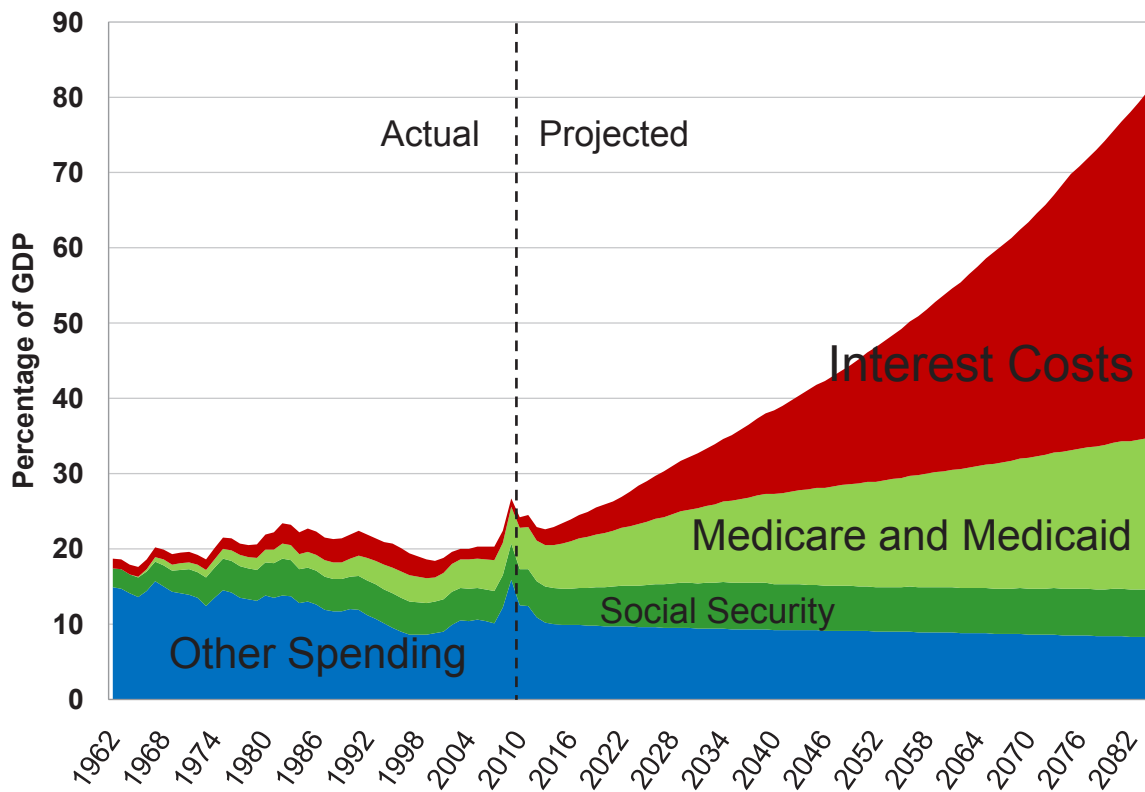


CHARTS – CLEARLY COMMUNICATING COMPLEX IDEAS



Source: Congressional Budget Office
Produced by: Veronique de Rugy, Mercatus Center at George Mason University



MERCATUS CENTER
George Mason University

CHARTS CHANGE MINDS BY ALLOWING PEOPLE TO VIEW RAW DATA AND REACH THEIR OWN CONCLUSIONS – CHANGING MINDS IN A DEEPER WAY.

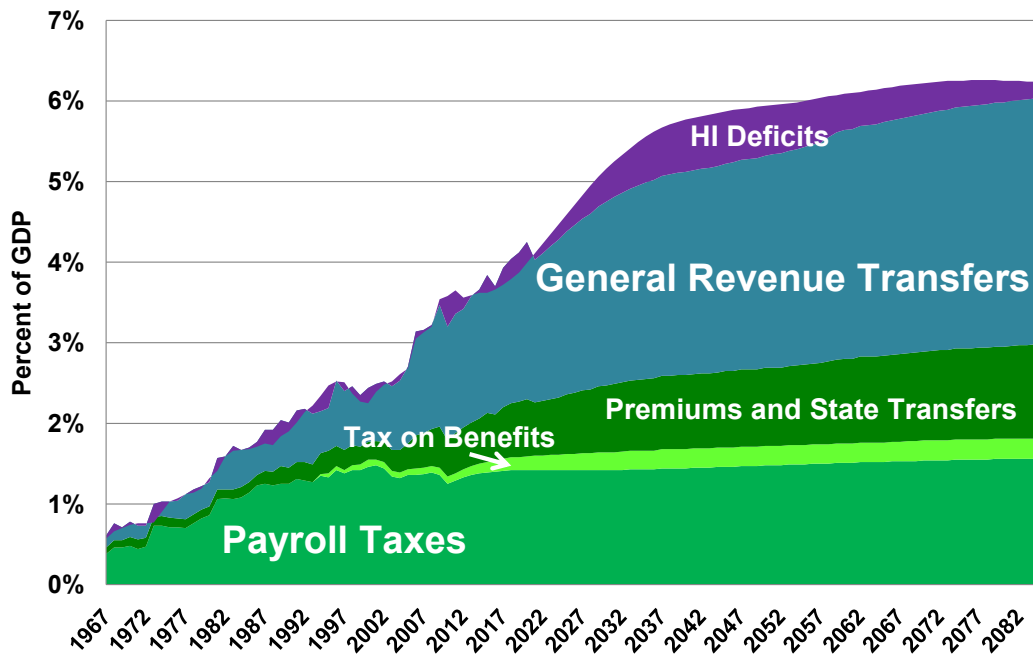
For the average American, a simple (but not too simple) chart can educate and persuade about a particular policy issue. Data, as long as it is presented in a straight-forward way, empowers people to draw their own conclusions—and to hold those conclusions with more conviction.

The Mercatus Center produces and distributes an average of two charts per week illustrating a relevant fact about government spending. The charts are timed to a specific opportunity or issue.

These charts have been used in media congressional hearings, briefings, and the regular newsletter communications of other organizations.

EXAMPLE: MEDICARE SPENDING BREAKDOWN

Featured in the Washington Examiner (print and online). Hard copy circulation of 100K+.



Source: Social Security Administration
Produced by: Veronique de Rugy, Mercatus Center at George Mason University

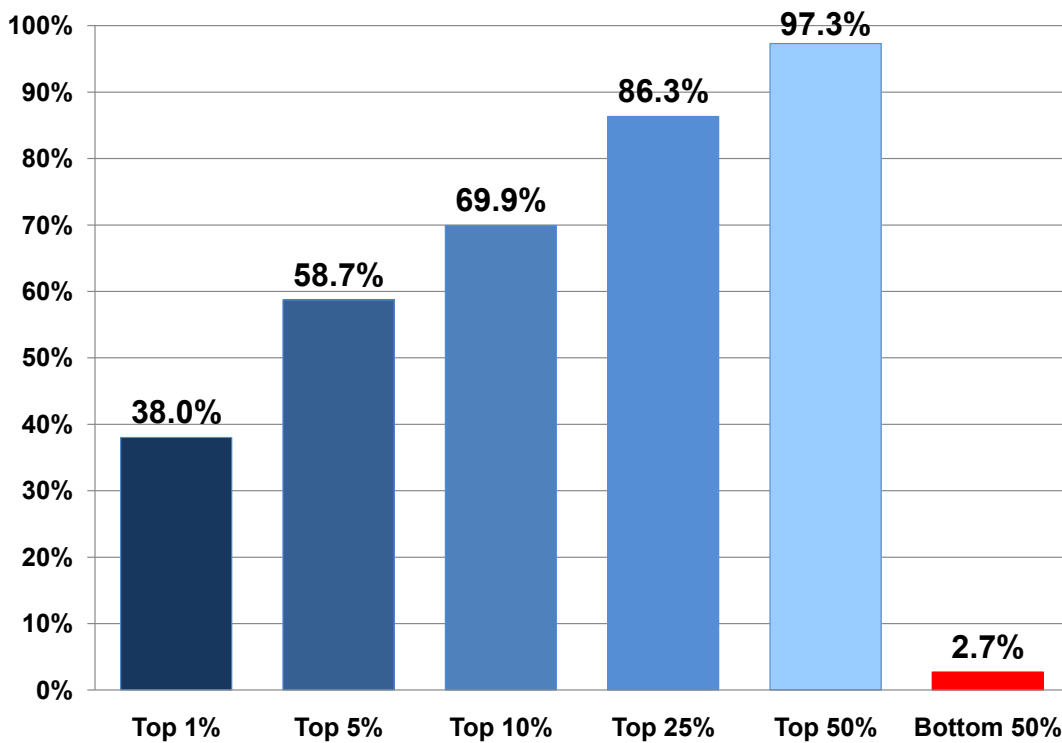
Veronique de Rugy uses the Social Security Trustees Report's projections to break down the funding sources of Medicare spending. Even under the best assumptions about the success of the president's healthcare reform, over 40 percent of future Medicare spending will require funding outside of the Medicare program.

BEST PRACTICES

- Generate file types that are easy to **download**, like PDF or JPG.
- **Simplify** graphs so that they are credible and legible.
- Charts perform well on social networks, where the audience is primed for small bites of information,
- Work to simplify complex subjects. Visuals provide context in a world where much is discussed and decided quantitatively.

EXAMPLE: BREAKDOWN OF FEDERAL PERSONAL INCOME TAXES

16K+ views on the Mercatus website. Featured on Bloomberg TV, Reason Online.



Source: IRS (Tax Year 2008) Produced by: Jason J. Fichtner, Mercatus Center at George Mason University

BEST PRACTICES

- **Label** important events in the data.
- Aesthetics matter! If graphics look dull, viewers' interest won't be piqued.
- Cover topics that appeal to the viewers at a personal level; highlight this individual connection through related marketing efforts.
- With a quicker turnaround time than many other publications, charts can help influence policy and establish organizational expertise.

The Mercatus Center has used charts as a rapid response tool to reach policy makers in federal and state legislatures, students, national and local media, and interested lay audiences.

STATE AND LOCAL ECONOMIC DATA

Constantly updated digest of national economic indicators with links: <http://www.nber.org/releases/>

State employment, unemployment, unemployment Rates: <http://www.bls.gov/lau/>

Regional unemployment, unemployment rates: <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/metro.t01.htm>

State and local spending, tax receipts, and debt: <http://www.census.gov/govs/estimate/>

Stimulus spending by state, county, or congressional district: <http://www.recovery.gov/FAQ/Developer/Pages/Location-Widget.aspx>

Beneficiaries of OASDI and SSI by state or congressional district: http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/factsheets/cong_stats/index.html

Gross domestic product by state and metropolitan area: <http://bea.gov/regional/downloadzip.cfm>

Compensation of employees and subsidies by state and by industry: http://bea.gov/iTable/iTable.cfm?reqid=70&step=1&i_suri=1&acrdrn=1

Demographic information by state, county or city: <http://quickfacts.census.gov>

LEARN MORE

Edward R. Tufte, *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information* (Cheshire: Graphics Press, 1983).

Sarah Harrison Smith, *The Fact Checkers Bible* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004).

The Economist, *Guide to Economic Indicators : Making Sense of Economics* (New York: Bloomberg Press, 2010).

JAKINA DEBNAM

Research Analyst

Mercatus Center at George Mason University

703-993-9458 (o)

678-612-3383 (m)

www.mercatus.org