



Lake Snell Perry Mermin Meadow Gotoff Ulibarri

Celinda C. Lake  
*President*

To: Social Security Works

Alysia R. Snell  
*Partner*

From: Lake Research Partners

Michael J. Perry  
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Re: Findings from a Nationwide Survey of 1,000 Likely Voters and an oversample of Targeted Legislative Districts

David Mermin  
*Partner*

Date: June 29, 2010

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Robert G. Meadow,  
Ph.D.  
*Partner*

This memo summarizes findings from a subset of questions in the Social Security Works survey.<sup>1</sup>

### Strategic Summary

Daniel R. Gotoff  
*Partner*

#### The Context:

Joshua E. Ulibarri  
*Partner*

- **Voters are solidly favorable toward Social Security.** Voters have strong, positive opinions of Social Security (60 percent favorable), which carries across all age groups and political affiliations. The recession reinforces voters' commitment to Social Security.

Rick Johnson  
*Managing Director*

Tresa Udem  
*Vice President*

- **Voters nationwide do not have great confidence in either party or in President Obama in their handling of Social Security.** When asked who they think will better handle the issue of Social Security—Republicans or Democrats in Congress—Republicans have a slight advantage (30 percent) over Democrats (26 percent). When voters are asked the same question, but with President Obama and Republicans in Congress, the two are tied at 27 percent.

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<sup>1</sup> Lake Research Partners designed and administered this telephone survey which was conducted by professional interviewers. The survey reached a total of 1,000 likely voters nationwide as well as an oversample of 250 likely voters from targeted legislative districts nationwide who it is believed will be critical swing votes on Social Security.

Relevant cases in the base were folded into the oversample. The survey was conducted May 13-20, 2010.

Data in the base sample were weighted slightly by age, education, race, region, and marital status to reflect the attributes of the actual population. Data in the oversample were weighted slightly by gender, age, party identification, education, race, region and marital status. The margin of sampling error for the survey is +/- 3.1 percentage points. The margin of sampling error for the oversample is +/- 6.9 percentage points.

### Widespread Rejection of Linking Social Security to the Deficit:

- **Voters adamantly reject the argument that Social Security should be cut because of the federal budget deficit or that Social Security is the cause of the deficit, and they are strongly unfavorable toward elected officials who espouse this line of thinking.**
  - Eight in ten reject cutting Social Security benefits to reduce the deficit (81 percent oppose; 71 percent strongly oppose). Across generations, party lines and targeted legislative districts, opposition to this argument is strong.
  - Six in ten voters would feel unfavorably toward an elected official who says we cannot reduce the deficit without cutting Social Security benefits (61 percent). In contrast, 75 percent would feel favorably toward elected officials who say we should not be cutting Social Security benefits and “if we need revenue we should be making Wall Street pay their fair share” (51 percent very favorably). Even a majority of self-identified Tea Party supporters feel very favorable toward elected officials who say we should not be cutting Social Security benefits and should make Wall Street pay (59 percent).
  - Three-quarters would feel unfavorably toward an elected official who believes that Social Security is just like any other government program (77 percent), or entitlement program (73 percent), and, therefore, should be cut. Opposition to elected officials who take this position is strong among every demographic and political subgroup, including young people and Tea Party supporters.

### Elected Officials Protecting Social Security:

- Voters indicate they agree with elected officials who oppose cuts to Social Security and disagree with those who suggest benefits should be cut, even to maintain the program’s solvency. **Supporting Social Security is one of the strongest positions for elected officials that we have seen. Voters react most favorably to elected officials who make commitments to protecting Social Security by asserting Social Security belongs to the people who contribute:**
  - Social Security belongs to the people who contribute, not the government. The money people put in should be protected and used only for Social Security (86 percent favorable; 64 percent very favorable toward elected officials making this statement);

- We need to make sure that any money borrowed from Social Security is paid back with interest (81 percent favorable; 58 percent very favorable);
  - We need to make sure Washington politicians do not raid Social Security (80 percent favorable; 57 percent very favorable); and
  - Then money paid into Social Security comes with the commitment it will be paid back to working Americans (81 percent favorable; 53 percent very favorable).
- o Voters also agree with elected officials who pledge to ensure the program exists for future generations (81 percent favorable; 51 percent very favorable).<sup>2</sup>

**Widespread Opposition to Cuts in Benefits to Reduce the Deficit or to Make Social Security Solvent:**

- o Voters strongly oppose cutting benefits for vulnerable populations:
  - Three quarters oppose reducing benefits for widows (77 percent oppose, 63 percent strongly oppose), childhood survivors (78 percent, 63 percent), or disabled individuals (74 percent, 57 percent) in order to reduce the deficit. Voters also strongly oppose these proposals when attached to making Social Security more solvent.
- o **Opposition to reducing benefits that would impact middle-income Americans is also strong and broad:**
  - Seven in ten voters oppose reducing benefits for workers earning more than \$30,000 yearly in order to reduce the deficit (72 percent oppose, 56 percent strongly oppose), as well as a potential proposal to reduce or eliminate benefits for future retirees with household incomes above \$60,000 to reduce the deficit (69 percent oppose, 51 percent strongly). Opposition is at seven in ten across age and party lines.
  - A solid majority of voters rejects raising the normal retirement age from 67 to 69 years old in order to reduce the budget deficit (64 percent oppose, 50 percent strongly), with similar numbers rejecting this proposal to make Social Security solvent.
  - Reducing the Cost of Living Adjustment for Social Security beneficiaries is slightly less offensive, but six in ten voters would still oppose such a

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<sup>2</sup> Voters also report feeling positive, although to a slightly lesser degree of intensity, toward elected officials who say that Social Security represents the best of American values—honoring parents and caring for neighbors (78% favorable; 46% very favorable toward elected officials making this statement) and that Social Security represents the best of American values—rewarding hard work (79% favorable; 45% very favorable).

measure to reduce the deficit (65 percent oppose, 49 percent strongly). Opposition is slightly weaker when the goal is to make the program more solvent (60 percent, 42 percent strongly).

### **Support for Some Revenue Enhancements to Make Social Security Solvent or to Reduce the Deficit**

- **Voters are most willing to support revenue enhancing proposals that target wealthy individuals or institutions.** Over four in ten voters say that elected officials who would require wealthy Americans to contribute more to Social Security represents their values extremely well (44 percent), compared to how they would feel about an official who would support requiring all Americans to contribute more (22 percent saying this represents their values extremely well).
  - Two-thirds support gradually removing the Social Security cap so that the Social Security payroll tax would apply to employees earning above \$106,800 in order to help make Social Security more solvent (65 percent favor, 41 percent strongly favor). Voters also strongly support requiring employers to pay Social Security taxes on wages above \$106,800 (69 percent favor, 45 percent strongly favor). Voters respond similarly when asked whether they would support these measures in order to reduce the deficit.
  - Almost six in ten voters support taxing estates worth more than \$3.5 million in order to make Social Security more solvent (58 percent favor, 37 percent strongly favor) and are in favor of increasing taxes on corporations that would be dedicated to Social Security (59 percent favor, 39 percent strongly favor). Responses are similar when voters consider these measures within the frame of reducing the deficit.
  - Nearly six out of ten voters would favor establishing a financial tax on Wall Street speculation that would tax frequent trading of stocks and assets and then dedicating that money to Social Security in order to make it more solvent (59 percent favor, 36 percent strongly favor). Voters also react similarly to these proposals when asked about them within the frame of reducing the deficit.