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**Country Losing Ground on Most National Problems**  
**ECONOMY, IRAQ WEIGHING DOWN BUSH POPULARITY**

**Also Inside...**

- Bush a Drag on Support for Social Security Indexing
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- Republicans Most Worried About Illegal Immigration

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## **Country Losing Ground on Most National Problems** **ECONOMY, IRAQ WEIGHING DOWN BUSH POPULARITY**

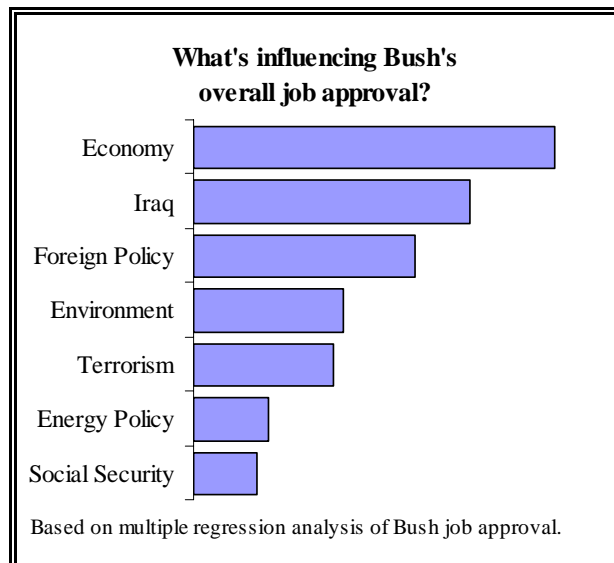
Americans are critical of President Bush’s job performance in many policy areas, but negative opinions of his handling of the economy and Iraq are doing the most damage to his overall approval rating, which now stands at 43%. Just 35% approve of the president’s handling of the economy, down from 43% in February and 45% in January.

	<u>Jan</u> %	<u>Feb</u> %	<u>May</u> %
Overall job	50	46	43
Terrorism	62	59	57
Environment	--	42	42
Foreign policy	48	43	38
Iraq	45	40	37
Economy	45	43	35
Energy policy	--	--	31
Social Security	--	29	29

With the level of violence rising in Iraq, Bush’s ratings also have slipped on that issue – from 45% in January, to 40% in February, and 37% currently. Over the same period, positive opinions of his handling of foreign policy have fallen 10 points, to 38%. There has been greater stability in Bush’s marks on energy policy and Social Security, but he gets positive ratings of only about 30% on both issues (energy policy 31%, Social Security 29%).

The latest national survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted May 11-15 among 1,502 Americans, shows that Bush gets positive marks from a majority of the public on just one issue – his handling of terrorist threats. Currently, 57% approve of his job performance in that area.

An analysis of opinions on Bush’s job performance shows that views of his handling of the economy are now the biggest factor influencing his overall rating, with Iraq nearly as important. Terrorism is less of a factor than either of these issues, although it may be preventing Bush’s overall rating from slipping further.



Negative opinions of Bush’s handling of Social Security outnumber positive ones by about a two-to-one margin (59%-29%), but this issue does not heavily influence Bush’s

overall job rating. However, Bush's association with a plan to limit the growth of Social Security benefits appears to undermine support for the concept.

Most Americans say they would support limiting the growth of benefits for wealthy and middle-income retirees, while keeping the current system intact for lower-income people. But support is significantly lower when the proposal is explicitly associated with Bush. By a 53% to 36% margin, Americans generally favor the idea of limiting benefit growth for wealthy and middle-income Americans, but when the same idea is preceded by the phrase "George W. Bush has proposed..." the public is divided (45% in favor, 43% opposed).

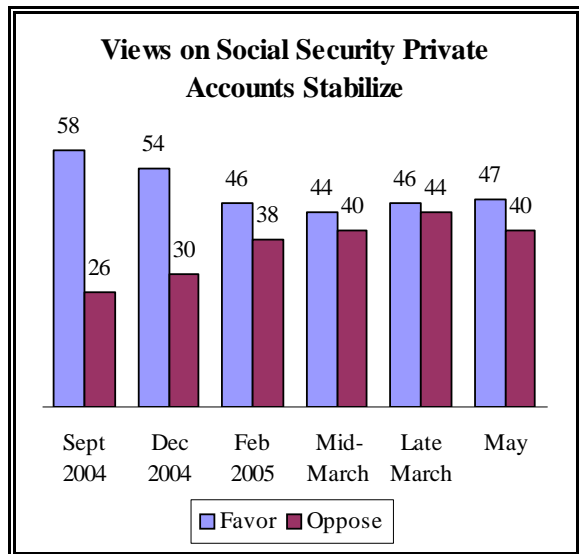
<b>Bush a Drag on Support for Social Security Indexing Plan</b>				
<i>Proposal described</i>	<i>Limit Future Benefits*</i>			
	<u>Total</u>	<u>Rep</u>	<u>Dem</u>	<u>Ind</u>
<i>without Bush's name</i>	%	%	%	%
Favor	53	47	54	55
Oppose	36	41	37	36
Don't know	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>9</u>
	100	100	100	100
<i>Described as Bush's proposal</i>				
Favor	45	62	34	43
Oppose	43	27	57	47
Don't know	<u>12</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>
	100	100	100	100
<b>Change in support</b>	<b>-8</b>	<b>+15</b>	<b>-20</b>	<b>-12</b>

\*Limit growth of future benefits for wealthy and middle-income retirees, but keep system as it is for lower-income retirees.

Without any mention of Bush, the proposal is slightly more popular among Democrats than Republicans. But when the proposal is attributed to Bush, Republican support is 15 points higher (62%), and Democratic support is 20 points lower (34%).

While partisanship is a large factor, Bush also faces problems on Social Security policy among political independents. Support among independents for limiting future benefit growth for wealthy and middle-income retirees drops 12 points, from 55% to 43%, when the proposal is attributed to the president.

Meanwhile, public support for adding private accounts to Social Security, which declined over the winter, has largely stabilized over the past three months. Since February, there has consistently been a slim plurality (currently 47%) in favor of the idea of allowing younger workers to invest a portion of their Social Security taxes in private retirement accounts, though



nearly as many (40%) are opposed. Bush's endorsement of this proposal is not mentioned in this survey question.

***Losing Ground***

On many key issues, from the budget deficit and Social Security to education and illegal drugs, more Americans think the country is losing ground than say it is making progress or holding its own. The exception is international terrorism; even here, only slightly more say the country is making progress than backsliding (36% vs. 31%).

Nearly two-thirds of Americans (65%) say the country is losing ground on the budget deficit, and nearly as many say the same about Social Security's finances (63%) and the health care system (62%). Majorities believe the country is losing ground on Medicare's finances (56%), the availability of good jobs (55%), and illegal immigration (52%), while half view the quality of education slipping.

Perceptions that the nation is losing ground in health care have grown sharply over the past decade or so. In 1994, about half of Americans (49%) thought the health care system was losing ground; currently, 62% say that. Opinions on the availability of good-paying jobs, which improved considerably from 1997-2001, have declined in recent years. Currently, 55% say the country is losing ground in this area; that is nearly as many as in 1994

<b>Country Losing Ground on Most Issues</b>				
	<u>Losing ground</u>	<u>About the same</u>	<u>Making progress</u>	<u>DK</u>
	%	%	%	%
Budget deficit	65	19	6	10=100
Social Security finances	63	25	6	6=100
Health care system	62	25	9	4=100
Medicare finances	56	26	5	13=100
Job availability	55	25	15	5=100
Illegal immigration	52	29	11	8=100
Quality of education	50	26	20	4=100
Illegal drugs	46	34	14	6=100
Political corruption	41	41	10	8=100
Environmental pollution	37	35	21	7=100
International terrorism	31	28	36	5=100

<b>Declining Views of Health Care System</b>				
	<u>Losing ground</u>	<u>About the same</u>	<u>Making progress</u>	<u>DK</u>
	%	%	%	%
<b><i>Health care system</i></b>				
May 2005	62	25	9	4=100
Mar. 2002	54	25	16	5=100
Feb. 2001	53	29	13	5=100
Nov. 1997	54	26	16	4=100
Mar. 1994	49	31	16	4=100
<b><i>Job availability</i></b>				
May 2005	55	25	15	5=100
Mar. 2002	51	22	21	6=100
Feb. 2001	36	26	33	5=100
Nov. 1997	37	28	31	4=100
Mar. 1994	63	23	10	4=100
<b><i>Budget deficit</i></b>				
May 2005	65	19	6	10=100
Nov. 1997	29	30	32	9=100
Mar. 1994	60	21	11	8=100
<b><i>Social Security</i></b>				
<b><i>Medicare</i></b>				
<i>For comparison...</i>				
S.S. & Medicare (one question) 12/96	65	21	10	4=100

(63%), before the late 1990s economic turnaround.

Not surprisingly, perceptions of the budget deficit have worsened considerably since 1997, when President Clinton and Congress reached an agreement to balance the budget. Currently, 65% say the country is losing ground on the budget deficit, more than double the number expressing that view in 1997 (29%).

***Immigration Cuts Against the Grain***

Democrats are decidedly more negative than Republicans in their perceptions of how the country is doing on most of these issues, with the biggest gaps over the availability of good-paying jobs and environmental pollution. Seven-in-ten Democrats say the nation is losing ground when it comes to good-paying jobs; just 37% of Republicans agree. And more than twice as many Democrats as Republicans feel the country is backsliding on environmental pollution (51% vs. 19%).

Yet in some cases – notably, on illegal drugs and the quality of education – the partisan differences are modest. Nearly half of Democrats (48%) say the country is losing ground on illegal drugs; a somewhat smaller plurality of Republicans (42%) agree. A narrow majority of Democrats (54%), and nearly half of Republicans (45%), say the quality of education has eroded.

On immigration, the partisan pattern is reversed; more Republicans than Democrats believe the country is losing ground on immigration (58% vs. 49%). The differences are most pronounced between those at either end of the political spectrum. Six-in-ten conservative Republicans (61%) think the country is losing ground on illegal immigration compared with just 38% of liberal Democrats.

There also is a wide generation gap in opinions on illegal immigration. Two-thirds of Americans ages 65 and older (66%) say the country is losing ground on illegal immigration, and nearly as many of

	<u>Losing ground</u> %	<u>About the same</u> %	<u>Making progress</u> %	<u>DK</u> %
Total	52	29	11	8=100
Republican	58	24	13	5=100
Independent	52	32	10	6=100
Democrat	49	32	9	10=100
Cons Rep	61	24	11	4=100
Mod/Lib Rep	53	24	16	7=100
Cons/Mod Dem	54	31	8	7=100
Lib Dem	38	39	11	12=100
18-29	40	33	17	10=100
30-49	47	32	12	9=100
50-64	61	29	6	4=100
65+	66	19	6	9=100

those ages 50-64 agree (61%). Young people are far less negative about illegal immigration. Just 40% of those under age 30 take a negative view of progress on illegal immigration.

### **ABOUT THE SURVEY**

Results for this survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International among a nationwide sample of 1,502 adults, 18 years of age or older, from May 11-15, 2005. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 3 percentage points. For results based on Form 1 (N=758) or Form 2 (N=744) only, the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 4 percentage points.

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**  
**MAY 2005 NEWS INTEREST INDEX**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**May 11-15, 2005**  
**N=1502**

Q.1 Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as president? **[IF DK ENTER AS DK. IF DEPENDS PROBE ONCE WITH: Overall do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as president? IF STILL DEPENDS ENTER AS DK]**

	<u>Approve</u>	Dis- approve	Don't <u>know</u>		<u>Approve</u>	Dis- approve	Don't <u>know</u>
May, 2005	43	50	7=100	<b>2002</b>			
Late March, 2005	49	46	5=100	December, 2002	61	28	11=100
Mid-March, 2005	45	46	9=100	Late October, 2002	59	29	12=100
February, 2005	46	47	7=100	Early October, 2002	61	30	9=100
January, 2005	50	43	7=100	Mid-September, 2002	67	22	11=100
<b>2004</b>				Early September, 2002	63	26	11=100
December, 2004	48	44	8=100	Late August, 2002	60	27	13=100
Mid-October, 2004	44	48	8=100	August, 2002	67	21	12=100
August, 2004	46	45	9=100	Late July, 2002	65	25	10=100
July, 2004	46	46	8=100	July, 2002	67	21	12=100
June, 2004	48	43	9=100	June, 2002	70	20	10=100
May, 2004	44	48	8=100	April, 2002	69	18	13=100
Late April, 2004	48	43	9=100	Early April, 2002	74	16	10=100
Early April, 2004	43	47	10=100	February, 2002	78	13	9=100
Late March, 2004	47	44	9=100	January, 2002	80	11	9=100
Mid-March, 2004	46	47	7=100	<b>2001</b>			
February, 2004	48	44	8=100	Mid-November, 2001	84	9	7=100
Mid-January, 2004	56	34	10=100	Early October, 2001	84	8	8=100
Early January, 2004	58	35	7=100	Late September, 2001	86	7	7=100
<b>2003</b>				Mid-September, 2001	80	9	11=100
December, 2003	57	34	9=100	Early September, 2001	51	34	15=100
November, 2003	50	40	10=100	August, 2001	50	32	18=100
October, 2003	50	42	8=100	July, 2001	51	32	17=100
September, 2003	55	36	9=100	June, 2001	50	33	17=100
Mid-August, 2003	56	32	12=100	May, 2001	53	32	15=100
Early August, 2003	53	37	10=100	April, 2001	56	27	17=100
Mid-July, 2003	58	32	10=100	March, 2001	55	25	20=100
Early July, 2003	60	29	11=100	February, 2001	53	21	26=100
June, 2003	62	27	11=100				
May, 2003	65	27	8=100				
April 10-16, 2003	72	22	6=100				
April 9, 2003	74	20	6=100				
April 2-7, 2003	69	25	6=100				
March 28-April 1, 2003	71	23	6=100				
March 25-27, 2003	70	24	6=100				
March 20-24, 2003	67	26	7=100				
March 13-16, 2003	55	34	11=100				
February, 2003	54	36	10=100				
January, 2003	58	32	10=100				

**QUESTIONS 2-6 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

**ASK FORM 2 [N=744]:**

Now thinking about George W. Bush...

Q.7F2 Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling [INSERT ITEM, RANDOMIZE]

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>DK/Ref.</u>
a.F2 The economy	35	57	8=100
February, 2005	43	50	7=100
January, 2005	45	50	5=100
Mid-October, 2004	38	55	7=100
Early September, 2004	44	49	7=100
August, 2004	42	52	6=100
July, 2004	42	52	6=100
June, 2004	43	50	7=100
Early April, 2004	39	53	8=100
Mid-January, 2004	47	47	6=100
September, 2003	43	48	9=100
February, 2003	43	48	9=100
January, 2003	47	45	8=100
Early October, 2002	49	40	11=100
June, 2002	53	36	11=100
January, 2002	60	28	12=100
Early September, 2001	47	44	9=100
February, 2001	50	22	28=100
b.F2 The situation in Iraq	37	56	7=100
February, 2005	40	53	7=100
January, 2005	45	50	5=100
Mid-October, 2004	37	56	7=100
Early September, 2004	47	45	8=100
August, 2004	43	52	5=100
July, 2004	42	53	5=100
June, 2004	42	51	7=100
Late April, 2004	44	48	8=100
Early April, 2004	40	53	7=100
Mid-January, 2004	59	37	4=100
September, 2003	52	40	8=100
April 10-16, 2003 <sup>1</sup>	77	17	6=100
April 8-9, 2003	71	23	6=100
--April 9, 2003	76	18	6=100
--April 8, 2003	65	28	7=100
April 2-7, 2003	73	21	6=100
March 28-April 1, 2003	69	26	5=100
March 25-27, 2003	73	23	4=100
March 23-24, 2003	72	22	6=100
March 20-22, 2003	70	23	7=100
February, 2003	56	37	7=100
January, 2003	56	36	8=100
Early October, 2002	56	34	10=100

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<sup>1</sup> From March to April 2003 the item was worded: "... dealing with the war in Iraq?" The 1991 Gallup trend was worded "...George Bush is handling the situation in the Persian Gulf region."



Q.7F2 CONTINUED...		<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>DK/Ref.</u>
c.F2	Terrorist threats	57	35	8=100
	February, 2005	59	34	7=100
	January, 2005	62	33	5=100
	Mid-October, 2004	49	40	11=100
	Early September, 2004	62	32	6=100
	August, 2004	58	37	5=100
	July, 2004	54	40	6=100
	June, 2004	56	35	9=100
	Late April, 2004	55	36	9=100
	Early April, 2004	53	38	9=100
	<i>Gallup</i> : December, 2003	65	33	2=100
	September, 2003	64	28	8=100
	February, 2003	67	25	8=100
	January, 2003	69	23	8=100
	Early October, 2002	71	22	7=100
	June, 2002	74	18	8=100
	Mid-September, 2001 <sup>2</sup>	85	6	9=100
	<b>Clinton</b> : Early September, 1998	72	20	8=100
d.F2	The nation's foreign policy	38	46	16=100
	February, 2005	43	46	11=100
	January, 2005	48	43	9=100
	Mid-October, 2004	37	49	14=100
	Early September, 2004	47	42	11=100
	August, 2004	42	49	9=100
	July, 2004	40	48	12=100
	Mid-January, 2004	53	36	11=100
	March, 2003	53	36	11=100
	Early April, 2002	69	20	11=100
	<i>Gallup</i> : October, 2001	81	14	5=100
	Early September, 2001	46	34	20=100
	August, 2001 <sup>3</sup>	45	32	23=100
	<b>Clinton</b> : September, 1997	54	34	12=100
	<b>Bush, Sr</b> : May, 1990	58	30	12=100
e.F2	The environment	42	43	15=100
	February, 2005	42	43	15=100
	<i>Gallup</i> : January, 2003	53	37	10=100
	June, 2002	50	38	12=100
	Early September, 2001	42	42	16=100
	<b>Bush, Sr</b> : May, 1990	44	45	11=100
f.F2	Energy policy	31	49	20=100
	Early April, 2004	29	48	23=100
	<i>Gallup</i> : August, 2003	47	44	9=100

<sup>2</sup> In Mid-September, 2001 the question was worded: "...dealing with the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington." In Early September 1998 the question was worded: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bill Clinton is handling current threats from international terrorist groups?"

<sup>3</sup> In August 2001 roughly half of the U.S. sample was asked about Bush's handling of international policy, while the other half was asked about the handling of the nation's foreign policy. Results did not differ between question wordings.

Q.7 CONTINUED...	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>DK/Ref.</u>
June, 2002	41	39	20=100
CBS News: August, 2001	43	42	15=100
g.F2 Social Security	29	59	12=100
February, 2005	29	55	16=100
June, 2002	36	42	22=100
Gallup: March, 2002	47	40	13=100
Gallup: March, 2001	49	31	20=100

### QUESTIONS 8-11 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

#### ASK ALL:

Q.12 Next, as I read you some problem areas, please tell me how you think each is affecting this country today. (First,) do you think the problem of [INSERT ITEM, RANDOMIZE] is ABOUT THE SAME as it has been, that the country is MAKING PROGRESS in this area, or that the country is LOSING GROUND?

		<u>Making Progress</u>	<u>About The Same</u>	<u>Losing Ground</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
a.	The way the health care system is working	9	25	62	4=100
	March, 2002	16	25	54	5=100
	February, 2001	13	29	53	5=100
	November, 1997	16	26	54	4=100
	December, 1996	20	25	52	3=100
	April, 1995	14	30	53	3=100
	March, 1994	16	31	49	4=100
b.	Political corruption	10	41	41	8=100
	March, 2002	15	43	34	8=100
	November, 1997	9	38	47	6=100
	December, 1996	12	36	49	3=100
	April, 1995	12	41	44	3=100
	March, 1994	12	39	46	3=100
c.	International terrorism	36	28	31	5=100
	March, 2002	40	14	40	6=100
	April, 1995	19	40	36	5=100
	March, 1994	18	24	53	5=100
d.	The availability of good-paying jobs	15	25	55	5=100
	March, 2002	21	22	51	6=100
	February, 2001	33	26	36	5=100
	November, 1997	31	28	37	4=100
	December, 1996	19	26	51	4=100
	April, 1995	17	24	55	4=100
	March, 1994	10	23	63	4=100
e.	The quality of public education	20	26	50	4=100
	March, 2002	27	22	45	6=100
	February, 2001	23	20	53	4=100
	November, 1997	26	26	46	2=100

**Q.12 CONTINUED...**

		<u>Making Progress</u>	<u>About The Same</u>	<u>Losing Ground</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
	December, 1996	24	22	52	2=100
	April, 1995	18	20	60	2=100
	March, 1994	17	19	61	3=100
f.	Environmental pollution	21	35	37	7=100
	November, 1997	38	32	27	3=100
	December, 1996	42	26	30	2=100
	April, 1995	43	26	30	1=100
	March, 1994	37	26	34	3=100
	March, 1989	32	20	42	6=100
g.	Illegal drugs	14	34	46	6=100
	February, 2001 <sup>4</sup>	13	29	54	4=100
	November, 1997	15	25	58	2=100
	December, 1996	13	21	64	2=100
	April, 1995	10	22	66	2=100
	March, 1994	13	22	62	3=100
	March, 1989	17	12	69	2=100
h.	Illegal immigration	11	29	52	8=100
	November, 1997	13	29	48	10=100
	December, 1996	15	32	47	6=100
	April, 1995	9	23	62	6=100
	March, 1994	9	22	58	11=100
i.	The federal budget deficit	6	19	65	10=100
	November, 1997	32	30	29	9=100
	December, 1996	23	24	48	5=100
	April 1995	15	21	60	4=100
	March 1994	11	21	60	8=100
	March 1989	16	27	56	7=100
j.	The financial condition of Social Security	6	25	63	6=100
k.	The financial condition of Medicare	5	26	56	13=100
<b>TREND FOR COMPARISON – December, 1996</b>					
	The financial soundness of Social Security and Medicare	10	21	65	4=100

**QUESTIONS 13-20 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

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<sup>4</sup> In February 2001 and earlier the item was listed as “drugs.”

Q.21 How much, if anything, have you heard about a proposal that would allow younger workers to invest a portion of their Social Security taxes in private retirement accounts, which might include stocks or mutual funds — have you heard a lot, a little or nothing at all?

		Late March <u>2005</u>	Mid- March <u>2005</u>	Feb <u>2005</u>	Dec <u>2004</u>	Early <sup>5</sup> Sept <u>2004</u>	(RVs) Sept <u>2000</u>
42	A lot	48	46	43	23	19	26
39	A little	41	32	35	43	41	43
19	Nothing at all	11	22	21	33	39	30
*	Don't know/Refused	*	*	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
100		100	100	100	100	100	100

Q.22 Generally, do you favor or oppose this proposal?

		Late March <u>2005</u>	Mid- March <u>2005</u>	Feb <u>2005</u>	Dec <u>2004</u>	Early Sept <u>2004</u>	(RVs) Sept <u>2000</u>
47	Favor	46	44	46	54	58	70
40	Oppose	44	40	38	30	26	21
<u>13</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>10</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>9</u>
100		100	100	100	100	100	100

**IF 'FAVOR' (1 IN Q.22) ASK:**

Q.23FAV Do you feel strongly about this, or do you think you could change your mind?

		Mid-March <u>2005</u>	Feb <u>2005</u>
25	Feel strongly / won't change mind	24	24
22	Could change mind / don't feel strongly	19	21
*	Don't know/Refused	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
47%		44%	46%

**IF 'OPPOSE' (2 IN Q.22):**

Q.23OPP Do you feel strongly about this, or do you think you could change your mind?

		Mid-March <u>2005</u>	Feb <u>2005</u>
27	Feel strongly / won't change mind	28	26
12	Could change mind / don't feel strongly	11	12
<u>1</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>1</u>	*
40%		40%	38%

<sup>5</sup> In Early September 2004 and 2000 the question was worded: "... portion of their payroll taxes in private retirement accounts, which might include stocks or mutual funds, rather than having all of it go toward Social Security."

**ASK FORM 1 [N=758]:**

Q.24F1 One proposal for dealing with Social Security's financial situation is to keep the system as it is now for lower income retirees, but limit the growth of future benefits for wealthy and middle income retirees. Would you favor or oppose this proposal?

53	Favor
36	Oppose
<u>11</u>	Don't know/Refused
100	

**ASK FORM 2 [N=744]:**

Q.24F2 George W. Bush has proposed dealing with Social Security's financial situation by keeping the system as it is now for lower income retirees, but limiting the growth of future benefits for wealthy and middle income retirees. Would you favor or oppose this proposal?

45	Favor
43	Oppose
<u>12</u>	Don't know/Refused
100	