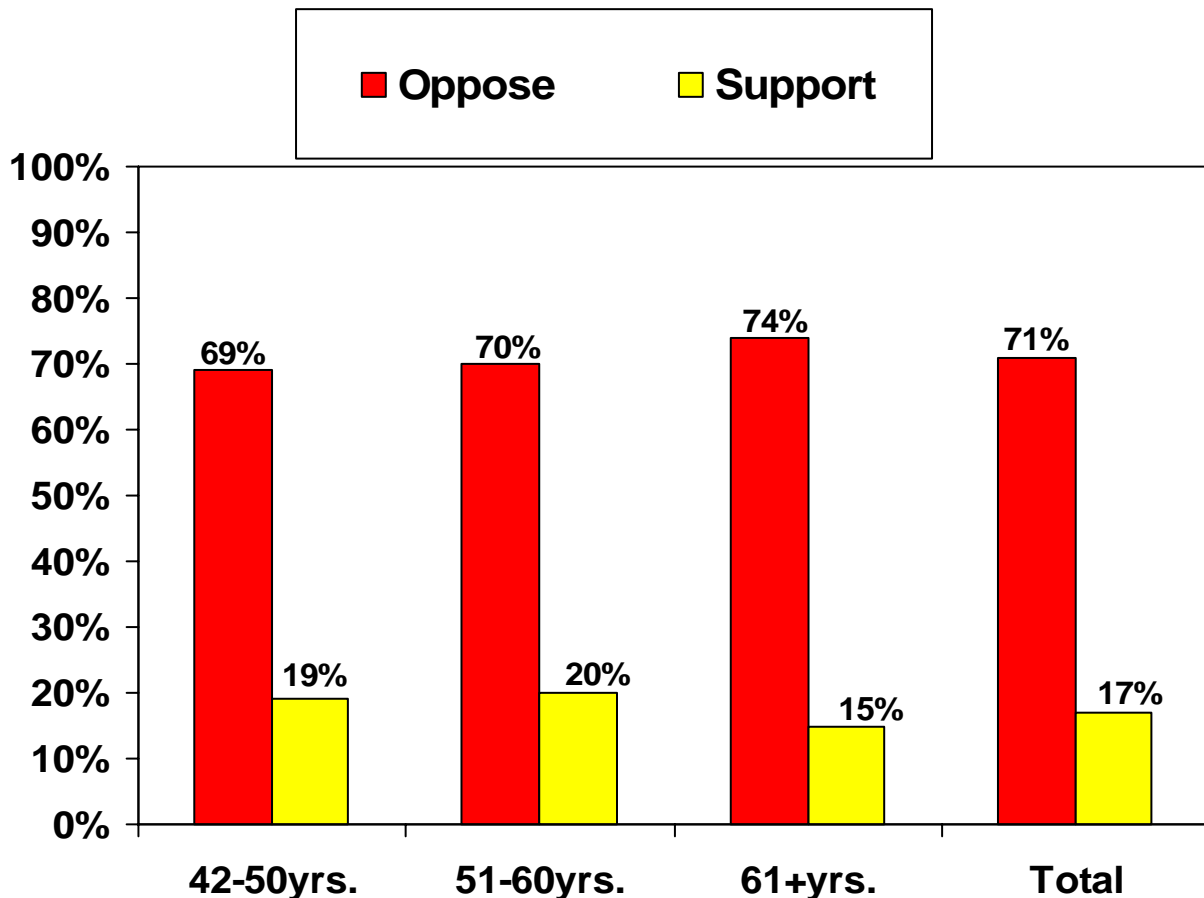


A total of 7 in 10 respondents oppose private accounts (71%) (see Figure 2). In fact, while respondents who support private accounts were almost evenly divided between *strongly support* (9%) and *somewhat support* (8%), those who *oppose* private accounts were more than four times as likely to *strongly oppose* private accounts (57%) as to *somewhat oppose* them (14%). That is, intensity in opposition to private accounts is greater than the intensity in support of private accounts.

A greater percentage of respondents ages 61+ (61%) than younger boomers ages 42 to 50 (54%) and older boomers ages 51 to 60 (55%) *strongly oppose* private accounts. Less than one-fifth of respondents across all age groups said they *somewhat oppose* private accounts (16% ages 42-50, 15% ages 51-60, and 13% ages 61+).

Additionally, there is no significant difference between boomers and respondents ages 61+ in their support for private accounts. Younger boomers (8%) are just as likely as older age groups (10% ages 51-60 and 7% ages 61+) to report they *somewhat support* private accounts. Similarly, a small percentage of respondents across all age groups report they *strongly support* private accounts (10% ages 42-50, 10% ages 51-60, and 8% ages 61+).

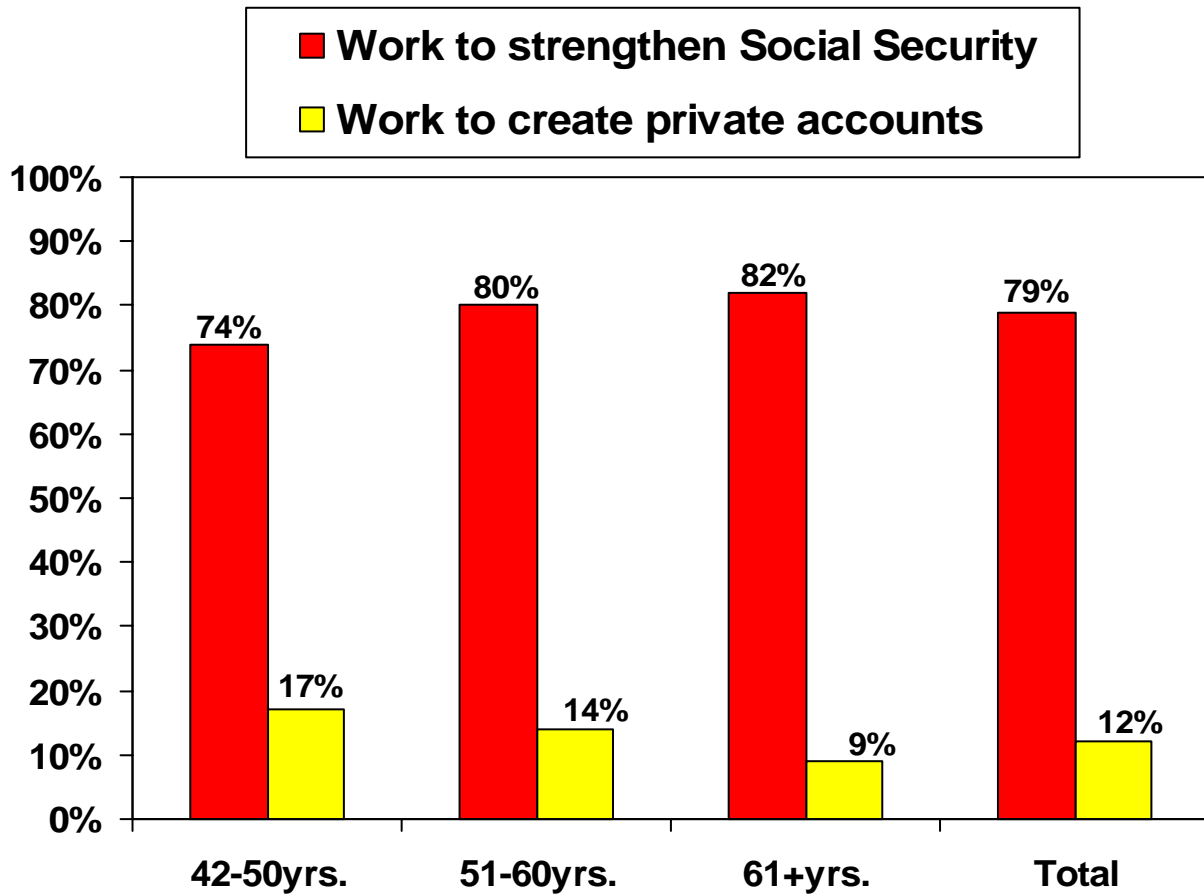
**Figure 2**  
(n=1,504)  
**Do You Support or Oppose Using Social Security Taxes to Fund Private Accounts?**



Half of all respondents are not clear where candidates stand on the issue of private accounts (50%). The remaining respondents are either *somewhat clear* (27%), *very clear* (9%) or *don't know* (13%).

While a considerable percentage of respondents do not know where candidates stand on the issue of private accounts they certainly have expressed how they want candidates to address issues with Social Security. An overwhelming 79 percent of all respondents want candidates for both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate to work to strengthen the existing Social Security program (see Figure 3). Only 12 percent of respondents want candidates to work to create private accounts funded with taxes from Social Security.

**Figure 3**  
(n=1,504)  
**When it Comes to Social Security**  
**What do You Want Candidates to do?**





## 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 (56%) and almost one-third are somewhat interested (31%). Furthermore, a greater percentage of respondents report they have given *quite a lot* of thought (44%) to these upcoming elections than those who have given *only a little* thought (36%) 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. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64%) have not yet decided for which U.S. House candidate to vote and a majority (55%) has not yet settled on a U.S. Senate candidate (see Figure 4).

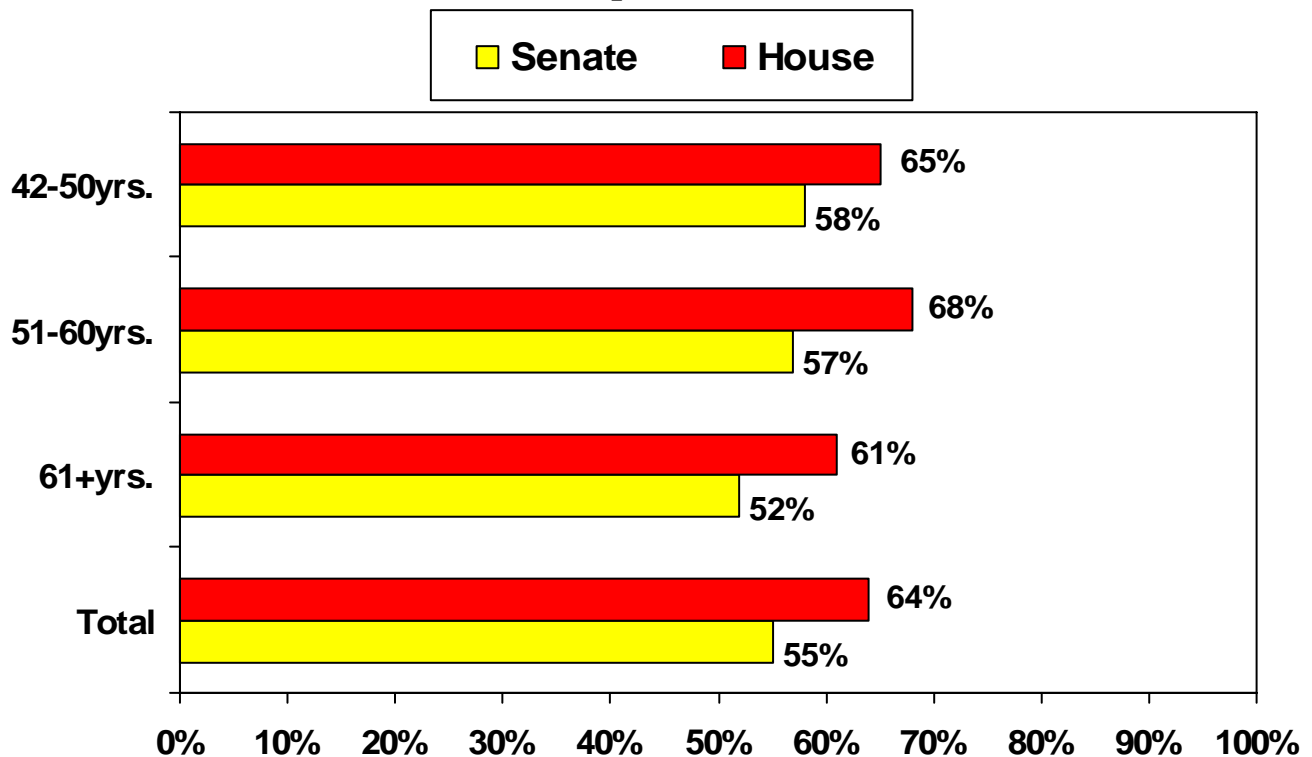
Boomers are more likely than respondents 61+ to be undecided in their voting decisions. Approximately two-thirds of younger boomers, ages 42 to 50 (65%) and 68 percent of older boomers ages 51 to 60 have not yet decided for which U.S. House candidate to vote compared to 61 percent of respondents 61+ (see Figure 4). For U.S. Senate, 58 percent of younger boomers and 57 percent of older boomers have not yet decided for which candidate to vote compared to 52 percent of respondents ages 61 and older.

**Figure 4**

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

**(Senate: n=976; House: n=1,367)**

### **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 (11%), or even personal qualities of the candidate (36%), 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**

Private accounts is likely to be an important election issue this year for boomers and older Americans, given the high percentage of those who oppose private accounts, and want candidates to work on strengthening Social Security.

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 1,504 people ages 42 and older. Interviews were conducted between September 8<sup>th</sup> and September 15<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 25, 2006  
(n= 1,504)**

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

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>
	Base:	1502 %	1003 %	1504 %
1	18-41	0	0	0
2	42 or older	100	100	100
3	Under 18	0	0	0
4	Refused	0	0	0

GENDER. [INTERVIEWER -- RECORD GENDER]

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>
	Base:	1502 %	1003 %	1504 %
1	Male	46	46	46
2	Female	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>
	Base:	1502 %	1003 %	1504 %
1	Already registered	89	90	90
2	Plan to register	4	4	4
3	Do Not Plan to register	6	5	5
4	Don't Know	1	1	1

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

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>
	Base:	1417	953	1429
		%	%	%
1	Very Likely	84	87	86
2	Somewhat Likely	9	8	8
3	Not Very Likely	3	2	2
4	Not At All Likely	2	2	2
5	Don't Know	2	1	2
6	Refused	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>
	Base:	1502	1003	1504
		%	%	%
1	Republican	29	28	30
2	Democrat	32	34	34
3	Independent	30	29	28
4	Don't Know	5	6	5
5	Refused	4	4	4

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

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>
	Base:	1502	1003	1504
		%	%	%
1	Conservative	38	37	38
2	Moderate	40	42	41
3	Liberal	15	14	12
4	Don't Know	6	6	7
5	Refused	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>
	Base:	1502	1003	1504
		%	%	%
1	Always	54	56	57
2	Nearly Always	29	30	28
3	Some of the time	8	7	8
4	Seldom	4	3	2
5	Never	5	4	4
5	Don't Know	0	1	0
6	Refused	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>
	Base:	1502	1003	1504
		%	%	%
1	Very Interested	53	57	56
2	Somewhat Interested	33	29	31
3	Not Very Interested	8	8	7
4	Not At All Interested	6	6	5
5	Don't Know	1	0	1
6	Refused	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>
	Base:	1502	1003	1504
		%	%	%
1	Quite a lot	38	45	44
2	Only a little	40	36	36
3	Not at all yet	22	17	18
4	Don't Know	1	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>
	Base:	1356 %	914 %	1367 %
1	Yes	28	36	35
2	No	70	63	64
3	Don't Know	2	1	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>
	Base:	960 %	643 %	976 %
1	Yes	39	44	44
2	No	60	56	55
3	Don't Know	1	1	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)

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

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

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

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

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>
	Base:	1502 %	1003 %	1504 %
1	Yes	29	28	27
2	No	62	63	64
3	Don't Know	8	8	8
4	Refused	1	1	1

12. Do you support or oppose using Social Security taxes to fund private accounts? Is that strongly or somewhat?

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>
	Base:	N/A %	N/A %	1504 %
1	Strongly support	-	-	9
2	Somewhat support	-	-	8
3	Somewhat oppose	-	-	14
4	Strongly oppose	-	-	57
5	Don't know	-	-	11
6	Refused	-	-	1



13. 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 using Social Security taxes to fund private accounts?

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>
	Base:	N/A %	N/A %	1504 %
1	Very clear	-	-	9
2	Somewhat clear	-	-	27
3	Not very clear	-	-	30
4	Not at all clear	-	-	20
5	Don't Know	-	-	13
6	Refused	-	-	0

14. When it comes to Social Security, what do you want candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives in your district or U.S. Senate (state) to do...?

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>
	Base:	N/A %	N/A %	1504 %
1	Work to create private accounts funded with taxes from Social Security	-	-	12
2	Work to strengthen the existing Social Security Program	-	-	79
3	Don't know	-	-	7
4	Refused	-	-	2

15. How likely are you to vote for a candidate who supports using Social Security taxes to fund private accounts?

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>
	Base:	N/A %	N/A %	1367 %
1	Very likely	-	-	9
2	Somewhat likely	-	-	19
3	Not very likely	-	-	26
4	Not at all likely	-	-	38
5	Don't know	-	-	7
6	Refused	-	-	1

Now, just a few questions for classification purposes only.

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

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>
	Base:	1502 %	1003 %	1504 %
1	Under 50	20	19	21
2	50 – 59	26	27	27
3	60 – 74	32	32	32
4	75+	19	19	17
5	Refused	3	3	4

QD2. What is your current marital status?

		<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>
	Base:	1502 %	1003 %	1504 %
1	Married	59	64	58
2	Not married, living with a partner	2	2	2
3	Separated	1	1	2
4	Divorced	13	12	13
5	Widowed	16	15	17
6	Never Married	7	6	8
7	Refused	1	1	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>
	Base:	1502 %	1003 %	1504 %
1	Yes	43	43	42
2	No	57	56	57
3	Don’t Know	1	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>
	Base:	1502 %	1003 %	1504 %
1	Less than high school	9	8	8
2	High school grad or equivalent	29	28	29
3	Some college or technical training beyond high school	20	19	18
4	College Graduate (2 year degree)	10	11	10
5	College Graduate (4 year degree)	17	17	19
6	Post-Graduate or Professional degree	14	16	15
7	Refused	1	2	1

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

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

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

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

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

QD8. What is your zip code?

\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for participating! Your opinion counts