

As Doubts on Social Security Linger, Most Favor Stock Investment Plan

Doubts about the longevity of the Social Security system have eased from their peak five years ago but are still widespread, helping to fuel public support for plans to allow Americans to invest some of their contributions in the stock market.

Fifty-one percent think Social Security will run out of money before they retire, while just 38 percent expect to receive their benefits, an ABC News/Washington Post poll has found. Doubts about the system are especially broad among young adults.

While that's hardly a vote of confidence, it's much better than it's been: Five years ago far more people, 73 percent, expected the system to fail them. Credit may go to the much-improved economy, and perhaps a sense the government's gotten its fiscal house in order.

	Think you'll get your benefits?	
	Yes	No
5/10/00	38%	51
8/22/95	23	73

As noted, confidence in the system is closely related to one's proximity to retirement. The farther off it is, the lower the faith that Social Security will be there to pay benefits.

Don't expect benefits from Social Security			
Age 18-30	31-44	45-60	61+
75%	65	38	17

STOCK PLAN - Sixty-four percent support a plan in which people could invest some of their contributions in the stock market. In a test, it was pointed out to half of respondents that benefits could be higher or lower depending on the market's performance. About as many - 61 percent - supported the plan just the same.

Investing Social Security contributions in the stock market	
Support	64%
Oppose	31

Support is higher - 72 percent - among people who think the current system won't be around long enough for them to collect their benefits. Among people who do expect to receive the benefits, fewer but still a majority, 55 percent, support the stock plan.

Young people, who tend not to expect benefits from the current system, also are more apt to support the stock plan.

CAMPAIGN 2000 - George W. Bush has backed a plan allowing stock investments of Social Security contributions; Al Gore has strongly criticized the proposal, saying it would turn Social Security "into a game of stock-market roulette." But not even Democrats back Gore on this one - six in 10 of them want the option to invest.

Support investing:	
Democrats	60%
Independents	65
Republicans	68

The issue may translate into votes. It's a top-tier concern, with seven in 10 Americans saying that protecting Social Security is very important in their vote, and another two in 10 saying it's somewhat important. Only seven percent give it little or no importance.

Importance of Social Security to vote	
Very important	71%
Somewhat important	21
Not too/not at all	7

Indeed, Republicans have been making the issue more competitive. Asked which candidate they better trust to protect the system, Americans choose Gore by an eight-point margin - a fairly slim lead in what's traditionally been a strongly Democratic issue.

METHODOLOGY - This survey was conducted May 7-10 among a random national sample of 1,068 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Field work by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Dalia Sussman.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:
<http://www.abcnews.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>

Here are the full results:

4. How important will protecting the Social Security system be to you in deciding how to vote in the 2000 presidential election in November - very important, somewhat important, not too important or not important at all?

	---Important---		----Not important---		No opin.
	Very	Somewhat	Not too	Not at all	
5/10/00	71	21	4	4	1
4/2/00	74	20	3	2	*
10/31/99	76	17	3	4	*
9/2/99	68	25	5	2	*
3/14/99	74	20	4	2	*

5. (Asked of half sample) Which presidential candidate, (Gore) or (Bush), do you trust to do a better job protecting the Social Security system?

	Gore	Bush	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opin.
5/10/00	46	38	2	6	8
4/2/00	43	43	4	4	6
3/11/00	48	35	3	8	6
10/31/99	42	45	3	3	6

11. What do you think of the nation's Social Security system? Do you think that by the time you retire there will be enough money in the system to pay you the benefits you are entitled to, or do you think there will not be enough money left to pay you benefits?

	Enough	Not enough	Not covered (vol.)	No opin.
5/10/00	38	51	3	7
5/4/97	27	66	3	4
8/22/95	23	73	0	4
11/19/84	29	59	2	9

12. SPLIT SAMPLE VERSION A: Would you support or oppose a plan in which people who chose to do so could invest some of their Social Security contributions in the stock market?

	Support	Oppose	No opin.
5/10/00	64	31	5

SPLIT SAMPLE VERSION B: There's a plan in which people could invest some of their Social Security contributions in the stock market. When they retire, their benefits could either be higher or lower, depending on the stock market's performance. Would you support or oppose this plan in which people who chose to do so could invest some of their Social Security contributions in the stock market?

	Support	Oppose	No opin.
5/10/00	61	34	5

END