



**SOCIAL SECURITY:
COMPARING CONGRESSIONAL RHETORIC
WITH REALITY**

October 2024

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Executive Summary

The enactment of the Social Security Act of 1935 was a watershed event in American history and laid a new foundation for the nation's social safety net. The law created the Old-Age Insurance program to deliver income security for retired workers and provided unprecedented amounts of federal funding to help the states administer unemployment insurance programs, maternal health and child welfare initiatives, and economic relief efforts for single mothers, the blind, and low-income seniors.

During the Act's congressional consideration and in the years following its passage, the Old-Age Insurance program was attacked by members of Congress and other critics. They claimed that the program would:

- Amount to a **"cruel hoax"** because workers' contributions would be redirected to pork barrel projects and other programs (Kansas Governor and 1936 presidential candidate Alf Landon)
- **"[P]lace all American industry, business, and individual liberties under the control of Government here in Washington"** (Representative Charles Eaton)
- Create a bureaucracy **"[g]reater than anything of its kind to be found in Russia, Germany, or Italy under the three dictators [Stalin, Hitler, and Mussolini]"** (Representative Daniel Reed)
- Be doomed to fail because **"no democratic government would [be able to] undertake such an impossible task"** (American Association for Social Security)

In contrast, President Franklin Roosevelt predicted that the law would be a first crucial step toward providing economic security for all Americans, stating:

"This law ... represents a corner stone in a structure which is being built but is by no means complete ... that will take care of human needs and at the same time provide for the United States an economic structure of vastly greater soundness."¹

Over the last nine decades, President Roosevelt's prediction has been proven correct and those of his opponents wrong. Subsequent Congresses and administrations repeatedly expanded the Old-Age Insurance program to cover workers' surviving dependents and Americans with disabilities. Today, Social Security is the largest and most successful anti-poverty program in American history and has helped guarantee the economic and retirement security of hundreds of millions of Americans.

¹ Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, *Statement of the President Upon Signing the Social Security Bill – August 14, 1935* (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://www.fdrlibrary.org/documents/356632/390886/sssigningstatement.pdf/d6507053-fdd3-4545-b09b-cf15b37c85e9>).

Background

The Social Security Act of 1935 marked a significant turning point in American social policy. Initially designed to provide economic relief from the Great Depression and income security for retired workers, the blind, and single mothers, the law has been amended numerous times to expand its original programs and create new ones. These amendments transformed the law's initial retirement program into the comprehensive Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability (OASDI) program, which today provides monthly benefits to 68 million Americans and is universally known as Social Security.²

The original Old-Age Insurance program created by the 1935 Act covered approximately 55% of workers. The starting benefit was between \$10 and \$85 a month (\$200 to \$1,700 in 2024 dollars).³ The first major expansion occurred in 1939, even before the first benefits payments were issued. The 1939 amendments added dependent and survivor benefits, establishing the family-centered structure that became a hallmark of Social Security. This expansion also shifted benefits toward early participants, reducing the importance of beneficiaries' cumulative earnings and accelerating payments' start date from 1942 to 1940.⁴

Social Security was significantly expanded and made more generous in the 1950s. The 1950 amendments increased average benefits by 77% and expanded eligibility to nearly all workers,

² Social Security Administration, *Fact Sheet: Social Security* (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://www.ssa.gov/news/press/factsheets/basicfact-alt.pdf>). In addition to OASDI, the Social Security Act also authorizes Medicare, Medicaid, and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). These programs provide healthcare coverage to 68 million Medicare beneficiaries and 80 million Medicaid and CHIP enrollees, approximately 13 million of whom are insured by both Medicare and Medicaid. The Social Security Act also provides benefits through programs like Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and joint federal-state unemployment insurance programs. See Department of Health and Human Services, *Medicare Monthly Enrollment* (September 30, 2024) (<https://data.cms.gov/summary-statistics-on-beneficiary-enrollment/medicare-and-medicaid-reports/medicare-monthly-enrollment>) (for Medicare enrollment); Department of Health and Human Services, *June 2024 Medicaid & CHIP Enrollment Data Highlights* (September 30, 2024) (<https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/program-information/medicaid-and-chip-enrollment-data/report-highlights/index.html>) (for Medicaid and CHIP enrollment); Commonwealth Fund, *The Health Care Experiences of People Dually Eligible for Medicare and Medicaid* (June 27, 2024) (<https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/2024/jun/health-care-experiences-people-dually-eligible-medicare-medicaid>) (for joint Medicare and Medicaid enrollment); Social Security Administration, *Social Security Programs in the United States* (July 1997) (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/progdesc/sspus/index.html>) (for additional information about programs authorized by the Social Security Act); Congressional Research Service, *Social Security: Major Decisions in the House and Senate Since 1935* (June 22, 2023) (<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/RL30920.pdf>) (for legislative history of the Social Security Act).

³ Social Security Bulletin, Volume 48, Number 12, *Economic Security 1935-1985*, page 12 (December 1985) (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v48n12/v48n12p5.pdf>) (for percent of initially eligible workers); Social Security Bulletin, Volume 66, Number 1, *Social Security: A Program and Policy History*, footnote 4 (2005) (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v66n1/v66n1p1.html>) (for initial monthly benefits); Bureau of Labor Statistics, *CPI Inflation Calculator* (<https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>) (for inflation calculation, calculated from January 1942 to August 2024, rounded to nearest \$100). For comparison, the average OASDI monthly benefit for a single retired worker in 2024 is approximately \$1,900. See Social Security Administration, *Fact Sheet on the Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance Program*, Table C (June 30, 2024) (<https://www.ssa.gov/OACT/FACTS/index.html>).

⁴ Social Security Administration, *Legislative History: 1939 Amendments* (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://www.ssa.gov/history/1939amends.html>).

including farmers, domestic workers, and the self-employed.⁵ The amendments of 1954 and 1956 created the Disability Insurance program that provided monthly benefit payments to workers aged 50-64 who were unable to work because “of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in death or to be of long-continued and indefinite duration.”⁶ Payroll tax rates were increased to finance these growing benefits, as was the maximum cap on earnings subject to Social Security’s payroll taxes.⁷

The 1960s saw continued expansion. Eligibility for Disability Insurance was expanded to all Americans under age 65, benefits for aged widows and widowers were increased, and both benefits and payroll tax levels were increased.⁸ In addition to these expansions, the Social Security Amendments of 1965 created Medicare and Medicaid, which expanded health insurance coverage for retired and low-income Americans.⁹

Social Security matured in the 1970s. Between 1970 and 1972, benefits for retirees were increased by more than 50% through a series of compounding adjustments: a 15% increase in 1970, followed by a 10% increase in 1971, and a 20% increase in 1972. In that same year, spousal benefits were increased by 21%, and these ad hoc benefit adjustments for all beneficiaries were replaced with annual automatic cost-of-living adjustments.¹⁰ Additionally, the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program, also established in 1972, provided additional cash benefits to low-income beneficiaries and replaced several federal-state means-tested aid programs established by the 1935 Act.¹¹ The 1977 amendments accelerated payroll tax increases to address short-term funding shortfalls.¹²

The 1980s saw the last major reforms to the Social Security system. In 1983, the National Commission on Social Security Reform, established by President Reagan and commonly known as the “Greenspan Commission” after its chair, Alan Greenspan, recommended a series of reforms to address short-term funding challenges. These included extending eligibility to nonprofit employees and new federal workers, making up to 50% of benefits for high-income beneficiaries subject to income taxation, and

⁵ Social Security Bulletin, Volume 66, Number 1, *Social Security: A Program and Policy History* (2005) (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v66n1/v66n1p1.html>).

⁶ Social Security Bulletin, Volume 66, Number 3, *Social Security and the “D” in OASDI: The History of a Federal Program Insuring Earners Against Disability* (2005/2006) (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v66n3/v66n3p1.html>).

⁷ Social Security Bulletin, Volume 66, Number 1, *Social Security: A Program and Policy History* (2005) (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v66n1/v66n1p1.html>).

⁸ Social Security Bulletin, Volume 66, Number 1, *Social Security: A Program and Policy History* (2005) (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v66n1/v66n1p1.html>).

⁹ For more information, see Co-Equal, *Medicare: Legislative Retrospective* (2024) (<https://www.co-equal.org/legislative-retrospectives/medicare-comparing-congressional-rhetoric-with-reality>).

¹⁰ Social Security Bulletin, Volume 66, Number 1, *Social Security: A Program and Policy History* (2005) (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v66n1/v66n1p1.html>).

¹¹ Social Security Bulletin, Volume 66, Number 1, *Social Security: A Program and Policy History* (2005) (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v66n1/v66n1p1.html>); Social Security Administration, *Annual Statistical Supplement: Supplemental Security Income Program Description and Legislative History* (2012) (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/supplement/2012/ssi.html>); Social Security Administration, *Supplemental Security Income (SSI)* (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://www-origin.ssa.gov/ssi/>).

¹² Congressional Research Service, *Social Security: Major Decisions in the House and Senate Since 1935*, pages 40-41 (June 22, 2023) (<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/RL30920.pdf>).

accelerating scheduled increases in payroll taxes, among other changes.¹³ Congress used these recommendations to craft the Social Security Act Amendments of 1983, and included additional changes, such as gradually increasing the full retirement age from 65 to 67. These changes put Social Security on a sound financial footing for the next 50 years.¹⁴

The evolution of Social Security has made it the largest and most enduring anti-poverty program in U.S. history, fulfilling President Roosevelt’s prediction that the Social Security Act would become the “corner stone” of a new safety net that protects the most vulnerable and supports the financial well-being of all Americans and refuting the dire predictions of the law’s vociferous opponents.¹⁵

Claim: Social Security Would Amount to a “Cruel Hoax” Because Full Benefits Would Never Be Paid

“I am not exaggerating the folly of this legislation. The saving it forces on our workers is a cruel hoax. There is every probability that the cash they pay in will be used for current deficits and new extravagances.”

– Kansas Governor and 1936 Presidential Candidate Alf Landon, September 27, 1936¹⁶

“It may prove to be a cruel and pitiful jest to compel by law the great body of our working people to save for their old age dollars which our existing public policies could so easily rob of most of their value long before the time came when the worker was to get them back.”

– Winthrop Aldrich, Chairman of Chase National Bank, July 11, 1936¹⁷

“What would be the consequence of having \$32,000,000,000 of credit standing in the name of the National Government? Would it not be an invitation for all sorts of pork-barrel schemes and wild-spending sprees? We would have such an orgy of extravagance that even the unprecedented expenditures of the Roosevelt administration would seem small in comparison.”

– Representative Allen Treadway, April 12, 1935¹⁸

“When the working men discover what this scheme means in reduced wages and higher costs of living and fiscal improvidence they are going to rebel against it.”

¹³ Social Security Administration, *Report of the National Commission on Social Security Reform* (January 1983) (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v46n2/v46n2p3.pdf>).

¹⁴ Congressional Research Service, *Social Security: Trust Fund Status in the Early 1980s and Today and the 1980s Greenspan Commission* (March 4, 2022) (<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R47040>).

¹⁵ In 2024, over 50% of Americans participated in Social Security, with 184 million workers currently contributing to the program through payroll taxes and 67 million individuals receiving benefits. See Board of Trustees, Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Federal Disability Insurance Trust Funds, *2024 Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Federal Disability Trust Funds*, Table IV.B3, page 64 (May 6, 2024) (<https://www.ssa.gov/OACT/TR/2024/tr2024.pdf>) (number of covered workers and beneficiaries). The percentage of the population participating in Social Security was calculated by dividing the sum of covered workers and beneficiaries in Table IV.B3 by the average of the 2023 and 2025 population projections from Table V.A3 on page 98.

¹⁶ New York Times, *Text of Gov. Landon’s Milwaukee Address on Economic Security* (September 27, 1936) (<https://www.nytimes.com/1936/09/27/archives/text-of-gov-landons-milwaukee-address-on-economic-security.html>).

¹⁷ Chicago Daily Tribune, *Social Security Act Assailed as Faulty Plan* (July 11, 1936) (PDF copy available).

¹⁸ *Congressional Record*, page 5533 (April 12, 1935) (<https://www.ssa.gov/history/pdf/h412.pdf>).

– 1936 Republican Vice-Presidential Candidate Frank Knox, September 22, 1936¹⁹

“[J]ust exactly what is the Congress going to say then to the younger men and women who have been paying, paying, paying for a promise? What is the Congress going to say to these people when they learn that the fund is exhausted and their money gone with it?”

– Senator Hugh Butler, June 13, 1950²⁰

One of the primary arguments against the initial Old-Age Insurance program, as well as the later Survivors and Disability Insurance programs, was that elected officials would fail to honor the promises made to beneficiaries. Critics argued that future Congresses and administrations could not be trusted and would break the Social Security Act’s commitment to beneficiaries, redirect their Social Security contributions to special interest pork barrel projects, and leave those who had contributed stranded and vulnerable in their retirement.²¹

In reality, the federal government has honored its promises to Social Security beneficiaries. Since tax collections and benefit payments began in 1937, Social Security has collected \$27.8 trillion in contributions and paid \$25.0 trillion to beneficiaries.²² At all times, beneficiaries’ payroll tax contributions have been held in trust funds and been dedicated to benefit payments.²³ Contrary to critics’ initial predictions that future Congresses and administrations would raid Social Security to fund other programs, the federal government’s commitment to Social Security beneficiaries has been unbroken and steadfast over the last nine decades.²⁴

¹⁹ New York Times, *Knox Hits Method of Social Security* (September 22, 1936)

(<https://www.nytimes.com/1936/09/22/archives/knox-hits-method-of-social-security-he-tells-los-angeles-group.html>).

²⁰ *Congressional Record*, page 8508 (June 13, 1950)

(<https://www.congress.gov/81/crecb/1950/06/13/GPO-CRECB-1950-pt6-19-1.pdf>).

²¹ New York Times, *Text of Gov. Landon’s Milwaukee Address on Economic Security* (September 27, 1936)

(<https://www.nytimes.com/1936/09/27/archives/text-of-gov-landons-milwaukee-address-on-economic-security.html>).

²² Totals are through the end of 2023. See Congressional Research Service, *Social Security: The Trust Funds*, page 15 (May 23, 2024) (<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL33028>).

²³ Between 1937 and 1939, workers’ payroll tax contributions were deposited into an “old-age reserve account” in the Treasury, dedicated to the Old-Age Insurance program. In 1940, these funds were transferred to the newly established Old-Age and Survivors (OASI) Trust Fund, which has received workers’ contributions ever since. The Disability Insurance (DI) Trust Fund, established in 1957, has performed a parallel function for the Disability Insurance program. See Social Security Administration, *Old-Age & Survivors Insurance Trust Fund* (accessed on September 30, 2024)

(<https://www.ssa.gov/oact/progdata/describeoasi.html>); Social Security Administration, *Disability Insurance Trust Fund* (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://www.ssa.gov/oact/progdata/describedi.html>).

These trust funds often accumulate surpluses when payroll tax contributions exceed benefit payments. By law, these surpluses are invested in special-issue bonds guaranteed by the full faith and credit of the federal government, generating interest for the trust funds. When benefit payments exceed payroll tax collections, as is currently the case, these bonds are redeemed to pay benefits to beneficiaries. See Social Security Bulletin, Volume 75, Number 1, *Social Security Trust Fund Cash Flow and Reserves* (2015) (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v75n1/v75n1p1.html>) (for a description of trust fund operations); Social Security Administration, *Social Security Trust Fund Data* (accessed on September 30, 2024)

(<https://www.ssa.gov/oact/progdata/funds.html>) (for historical information about OASI and DI trust fund surpluses and deficits).

²⁴ In periods when the Social Security trust funds have accumulated surpluses, excess payroll tax contributions are used to issue special-issue bonds to the Social Security trust funds and simultaneously pay other federal obligations. This process reduces the need for additional public borrowing, effectively lowering net federal debt in the short term. These bonds pay interest to the trust funds, which supports Social Security’s long-term solvency. While some critics argue that borrowing from these surpluses diverts resources away from Social Security, the funds remain secure because interest payments are

Instead of becoming a “cruel hoax,” Social Security is now the largest and most successful anti-poverty program in American history. When the Social Security Act became law in 1935, 50% of Americans aged 65 and over lived in poverty.²⁵ A 1930 report described the typical conditions in one state’s poorhouses, where many impoverished seniors had to turn:

[S]ick people are thrown together with the well, the blind, the deaf, the crippled, the epileptics. ... Privacy, even in the most intimate affairs of life, is impossible ... and all the inmates are regimented as though in a prison or penal colony. Private possessions, other than the clothes on the back, are almost out of the question, since individual bureaus, closets, tables or other articles of furniture, outside of a bed, are generally not provided. ... The whole atmosphere of the almshouses tends to become more and more depressing, ‘institutionalized’ and dehumanized.”²⁶

As a result of Social Security, the percentage of seniors living in poverty fell by more than two-thirds to 15.7% by 1980, and by 2023 it had fallen by over another third to 9.7%.²⁷ These declines are shown in Figure 1 below. Today, Social Security lifts more people out of poverty than any other federal

reinvested into the trust funds. When current benefit payments exceed payroll tax revenues, as they do now, the bonds are redeemed to ensure uninterrupted benefit payments to beneficiaries. See Social Security Bulletin, Volume 75, Number 1, *Social Security Trust Fund Cash Flow and Reserves* (2015) (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v75n1/v75n1p1.html>).

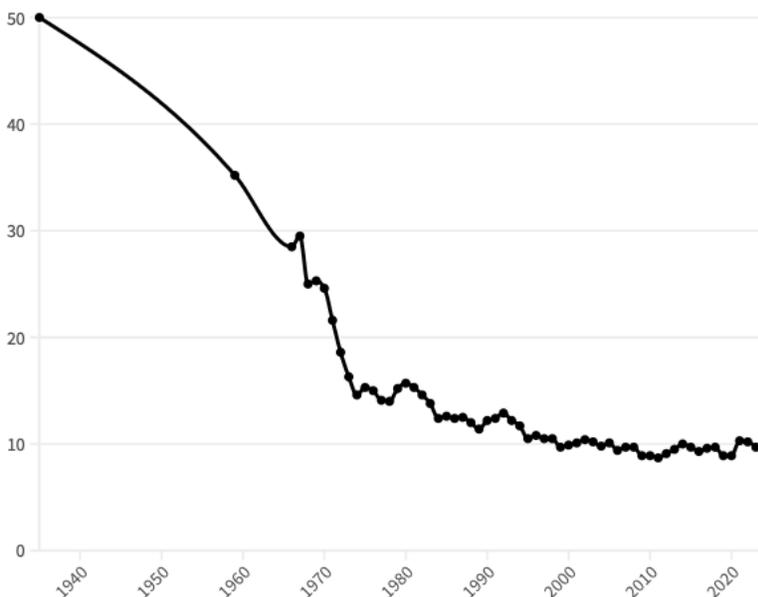
²⁵ Social Security Bulletin, Volume 70, Number 3, *The Development of Social Security in America*, Chart 4 (2010) (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v70n3/v70n3p1.html>). Other analyses estimated that poverty rates for retirees exceeded 75% before the implementation of Social Security. See Eugene Smolensky, Sheldon Danziger, and Peter Gottschalk, University of Wisconsin Center for Demography and Ecology Working Paper, *The Declining Significance of Age in the United States: Trends in the Well-Being of Children and the Elderly Since 1939*, Table 1, page 7 (1988) (<https://cde.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/839/2019/07/cde-working-paper-1987-22.pdf>).

²⁶ Abraham Epstein, *Insecurity: A Challenge to America*, pages 508-509 (1933) ([https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.\\$b94846](https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.$b94846)).

²⁷ For data on poverty trends among individuals aged 65 and older, see Social Security Bulletin, Volume 70, Number 3, *The Development of Social Security in America*, Chart 4 (2010) (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v70n3/v70n3p1.html>); U.S. Census Bureau, *Historical Poverty Tables: People and Families – 1959 to 2023*, Table 3 (September 10, 2024) (<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-people.html>). Economic analysis of this reduction in poverty between 1967 and 2000 found that increases in Social Security benefits were responsible for nearly all the decline. See Gary Engelhardt and Jonathan Gruber, National Bureau of Economic Research, *Social Security and the Evolution of Elderly Poverty* (May 2004) (<https://www.nber.org/papers/w10466>). Additional research has examined the role of SSI in reducing poverty for this population. See Social Security Bulletin, Volume 69, Number 1, *Elderly Poverty and Supplemental Security Income* (2009) (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v69n1/v69n1p45.html>); Social Security Bulletin, Volume 70, Number 2, *Elderly Poverty and Supplemental Security Income, 2002-2005* (2010) (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v70n2/v70n2p1.html>). Since 2011, the Census Bureau’s Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) has provided additional insights into poverty rates by accounting for additional costs and income not included in the official poverty measure. The SPM also shows that Social Security and SSI have had significant effects on poverty rates for individuals aged 65 and older. See Congressional Research Service, *Poverty Among the Population Aged 65 and Older*, Figure 11, page 20 (December 6, 2022) (<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45791>); Center on Poverty & Social Policy at Columbia University, *Historical Supplemental Poverty Measure Data* (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/historical-spm-data>) (for historical SPM data from 1967-2023). Finally, neither the official nor supplemental poverty measures include nursing home residents, most of whom are 65 and older. See Congressional Research Service, *Poverty Among the Population Aged 65 and Older*, page 21 (December 6, 2022) (<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45791>).

program.²⁸ In 2023, the most recent year for which data is available, Social Security lifted 27.6 million people out of poverty.²⁹ Among retirees, Social Security currently reduces the poverty rate by 75%, and among people with disabilities, it reduces the poverty rate by a third.³⁰

Figure 1. Poverty Rate Among Americans 65 and Older, 1935-2023



Source: Social Security Administration and Census Bureau

Claim: Social Security Would Harm the Economy

"[I] think we stand today in this country at the crossroads of a great decision ... and this decision is whether we are going to choose American organized industry as the instrument for the solutions of these tremendous, far-reaching problems, or whether we are going to resort to some modified form of Russianism and attempt to solve these problems by government. ... The ultimate aim of the new deal is to place all American industry, business, and individual liberties under the control of Government here in Washington."

– Representative Charles Eaton, April 13, 1935³¹

²⁸ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *Social Security Lifts More People Above the Poverty Line Than Any Other Program* (January 31, 2024) (<https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/10-25-13ss.pdf>).

²⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, *Poverty in the United States: 2023*, Figure 10, page 13 (September 2024) (<https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/2024/demo/p60-283.pdf>).

³⁰ Bruce Meyer and Derek Wu, *The Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, *The Poverty Reduction of Social Security and Means-Tested Transfers*, page 30 (July 25, 2018)

(https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0019793918790220?casa_token=yjVUX0CGnUAAAAA%3Af7LkBRHCKJD_M0IWtJd8asOjaFkVvubwGrT6AGTssSy72yJuU23LwffwcGwTW-aEofmsRiSP8II0VIQ).

³¹ *Congressional Record*, pages 5581-5582 (April 13, 1935) (<https://www.ssa.gov/history/pdf/h413.pdf>).

“Never in the history of the world has any measure been brought in here so insidiously designed as to prevent business recovery, to enslave workers, and to prevent any possibility of the employers providing work for the people.”

– Representative John Taber, April 19, 1935³²

“[The Social Security Act] is in harmony with the dictatorship program launched under the new deal and to be carried on by it. It is carrying out a program of Karl Marx from beginning to end, the domination of the citizen and the destruction of private industry. This is only one more effort under a dictatorial program to regiment labor and make them submit themselves to this Federal test before wage earners can go to an employer and get a job to earn their daily bread.”

– Representative Daniel Reed, April 19, 1935³³

“These titles [the Old-Age Insurance program] impose a crushing burden upon industry and upon labor. They establish a bureaucracy in the field of insurance in competition with private business.”

– Minority Views, Ways and Means Committee Report on the Social Security Act of 1935³⁴

“What is the possible sense of making promises covering a period 40 or 50 years hence, which may have to be fulfilled with such crushing tax levies? How do we know that private business in 1990 or 2000 will be able to bear such a burden? In fact, how do we know that private business will be able to bear a payroll tax of 6 1/2 percent at that time?”

– Senator Hugh Butler, June 13, 1950³⁵

Critics of Social Security argued that the program would become an intolerable economic burden. They asserted that the law’s payroll taxes would reduce employment, prevent businesses from expanding, and stifle the creation of new businesses. They also contended that the total cost of the law’s programs would be a drag on the entire economy. Rather than being an economic burden, however, Social Security addressed multiple shortcomings of the United States’ labor market. By providing retirees, surviving dependents, and disabled people with economic security, the law has helped, rather than hindered, economic growth and prosperity.

Since Social Security payments began, real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew from \$1.4 trillion in 1940 to \$22.7 trillion in 2023, as shown in Figure 2, and inflation-adjusted per capita GDP increased from \$16,766 in 1940 to \$81,624 in 2023.³⁶ During this period, the labor market expanded massively,

³² *Congressional Record*, page 6054 (April 19, 1935) (<https://www.ssa.gov/history/pdf/h419.pdf>).

³³ *Congressional Record*, pages 6051-6052, April 19, 1935 (<https://www.ssa.gov/history/pdf/h419.pdf>).

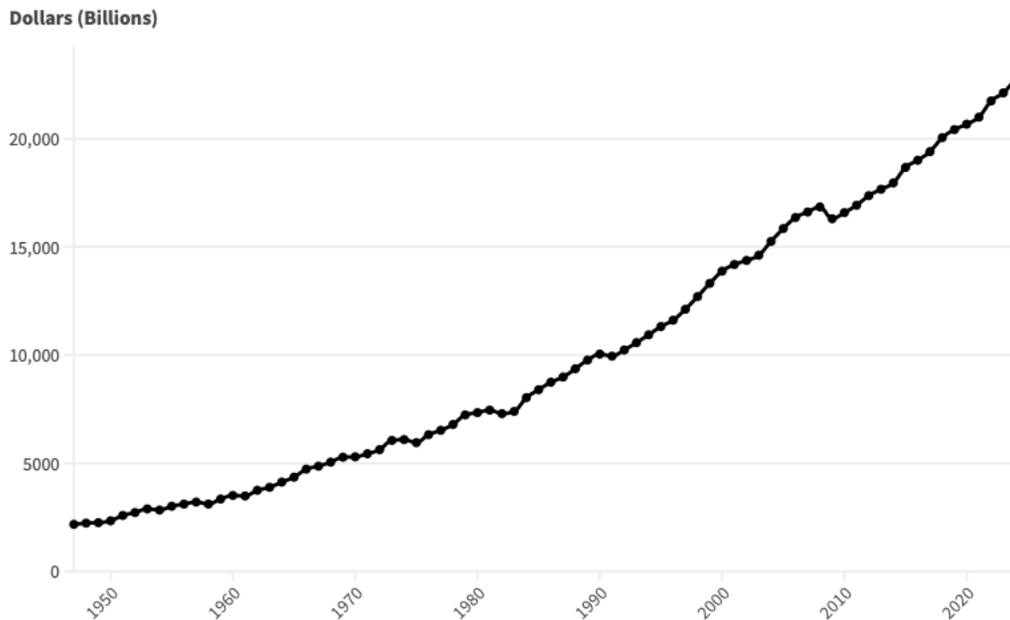
³⁴ Social Security Administration, *Social Security Act of 1935 Volume 1: Committee on Ways and Means Report House Report No. 615 (to accompany H.R. 7260)*, page 46 (April 5, 1935) (<https://www.ssa.gov/history/pdf/Downey%20PDFs/Social%20Security%20Act%20of%201935%20Vol%201.pdf>).

³⁵ *Congressional Record*, page 8508 (June 13, 1950) (<https://www.congress.gov/81/crecb/1950/06/13/GPO-CRECB-1950-pt6-19-1.pdf>).

³⁶ U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, *Gross Domestic Product Per Capita [A939RCOA052NBEA]*, retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/A939RCOA052NBEA>) (the 1940 per capita GDP amount was adjusted to 2023 dollars using the Bureau of Labor Statistics’s *CPI Inflation Calculator* (<https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>) (inflation calculation from January 1940 to January 2023)); U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, *Real Gross Domestic Product [GDPCA]*, retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/GDPCA>) (for total GDP growth, amounts are in chained 2017 dollars).

with total employment growing from 32.4 million workers in 1940 to 156.1 million by 2023.³⁷ Wages for workers have increased as well. For example, the inflation-adjusted average hourly wage for manufacturing workers increased from \$11.48 in 1940 to \$26.38 in 2023.³⁸

Figure 2. Real Gross Domestic Product, 1947-2024



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis

Social Security also did not result in a government takeover of the private sector. When the Old-Age and Survivors Insurance program began in 1940, 87% of America's 32.4 million workers were employed by the private sector. By 2023, the number of workers had grown to 156.1 million, 85% of whom were employed in the private sector.³⁹ Similarly, Social Security has complemented rather than

³⁷ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *All Employees, Government [USGOVT]*, retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/USGOVT>) (for number of government workers); U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *All Employees, Total Private [USPRIV]*, retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/USPRIV>) (for total number of private-sector employees). The total number of workers is the combined annual average of private-sector and government workers from these respective datasets.

³⁸ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Average Hourly Earnings of Production and Nonsupervisory Employees, Manufacturing [AHEMAN]*, retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/AHEMAN>) (for average earnings); Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, *Consumer Price Index, 1913-* (<https://www.minneapolisfed.org/about-us/monetary-policy/inflation-calculator/consumer-price-index-1913->) (for inflation adjustment). Nominal values were adjusted by the change in the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis's consumer price index, which uses 1983 as its base year.

³⁹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *All Employees, Government [USGOVT]*, retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/USGOVT>); U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *All Employees, Total Private [USPRIV]*, retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/USPRIV>). These totals are the average annual number of private sector and government workers. The percentage of private-sector workers was calculated by dividing the annual number of private-sector workers by the combined total of private-sector and government workers in each year.

displaced the private sector's role in providing retirement benefits. In 1932, fewer than 15% of American workers were eligible for a private sector pension, and even fewer – approximately 5% of retirees – actually received pension payments due to employers' ability to withhold payments and lack of legal protections for beneficiaries.⁴⁰ There was a significant increase in private pensions after the enactment of Social Security, with the number of workers covered by private pensions growing from 4 million in 1940 to 23 million in 1960.⁴¹ In recent years, private sector retirement plans have often taken the form of defined-contribution plans like 401(k) plans.⁴² In 2022, 65% of retired workers aged 65 or older received income from either a private sector pension or a defined-contribution plan.⁴³

Finally, the argument that Social Security's costs would be unsustainable over the long run has also been proven false. Figure 3 shows the combined costs of the program from 1937 through 2023.⁴⁴ Costs for Social Security rose sharply from the 1940s through the 1970s as program eligibility expanded and the value of the benefits increased repeatedly. However, rather than spiraling out of control like critics initially predicted, the program's costs plateaued between 4% to 5% of GDP in the early 1980s through the 2000s.

⁴⁰ Social Security Administration, *Historical Background and Development of Social Security* (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://www.ssa.gov/history/briefhistory3.html>).

⁴¹ Economic History Association, *Economic History of Retirement in the United States* (October 2002) (<https://eh.net/encyclopedia/economic-history-of-retirement-in-the-united-states/>).

⁴² Bureau of Labor Statistics, *ERISA at 50: BLS Tracks the Evolution of Retirement Benefits* (July 2024) (<https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2024/article/erisa-at-50-bls-tracks-the-evolution-of-retirement-benefits.htm>).

⁴³ Federal Reserve Board of Governors, *Report on Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2022*, Table 34 (May 2023) (<https://www.federalreserve.gov/publications/2023-economic-well-being-of-us-households-in-2022-retirement-investments.htm>).

⁴⁴ Social Security Administration, *Old-Age and Survivors Insurance Trust Fund, 1937-2023* (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://www.ssa.gov/oact/STATS/table4a1.html>) (for Old-Age and Survivors Insurance Trust Fund costs); Social Security Administration, *Disability Insurance Trust Fund, 1957-2023* (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://www.ssa.gov/oact/STATS/table4a2.html>) (for Disability Insurance Trust Fund costs); U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, *Gross Domestic Product [GDP]*, retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/GDP>) (for historical GDP).

Figure 3. Cost of OASDI Program, Calendar Years 1937-2023, % of GDP



Source: Social Security Administration Office of the Chief Actuary, Bureau of Economic Analysis

Social Security's costs are projected to rise due to the Baby Boom generation becoming eligible for benefits. However, according to CBO's current long-term projections, the program's cost will plateau again at roughly 5.75% of GDP over the next 30 years. Over this same period, CBO is projecting that GDP will increase from \$28 trillion in 2024 to \$83 trillion by 2053.⁴⁵

Claim: Social Security Would Undermine Americans' Freedoms and Civil Liberties

"[I]magine the vast army of clerks that would be necessary [to implement Social Security]. Imagine the boost for bureaucracy. Imagine the field opened for federal snooping. Are these 26,000,000 [beneficiaries] going to be finger printed? Are their photographs going to be kept on file in a Washington office? Or are they going to have identification tags put around their necks?"

— Kansas Governor and 1936 Presidential Candidate Alf Landon, October 31, 1936⁴⁶

"[I]f the Roosevelt administration is returned to power we shall see two groups of citizens in this nation – those who are numbered and those who are not numbered. In the first group are 27,000,000 men and women who will be forced to report to a politically appointed clerk – every change of their residence, every change in their wages, every change of their employment."

⁴⁵ Congressional Budget Office, *Budget and Economic Data, Long-Term Budget Projections, March 2024* (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://www.cbo.gov/data/budget-economic-data-1>). Dollar amounts are in calendar years.

⁴⁶ Chicago Daily Tribune, *Landon Plea: 'Free America'* (October 31, 1936) (PDF copy available). In the transcription of Governor Landon's remarks, "bureaucracy" was originally misspelled and has been corrected.

– John D.M. Hamilton, Governor Alf Landon’s presidential campaign manager and chairman of the Republican National Committee, October 31, 1936⁴⁷

“[T]he membership of this House might appreciate its responsibility, that it might stand for the preservation of American liberty, that it might stand for giving the people of America an opportunity to work out their salvation instead of enslaving them....”

– Representative John Taber, April 19, 1935⁴⁸

“[Implementing Social Security] means the setting up here in Washington of a Federal bureau with a fingerprint test of regimentation not only comparable to but greater than anything of its kind to be found in Russia, Germany, or Italy under the three dictators [Stalin, Hitler, and Mussolini]. ... [T]he lash of the dictator will be felt, and 25,000,000 free American citizens will for the first time submit themselves to a fingerprint test and have their fingerprints filed down here with those of Al Capone and every jailbird and racketeer in the country.”

– Representative Daniel Reed, April 19, 1935⁴⁹

Congressional critics of the Social Security Act frequently claimed that the law would empower federal officials to violate Americans’ civil liberties under the auspices of implementing the law. Some of the most extreme arguments warned that the Act would open the door to an American-style dictatorship and lead to the permanent loss of workers’ and retirees’ personal freedoms. Although not as extreme, many opponents of the law predicted that workers and retirees would have to submit to invasive questionnaires, fingerprint tests, and wear identification dog tags to receive Social Security benefits.

These arguments extended beyond Congress and reached a crescendo during the 1936 presidential election campaign. Alf Landon and his campaign manager, John Hamilton, claimed that the Roosevelt Administration would force workers and retirees to wear identification tags, be fingerprinted, and disclose personal details to the federal government to enroll in the program.⁵⁰ These claims were amplified by campaign mailers from the Republican National Committee and a coordinated advertising campaign that claimed that workers’ “personal life will be laid bare” by the information collected by Social Security, including the “intimate secrets” of their lives such as their marital status, church and union membership, and medical conditions.⁵¹

⁴⁷ New York Times, *Hamilton Predicts Tags for Workers* (November 1, 1936) (PDF copy available).

(<https://www.nytimes.com/1936/11/01/archives/hamilton-predicts-tags-for-workers-social-security-board-has.html>),

⁴⁸ *Congressional Record*, page 6054 (April 19, 1935) (<https://www.ssa.gov/history/pdf/h419.pdf>).

⁴⁹ *Congressional Record*, pages 6051-6052 (April 19, 1935) (<https://www.ssa.gov/history/pdf/h419.pdf>).

⁵⁰ New York Times, *The Text of Governor Landon’s Attack in St. Louis on the New Deal* (November 1, 1936)

(<https://www.nytimes.com/1936/11/01/archives/the-text-of-governor-landons-attack-in-st-louis-on-the-new-deal.html?seArchResultPosition=5>); New York Times, *Hamilton Predicts Tags for Workers* (November 1, 1936)

(<https://www.nytimes.com/1936/11/01/archives/hamilton-predicts-tags-for-workers-social-security-board-has.html>).

⁵¹ Wilbur Cohen, University of Minnesota Law Review, *The Development of the Social Security Act of 1935: Reflections Some Fifty Years Later*, Volume 68, pages 403-405 (1984)

(<https://scholarship.law.umn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3499&context=mlr>); New York Times, *Forgery Charged to Security Foes* (November 3, 1936)

(<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1936/11/03/88710315.html?pageNumber=17>).

Contrary to these critics' predictions, the Social Security Administration (SSA) has prioritized protecting beneficiaries' privacy since its inception. During the 1936 presidential campaign, the SSA immediately repudiated the Republican National Committee's advertising campaign as misleading forgeries.⁵² In its first regulatory action following the campaign, the SSA established Social Security's privacy and disclosure policy, which limited the collection of beneficiaries' personal information to the bare minimum necessary to administer Social Security. These regulations also strictly limited the sharing of beneficiaries' information with other government agencies and third parties.⁵³ The SSA also encouraged beneficiaries to inspect the agency's records to ensure their accuracy.

The protections for beneficiaries were further strengthened in 1939, when amendments to the Social Security Act established robust due process rights for beneficiaries, requiring the SSA to provide advance notice of any benefit changes and granting beneficiaries the ability to challenge these decisions in federal courts.⁵⁴

This commitment to protecting beneficiaries' privacy is still evident today, as the SSA maintains and protects the confidentiality of employment and earning records for 184 million workers covered by Social Security and 68 million beneficiaries receiving benefits.⁵⁵ In fact, Social Security has played an essential role in identity verification across America, with the agency providing identity verification services to employers, financial institutions, and private entities.⁵⁶

⁵² New York Times, *Forgery Charged to Security Foes* (November 3, 1936) (<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1936/11/03/88710315.html?pageNumber=17>).

⁵³ Social Security Administration, *Social Security History: Regulation No. 1* (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://www.ssa.gov/history/reg1.html>);

Social Security Bulletin, Volume 48, Number 6, *The Evolution of Privacy and Disclosure in the Social Security Administration* (June 1985) (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v48n6/v48n6p7.pdf>).

⁵⁴ U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, *The Social Security Administration and Information Technology*, page 95 (October 1986) (<https://www.ssa.gov/history/pdf/ota86.pdf>).

⁵⁵ Social Security Administration, *Fact Sheet: Social Security* (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://www.ssa.gov/news/press/factsheets/basicfact-alt.pdf>). For further details about how the Social Security Administration protects the privacy of this information, see Social Security Administration, *Privacy Program: Privacy Impact Assessments* (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://www.ssa.gov/privacy/pia.html>).

⁵⁶ Social Security Administration, *Data Exchange Overview* (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://www.ssa.gov/dataexchange/index.html>); Social Security Administration, *Social Security Number Verification Service (SSNVS) Handbook* (accessed on September 30, 2024) (https://www.ssa.gov/employer/ssnvshandbk/ssnvs_bso.htm). Although identity theft and fraud affect thousands of OASDI beneficiaries yearly, these cases are a small fraction of the total number of beneficiaries. A recent five-year audit by the SSA's Office of Inspector General found that approximately 21,000 beneficiaries were affected by identity theft. Although this is a serious issue for the affected beneficiaries, the stolen funds were less than 0.001% of the \$4.8 trillion of benefit payments made over the audited period, and over 50% of the stolen funds were recovered. See Federal Trade Commission, *Consumer Sentinel Network Data Book 2023*, Appendix A3, page 78 (February 2024) (https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/ftc_gov/pdf/CSN-Annual-Data-Book-2023.pdf) (for number of identity theft reports from Social Security Administration); Social Security Administration, Office of Inspector General, *Unauthorized my Social Security Direct Deposit Changes Through May 2018* (September 2019) (<https://oig-files.ssa.gov/audits/summary/A-01-18-50669Summary.pdf>) (for results of five-year audit of Social Security Administration); Social Security Administration, *Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance Trust Funds, 1957-2023* (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://www.ssa.gov/oact/STATS/table4a3.html>) (for total amount of Social Security benefits).

Claim: The Federal Government Would Not Be Able to Manage the Program

"I do not approve the growing tendency of Congress to constantly set up needless, complicated, cumbersome, and expensive governmental machinery to carry into effect new policies and programs that are more or less experimental. ... [T]hrough which we will again spend hundreds of millions of dollars, over a period of years, to operate a new and unnecessary Government machine, and again the cost thereof will come out of the pockets of the taxpayers and the beneficiaries."

– Representative Harold Knutson, April 12, 1935⁵⁷

"This is a crazy notion, as expressed in a lot of this new-deal legislation, and accepted by increasing numbers of our people, that somehow, by some legerdemain, the Government of the United States can make it impossible and unnecessary for any of its citizens to face any difficulty, to run any risk, to bear any burden, but to be assured an income in youth, childhood, and old age, and even after they die. The thing is absolutely absurd."

– Representative Charles Eaton, April 13, 1935⁵⁸

"Is it possible that the [Social Security] board is not aware of the almost insuperable difficulties which confront any plan of registering millions of workers voluntarily. ... Experienced students know that such a miracle could not be performed even by a dictator, and no democratic government would undertake such an impossible task."

– American Association for Social Security, November 9, 1936⁵⁹

Critics of Social Security argued that the federal government would be incapable of effectively administering and managing the program. They predicted that it would either be impossible for the federal government to administer the program or that its administration would be inept and inefficient. These predictions have been disproven by the SSA's actual performance and success. The agency has built a remarkable record of administrative efficiency and excellence as Social Security has expanded and evolved over the last 90 years.

Launching Social Security required the federal government to create the world's largest insurance program from scratch.⁶⁰ To meet this immense challenge, the SSA used multiple administrative and technological innovations to register employers and workers, collect payroll taxes, enroll beneficiaries, maintain records of workers' earnings, and make benefit payments. For example, the SSA had to register 22 million workers and 3.5 million employers in less than a year and a half after the Social Security Act's enactment in order to collect the payroll taxes that would fund beneficiaries' benefits.⁶¹ To achieve this, the SSA created the Social Security Number (SSN) and Employer Identification Number (EIN) systems and partnered with the U.S. Postal Service to conduct a national education, outreach, and registration drive. Within 28 days of launching the initiative, Americans submitted 22

⁵⁷ *Congressional Record*, page 5544 (April 12, 1935) (<https://www.ssa.gov/history/pdf/h412.pdf>).

⁵⁸ *Congressional Record*, page 5580 (April 13, 1935) (<https://www.ssa.gov/history/pdf/h413.pdf>).

⁵⁹ Washington Post, *Security Backers Criticize System* (November 9, 1936) (PDF copy available).

⁶⁰ U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, *The Social Security Administration and Information Technology*, page 94 (October 1986) (<https://www.ssa.gov/history/pdf/ota86.pdf>).

⁶¹ Social Security Bulletin, Volume 70, Number 3, *Administering Social Security: Challenges Yesterday and Today* (2010) (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v70n3/v70n3p27.html>).

million completed applications, and within four months, the SSA had assigned 26 million SSNs and 2.6 million EINs.⁶²

In addition to registering employers and employees, the SSA had to establish and maintain record-keeping systems to document workers' earning histories and accurately calculate their benefits. Recognizing that the existing record-keeping technology would be insufficient, the SSA partnered with International Business Machines (IBM) and other technology experts to invent new automated recordkeeping and data management processes. These new technologies put the SSA at the "leading edge of recordkeeping and data-processing science" and "[s]tretch[ed] ... the state of the art in information technology."⁶³ Due to these innovations, the SSA started making Social Security payments as scheduled in January 1940. By the end of 1941, the agency was distributing monthly benefit payments of \$6.8 million (\$154 million in today's dollars) to over 372,000 beneficiaries.⁶⁴

In addition to accomplishing an unprecedented launch, the SSA established an excellent reputation for efficient and accurate administration. During the initial phase of Social Security's implementation, administrative expenses for the program comprised only 2% of total benefit payments.⁶⁵ This efficiency did not come at the expense of inferior service to the public. Throughout the program's history, beneficiaries have reported a high degree of satisfaction with the program and their benefits.⁶⁶

Today, the SSA continues to administer Social Security efficiently. Administrative payments in fiscal year 2024 were less than 1% of the \$1.5 trillion of annual benefits paid to beneficiaries.⁶⁷ The SSA also

⁶² Social Security Bulletin, Volume 70, Number 3, *Administering Social Security: Challenges Yesterday and Today* (2010) (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v70n3/v70n3p27.html>).

⁶³ U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, *The Social Security Administration and Information Technology*, pages 11 & 94 (October 1986) (<https://www.ssa.gov/history/pdf/ota86.pdf>).

⁶⁴ Social Security Bulletin, Volume 70, Number 3, *Administering Social Security: Challenges Yesterday and Today* (2010) (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v70n3/v70n3p27.html>) (for monthly statistics); Bureau of Labor Statistics, *CPI Inflation Calculator* (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>) (for inflation calculation, calculated from January 1940 to August 2024).

⁶⁵ U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, *The Social Security Administration and Information Technology*, pages 94-95 (October 1986) (<https://www.ssa.gov/history/pdf/ota86.pdf>).

⁶⁶ Social Security Bulletin, Volume 70, No. 3, *Administering Social Security: Challenges Yesterday and Today* (2010) (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v70n3/v70n3p27.html>) (references high degree of beneficiary satisfaction in 1965 and 1999); Social Security Administration, *Social Security Administration (SSA) Annual Data for Customer Service Satisfaction* (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://www.ssa.gov/open/data/Overall-Customer-Service-Satisfaction.html>) (for customer satisfaction surveys from 2007-2023); Robert Shapiro and Tom Smith, Public Opinion Quarterly, *The Polls: Social Security* (1985) (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2748923>) (for historical public opinion about Social Security).

⁶⁷ Social Security Administration, *SecurityStat: Agency Overhead Relative to Benefits Paid* (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://www.ssa.gov/securitystat>). Administrative costs for private annuities and other retirement products, such as defined-contribution plans, are generally higher than Social Security's. Annuity fees are often 3% or more, and the annual fees charged by private-sector retirement plans, typically based on a percentage of savings, can significantly reduce workers' retirement savings. Additionally, annuities and defined-contribution plans carry investment risks, in contrast to Social Security's benefits that are guaranteed by law. See Congressional Budget Office, *Administrative Costs of Private Accounts in Social Security*, pages 12-14 (March 2004) (<https://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/cbofiles/ftpdocs/52xx/doc5277/report.pdf>) (summary of fees charged by mutual funds, defined-contribution retirement accounts, and retirement annuities); Morningstar, *The 2023 US Fund Fee Study From Morningstar* (July 16, 2024) (<https://www.morningstar.com/business/insights/blog/funds/us-fund-fee-study>) (recent

maintains a strong track record of ensuring beneficiaries receive the benefits they are entitled to. The most recent data, from fiscal year 2022, show that the SSA has a payment accuracy rate of 99%, with only \$13.6 billion of the \$1.3 trillion in paid benefits being over or underpayments.⁶⁸ Annual surveys also routinely show that the majority of Social Security beneficiaries are satisfied with the customer service they receive from the SSA.⁶⁹

The SSA's long history of successfully administering Social Security highlights the flaws in critics' claims that the program would be unmanageable. Rather than leading to failure, the Social Security Act spurred the SSA to adopt innovative administrative solutions and develop new technologies to meet the needs of beneficiaries. As a result of their early work – and the continued dedication of subsequent generations of SSA employees – the SSA has efficiently met the needs of hundreds of millions of beneficiaries while maintaining high levels of beneficiary satisfaction.⁷⁰

information on retirement fees); AARP, *5 Things You Should Know About Annuities* (March 6, 2024) (<https://www.aarp.org/retirement/retirement-savings/info-2020/learn-about-annuities.html>) (average annuity fees); Securities and Exchange Commission, *How Fees and Expenses Affect Your Investment Portfolio* (accessed on September 30, 2024) (https://www.sec.gov/investor/alerts/ib_fees_expenses.pdf) (how fees affect retirement savings); Social Security Administration, *Social Security Retirement Benefits and Private Annuities: A Comparative Analysis* (May 2017) (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/issuepapers/ip2017-01.html>) (comparison of private annuities and Social Security benefits).

⁶⁸ Social Security Administration, *FY 2025 Budget Request: Budget Overview*, pages 39-40 (March 11, 2024) (<https://www.ssa.gov/budget/assets/materials/2025/2025BO.pdf>).

⁶⁹ Social Security Administration, *Social Security Administration (SSA) Annual Data for Customer Service Satisfaction: Overall Customer Service Satisfaction* (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://www.ssa.gov/open/data/Overall-Customer-Service-Satisfaction.html>).

⁷⁰ Social Security Administration, *Frequently Asked Questions, Q19: How Many Social Security Numbers Have Been Issued Since the Program Started?* (accessed on September 30, 2024) (<https://www.ssa.gov/history/hfaq.html>).