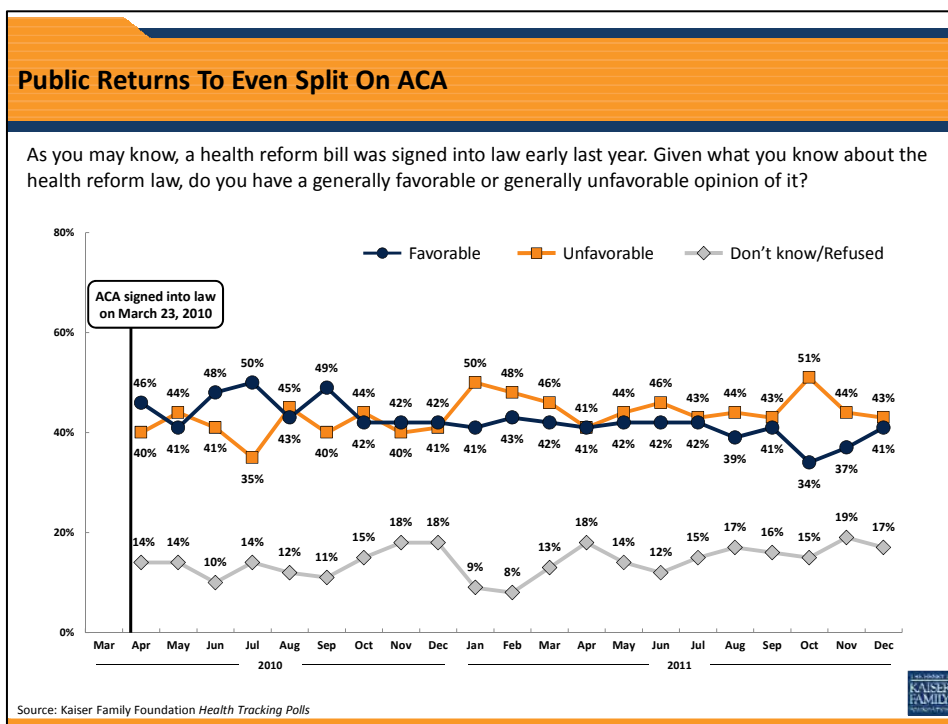


After a bumpy fall, American opinion toward the 2010 health reform law returned to the nearly even divide now familiar to opinion watchers, a divide that masks the lasting partisan gap in favorability that has existed since passage. At this point, even independents seem divided along partisan lines in their views of the ACA. Among the major provisions tested this month, the health insurance exchanges were highly popular on a bipartisan basis, and the individual mandate continues to stand out as the only truly unpopular provision. Though opinion on the mandate has been fairly consistent, it also remains malleable, and basic messages can still sway Americans pro and con.

OCTOBER DOWNTURN WAS DIP, NOT FREE FALL

The October dip in support for the ACA, a dip fueled by a loss of support among the law's natural Democratic constituency, has been fully made up in December, with Democrats coming back on board and overall national opinion on the law back to the even split we've seen for most of 2011. This month, 41 percent of Americans expressed favorable views of the health reform law, compared to 43 percent unfavorable. Partisan divisions on the law persist with 64 percent of Democrats backing the law and just as many Republicans (69 percent) opposing it. The public's views of how the law will impact their own family, and whether it will benefit the country as a whole, have also reverted to the more even divide witnessed since passage after ticking downward this fall.



CONCEPT OF EXCHANGES POPULAR WITH PUBLIC

As many states work on the extensive planning needed to launch the exchanges, and others hold off in anticipation of a Supreme Court ruling on the law in 2012, most Americans (79 percent) say they have at least a somewhat favorable view of the creation of “health insurance exchanges or marketplaces where small businesses and people who don’t get coverage through their employers can shop for insurance and compare prices and benefits.” The provision is backed by 92 percent of Democrats, 75 percent of independents and even by a solid majority (62 percent) of Republicans.

FAVORABILITY OF MAJOR PROVISIONS OF THE ACA BY PARTY				
	Total	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Health insurance exchanges	79%	92%	75%	62%
Subsidy assistance to individuals	75	93	70	51
Medicaid expansion	69	89	63	41
Employer mandate/penalty for large employers	61	83	56	36
Individual mandate/penalty	33	50	30	18

INDIVIDUAL MANDATE LEAST POPULAR ASPECT OF LAW, YET MALLEABILITY OF OPINION PERSISTS

Meanwhile, the provision at the heart of the legal challenges to the ACA—the individual mandate—remains unpopular, opposed by most Republicans and independents, and about half of Democrats. But even here, on a provision where opinion has seemed fairly consistent over the past year, people’s views remain malleable in the face of basic information from an opposing viewpoint. The December tracking poll finds that support for the mandate overall is at 33 percent, but that support can vary from 17 percent to 61 percent, depending on which messages opponents hear on the issue.

Perhaps surprisingly, the most effective message in terms of changing people’s minds is the basic reminder that, “under the reform law, most Americans would still get coverage through their employers and so would automatically satisfy the requirement without having to buy any new insurance.” After hearing that message, favorable views of the mandate went up 28 percentage points to 61 percent. Messages about overturning the guaranteed issue provision of the law, the possibility of risk selection driving up costs, and the escape hatch for people whose insurance costs prove prohibitive also sway some members of the public, though not as many.

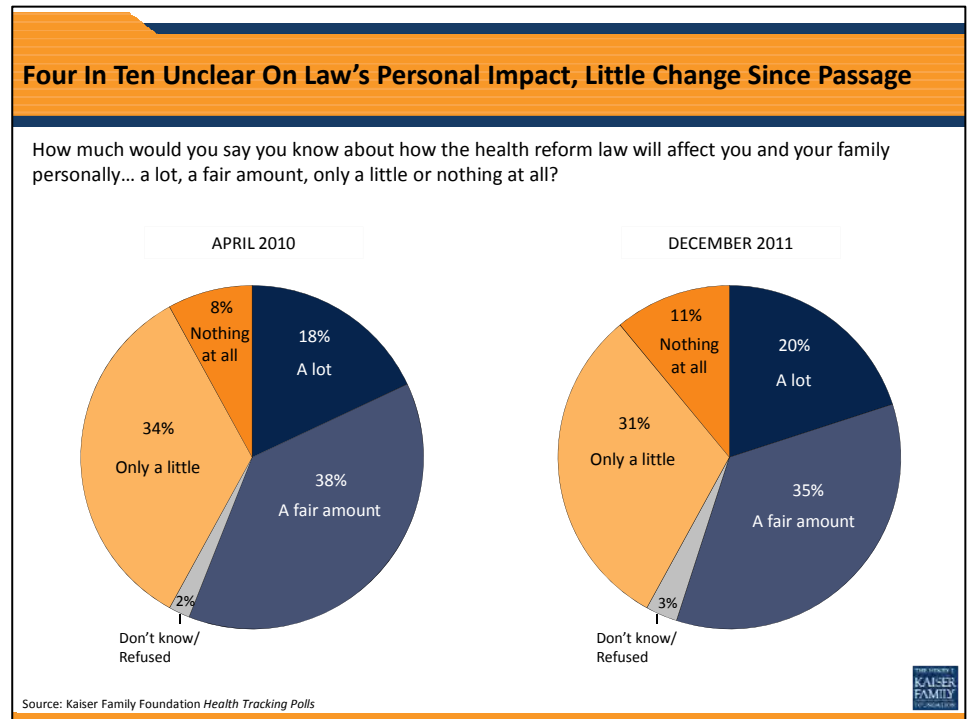
MESSAGES MOVE VIEWS ON INDIVIDUAL MANDATE			
	Favorable	Unfavorable	Percentage point change in favorability
Public opinion on individual mandate	33%	65%	-
POSITIVE ARGUMENTS			
<i>What if you heard that...</i>			
...under the reform law, most Americans would still get coverage through their employers and so would automatically satisfy the requirement without having to buy any new insurance	61%	34%	+28
...without such a requirement, insurance companies would still be allowed to deny coverage to people who are sick	49	44	+16
...people would not be held to this requirement if the cost of new coverage would consume too large a share of their income	49	45	+16
...without such a requirement, people may wait until they are seriously ill to buy health insurance, which will drive up health insurance costs for everyone	47	45	+14
NEGATIVE ARGUMENTS			
<i>What if you heard that...</i>			
...a case has been brought before the Supreme Court arguing that this requirement to have health insurance is unconstitutional	23%	74%	-10
...requiring all Americans to have health insurance could mean that some people would be required to buy health insurance that they find too expensive or did not want	17	80	-16

On the flip side, messages against the mandate also move some Americans previously in favor of the provision to *oppose* it. Overall favorability goes down 16 percentage points when the public is told that “requiring all Americans to have health insurance could mean that some people would be required to buy health insurance that they find too expensive or did not want.” It goes down 10 points when people are told that “a case has been brought before the Supreme Court arguing that this requirement to have health insurance is unconstitutional.”

UNDERSTANDING OF LAW’S PERSONAL IMPACT UNCHANGED SINCE PASSAGE

Overall, Americans’ sense that they understand how the ACA will impact them directly is little changed over the course of the past year, despite the fact that some provisions have been implemented and that the law has been a constant topic of debate in the run-up to the 2012 presidential elections. Overall, a narrow majority of the public (55 percent) say they know at least a “fair amount” about how the ACA will impact them, but four in ten (42 percent) report not being sure how the law will affect their own family. This is virtually unchanged since April 2010, when 56 percent felt they knew a fair bit about the law’s potential impact, and 42 percent did not.

Those Americans who stand to benefit from the planned coverage expansions in the law are no more likely than others to say they have a good sense of how the law will impact them. Four in ten of the uninsured say they know little about what the law will do, and nearly half of the low-income are equally unsure.



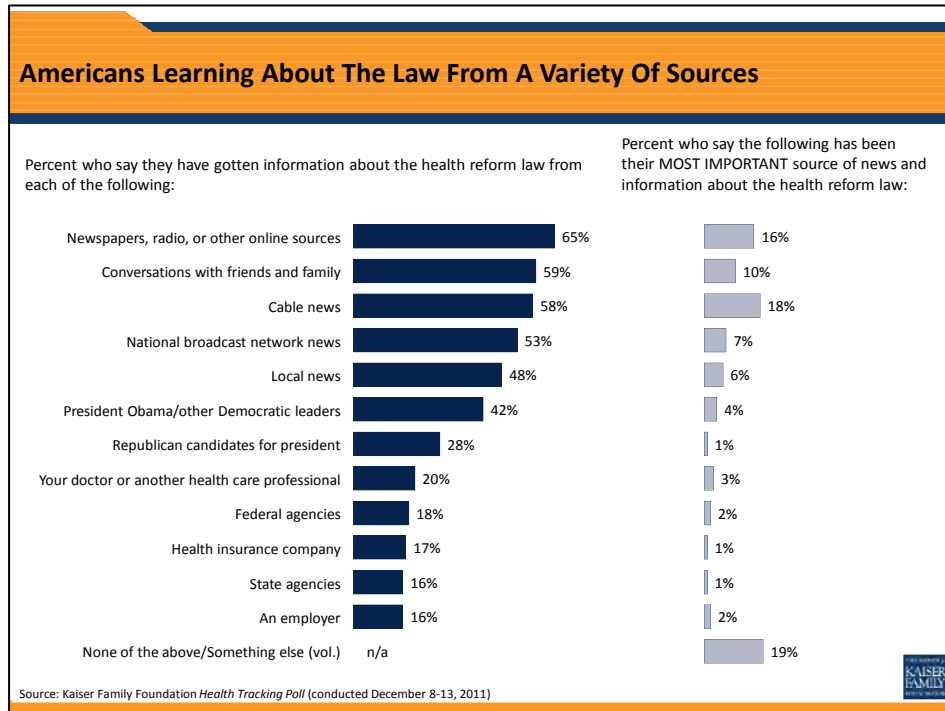
AMERICANS GETTING THEIR HEALTH REFORM INFORMATION FROM A VARIETY OF SOURCES

Americans continue to say they are getting information on the new health reform law from a variety of sources, but with the ACA remaining in some ways an abstract political issue for many people, the news media continues to top the list when people are asked to name their *most important* source of information.

Overall, fully two in three say they have gotten some information about health reform from media outlets like newspapers, radio, or online news sources, while almost as many say they are learning about the law from conversations with friends and family (59 percent), cable news (58 percent), national broadcast network news (53 percent), and local news (48 percent). Fewer, though still significantly large percentages, report learning about the law from their doctor (20 percent), health insurance company (17 percent), or employer (16 percent). Roughly two in ten (18 percent) have learned about the ACA from a federal agency, while 16 percent have gotten information from a state agency.

CABLE NEWS STILL TOP NEWS SOURCE, BY A HAIR

But asked to name their TOP source of information, the largest proportion (18 percent) mention cable news—a medium with a number of programs focused squarely on domestic politics—more than twice as many as name broadcast (7 percent), despite the fact that broadcast news reaches a much larger audience nightly. Next is newspaper, radio and web sources at 16 percent combined. Cable news is the top source of information on the law for both Democrats and Republicans. Among Republicans, 24 percent name cable, with newspapers, radio and web second at 15 percent. For Democrats, 17 percent name cable versus 12 percent for the other non-broadcast sources.



SOMEWHAT LARGER SHARE HAVE GOTTEN INFORMATION FROM PRESIDENT AND CONGRESSIONAL DEMOCRATS THAN FROM GOP CANDIDATES

When it comes to getting ACA information through political leaders more directly, President Obama and the Democrats seem to have broken through to somewhat more Americans overall than the GOP presidential candidates, despite the media’s recent focus on the steady stream of Republican debates. Roughly three in ten Americans (28 percent) say they have gotten information about the health reform law from the Republican candidates for president, compared to four in ten (42 percent) who report getting information about the law from President Obama and the Democrats.

PERCENT WHO SAY THEY HAVE GOTTEN ACA INFORMATION FROM CAMPAIGNS AND COMMERCIALS RUN BY...				
	Total	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
President Obama or other Democratic leaders in Congress	42%	48%	39%	39%
Republican candidates for president	28	27	25	40

Though it may seem unusual given the deep partisan divide on the subject, self-identified Republicans are just as likely to say they have gotten information from the opposite party as report getting information from the GOP candidates (39 percent vs. 40 percent). And though Democrats and independents were more likely to say they have learned about health reform from the president and Congressional Democrats than Republican presidential candidates, roughly one in four from each group also said they had gotten information from candidates from the other party.

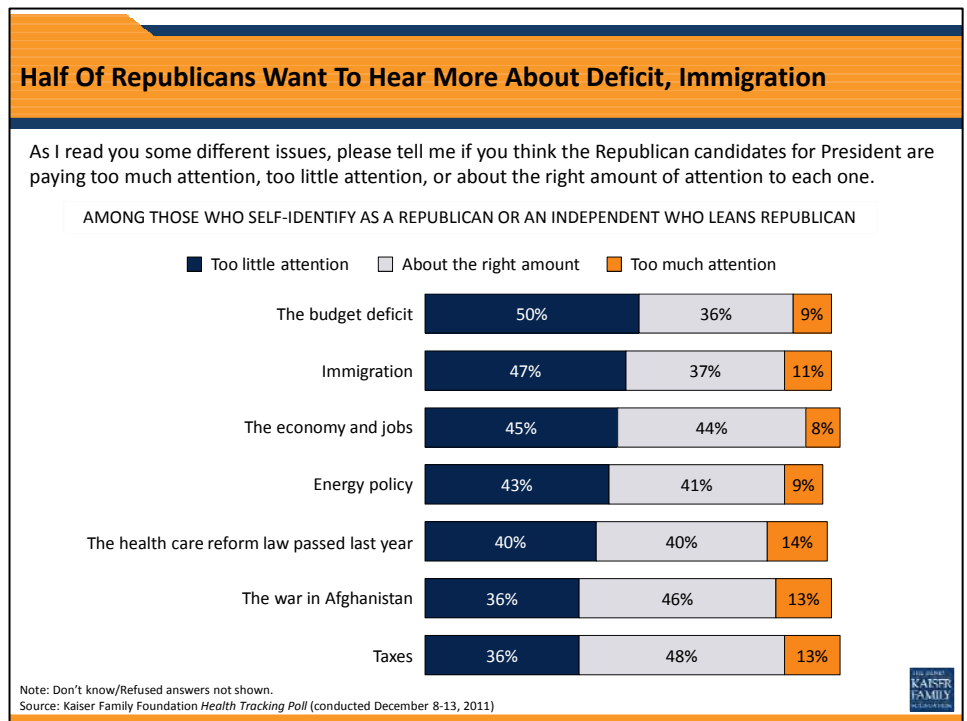
FOR THOSE LEARNING ABOUT THE ACA MAINLY VIA WORD OF MOUTH, CONVERSATIONS MORE NEGATIVE THAN POSITIVE
 Overall, six in ten (59 percent) Americans say they have talked about the ACA with family and friends, and one in ten say these kitchen table conversations are their major source of information about the health reform law. Among this latter group, people are much more likely to report that the information they were getting was negative rather than positive. In contrast, those who say their major source of information on the ACA is the media were most likely to say the information they were getting was evenly balanced.

HAS THE INFORMATION ABOUT THE HEALTH REFORM LAW YOU'VE GOTTEN FROM THE FOLLOWING BEEN MOSTLY POSITIVE, MOSTLY NEGATIVE, OR EVENLY BALANCED?				
	Among those who named each as their MOST IMPORTANT source of information			
	Cable news is major source of information	Broadcast news is major source of information	Newspapers, radio, online news is major source of information	Conversations with friends/family is major source of information
Mostly positive	13%	15%	12%	10%
Evenly balanced	60	66	65	37
Mostly negative	24	15	22	53

THE GOP PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES: REPUBLICANS WANT TO HEAR MORE ABOUT THE DEFICIT, IMMIGRATION

Taken as a group, Republicans and those independents who say they tend to lean Republican, seem to want to hear the field of GOP presidential candidates talk more about the budget deficit and immigration. Overall, 50 percent say the current crop of candidates have paid too little attention to the deficit, and nearly as many (47 percent) say the same about immigration.

There are some divisions within the party as to the issues they'd like to see candidates address. For example, while half of Republican conservatives say they are hearing enough about jobs and the economy, the majority of moderate Republicans think the candidates need to talk more about this issue. On the flip side, moderate Republicans are significantly more likely than conservatives to think the GOP candidates are spending too much time talking about health reform (24 percent vs. 8 percent think so).

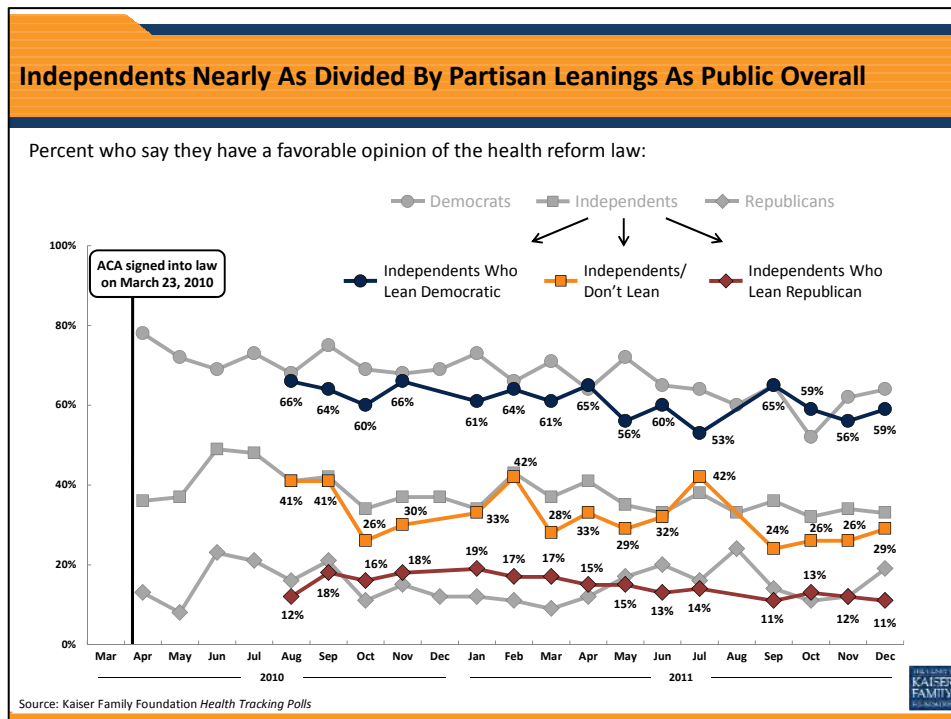


EVEN IN CLIMATE OF DIVIDED VIEWS, THREE IN TEN AMERICANS WOULD EXPAND ACA

Asked about the future of the law, 30 percent of Americans would support expanding it, and 20 percent support leaving it as is. On the other hand, 22 percent would like to see the ACA repealed and not revisited, while 16 percent would have it repealed and replaced with a Republican alternative. These views have been fairly stable over the year, and are quite different by party in the expected directions.

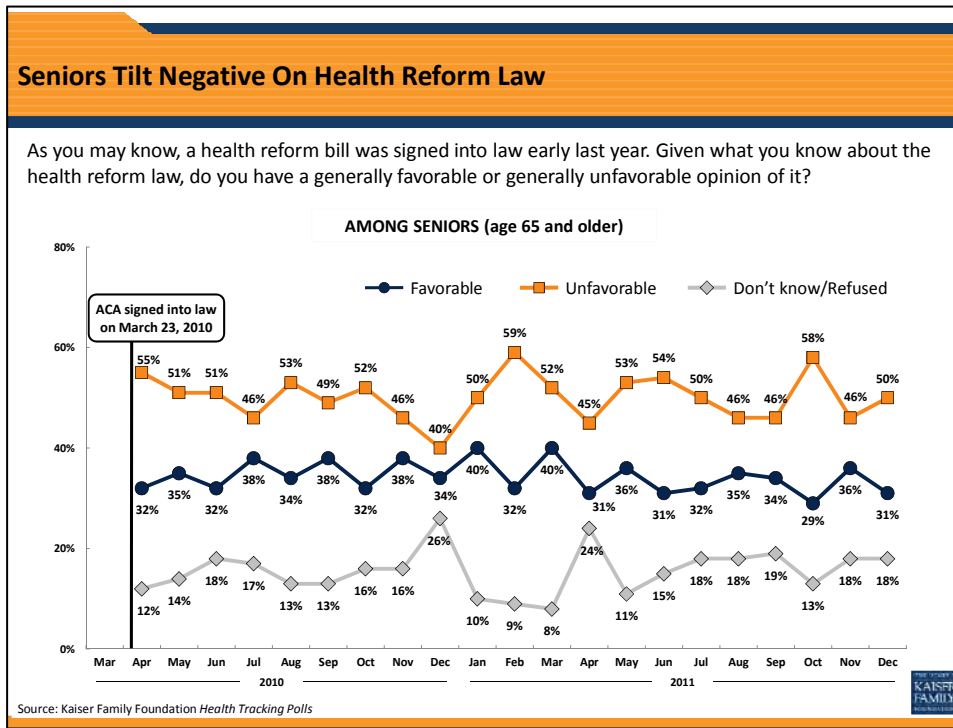
FEW TRUE INDEPENDENTS UP FOR GRAB ON THE ACA IN POLITICIZED YEAR

Although self-declared independents as a group seem to strike a middle ground between Democrats and Republicans on the ACA, the views of this often critical group of voters are actually quite divided along partisan lines, and have been fairly stable over the past year, leaving few people actually up for grabs. So among that group of independents who say they “lean Democratic”, a majority (59 percent) favor the law, while among those who “lean Republican, 78 percent oppose the law (an even more negative view than among self-identified Republicans themselves). Among that narrow sliver of the public (18 percent) that reports not having an inclination toward one party or the other, support for the ACA is at 29 percent.



MORE SENIORS NEGATIVE THAN POSITIVE ON HEALTH REFORM LAW

Seniors end the year leaning against the law, as they have from the start. In December, 50 percent of seniors had unfavorable views of the ACA, compared to 31 percent who had favorable views. Nearly one in five (18 percent) weren't able to offer an opinion on the law either way. In general, those over age 65 have held more negative views of health reform than younger Americans.



Methodology

This *Kaiser Health Tracking Poll* was designed and analyzed by public opinion researchers at the Kaiser Family Foundation led by Mollyann Brodie, Ph.D., including Claudia Deane, Sarah Cho, and Theresa Boston. The survey was conducted December 8 through December 13, 2011, among a nationally representative random sample of 1,212 adults ages 18 and older. Telephone interviews conducted by landline (708) and cell phone (504, including 285 who had no landline telephone) were carried out in English and Spanish by Princeton Survey Research Associates.

The margin of sampling error for results based on the full sample is plus or minus 3 percentage points. For results based on subgroups, the margin of sampling error may be higher. Note that sampling error is only one of many potential sources of error in this or any other public opinion poll.

The full question wording and methodology of the poll can be viewed online at <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/8265.cfm>.

This publication (#8265-F) is available on the Kaiser Family Foundation's website at www.kff.org.