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## GOP Divided Over Benefit Reductions

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# Public Wants Changes in Entitlements, Not Changes in Benefits

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## GOP Divided Over Benefit Reductions

# Public Wants Changes in Entitlements, Not Changes in Benefits

As policymakers at the state and national level struggle with rising entitlement costs, overwhelming numbers of Americans agree that, over the years, Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid have been good for the country.

But these cherished programs receive negative marks for current performance, and their finances are widely viewed as troubled.

Reflecting these concerns, most Americans say all three programs either need to be completely rebuilt or undergo major changes. However, smaller majorities express this view than did so five years ago.

The public's desire for fundamental change does not mean it supports reductions in the benefits provided by Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid. Relatively few are willing to see benefit cuts as part of the solution, regardless of whether the problem being addressed is the federal budget deficit, state budget shortfalls or the financial viability of the entitlement programs.

The latest national survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted June 15-19 among 1,502 adults, finds that Republicans face far more serious internal divisions over entitlement reforms than do Democrats. Lower income Republicans are consistently more likely to oppose reductions in benefits – from Medicare, Social Security or Medicaid – than are more affluent Republicans.

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### Entitlements Overview

#### Overwhelmingly Viewed as Good for the Country

	Social Security	Medicare	Medicaid
<i>Over the years, each has been...*</i>	%	%	%
Good for the country	87	88	77
Bad for the country	11	10	20
Don't know	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>4</u>
	100	100	100

#### But Job Ratings Are Negative

<i>Job serving recipients</i>			
Excellent/Good	39	41	36
Only fair/Poor	56	53	54
Don't know	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>10</u>
	100	100	100

#### Finances Are Seen as Troubled

<i>Current financial condition</i>			
Excellent/Good	18	18	15
Only fair/Poor	77	74	72
Don't know	<u>5</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>13</u>
	100	100	100

#### And Majorities Say They Need Major Changes

	Social Security	Medicare	Medicaid
Needs to be completely rebuilt	18	21	17
Needs major changes	34	33	37
Works pretty well	41	38	39
Don't know	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>8</u>
	100	100	100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER June 15-19, 2011. \* June 16-19, 2011 omnibus. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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On the broad question of whether it is more important to reduce the budget deficit or to maintain current Medicare and Social Security benefits, the public decisively supports maintaining the status quo. Six-in-ten (60%) say it is more important to keep Social Security and Medicare benefits as they are; only about half as many (32%) say it is more important to take steps to reduce the budget deficit.

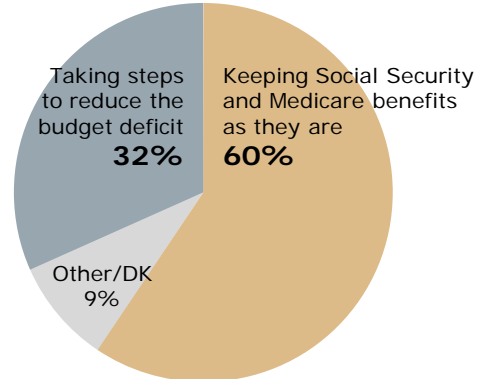
Half (50%) of Republicans say that maintaining benefits is more important than deficit reduction; about as many (42%) say it is more important to reduce the budget deficit. More independents prioritize maintaining benefits over reducing the deficit (by 53% to 38%). Democrats overwhelmingly view preserving current Social Security and Medicare benefits as more important (by 72% to 21%).

The public also opposes making Medicare recipients more responsible for their health care costs and allowing states to limit Medicaid eligibility. About six-in-ten (61%) say people on Medicare already pay enough of their own health care costs, while only 31% think recipients need to be responsible for more of the costs of their health care in order to make the system financially secure.

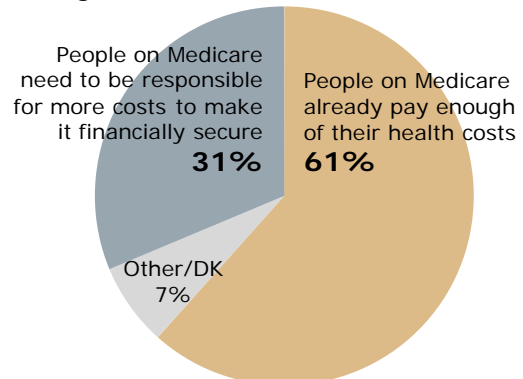
When it comes to Medicaid, just 37% want to allow states to cut back on who is eligible for Medicaid in order to deal with budget problems, while 58% say low-income people should not have their Medicaid benefits taken away. And most say it is more important to avoid future cuts in Social Security benefits than future increases in Social Security taxes (56% vs. 33%).

## In Entitlement Debate, Most Want to Maintain Benefits

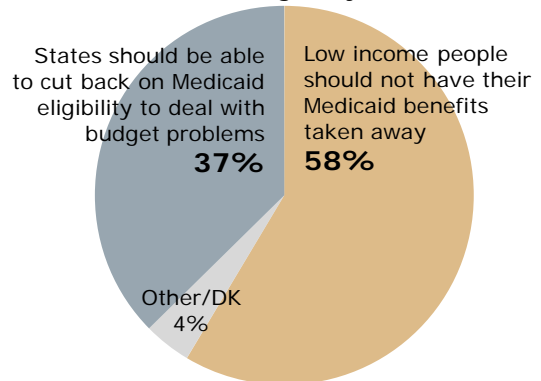
Which is more important ...



Dealing with Medicare Costs



States and Medicaid Eligibility



PEW RESEARCH CENTER June 15-19, 2011. Q51, Q56, Q57.

On Social Security and Medicare, there are substantial differences of opinion by age. People age 65 and older are the only age group in which majorities say these programs work well; seniors also overwhelmingly say it is more important to maintain Social Security and Medicare benefits than to reduce the budget deficit. Those 50 to 64 also broadly favor keeping benefits as they are. Younger Americans support maintaining Social Security and Medicare benefits, but by smaller margins than older age groups.

Lower income people are more committed to maintaining benefits across all three major entitlement programs. This income gap is particularly wide when it comes to allowing states to cut back on Medicaid eligibility: 72% of those with family incomes of less than \$30,000 oppose allowing states to limit Medicaid eligibility to deal with budget problems, compared with 53% of those with higher incomes.

## GOP Base Divided over Entitlement Changes

The GOP's internal divisions over entitlement changes are seen particularly in views of whether it is more important to maintain Social Security and Medicare benefits or to take steps to bring down the deficit.

Among Republicans and Republican-leaning independents, 63% of those with family incomes of \$75,000 or more say it is more important to take steps to reduce the budget deficit; a nearly identical percentage (62%) of Republicans with incomes of \$30,000 or less say it is more important to maintain Social Security and Medicare benefits as they are.

The income gap among Republicans and Republican leaners is about as large as the difference between GOP supporters of the Tea Party and non-supporters. Among Republicans and Republican leaners who agree with the Tea Party, 57% view deficit reduction as more important than preserving Social Security and Medicare benefits as they are. Among

### Reducing Deficit a Lower Priority for Less Affluent Republicans

<i>Which is more important...</i>	Reducing budget deficit	Keeping SS/Medicare benefits as they are	Both/DK
	%	%	%
<i>Among Rep/Lean Rep</i>	44	47	8=100
\$75,000+	<b>63</b>	29	8=100
\$30-\$74,999	38	<b>53</b>	9=100
<\$30,000	33	<b>62</b>	5=100
<i>Tea Party</i>			
Agree	<b>57</b>	35	9=100
Disagree/No opinion	36	<b>56</b>	8=100
<i>Among Dem/Lean Dem</i>	23	<b>71</b>	6=100
\$75,000+	29	<b>68</b>	3=100
\$30-\$74,999	21	<b>75</b>	4=100
<\$30,000	22	<b>72</b>	7=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER June 15-19, 2011. Q51.

Republicans and leaners who do not agree with the Tea Party, just 36% say that reducing the deficit is more important than maintaining benefits.

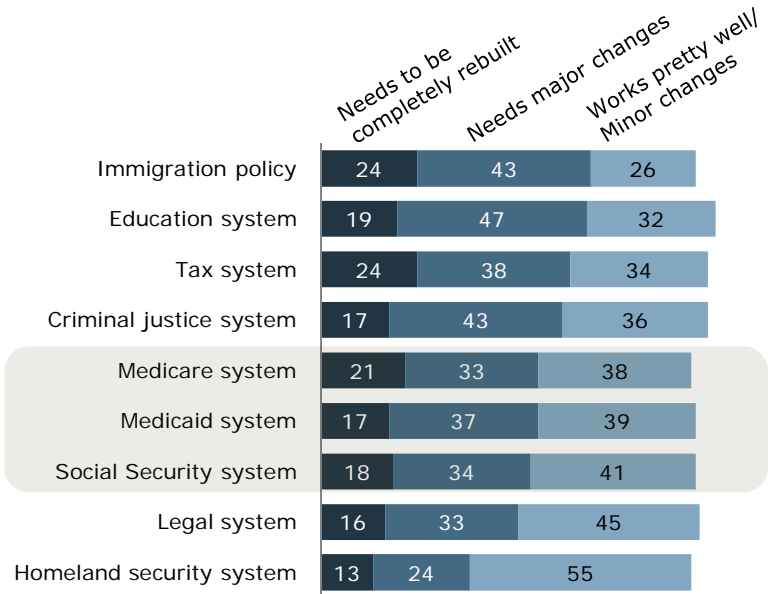
Democrats face no such internal divisions, as both high- and low-income Democrats prioritize maintaining benefits over deficit reduction; there also are no ideological differences among Democrats over this issue. Notably, the balance of opinion among low-income Republicans is similar to how Democrats view the issue.

## SECTION 1: IMPRESSIONS OF ENTITLEMENT PROGRAMS

Majorities say that Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security need to be completely rebuilt or undergo major changes. However, even larger numbers say that other systems and policies are in need of major changes.

Two-thirds (67%) say that immigration policy needs to be completely rebuilt (24%) or undergo major changes (43%). Nearly as many say the same about the nation's educational system (66% completely rebuilt or major changes). And roughly six-in-ten think that the tax system (62%) and criminal justice system (60%) need at least major changes.

### Entitlement Programs Viewed as Needing Major Changes or Complete Overhaul



PEW RESEARCH CENTER June 15-19, 2011. Q7.

Among the entitlement programs, 54% say either that Medicare should be completely rebuilt (21%) or changed in a major way (33%). Comparable percentages say the same about the Medicaid system (54%) and Social Security system (52%).

For each of the entitlement programs, the view that major change or a complete overhaul is needed is more widely held among Republicans than Democrats. About six-in-ten Republicans say each entitlement needs major changes or more, compared to about half of Democrats and about 55% of independents. While there are similar partisan gaps regarding changes to immigration policy (Republicans +17) and the criminal justice system (Democrats +12), there are narrower divisions when it comes to opinions about other policy areas.

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### Partisan Differences over Necessity of Entitlement Changes

*Percent saying program needs major changes/ or to be completely rebuilt*

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind	R-D diff
Immigration policy	67	77	60	69	+17
Social Security system	52	60	47	56	+13
Medicaid system	54	62	50	54	+12
Medicare system	54	60	51	55	+9
Homeland security system	37	36	31	46	+5
Education system	66	66	68	66	-2
Tax system	62	61	64	63	-3
Legal system	49	45	51	46	-6
Criminal justice system	60	51	63	66	-12

PEW RESEARCH CENTER June 15-19, 2011. Q7.

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## Support for Major Changes Declines

The public's support for changing entitlement programs, while broad, has declined since February 2006. At that time, 70% of Americans said Medicare needed to be completely rebuilt or undergo major changes; today, 54% say the same. Support for major changes to Social Security has also declined, from 62% in 2006 to 52% today.

### Less Support for Major Changes than in 2006

*Percent saying program needs major changes/completely rebuilt*

	Social Security			Medicare		
	2006	2011	Change	2006	2011	Change
	%	%		%	%	
Total	62	52	-10	70	54	-16
18-49	71	61	-10	75	61	-14
50-64	56	50	-6	69	54	-15
65+	38	30	-8	52	33	-19

PEW RESEARCH CENTER June 15-19, 2011. Q7a, b.

Support for major changes to both Medicare and Social Security is significantly higher among those under 50 than it is among older Americans. About six-in-ten (61%) of those younger than 50 say Social Security requires major changes or a complete overhaul, compared with 50% of those 50 to 64 and just 30% of those 65 and older.

## Age and Entitlement Views

Older Americans give both Social Security and Medicare higher marks for performance, with sizable majorities saying each does an excellent or good job serving the people they cover. By contrast, most Americans under age 65 say the programs do only a fair job or a poor job serving their recipients.

Those living in households receiving Medicare or Social Security benefits also are more likely to rate the quality of the services provided positively. About half of those with participants in the household rate Social Security (49%) and Medicare (53%) as excellent or good at serving the people it covers compared with

### Social Security, Medicare Get More Positive Marks from Recipients

*Job program does serving the people it covers*

	Social Security		Medicare	
	Excel- lent/ Good	Only fair/ Poor	Excel- lent/ Good	Only fair/ Poor
	%	%	%	%
Total	39	56	41	53
18-34	33	61	39	56
35-49	33	62	33	62
50-64	40	57	38	54
65+	57	39	61	35

*Program recipient in household?*

Yes	49	48	53	45
No	33	61	36	56

PEW RESEARCH CENTER June 15-19, 2011. Q49a, b.



about a third of those without program participants in their households. A similar gap is evident in views of Medicaid's performance between recipient households and non-recipient households; 46% of those in households receiving Medicaid say it does an excellent or good job of serving the people it covers compared with 34% of those in households that do not receive Medicaid.

## SECTION 2: ENTITLEMENTS VS. DEFICIT REDUCTION

Despite rising public concern about the federal budget deficit, Americans favor keeping Social Security and Medicare benefits as they are rather than taking steps to reduce the budget deficit (by 60% vs. 32%).

Republicans are twice as likely as Democrats to say deficit reduction is the higher priority (42% vs. 21%), yet even among Republicans the prevailing view (50%) is that maintaining benefits is the bigger priority. The balance of opinion among independents is far closer to that of Republicans than Democrats, with 38% prioritizing the deficit and 53% prioritizing benefits.

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### Deficit Concerns Take a Back Seat to Maintaining Benefits

	Feb 1995	Jun 2011
<i>Which is more important?</i>	%	%
Taking steps to reduce the deficit	24	32
Keeping Social Security and Medicare benefits as they are	70	60
Both/Don't know	6	9
	100	100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER June 15-19, 2011. Q51.  
Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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The public has shifted slightly from where it stood 16 years ago, when deficit reduction was being debated between then President Bill Clinton and the new Republican majority in Congress. In February 1995, 70% prioritized keeping benefits as they were, while just 24% said deficit reduction was more important. And then as now, Republicans were twice as likely as Democrats to prioritize the deficit (33% vs. 16%).

### Age Gaps in Both Parties

While majorities in all age groups say maintaining current benefits is more important than deficit reduction, this sentiment is strongest among people over 50. About two-thirds of those 50 and older (65%) say keeping benefits as they are is the priority; that compares with 55% of those younger than 50.

These generational differences produce some degree of disagreement within each party's base. Notably, Republicans and Republican leaners who are 65 and older prioritize benefits over deficit reduction (52% vs. 35%), while those under age 50 are divided on the issue. The generation gap is even wider among Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents. Fully 81% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning who are 65 and older say keeping benefits as they are should take precedence, as do 77% of those age 50-64. While roughly two-thirds (65%) of Democrats under 50 share this view, a substantial minority – 31% – says deficit reduction should take precedence.

Although the generational gaps are large, partisanship plays a much larger role in these opinions. Even the youngest Democrats are more supportive of maintaining benefits than the oldest Republicans (63% vs. 52%).

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### Age Differences in Both Parties in Deficit vs. Benefits Tradeoff

*More important to take steps to reduce the deficit or to keep Social Security and Medicare benefits as they are...?*

	Total			Rep/Lean Rep			Dem/Lean Dem		
	Reduce deficit	Keep benefits	Both/DK	Reduce deficit	Keep benefits	Both/DK	Reduce deficit	Keep benefits	Both/DK
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total	32	60	9=100	44	47	8=100	23	71	6=100
18-34	39	56	4=100	46	48	6=100	34	63	3=100
35-49	36	54	9=100	51	43	6=100	27	68	5=100
50-64	27	64	10=100	42	48	10=100	16	77	7=100
65+	20	66	13=100	35	52	13=100	7	81	12=100
\$75k+	46	48	7=100	63	29	8=100	29	68	3=100
\$30k-\$74,999	29	63	8=100	38	53	9=100	21	75	4=100
<\$30k	25	66	8=100	33	62	5=100	22	72	7=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER June 15-19, 2011. Q51. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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### The GOP's Income Divide

By more than two-to-one, people with household incomes under \$30,000, as well as those earning between \$30,000 and \$75,000, say keeping benefits as they are is more important than deficit reduction. Only among those with annual incomes over \$75,000 is there a division of opinion, with as many prioritizing deficit reduction (46%) as benefits (48%).

Among Republicans and Republican-leaners, this income divide is even more pronounced: Higher-income Republicans (\$75,000+) overwhelmingly prioritize the deficit over benefits (by 63% vs. 29%) while low-income Republicans (less than \$30,000) say it is more important to preserve benefits (by 62% vs. 33%).

By contrast, there are no differences in the views of Democrats across income categories. Sizable majorities of Democrats and Democratic leaners in every income group say that keeping benefits as they are is more important than deficit reduction.

## Views of Specific Entitlement Changes

The public’s unwillingness to see Social Security and Medicare benefits cut in the interest of deficit reduction is evident when specific benefit reforms are tested.

In May, the Pew Research Center asked about 12 deficit reduction proposals; only one proposal related to entitlement programs received majority support, and it is a proposal linked to Social Security taxes, not

benefits (*For more, see “[More Blame Wars than Domestic Spending or Tax Cuts for Nation’s Debt.](#)” June 7, 2011.*) By a 67% to 26% margin, most Americans approve of making more of high-earners’ income subject to the Social Security payroll tax. This includes seven-in-ten Democrats and independents, and even a slim majority of Republicans.

But the same poll found continued disapproval of raising the Social Security retirement age, or means-testing Social Security benefits. And a similar test in December 2010 found deep opposition to raising the amount Medicare recipients pay to cover their health care costs.

### More Support for Expanding Payroll Taxes than Altering Social Security Benefits, Eligibility

		Total	Rep	Dem	Ind
		%	%	%	%
<b>Deficit reduction proposal</b>					
Make more of high-earners’ income subject to the Social Security payroll tax	Approve	67	54	73	71
	Disapprove	26	42	17	25
Reduce Social Security benefits for seniors with higher incomes	Approve	42	48	37	43
	Disapprove	54	47	59	54
Gradually raise the age at which people can begin receiving Social Security	Approve	36	44	31	38
	Disapprove	59	51	65	57
Raise the amount people on Medicare contribute to cover health care costs*	Approve	32	37	29	31
	Disapprove	64	58	67	66

PEW RESEARCH CENTER May 25-30, 2011. Q37. \* Dec. 1-5, 2010. Q53g.

## SECTION 3: VIEWS OF MEDICARE

Nearly nine-in-ten (88%) give Medicare positive marks for its contributions to the country over the years, and these positive assessments cross party lines. There also is general agreement over the job Medicare does serving the people it covers (41% of Americans say it does an excellent or good job), and its financial shape (just 18% say it is in excellent or good financial condition).

A partisan gap does emerge, however, when presented with the tradeoff of whether Medicare recipients should be more responsible for the costs of their health care in order to keep the program financially secure or whether Medicare recipients already pay enough of their costs.

Majorities of Republicans (53%), Democrats (72%) and independents (58%) say that people on Medicare already pay enough of the cost of their health care. But 41% of Republicans say recipients should bear more of the costs, compared with 32% of independents and just 23% of Democrats.

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### Partisan Agreement on Medicare and its Finances ...

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind
<i>Medicare...</i>	%	%	%	%
Has been very good/good for the country	88	85	93	86
Does an excellent/good job serving people it covers	41	42	45	38
Is in excellent/good financial condition	18	15	23	15

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### Not on Whether Recipients Should Bear More Health Care Costs

<i>People on Medicare...</i>	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind
Need to be responsible for more of the costs	31	41	23	32
Already pay enough of the costs	61	53	72	58
Other/Don't know	<u>8</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>9</u>
	100	100	100	100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER June 15-19, 2011. Q49b, Q50b & Q56. June 16-19, 2011 omnibus. PEW4b. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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Within the general public, opinions on this issue show modest variations by age and income. Democratic opinions, in particular, are relatively uniform. However, younger and more affluent Republicans are more likely than other Republicans to say Medicare participants should shoulder additional responsibility for the cost of their health care: 45% of Republicans and Republican leaners under 35 say people need to be more responsible, while just 27% of those 65 and older share this view. Nearly half (48%) of Republicans and Republican leaners with family incomes of \$75,000 or more advocate more individual responsibility for the costs of Medicare, compared with just 33% among those with annual incomes below \$30,000.

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### Older and Low-Income Republicans Say Medicare Recipients Already Pay Enough for Health Care

*Do people on Medicare need to be responsible for more of the costs of their health care in order to keep the program financially secure, OR Do people on Medicare already pay enough of the cost of their health care?*

	Total			Rep/Lean Rep			Dem/Lean Dem		
	More responsible %	Pay enough %	Other/DK %	More responsible %	Pay enough %	Other/DK %	More responsible %	Pay enough %	Other/DK %
Total	31	61	8=100	37	57	6=100	25	69	6=100
18-34	38	59	3=100	45	54	2=100	30	68	2=100
35-49	32	59	8=100	41	52	7=100	24	71	5=100
50-64	27	63	10=100	32	58	10=100	24	69	7=100
65+	24	66	10=100	27	66	7=100	22	67	12=100
\$75k+	39	54	6=100	48	44	8=100	28	67	4=100
\$30k-\$74,999	30	65	4=100	33	62	5=100	26	69	5=100
<\$30k	27	66	7=100	33	65	2=100	23	71	6=100
<i>Medicare household?</i>									
Yes	26	67	8=100	29	66	5=100	22	71	8=100
No	33	60	7=100	41	53	7=100	26	69	5=100

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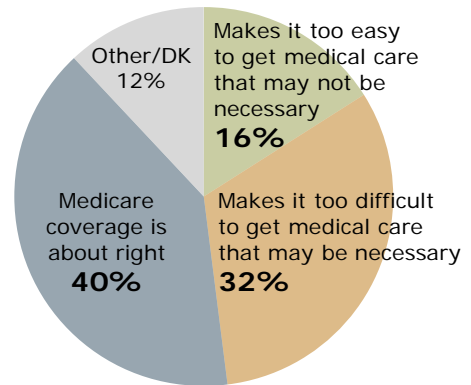
## Public Doesn't See Medicare Overused

A broader debate among Medicare analysts and policymakers is whether the system encourages the overutilization of medical treatments, driving up the overall cost of the program. While the extent of the problem may be debated in policy and economic circles, it has little resonance with the general public.

Just 16% of Americans say that Medicare makes it too easy to get medical care and treatments that may not be necessary. Twice as many (32%) are of the view that Medicare in fact makes it too difficult to get medical care and treatments that may be necessary for patients.

The plurality view, held by 40%, is that current Medicare coverage is about right in this regard. This is the assessment of 61% of people age 65 and older, very few of whom think Medicare goes too far (12%) or not far enough (12%).

### More Say Medicare Does Too Little Rather than Too Much



PEW RESEARCH CENTER June 15-19, 2011. Q55.

## SECTION 4: VIEWS OF MEDICAID

In contrast to opinions about Medicare and Social Security, there are clear partisan differences in assessments of Medicaid. About three-quarters of the public (77%) say the program has been good for the country, but that percentage rises to 91% of Democrats and falls to 68% of Republicans; 75% of independents say it has been good for the country.

Ratings of how well Medicaid serves its constituents are considerably lower across the board (36% say it does an excellent or good job), with Democrats giving slightly better evaluations than Republicans and independents.

And while there is little partisan variation in the positive ratings for the program's financial condition (about 15% of all groups say it is in excellent or good shape), both Republicans and independents are significantly more likely than Democrats to say the program is in poor fiscal shape (45% of Republicans and 42% of independents, compared with 26% of Democrats).

A deep partisan divide is evident in the current debate over state funding for the Medicaid program. Just 24% of Democrats would allow states to cut back on Medicaid eligibility in order to deal with their budget problems, while 73% say low income people should not lose their benefits. By contrast, a majority of Republicans (56%) say states should be able to cut their Medicaid rolls. More independents say lower income people should not lose their benefits than say states should be able to cut back on eligibility (58% vs. 38%).

### Republicans Favor Allowing States to Cut Medicaid Eligibility

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind
<i>Medicaid...</i>	%	%	%	%
Has been very good/good for the country	77	68	91	75
Does an excellent/good job serving people it covers	36	34	41	31
Is in excellent/good financial condition	15	15	17	15
States should be able to cut eligibility	37	56	24	38
Low income people should not lose benefits	58	38	73	58
Other/Don't know	4	6	3	4
	100	100	100	100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER June 15-19, 2011. Q49c, Q50b, Q57. June 16-19, 2011 omnibus. PEW4c. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.



Nearly three-quarters (72%) of lower-income Americans oppose allowing states to reduce Medicaid eligibility. Smaller majorities of middle-income (54%) and higher-income (51%) people take this position.

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### Little Support for Eligibility Cuts Among Low-Income Republicans

*In the current debate over the Medicaid program: States should be able to cut back on eligibility for Medicaid to deal with budget problems, OR Low-income people should not have their Medicaid benefits taken away.*

	Total			Rep/Lean Rep			Dem/Lean Dem		
	Eligibility cuts	No lost benefits	Other/ DK	Eligibility cuts	No lost benefits	Other/ DK	Eligibility cuts	No lost benefits	Other/ DK
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total	37	58	4=100	54	41	6=100	23	74	3=100
\$75k+	45	51	3=100	64	33	3=100	22	75	4=100
\$30k-\$74,999	42	54	4=100	56	38	7=100	30	68	2=100
<\$30k	24	72	4=100	35	61	4=100	19	79	2=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER June 15-19, 2011. Q57. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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More than six-in-ten (64%) Republicans and Republican-leaners with family incomes of \$75,000 or more say states should be able to cut their Medicaid eligibility rolls to deal with state budget problems; 56% of Republicans and leaners with incomes between \$30,000 and \$75,000 say the same. But among Republicans and leaners with annual incomes under \$30,000, opinion is reversed: 61% say low-income people should not lose their Medicaid benefits and just 35% say states should be able to cut back on eligibility. By contrast, two-thirds or more of all Democratic and Democratic-leaning income groups say low-income people should not lose their benefits.

## SECTION 5: VIEWS OF SOCIAL SECURITY

As with Medicare, an overwhelming majority (87%) says that Social Security has been good for the country. At the same time, however, just 39% say it does an excellent or good job serving the people it covers and only 18% say the program is in excellent or good financial condition. There is little variation in these evaluations by party, but Republicans and Democrats differ in their views about the program's future.

Most Americans say avoiding future cuts to the program is more important than avoiding increases in Social Security taxes for workers and employers (by 56% to 33%). Two-thirds of Democrats (67%) say avoiding benefit cuts is more important; that compares with 55% of independents and 49% of Republicans.

Opinions on this issue are little changed since either 2005 or 1999. Democratic and Republican opinions are nearly identical to opinions in 2005. However, independents are now less likely to prioritize avoiding benefit cuts (55% today, compared with 63% in 2005).

There has been a small shift in opinion about whether the costs associated with changes in Social Security should be borne by all income groups or by those with higher incomes since 1999. Today, a slim majority (53%) says that higher income people should make these financial sacrifices. Twelve years ago, public opinion was evenly split (47% higher income people, 46% people of all income levels). This is primarily driven by changing attitudes among Democrats; 70% of Democrats now say the costs should fall to higher-income people, up from 51% in 1999.

### Social Security: More Are Willing to Raise Taxes than Cut Benefits

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind
<i>Social Security...</i>	%	%	%	%
Has been very good/good for the country	87	87	91	85
Does an excellent/good job serving people it covers	39	37	43	39
Is in excellent/good financial condition	18	14	21	19
<i>It is more important to...</i>				
Avoid future increases in Social Security taxes	33	43	25	34
Avoid future cuts to Social Security benefit amounts	56	49	67	55
Both/Other/Don't know	10	9	7	12
	100	100	100	100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER June 15-19, 2011. Q49a, Q50a, Q53. June 16-19, 2011 omnibus. PEW4a. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

### Opinions about Social Security's Future Unchanged

	May 1999	Feb 2005	Jun 2011
<i>In future of Social Security, more important to...</i>	%	%	%
Avoid Social Security tax increases	34	30	33
Avoid Social Security benefit cuts	53	60	56
Both/Other/Don't know	13	10	10
	100	100	100
<i>Financial sacrifices resulting from changes in Social Security should come from...</i>			
People of all income levels	46	--	42
Higher income people	47	--	53
Other/Don't know	8	--	6
	100		100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER June 15-19 2011. Q53, Q54. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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## Younger Republicans Say More Important to Avoid Tax Hikes

*Which is more important...Avoiding any Social Security tax increases for workers and employers or avoiding any future cuts in Social Security benefits?*

	Total			Rep/Lean Rep			Dem/Lean Dem		
	Tax increases	Future benefits	Other/DK	Tax increases	Future benefits	Other/DK	Tax increases	Future benefits	Other/DK
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total	33	56	10=100	41	50	8=100	28	65	8=100
18-34	45	50	5=100	53	43	4=100	39	58	3=100
35-49	36	55	9=100	46	49	5=100	30	65	5=100
50-64	24	66	10=100	32	58	11=100	18	74	7=100
65+	24	54	21=100	31	53	16=100	18	59	22=100
<i>Social Security household?</i>									
Yes	25	61	14=100	30	57	13=100	22	68	11=100
No	38	54	8=100	48	46	6=100	32	63	6=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER June 15-19, 2011. Q53. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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## About the Surveys

Most of the analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted June 15-19, 2011 among a national sample of 1,502 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (1,001 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 501 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 200 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see <http://people-press.org/methodology/>

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, region, and population density to parameters from the March 2010 Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status and relative usage of landline and cell phones (for those with both), based on extrapolations from the 2010 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size within the landline sample. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Group	Sample Size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1,502	3.5 percentage points
Republicans	408	6.0 percentage points
Democrats	495	5.5 percentage points
Independents	479	5.5 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

Some of the analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted June 16-19, 2011 among a national sample of 1,003 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (670 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 333 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 128 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, region, and population density to parameters from the March 2010 Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status, based on extrapolations from the 2010 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size within the landline sample. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

<b>Group</b>	<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>Plus or minus ...</b>
Total sample	1,003	4.0 percentage points
Republicans	266	7.5 percentage points
Democrats	284	7.0 percentage points
Independents	368	6.5 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS**  
**JUNE 2011 POLITICAL SURVEY**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**June 15-19, 2011**  
**N=1502**

**QUESTIONS 1-2 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED****NO QUESTIONS 3-6****ASK ALL:**

Now thinking about the way some things work in this country ...

Q.7 Do you think [**INSERT ITEM, RANDOMIZE ITEMS a-h WITH ITEM i ALWAYS LAST – OBSERVE FORM SPLITS**] in this country works pretty well and requires only MINOR CHANGES, do you think it needs MAJOR CHANGES, or do you think it needs to be COMPLETELY REBUILT? What about [**NEXT ITEM**]? [**IF NECESSARY: Does [ITEM] in this country work pretty well and require only MINOR CHANGES, need MAJOR CHANGES, or does it need to be COMPLETELY REBUILT?**]

		<u>Works pretty well/ Only minor changes</u>	<u>Major changes</u>	<u>Completely rebuilt</u>	<b>(VOL.) DK/Ref</b>
a.	The Social Security system				
	Jun 15-19, 2011	41	34	18	7
	February, 2006	35	36	26	3
	January, 2005	47	34	15	4
b.	The Medicare system				
	Jun 15-19, 2011	38	33	21	8
	February, 2006	26	42	28	4
c.	The education system				
	Jun 15-19, 2011	32	47	19	2
	February, 2006	35	45	16	4
	January, 2005	36	45	17	2
d.	Immigration policy				
	Jun 15-19, 2011	26	43	24	6
	February, 2006	23	41	27	9
<b>ASK FORM 1 ONLY [N=740]:</b>					
e.F1	The tax system				
	Jun 15-19, 2011	34	38	24	3
	February, 2006	35	39	22	4
	January, 2005	50	29	17	4
f.F1	The legal system				
	Jun 15-19, 2011	45	33	16	7
	February, 2006	43	34	19	4
	January, 2005	44	37	15	4
<b>ASK FORM 2 ONLY [N=762]:</b>					
g.F2	The criminal justice system				
	Jun 15-19, 2011	36	43	17	4
	February, 2006	36	41	20	3
h.F2	The Homeland Security system				
	Jun 15-19, 2011	55	24	13	8
	February, 2006	39	36	19	6
<b>ASK ALL:</b>					
i.	The Medicaid system which provides health and long-term care to low income people				
	Jun 15-19, 2011	39	37	17	8

**ASK ALL:**

Q.8 Now a different kind of question. Which of the following statements comes closer to the way you feel, even if neither is exactly right. **[READ]**

Jun 15-19 2011		<i>Americans Discuss</i>	
		<i>Soc. Sec. Nov 1997<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>AARP Sep 1992<sup>2</sup></i>
33	Older people who can afford it need to give up some government benefits to help the country overcome its economic problems	50	32
62	The government needs to keep its promises to older people by maintaining their benefits, even for those who are well-off	48	65
2	Both/Neither/Other <b>(VOL.)</b>	1	2
3	Don't know/Refused <b>(VOL.)</b>	1	1

**NO QUESTIONS 9-15, 19-29, 36, 43-48****QUESTIONS 16-18, 30-35, 37-42 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED****ASK ALL:**

Q.49 From what you know, how good a job does each of the following do serving the people it covers? (First,) does **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]** do an excellent, good, only fair, or poor job serving the people it covers? How about **[NEXT ITEM]**? **[IF NECESSARY: Does [ITEM] do an excellent, good, only fair, or poor job serving the people it covers?]** **[NOTE: If respondent says they are not covered by the program, prompt "Just your impression from what you know about it."]**

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<b>(VOL.) DK/Ref</b>
a. Social Security Jun 15-19, 2011	7	32	40	16	5
b. Medicare, which provides health care to seniors and people with permanent disabilities Jun 15-19, 2011	7	34	40	13	6
c. Medicaid, which provides health and long-term care to low income people Jun 15-19, 2011	6	30	40	14	10
d. Private health insurance Jun 15-19, 2011	5	31	37	20	7

**ASK ALL:**

Q.50 And from what you know about its financial condition, is **[INSERT; RANDOMIZE]** in excellent, good, only fair, or poor shape financially? How about **[NEXT ITEM]**? **[IF NECESSARY: Is [ITEM] in excellent, good, only fair, or poor shape financially?]**

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<b>(VOL.) DK/Ref</b>
a. Social Security Jun 15-19, 2011	2	16	32	45	5

<sup>1</sup> November 1997 trend conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates for Americans Discuss Social Security. Question was part of a list and began "I'm going to read some pairs of statements that give different views on some of these subjects. For each pair, please tell me which statement, A or B, comes closer to the way you feel."

<sup>2</sup> September 1992 question was part of a list and began "People today have many different views about politics, government and social problems. I'm going to read some pairs of statements that give different views on some of these subjects. Of course, these subjects are complicated, and no statement will capture exactly how you feel. For each pair, please tell me which statement, A or B, comes closer to the way you feel."

**Q.50 CONTINUED...**

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<b>(VOL.) DK/Ref</b>
b. Medicare Jun 15-19, 2011	2	16	38	36	8
c. Medicaid Jun 15-19, 2011	2	13	35	37	13

**ASK ALL:**

Q.51 What is more important, taking steps to reduce the budget deficit or keeping Social Security and Medicare benefits as they are?

Jun 15-19 <u>2011</u>		Feb <u>1995</u>
32	Taking steps to reduce the budget deficit	24
60	Keeping Social Security and Medicare benefits as they are	70
4	Both equally <b>(VOL.)</b>	2
5	Don't know/Refused <b>(VOL.)</b>	4

**NO QUESTION 52****ASK ALL:****RANDOMIZE Q.53 AND Q.54**

Thinking specifically about Social Security...

Q.53 Which do you think is MORE important when it comes to Social Security's future **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

Jun 15-19 <u>2011</u>		Feb <u>2005</u> <sup>4</sup>	May <u>1999</u>	Feb <u>1999</u>	Aug <u>1998</u>
33	Avoiding any Social Security tax increases for workers and employers <sup>5</sup>	30	34	32	33
56	Avoiding any future cuts in Social Security benefit amounts	60	53	59	55
4	Both/Neither/Other <b>(VOL.)</b>	4	8	5	7
6	Don't know/Refused <b>(VOL.)</b>	6	5	4	5

*Americans Discuss Soc. Sec.*<sup>3</sup>

**ASK ALL:****RANDOMIZE Q.53 AND Q.54**

Q.54 If there are financial sacrifices that come with changing Social Security **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

Jun 15-19 <u>2011</u>		May <u>1999</u>	Feb <u>1999</u>	Aug <u>1998</u>
42	Should people of all income levels share in the financial sacrifices	46	46	47
53	Should higher income people who can most afford it make the financial sacrifices	47	47	46
2	Both/Neither/Other <b>(VOL.)</b>	4	3	3
4	Don't know/Refused <b>(VOL.)</b>	4	4	4

*Americans Discuss Soc. Sec.*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Question was asked as part of a list and began "People have different opinions about how the Social Security system might be changed for the future. We'd like your opinion on what policymakers' priorities should be when they are making decisions about Social Security's future."

<sup>4</sup> Question began "When decisions about Social Security's future are being made, which do you think is more important?"

<sup>5</sup> In 2005 and Americans Discuss Social Security trend, first response option read "Avoiding any tax increases for workers and employers."

<sup>6</sup> Question was asked as part of a list and began "People have different opinions about how the Social Security system might be changed for the future. We'd like your opinion on what policymakers' priorities should be when they are making decisions about Social Security's future." Response options were "Having people of all income levels share in the financial sacrifices that might come with changing the Social Security program" and "Having those who can most afford it – higher income people – make the financial sacrifices that might come with changing the Social Security program."



**ASK ALL:**

Q.55 From what you know about the Medicare program that provides health care for seniors and people with permanent disabilities, does the program make it **[READ; RANDOMIZE OPTIONS 1 AND 2 WITH 3 ALWAYS LAST]**

Jun 15-19

2011

- 16 Too easy to get medical care and treatments that may not be necessary  
 32 Too difficult to get medical care and treatments that may be necessary  
 40 [OR] Is Medicare coverage about right  
 1 Other/Mixed **(VOL.)**  
 11 Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**

**ASK ALL:**

Q.56 Which comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right? **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

Jun 15-19

2011

- 31 People on Medicare need to be responsible for more of the costs of their health care in order to keep the program financially secure  
 61 People on Medicare already pay enough of the cost of their health care  
 \* Both **(VOL.)**  
 1 Neither **(VOL.)**  
 \* Other **(VOL.)**  
 6 Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**

**ASK ALL:**

Q.57 And one question about a current debate over the MEDICAID program for low income people. Which comes closer to your view? **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

Jun 15-19

2011

- 37 States should be able to cut back on who is eligible for Medicaid in order to deal with budget problems  
 58 Low income people should not have their Medicaid benefits taken away  
 \* Both **(VOL.)**  
 1 Neither **(VOL.)**  
 1 Other **(VOL.)**  
 2 Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**

**NO QUESTIONS 58-59****ASK ALL:**

Q.60 Please tell me whether you or anyone in your household currently receives **[INSERT ITEM]**? What about **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]**? ...

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>(VOL.) DK/Ref</u>
a. Social Security payments Jun 15-19, 2011	37	62	1
b. Medicare benefits Jun 15-19, 2011	30	68	2
c. Medicaid benefits Jun 15-19, 2011	16	82	2

**ASK ALL:**

Q.61 Are you or someone in your household covered by a private health insurance plan, such as insurance provided through an employer or purchased for an individual or family?

Jun 15-19

2011

72	Yes
28	No
1	Don't know/Refused <b>(VOL.)</b>

**NO QUESTIONS 62-71, 76****QUESTIONS 72-75, 77-83 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED****ASK ALL:**

PARTY In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or independent?

**ASK IF INDEP/NO PREF/OTHER/DK/REF (PARTY=3,4,5,9):**

PARTYLN As of today do you lean more to the Republican Party or more to the Democratic Party?

	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Independent</u>	<b>(VOL.)</b> <u>No preference</u>	<b>(VOL.)</b> <u>Other party</u>	<b>(VOL.)</b> <u>DK/Ref</u>	<i>Lean</i> <u>Rep</u>	<i>Lean</i> <u>Dem</u>
Jun 15-19, 2011	26	34	32	4	*	4	13	13
May 25-30, 2011	24	33	38	3	*	2	15	17
Mar 30-Apr 3, 2011	25	32	37	3	*	3	17	16
Mar 8-14, 2011	24	33	38	3	*	2	17	15
Feb 22-Mar 1, 2011	24	33	37	3	*	3	15	16
Feb 2-7, 2011	24	31	39	3	*	2	16	16
Jan 5-9, 2011	27	32	35	4	*	2	15	14
Dec 1-5, 2010	25	33	34	5	1	2	13	14
Nov 4-7, 2010	26	30	37	4	*	2	17	13
Oct 27-30, 2010	25	34	31	6	1	4	13	11
Oct 13-18, 2010	25	31	36	4	*	3	16	13
Aug 25-Sep 6, 2010	24	32	39	2	*	2	15	17
Jul 21-Aug 5, 2010	26	33	34	4	*	3	14	14
Jun 16-20, 2010	27	34	34	3	1	2	15	15
<b>Yearly Totals</b>								
2010	25.2	32.7	35.2	3.6	.4	2.8	14.5	14.1
2009	23.9	34.4	35.1	3.4	.4	2.8	13.1	15.7
2008	25.7	36.0	31.5	3.6	.3	3.0	10.6	15.2
2007	25.3	32.9	34.1	4.3	.4	2.9	10.9	17.0
2006	27.8	33.1	30.9	4.4	.3	3.4	10.5	15.1
2005	29.3	32.8	30.2	4.5	.3	2.8	10.3	14.9
2004	30.0	33.5	29.5	3.8	.4	3.0	11.7	13.4
2003	30.3	31.5	30.5	4.8	.5	2.5	12.0	12.6
2002	30.4	31.4	29.8	5.0	.7	2.7	12.4	11.6
2001	29.0	33.2	29.5	5.2	.6	2.6	11.9	11.6
2001 Post-Sept 11	30.9	31.8	27.9	5.2	.6	3.6	11.7	9.4
2001 Pre-Sept 11	27.3	34.4	30.9	5.1	.6	1.7	12.1	13.5
2000	28.0	33.4	29.1	5.5	.5	3.6	11.6	11.7
1999	26.6	33.5	33.7	3.9	.5	1.9	13.0	14.5
1998	27.9	33.7	31.1	4.6	.4	2.3	11.6	13.1
1997	28.0	33.4	32.0	4.0	.4	2.3	12.2	14.1
1996	28.9	33.9	31.8	3.0	.4	2.0	12.1	14.9
1995	31.6	30.0	33.7	2.4	.6	1.3	15.1	13.5
1994	30.1	31.5	33.5	1.3	--	3.6	13.7	12.2
1993	27.4	33.6	34.2	4.4	1.5	2.9	11.5	14.9
1992	27.6	33.7	34.7	1.5	0	2.5	12.6	16.5
1991	30.9	31.4	33.2	0	1.4	3.0	14.7	10.8
1990	30.9	33.2	29.3	1.2	1.9	3.4	12.4	11.3
1989	33	33	34	--	--	--	--	--
1987	26	35	39	--	--	--	--	--

**ASK ALL:**

TEAPARTY2 From what you know, do you agree or disagree with the Tea Party movement, or don't you have an opinion either way?

	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>No opinion either way</u>	<b>(VOL.)</b> <u>Haven't heard of</u>	<b>(VOL.)</b> <u>Refused</u>	<i>Not heard of/ DK</i>
Jun 15-19, 2011	20	26	50	3	2	--
May 25-30, 2011	18	23	54	2	2	--
Mar 30-Apr 3, 2011	22	29	47	1	1	--
Mar 8-14, 2011	19	25	54	1	1	--
Feb 22-Mar 1, 2011	20	25	52	2	2	--
Feb 2-7, 2011 <sup>7</sup>	22	22	53	2	2	--
Jan 5-9, 2011	24	22	50	2	1	--
Dec 1-5, 2010	22	26	49	2	2	--
Nov 4-7, 2010	27	22	49	1	1	--
Oct 27-30, 2010 (RVs)	29	25	32	--	1	13
Oct 13-18, 2010 (RVs)	28	24	30	--	1	16
Aug 25-Sep 6, 2010 (RVs)	29	26	32	--	1	13
Jul 21-Aug 5, 2010	22	18	37	--	1	21
Jun 16-20, 2010	24	18	30	--	*	27
May 20-23, 2010	25	18	31	--	1	25
Mar 11-21, 2010	24	14	29	--	1	31

7

In the February 2-7, 2011 survey and before, question read "...do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the Tea Party movement..." In October 2010 and earlier, question was asked only of those who had heard or read a lot or a little about the Tea Party. In May through October, it was described as: "the Tea Party movement that has been involved in campaigns and protests in the U.S. over the past year." In March it was described as "the Tea Party protests that have taken place in the U.S. over the past year."

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**  
**June 16-19, 2011 OMNIBUS**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**N=1,003**

**PEW.1-PEW.3 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**

**ASK ALL:**

PEW.4 Now thinking about some programs, please tell me if over the years you think each has been very good, good, bad, or very bad for the country **[INSERT ITEM a FIRST, RANDOMIZE ITEMS b,c]**  
 How about **[NEXT ITEM]**? **[IF NECESSARY: Has [ITEM] been very good, good, bad, or very bad for the country]**?

	Very <u>good</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Bad</u>	Very <u>bad</u>	<b>(VOL.)</b> <u>DK/Ref</u>
a. Social Security					
June 16-19, 2011	30	57	8	3	2
February, 2005 <sup>8</sup>	18	61	12	3	6
b. Medicare, which provides health care to seniors and people with permanent disabilities					
June 16-19, 2011	36	52	8	2	2
c. Medicaid, which provides health and long-term care to low-income people					
June 16-19, 2011	26	51	14	6	4

**ASK ALL:**

PEW.5 And how much if anything, have you heard about each of the following programs in the news recently? Have you heard a lot, a little or nothing at all? **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]**

	<u>A lot</u>	<u>A little</u>	Nothing <u>at all</u>	<b>(VOL.)</b> <u>DK/Ref</u>
a. Social Security				
June 16-19, 2011	34	45	21	*
b. Medicare				
June 16-19, 2011	33	44	22	1
a. Medicaid				
June 16-19, 2011	21	48	30	1

<sup>8</sup> Item was not asked as part of a list.