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## SOCIAL SECURITY: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ELDERLY CALIFORNIANS?

President Bush has called for sweeping changes to the Social Security program. The specifics of the President's proposal are still unclear, but the debate has focused attention on the program, who relies on it, and how it affects Californians. The following facts, drawn from a study by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), examine how much seniors in California relied on Social Security for their income during the period 2001-2003.

**Social Security provides cash payments that enable Americans to maintain a basic quality of life if they, or the workers they rely on, lose the ability to work due to age, disability, or death.**

Workers who are elderly or become disabled receive a Social Security check based on how long they worked and how much they earned. Spouses and children of deceased, disabled, and retired workers also receive Social Security. The largest group of Social Security recipients consists of those aged 65 and over. Nationally, one-third of senior Social Security recipients relied on these benefits for at least 90 percent of their income in 2001-03.

**The typical California senior Social Security recipient relied on Social Security for almost two-thirds of his or her income.** Social Security provided 64 percent of the income of the median or typical California recipient aged 65 and over. In other words, half of California's senior Social Security recipients received more than 64 percent of their income from Social Security; the other half received less than 64 percent. Among California's recipients aged 75 and older, half received at least 74 percent of their income from Social Security.

**Almost 1.4 million California individuals and couples aged 65 and older – 61 percent of all senior recipients – relied on Social Security for at least half of their income.** More than half (55 percent) of these individuals and couples depended on Social Security for at least 90 percent of their income.

**In California, Latino senior recipients relied more heavily on Social Security than did their white and black counterparts.** Half of the state's senior Latino Social Security recipients received at least 81 percent of their income from Social Security. Half of California's senior black recipients derived at least 66 percent of their income from Social Security, and half of white senior recipients relied on Social Security for at least 60 percent of their income.

**In California, nonmarried senior women relied more heavily on Social Security than did nonmarried men and married couples.** Half of the state's nonmarried senior female recipients received at least 81 percent of their income from Social Security. Half of California's nonmarried senior male recipients received at least 72 percent of their income from Social Security, and half of senior married couples relied on Social Security for at least 48 percent of their income.

The information presented above is from an analysis of Current Population Survey data for the period 2001-2003. Multiple years of data were pooled to provide a sufficient sample size to provide statistically reliable results. For additional information, see the Economic Policy Institute's study, *Social Security and the Income of the Elderly* (March 23, 2005), at <http://www.epinet.org/content.cfm/ib206>.