



## Virginia Voters' Attitudes Toward Social Security

Findings from a Survey of 603 Likely 2012  
Voters in Virginia

Commissioned by Social Security Works,  
National Committee to Preserve Social  
Security and Medicare Foundation & Alliance  
for Retired Americans

**May 31, 2011**

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# Survey Methodology

- Lake Research Partners designed and administered this survey which was conducted by telephone by professional interviewers from March 6-10, 2011. The survey reached a total of 603 likely voters in Virginia.
- Telephone numbers for the base sample were drawn from a listed voter sample. The sample was stratified geographically based on the proportion of likely voters in each region of the state. Data have been weighted slightly by gender, age, education, race, region, and party identification to reflect the attributes of the actual population. The margin of error for the survey is +/- 4.0 percentage points.
- Due to rounding, the percentages and margins for some questions may add to 101% or 99%.

# Key Findings

- The issue of Social Security could play a major role in the 2012 U.S. Senate elections in Virginia, especially among swing voters. Voters adamantly oppose cutting Social Security to deal with the deficit. Social Security could be a real wedge issue in the Virginia 2012 Senate race.
- As we have seen nationally, Virginia voters see little relationship between the deficit and Social Security. Despite negative rhetoric, Social Security is a highly popular program that voters across all political and demographic groups want to protect.
- Virginia voters, across party lines, strongly oppose cutting Social Security benefits in order to reduce the federal deficit (75 percent oppose; 67 percent strongly oppose). Swing voters in Virginia feel strongly on this measure: 80 percent of voters who are undecided on who they will vote for on the generic ballot for the 2012 U.S. Senate elections are opposed to cutting Social Security benefits to reduce the deficit (73 percent strongly oppose) and 79 percent of independents are opposed (70 percent strongly opposed). Additionally, majorities of Democrats (85 percent), Republicans (63 percent), and Tea Party supporters (57 percent) oppose cutting benefits. Strong opposition to cutting benefits for deficit reduction is also cross-generational (74% of voters under age 40 oppose cutting benefits; 71% aged 40-49; 74% aged 50-64; and 79% aged 65 and older).
- This has electoral impacts: Two-thirds of Virginia voters say they would be less likely to vote for a Senate candidate who supports cutting benefits to reduce the deficit. Seventy-three percent of Democrats and 54 percent of independents would be much less likely to support such a candidate. This issue also has the potential to swing undecided voters: 53 percent of those who are undecided in the generic 2012 Senate ballot indicate they would be much less likely to vote for a candidate who supports cutting Social Security benefits to reduce the deficit.
- In an engaged debate over three-quarters of Virginia voters agree with the Senate candidate who says that Social Security did not cause the federal deficit and should not be on the table for cuts to address the deficit because it is funded by and belongs to the people who have worked hard and paid into the program, over the candidate who calls for cutting Social Security to avoid burdening future generations with debt. This view is strong among swing voters, with 85 percent of undecided voters and 84 percent of independents siding with the Senate candidate who calls for protecting Social Security because it belongs to the people rather than siding with the candidate who makes the argument that we must cut Social Security to avoid burdening future generations with debt.

# Key Findings

- Strong majorities of Virginia voters oppose three specific proposals that would cut Social Security benefits by: Raising the retirement age (61 percent oppose; 53 percent strongly oppose), changing the COLA formula in a way that reduces the amount beneficiaries receive (60 percent oppose; 48 percent strongly oppose), and reducing benefits for people earning above \$60,000 (66 percent oppose; 54 percent strongly oppose).
- There is strong bipartisan support among Virginia voters for lifting the cap to impose Social Security taxes on all wages above \$106,800 and requiring both employees and employers to pay (75 percent of Democrats support; 64 percent of independents; 67 percent of Republicans; and 73 percent of Tea Party supporters). Two-thirds (67 percent) of undecided voters favor this proposal (56 percent strongly favor). Further, across party lines, at least half of Virginia voters say they would be more likely to vote for a Senate candidate who supports requiring employees and employers to pay Social Security taxes on all wages above \$106,800. This includes 54 percent of undecided voters in the 2012 U.S. Senate race.
- A strong majority of Virginia voters (61 percent) favor a proposal that, instead of extending the tax cuts for the top two percent of Americans due to expire in 2012, would have Congress dedicate those additional taxes to guarantee Social Security benefits for the next 75 years. This includes 55 percent of independents and 61 percent of undecided voters in favor of the proposal.
- Democratic politicians no longer have the advantage they have traditionally enjoyed on Social Security among voters. Virginia voters believe Republicans in Congress will better handle Social Security than their Democratic counterparts by a margin of 5 points, and better than President Obama by a margin of 3 points. Interestingly, independent voters are evenly divided between seeing the Democrats and Republicans or the Republicans and Obama as better on Social Security. Similarly, voters who are currently undecided about who they will vote for on the generic 2012 Senate ballot are also fairly evenly split in their views.



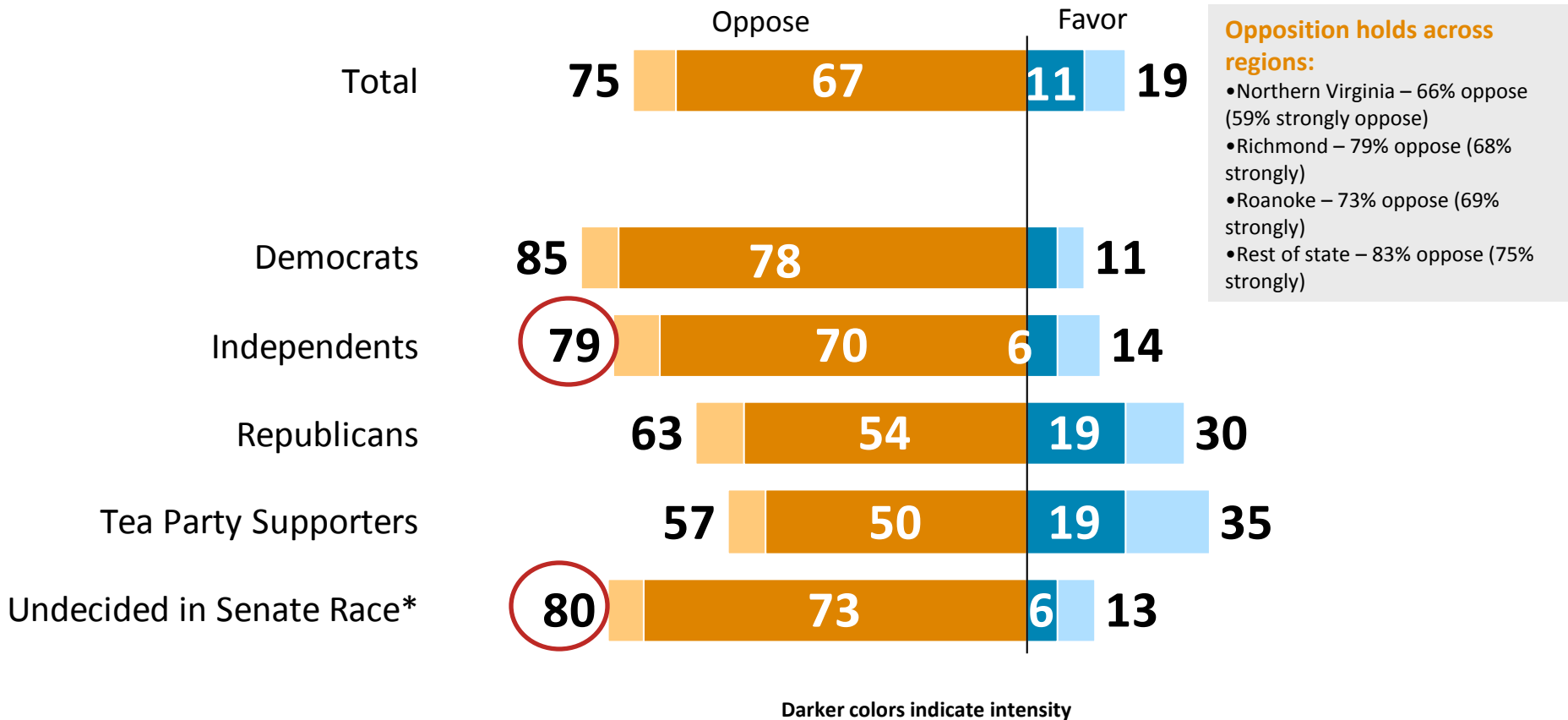
## Reactions to Cutting Social Security Benefits in Order to Reduce the Deficit

There is strong, widespread opposition to cutting Social Security benefits in order to reduce the federal deficit among Virginia voters. This is especially true for independent voters and those undecided in the generic 2012 Senate ballot.



Three-quarters of Virginia voters oppose cutting Social Security benefits in order to reduce the federal deficit, with two-thirds strongly opposed. Strong opposition carries across party lines and among independents and those currently undecided on who they will vote for in the 2012 Senate race.

### Cutting Social Security Benefits to Reduce the Federal Deficit



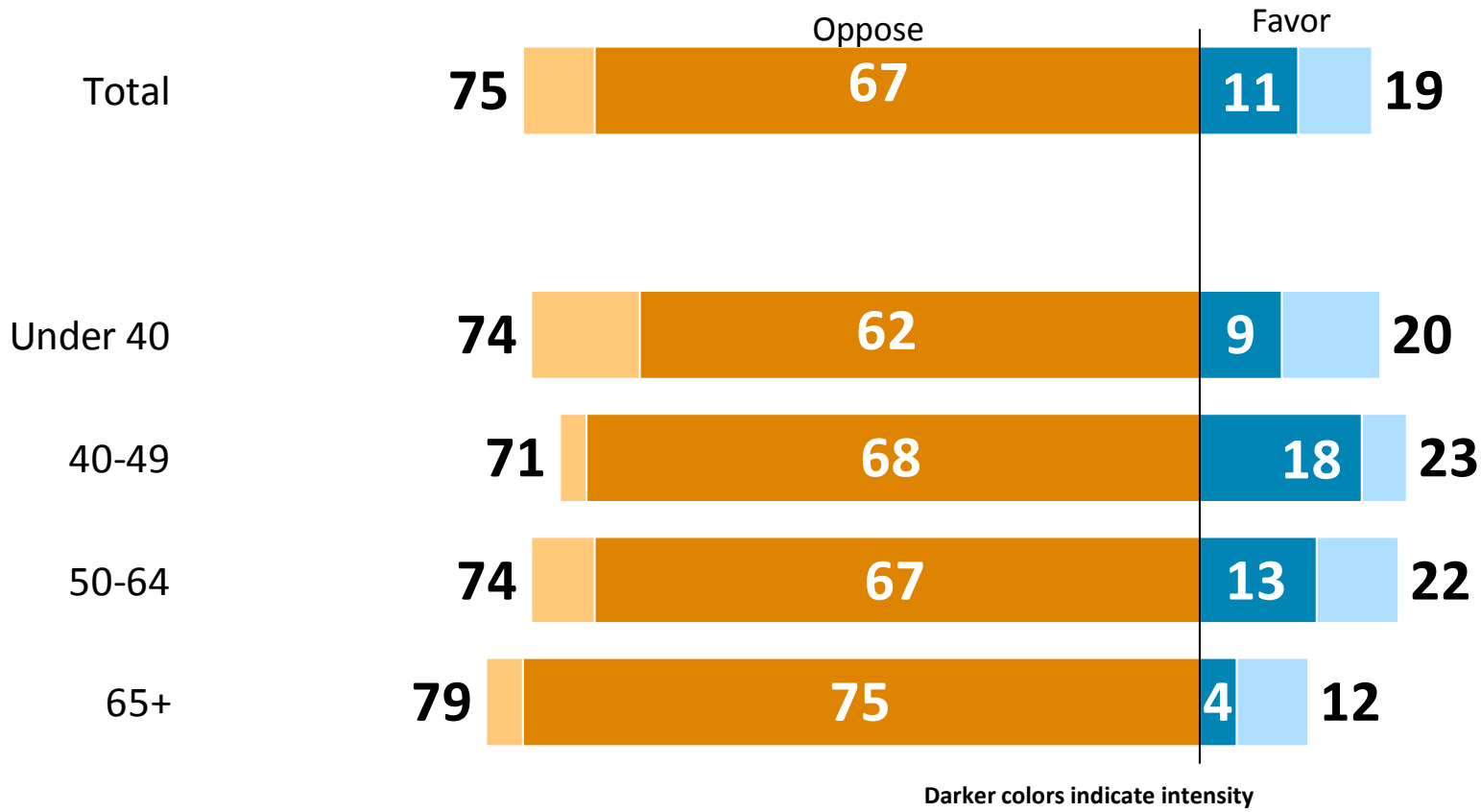
\*Respondents who say they are “Undecided” when asked for whom they will vote in the 2012 elections for U.S. Senate.

Would you favor or oppose cutting Social Security benefits in order to reduce the federal deficit? [IF FAVOR/OPPOSE: Is that strongly or not so strongly?]



Across age groups, strong majorities of Virginia voters also strongly oppose cutting Social Security benefits in order to reduce the federal deficit.

### Cutting Social Security Benefits to Reduce the Federal Deficit



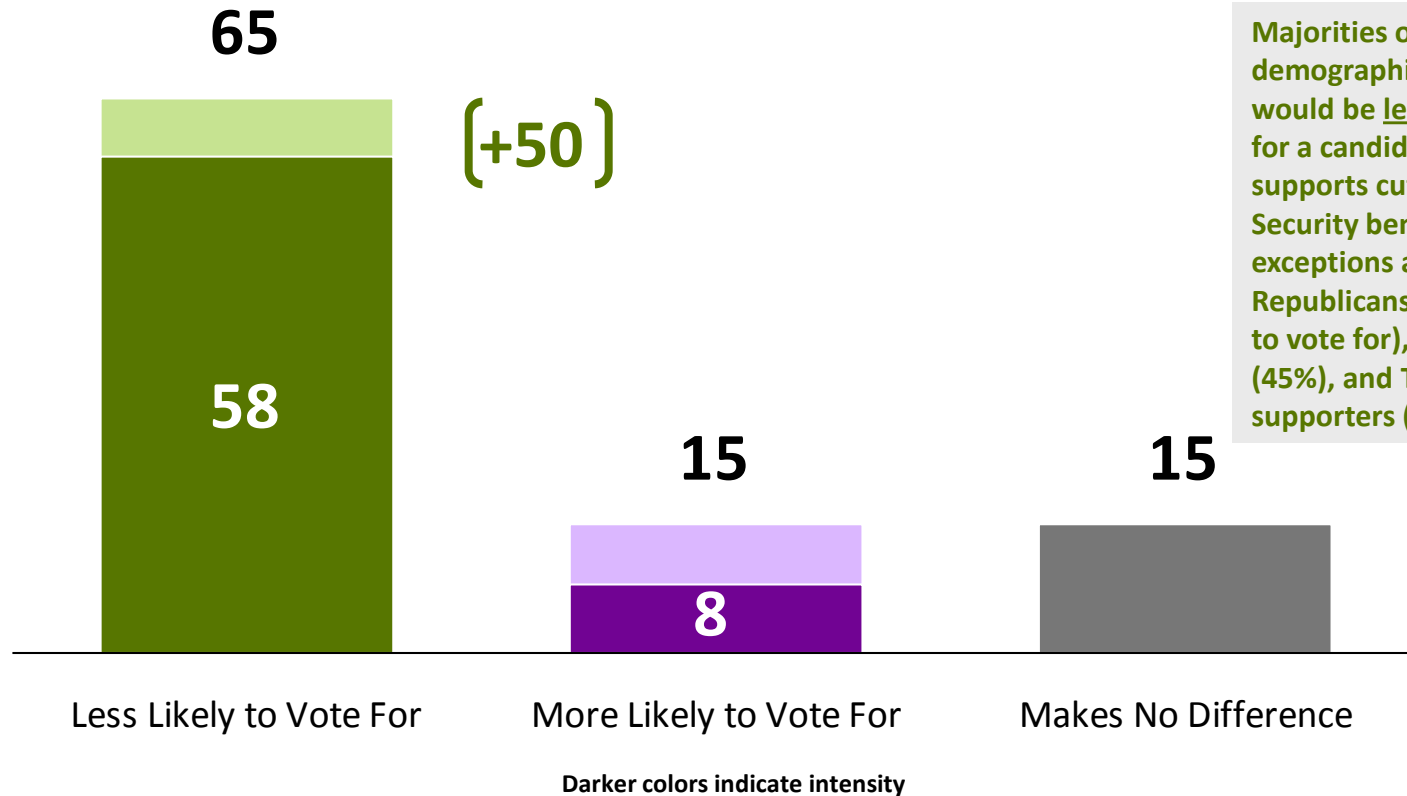
Majorities of all demographic subgroups oppose cutting benefits to reduce the deficit.

Would you favor or oppose cutting Social Security benefits in order to reduce the federal deficit? [IF FAVOR/OPPOSE: Is that strongly or not so strongly?]



Two-thirds of Virginia voters say they would be less likely to vote for a Senate candidate who supports cutting Social Security benefits in order to reduce the federal deficit. Nearly six in ten would be much less likely to vote for such a candidate.

### More or Less Likely to Vote for a Senate Candidate Who Supports Cutting Social Security Benefits to Reduce the Deficit



Majorities of most demographic subgroups would be less likely to vote for a candidate who supports cutting Social Security benefits. The exceptions are strong Republicans (49% less likely to vote for), Republican men (45%), and Tea Party supporters (49%).

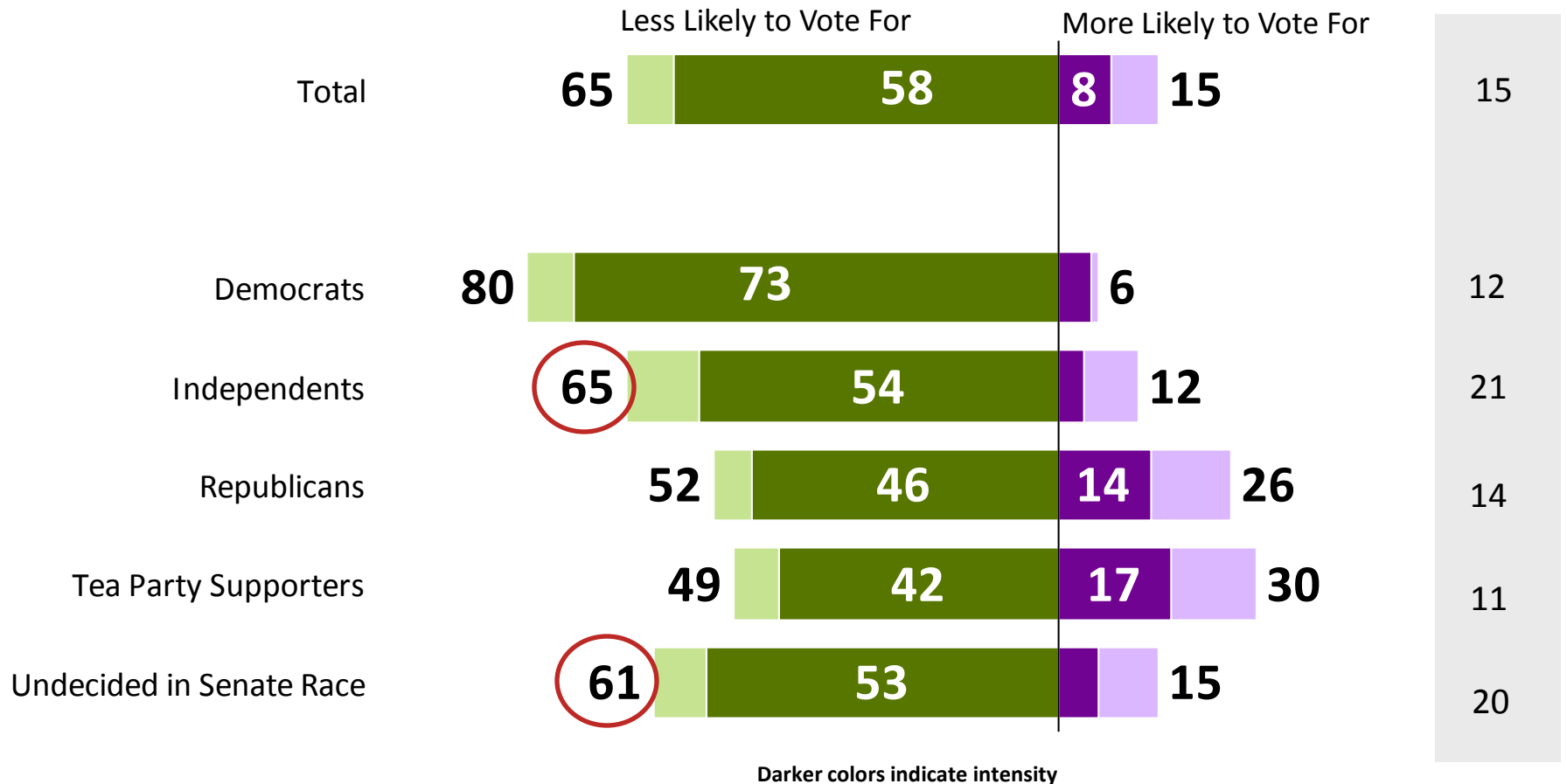
And, please tell me, would you be more or less likely to vote for a candidate for Senate who supports cutting Social Security benefits in order to reduce the federal deficit, or would it make no difference to you? [IF MORE/LESS: Is that MUCH MORE/LESS or SOMEWHAT MORE/LESS?]



Majorities of Virginia Democrats, independents, and Republicans say they would be less likely to vote for a Senate candidate if that candidate supported cutting Social Security benefits in order to reduce the federal deficit. Two-thirds of independents and six in ten voters who are undecided in the 2012 generic Senate ballot are less likely to vote for such a candidate. Roughly half of Tea Party supporters say they are less likely to support this candidate.

Candidate Who Supports Cutting Social Security Benefits to Reduce Deficit

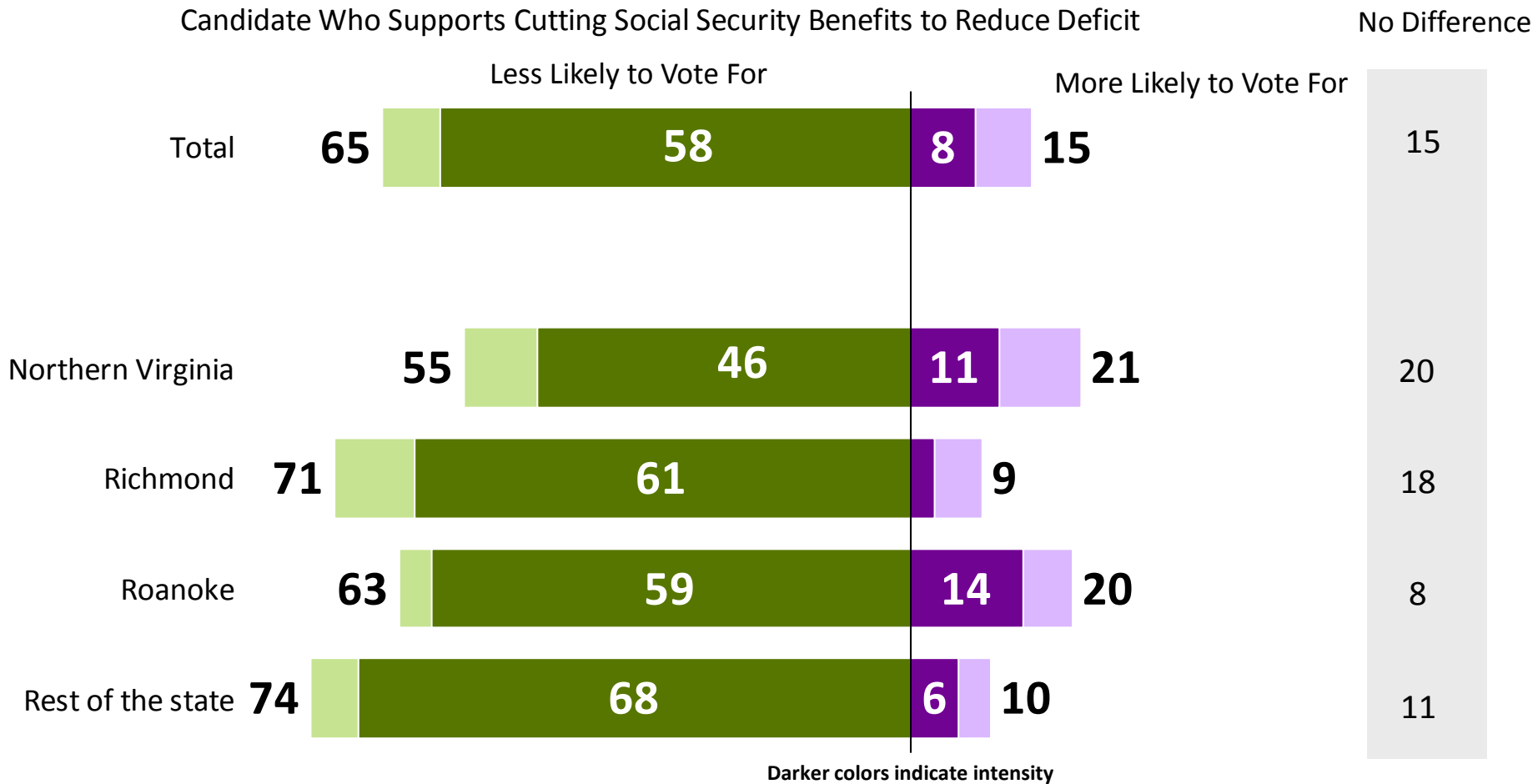
No Difference



And, please tell me, would you be more or less likely to vote for a candidate for Senate who supports cutting Social Security benefits in order to reduce the federal deficit, or would it make no difference to you? [IF MORE/LESS: Is that MUCH MORE/LESS or SOMEWHAT MORE/LESS?]



Majorities of voters across most regions in Virginia would be much less likely to vote for a candidate who would cut benefits in order to reduce the federal deficit.



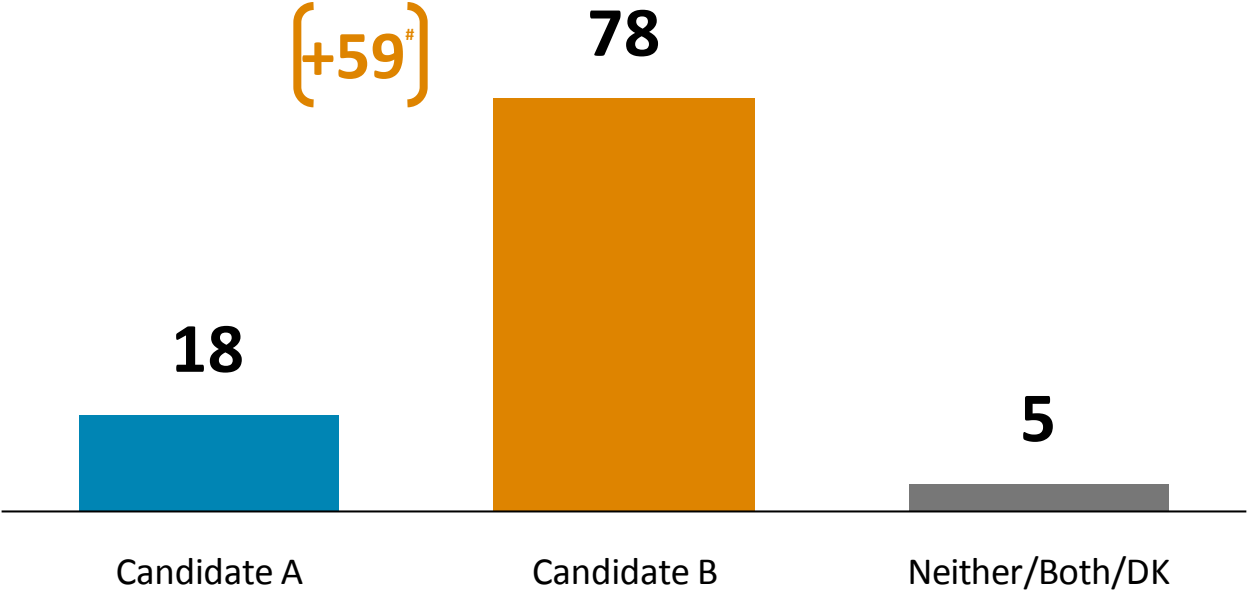
And, please tell me, would you be more or less likely to vote for a candidate for Senate who supports cutting Social Security benefits in order to reduce the federal deficit, or would it make no difference to you? [IF MORE/LESS: Is that MUCH MORE/LESS or SOMEWHAT MORE/LESS?]

In an engaged debate over three-quarters of Virginia voters agree with the candidate who says that Social Security should not be on the table for cuts to address the deficit because it is funded by and belongs to the people who have worked hard and paid into the program. They pick this candidate over one who makes the argument that we must cut Social Security to avoid burdening future generations with massive debt.

\*Now I am going to read two statements that might be made by a U.S. Senator in your state. Which one comes closer to your point of view?

**Candidate A**  
Says it is simply wrong to shackle future generations with such a massive debt burden. We must cut our entitlement spending now to leave our children and grandchildren a better future. Everything has to be on the table, including cutting Social Security.

**Candidate B:**  
Says Social Security did not cause the federal budget deficit and it is fully funded. Social Security is funded by contributions from working Americans. It belongs to the people who have worked hard and paid into the program, not to the government. Social Security has not contributed to the federal deficit, and should NOT be on the table for cuts to address the deficit.



# Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding

\*Split Sampled question

More than eight in ten independents and undecided Virginia voters side with the candidate who argues that because Social Security belongs to the people who have paid into the program it should not be considered for cuts to reduce the federal debt.

\*Now I am going to read two statements that might be made by a U.S. Senator in your state. Which one comes closer to your point of view?

### Candidate A

**Says it is simply wrong to shackle future generations with such a massive debt burden. We must cut our entitlement spending now to leave our children and grandchildren a better future. Everything has to be on the table, including cutting Social Security.**

### Candidate B:

**Says Social Security did not cause the federal budget deficit and it is fully funded. Social Security is funded by contributions from working Americans. It belongs to the people who have worked hard and paid into the program, not to the government. Social Security has not contributed to the federal deficit, and should NOT be on the table for cuts to address the deficit.**

	Side with Candidate A	Side with Candidate B	Candidate B Advantage #
Total	18%	78%	+59
Democrats	8%	90%	+82
Independents**	10%	84%	+74
Republicans	32%	63%	+30
Tea Party Supporters**	30%	64%	+35
Undecided in Senate race**	13%	85%	+72

# Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding

\*Split Sampled question

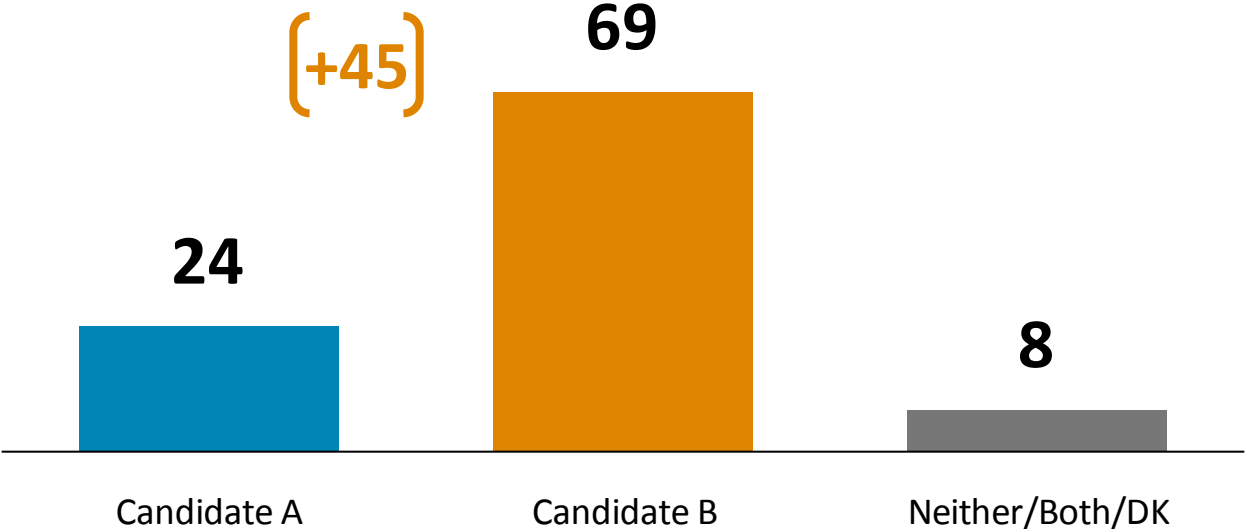
\*\*Sample size less than 100 (For Independents N=57; Tea Party Supporters N=71; For Undecideds N=84)

Virginia voters are also much more likely to agree with a candidate who says Social Security is a promise that should be kept for current and future generations, over a candidate who argues that Social Security should be on the table for cuts to avoid shackling future generations with massive debt.

\*Now I am going to read two statements that might be made by a U.S. Senator in your state. Which one comes closer to your point of view?

**Candidate A**  
Says it is simply wrong to shackle future generations with such a massive debt burden. We must cut our entitlement spending now to leave our children and grandchildren a better future. Everything has to be on the table, including cutting Social Security.

**Candidate B:**  
Says Social Security is a promise made to all generations to provide a basic and reliable retirement income for when they retire, become widowed or disabled, or leave loved ones behind. Americans need to know the promise of Social Security will continue to be kept for them and for future generations.



\*Split Sampled question

Over six in ten independent and undecided Virginia voters side with the candidate who argues for protecting the promise of Social Security for current and future generations, rather than the candidate who espouses cutting Social Security to address the deficit.

\*Now I am going to read two statements that might be made by a U.S. Senator in your state. Which one comes closer to your point of view?

**Candidate A**

Says it is simply wrong to shackle future generations with such a massive debt burden. We must cut our entitlement spending now to leave our children and grandchildren a better future. Everything has to be on the table, including cutting Social Security.

**Candidate B:**

Says Social Security is a promise made to all generations to provide a basic and reliable retirement income for when they retire, become widowed or disabled, or leave loved ones behind. Americans need to know the promise of Social Security will continue to be kept for them and for future generations.

	Side with Candidate A	Side with Candidate B	Candidate B Advantage #
Total	24%	69%	+45
Democrats	11%	82%	+70
Independents**	29%	62%	+33
Republicans	34%	58%	+24
Tea Party Supporters**	41%	47%	+6
Undecided in Senate race**	25%	66%	+41

# Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding

\*Split Sampled question

\*\*Sample size less than 100 (For Independents N=66; Tea Party Supporters N=83; For Undecideds N=91)



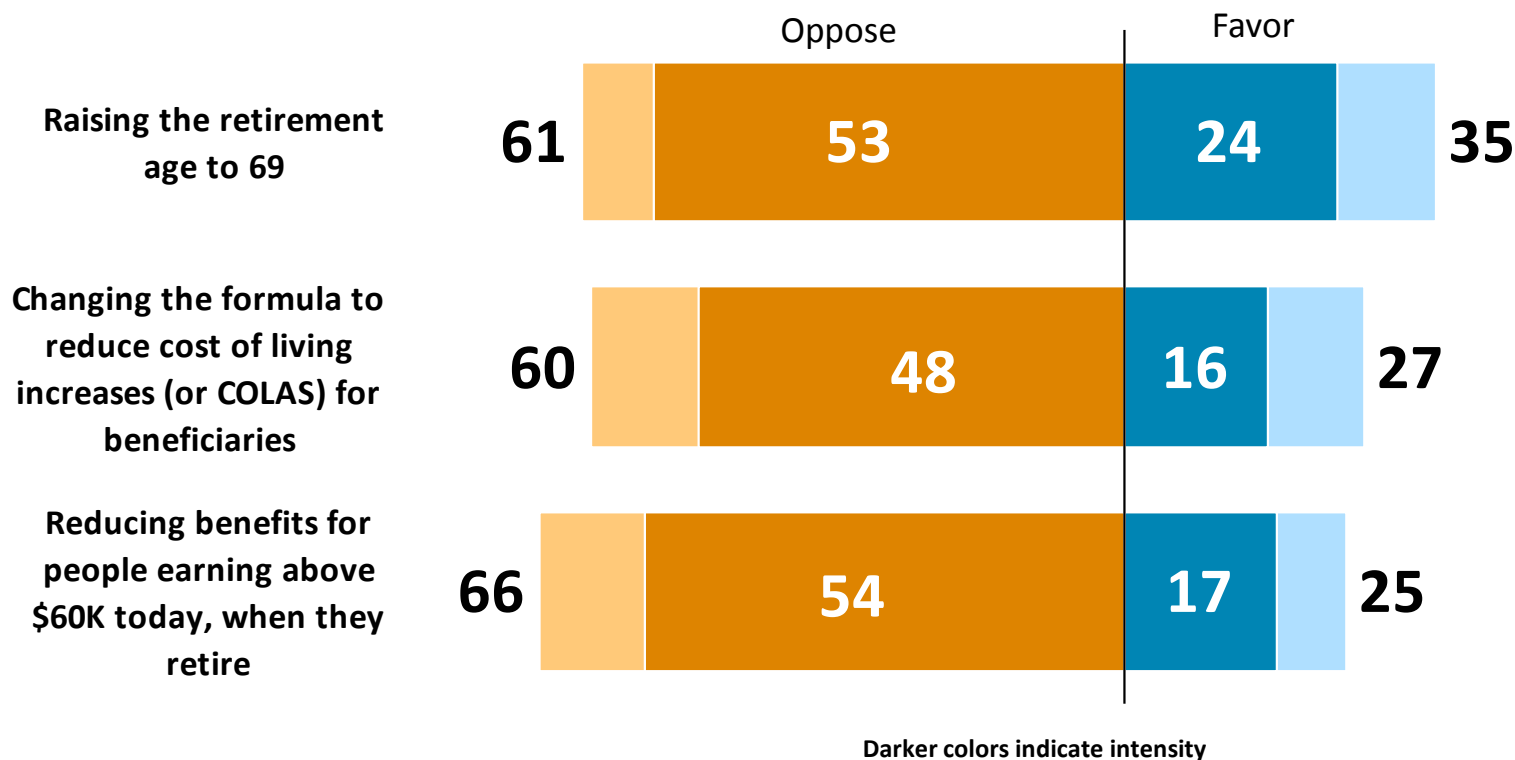
## Reactions to Specific Cuts to Social Security Benefits

There is broad opposition among Virginia voters to raising the retirement age, changing the COLA formula in a way that reduces the amount beneficiaries receive, and reducing benefits for people earning above \$60,000.



Strong majorities of Virginia voters oppose three specific proposals that would cut Social Security benefits by: Raising the retirement age, changing the COLA formula in a way that reduces the amount beneficiaries receive, and reducing benefits for people earning above \$60,000.

To Help Make Social Security More Solvent Would You Favor or Oppose.....



Opposition to raising the retirement age is particularly robust among blue-collar voters: 69% of non-college educated voters oppose raising the retirement age (60% strongly). Fifty-four percent of college-educated voters are opposed (47% strongly).

Here are some changes people are proposing to help make Social Security more solvent. Please tell me if you would favor or oppose each of the following proposals to make Social Security more solvent [IF FAVOR/OPPOSE: Is that strongly or not so strongly?] Q. Raising the retirement age to 69; Q. Changing the formula to reduce cost of living increases – or COLAS—for people receiving Social Security benefits; Q. Reducing Social Security benefits for people earning above \$60,000 today when they retire.

Voters undecided on who they will vote for in the generic 2012 Senate ballot and independent voters are solidly against these specific benefit cuts.

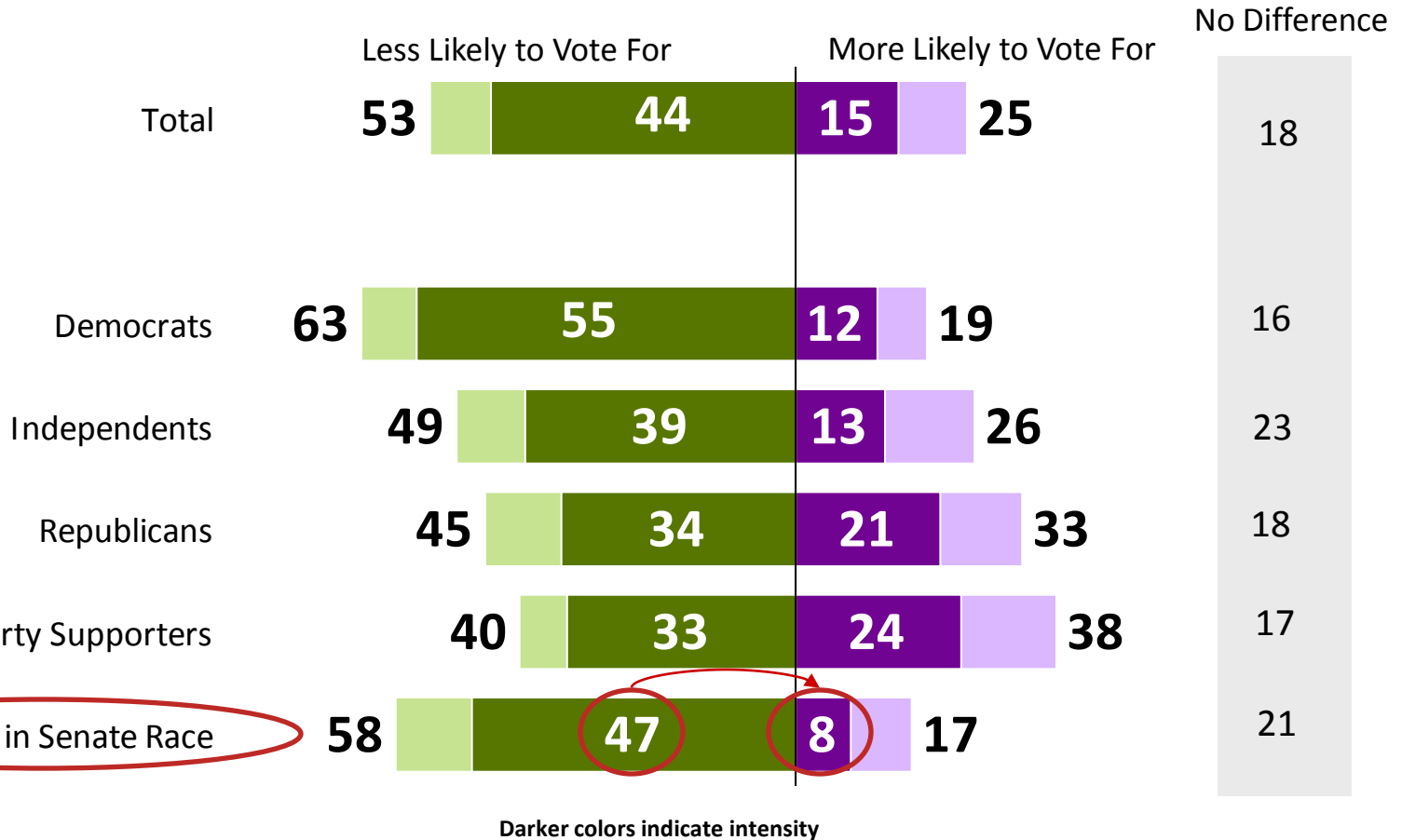
<i>% oppose (% strongly oppose)</i>	Raising the retirement age to 69	Changing COLA formula to reduce benefits	Reducing benefits for those earning above \$60K
Total	<b>61%</b> (53%)	<b>60%</b> (48%)	<b>66%</b> (54%)
Democrats	<b>67%</b> (61%)	<b>70%</b> (59%)	<b>68%</b> (56%)
Independents	<b>60%</b> (52%)	<b>59%</b> (41%)	<b>68%</b> (52%)
Republicans	<b>53%</b> (43%)	<b>51%</b> (42%)	<b>64%</b> (53%)
Tea Party Supporters	<b>48%</b> (38%)	<b>45%</b> (37%)	<b>63%</b> (49%)
Undecided in Senate race	<b>65%</b> (57%)	<b>58%</b> (44%)	<b>65%</b> (54%)
Under age 40	<b>66%</b> (59%)	<b>53%</b> (38%)	<b>66%</b> (51%)
40-49	<b>62%</b> (55%)	<b>62%</b> (55%)	<b>69%</b> (62%)
50-64	<b>62%</b> (55%)	<b>60%</b> (50%)	<b>64%</b> (54%)
65+	<b>47%</b> (36%)	<b>67%</b> (57%)	<b>63%</b> (49%)



By a margin of three-to-one, undecided voters would be more likely to vote against a Senate candidate who would support raising the retirement age. Intensity among undecided voters is six-to-one. This is also especially unpopular among blue-collar voters.

Candidate Who Supports Raising the Retirement Age to 69

62 percent of blue-collar voters would be less likely to vote for a candidate who supports raising the retirement age (53 percent much less likely). This is particularly true among blue-collar men (67 percent oppose; 56 percent strongly). This compares to 46 percent of those with a four-year college degree or more (37 percent would be much less likely).



Now let me read you some items and tell me if that item would make you more or less likely to vote for a candidate for Senate, or if it would make no difference to you. [IF MORE/LESS LIKELY: Is that much or somewhat more/less likely?] Q. The candidate supports raising the retirement age to 69.



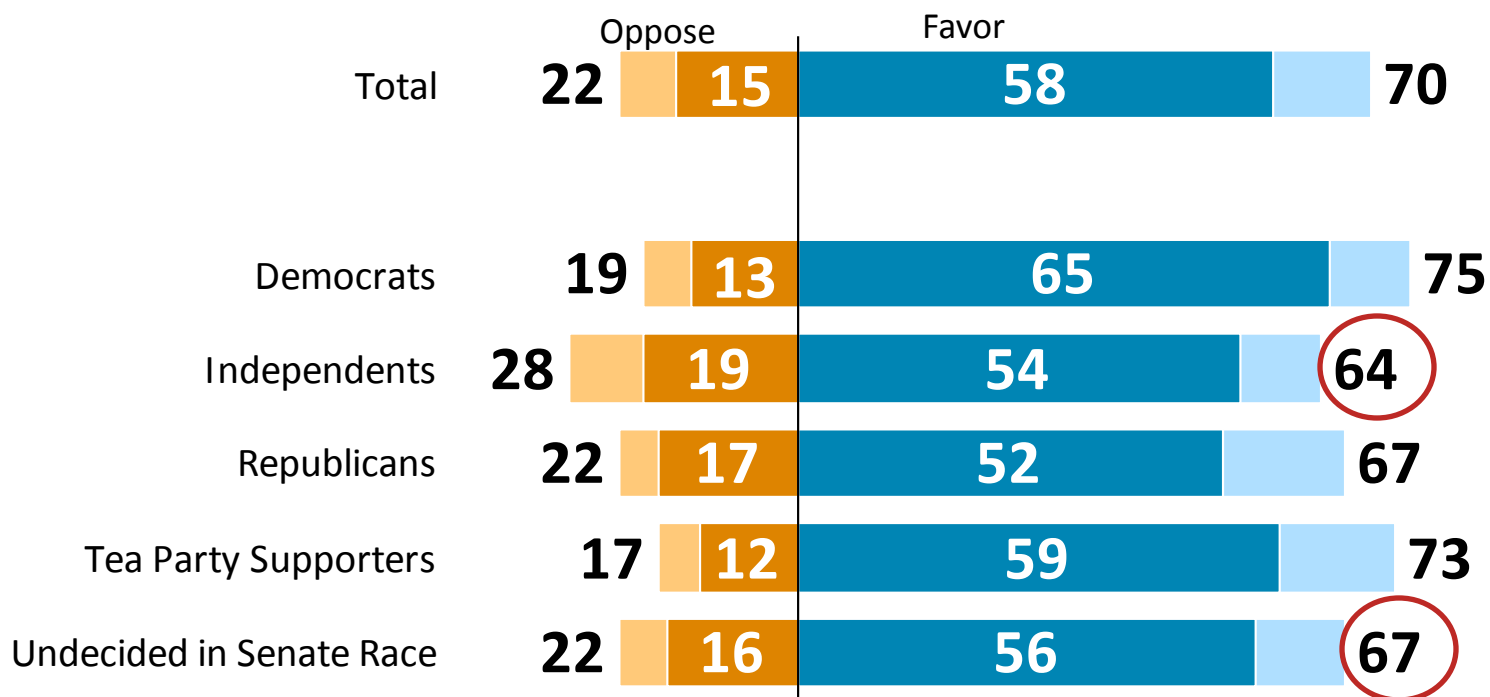
## Attitudes Toward Imposing Social Security Taxes on Wages Above \$106,800 & Other Revenue Proposals

Seven in ten Virginia voters favor a proposal to gradually require employees and employers to pay Social Security taxes on all wages above \$106,800, and 57 percent would be more likely to vote for a Senate candidate who supports this proposal. Half or more of voters across partisan lines say they would support such a candidate.



Seven in ten Virginia voters favor, and majorities strongly favor, gradually requiring employees and employers to pay Social Security taxes on all wages above \$106,800, which they do not currently do. Roughly two-thirds of voters or more across every political affiliation favor this proposal.

### Requiring Employees & Employers to Pay Social Security Taxes on All Wages Above \$106,800



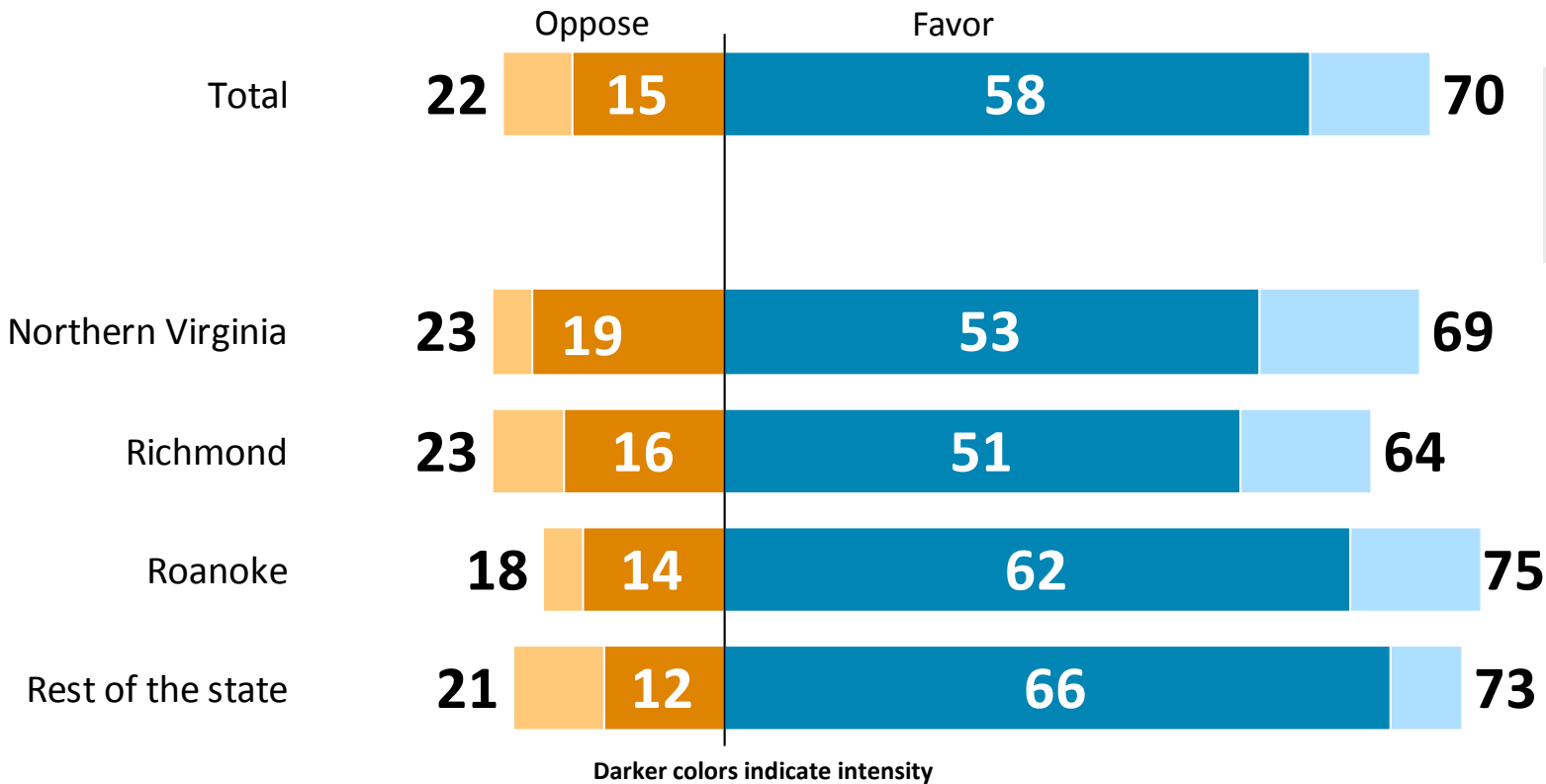
Darker colors indicate intensity

Here are some changes people are proposing to help make Social Security more solvent. Please tell me if you would favor or oppose each of the following proposals to make Social Security more solvent [IF FAVOR/OPPOSE: Is that strongly or not so strongly?] Q. Gradually requiring employees and employers to pay Social Security taxes on all wages above one-hundred and six thousand eight-hundred dollars, which they do not do now.



Across regions of the state, at least roughly two-thirds of voters favor requiring employees and employers to pay Social Security taxes on all wages above \$106,800.

### Requiring Employees & Employers to Pay Social Security Taxes on All Wages Above \$106,800



Majorities of all demographic subgroups favor this proposal.

Here are some changes people are proposing to help make Social Security more solvent. Please tell me if you would favor or oppose each of the following proposals to make Social Security more solvent [IF FAVOR/OPPOSE: Is that strongly or not so strongly?] Q. Gradually requiring employees and employers to pay Social Security taxes on all wages above one-hundred and six thousand eight-hundred dollars, which they do not do now.

Seven in ten Virginia voters—including over eight in ten Democrats and seven in ten independents —agree with the candidate who argues that instead of drastic cuts to Social Security what is needed is closing the loophole to make all wages over \$106,800 subject to Social Security payroll taxes.

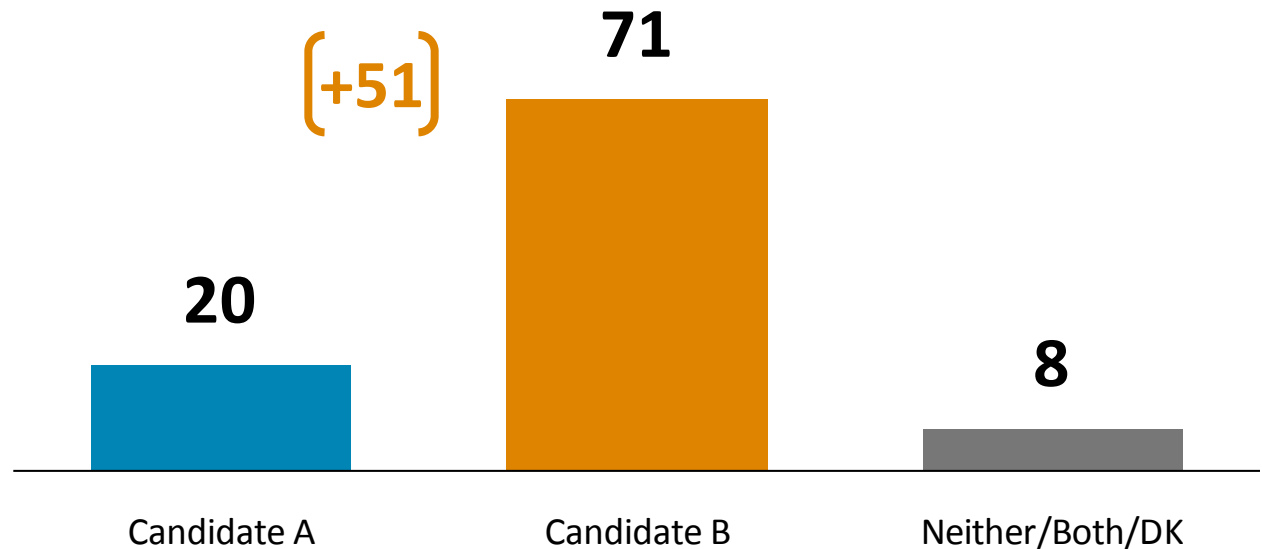
Now I am going to read two statements that might be made by a U.S. Senator in your state. Which one comes closer to your point of view?

### Candidate A

Says the Social Security program is going broke, leaving us with some very difficult choices to make. In order to protect the program for our children and our grandchildren we must make changes, including raising the retirement age to 69 and make cuts in other Social Security benefits.

### Candidate B:

Says Social Security is fully funded through 2037, so drastic cuts are not needed. Instead, to protect the program for future generations we should close a loophole, and make all wages over \$106,800 subject to Social Security payroll taxes, which they are not now. Doing this will ensure that Social Security is fully funded for the next 75 years.



Across age groups and political affiliations, voters side with the candidate who believes that instead of drastically cutting Social Security we should make all wages over \$106,800 subject to Social Security payroll taxes. This argument is especially strong among undecided and independent voters.

Now I am going to read two statements that might be made by a U.S. Senator in your state. Which one comes closer to your point of view?

### Candidate A

Says the Social Security program is going broke, leaving us with some very difficult choices to make. In order to protect the program for our children and our grandchildren we must make changes, including raising the retirement age to 69 and make cuts in other Social Security benefits.

### Candidate B:

Says Social Security is fully funded through 2037, so drastic cuts are not needed. Instead, to protect the program for future generations we should close a loophole, and make all wages over \$106,800 subject to Social Security payroll taxes, which they are not now. Doing this will ensure that Social Security is fully funded for the next 75 years.

	Side with Candidate A	Side with Candidate B	Candidate B Advantage #
Total	20%	71%	+51
Democrats	9%	85%	+76
Independents	18%	71%	+53
Republicans	33%	56%	+24
Tea Party Supporters	33%	52%	+20
Undecided in Senate race	17%	73%	+56
Under age 40	17%	73%	+57
40-49	23%	70%	+47
50-64	25%	67%	+43
65+	17%	73%	+56

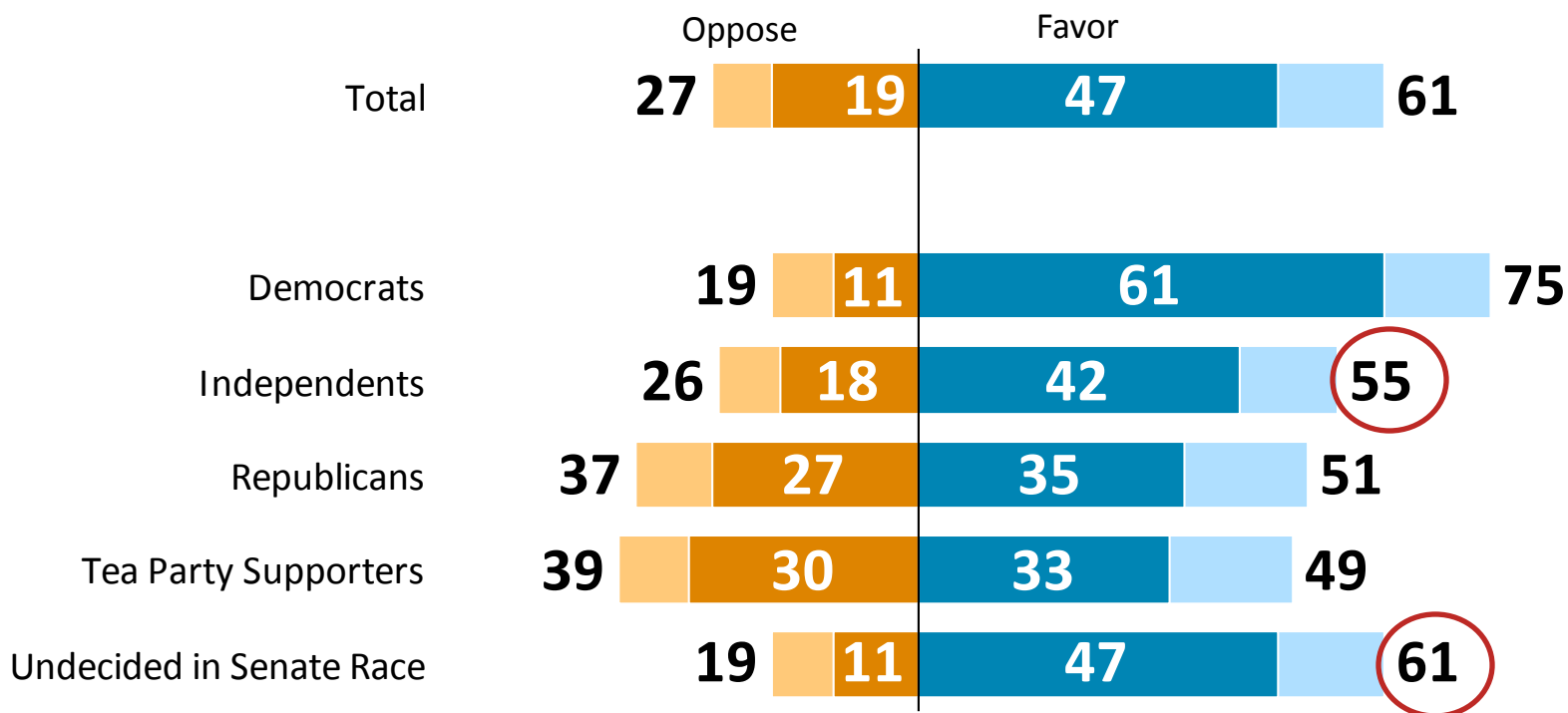
# Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding





Six in ten Virginia voters favor a proposal that, instead of extending the tax cuts for the top two percent of Americans due to expire in 2012, would have Congress dedicate those additional taxes to guarantee Social Security benefits for the next 75 years. Nearly half strongly support this proposal.

### Instead of Extending Tax Cuts for Richest Americans in 2012, Let These Expire and Dedicate Additional Money to Social Security



Darker colors indicate intensity

Now let me read you another proposal, please tell me if you would favor or oppose this: Instead of extending the tax cuts for the top two percent of Americans that will be due to expire in 2012 Congress should instead dedicate the additional taxes from the richest Americans to guarantee Social Security benefits for the next 75 years. Do you favor or oppose this proposal, or are you not sure? [IF FAVOR/OPPOSE: Is that strongly/not so strongly favor/oppose?]

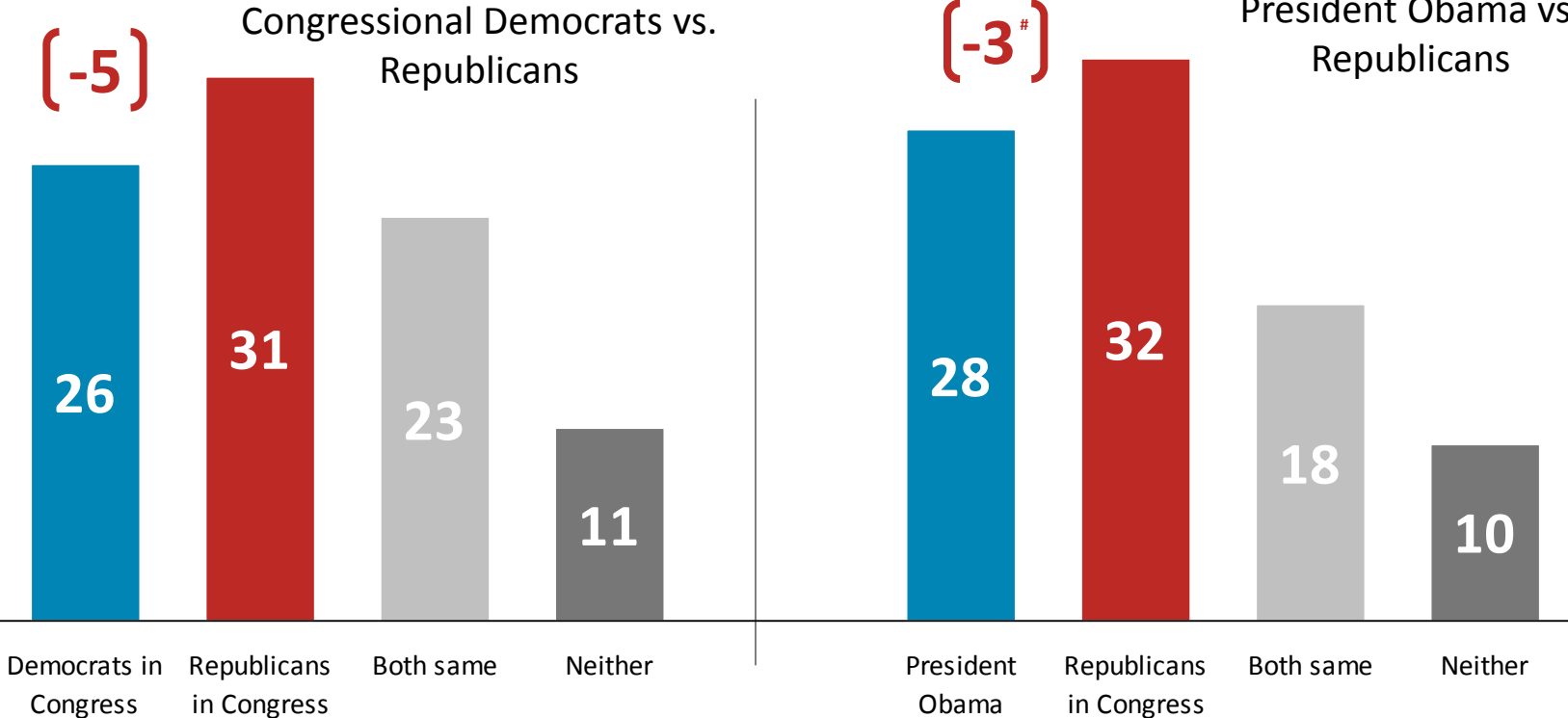


## Political Leadership on Social Security

Democrats no longer enjoy their traditional advantage when it comes to which party would better handle Social Security. Overall, Virginia voters slightly favor Republicans in Congress to handle Social Security over Democrats in Congress or President Obama.

Virginia voters give Republicans in Congress the advantage in terms of who will better handle the issue of Social Security, over both Congressional Democrats and over President Obama.

Who Will Better Handle Social Security



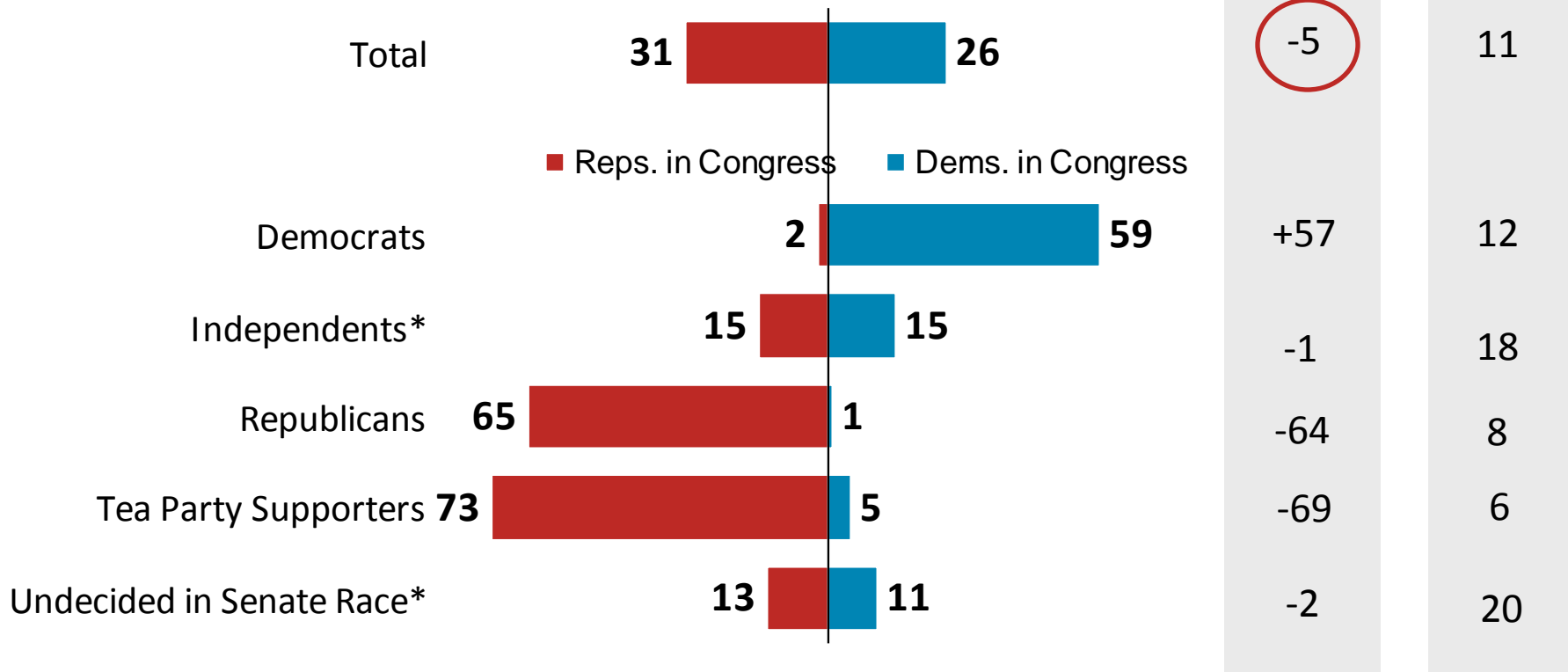
# Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding

Who do you think will better handle the issue of Social Security: [ROTATE: \_ the Republicans in Congress, \_ the Democrats in Congress], or are they both about the same? Who do you think will better handle the issue of Social Security: [ROTATE: \_ the Republicans in Congress, \_ President Obama], or are they both about the same?



Congressional Republicans have the advantage over Congressional Democrats on Social Security among Republicans and Tea Party supporters. Independents and undecided voters split.

### Who will Better Handle Social Security



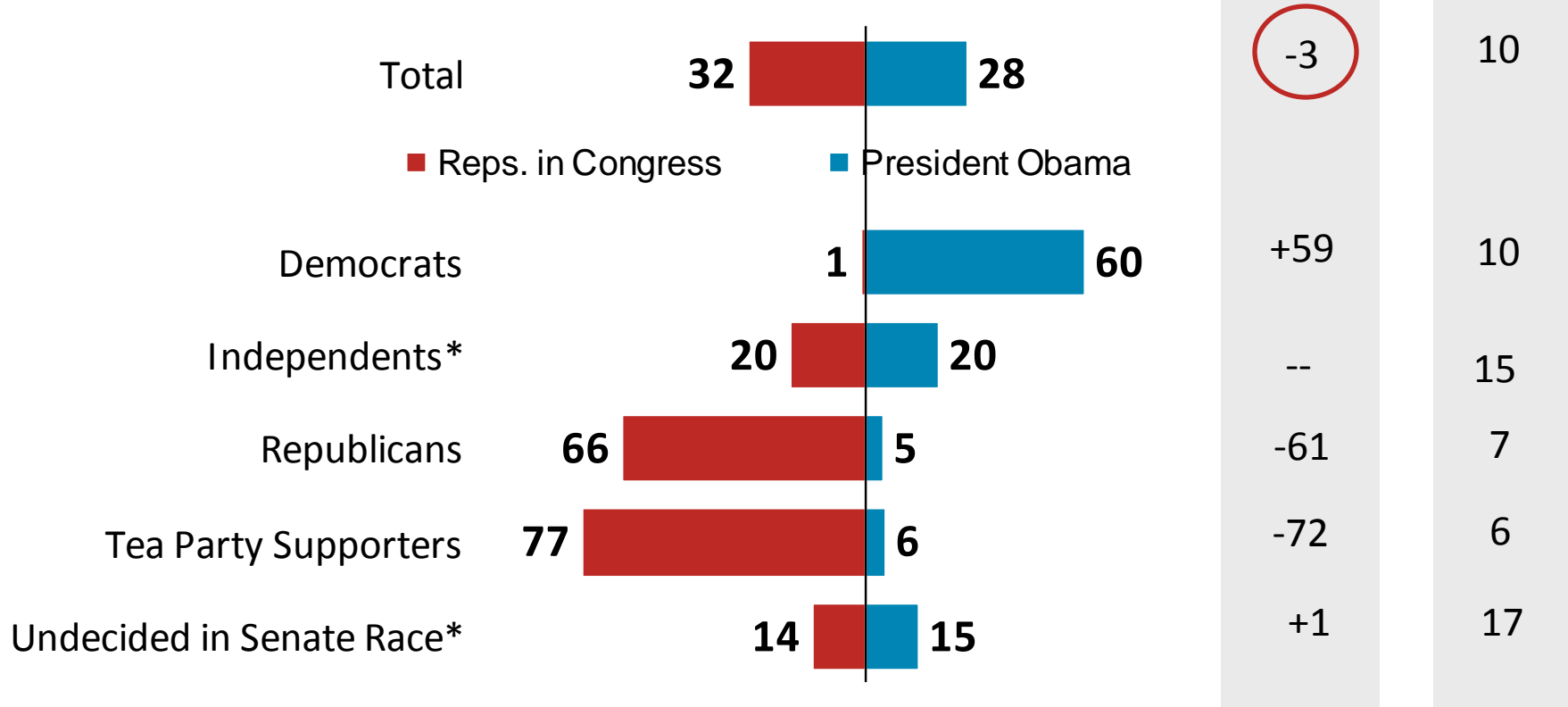
\*Respondents who say they are “Undecided” when asked for whom they will vote in the 2012 elections for U.S. Senate. 32% of Undecideds and 29% of independents say Republicans in Congress and Democrats in Congress are “Both about the same” in how they will handle Social Security.

Who do you think will better handle the issue of Social Security: [ROTATE: \_ the Republicans in Congress, \_ the Democrats in Congress], or are they both about the same?



Republicans in Congress also hold an advantage over President Obama on Social Security among Republicans and Tea Party supporters, while independents are divided.

### Who will Better Handle Social Security

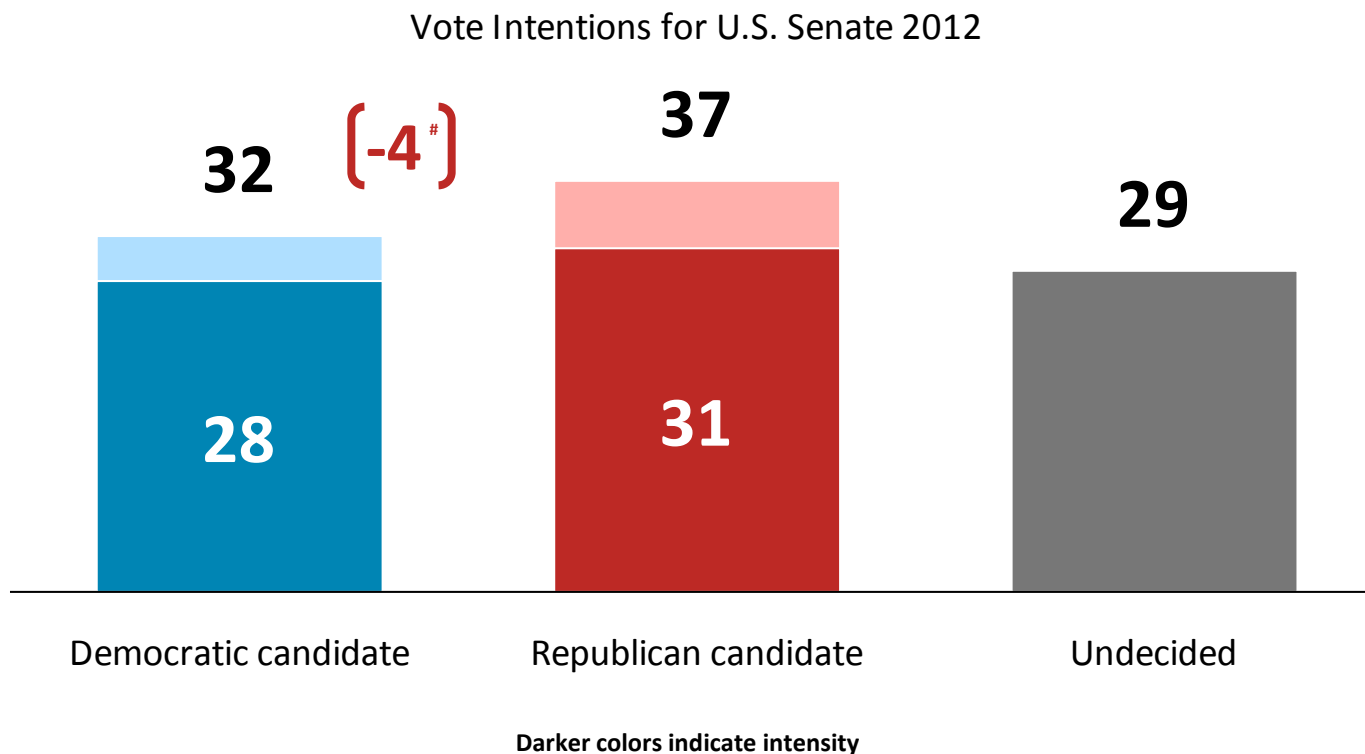


# Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding

\*28% of Undecideds and 23% of independents say Republicans in Congress and President Obama are “Both about the same” in how they will handle Social Security.

Who do you think will better handle the issue of Social Security: [ROTATE: \_the Republicans in Congress, \_President Obama], or are they both about the same?

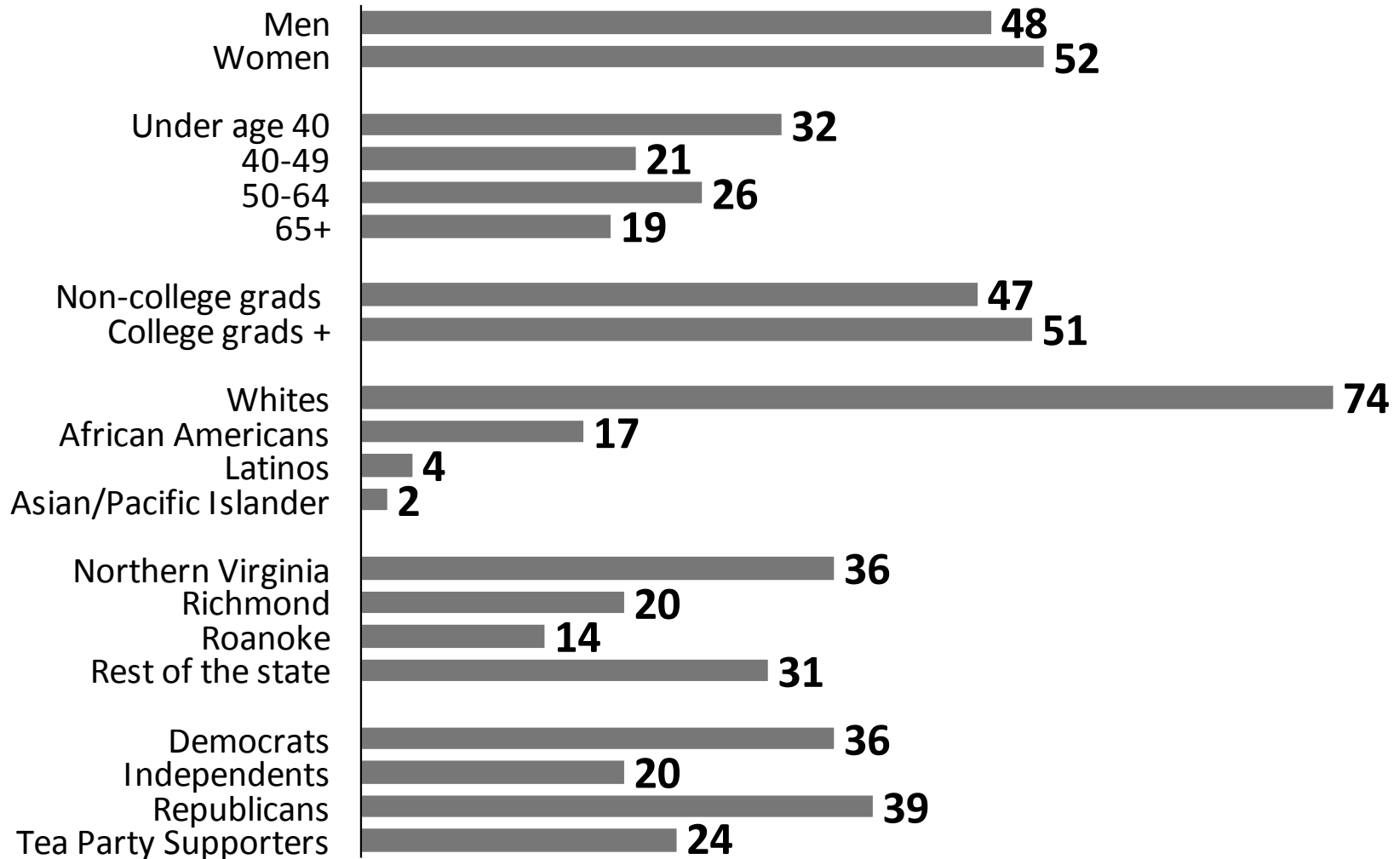
In a generic ballot for the 2012 Virginia Senate race, voters lean toward the Republican candidate by four points if the election were held today. Roughly three in ten are currently undecided.



# Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding

I know it is a long way off, but thinking about the elections for U.S. Senate in 2012, if the election for Senate were held today, and you had to make a choice, would you be voting for the [ROTATE: DEMOCRATIC SENATE CANDIDATE or the REPUBLICAN SENATE CANDIDATE] in [INSERT STATE NAME]?

# Demographic Profile of the Virginia Electorate





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