

**GAO**

**Briefing Report to Congressional Requesters**

**July 1987**

**SOCIAL SECURITY**

**Clients Still Rate  
Quality of Service  
High**



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Human Resources Division

B-226484

July 14, 1987

The Honorable Lawton Chiles, Chairman  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, and Education  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate

The Honorable William H. Natcher, Chairman  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, and Education  
Committee on Appropriations  
House of Representatives

This briefing report presents the final results<sup>1</sup> of our November 1986 nationwide survey of client satisfaction with the quality of service provided by the Social Security Administration (SSA) and compares the results with a similar survey we conducted 2 years earlier. The 1986 survey was made because your offices expressed concern about SSA service during implementation of the agency's plan--announced in January 1985--to reduce staff by 17,000 full-time equivalent positions through fiscal year 1990. Staff was reduced by about 4,500 full-time equivalent positions between the two surveys.

Comparing the results of the two surveys (using the same questionnaire for both) shows that clients rated the overall quality of service in 1986 about the same as or better than the service provided in 1984. Notably, no specific service aspects were rated significantly lower by 1986 respondents in comparison with 1984 respondents, and a number of service aspects were rated higher. Several of the questions that drew more favorable responses in 1986 represent statistically significant differences, indicating that 1986 respondents are more satisfied with some aspects of service than their 1984 counterparts. Appendix I indicates where differences in clients' responses were statistically significant at the 90-percent confidence level or higher. This means that the changes in 1986 represent more than the expected variation normally resulting from random sampling.

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<sup>1</sup>Preliminary results from selected aspects of our survey were furnished to your Committees as part of our report, Social Security: Staff Reductions and Service Quality (GAO/HRD-87-66, Mar. 10, 1987).

In 1986, about 81 percent of clients rated SSA service as "good" to "very good," whereas about 78 percent rated SSA service similarly in 1984. Likewise, about 54 percent of the clients said that service in 1986 was "somewhat better" or "much better" than the service received from other government agencies. This figure is up from the 51 percent who held this view in 1984 and is a statistically significant difference.

In contrast, only about 6 percent of 1986 respondents considered SSA service as "poor" to "very poor" compared with 7 percent in 1984. Because SSA makes monthly payments to about 42 million beneficiaries and recipients, however, a relatively small percentage of dissatisfied clients can translate into a large problem. Observations with respect to a number of specific service aspects follow.

#### MAIL FROM SSA

Respondents in 1986 had fewer problems with SSA mail than the 1984 respondents. For example, 77 percent of 1986 respondents said that SSA mail was "generally easy" to "very easy" to understand, which was about 10 percent higher than clients surveyed in 1984. The percentage of 1986 respondents who rated SSA mail as "generally difficult" to "very difficult" to understand decreased from 18 percent of 1984 respondents to 11 percent of 1986 respondents. These differences are statistically significant.

The changing perceptions of the understandability of SSA mail may be partly attributable to SSA's Clear Notice Project, which was aimed at improving the clarity of SSA notices sent to the public. The project, initiated in 1984, produced changes in the language and format of various notices that, in our view, improved their clarity.

Although clients in 1986 perceived SSA mail to be less of a problem, about 46 percent of clients responding still indicated that they contacted SSA for explanations of their mail. This may be because clients receive some mail from SSA that is generally understandable but still requires some explanation of its contents.

#### VISITS TO SSA

Respondents in 1986 viewed SSA employees more favorably during visits to field offices than the 1984 respondents. For example, 77 percent of the 1986 respondents indicated that SSA had done a "good" to "very good" job in handling their business compared with 73 percent in 1984. In addition, about 4 percent believed

that programs and rules were not explained clearly by employees, which was 2 percent lower than the 1984 respondents. These differences are statistically significant.

Respondents in 1986 indicated that they spent less time waiting for service at SSA field offices than did the 1984 respondents. For example, 39 percent of 1986 respondents said that they waited less than 15 minutes for service, whereas 34 percent of 1984 respondents said this. Although the 1986 respondents indicated their waiting time in SSA field offices was less than 1984 respondents, about 30 percent still waited 30 or more minutes for service. However, such waiting times for some clients may not be unreasonable considering that about 52 percent of clients sampled visited the office between 9:00 and 11:00 a.m.

#### PHONE CALLS TO SSA

Respondents in 1986 perceived a slight improvement in accessibility to SSA by phone. For example, about 50 percent of 1986 respondents were successful in reaching SSA by phone on the first try, which was about 3 percent higher than the first-try success rate of the 1984 respondents. The difference is statistically significant. However, the current survey results indicate that about one in four respondents still had to call SSA three or more times before getting through.

#### CLIENT COMMENTS

Our survey questionnaire offered respondents the opportunity to provide any comments they wished to make. Of the 1,345 respondents in 1986, 167 added positive written comments, in most cases, complimenting the overall quality of SSA service in general or the quality of service at a particular field office; 207 added negative written comments. The complaints, which parallel the 1984 complaints, mainly cited factors that are not a reflection of SSA service, such as unfavorable eligibility decisions and insufficient benefits for necessities.

#### STATUS OF SSA ACTION ON PRIOR GAO RECOMMENDATION

In our January 1986 report (Social Security: Quality of Service Generally Rated High by Clients Sampled, GAO/HRD-86-8, Jan. 30, 1986), we recommended that SSA periodically survey client satisfaction with the quality of SSA service and advise the Congress of the results. SSA agreed with our recommendation and decided that the initial survey should be conducted by an independent contractor. On April 2, 1987, SSA issued a Request

for Proposal, soliciting bids for making the survey. In addition to its main purpose, the survey will gather information to gauge clients' future service needs and expectations. SSA expects data from this survey to be available in the summer of 1988. In May 1987, the SSA Commissioner also requested that the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), Department of Health and Human Services, obtain client perceptions of SSA service and report by mid-August 1987. OIG has agreed to make the survey and plans to use the same questionnaire we used in our surveys.

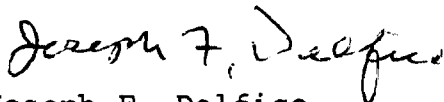
Measuring client satisfaction through independent evaluations is important to keep the Congress abreast of the public's views of SSA service. With over half of the planned staff reductions yet to be achieved, periodic monitoring of the public's views should be helpful in assessing any changes in SSA service as such reductions continue.

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The results of our November 1984 survey were discussed in our January 1986 report. That report contains a copy of our questionnaire, background information, and a detailed description of the objectives, scope, and methodology of the nationwide survey. It also describes other SSA services and measures of performance that were excluded from the 1984 survey and that we have also excluded from the 1986 survey. The methodology for our 1986 survey was identical to that for the 1984 survey and is discussed in appendix IV of this report. Appendixes I to III provide detailed information on clients' responses.

As requested by your offices, we did not obtain agency comments on this report. In addition, as agreed, we plan to send copies of this report to the Commissioner of Social Security and interested Senate and House Committees; we will make copies available to others on request.

Should you desire additional information about the matters discussed in this report, please call me on 275-6193.



Joseph F. Delfico  
Senior Associate Director

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ABBREVIATIONS

GAO	General Accounting Office
OASDI	Old Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance
SSA	Social Security Administration
SSI	Supplemental Security Income

COMPARISON OF 1984 AND 1986 RESPONSES TO GAO QUESTIONNAIRE  
(OVERALL, BY PROGRAM, AND BY STATUS)

Numbers are percentages

Question	Overall		By program <sup>a</sup>				By status <sup>a</sup>			
			CASDI		SSI		Disabled		Nondisabled	
	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86		
<b>Part I: Mail to and from Social Security</b>										
1. Have you ever written to SS? <sup>b</sup>										
Yes (continue)	27	24*	29	23	21	24	33	28	29	22
No (skip to Q <sup>c</sup> 3)	73	76	71	77	79	76	67	72	71	78
2. If you have written to SS, about how many times in all have you written?										
1 time	33	28*	35	26	22	34	36	24	32	22
2 times	25	30	25	30	29	30	18	28	29	32
3 times	16	13	16	15	15	09	14	10	17	17
More than 3 times	26	29	25	29	33	27	32	38	23	29
3. Often SS contacts people by mail to give or ask for information. Have you ever received mail, other than a benefit check itself, from SS?										
Yes (continue)	76	74	75	73	80	80	79	82	75	71
No (skip to Q 8)	24	26	25	27	20	20	21	18	25	29
4. In general, is the mail you've received from SS written in a language that you can read?										
Yes	88	93	88	94	88	91	85	94	88	93
No	12	07*	12	06	12	09	15	06	12	07

<sup>a</sup>Responses are weighted.

<sup>b</sup>SS-Social Security.

<sup>c</sup>Q-Question.

\*Indicates a statistically significant difference at the 90-percent confidence level or higher.

Notes: 1. Except where otherwise indicated, respondent was instructed to check one response to each question.

2. The sum of individual percentages may not equal 100 percent due to independent rounding.



Numbers are percentages

Question	Overall		By program				By status				
			OASDI		SSI		Disabled		Nondisabled		
			1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	
5. In general, how easy or difficult to understand is the mail you've received from SS?											
Very easy to understand	25	31*	25	32	25	28	25	27	24	32	
Generally easy to understand	42	46	43	47	38	44	38	48	44	46	
Neither easy nor difficult to understand	15	12*	14	12	16	11	17	15	14	11	
Generally difficult to understand	12	08*	12	06	14	12	15	05	11	08	
Very difficult to understand	06	03*	06	03	07	05	06	05	07	03	
6. Have you ever contacted, or thought about contacting SS to find out what the mail you'd received from them meant?											
Yes, I've contacted them	49	46	46	44	58	52	58	51	46	47	
Yes, I've thought about it, but haven't contacted them	08	09	08	08	08	11	10	11	07	07	
No, I haven't contacted, or thought about contacting them	43	45	46	48	34	37	33	39	47	46	
7. Have you ever contacted, or thought about contacting either family or friends to ask them what the mail you'd received from SS meant?											
Yes, I've contacted them	32	29	28	25	45	44	31	30	29	24	
Yes, I've thought about it, but haven't contacted them	06	04	05	03	06	06	06	01	06	04	
No, I haven't contacted, or thought about contacting them	62	67	66	72	49	50	63	69	65	72	

Numbers are percentages

Question	Overall		By program <sup>a</sup>				By status <sup>a</sup>													
			OASDI		SSI		Disabled		Nondisabled											
	1984-86		1984-86		1984-86		1984-86		1984-86											
Part II: Visits to the Social Security Office																				
8. Have you ever visited an SS office?																				
Yes (continue)	91	90	91	89	91	92	91	92	90	88										
No (skip to Q 22)	09	10	09	11	09	08	09	08	10	12										
9. About how many times in all have you visited an SS office?																				
1 time	15	16	17	18	09	09	08	09	16	17										
2 times	22	21	24	23	15	14	21	13	23	24										
3 times	21	20	22	19	18	22	18	19	25	19										
More than 3 times	43	43	38	40	58	55	53	59	36	40										
10. About how long ago did you last visit the SS office?																				
Within the last 3 months	39	36	36	32	51	51	30	25	29	26										
At least 3 but less than 6 months ago	18	19	17	19	20	19	12	23	16	17										
At least 6 but less than 9 months ago	08	10	08	10	08	09	10	11	10	12										
At least 9 but less than 12 months ago	06	05	06	05	05	05	14	07	04	05										
12 months ago or more	29	30	33	34	16	16	34	33	41	40										
11. Listed below are several reasons why a person might visit the SS office. Indicate whether or not your last visit had something to do with each.																				
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No						
You filed a claim for retirement benefits	26	74	29	71	32	68	35	65	08	92	07	93	07	93	06	94	36	64	41	59
You filed a claim for disability benefits	23	77	20	80	20	80	16	84	31	69	35	65	46	54	30	70	08	92	09	91
You filed a claim for survivors benefits	16	84	15	85	19	81	17	83	06	94	07	93	09	91	02	98	25	75	20	80
You filed a claim for SSI benefits	19	81	22*	78*	08	92	11	89	53	47	62	37	12	88	12	87	05	95	09	91
You asked for help concerning Medicare	13	87	15	85*	11	89	14	86	19	81	20	80	12	88	17	83	10	90	12	88

Numbers are percentages

Question	Overall		By program <sup>a</sup>				By status <sup>a</sup>													
			OASDI		SSI		Disabled		Non-disabled											
	1984-86		1984-86		1984-86		1984-86		1984-86											
<b>Part II: Visits to the Social Security Office</b>																				
<b>11. Listed below are several reasons why a person might visit the SS office. Indicate whether or not your last visit had something to do with each.</b>																				
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No								
You asked about a notice or other mail you'd gotten from SS	30	70	27	73	30	70	26	74	30	70	33	67	39	61	41	59	31	69	24	76
You notified SS of a name or address change	22	78	25	75*	21	79	24	76	28	72	31	69	26	74	32	68	23	78	26	74
SS asked you to contact them	27	73	25	75	22	78	20	80	43	57	43	57	36	65	28	72	19	81	19	81
You visited the office for some other reason	20	80	22	78	20	80	23	77	21	79	21	79	24	76	28	72	19	81	24	76
<b>12. About what time did you get to the SS office that day?</b>																				
Before 9 a.m./before it opened	13	11			13	10	13	15			20	16			10	08				
9 a.m. to before 11 a.m.	47	52*			46	52	51	51			38	45			51	56				
11 a.m. to before 1 p.m.	15	13			15	13	14	14			16	12			14	11				
1 p.m. to before 3 p.m.	19	16			20	17	16	15			21	20			19	15				
3 p.m. to before 5 p.m.	06	07			06	08	06	06			06	07			07	10				
At 5 p.m. or later	0	0			0	0	0	0			01	0			0	0				
<b>13. We would like to know how crowded or empty the SS office waiting area was. Was there room for everyone to sit in a chair during most of the time you were there?</b>																				
Yes	93	93			94	94	91	92			91	95			95	93				
No	07	07			06	06	09	08			09	05			05	07				

Numbers are percentages

Question	Overall 1984-86	By program <sup>a</sup>		By status <sup>a</sup>		
		ONSDI 1984-86	SSI 1984-86	Disabled 1984-86	Nondisabled 1984-86	
<b>Part II: Visits to the Social Security Office</b>						
<b>14. About how much time did you spend waiting to be helped at the SS office that day?</b>						
Less than 5 minutes	06 09*	06 10	06 06	05 05	07 11	
5 to less than 15 minutes	28 30	30 31	23 27	21 26	34 33	
15 to less than 30 minutes	33 31	33 31	31 31	28 33	37 30	
30 minutes or more	33 30	30 28	40 36	46 36	22 26	
<b>15. Considering the reason for your visit and the number of people there waiting to be helped, was your wait longer than, about as long as, or shorter than you expected?</b>						
Longer than expected	21 19	20 18	26 23	36 24	14 17	
About as long as expected	49 50	49 51	48 46	43 55	53 49	
Shorter than expected	30 31	31 31	26 31	21 21	34 34	
<b>16. How much privacy did you have at the SS office to talk about your business? Did you have more than, about as much as, or less than you needed?</b>						
Had more privacy than needed	09 08	09 07	10 10	07 06	10 07	
Had about as much privacy as needed	79 79	81 81	75 76	71 73	84 82	
Had less privacy than needed	12 13	11 12	15 14	23 21	06 11	
<b>17. In general, how courteous or discourteous were SS employees to you during your last visit?</b>						
Very courteous	57 58	59 58	50 58	54 44	58 62	
Generally courteous	32 32	31 32	36 31	29 41	34 29	
Neither courteous nor discourteous	07 08	07 08	09 07	11 11	05 07	
Generally discourteous	02 01	01 0	04 02	02 01	01 0	
Very discourteous	02 01	02 02	01 02	03 02	02 01	

Numbers are percentages

Question	Overall		By program <sup>a</sup>		By status <sup>a</sup>	
			OASDI	SSI	Disabled	Non-disabled
	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86
<b>Part II: Visits to the Social Security Office</b>						
<b>18. How clearly or unclearly did they explain the rules or program that applied to you?</b>						
Clearly	72	76	71	78	72	71
Somewhat clearly	22	19	22	18	25	19
Unclearly	06	04*	07	04	06	04
<b>19. Think about the reason for your last visit to the SS office. Do you think SS has done a very good, good, fair, poor or very poor job handling this matter so far?</b>						
Very good job	38	39	39	40	32	38
Good job	35	38	35	40	34	33
Fair job	15	13	14	12	20	16
Poor job	07	06	07	05	08	07
Very poor job	05	04	05	03	06	06
<b>20. Once again, think about the reason for your last visit. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the amount of time it has taken SS, so far, to take care of this matter?</b>						
Very satisfied	43	45	45	46	38	40
Generally satisfied	35	38	35	38	34	37
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	08	07	08	06	09	09
Generally dissatisfied	06	04*	05	04	09	05
Very dissatisfied	08	06	07	06	10	09
<b>21. Altogether, about how long were you at the SS office that day?</b>						
Less than 15 minutes	09	10	10	11	08	07
At least 15 but less than 30 minutes	29	31	30	32	25	27

Numbers are percentages

Question	Overall		By program <sup>a</sup>				By status <sup>a</sup>			
			OASDI		SSI		Disabled		Non-disabled	
	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86		
<b>Part II: Visits to the Social Security Office</b>										
21. Altogether, about how long were you at the SS office that day?										
At least 30 minutes but less than an hour	33	33	34	33	30	33	30	42	35	28
At least 1 but less than 1-1/2 hours	15	14	14	13	19	15	16	13	11	12
At least 1-1/2 but less than 2 hours	06	06	06	05	07	08	11	08	05	04
2 hours or more	08	07	06	06	11	10	11	06	05	06
22. Has anyone ever visited the SS office for you?										
Yes	14	13	11	09	26	24	17	22	09	07
No	86	87	89	91	74	76	83	78	91	93
<b>Part III: Telephoning Social Security</b>										
23. Do you know that SS business can be taken care of over the telephone?										
Yes (continue)	84	86*	85	87	81	80	88	84	86	89
No (skip to Q 25)	16	14	15	13	19	20	12	16	14	11
24. Do you know that almost all SS business can be taken care of over the telephone?										
Yes	76	78*	76	79	77	73	72	77	79	82
No	24	22	24	21	23	27	28	23	21	18
25. Have you ever reached or tried to contact SS by telephone?										
Yes, I've reached them by phone (continue)	72	76*	71	76	76	77	81	84	68	75
Yes, I've tried to contact them by phone, but never reached them (skip to Q 36)	04	03	04	03	03	04	04	03	05	02
No, I've never reached or tried to contact them by phone (skip to Q 36)	24	21	25	21	21	19	16	13	27	23

Numbers are percentages

Question	Overall		By program <sup>a</sup>				By status <sup>a</sup>													
			OASDI		SSI		Disabled		Non-disabled											
	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86										
<b>Part III: Telephoning Social Security</b>																				
<b>26. About how many times in all have you reached SS by telephone?</b>																				
1 time	15	16	16	17	12	11	11	11	14	16										
2 times	21	22	21	22	21	20	17	10	20	25										
3 times	20	21	21	22	17	20	20	16	22	23										
More than 3 times	44	41	42	39	50	49	52	63	44	36										
<b>27. About how long ago did you last reach SS by telephone?</b>																				
Within the last 3 months	48	49	43	47	61	58	42	47	38	42										
At least 3 but less than 6 months ago	20	20	21	20	18	19	19	22	23	20										
At least 6 but less than 9 months ago	08	08	09	07	07	09	11	08	08	08										
At least 9 but less than 12 months ago	05	04	05	04	06	05	08	03	04	04										
12 months ago or more	19	19	22	22	08	09	21	20	26	26										
<b>28. The last time you reached SS by phone, about how many times did you try before you got through?</b>																				
1 time, got through on the first try	47	50*	48	51	44	45	43	43	49	51										
2 times	28	26	27	25	29	30	26	27	29	26										
3 times	11	12	11	11	13	13	13	11	10	11										
More than 3 times	14	12	14	13	14	11	19	19	13	12										
<b>29. Indicate whether or not each of the following things happened to you the last time you reached SS by phone.</b>																				
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No						
Before you got through, you hung up because no one answered	12	88	10	90*	11	89	10	90	14	86	10	90	14	86	11	89	10	90		
Before you got through, you hung up because you got a busy signal	35	65	37	63	33	67	36	64	40	60	40	60	38	62	40	60	30	70	37	63
Once you got through, you were put on hold and you hung up while you were waiting	46	54	45	55	45	55	43	57	49	51	53	47	56	44	60	40	38	62	40	60
Once you got through, you were disconnected	10	90	10	90	10	90	10	90	12	88	11	89	14	86	13	87	08	92	09	91
	05	95	06	94*	05	95	06	94	07	93	08	92	10	90	11	89	02	98	04	96

	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
30. Listed below are several reasons why a person might telephone the SS office. Indicate whether or not your last phone call had something to do with each.														
You filed a claim for retirement benefits	14	86	13	87	17	83	16	84	04	96	04	96	05	95
You filed a claim for disability benefits	17	83	17	83	14	86	13	87	28	72	30	70	34	66
You filed a claim for survivors benefits	10	90	13	87	12	88	15	85	06	94	06	94	05	95
You filed a claim for SSI benefits	15	85	18*	82	06	94	09	91	42	58	47	53	09	91
You asked for help concerning Medicare	14	86	15	85	12	88	15	85	20	80	16	84	15	85
You asked about a notice or other mail you'd gotten from SS	40	60	40	60	37	63	38	62	48	52	46	54	46	54
You notified SS of a name or address change	22	78	28*	72	20	80	28	72	29	71	28	72	22	79
SS asked you to contact them	26	74	26	74	21	79	21	79	40	60	42	58	29	71
You telephoned SS for some other reason	25	75	25	75	27	73	26	74	19	81	22	78	28	72



Numbers are percentages

Question	Overall		By program <sup>a</sup>				By status <sup>a</sup>			
			OASDI		SSI		Disabled		Non-disabled	
	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86		
<b>Part III: Telephoning Social Security</b>										
31. In general, how courteous or discourteous were SS employees to you during this call?										
Very courteous	55	53	58	54	46	52	55	35	60	59
Generally courteous	34	36	33	36	37	35	33	44	34	35
Neither courteous nor discourteous	08	09	07	09	12	09	10	17	06	06
Generally discourteous	02	01	01	01	04	01	01	03	01	0
Very discourteous	01	01	01	0	01	03	02	0	0	0
32. How clearly or unclearly did they explain the rules or program that applied to you?										
Clearly	70	71	72	72	64	68	68	60	74	75
Somewhat clearly	23	25	21	25	28	27	25	33	19	23
Unclearly	07	04*	07	03	08	05	07	07	07	02
33. Think about the reason why you last reached SS by phone. Have they done a very good, good, fair, poor or very poor job handling this matter so far?										
Very good job	40	40	42	40	33	38	35	22	46	44
Good job	35	38*	36	39	33	37	33	43	37	40
Fair job	15	12	13	11	22	16	18	18	10	09
Poor job	06	05	05	05	07	05	08	06	04	05
Very poor job	04	05	04	05	05	05	07	11	03	02
34. Once again, think about the reason why you last reached SS by phone. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the amount of time it has taken them, so far, to take care of this matter?										
Very satisfied	42	42	44	43	37	40	36	31	48	45
Generally satisfied	36	39*	35	39	38	39	39	37	32	41
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	10	07	10	07	09	07	14	12	09	05
Generally dissatisfied	05	04	05	03	06	07	04	06	06	03
Very dissatisfied	07	07	07	08	09	07	09	14	05	06

Numbers are percentages

Question	Overall		By program <sup>a</sup>				By status <sup>a</sup>			
			OASDI		SSI		Disabled		Non-disabled	
	1984-86		1984-86		1984-86		1984-86		1984-86	

## Part III: Telephoning Social Security

35. About how long (including the time you waited, if any) did this phone call last?											
Less than 3 minutes	25	30*	25	32	24	26	17	31	27	32	
At least 3 but less than 10 minutes	55	55	56	55	52	53	58	51	57	57	
At least 10 but less than 20 minutes	15	10*	14	08	17	16	18	12	13	06	
20 minutes or more	05	05	05	05	06	05	07	06	04	05	
36. Has anyone ever telephoned SS for you?											
Yes	18	20	12	16	37	33	18	26	11	14	
No	82	80	88	84	63	67	82	74	90	86	

## Part IV: Social Security Benefits

37. Listed below are several kinds of SS benefits. Indicate whether or not you are currently receiving each.																				
Old age retirement benefits	33	67	37*	63	38	62	44	56	15	85	13	87	04	96	05	95	55	45	59	41
Disability retirement benefits	22	78	18	82*	24	76	18	82	17	83	18	82	69	31	59	41	07	93	08	92
Survivors benefits	17	83	17	83	21	79	20	80	07	93	06	94	07	93	08	92	30	70	25	75
SSI	25	75	26	74	09	91	13	87	73	27	71	29	17	83	25	75	07	94	11	89
38. Do you usually get your benefit check on time?																				
Yes	96	98*	96	99	97	95	94	99	97	99										
No	04	02	04	01	03	05	06	01	03	01										
39. Have you ever contacted, or thought about contacting SS because your check did not come on time?																				
Yes, I've contacted them	25	23	23	20	30	32	36	33	18	19										
Yes, I've thought about it, but haven't contacted them	02	03	01	03	05	03	01	04	01	02										
No, I haven't contacted or thought about asking them	73	74	76	77	64	65	63	63	80	79										

Numbers are percentages

Question	Overall		By program <sup>a</sup>				By status <sup>a</sup>			
			CASDI		SSI		Disabled		Nondisabled	
	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86		
<b>Part IV: Social Security Benefits</b>										
40. Have you ever asked, or thought about asking SS if the amount of your benefit is correct?										
Yes, I've asked them	28	27	27	25	29	32	29	28	25	25
Yes, I've thought about it, but haven't asked them	11	09	11	09	11	10	17	12	08	08
No, I've never asked or thought about asking them	61	64	62	65	60	58	54	60	67	67
<b>Part V: Overall Quality of Social Security's Service</b>										
41. Overall, how would you rate the service that SS has given you?										
Very Good	42	41	43	42	41	38	32	26	47	43
Good	36	40	38	40	30	37	40	50	39	40
Fair	14	13	13	12	19	18	19	16	10	12
Poor	04	03	03	03	06	03	03	04	02	02
Very poor	03	03	03	02	04	04	06	04	02	02
42. How would you rate SS's service in comparison to the service you get from other Federal, State and Local Government Agencies? Is SS's service better, about as good as, or worse?										
SS much better than others	29	32*	28	32	30	32	24	26	31	34
SS somewhat better than others	22	22	22	21	21	24	14	16	25	22
SS is about as good as others	43	41	44	42	41	39	54	47	39	41
SS somewhat worse than others	04	03	03	03	05	03	05	08	03	01
SS much worse than others	03	02	03	02	02	03	04	03	03	02
Can't say, have had no contact with other government agencies	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Numbers are percentages

Question	Overall		By program <sup>a</sup>		By status <sup>a</sup>	
			OASDI	SSI	Disabled	Non-disabled
	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86	1984-86
<b>Part V: Overall Quality of Social Security's Service</b>						
<b>43. If you must contact SS in the future, would your first preference be to write, telephone, or visit?</b>						
Write	04 04	03 04	05 05	02 07	04 03	
Telephone	51 53	50 53	52 51	58 51	48 55	
Visit	45 43	47 43	42 44	40 42	48 42	
<b>44. Thank you for your cooperation. We appreciate your help. If you have any comments about how SS has served you, please write them in the space below.</b>						
Positive comment	30 35	31 35	27 35	15 33	38 33	
Negative comment	58 49	57 49	60 46	74 46	51 52	
Mixed comment	12 16	11 16	13 18	09 21	12 15	

RESPONDENTS' OVERALL RATING OF  
SSA SERVICE BY REGION,  
1984 VERSUS 1986

Numbers are percentages

SSA region	Very Good		Good		Fair		Poor		Very Poor	
	1984	1986	1984	1986	1984	1986	1984	1986	1984	1986
1. Boston	47	49	32	41	12	08	05	01	04	0
2. New York	43	36	41	39	10	17	03	03	03	04
3. Philadelphia	51	39	33	40	10	16	03	05	03	01
4. Atlanta	43	41	37	41	12	13	04	03	04	02
5. Chicago	42	39	37	40	14	16	04	02	03	03
6. Dallas	38	40	32	40	22	14	04	02	04	04
7. Kansas City	37	44	42	45	15	06	02	0	04	05
8. Denver <sup>a</sup>	30	49	51	12	18	13	01	14	0	12
9. San Francisco	38	40	35	40	20	16	04	03	03	01
10. Seattle	52	47	29	35	09	11	05	04	05	03
Average rating	42	41	36	40	15	14	04	03	03	03

<sup>a</sup>GAO does not consider the 1986 totals for the Denver Region to be conclusive since its sample included only 25 responses from that region and consequently resulted in a high sampling error.

OVERALL RATING OF SSA SERVICE  
BY CLAIM STATUS,  
1984 VERSUS 1986

<u>Claim status</u>	Good		Fair		Poor	
	<u>1984</u>	<u>1986</u>	<u>1984</u>	<u>1986</u>	<u>1984</u>	<u>1986</u>
Approved	83	91	12	06	05	03
Denied	51	46	27	28	22	26

SAMPLING AND ESTIMATION METHODOLOGY

SSA data bases lack the capability to identify precisely the universe of SSA's client contacts. Consequently, in preparing to conduct a nationwide survey concerning the perceived quality of SSA services, we had to estimate the total universe size. To do this, we worked with SSA officials to identify and select SSA computerized files and transaction codes that, in our judgment and SSA's, indicated a client contact. We believe this approach was adequate because our objective was to develop a universe of SSA clients who had high probabilities of having had recent contact with SSA.

DEVELOPMENT OF A  
SAMPLING LIST

To select a sample of persons to receive questionnaires, we first obtained a list of the universe of SSI and OASDI client transactions. SSA's data processing cycles determined which transaction files would be complete and ready for our use. Based on our anticipated dates for mailing the questionnaires to assure a recent contact and to be consistent with our 1984 survey, we selected September 1986 transactions. Because of the large volume of transactions, we randomly selected 4 days (1 in each of the 4 weeks in September) of transactions meeting our criteria for type of contact. These 660,448 transactions constituted the list from which we drew our sample.

SAMPLE SELECTION

From our 4-day list of transactions, we drew an initial random sample of each of the four SSA program categories and their corresponding transaction groups--SSI initial claims, SSI postentitlements, OASDI initial claims, and OASDI postentitlements. We then matched these records, by Social Security number, to SSA's Master Beneficiary Record (for OASDI beneficiaries) and Supplemental Security Record (for SSI recipients) to obtain additional information needed to select a final sample for the questionnaires. After deleting records of deceased individuals, absent or incomplete mailing addresses, and duplicate records, to the extent practicable, we randomly selected a subsample from each group. Our final sample size was 1,679, as shown in table IV.1.

Table IV.1: Development of Final Sample for Survey

Program	Type of transaction	Sampling frame (4-day)	Initial sample	Final sample
SSI	Initial claim	25,951	281	268
SSI	Postentitlement	127,089	1,330	529
OASDI	Initial claim	110,345	1,500	390
OASDI	Postentitlement	<u>397,063</u>	<u>3,000</u>	<u>492</u>
Total		<u>660,448</u>	<u>6,111</u>	<u>1,679<sup>a</sup></u>

<sup>a</sup>There were 1,745 questionnaires mailed; undeliverables and additional deceased individuals reduced the sample to 1,679.

PROJECTION TO THE  
UNIVERSE OF CLIENTS

Because we randomly sampled September 1986 transactions that met our criteria as being initiated by telephone, mail, or personal contacts, we projected our sample results to the September universe of SSA clients. We used appropriate statistical formulas for a stratified random sample design to determine our universe of SSA clients; we estimated responses based on questionnaires completed and returned and sampling errors of the estimates. Our September SSA client universe was more than 2.7 million people. All percentages in this report, unless otherwise noted, reflect the expected response rates had we actually sent questionnaires to all clients in all four groups. The response rates by transaction group are shown in table IV.2.

Table IV.2: Questionnaire Response Rates

Program	Type of transaction	Number sampled	Number responding	Response rate (percent)
SSI	Initial claim	268	202	75.4
SSI	Postentitlement	529	411	77.7
OASDI	Initial claim	390	322	82.6
OASDI	Postentitlement	<u>492</u>	<u>410</u>	<u>83.3</u>
Total		<u>1,679</u>	<u>1,345</u>	<u>80.1</u>

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