



Cato Institute December 2025 Social Security National Survey

CATO INSTITUTE/YOUGOV • N=2,000

MARGIN OF ERROR $\pm 2.59\%$. NUMBERS MAY NOT ADD UP TO 100% DUE TO ROUNDING.

1. Do you have a favorable or unfavorable view of Social Security?

■ <i>Total favorable</i>	83%
■ <i>Total unfavorable</i>	17%
■ Very favorable	37%
■ Somewhat favorable	46%
■ Somewhat unfavorable	13%
■ Very unfavorable	4%
■ Total	100%

2. [If not retired] Besides Social Security taxes, are you currently saving for retirement through a 401(k), IRA, or other means?

■ Yes, currently saving	49%
■ No, not currently saving	51%
■ Total	100%

3. [If not retired] When you retire, how much do you expect to rely on Social Security? As your ...

■ Main source of income	40%
■ Minor source of income	42%
■ Not at all	18%
■ Total	100%

4. [If retired] How much do you rely on Social Security as a source of income today? It is a ...

■ Main source of income	65%
■ Minor source of income	20%
■ Not a source at all	15%
■ Total	100%

5. As you may know, the Social Security program in the United States was created in 1935. Do you think the creation of Social Security was a good or bad idea?

■ Good idea	82%
■ Bad idea	5%
■ Neither good nor bad idea	12%
■ Total	100%

6. Do you think younger workers will get a better, a worse, or about the same deal from Social Security compared to today's retirees?

■ Better deal	11%
■ Worse deal	58%
■ About the same	31%
■ Total	100%

7. Thinking of Congress's overall management of the Social Security program, do you think Congress has mostly kept its promises or mostly broken its promises to workers?

■ Mostly kept its promises	38%
■ Mostly broken its promises	62%
■ Total	100%

8. When you pay Social Security payroll taxes, what do you think happens to the money?

■ It is set aside in a personal account for me until I retire.	8%
■ It is invested in the Social Security Trust Fund for me until I retire.	20%
■ It is used to pay benefits to current retirees.	51%
■ Not sure	21%
■ Total	100%

9. Do you think of Social Security more as . . .

■ A retirement savings program, where workers pay to finance their own future benefits	33%
■ A program where today's workers pay taxes that fund the benefits of current retirees	51%
■ Not sure	16%
■ Total	100%

10. In total, what percentage of wages does Social Security take in payroll taxes (counting both the employee's share and the employer's share)?

■ Around 3%	10%
■ Around 6%	23%
■ Around 12%	17%
■ Around 16% or more	7%
■ Not sure	43%
■ Total	100%

11. Suppose a worker earns \$60,000 a year. They and their employer together pay about \$7,400 a year combined in Social Security taxes. Do you think this amount of Social Security tax is . . .

■ Too high	27%
■ Too low	16%
■ About right	57%
■ Total	100%

12. [ASKED OF HALF] At what age do you think someone can first begin receiving some level of Social Security retirement benefits?

■ 55	14%
■ 60	15%
■ 62	50%
■ 67	18%
■ 70	3%
■ Total	100%

13. [ASKED OF HALF] At what age do you think someone can first receive full Social Security retirement benefits?

■ 55	10%
■ 60	15%
■ 62	30%
■ 67	39%
■ 70	7%
■ Total	100%

14. When people retire, do you think Social Security gives . . .

■ Everyone about the same as they paid in, plus a little for interest	33%
■ Lower earners more back for what they paid and higher earners less back	28%
■ Not sure	40%
■ Total	100%

15. Based on what you've read and heard, does the Social Security program take in enough money in taxes to pay current retirees benefits?

■ Yes	29%
■ No	40%
■ Not sure	31%
■ Total	100%

16. How well do you think Social Security is funded right now?

■ It's fully funded.	11%
■ It's only a little underfunded.	12%
■ It's moderately underfunded.	32%
■ It's extremely underfunded.	24%
■ Not sure	21%
■ Total	100%

17. Social Security has been paying out more in benefits than it collects in taxes. Experts say that if Congress does nothing, all benefits will be cut by about 23% starting in 2033. Knowing this, would you say Social Security’s financial situation is . . .

■ Less serious than you thought	5%
■ About as serious as you thought	51%
■ More serious than you thought	44%
■ Total	100%

18. If someone starts Social Security early and keeps working, their monthly check can be reduced if they earn too much. What happens to the money that’s held back?

■ It’s gone for good.	27%
■ It’s added back later by raising their monthly benefit at full retirement age.	27%
■ Not sure	46%
■ Total	100%

19. Based on what you’ve read and heard, what do you think is inside the Social Security trust fund?

■ Money invested in stocks and the financial markets	10%
■ Special US Treasury securities—government obligations	49%
■ Not sure	41%
■ Total	100%

20. In 1950, about 16 workers paid into Social Security for every one person receiving benefits. Since then, do you think the number of workers supporting each retiree has . . .

■ Increased a lot	27%
■ Increased a little	15%
■ Stayed the same	17%
■ Decreased a little	13%
■ Decreased a lot	27%
■ Total	100%

21. Thinking back to when Social Security began, did the first recipients of Social Security . . .?

■ Contribute about the same amount that they later received in benefits	37%
■ Contribute a lot less than they later received in benefits	45%
■ Contribute a lot more than they later received in benefits	18%
■ Total	100%

22. There’s been lots of discussion about the financial condition of the Social Security system. Do you think Social Security will exist or not when you retire?

■ Yes	34%
■ No	30%
■ Not sure	36%
■ Total	100%

23. [If retired] Do you think the Social Security system will be able to continue to pay you full benefits, or do you think there will eventually be cuts in your benefits?

■ Continue to get full benefits	44%
■ Will be cut in benefits	56%
■ Total	100%

24. [If not retired] When you reach retirement age, how much of your scheduled Social Security benefit do you expect to receive?

■ The full benefit	30%
■ A moderate amount	27%
■ Some	25%
■ Nothing at all	17%
■ Total	100%

25. When you retire, do you think you’ll get back from Social Security more, less, or about the same as what you and your employer paid in, assuming your contributions have grown normally over time?

■ More	9%
■ About the same	31%
■ Less	43%
■ Not sure	18%
■ Total	100%

26. Do you think Social Security is more like . . .

■ A retirement savings program you paid for	60%
■ A welfare program that provides benefits	24%
■ Not sure	15%
■ Total	100%

27. Do you think the United States is spending too much, too little, or the right amount on Social Security?

■ Too much	11%
■ Too little	66%
■ About the right amount	23%
■ Total	100%

28. What's your impression, do you think Social Security benefits are too high, too low, or about right?

■ Too high	5%
■ Too low	54%
■ About right	23%
■ No opinion	18%
■ Total	100%

29. Who do you believe should receive Social Security benefits?

■ All who have paid into the system	86%
■ Only those in financial need	14%
■ Total	100%

30. Do you think Social Security should . . . ?

■ Pay benefits in line with what each worker contributed	58%
■ Give lower earners relatively more and higher earners relatively less	23%
■ Not sure	19%
■ Total	100%

31. Do you think people who receive Social Security benefits should be allowed to work and earn as much as they want without having their benefits reduced?

■ Yes, they should.	61%
■ No, they should not.	20%
■ Not sure	19%
■ Total	100%

32. Can Congress change Social Security benefits, or are workers guaranteed what they were promised?

■ Congress can change them.	65%
■ Workers are guaranteed benefits.	35%
■ Total	100%

33. Over the past decade, Social Security has paid out more in benefits than it collects in taxes from current workers. Government analysts project that if Congress does nothing, all Social Security benefits could be cut by about a quarter starting in 2033. Do you favor or oppose the following proposals to help solve the financial problems of the Social Security system?

33. (a) [ASKED OF HALF] Increasing income taxes to keep full benefits.

■ <i>Total favor</i>	58%
■ <i>Total oppose</i>	42%
■ Strongly favor	19%
■ Somewhat favor	39%
■ Somewhat oppose	23%
■ Strongly oppose	19%
■ Total	100%

33. (b) [ASKED OF HALF] Increasing Social Security payroll taxes as much as necessary to keep full benefits.

■ <i>Total favor</i>	63%
■ <i>Total oppose</i>	37%
■ Strongly favor	21%
■ Somewhat favor	42%
■ Somewhat oppose	23%
■ Strongly oppose	14%
■ Total	100%

33. (c) [ASKED OF HALF] Raising Social Security payroll taxes from 12.40% to 16.05%.

■ <i>Total favor</i>	55%
■ <i>Total oppose</i>	45%
■ Strongly favor	16%
■ Somewhat favor	40%
■ Somewhat oppose	27%
■ Strongly oppose	18%
■ Total	100%

33. (d) [ASKED OF HALF] Would you favor or oppose raising Social Security payroll taxes to maintain current seniors' benefits even if current workers would eventually get back less than they paid in?

■ <i>Total favor</i>	39%
■ <i>Total oppose</i>	61%
■ Strongly favor	10%
■ Somewhat favor	30%
■ Somewhat oppose	39%
■ Strongly oppose	22%
■ Total	100%

34. Would you be willing or unwilling to increase your taxes by about [INSERT] per year to maintain current benefit levels?

34. (a) Increase taxes for benefits—\$200

■ Yes willing	68%
■ No not willing	32%
■ Total	100%

34. (b) Increase taxes for benefits—\$600

■ Yes willing	61%
■ No not willing	39%
■ Total	100%

34. (c) Increase taxes for benefits—\$1,300

■ Yes willing	23%
■ No not willing	77%
■ Total	100%

34. (d) Increase taxes for benefits—\$2,600

■ Yes willing	21%
■ No not willing	79%
■ Total	100%

34. (e) Increase taxes for benefits—\$3,500

■ Yes willing	10%
■ No not willing	90%
■ Total	100%

34. (f) Increase taxes for benefits—\$5,000

■ Yes willing	10%
■ No not willing	90%
■ Total	100%

35. Which comes closer to your view?

■ Social Security benefits should be protected for current retirees, even if that means higher taxes on younger workers.	69%
■ Younger workers should be protected from higher taxes, even if that means reducing benefits for current retirees.	31%
■ Total	100%

36. To help fix Social Security's financial problems, would you be willing to reduce your own Social Security benefits as long as you were guaranteed to get back at least what you and your employer paid in—plus reasonable growth or interest, as if you had saved it yourself?

■ Yes, I'd be willing.	35%
■ No, I would not.	35%
■ Not sure	30%
■ Total	100%

37. Government analysts project that if Congress does nothing, all Social Security benefits could be cut by about 20%–25% starting in 2033. If you had to choose, which would you prefer Congress do?

■ Raise taxes	35%
■ Cut benefits	14%
■ Borrow more money	17%
■ Not sure	34%
■ Total	100%

38. Over the past decade, Social Security has paid out more in benefits than it collects in taxes from current workers. Government analysts project that if Congress does nothing, all Social Security benefits could be cut by about 20%–25% starting in 2033. Do you favor or oppose the following proposals to help solve the financial problems of the Social Security system?

38. (a) [ASKED OF HALF] Reducing Social Security benefits for current and future retirees.

■ Total favor	23%
■ Total oppose	77%
■ Strongly favor	6%
■ Somewhat favor	17%
■ Somewhat oppose	35%
■ Strongly oppose	42%
■ Total	100%

38. (b) [ASKED OF HALF] Reducing Social Security benefits for *only* future retirees.

■ Total favor	33%
■ Total oppose	67%
■ Strongly favor	5%
■ Somewhat favor	28%
■ Somewhat oppose	36%
■ Strongly oppose	31%
■ Total	100%

38. (c) [ASKED OF HALF] Cutting other government programs to finance Social Security.

■ Total favor	64%
■ Total oppose	36%
■ Strongly favor	24%
■ Somewhat favor	39%
■ Somewhat oppose	23%
■ Strongly oppose	14%
■ Total	100%

38. (d) [ASKED OF HALF] Gradually raising the full retirement age from 67 to 70.

■ Total favor	35%
■ Total oppose	65%
■ Strongly favor	11%
■ Somewhat favor	24%
■ Somewhat oppose	28%
■ Strongly oppose	36%
■ Total	100%

38. (e) [ASKED OF HALF] Holding Social Security benefits level for one year without any raise in benefits to help build funds.

■ Total favor	57%
■ Total oppose	43%
■ Strongly favor	13%
■ Somewhat favor	44%
■ Somewhat oppose	25%
■ Strongly oppose	17%
■ Total	100%

38. (f) [ASKED OF HALF] Increasing Social Security benefits at a slower rate in the future.

■ Total favor	58%
■ Total oppose	42%
■ Strongly favor	12%
■ Somewhat favor	47%
■ Somewhat oppose	28%
■ Strongly oppose	14%
■ Total	100%
■ Total	100%

38. (g) [ASKED OF HALF] Only paying Social Security to seniors in financial need.

■ Total favor	33%
■ Total oppose	67%
■ Strongly favor	9%
■ Somewhat favor	25%
■ Somewhat oppose	31%
■ Strongly oppose	36%
■ Total	100%

38. (h) [ASKED OF HALF] Changing the rules on Social Security benefits so people only get back what they and their employers paid in plus interest.

■ Total favor	59%
■ Total oppose	41%
■ Strongly favor	17%
■ Somewhat favor	42%
■ Somewhat oppose	28%
■ Strongly oppose	13%
■ Total	100%

38. (i) Paying a flat benefit of about \$1,800 a month to all retirees, so lower earners would get more and higher earners would get less than they do now.

■ Total favor	48%
■ Total oppose	52%
■ Strongly favor	14%
■ Somewhat favor	34%
■ Somewhat oppose	27%
■ Strongly oppose	24%
■ Total	100%

39. Which of the following would you support to address the Social Security budget shortfall? (Select all that apply.)

■ Raise taxes across the board	27%
■ Cut benefits across the board (~23% cut)	8%
■ Reduce benefits for higher-income retirees only	39%
■ Raise the retirement age	19%
■ Adjust initial benefits to rise with price inflation rather than wage growth	33%
■ Offer flat benefits of about \$1,800 to all, regardless of what they paid in	24%
■ Borrow the money	16%
■ Expand private tax-preferred savings options	27%
■ None of the above	16%

40. [ASKED OF HALF] Should Social Security benefits for higher earners be reduced to protect average retirees' benefits and avoid tax increases, or should higher earners keep full benefits because they paid more in?

■ Reduce benefits for higher earners	41%
■ Keep full benefits for higher earners	29%
■ Not sure	30%
■ Total	100%

41. [ASKED OF HALF] Would you favor or oppose cutting Social Security benefits for higher earners to protect benefits for lower-income earners?

■ Total favor	61%
■ Total oppose	39%
■ Strongly favor	19%
■ Somewhat favor	41%
■ Somewhat oppose	25%
■ Strongly oppose	14%
■ Total	100%

42. Right now, people who pay more into Social Security get higher benefits. To fix the funding shortfall, some propose giving all retirees who worked at least 35 years the same flat benefit of about \$1,800 a month, no matter how much they paid in. Would you support or oppose this change?

■ Support flat benefit	29%
■ Oppose flat benefit	42%
■ Not sure	29%
■ Total	100%

43. [ASKED OF HALF] Would you support gradually raising the retirement age for Social Security from 67 to 70?

■ Total support	32%
■ Total oppose	68%
■ Strongly support	8%
■ Somewhat support	24%
■ Somewhat oppose	29%
■ Strongly oppose	39%
■ Total	100%

44. [ASKED OF HALF] Would you support gradually raising the retirement age for Social Security from 67 to 70, as Americans are, on average, living longer now?

■ Total support	40%
■ Total oppose	60%
■ Strongly support	12%
■ Somewhat support	28%
■ Somewhat oppose	24%
■ Strongly oppose	36%
■ Total	100%

45. Would you support letting workers put part of their Social Security taxes into personal investment accounts, like a 401(k)?

■ Total support	60%
■ Total oppose	19%
■ Strongly support	25%
■ Somewhat support	34%
■ Somewhat oppose	10%
■ Strongly oppose	9%
■ Not sure	21%
■ Total	100%

46. [ASKED OF HALF] Would you favor or oppose allowing young workers to opt out of paying Social Security taxes if it meant benefits for current seniors would have to be reduced?

■ Total favor	31%
■ Total oppose	69%
■ Strongly favor	9%
■ Somewhat favor	22%
■ Somewhat oppose	34%
■ Strongly oppose	35%
■ Total	100%

47. [ASKED OF HALF] Would you favor or oppose allowing young workers to opt out of paying Social Security taxes if it meant only paying benefits to seniors in financial need?

■ Total favor	35%
■ Total oppose	65%
■ Strongly favor	8%
■ Somewhat favor	27%
■ Somewhat oppose	35%
■ Strongly oppose	30%
■ Total	100%

48. [ASKED OF HALF] Right now, Social Security taxes apply only to wages up to about \$175,000 a year. Some people say the cap should be raised so higher earners pay more and the program gets more money. Others say we should keep the cap because raising it would cover only part of the shortfall and could discourage work. Which comes closer to your view?

■ Raise the tax cap so higher earners pay more	53%
■ Keep the current tax cap	24%
■ Not sure	23%
■ Total	100%

49. [ASKED OF HALF] Right now, Social Security taxes apply only to workers' paychecks, not to benefits such as employer-provided health insurance. Would you support or oppose taxing those benefits, too, if it helped strengthen Social Security's finances?

■ Total support	31%
■ Total oppose	47%
■ Strongly support	6%
■ Somewhat support	25%
■ Somewhat oppose	19%
■ Strongly oppose	28%
■ Not sure	22%
■ Total	100%

50. Would you favor or oppose Congress creating a National Commission, composed of independent, nonpartisan experts, on Social Security reform and giving it the authority to solve Social Security budget problems?

■ Total support	71%
■ Total oppose	29%
■ Strongly support	20%
■ Somewhat support	51%
■ Somewhat oppose	20%
■ Strongly oppose	9%
■ Total	100%

51. Which political party do you trust more to solve the problems in the Social Security system?

■ Republicans	45%
■ Democrats	55%
■ Total	100%

52. Some people say Social Security is a "Ponzi scheme." Do you think that is a fair or unfair characterization of the program?

■ Fair	33%
■ Unfair	67%
■ Total	100%

53. If you had to choose, would you rather have a smaller government providing fewer services or a bigger government providing more services?

■ Smaller government providing fewer services	43%
■ Larger government providing more services	57%
■ Total	100%

54. Some people think the government should promote traditional values in our society. Others think the government should not favor any particular set of values. Which comes closer to your own view?

■ Government should promote traditional values.	47%
■ Government should not favor any particular set of values.	53%
■ Total	100%

55. Social Security recipient status

■ Social Security recipient	32%
■ Not a Social Security recipient	68%
■ Total	100%

56. Voter registration status

■ Yes	82%
■ No	17%
■ Don't know	2%
■ Total	100%

57. Party identification (no leaners)

■ Democrat	31%
■ Republican	28%
■ Independent	29%
■ Other	4%
■ Not sure	8%
■ Total	100%

58. Political ideology

■ Very liberal	9%
■ Liberal	15%
■ Moderate	35%
■ Conservative	19%
■ Very conservative	10%
■ Not sure	12%
■ Total	100%

59. Recalled 2024 presidential vote

■ Kamala Harris	31%
■ Donald Trump	30%
■ Robert F. Kennedy Jr.	0%
■ Jill Stein	0%
■ Cornel West	<0.1%
■ Chase Oliver	0%
■ Other	1%
■ Did not vote for president	38%
■ Total	100%

60. Libertarian?

■ Yes	10%
■ No	62%
■ Not sure	28%
■ Total	100%

61. Household income

■ <\$30K	26%
■ \$30K–\$60K	25%
■ \$60K–\$90K	20%
■ \$90K–\$150K	13%
■ >\$150K	10%
■ Prefer not to say	7%
■ Total	100%

62. Age

■ 18–29	20%
■ 30–44	26%
■ 45–54	13%
■ 55–64	18%
■ 65+	23%
■ Total	100%

63. Gender

■ Male	49%
■ Female	51%
■ Total	100%

64. Race

■ White	63%
■ Black	12%
■ Hispanic	13%
■ Asian	4%
■ Native American	2%
■ Two or more races	4%
■ Other	3%
■ Middle Eastern	0%
■ Total	100%

65. Educational attainment

■ No high school	7%
■ High school graduate	30%
■ Some college	20%
■ Two-year	10%
■ Four-year	20%
■ Postgraduate	12%
■ Total	100%

66. Marital status

■ Married	44%
■ Separated	2%
■ Divorced	11%
■ Widowed	5%
■ Never married	32%
■ Domestic/Civil partnership	6%
■ Total	100%

67. Employment status

■ Full-time	39%
■ Part-time	12%
■ Temporarily laid off	1%
■ Unemployed	9%
■ Retired	22%
■ Permanently disabled	6%
■ Homemaker	8%
■ Student	2%
■ Other	2%
■ Total	100%

68. Residence (urbanicity)

■ Big city	21%
■ Smaller city	15%
■ Suburban area	37%
■ Small town	10%
■ Rural area	18%
■ Total	100%

69. Political interest

■ Most of the time	39%
■ Some of the time	31%
■ Only now and then	16%
■ Hardly at all	9%
■ Don't know	5%
■ Total	100%

70. Religion (Pew categories)

■ Protestant	28%
■ Roman Catholic	20%
■ Mormon	1%
■ Eastern or Greek Orthodox	1%
■ Jewish	2%
■ Muslim	1%
■ Buddhist	1%
■ Hindu	0%
■ Atheist	6%
■ Agnostic	6%
■ Nothing in particular	26%
■ Something else	9%
■ Total	100%

71. Importance of religion (Pew)

■ Very important	35%
■ Somewhat important	27%
■ Not too important	14%
■ Not at all important	24%
■ Total	100%

72. Tea Party supporter

■ Yes	13%
■ No	60%
■ Unsure	27%
■ Total	100%

72. MAGA supporter

■ Yes	27%
■ No	60%
■ Unsure	13%
■ Total	100%

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

From October 9 to 14, YouGov interviewed 2,402 respondents who were then matched down to a sample of 2,000 to produce the final dataset. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race, and education. The sampling frame was constructed with stratified sampling from the full 2023 American Community Survey one-year sample, with selection within strata based on weighted sampling with replacements (using the person weights from the public-use file).

The matched cases were weighted to the sampling frame using propensity scores. The matched cases and the frame were combined, and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion in the frame. The propensity score function included age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of education, region, and homeownership status. The propensity

scores were grouped into deciles of the estimated propensity score in the frame and post-stratified according to these deciles. The demographic marginals and their interlocking frequencies were based on the sample frame. The marginal distribution of the 2024 vote choice was based on official ballot counts compiled by the University of Florida Election Labs and CNN. Demographic interlocking frequencies for the 2024 vote choice were based on CNN's 2024 exit polls.

The weights were then post-stratified on the 2024 presidential vote choice, as well as a four-way stratification by gender, age (four categories), race (four categories), and education (four categories) to produce the final weight. The margin of error is $\pm 2.59\%$.