



Colorado Voters' Attitudes Toward Social Security

Findings from a Survey of 502 Likely 2012
Voters in Colorado

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

May 26, 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 6-9, 2011. The survey reached a total of 502 likely voters in Colorado.
- 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 age, education and race to reflect the attributes of the actual population. The margin of error for the survey is +/- 4.4 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 elections for Congress and President in Colorado, especially among independent and undecided voters.** Voters adamantly oppose cutting Social Security to deal with the deficit. Social Security could be a real wedge issue in the 2012 elections.
- As we have seen nationally, **Colorado 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.
- **Colorado voters, across party lines, strongly oppose cutting Social Security benefits in order to reduce the federal deficit (71 percent oppose; 66 percent strongly oppose).** Swing voters in Colorado feel strongly on this measure: 76 percent of voters who are undecided on who they will vote for on the 2012 generic Congressional ballot are opposed to cutting Social Security benefits to reduce the deficit (68 percent strongly opposed) and 69 percent of independents are opposed (65 percent strongly opposed). Additionally, majorities of Democrats (83 percent) and Republicans (61 percent) oppose cutting benefits. Opposition to cutting benefits for deficit reduction is also cross-generational (66 percent of voters under age 40 oppose cutting benefits; 71 percent aged 40-49; 72 percent aged 50-64; and 75 percent aged 65 and older).
- **This has electoral impacts: Over six in ten Colorado voters say they would be less likely to vote for a Congressional candidate who supports cutting benefits to reduce the deficit.** Three-quarters of Democrats and 59 percent of independents would be less likely to support such a candidate. This issue also has the potential to swing undecided voters: 64 percent of those who are undecided in the generic 2012 Congressional ballot indicate they would be less likely to vote for a candidate who supports cutting Social Security benefits to reduce the deficit.
- In an engaged debate seven in ten Colorado voters agree with the Representative 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 Representative who calls for cutting Social Security to avoid burdening future generations with debt. This view is strong among swing voters, with 71 percent of undecided voters and 61 percent of independents siding with the Representative who calls for protecting Social Security because it belongs to the people, rather than siding with the Representative who makes the argument that we must cut Social Security to avoid burdening future generations with debt.

Key Findings

- Majorities of Colorado voters oppose three specific proposals that would cut Social Security benefits by: Raising the retirement age (56 percent oppose; 48 percent strongly oppose), changing the COLA formula in a way that reduces the amount beneficiaries receive (59 percent oppose; 50 percent strongly oppose), and reducing benefits for people earning above \$60,000 (62 percent oppose; 48 percent strongly oppose).
- There is strong bipartisan support among Colorado voters for lifting the cap to impose Social Security taxes on all wages above \$106,800 (67 percent support) and requiring both employees and employers to pay (78 percent of Democrats support; 58 percent of independents; 64 percent of Republicans; and 64 percent of Tea Party supporters). Nearly six in ten undecided voters favor this proposal (59 percent favor; 54 percent strongly favor). Further, over half of Colorado voters say they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports requiring employees and employers to pay Social Security taxes on all wages above \$106,800. This includes 51 percent of voters who are undecided in the generic 2012 Congressional ballot.
- Nearly six in 10 Colorado voters (57 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, including 76 percent of Democrats, 56 percent of independents, and 58 percent of voters undecided in the 2010 Congressional elections.
- Democratic politicians no longer have the advantage they have traditionally enjoyed on Social Security among voters. Colorado voters believe Republicans in Congress will handle Social Security better than their Democratic counterparts by a margin of four points, and better than President Obama by a margin of five points. Congressional Republicans have a four-point lead over President Obama among Colorado voters who are currently undecided about who they will vote for on the generic ballot for U.S. House of Representatives.



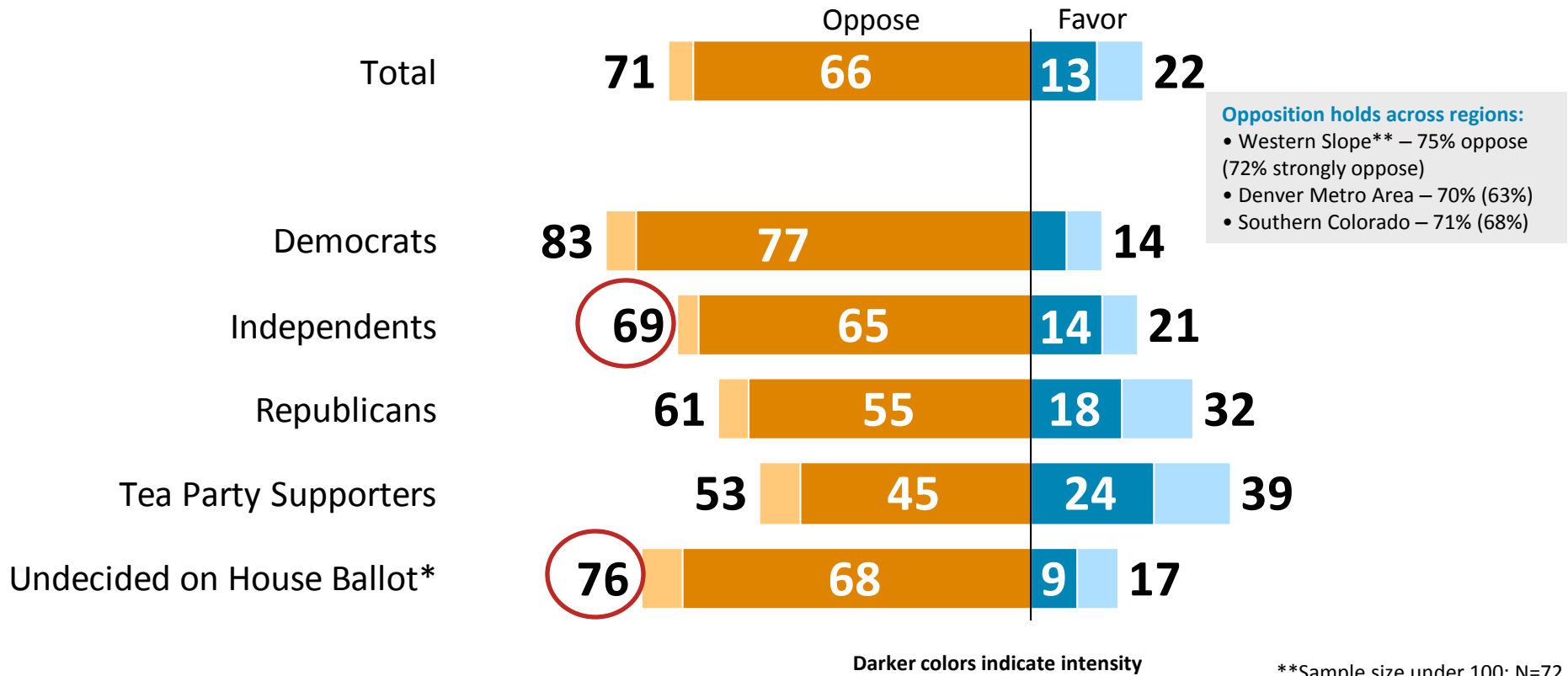
Reactions to Cutting Social Security Benefits in Order to Reduce the Deficit

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



Seven in ten Colorado 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 especially among independents and those currently undecided on who they will vote for in the generic Congressional ballot for 2012.

Cutting Social Security Benefits to Reduce the Federal Deficit



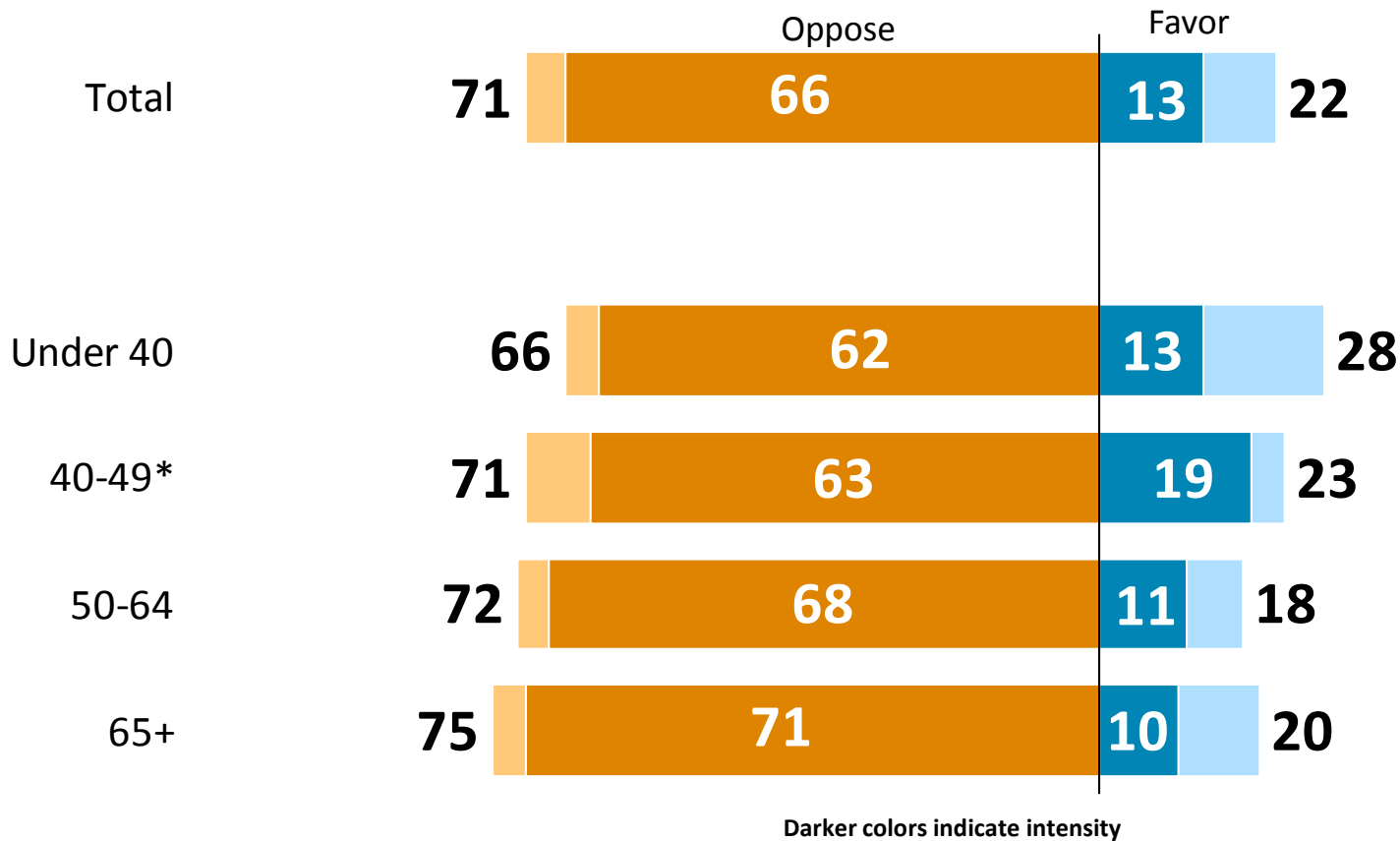
*Respondents who say they are “Undecided” when asked for whom they will vote in the 2012 elections for U.S. House of Representatives.

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 Colorado voters 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, including 64 percent of veteran/military households in Colorado.

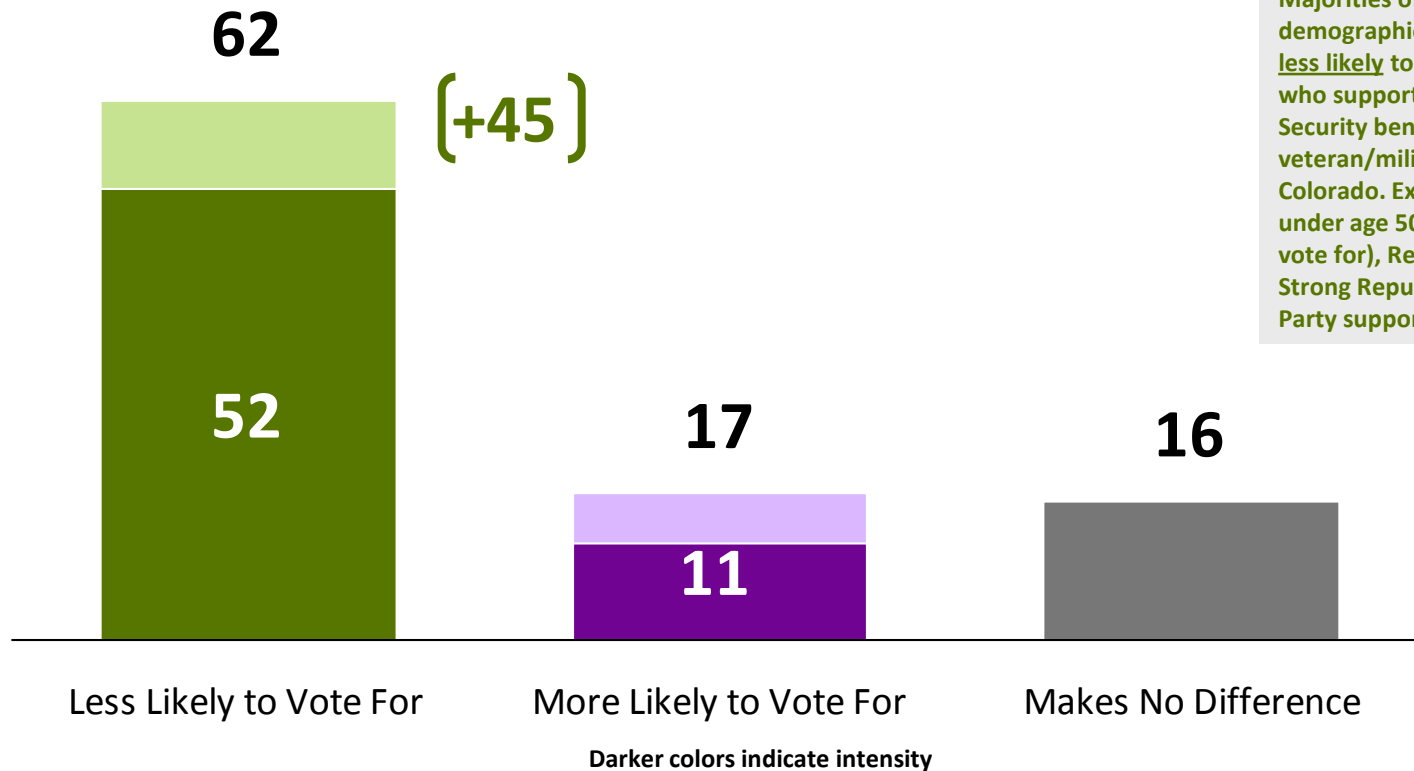
*Sample size under 100 (For under age 40-49: N=82)

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?]



Over six in ten Colorado voters say they would be less likely to vote for a candidate who supports cutting Social Security benefits in order to reduce the federal deficit. Over half would be much less likely to vote for such a candidate.

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

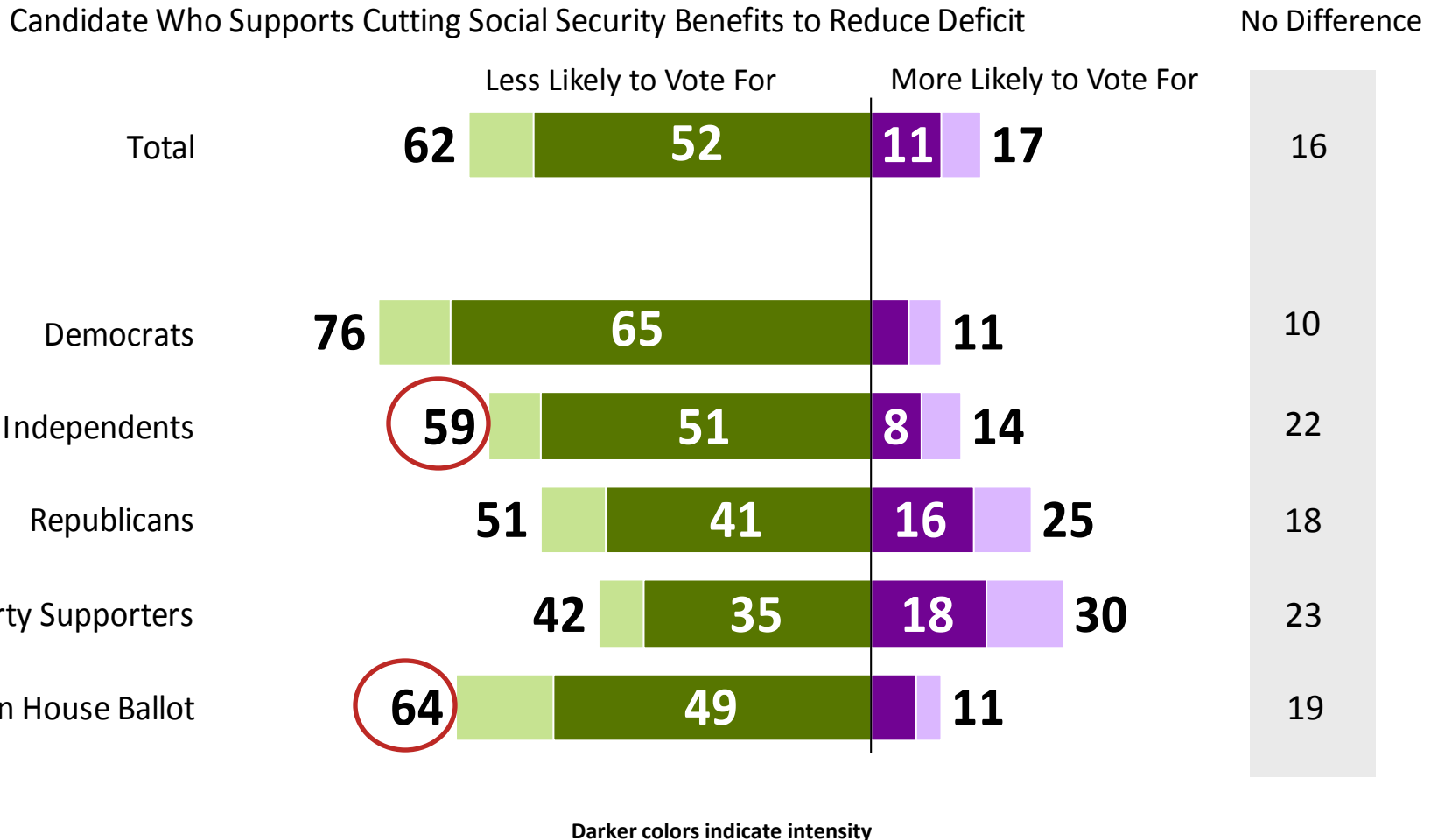


Majorities of nearly all demographic subgroups would be less likely to vote for a candidate who supports cutting Social Security benefits, including 54% of veteran/military households in Colorado. Exceptions include men under age 50 (46% less likely to vote for), Republican men (45%), Strong Republicans (48%) and Tea Party supporters (42%).

And, please tell me, would you be more or less likely to vote for a candidate for Congress 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?]



Three-quarters of Colorado Democrats say they would be less likely to vote for a candidate if he or she supported cutting Social Security benefits in order to reduce the federal deficit. Six in ten independent voters and voters who are undecided in the generic 2012 Congressional ballot are less likely to vote for such a candidate.

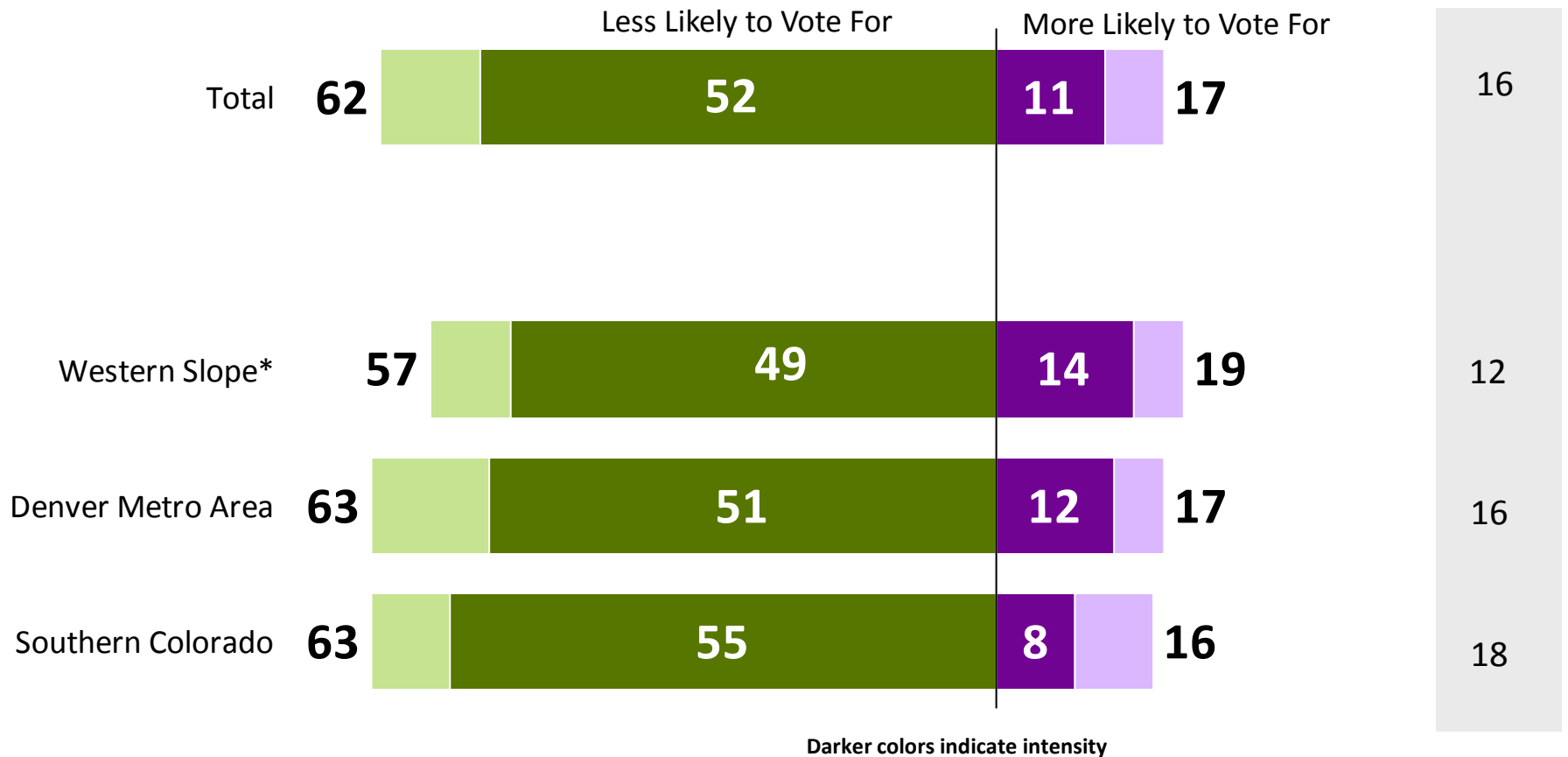




Across all regions of Colorado, at least half of voters would be much less likely to vote for a candidate who would cut benefits in order to reduce the federal deficit.

Candidate Who Supports Cutting Social Security Benefits to Reduce Deficit

No Difference



*Sample size under 100; N=72

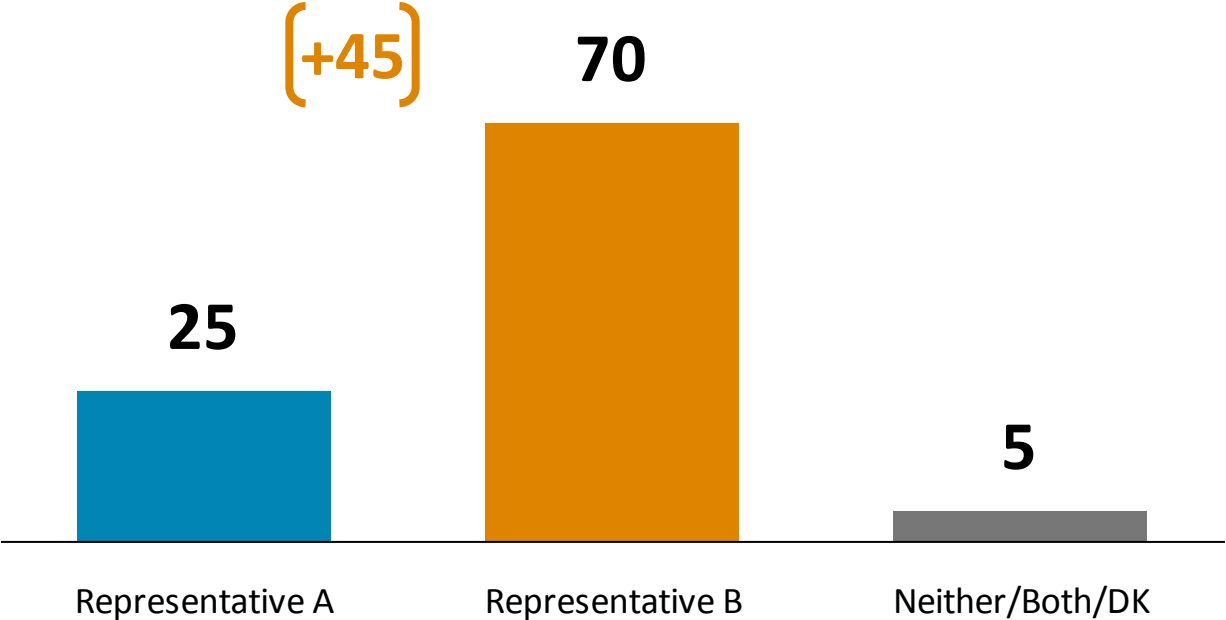
And, please tell me, would you be more or less likely to vote for a candidate for Congress who supports cutting Social Security benefits in order to reduce the federal deficit, or would it make no difference to you? [IF MORE/LESS: Is that MUCH MORE/LESS or SOMEWHAT MORE/LESS?]

In an engaged debate seven in ten Colorado voters agree with the Representative 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 Representative 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 you two statements that might be made by a U.S. Member of Congress in your state. Which one comes closer to your point of view?

Representative 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.

Representative 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.



*Split Sampled question

Seven in ten undecided voters and six in ten independent voters in Colorado side with the Representative 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 you two statements that might be made by a U.S. Member of Congress in your state. Which one comes closer to your point of view?

Representative 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.

Representative 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 Rep. A	Side with Rep. B	Rep. B Advantage#
Total	25%	70%	+45
Democrats	17%	79%	+62
Independents**	30%	61%	+31
Republicans	29%	67%	+39
Tea Party Supporters**	38%	58%	+20
Undecided on House ballot**	21%	71%	+51

Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding

*Split Sampled question

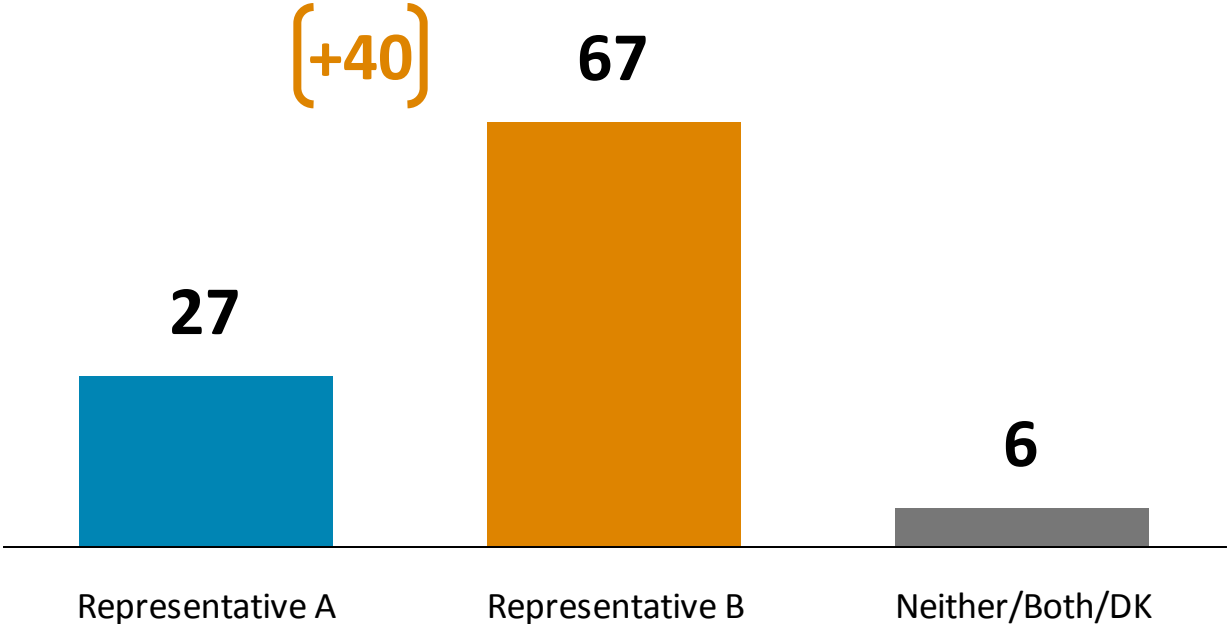
**Sample size less than 100 (For Democrats N=84; Independents N=60; Tea Party Supporters N=81; For Undecideds N=76)

Colorado voters are also much more likely to agree with a Representative who says Social Security is a promise that should be kept for current and future generations, over a Representative 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 you two statements that might be made by a U.S. Member of Congress in your state. Which one comes closer to your point of view?

Representative 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.

Representative 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

Two-thirds of independents and three-quarters of undecided Colorado voters side with the Representative who argues for protecting the promise of Social Security for current and future generations, rather than the Representative who espouses cutting Social Security to address the deficit.

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

Representative 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.

Representative 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 Rep. A	Side with Rep. B	Rep. B Advantage [#]
Total	27%	67%	+40
Democrats	13%	83%	+70
Independents**	23%	66%	+42
Republicans	42%	53%	+12
Tea Party Supporters**	49%	45%	-4
Undecided on House ballot**	15%	74%	+59

[#] Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding

*Split Sampled question

**Sample size less than 100 (For Democrats N=92; Independents N=64; Tea Party Supporters N=64; For Undecideds N=73)



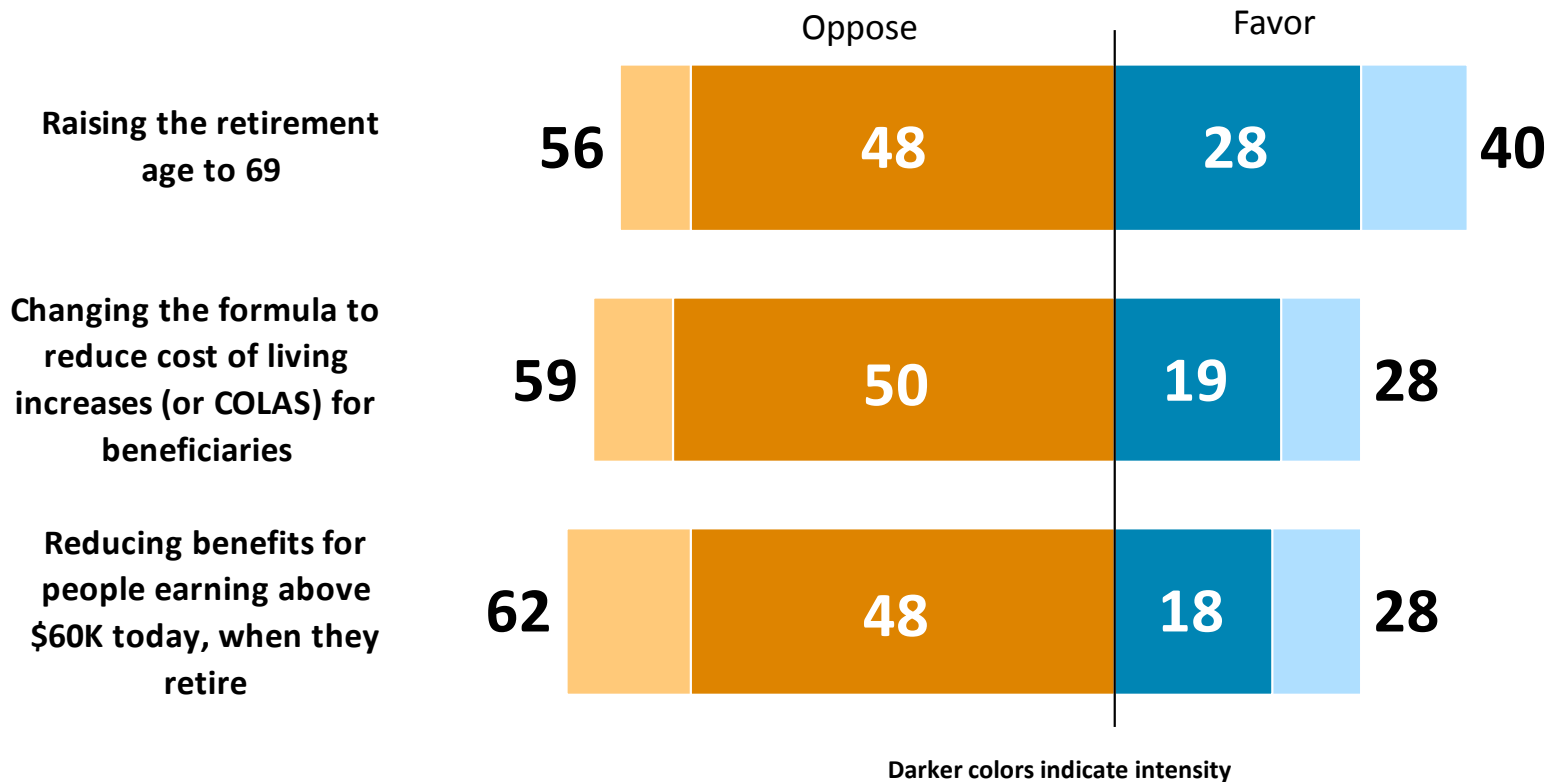
Reactions to Specific Cuts to Social Security Benefits

A majority of Colorado voters oppose 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.



Majorities of Colorado 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: 60% of non-college educated voters oppose raising the retirement age (53% strongly). Fifty-two percent of college-educated voters are opposed (43% 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 on the generic 2012 U.S. Congressional ballot and independent voters are against these specific benefit cuts. Opposition holds across nearly all political affiliations.

<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	56% (48%)	59% (50%)	62% (48%)
Democrats	63% (55%)	65% (55%)	63% (49%)
Independents	55% (49%)	57% (49%)	64% (49%)
Republicans	49% (39%)	54% (47%)	59% (47%)
Tea Party Supporters	47% (37%)	56% (50%)	59% (49%)
Undecided on House ballot	53% (47%)	58% (47%)	64% (46%)
Under age 40	64% (59%)	53% (44%)	60% (47%)
40-49	61% (52%)	61% (48%)	64% (46%)
50-64	54% (46%)	63% (57%)	67% (54%)
65+	41% (30%)	58% (51%)	52% (43%)

Majorities of voters across Colorado's regions oppose these three proposals.

<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	56% (48%)	59% (50%)	62% (48%)
Western Slope*	65% (57%)	65% (63%)	62% (48%)
Denver Metro Area	54% (47%)	56% (47%)	63% (48%)
Southern Colorado	54% (45%)	60% (51%)	60% (48%)

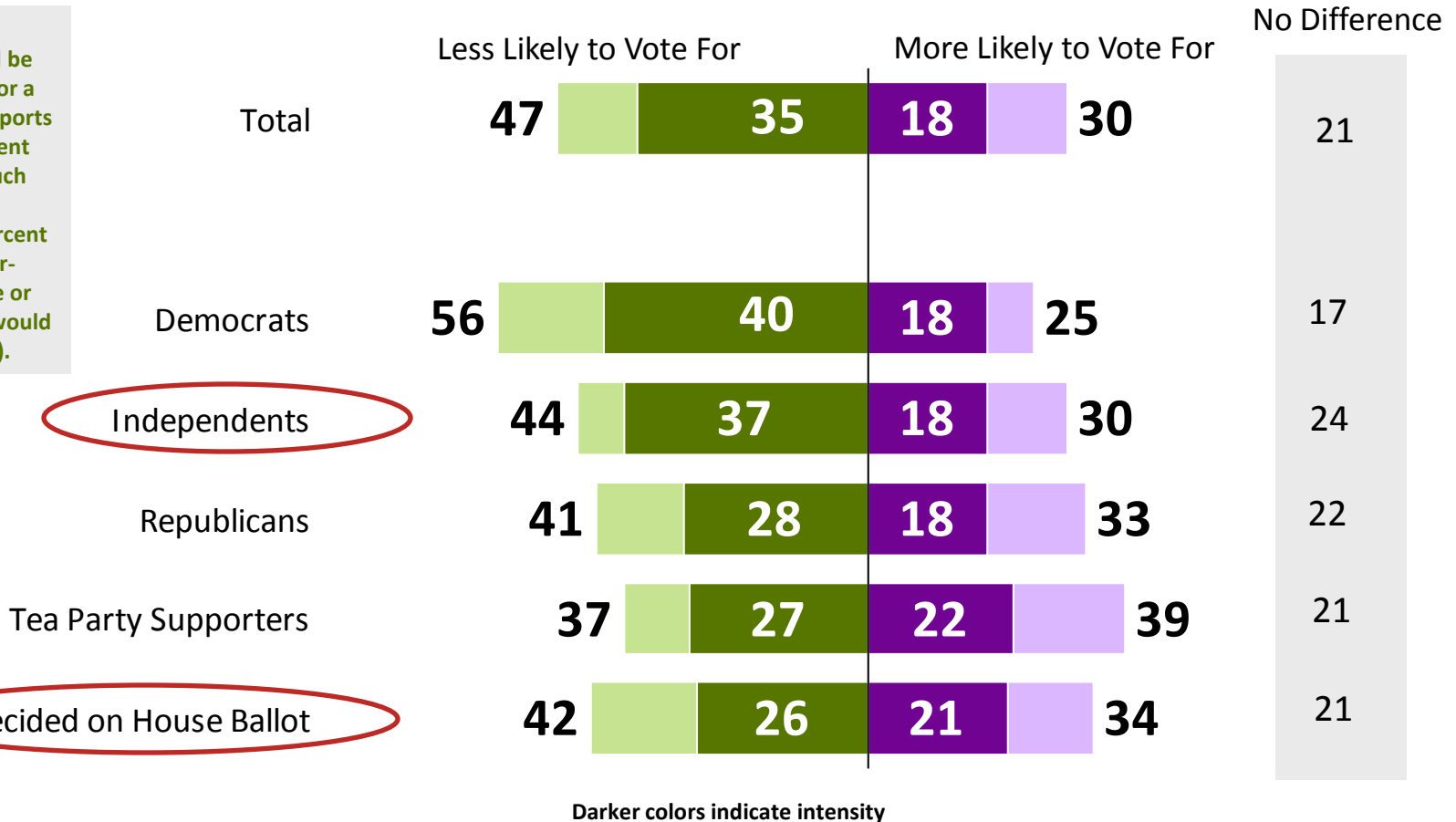
*Sample size under 100; N=72



Democrats, independents and undecided voters would be more likely to vote against, rather than for, a candidate who would support raising the retirement age. This is also especially unpopular among blue-collar voters.

Candidate Who Supports Raising the Retirement Age to 69

51 percent of blue-collar voters would be less likely to vote for a candidate who supports raising the retirement age (38 percent much less likely). This compares to 43 percent of those with a four-year college degree or more (31 percent would be much less likely).





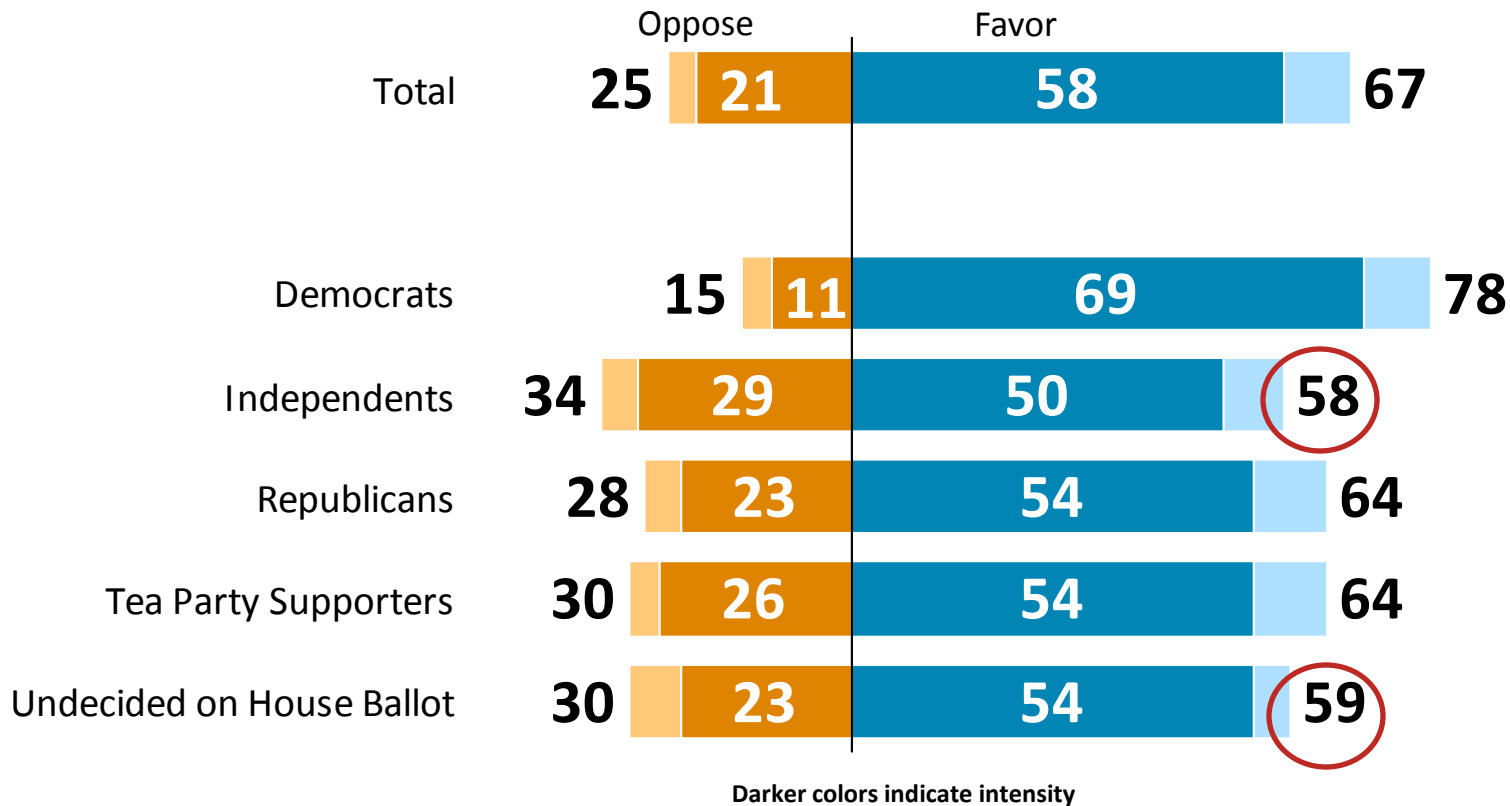
Attitudes Toward Imposing Social Security Taxes on Wages Above \$106,800 & Other Revenue Proposals

Two-thirds of Colorado voters favor a proposal to gradually require employees and employers to pay Social Security taxes on all wages above \$106,800, and over half would be more likely to vote for a Congressional candidate who supports this proposal.



Two-thirds of Colorado voters favor, and a majority strongly favors, gradually requiring employees and employers to pay Social Security taxes on all wages above \$106,800, which they do not currently do. Around six in ten voters across every political affiliation favor this proposal.

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

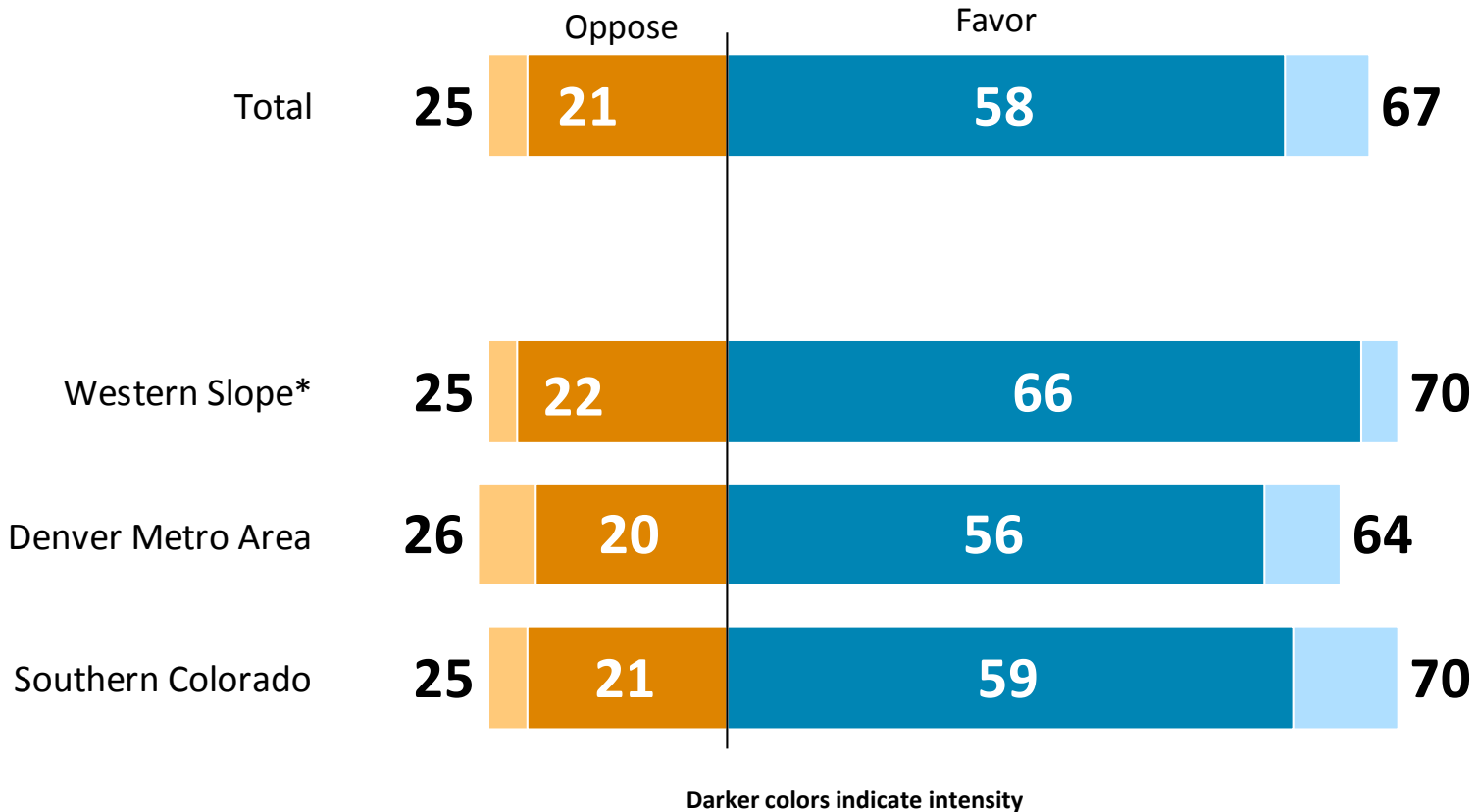


Here are some changes people are proposing to help make Social Security more solvent. Please tell me if you would favor or oppose each of the following proposals to make Social Security more solvent [IF FAVOR/OPPOSE: Is that strongly or not so strongly?] Q. Gradually requiring employees and employers 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 six in ten 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, including 76% of veteran/military households in Colorado.

*Sample size under 100; N=72

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.

Seven in ten voters—including nearly nine in ten Democrats and six in ten independents and Republicans—agree with the Representative 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.

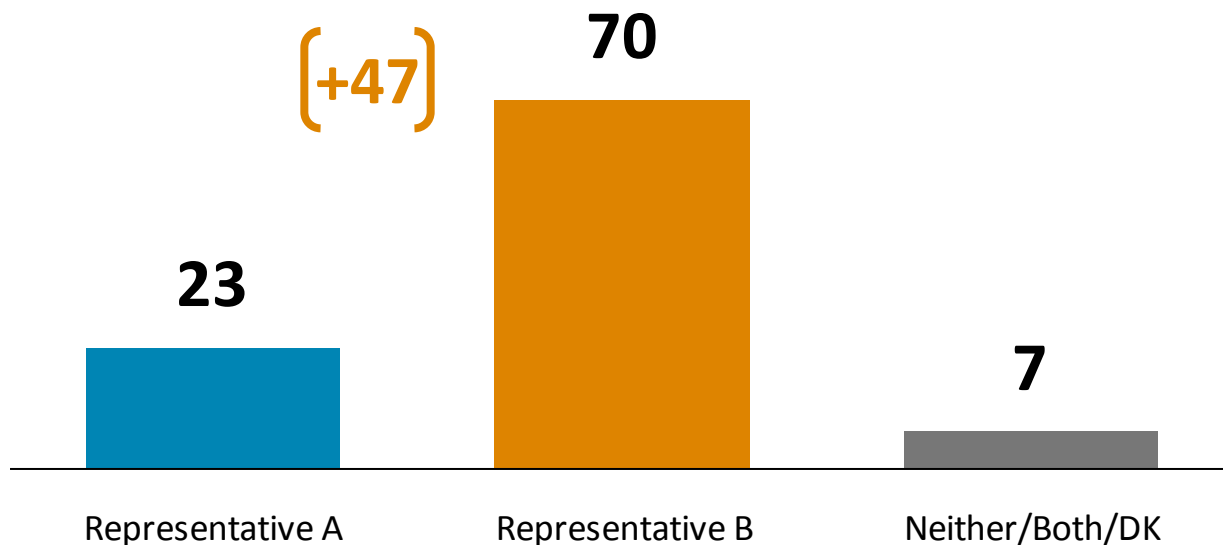
* Now I am going to read you two statements that might be made by a U.S. Member of Congress in your state. Which one comes closer to your point of view?

Representative 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.

Representative 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 Representative 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 voters.

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

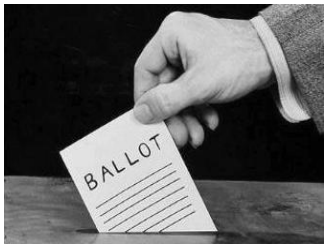
Representative A

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.

Representative 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 Rep. A	Side with Rep. B	Rep. B Advantage
Total	23%	70%	+47
Democrats	10%	87%	+77
Independents	24%	63%	+39
Republicans	34%	58%	+24
Tea Party Supporters	39%	52%	+13
Undecided on House Ballot	15%	75%	+60
Under age 40	22%	72%	+50
40-49	30%	58%	+28
50-64	22%	74%	+52
65+	18%	73%	+55



Over half of Colorado voters say they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports requiring employees and employers to pay Social Security taxes on all wages above \$106,800. By a wide margin undecided voters also say they would be more likely to vote for such a candidate.

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

No Difference

Less Likely to Vote For

More Likely to Vote For

Total **23** **18** **37** **53**

Democrats **21** **14** **48** **62**

Independents **26** **21** **23** **41**

Republicans **23** **18** **34** **53**

Tea Party Supporters **26** **21** **34** **52**

Undecided on House Ballot **23** **15** **32** **51**

19

14

28

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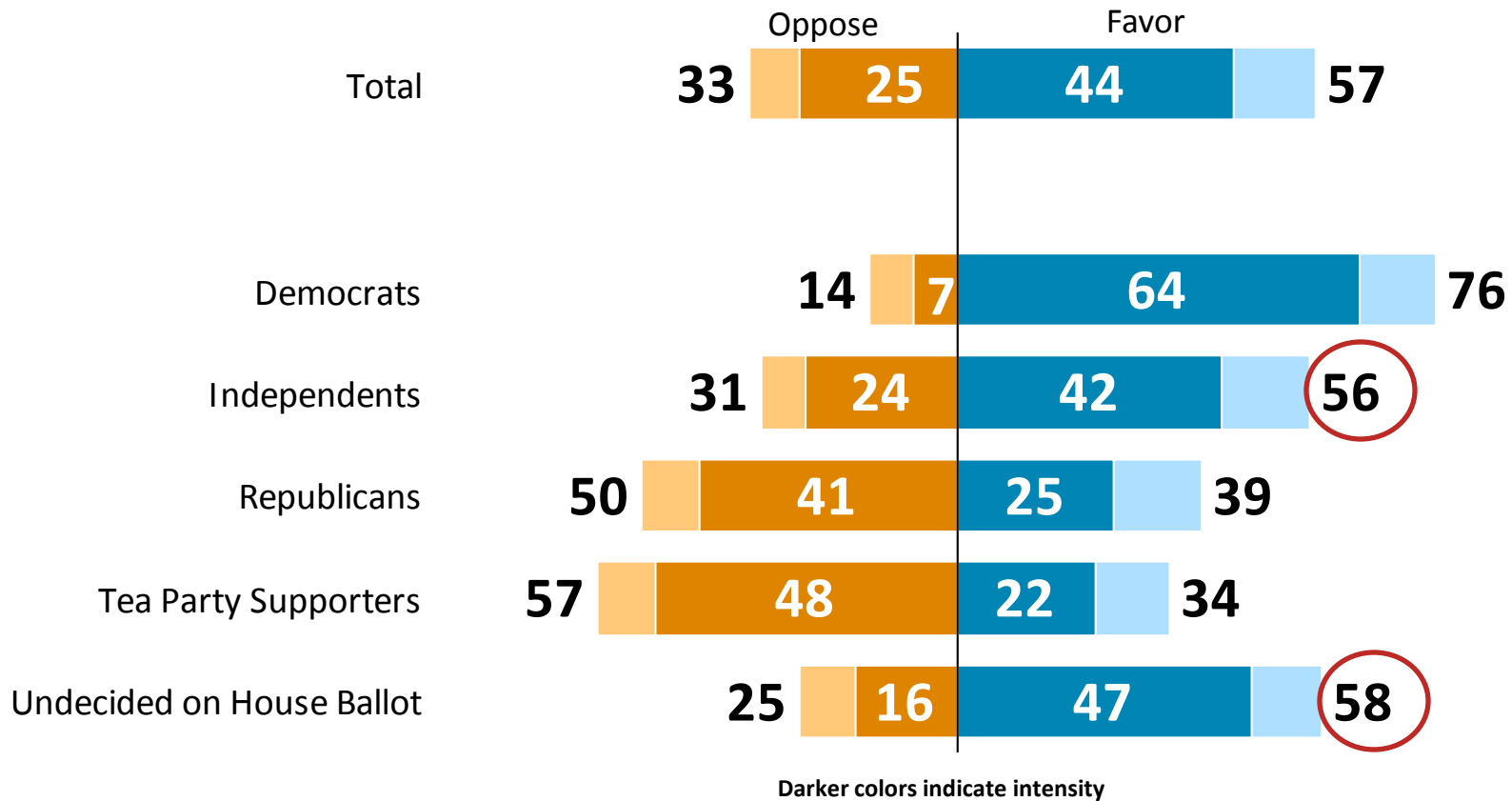
Darker colors indicate intensity

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 Congress, 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 requiring employees and employers to pay Social Security taxes on all wages above \$106,800.



A majority of Colorado 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.

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?]

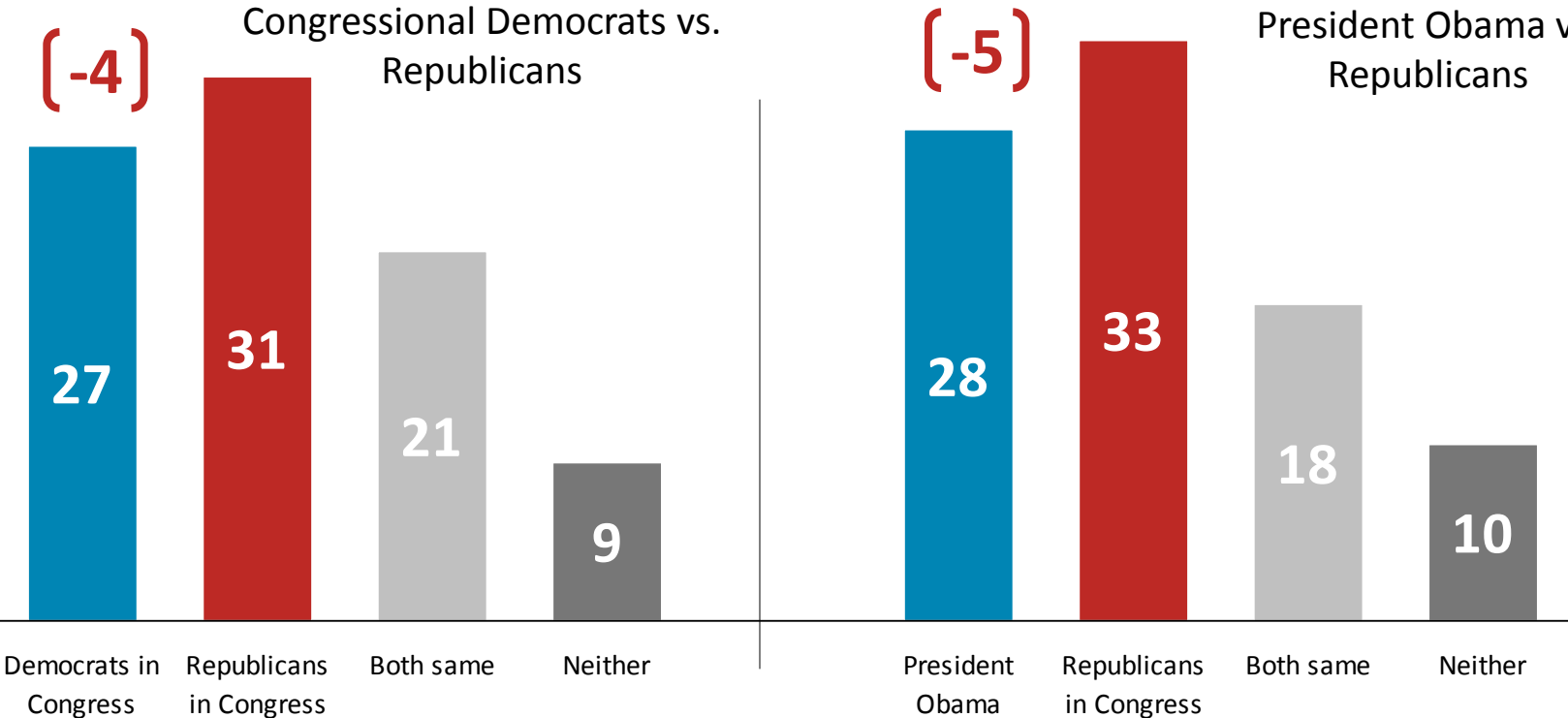


Political Leadership on Social Security

Democrats no longer enjoy their traditional advantage when it comes to which political party would better handle the issue of Social Security. Republicans in Congress beat Democrats in Congress and President Obama among all voters on who they feel will handle Social Security better, while independent voters evenly divide.

Colorado 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

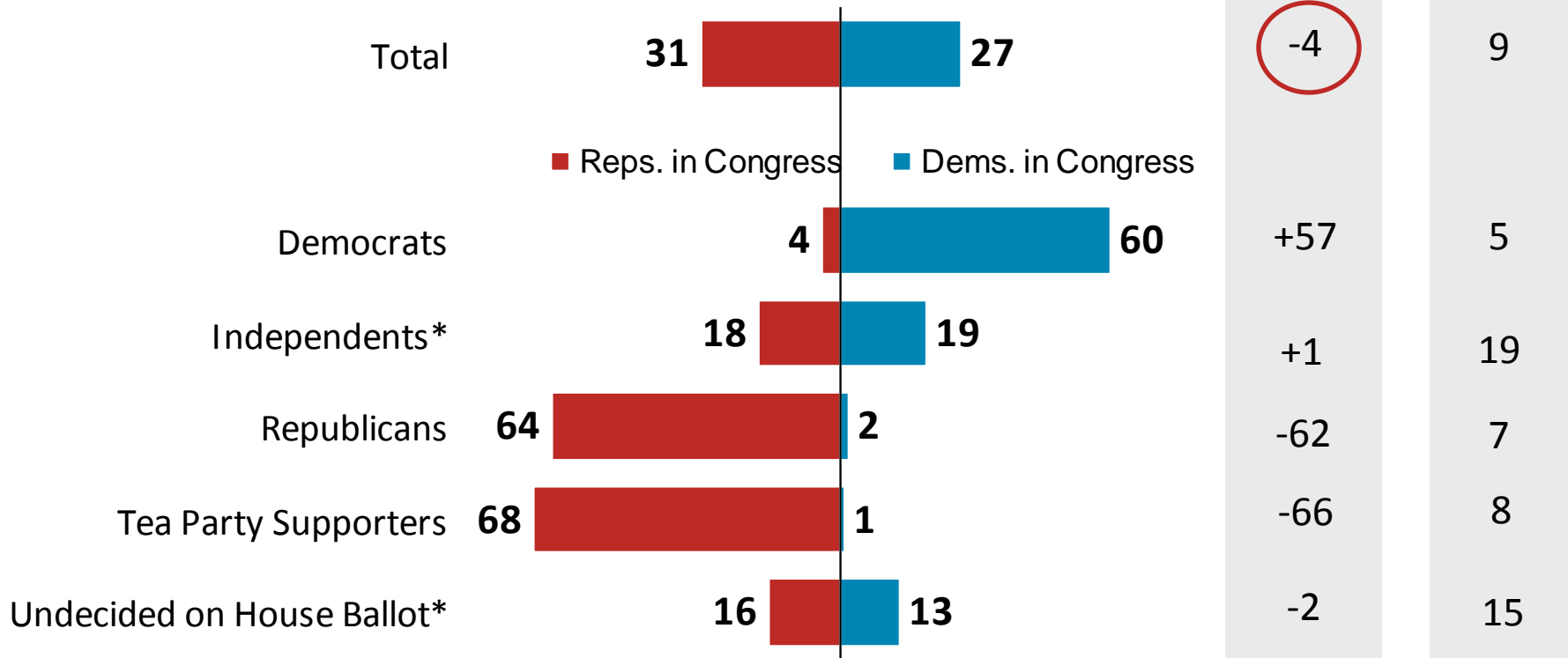


Who do you think will better handle the issue of Social Security: [ROTATE: _ the Republicans in Congress, _ the Democrats in Congress], or are they both about the same? Who do you think will better handle the issue of Social Security: [ROTATE: _ the Republicans in Congress, _ President Obama], or are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



Those Colorado voters who are undecided on who they will vote for Congress in 2012 give Congressional Republicans a slight advantage over their Democratic counterparts on handling Social Security.

Who will Better Handle Social Security



Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding

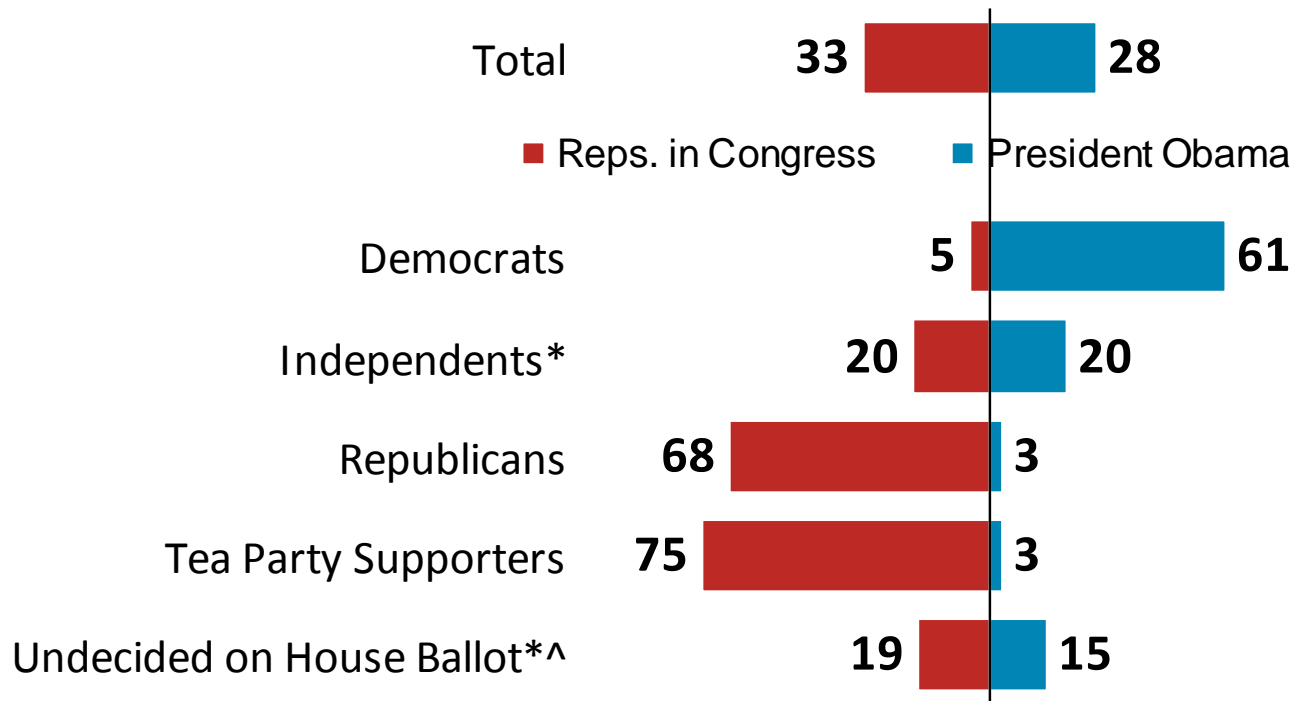
*Respondents who say they are “Undecided” when asked for whom they will vote in the 2012 elections for U.S. House of Representatives. 37% of Undecideds and 35% of independents say Republicans in Congress and Democrats in Congress are “Both about the same” in how they will handle Social Security.

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?



Undecided Colorado voters give Congressional Republicans a four-point advantage over President Obama on handling Social Security. Independent voters split.

Who will Better Handle Social Security



Margin (D-R)#	Neither
-5	10
+56	6
--	17
-64	6
-72	9
-4	18

Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding

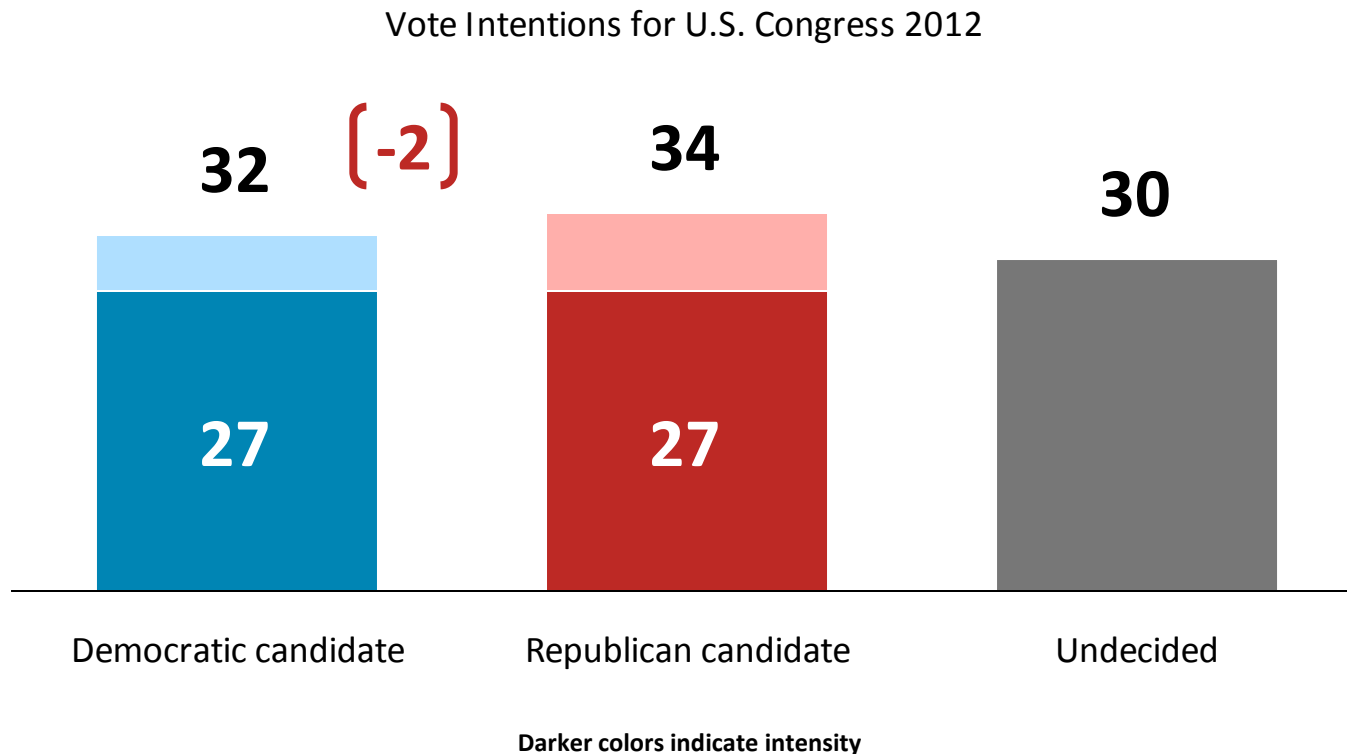
^ Respondents who say they are "Undecided" when asked for whom they will vote in the 2012 elections for U.S. House of Representatives.

* 32% of Undecideds and 29% of independents say Republicans in Congress and President Obama are "Both about the same" in how they will handle Social Security.



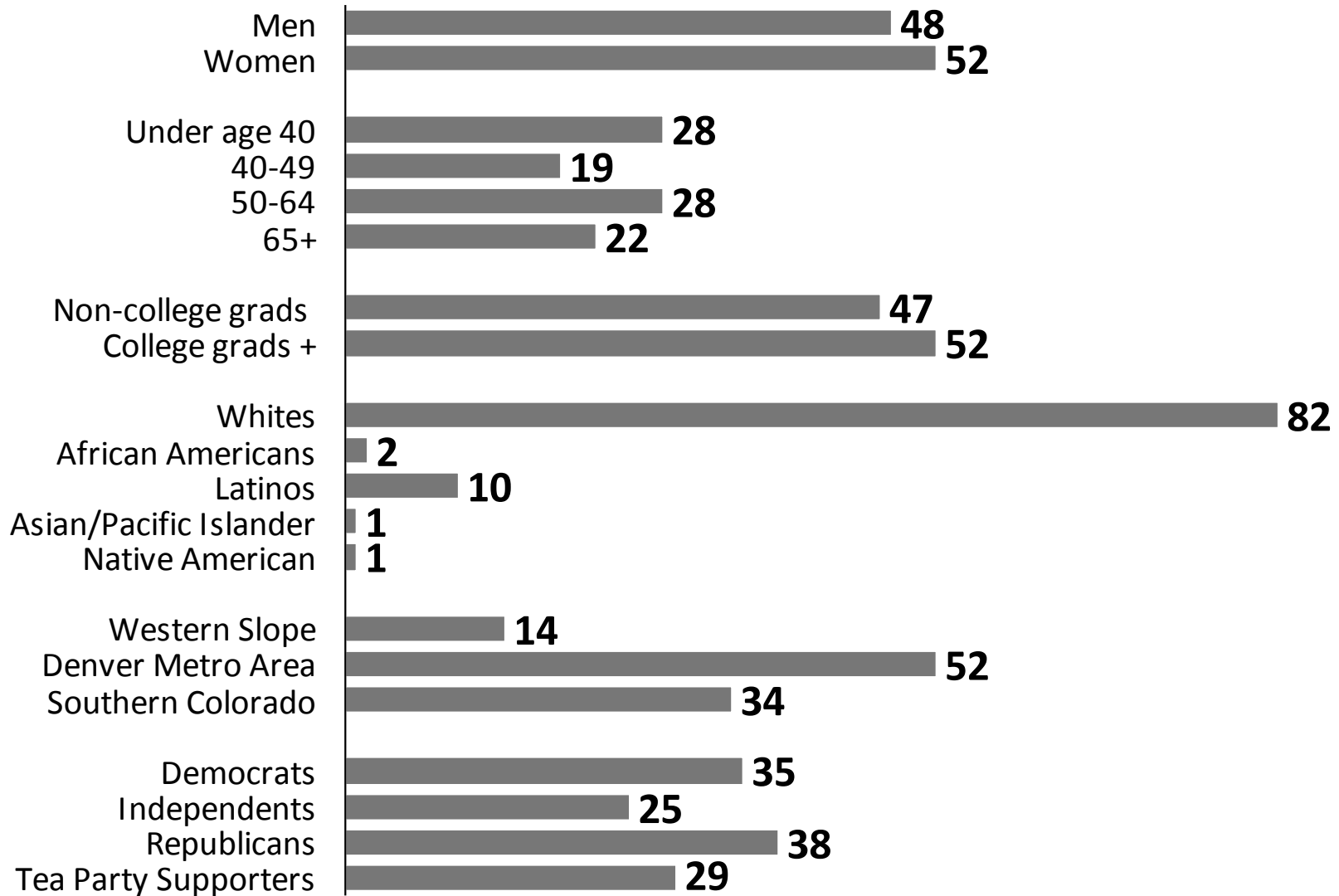
Who do you think will better handle the issue of Social Security: [ROTATE: _the Republicans in Congress, _President Obama], or are they both about the same?

In a generic ballot for the 2012 U.S. House of Representatives, Colorado voters lean toward the Republican candidate by two points if the election were held today. Three in ten are currently undecided.



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

Demographic Profile of the Colorado Electorate





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