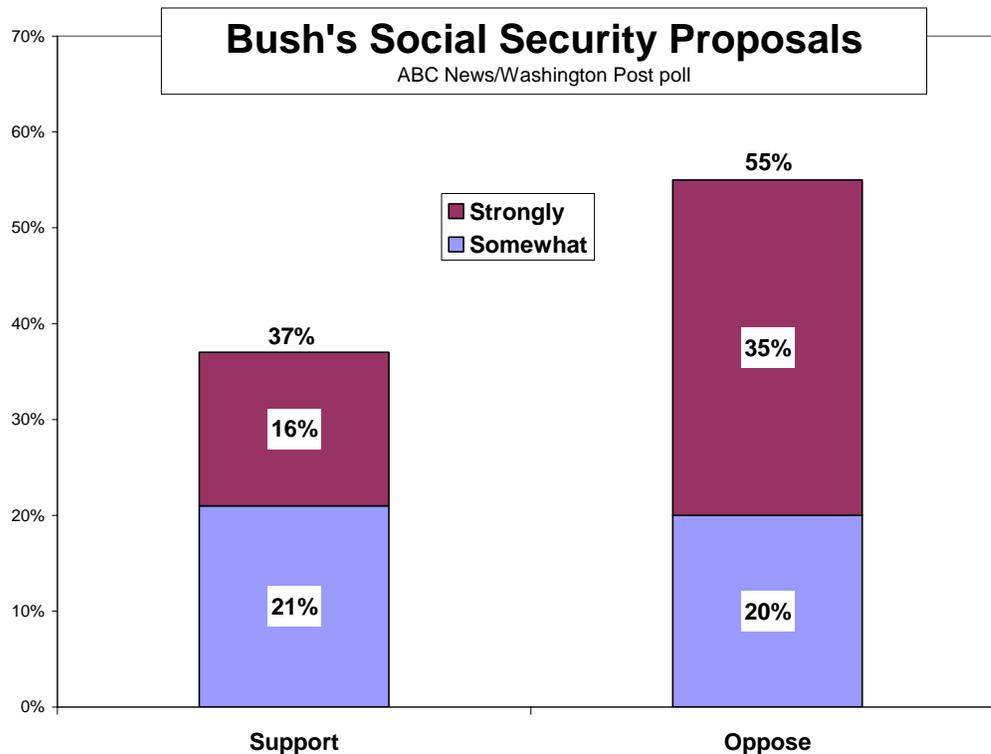


## **Bush’s Social Security Plan Plays to a Tough Audience**

George W. Bush’s Social Security road show is playing to a tough audience: Not only do most Americans oppose his effort to revamp the retirement system, but nearly six in 10 also say that the more they hear about it – the less they like it.

In the midst of a 60-day drive to build public support for his Social Security initiative, this ABC News/Washington Post poll shows no movement in Bush’s direction. Americans oppose his plans by 55-37 percent, and the intensity of sentiment is against him: Those who are “strongly” opposed outnumber strong supporters by a 2-1 margin.

Just 10 percent rate Social Security as the top priority for Bush and Congress, placing it last of five issues tested. Just 35 percent approve of Bush’s handling of the issue, a career low. And by a 12-point margin, 49-37 percent, the public better trusts the Democrats in Congress to handle Social Security, unchanged since Bush began the policy push in mid-January.

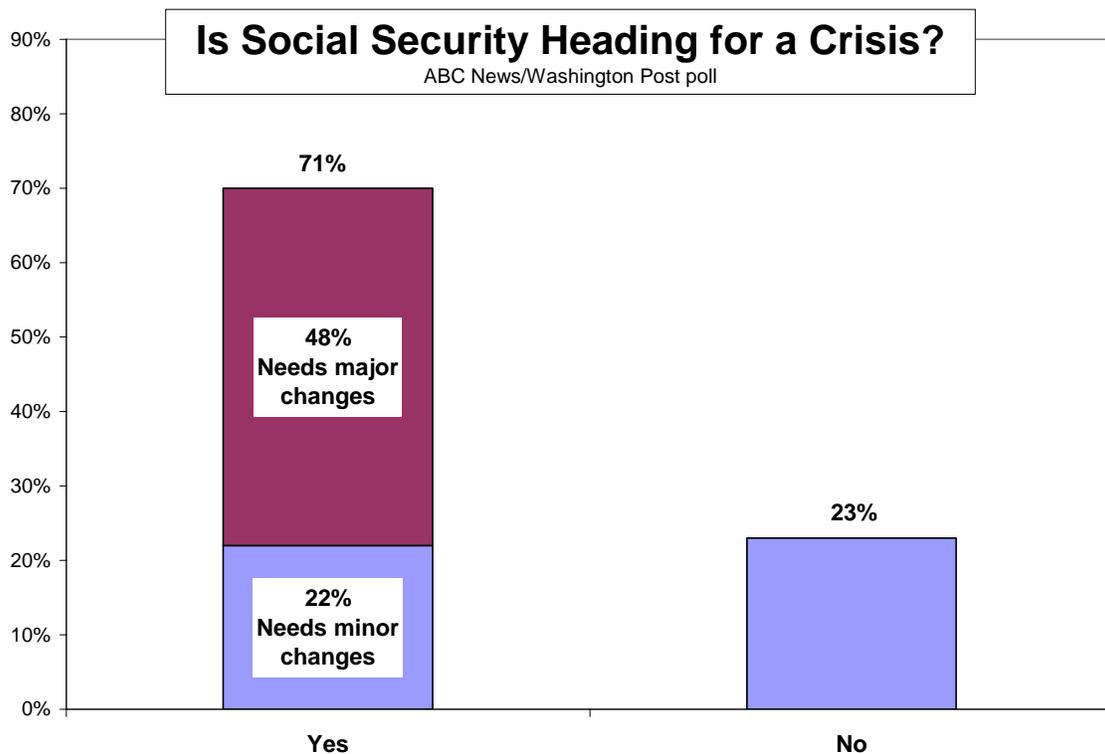


The results run counter to the administration's claims that fuller information will turn opinion its way. In fact opposition to the president's plan is as high among people who feel well-informed about it (half the public) as among the less well-informed. And while opposition is highest and strongest among older Americans – who wouldn't be affected – the plan is weakly received down the line. Middle-aged adults oppose it by about a 20-point margin; those under 30, by nine points.

**CRISIS and CHANGE** – This resistance does not represent denial: Seven in 10 Americans believe the Social Security system is headed for a crisis down the road. But previous polling has found that far fewer think the system is in crisis now, and apprehension about the future is a weaker force for change than discontent with current conditions.

And there is division about the extent of changes needed. About half of Americans, 48 percent, say the system needs major changes to avoid a crisis – but about as many, 45 percent, either say that minor changes will do, or that no crisis is coming.

A problem for Bush is that his plan isn't popular even among people who see a need for major changes in Social Security. They only divide about evenly on his plans, with 47 percent in favor, 45 percent opposed. Those who don't see a need for major changes, meanwhile, oppose Bush on Social Security by a wide margin.



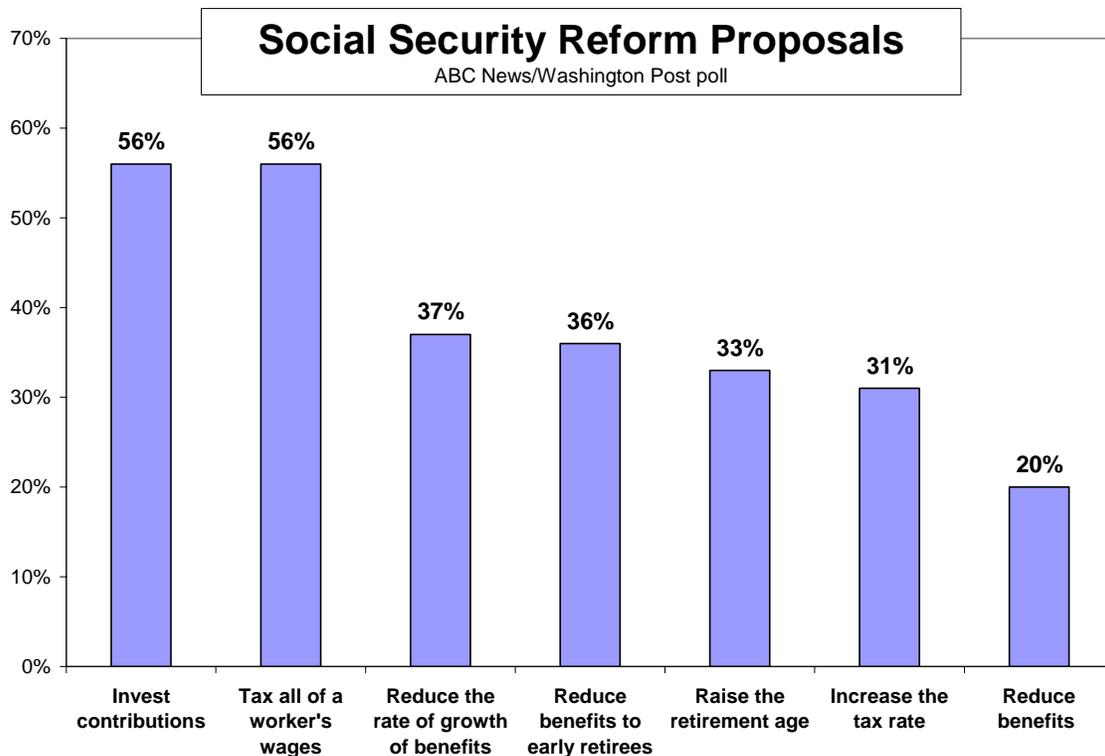
**OPTIONS** – Best for Bush is that most, 56 percent in this poll, continue to support creation of voluntary personal accounts “in which people who chose to could invest some

of their Social Security contributions in the stock market.” The trouble is that there’s broad opposition to the stick that would drive people to such accounts – reducing the rate of growth in benefits in the traditional program.

The public by nearly 4-1, 75-20 percent, opposes “reducing guaranteed benefits for future retirees.” Language counts: Opposition drops when the change is more precisely described as one in which “benefits increase at a slower rate.” But the public’s still opposed, in this formulation by 57-37 percent.

Other changes are also broadly unpopular. Americans by 2-1 oppose increasing the Social Security tax rate, by 2-1 oppose raising the retirement age to receive full benefits to 68 from the current 67, and by nearly 2-1 oppose further trimming the benefits paid to people who retire early.

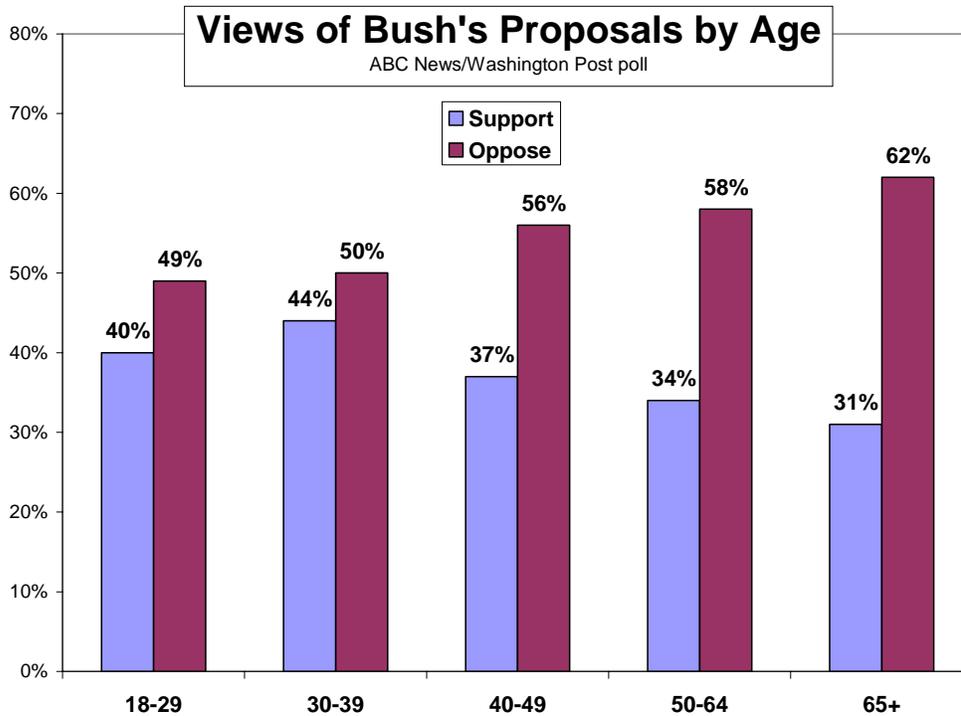
Much more popular is the notion of taking more from the better-off. By 56-40 percent, the public favors eliminating the cap on annual earnings that are subject to Social Security taxes, now \$90,000. Interestingly, this is supported by a 20-point margin even in households with total incomes greater than \$100,000 a year.



Within any proposals, there are complications that can influence public opinion. Earlier ABC/Post polling has shown that support for personal accounts drops sharply if it means borrowing up to \$2 trillion to pay for the transition. Support also is lower if the change is portrayed as “diverting” Social Security money. And there’s broad reluctance actually to

participate in such accounts. A key reason: Sixty-nine percent in this poll view the stock market as “a risky investment,” not a safe one.

**GROUPS** – There are generational differences on Social Security. Opposition to Bush’s plan peaks at 62 percent among senior citizens. Fifty-two percent of seniors not only oppose Bush’s plan, but do so strongly – an extremely high level of intense opposition. However, even among 18- to 29-year olds, strong opponents outnumber strong supporters by 2-1, albeit at much lower levels of intensity, 23 percent to 12 percent.



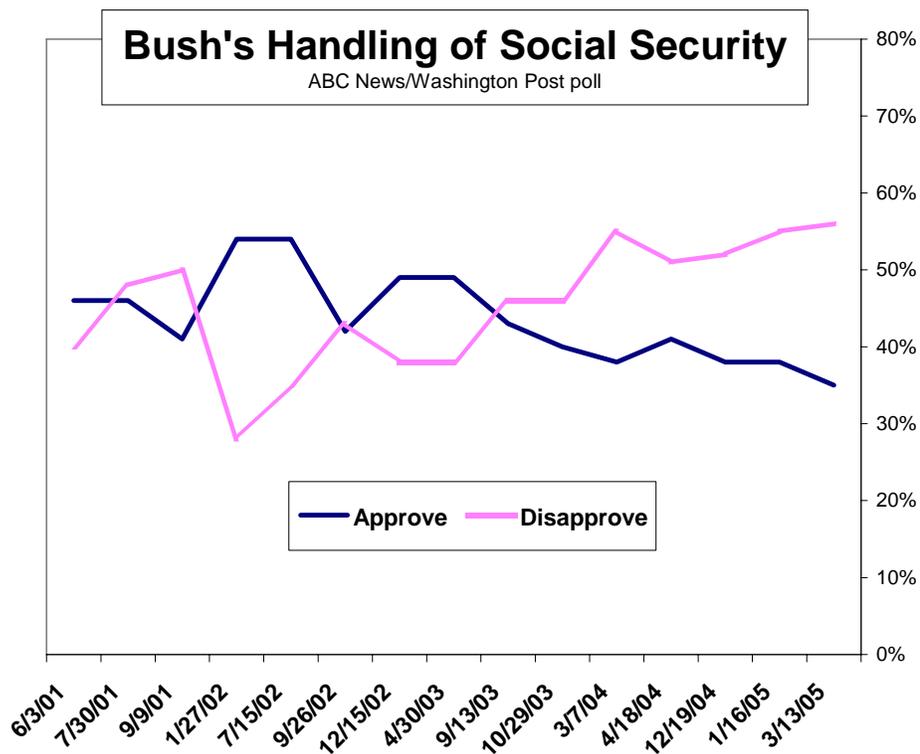
There’s also strong partisanship on this issue: Opposition runs to 83 percent among Democrats and 56 percent among independents, while 74 percent of Republicans back the president’s proposals.

On some specific proposals, views transcend partisanship. More than six in 10 Republicans, Democrats and independents alike oppose increasing the Social Security tax rate (something Bush has ruled out). And 55 to 58 percent, across party lines, support raising the \$90,000 cap on taxable income. Indeed this idea – which Bush has not ruled out – wins majority support both from supporters and opponents of his proposals overall.

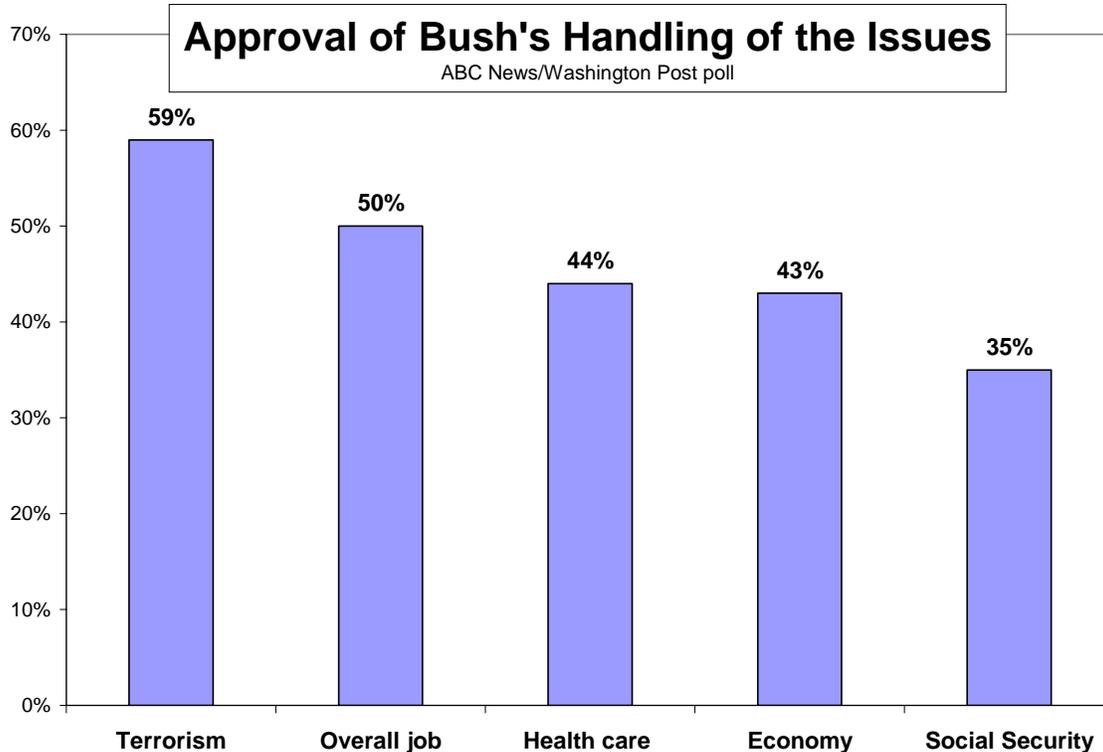
	Bush proposals on Social Security	
	Support	Oppose
All	37%	55
Age 65+	31	62
40-49	37	56
18-30	40	49

Democrats	11	83
Independents	33	56
Republicans	74	20
Think major changes needed	47	45
Major changes not needed	27	68
Well-informed on Bush plan	43	56
Not well-informed	32	54

**APPROVALS** – As noted, at 35 percent, approval of Bush’s work on Social Security is at a career low. He more generally remains a 50-percent president: Half of Americans approve of his job performance overall, 48 percent disapprove, about the same as just before his second inauguration, and indeed about the same as its been on average for the past year. (Slightly more now disapprove strongly than approve strongly, 37 percent to 31 percent.)



More disapprove than approve of his work on the economy as well as on Social Security. His rating on health care has moderated a bit but is hardly strong; 44 percent approve, 48 percent disapprove. The campaign against terrorism – the issue that won Bush re-election – remains the cornerstone of his presidency, with a 59-38 percent approval rating. All these are little changed from an ABC/Post poll in mid-January. (Bush’s ratings on Iraq will be the subject of a separate analysis tomorrow.)



**PRIORITIES** – No one issue dominates the public’s agenda: Asked what Bush and Congress should make their top priority this year, 27 percent cite the economy and jobs, 23 percent Iraq, 17 percent terrorism and 16 percent health care. But, as noted, Social Security ranks a clear last, selected by 10 percent.

It trails these other issues as a priority even among people who say the system is headed for a crisis, as well as among those who say it needs major changes; and it ranks ahead of just one – health care – even among those who support Bush’s Social Security proposals.

**METHODOLOGY** – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone March 10-13, 2005, among a random national sample of 1,001 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollvault.html>.

Media contact: Cathie Levine, (212) 456-4934.

Full results follow (\*= less than 0.5 percent).

1. Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as president? Do you approve/disapprove strongly or somewhat?

	-----Approve-----			-----Disapprove-----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opin.
3/13/05	50	31	19	48	11	37	3
1/31/05	50	34	15	45	11	34	5
1/16/05	52	33	19	46	11	35	2
12/19/04	48	27	21	49	12	38	2
10/20/04	All 50	30	20	46	11	35	4
	LV 50	33	17	48	10	38	2
	RV 50	30	20	46	11	35	3
10/17/04	LV 54	35	19	45	9	36	2
10/16/04	LV 54	35	19	44	10	34	2
10/15/04	LV 54	35	19	44	10	34	2
10/3/04	LV 53	36	17	46	11	34	1
9/26/04	All 50	33	18	45	13	32	5
	LV 53	38	15	46	10	35	1
	RV 52	35	17	46	13	32	5
9/8/04	All 52	35	17	43	11	32	5
	RV 52	38	14	45	11	33	3
8/29/04	All 50	31	19	47	13	34	3
	RV 52	33	19	47	13	35	1
8/1/04	All 47	28	18	49	13	36	5
	RV 48	29	19	51	13	38	2
7/25/04	All 50	32	19	47	13	34	3
	RV 51	33	18	47	13	34	2
7/11/04	48	31	17	50	11	39	2
6/20/04	All 47	30	17	51	13	39	1
	RV 48	32	15	51	12	40	1
5/23/04	47	31	17	50	14	36	3
4/18/04	51	33	18	47	13	34	1
3/7/04	50	32	18	48	12	36	2
2/11/04	50	30	21	47	14	34	2
1/18/04	58	35	24	40	9	30	2
12/21/03	59	39	21	38	15	23	3
12/14/03	57	37	20	39	10	29	5
12/7/03	53	32	21	40	13	27	7
11/16/03	57	34	23	39	11	28	4
10/29/03	56	30	26	42	13	29	2
10/13/03	53	33	20	43	13	29	4
9/30/03	54	34	20	44	15	29	2
9/13/03	58	35	23	40	14	27	2
9/7/03	56	34	22	41	13	28	4
8/11/03	59	37	22	37	14	23	4
7/10/03	59	35	24	38	13	25	3
6/22/03	68	45	23	29	11	18	4
4/30/03	71	50	22	26	17	9	3
4/16/03	74	52	22	23	9	14	3
4/9/03	77	58	19	20	6	14	4
4/3/03	71	54	16	25	7	19	4
3/23/03	68	NA	NA	27	NA	NA	4
3/20/03	67	NA	NA	28	NA	NA	5
3/2/03	62	38	23	35	13	22	4
2/23/03	60	NA	NA	34	NA	NA	6
2/9/03	64	42	21	34	14	20	3
2/1/03	62	41	21	34	13	22	4
1/28/03	62	43	19	36	13	23	2
1/27/03	59	39	21	37	15	22	4
1/20/03	59	36	23	38	16	22	2
12/15/02	66	37	28	32	12	20	2
11/4/02	LV 67	45	23	31	12	20	1
11/3/02	LV 67	45	22	32	12	20	1
11/2/02	LV 67	47	20	32	9	23	1
10/27/02	All 67	39	28	29	13	16	4
	LV 68	47	21	30	14	16	3

9/26/02	67	42	25	30	12	18	3
9/8/02	71	42	28	27	12	15	3
7/28/02	69	39	31	28	14	14	3
7/15/02	72	42	31	25	12	13	2
6/17/02	74	42	32	22	9	13	4
6/9/02	77	41	36	20	9	11	3
5/19/02	76	48	28	22	8	13	3
4/21/02	78	47	31	20	9	10	2
3/28/02	79	49	30	18	8	10	3
3/10/02	82	52	30	16	9	7	2
1/27/02	83	56	27	14	7	7	3
12/19/01	86	64	22	12	6	6	2
11/27/01	89	69	21	9	4	5	1
11/6/01	89	65	24	9	5	4	2
10/9/01	92	76	16	6	3	3	1
9/27/01	90	70	20	6	3	3	4
9/13/01	86	63	23	12	5	6	2
9/9/01	55	26	29	41	20	22	3
8/12/01	61	28	33	31	14	17	8
7/30/01	59	28	30	38	17	22	3
6/3/01	55	27	28	40	18	22	6
4/22/01	63	33	30	32	16	16	5
3/25/01	58	NA	NA	33	NA	NA	8
2/25/01	55	NA	NA	23	NA	NA	22

2. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bush is handling (ITEM)?

3/13/05 - Summary Table\*

	Approve	Disapprove	No op.
a. Social Security	35	56	9
b. Held for release			
c. The economy	43	55	2
d. The US campaign against terrorism	59	38	3
e. Health care	44	48	8

\*Half sample answered b-c, other half answered d-e.

Trend:

a. Social Security

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
3/13/05	35	56	9
1/16/05	38	55	7
12/19/04	38	52	9
4/18/04	41	51	8
3/7/04	38	55	7
10/29/03	40	46	14
9/13/03	43	46	11
4/30/03	49	38	13
12/15/02	49	38	13
9/26/02	42	43	15
7/15/02	54	35	11
1/27/02	54	28	18
9/9/01	41	50	9
7/30/01	46	48	6
6/3/01	46	40	14

b. Held for release.

c. The economy

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
3/13/05	43	55	2
1/16/05	46	52	2
12/19/04	46	51	3
9/26/04 RV	47	50	4
8/29/04 RV	45	52	3
7/25/04	47	50	3
6/20/04	46	53	1
5/23/04	44	54	2
4/18/04	44	54	2
3/7/04	39	59	1
2/11/04	44	54	2
1/18/04	51	47	2
12/21/03	51	44	5
11/16/03	48	49	3
10/29/03	45	53	2
10/13/03	45	52	2
9/13/03	42	56	3
9/7/03	44	51	5
8/11/03	45	51	5
7/10/03	47	49	4
4/30/03	52	45	3
2/9/03	47	49	4
2/1/03	44	52	4
1/28/03	46	49	4
1/27/03	47	47	5
1/20/03	43	53	4
1/5/03	50	43	7
12/15/02	50	46	4
11/4/02 LV	53	45	2
11/3/02 LV	52	46	2
11/2/02 LV	55	43	2
10/27/02	51	43	6
10/27/02 LV	53	44	3
9/26/02	51	47	3
9/8/02	57	40	4
7/28/02	57	39	4
7/15/02	58	38	3
4/21/02	64	33	3
1/27/02	62	34	4
12/19/01	67	27	6
11/6/01	72	23	5
9/9/01	48	48	4
7/30/01	52	45	3
6/3/01	53	41	6
4/22/01	55	38	7
3/25/01	50	42	8

d. The US campaign against terrorism

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
3/13/05	59	38	3
1/16/05	61	38	2
12/19/04	53	43	3
9/26/04 RV	59	38	3
8/29/04 RV	60	37	3
7/25/04	57	40	4
6/20/04	50	48	2
5/23/04	58	39	4
4/18/04	63	35	2
3/7/04	63	34	3
2/11/04	64	34	2

1/18/04	66	33	2
12/21/03	70	28	2
10/29/03	63	35	2
10/13/03	66	30	4
9/13/03	70	27	3
9/7/03	67	28	5
4/30/03	79	19	2
2/9/03	74	23	4
2/1/03	75	21	3
1/27/03	72	26	2
1/20/03	71	25	4
12/15/02	79	20	1
11/4/02 LV	76	22	1
11/3/02 LV	77	22	3
11/2/02 LV	78	21	2
10/27/02 All	74	23	4
10/27/02 LV	78	20	2
9/26/02	70	28	2
9/8/02	74	24	2
7/28/02	81	17	2
7/15/02	83	15	2
5/19/02*	79	19	3
4/21/02*	81	18	2
3/10/02*	88	10	2
1/27/02	88	10	2
12/19/01*	89	9	2
10/15/01*	92	5	3

\*Asked very/somewhat follow-up

e. Health care

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
3/13/05	44	48	8
1/16/05	42	51	6
12/19/04	37	56	7
8/29/04 RV	39	55	6
7/25/04	38	53	9
6/20/04	39	57	4

Compare to: The cost, availability and coverage of health insurance

4/18/04	33	61	5
3/7/04	32	62	6
2/11/04	32	62	6
1/18/04	37	55	8
12/21/03	34	56	10
10/29/03	28	63	9
10/13/03	30	60	10
9/13/03	32	61	7
4/30/03	34	57	9
1/28/03	40	47	13
1/20/03	36	51	13
12/15/02	33	58	9

3. Which of these should be the highest priority for Bush and Congress this year: (The U.S. campaign against terrorism), (the war in Iraq), (the economy and jobs), (health care), (Social Security) or something else?

	Terrorism	Iraq	Economy/ jobs	Health care	Social Security	Something else	No op.
3/13/05	17	23	27	16	10	5	2

4. If changes are not made, do you think the Social Security system is heading for a crisis down the road, or not?

	Yes	No	Already in crisis (vol.)	No opin.
3/13/05	71	23	1	5

5. (IF HEADED FOR/IN CRISIS, Q4) To avoid a crisis, do you think Social Security needs major changes, or minor changes?

	Major	Minor	No opinion
3/13/05	67	30	3

4/5 NET. If changes are not made, do you think the Social Security system is heading for a crisis down the road, or not? (IF HEADED FOR/IN CRISIS) To avoid a crisis, do you think Social Security needs major changes, or minor changes?

	-----System in crisis-----				No crisis	No opin.
	NET	Major	Minor	No op.		
3/13/05	72	48	22	2	23	5

6. How much do you feel you know about Bush's proposals to change the Social Security system - a great deal, a good amount, only some or hardly anything?

	-----More-----			-----Less-----				No op.
	NET	Grt. deal	Good amt.	NET	Some	Hardly	Nothing (vol.)	
3/13/05	50	13	37	50	35	14	1	*

7. Overall, do you support or oppose Bush's proposals on Social Security? Do you support/oppose them strongly or somewhat?

	-----Support-----			-----Oppose-----			No opin.
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
3/13/05	37	16	21	55	20	35	8

8. Would you say that the more you hear about Bush's proposals on Social Security (the more you like them), or the more you hear about Bush's proposals on Social Security (the less you like them)?

	More	Less	No difference (vol.)	No opin.
3/13/05	33	58	5	5

9. I'm going to mention changes some leaders have proposed for Social Security. Please tell me if you support or oppose each one.

3/13/05 - Summary Table

	Support	Oppose	No op.
a. Increasing the Social Security tax rate	31	64	4
b. Collecting Social Security taxes on all the money a worker earns, rather than taxing only up to the first \$90,000 of annual income	56	40	4
c. Raising the retirement age to receive full			

Social Security benefits to 68, instead of the current 67	33	66	2
d. Further reducing the benefits paid to people who retire early. For instance, people who retire at age 62 would get 63% of their full benefits, rather than the current 70%	36	62	2
e. (HALF SAMPLE) Changing the way Social Security benefits are calculated so that benefits increase at a slower rate than they would under the current formula	37	57	6
f. (HALF SAMPLE) Reducing guaranteed benefits for future retirees	20	75	5

9g. Would you support or oppose a plan in which people who chose to could invest some of their Social Security contributions in the stock market?

	Support	Oppose	No opin.
3/13/05	56	41	3
12/19/04	53	44	3
7/15/02	52	45	3
4/22/01	53	46	2
3/25/01	52	45	3
10/30/00 LV	58	35	8
9/6/00 RV	59	37	4
5/10/00	64	31	5

10. Who do you trust to do a better job handling Social Security, (Bush) or (the Democrats in Congress)?

	Bush	Dems	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opin.
3/13/05	37	49	2	11	2
1/16/05	37	50	2	8	3
4/30/03	43	50	1	3	3
9/9/01	41	50	1	4	4
7/30/01	42	51	1	5	2
6/3/01	38	52	1	5	3

11-34 Held for release.

35. Overall, do you think the stock market is a safe investment, or a risky one?

	Safe	Risky	No opin.
3/13/05	29	69	3
7/15/02	19	80	2
1/15/01	35	61	3
5/7/00	34	58	8
6/6/99	37	52	9
10/13/97	27	69	4
8/31/97	32	54	14
9/14/88	16	71	12

36-42 Held for release.

\*\*\*END\*\*\*