

KAISER PUBLIC OPINION SPOTLIGHT

Kaiser Public Opinion Spotlights provide in-depth analysis of public opinion on a variety of health care and health policy topics. Each Spotlight uses public opinion data from Kaiser surveys and other sources to examine current views and trends. All Spotlights available at www.kff.org/spotlight.

Updated: April 2008

Health Care and Elections

With the presidential election coming up in November 2008, an examination of recent public opinion data as well as historical trends can give some insight into the potential role health care might play as an election issue. When it comes to the relative importance of different issues in deciding their vote, health care was one of the top five issues chosen by voters in three out of four presidential elections since 1992, while its ranking varied in congressional elections from 1994 through 2006.

Although the 2008 presidential election is close to nine months away, polls conducted in February 2008 provide an early indication that health care may again play an important role as an issue in the presidential election, though secondary to the economy and Iraq. In February 2008, health care ranked third in terms of the percent of registered voters saying it will be the top issue determining their vote for president in November (21 percent), far behind the economy (43 percent), and somewhat behind Iraq (29 percent) as a voting issue. However, it's important to remember that candidates' stands on the issues are only one part of what determines how people vote, with other candidate characteristics, such as experience, values, and perceived ability to bring about change often playing as large a role or an even larger role in people's voting decisions.

While most polls treat health care and the economy as separate issues, Kaiser tracking polls suggest that such discrete categories do not necessarily capture the full picture. Using these data to probe deeper into how health care costs contribute to people's economic anxieties reveals that for at least some voters, the two issues are intertwined. For example, in February 2008, more than a quarter of voters (26 percent) named inflation or rising prices overall as the single most important economic concern facing their families. But behind this general concern, health care costs are one of a number of more specific worries cited by similar shares of voters: high taxes (13 percent), the price of gasoline (11 percent), the cost of health care (10 percent), and problems with getting a good-paying job or a raise in pay (9 percent).

Historically, people with different political party identifications have given different rankings to health care as a voting priority, with Democrats tending to place more importance on health care than Republicans, and independents falling somewhere in between. Partisan differences in the ranking of health are similar to past years according to recent survey data in the 2008 election. In February, larger shares of voters who self-identified as Democrats (27 percent) and independents (19 percent) named health care as a top issue in their vote than those who identified as Republicans (11 percent).

Interestingly, survey data from 2008 reveal a shift from previous elections in the difference in health care as a voting issue by age. While in previous years, seniors were more likely than younger voters to see health care as a top issue in their vote, the opposite seems to be

true so far in the 2008 election. In February, younger voters (27 percent of those under age 40) were twice as likely as older voters (13 percent of those ages 65 and over) to name health care as a top issue in their choice for president in 2008. This shift may be due, at least in part, to the fact that, in past elections, Medicare was a more prominent issue in discussions and debates of health policy than it has been so far in the 2008 campaign.

In addition to examining the issues presented above, this Kaiser Public Opinion Spotlight also highlights several groups to watch in the 2008 presidential election, including political independents, health-focused voters, and the uninsured. We also take a historical look and examine the ranking of health, and some key health issues in presidential and congressional elections dating back to 1992.

Click on a title below to jump to that section of the Spotlight:

[Health Care as Most Important Issue for Government to Address](#)

[The Public's Assessment of the State of the U.S. Health Care System](#)

[Party Trust in Dealing with Health Care](#)

[Issues Are Only One Part of What Determines Votes](#)

[Health Care as an Election Issue in Exit Polls 1992-2006](#)

[Health Care in the 2008 Democratic Presidential Primaries](#)

[Where Is Health Care Likely to Rank in the 2008 General Election?](#)

[Issues Voters Want to Hear About in the 2008 Campaign](#)

[What Role Does Health Care Play in Voters' Concerns About the Economy?](#)

[Health Care Costs and People's Personal Economic Situations](#)

[Views on the Potential Impact of Changes in Health Care Costs and Coverage on the Economy Overall](#)

[Differences in Health Care as a Voting Issue by Political Party](#)

[Differences in Health Care as a Voting Issue by Age](#)

[Specific Health Care Issues in the 2008 Campaign](#)

[Groups to Watch in the 2008 Presidential Election: Political Independents](#)

[Political Independents: Variation in Opinion](#)

[Groups to Watch in the 2008 Presidential Election: Health-Focused Voters](#)

[Health-Focused Voters: Health Care Issue Preferences](#)

[Groups to Watch in the 2008 Presidential Election: The Uninsured](#)

[The Uninsured and Voting](#)

[Historical Perspective: Specific Health Care Issues in the 2006 Presidential Election](#)

[Historical Perspective: Specific Health Care Issues in the 2004 Presidential Election](#)

[Historical Perspective: Specific Health Care Issues in the 2002 Congressional Election](#)

[Historical Perspective: Specific Health Care Issues in the 2000 Presidential Election](#)

[Historical Perspective: Health Care in the 1998 Congressional Election](#)

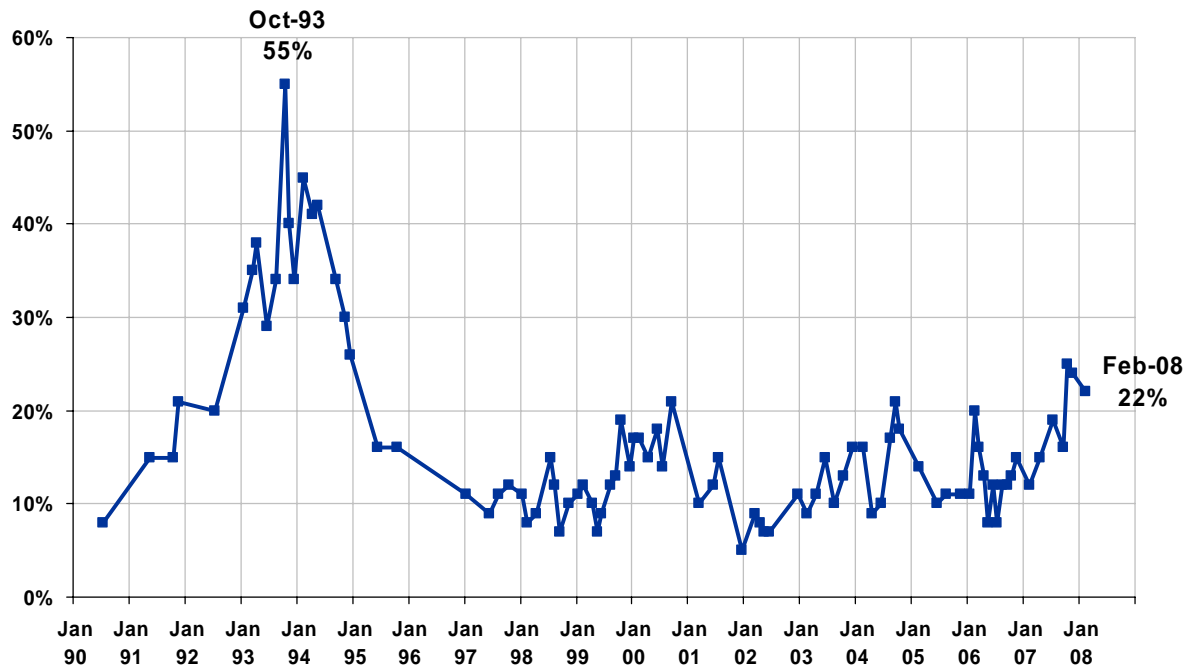
[Historical Perspective: Health Care Reform and the 1992 Presidential Election](#)

Health Care as Most Important Issue for Government to Address

One way to determine the potential role health care might play as an election issue is to examine where it ranks among issues the public thinks are important for the government to address. Since 1996, the share of the public naming health care as one of the two most important problems for the government to address has remained fairly steady at around ten to twenty percent, and in February 2008, it was 22 percent (close to the high since 1996). In 1993, during the Clinton health care reform debate, this share peaked at 55 percent, perhaps reflecting the interaction among the intense policy debates, substantial media coverage, and the public's real concerns at the time.

Health Care as Most Important Issue for Government to Address

Percent naming health care as one of the two most important issues for the government to address
(asked of all adults)



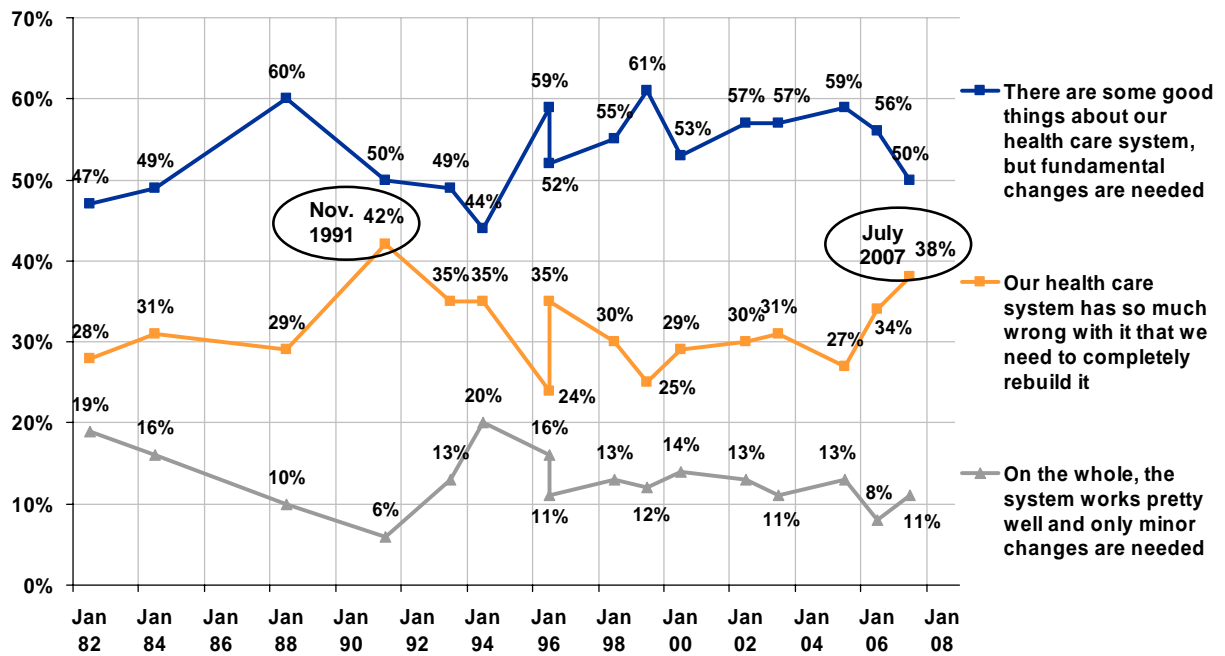
Source: NBC/Wall Street Journal; Harris Polls

The Public's Assessment of the State of the U.S. Health Care System

Another important public opinion measure that provides insight into how health care might shape people's votes is the public's perception of the state of the U.S. health care system. Historically, a majority of the public (between about 50 and 60 percent) has said that there are some good things about the health care system, but major changes are needed. The share saying the health care system needs to be completely rebuilt peaked at 42 percent in 1991, leading into the campaigns for the 1992 presidential election. In late 2007, this share was again close to its peak, reaching 38 percent in July 2007.

The Public's Assessment of the State of the U.S. Health Care System

Which of the following comes closest to expressing your overall view of the health care system in the U.S.?
(asked of all adults)



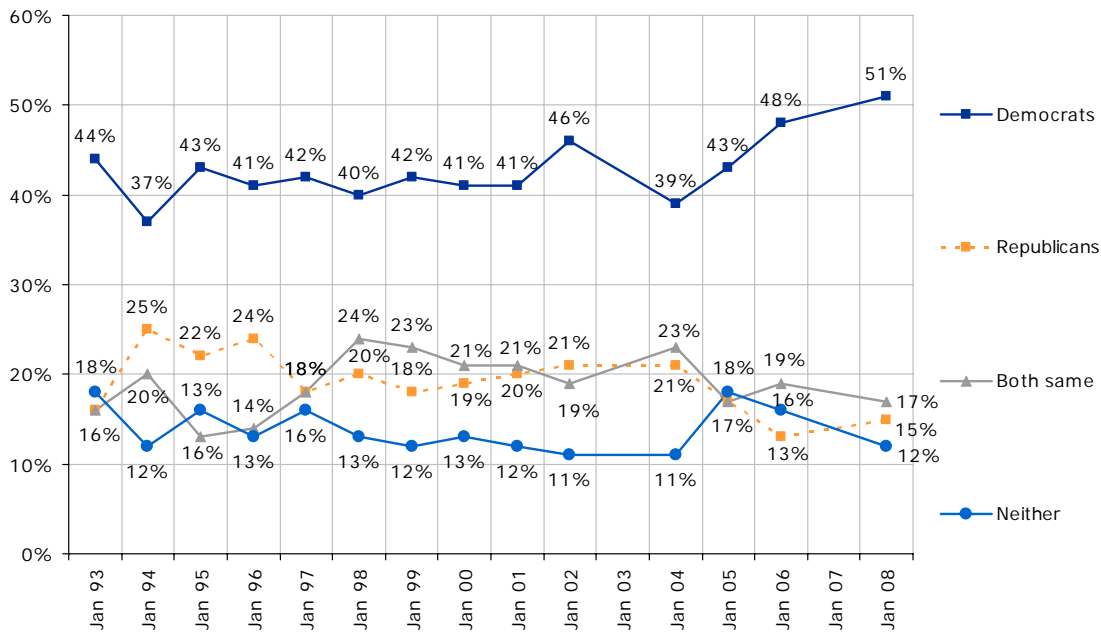
Source: Harris Polls; CBS News/NY Times Polls

Party Trust in Dealing with Health Care

Differences on the issues between the two major political parties are another factor that many people consider in deciding who to vote for. Since 1993, more people have said they think the Democratic Party would do a better job dealing with health care than the Republican Party. In most years, around four in ten people have chosen the Democrats, while around two in ten have chosen the Republicans. In January 2008, the gap between the two parties on this question reached a historic high, with more than half (51 percent) saying they think the Democratic Party would do a better job, compared with 15 percent who chose the Republican Party.

Party Trust in Dealing with Health Care

When it comes to dealing with (the problem of) health care, which party do you think would do a better job – the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, both about the same, or neither? (asked of all adults)



Source: NBC News/Wall Street Journal Polls

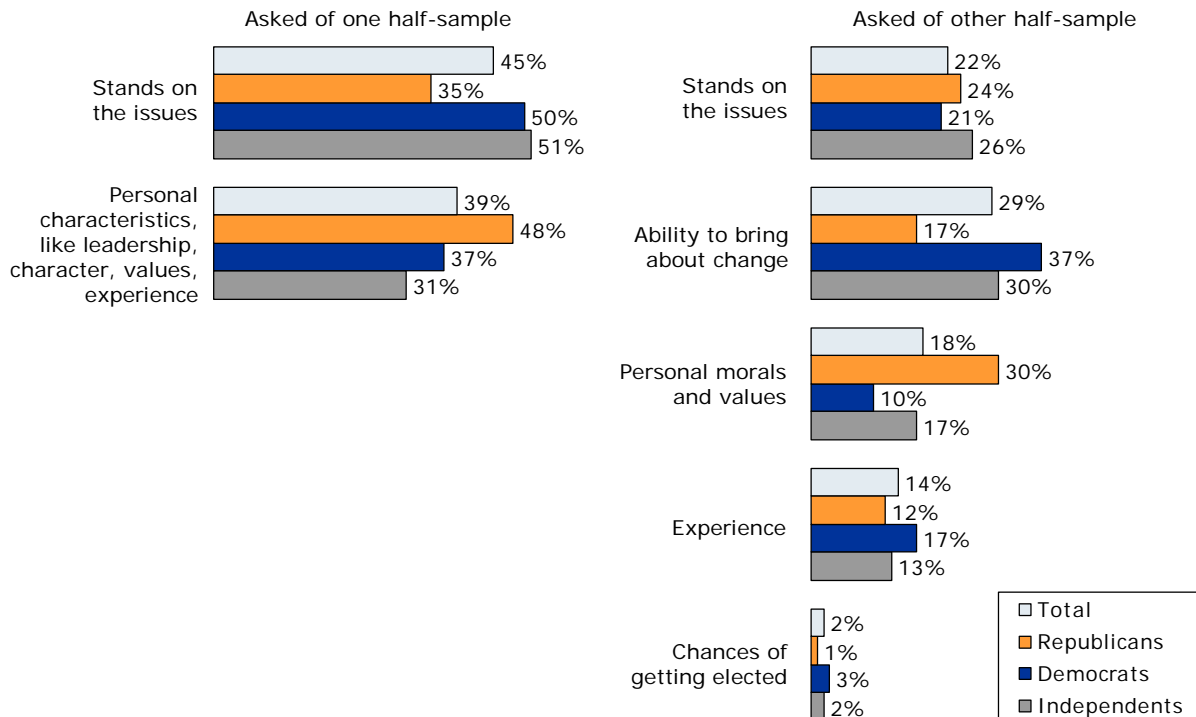
Issues Are Only One Part of What Determines Votes

While health care as an issue clearly registers on the public's radar screen, it is important to remember that candidates' stands on the issues are only one part of what determines how people vote. In a February 2008 survey, when asked which will be more important in their voting decision, voters were nearly evenly split between the candidates' stands on the issues (45 percent) and their personal characteristics, including leadership abilities, character, values, and experience (39 percent).

This same survey also asked a separate half-sample a more detailed question about the relative importance of stands on the issues and four specific candidate characteristics that have often been discussed in the 2008 campaign (ability to bring about change, personal morals and values, experience, and chances of getting elected). In this question, the candidates' ability to bring about change ranked first (chosen by 29 percent), followed by the candidates' stands on the issues (22 percent), personal morals and values (18 percent), and experience (14 percent). Democrats (37 percent) and independents (30 percent) were most likely to choose the candidates' ability to bring about change as the most important factor in their vote, while Republicans were most likely to pick the candidates' personal morals and values (30 percent).

Issues Are Only One Part of What Determines Votes

Overall, which of the following will be MOST important to you when you decide who to vote for? Will it be the candidates'... (Feb. 2008, registered voters)



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, *Kaiser Health Tracking Poll: Election 2008* (conducted Feb. 7-16, 2008)

Health Care as an Election Issue in Exit Polls 1992-2006

When it comes to the relative importance of different issues in deciding their vote, health care was one of the top five issues chosen by voters on election day in three out of four presidential elections since 1992, while the economy and jobs has almost always been the number one issue. Health care ranked fifth on the list of issues in the presidential election in 2004 (8 percent), and health care combined with Medicare and prescription drugs was tied for second place in 2000 (15 percent). Health care was not on the list of issues included in the exit poll list in 1996, but Medicare combined with Social Security ranked second at 18 percent. In 1992, when voters were asked to pick their top two issues, health care ranked third at 20 percent.

Looking at the past four off-year Congressional elections, health care was not included on the list of exit poll issues in 2006, and its ranking varied in elections from 1994 through 2002. Health care ranked second in 2002 (16 percent), sixth in 1998 (7 percent), and fourth in 1994 (21 percent when voters were asked to pick their top two issues).

Health Care as an Election Issue in Exit Polls 1992-2006

Which issue(s) mattered most in deciding how you voted for president? *(asked of voters)*

Rank	1992*	1996	2000	2004
1	Economy/jobs (42)	Economy/jobs (26)	Economy/jobs (18)	Moral values (22)
2	Federal deficit (21)	Medicare/Social Security (18)	Health care/Medicare/ Prescription drugs (15)†	Economy/jobs (20)
3	Health care (20)	Education (15)	Education (15)	Terrorism (19)
4	Family values (15)	Federal deficit (15)	Taxes (14)	Iraq (15)
5	Taxes (14)	Taxes (14)	Social Security (14)	Health care (8)
6	Education (13)	Crime/drugs (8)	World affairs (12)	Taxes (5)
7	Abortion (12)	Foreign policy (5)		Education (4)
8	Foreign policy (8)			
9	Environment (5)			

†Note: this represents the combination of health care (8 percent) and Medicare/Prescription drugs (7 percent)

Which issue(s) mattered most in deciding how you voted for U.S. House? *(asked of voters)*

Rank	1994*	1998	2002	2006**
1	Crime (35)	Education (23)	Economy (34)	Corruption/ethics (41)
2	Economy/jobs (27)	Moral/ethical standards (21)	Health care (16)	Terrorism (39)
3	Taxes (23)	Economy/jobs (16)	Education (15)	Economy (39)
4	Health care (21)	Taxes (15)	Terrorism (14)	Values issues (35)
5	Family values (21)	Social Security (13)	Social Security (13)	Iraq (35)
6	Education (18)	Health care (7)		Illegal immigration (30)
7	Abortion (13)	Clinton/Lewinsky (6)		Saddam Hussein verdict (18)
8	Campaign finance reform (4)			
9	NAFTA (3)			

* Multiple responses allowed in 1992 and 1994.

** In 2006, voters were asked to rank each issue, rather than pick one or two issues from a list. Percentages shown are those who said each issue was "extremely important".

Source: Edison/Mitofsky for the National Election Pool (2004-2006), National Exit Polls by Voter News Service (1996-2002), Mitofsky International (1994), Voter Research & Surveys (1992)

Health Care in the 2008 Democratic Presidential Primaries

An early indication of the role health care will play in the 2008 election is its ranking as an issue in the presidential primaries. Exit polls for the Democratic primaries and caucuses asked voters to choose which of three issues was most important to their vote: the economy, Iraq, or health care. (Note that health care was not included on the list of issues asked about in the exit polls for the Republican primaries and caucuses). In every state holding a primary or caucus on or before March 4, the economy ranked number one, with roughly half of Democratic voters on average saying it was the most important issue to their vote. Iraq ranked second in most states, while health care was second or tied for second in five states, and third in 24 states. Roughly one in five Democratic voters on average in these exit polls said health care was the most important issue in their vote.

Ranking of Issues in 2008 Democratic Primary Exit Polls

State (date)	Issue #1	Issue #2	Issue #3
Iowa (Jan. 3)	Economy (35%)	Iraq (35%)*	Health care (27%)
New Hampshire (Jan. 8)	Economy (38%)	Iraq (31%)	Health care (27%)
Michigan (Jan. 15)	Economy (62%)	Iraq (20%)	Health care (16%)
Nevada (Jan. 19)	Economy (50%)	Health care (23%)	Iraq (22%)
South Carolina (Jan. 26)	Economy (52%)	Health care (25%)	Iraq (19%)
Florida (Jan. 29)	Economy (55%)	Iraq (24%)	Health care (18%)
Alabama (Feb. 5)	Economy (48%)	Iraq (25%)	Health care (23%)
Arizona (Feb. 5)	Economy (49%)	Iraq (26%)	Health care (22%)
Arkansas (Feb. 5)	Economy (54%)	Iraq (24%)	Health care (19%)
California (Feb. 5)	Economy (46%)	Iraq (32%)	Health care (19%)
Connecticut (Feb. 5)	Economy (45%)	Iraq (31%)	Health care (22%)
Delaware (Feb. 5)	Economy (47%)	Iraq (30%)	Health care (19%)
Georgia (Feb. 5)	Economy (54%)	Health care (21%)	Iraq (21%)*
Illinois (Feb. 5)	Economy (50%)	Iraq (27%)	Health care (19%)
Massachusetts (Feb. 5)	Economy (48%)	Iraq (35%)	Health care (15%)
Missouri (Feb. 5)	Economy (55%)	Iraq (22%)	Health care (19%)
New Jersey (Feb. 5)	Economy (47%)	Iraq (31%)	Health care (18%)
New Mexico (Feb. 5)	Economy (43%)	Iraq (36%)	Health care (17%)
New York (Feb. 5)	Economy (46%)	Iraq (30%)	Health care (20%)
Oklahoma (Feb. 5)	Economy (51%)	Iraq (25%)	Health care (20%)
Tennessee (Feb. 5)	Economy (52%)	Iraq (23%)	Health care (22%)
Utah (Feb. 5)	Economy (42%)	Iraq (32%)	Health care (24%)
Louisiana (Feb. 9)	Economy (47%)	Iraq (27%)	Health care (22%)
Maryland (Feb. 12)	Economy (47%)	Iraq (30%)	Health care (21%)
Virginia (Feb. 12)	Economy (49%)	Iraq (30%)	Health care (17%)
Wisconsin (Feb. 19)	Economy (45%)	Health care (26%)	Iraq (26%)*
Ohio (Mar. 4)	Economy (59%)	Health care (19%)	Iraq (19%)*
Texas (Mar. 4)	Economy (50%)	Iraq (25%)	Health care (22%)
Vermont (Mar. 4)	Economy (41%)	Iraq (38%)	Health care (18%)

* indicates a tie with the previous issue on the list.

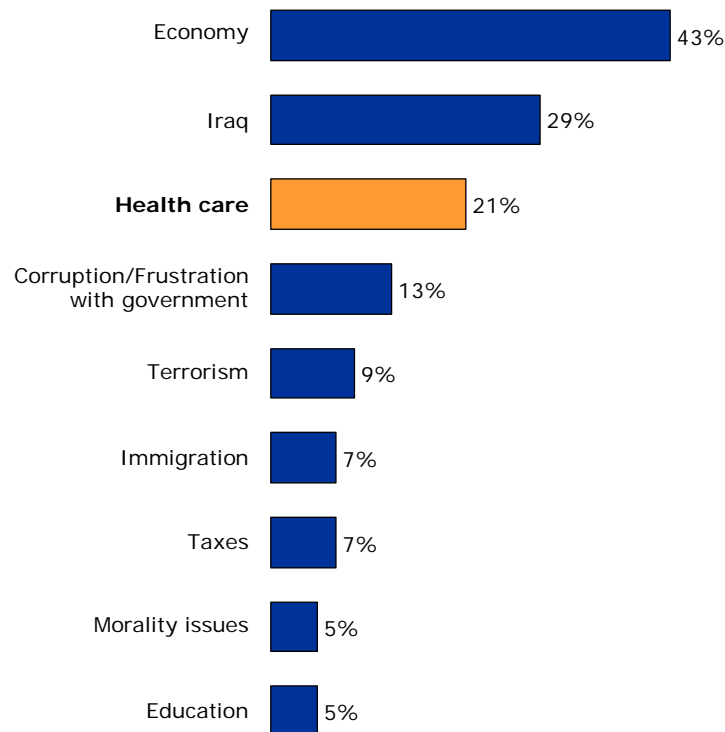
Source: Primary state exit polls conducted by Edison/Mitofsky for the National Election Pool (as of March 4, 2008)

Where Is Health Care Likely to Rank in the 2008 General Election?

Although the 2008 presidential election is close to nine months away, polls conducted in February 2008 provide an early indication that health care may play an important role as an issue in the presidential election, though secondary to the economy and Iraq. Similar to the Democratic primary exit poll results, in February 2008, health care ranked third among registered voters in terms of the percent of people saying it will be the top issue determining their vote for president in November (21 percent), far behind the economy (43 percent), and somewhat behind Iraq (29 percent) as a voting issue.

Most Important Issue Deciding Your Vote

Thinking ahead to the November 2008 presidential election, what is the single most important issue in your choice for president? Is there one other issue that's nearly as important? (Feb. 2008, open-ended, among registered voters)



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, *Kaiser Health Tracking Poll: Election 2008* (conducted Feb. 7-16, 2008)

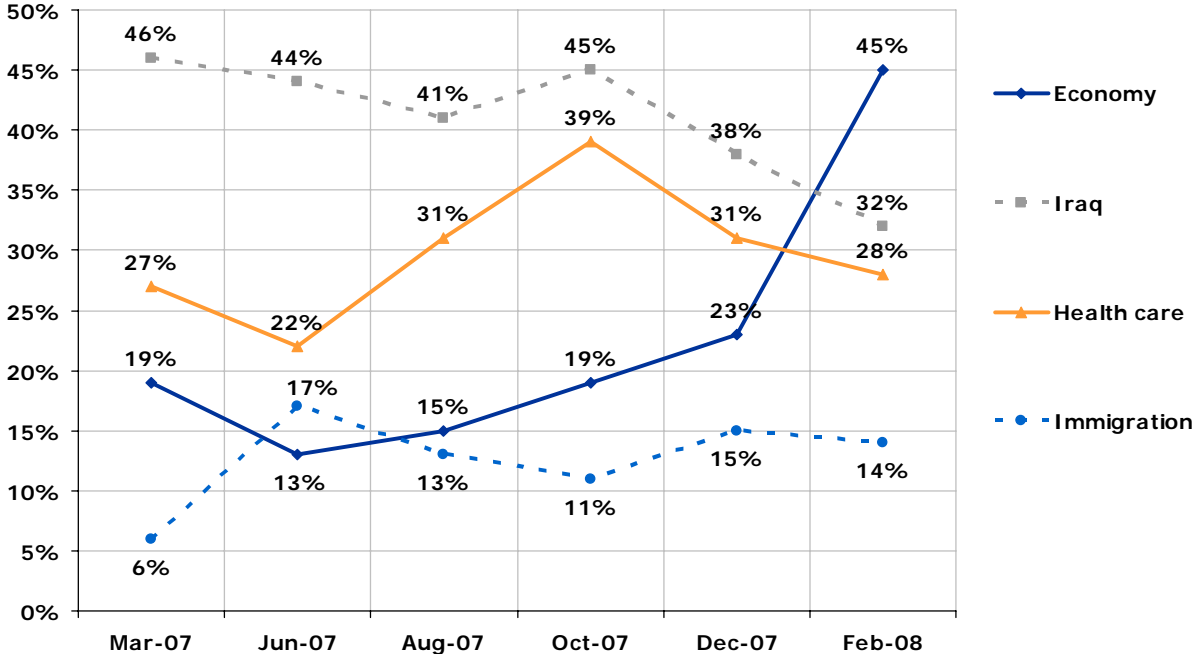
Issues Voters Want to Hear About in the 2008 Campaign

The list of issues voters say they want to hear presidential candidates talk about in the campaign is similar to the issues they say will influence their vote in November. In Kaiser tracking polls from March through December 2007, the top four issues voters said they wanted to hear candidates discuss were the same in each poll – Iraq, followed by health care, the economy, and immigration (though the order of the last two was switched in June 2007). Between the December 2007 and February 2008 tracking polls, the share of voters naming the economy as the top issue for candidates to discuss nearly doubled (from 23 percent to 45 percent), making the economy the top-named issue in February. This increase was matched by smaller but significant decreases in the shares naming Iraq (now ranking second) and health care (now ranking third).

While most polls treat health care and the economy as separate issues, Kaiser tracking polls suggest that such discrete categories do not necessarily capture the full picture. As data on the next several pages will show, probing deeper into how health care costs contribute to people’s economic anxieties reveals that for at least some voters, the two issues are intertwined.

Top Issues Voters Want Candidates to Discuss in 2008 Campaign

Thinking about the campaign for the presidential election in 2008, what two issues would you most like to hear the presidential candidates talk about? (open-ended, top 4 responses shown among registered voters)



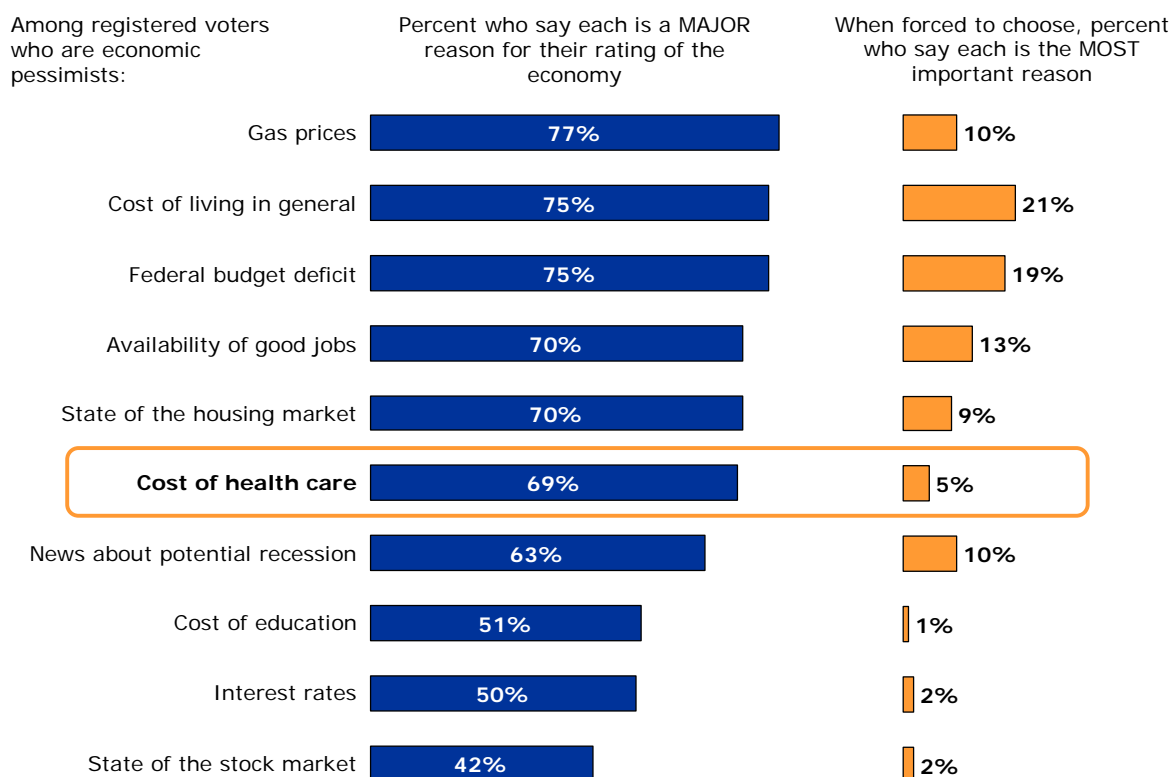
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, *Kaiser Health Tracking Poll: Election 2008*

What Role Does Health Care Play in Voters' Concerns About the Economy?

Given the large and increasing share of voters naming the economy as a top issue, it is helpful to look in more detail at people's economic concerns, and what, if any, role the cost of health care plays in voters' economic views. In February 2008, a large majority of registered voters overall rated the economy as "not so good" (44 percent) or "poor" (34 percent) (data not shown).

Among the 78 percent of voters who rated the economy as not so good or poor (the "economic pessimists"), a variety of reasons emerged as important to their negative views of the economy. Given a list of ten possible reasons for their views, majorities said nine out of the ten were major reasons they rated the economy poorly, including seven in ten who said the cost of health care was a major reason. Fewer economic pessimists (just 5 percent) said health care costs were the main reason for their negative rating of the economy, instead focusing on the cost of living in general (21 percent), the federal budget deficit (19 percent), and the availability of good jobs (13 percent).

Role of Health Care Costs in Negative Views of Economy



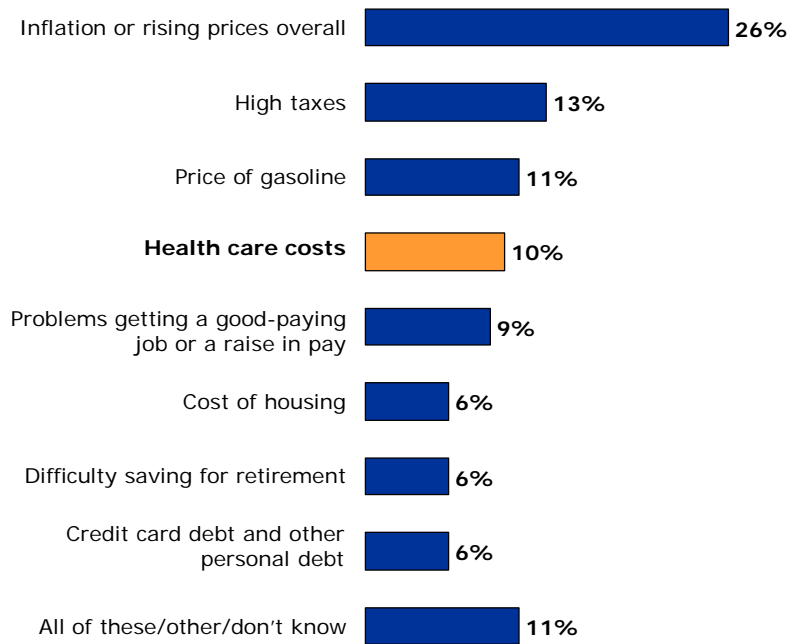
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, *Kaiser Health Tracking Poll: Election 2008* (conducted Feb. 7-16, 2008)

Health Care Costs and People's Personal Economic Situations

In addition to seeing health care costs as a major contributor to a troubled economy, voters also report feeling the pinch of these costs on their own pocketbooks. In February 2008, more than a quarter of voters (26 percent) named inflation or rising prices overall as the single most important economic concern facing their families. But behind this general concern, health care costs were one of a number of more specific worries cited by similar shares of voters. Around one in ten voters each mentioned high taxes (13 percent), the price of gasoline (11 percent), the cost of health care (10 percent), and problems with getting a good-paying job or a raise in pay (9 percent) as the biggest economic issue for themselves and their family.

Role of Health Care Costs in Personal Economic Situation

Which of the following is the single most important economic issue facing you and your family? (Feb. 2008, registered voters)



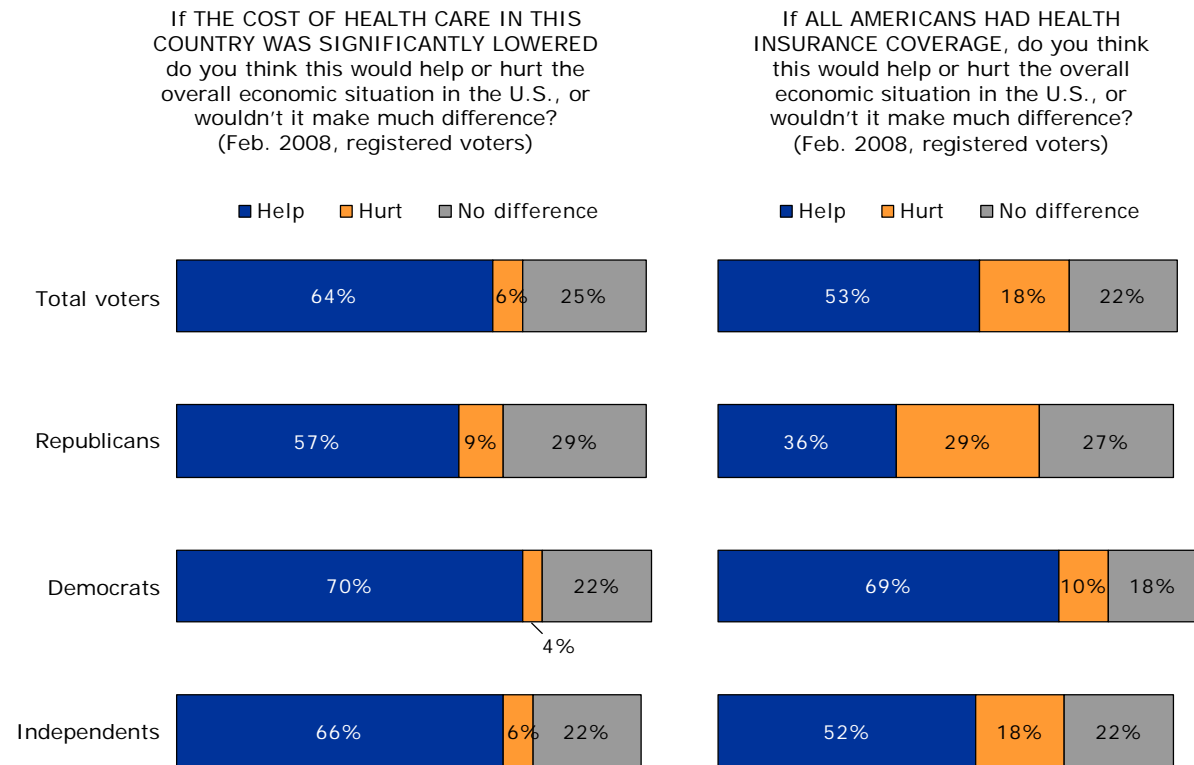
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, *Kaiser Health Tracking Poll: Election 2008* (conducted Feb. 7-16, 2008)

Views on the Potential Impact of Changes in Health Care Costs and Coverage on the Economy Overall

In addition to the role health care costs play in people's overall economic concerns, both for the nation and for their families, the February 2008 tracking survey found that the public also links health care costs with the economy overall. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of registered voters said that if the cost of health care in the U.S. was significantly lowered, it would help the overall U.S. economic situation, including majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and independents.

On a separate question, a slim majority (53 percent) of voters said that if all Americans had health insurance coverage, it would help the overall economic situation in the U.S., while about one in five each thought it would hurt the U.S. economic situation (18 percent) or make no difference (22 percent). Partisan differences emerge on this question. Nearly seven in ten Democrats and about half of independents said that everyone being covered by insurance would be a help to the country's economic situation, while Republicans were more split (just over a third thought it would help, three in ten said it would hurt, and just over a quarter said it would make no difference).

Potential Impact of Changes in Health Care Costs/Coverage on Economy Overall



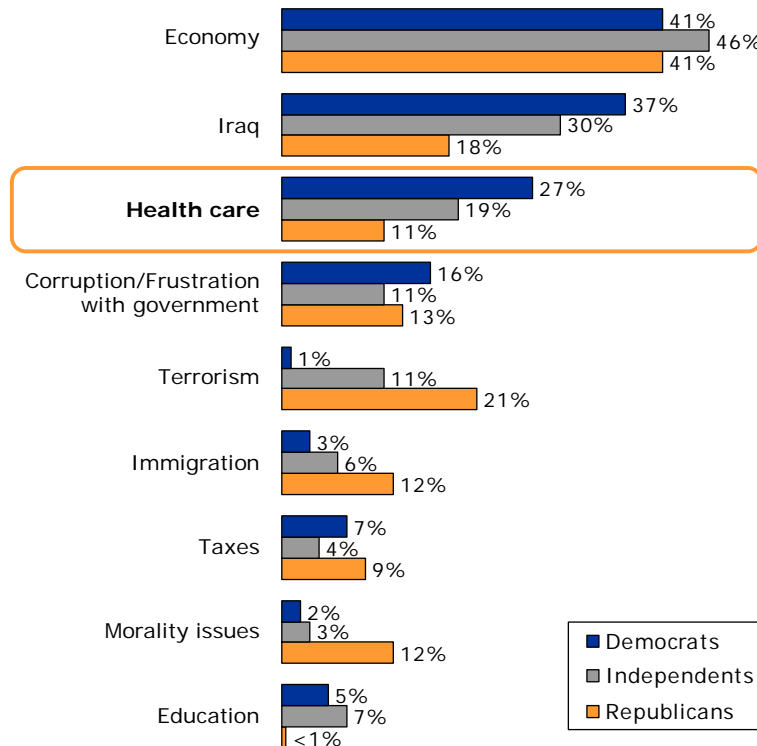
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, *Kaiser Health Tracking Poll: Election 2008* (conducted Feb. 7-16, 2008)

Differences in Health Care as a Voting Issue by Political Party

Historically, people with different political party identifications have given different rankings to health care as a voting priority, with Democrats tending to place more importance on health care than Republicans, and independents falling somewhere in between. The 2008 election is no different. In February 2008, health care ranked third as a voting issue for Democrats (named by 27 percent of registered voters) and independents (19 percent), but was much lower on the list for Republicans, ranking seventh (11 percent). Democrats and independents were also more likely than Republicans to name Iraq as a top issue in their choice for president. By contrast, Republicans were more likely than Democrats or independents to name terrorism, immigration, taxes, and morality issues as top issues in deciding their vote.

Most Important Issue Deciding Your Vote By Party

Thinking ahead to the November 2008 presidential election, what is the single most important issue in your choice for president? Is there one other issue that's nearly as important? (Feb. 2008, open-ended, among registered voters)



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, *Kaiser Health Tracking Poll: Election 2008* (conducted Feb. 7-16, 2008)

Differences in Health Care as a Voting Issue by Age

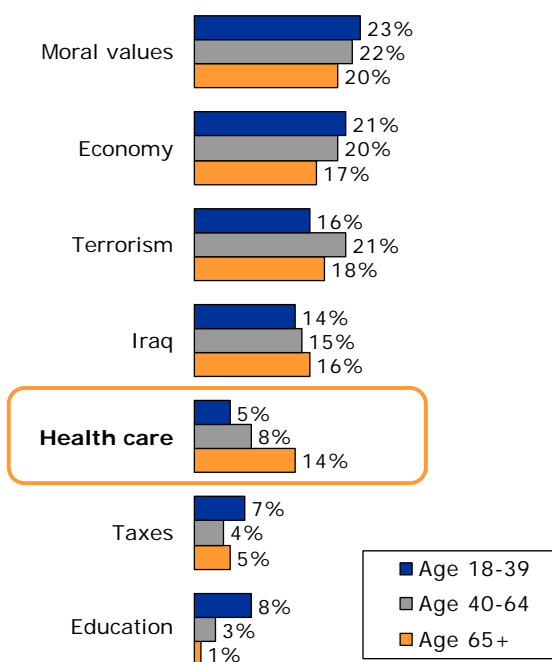
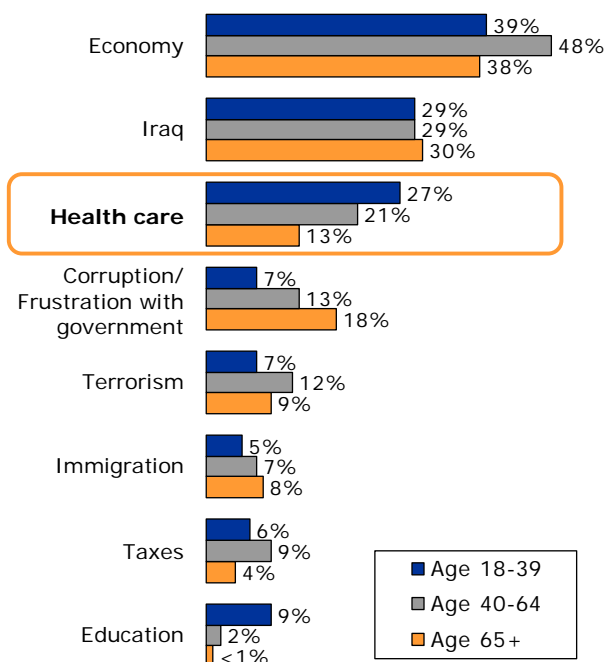
Another difference in the importance of health care as a voting issue emerges when looking at different age groups. In February 2008, younger voters (27 percent of those under age 40) were twice as likely as older voters (13 percent of those ages 65 and over) to name health care as a top issue in their choice for president in 2008.

This represents a shift from previous elections, in which older voters were more likely than their younger counterparts to see health care as a top voting issue. For instance, in the 2004 exit poll, 14 percent of elderly voters chose health care as the most important issue to their vote, compared with 8 percent of 40 to 64 year-olds and just 5 percent of voters under age 40. This shift in health as a voting issue by age may be due, at least in part, to the fact that, in past elections, Medicare was a more prominent issue in discussions and debates of health policy than it has been so far in the 2008 campaign.

Most Important Issue Deciding Your Vote By Age – 2008 and 2004

Thinking ahead to the November 2008 presidential election, what is the single most important issue in your choice for president? Is there one other issue that's nearly as important? (**Feb. 2008**, open-ended, registered voters)

Which one issue mattered most in deciding how you voted for president? (**2004 Exit polls**)



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, *Kaiser Health Tracking Poll: Election 2008* (conducted Feb. 7-16, 2008)

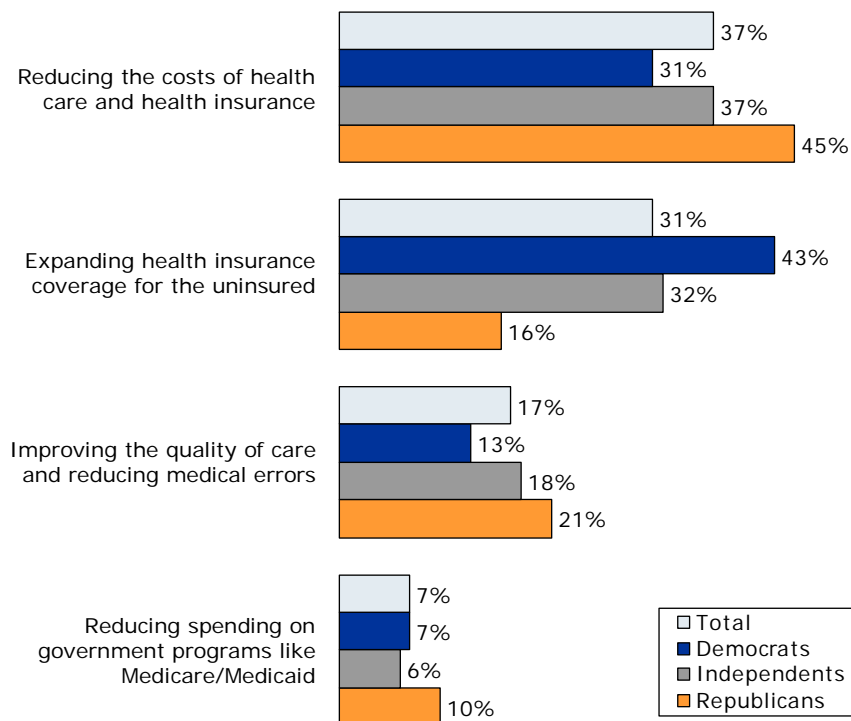
Specific Health Care Issues in the 2008 Campaign

When it comes to the specific health care issues they most want to hear candidates discuss in the 2008 presidential campaign, nearly four in ten voters (37 percent) chose reducing the costs of health care and insurance as the top issue, while just over three in ten (31 percent) said they most want to hear about expanding health insurance coverage for the uninsured. Fewer voters said the top health care issues they want to hear about are improving the quality of care and reducing medical errors (17 percent) and reducing spending on government health insurance programs (7 percent).

There are partisan differences in the priorities placed on different health issues for candidates to discuss. Democrats chose expanding coverage for the uninsured (43 percent) as the top issue, followed by reducing health care costs (31 percent). For Republicans, reducing costs (45 percent) was the top issue, followed by improving quality of care (21 percent) and expanding coverage for the uninsured (16 percent). Independents were more evenly split between reducing costs (37 percent) and expanding coverage (32 percent) as the health care issue they'd most like to hear candidates discuss.

Specific Health Care Issues Voters Want Candidates to Discuss in 2008

Now thinking specifically about health care... Which ONE of the following health care issues would you most like to hear the presidential candidates talk about? (among registered voters)



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, *Kaiser Health Tracking Poll: Election 2008* (conducted Feb. 7-16, 2008)

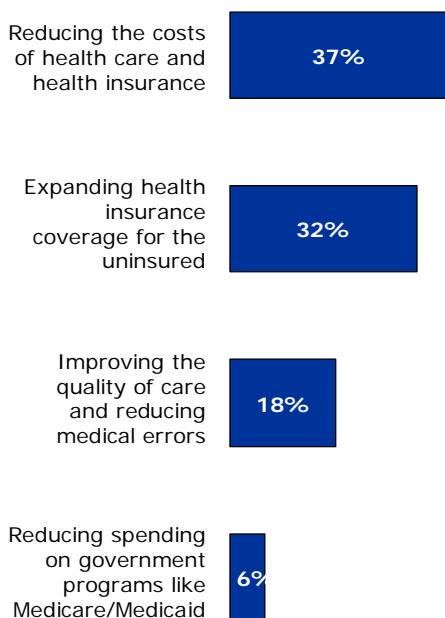
Groups to Watch in the 2008 Presidential Election: Political Independents

As the 2008 primary election season winds down and the general election approaches, the views of political independents are particularly interesting in assessing the role of health care in the 2008 presidential race. Independents (who made up 26 percent of registered voters in a February 2008 Kaiser tracking survey) have views on health care which tend to mirror those of voters at large. In February 2008, one in five independent voters (19 percent) said health care would be one of the most important issues in their vote choice. When it comes to the specific health care issues they want to hear candidates talk about, more than a third (37 percent) of independent voters said they most want to hear about reducing health care costs, while slightly fewer (32 percent) want to hear about expanding coverage for the uninsured, and nearly two in ten (18 percent) said they would most like to hear about improving the quality of care and reducing medical errors.

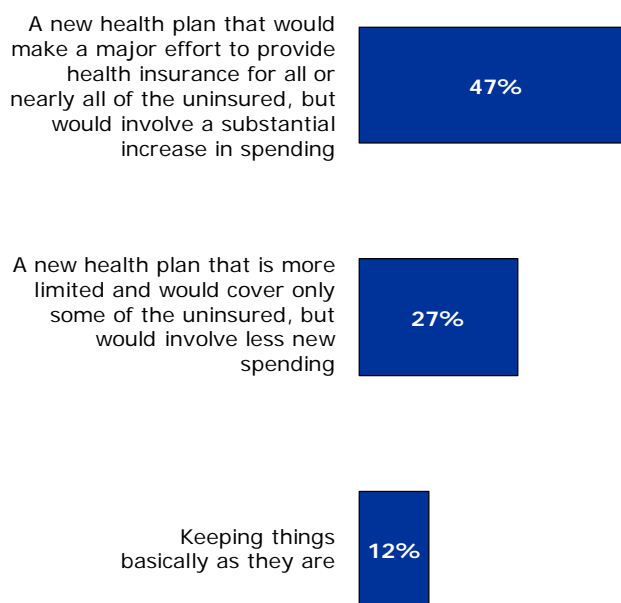
In addition to their interest in hearing candidates talk about lowering health care costs and increasing coverage for the uninsured, nearly half (47 percent) of independent voters said they would like a candidate for president to propose “a new health plan that would make a major effort to provide health insurance for all or nearly all of the uninsured, but would involve a substantial increase in spending.” Just over a quarter (27 percent) said they would rather see a candidate propose a more limited plan that would only cover some of the uninsured but involve less new spending, while 12 percent would prefer a candidate to propose keeping things basically as they are.

Top Health Care Issues and Proposal Preferences Among Independent Voters

Which ONE of the following health care issues would you most like to hear the presidential candidates talk about? (Feb. 2008, Among registered voters who identify as independents)



Which ONE of the following three things would you like to see in a health care reform proposal from a presidential candidate? (Feb. 2008, Among registered voters who identify as independents)



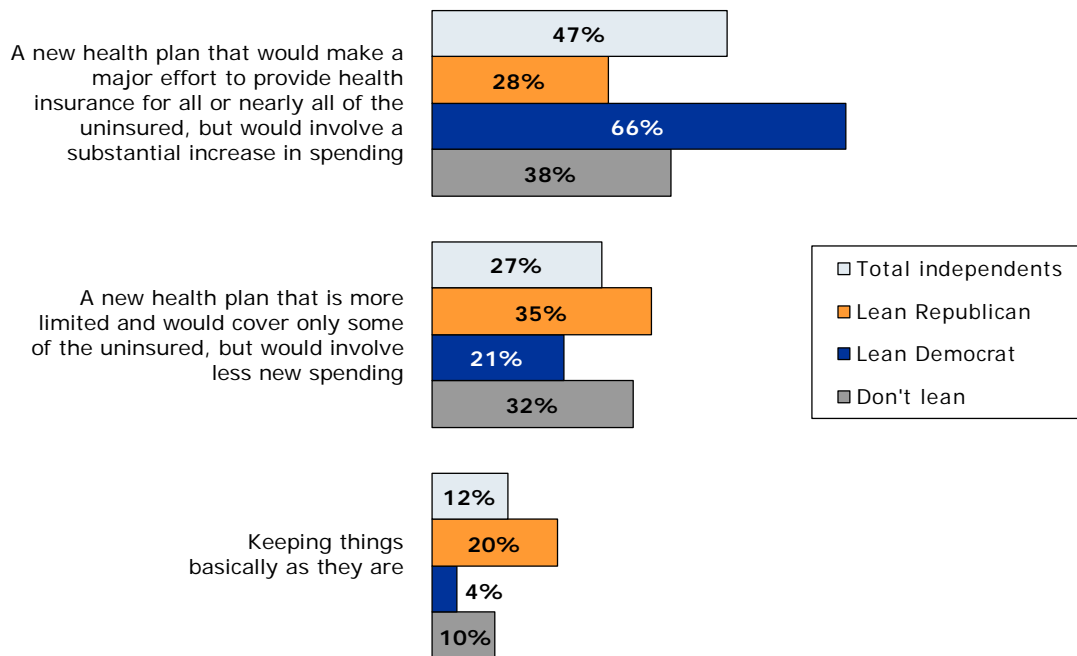
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, *Kaiser Health Tracking Poll: Election 2008* (conducted Feb. 7-16, 2008)

Political Independents: Variation in Opinion

While looking at independent voters overall is illuminating, previous survey work has shown that independents are not a monolithic group, and there is often great variation in opinion among different groups of independent voters when it comes to health care. Some evidence of that variation emerges in the February 2008 survey when looking at independents who lean toward the Democratic party (38 percent of independent voters) compared with those who lean Republican (30 percent) and those who say they don't lean either way (32 percent). Independent voters who lean Democratic were more likely than those who lean Republican and those who don't lean to mention health care as one of the most important issues to their vote or for candidates to discuss in the campaign (data not shown). In addition, Democratic-leaning independents were more than twice as likely as those who lean Republican to say they would like a candidate to propose a major, more costly plan to cover nearly all the uninsured (66 percent versus 28 percent).

Variations in Opinion Within Independent Voters

Which ONE of the following three things would you like to see in a health care reform proposal from a presidential candidate? (Feb. 2008, Among registered voters who identify as independents)



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, *Kaiser Health Tracking Poll: Election 2008* (conducted Feb. 7-16, 2008)

Groups to Watch in the 2008 Presidential Election: Health-Focused Voters

Another interesting group to watch as the general election unfolds is “health-focused voters,” defined here as the 21 percent of all voters who mentioned health care as one of the two most important issues in their vote for president in a February 2008 tracking survey.

Looking at a profile of these voters shows that they are more likely to identify as Democrats, less likely to be Republicans, and less likely to be politically conservative compared to other voters. Demographically, health-focused voters are younger, disproportionately lower-income, and more likely to be female. They are also more likely to be African American, to be uninsured, and to have children living in the home. As mentioned previously, looking at data from previous elections shows that in the past, voters who focused on health care were more likely than other voters to be elderly. However at this point in the 2008 election, the opposite appears to be the case: health-focused voters are half as likely as their counterparts to be ages 65 and older. This may be due, at least in part, to the fact that, in past elections, Medicare was a more prominent issue in discussions and debates of health policy than it has been so far in the 2008 campaign.

Demographic Profile of Health-Focused Voters

	Health-focused voters*	Other Voters
Party ID		
Republican	14%	30% ^
Democrat	47 ^	34
Independent	22	28
Something else	10 ^	4
Ideology		
Liberal	27	20
Moderate	42	33
Conservative	28	43 ^
Gender		
Male	36	52 ^
Female	64 ^	48
Age (years)		
18-49	64 ^	51
50-64	25	28
65+	11	21 ^

	Health-focused voters*	Other Voters
Race/ethnicity		
White	68%	80% ^
African American	19 ^	8
Hispanic/Latino	7	8
Other	6	4
Household income		
<\$30K	34 ^	23
\$30K-\$49.9K	16	17
\$50K-\$74.9K	18	17
\$75K+	27	26
Refused	6	16 ^
Health insurance status		
Insured	80	88 ^
Uninsured	20 ^	12
Any children at home		
Yes	46 ^	34
No	54	66 ^

* Health-focused voters are defined as the 21 percent of all registered voters who mentioned health care as one of the two most important issues in their vote for president.

^ indicates a statistically significant difference between groups ($p < .05$)

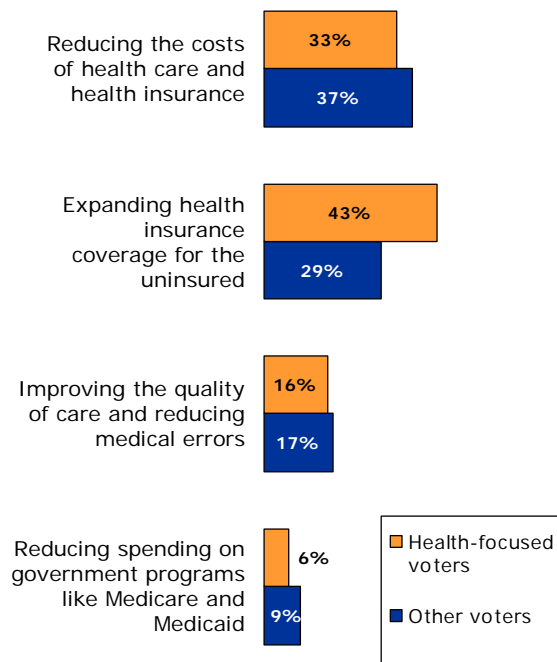
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, *Kaiser Health Tracking Poll: Election 2008* (conducted Feb. 7-16, 2008)

Health-Focused Voters: Health Care Issue Preferences

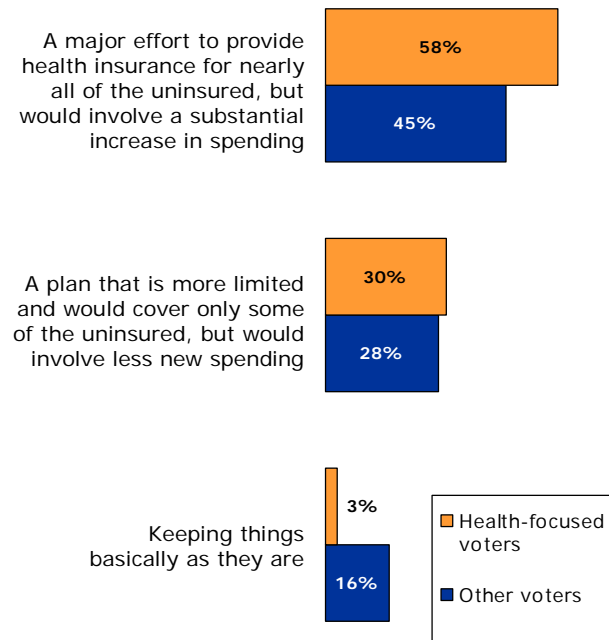
In addition to their demographic differences, there are also differences between health-focused voters and their counterparts when it comes to their preferences for health reform and the specific aspects of health care they want to hear about from candidates. In February 2008, a 43 percent plurality of these voters said the health care issue they most want to hear presidential candidates discuss is expanding health insurance coverage for the uninsured, compared with a third (33 percent) who said they most want to hear about reducing health care costs, and one in six (16 percent) who wanted to hear about improving the quality of health care and reducing medical errors. Nearly six in ten of these health-focused voters (58 percent) said they would like a candidate to propose a major effort to cover all of the uninsured, even if it is more expensive, while three in ten said they would prefer a more limited, less expensive plan, and just three percent would like to keep things basically as they are.

Health Care Issue Preferences Among Health-Focused Voters

Which ONE of the following health care issues would you most like to hear the presidential candidates talk about? (Feb. 2008, registered voters)



Which ONE of the following three things would you like to see in a health care reform proposal from a presidential candidate? (Feb. 2008, registered voters)



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, *Kaiser Health Tracking Poll: Election 2008* (conducted Feb. 7-16, 2008)

Groups to Watch in the 2008 Presidential Election: The Uninsured

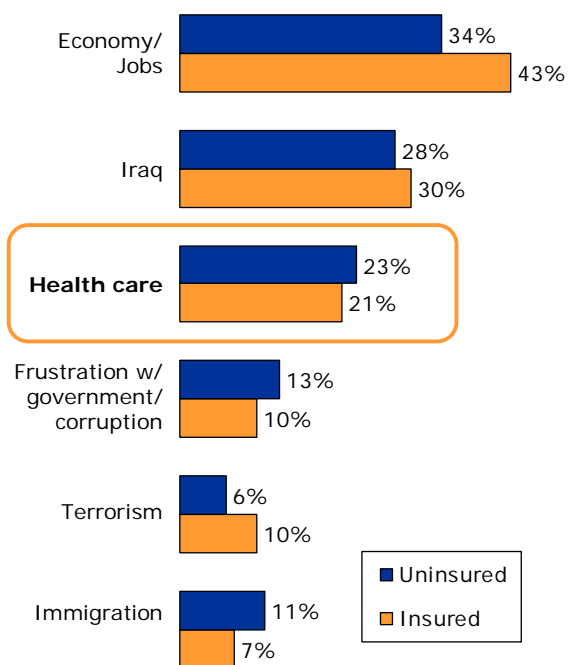
People without health insurance often express different opinions than their insured counterparts about health care priorities. In February 2008, the non-elderly uninsured* were just about as likely as their insured counterparts to say health care will be one of the most important issues in their vote for president. However, when it comes to priorities within health care, the uninsured are more likely to choose expanding health insurance coverage as the health care issue they'd most like to hear about from candidates, while those with health insurance are more likely to pick reducing the cost of health care and insurance as the top issue.

While the views of the uninsured are important to note, it's also important to keep in mind (as data on the next page will show) that people without health insurance are much less likely to be registered to vote, and much less likely to report voting in presidential elections than their insured counterparts.

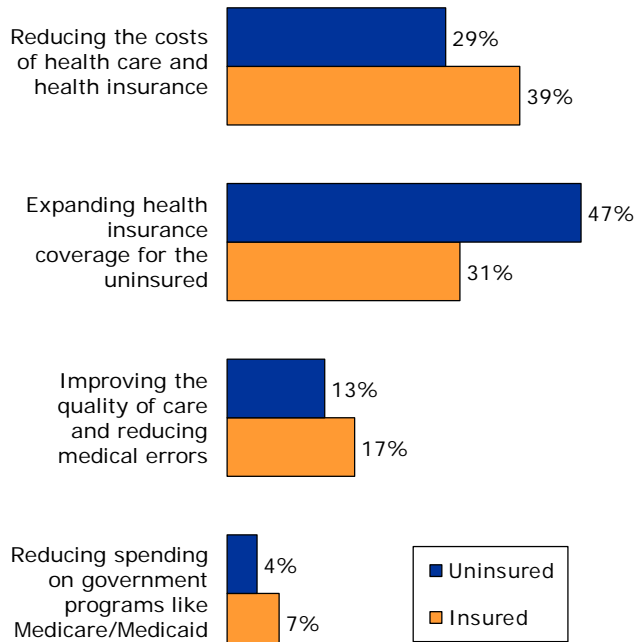
* Note: We break out separately those ages 65 and over because they all have access to health insurance coverage through Medicare.

Health Care Priorities Among the Uninsured

Thinking ahead to the November 2008 presidential election, what is the single most important issue in your choice for president? Is there one other issue that's nearly as important? (Feb. 2008, adults ages 18-64)



Which ONE of the following health care issues would you most like to hear the presidential candidates talk about? (Feb. 2008, adults ages 18-64)

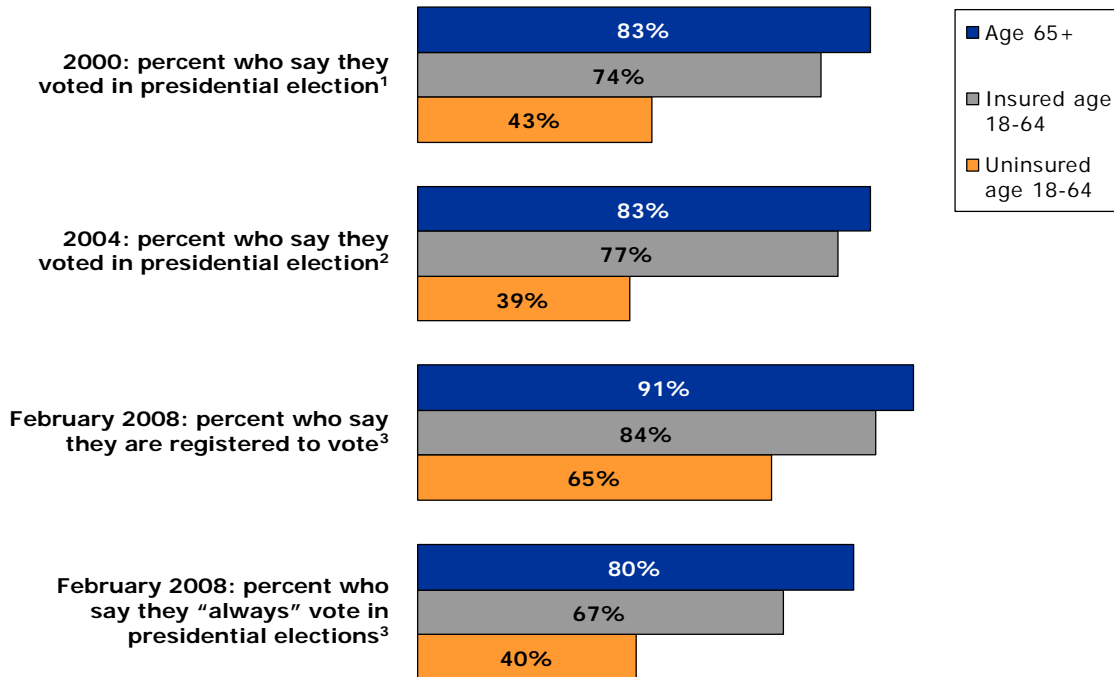


Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, *Kaiser Health Tracking Poll: Election 2008* (conducted Feb. 7-16, 2008)

The Uninsured and Voting

There are 47 million people in the United States without health insurance (including 38 million uninsured adults), and it is possible that such a large group could have a big impact on elections. However, survey data show that the uninsured are less likely than their insured counterparts to report being registered to vote, and to say that they participate in elections. In surveys following the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, roughly three-quarters of people under age 65 who had health insurance said they voted in each election (74 percent in 2000 and 77 percent in 2004), while just about four in ten of the non-elderly uninsured said they voted (43 percent in 2000 and 39 percent in 2004). Similarly, in February 2008, while more than eight in ten (84 percent) of the non-elderly insured said they were registered to vote, fewer than two-thirds (65 percent) of the non-elderly uninsured said they were registered, and while two-thirds (67 percent) of the non-elderly insured said they “always” vote in presidential elections, just four in ten of the non-elderly uninsured said they vote this often.

Reported Voting by Age and Insurance Status



Sources: ¹Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health *Post-Election Survey: The Public and the Health Care Agenda for the New Administration and Congress* (Nov. 13-Dec. 13, 2000); ²Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health Survey, *Health Care Agenda for the New Congress* (Nov. 4-28, 2004); ³Kaiser Health Tracking Poll: Election 2008 (Feb. 7-16, 2008)

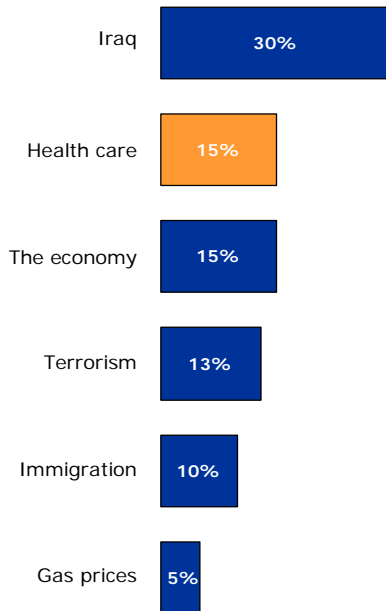
Historical Perspective: Specific Health Care Issues in the 2006 Presidential Election

In addition to the preceding analysis of survey data in the 2008 election context, examinations of past elections can help shed light on the role health care may play in 2008. The following sections examine the ranking of health, and some key health issues in presidential and congressional elections dating back to 1992.

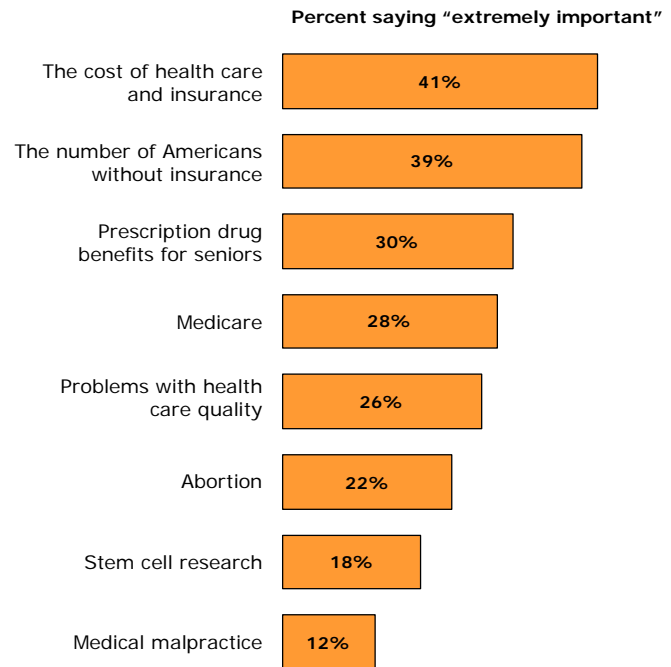
Although health care was not included in the list of issues voters were asked about in the 2006 exit poll, a survey conducted in October 2006 indicates that health care in general, and several specific health care issues, were on voters' minds in the month leading up to the election. In an open-ended question, health care ranked second (tied with the economy, and behind Iraq) as the issue registered voters said would be most important to their vote for Congress, with 15 percent naming it as the top issue. In addition, significant shares of voters said various health care issues would be extremely important to their vote, including the cost of health care and insurance (41 percent), the number of Americans without insurance (39 percent), prescription drug benefits for seniors (30 percent), Medicare (28 percent), and problems with health care quality (26 percent).

Specific Health Care Issues in the 2006 Congressional Election

What will be the single most important issue in your vote for Congress this year...?
(open-ended; asked of registered voters)



I'm going to read you a list of specific health care issues. For each one, please tell me how important it will be in your vote for U.S. Congress this year. Will it be extremely important in deciding your vote, very important, somewhat important, or not important?
(asked of registered voters)



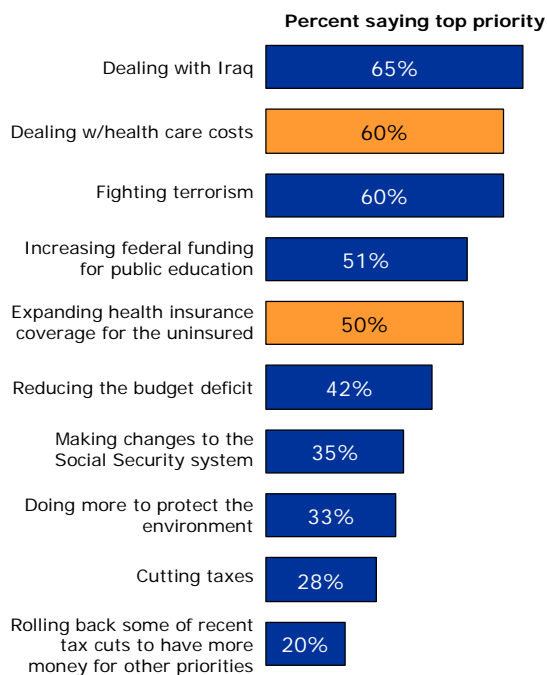
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Voters on Health Care and the 2006 Elections* (conducted October 5-10, 2006)

Historical Perspective: Specific Health Care Issues in the 2004 Presidential Election

In the 2004 presidential election exit poll, health care ranked fifth among issues voters said were most important to their vote. However, health care ranked somewhat higher as a priority for the next Congress to address. In a survey of the public just after the 2004 election, six in ten said dealing with health care costs should be a top priority for the president and Congress to act on in the coming year (ranking second out of ten issues), and half said the same about expanding health insurance coverage for the uninsured (ranking fifth). When asked more specifically about different health care priorities the president and Congress might try to act on, five issues were named by at least half the public as being top priorities: lowering the cost of health care and insurance (63 percent), making Medicare more financially sound for the future (58%), increasing the number of Americans covered by health insurance (57%), improving the quality of medical care and reducing medical errors (53%), and improving the nation's ability to respond to bioterrorist attacks (50%).

Specific Health Care Issues in the 2004 Presidential Election

I'm going to read you a list of some different things the President and Congress might try to act on this year. Tell me if you think it should be one of their TOP priorities, important but not a top priority, not too important, or should not be done at all. *(asked of all adults)*



I'm going to read you a list of health care issues the President and Congress might try to act on this year. Tell me if you think each should be one of their TOP priorities, important but not a top priority, not too important, or should not be done at all. *(asked of all adults)*



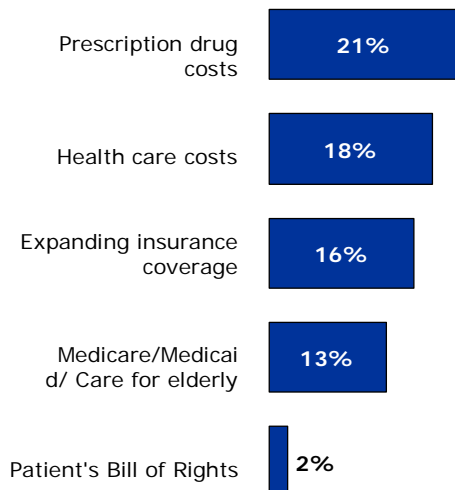
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health *Health Care Agenda for the New Congress* (Nov. 4-28, 2004)

Historical Perspective: Specific Health Care Issues in the 2002 Congressional Election

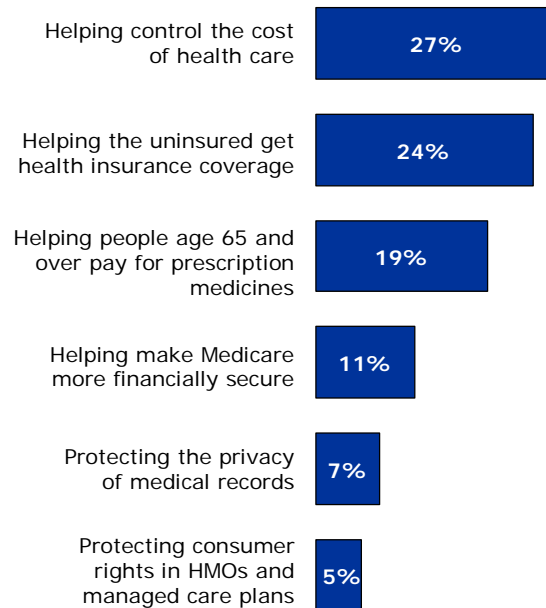
According to exit polls, health care played a role in determining many people's votes in the 2002 Congressional election, ranking second only to the economy as a voting issue. However, the public was split on which specific health care issue would be most important in determining their vote, with costs and health insurance coverage topping the list. In an open-ended question asked just before the 2002 election, about two in ten each named prescription drug costs (21 percent) and health care costs in general (18 percent) as the most important health care issue deciding their vote, followed by expanding health insurance coverage (16 percent), and Medicare/care for the elderly (13 percent). When given a list and asked to choose the most important issue determining their vote, more than a quarter chose controlling the cost of health care (28 percent) and helping the uninsured get coverage (26 percent); one in five chose helping seniors pay for prescription drugs (20 percent); and smaller shares chose making Medicare more financially secure (12 percent), protecting the privacy of medical records (6 percent), and protecting patients' rights in managed care plans (5 percent).

Specific Health Care Issues in the 2002 Congressional Election

Now thinking specifically about health care...what health care issue, if any, will be most important to you in deciding how to vote for U.S. Congress (2002)? Is there another health care issue that will be almost as important to you? *(open-ended; asked of all adults)*



Which ONE of the following issues do you think will be the MOST important in deciding your vote for U.S. Congress (2002)? *(list of issues read; asked of all adults)*



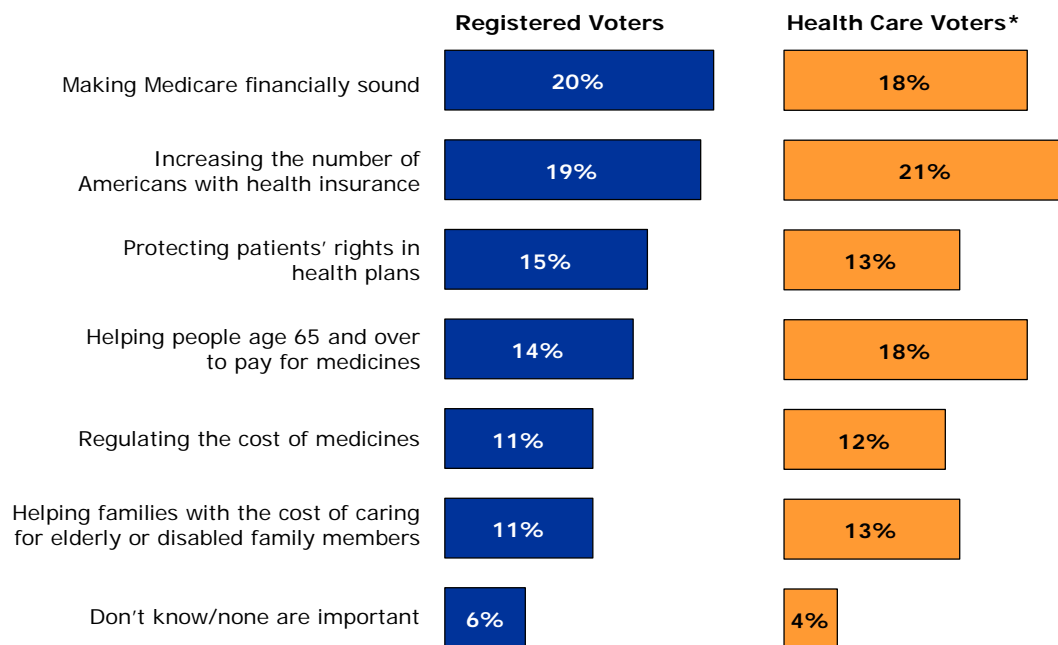
Source: NPR/Kaiser/Harvard *Congressional Election Tracking Survey* (conducted Oct 23-Oct 27, 2002)

Historical Perspective: Specific Health Care Issues in the 2000 Presidential Election

In a pre-election survey in 2000, more than four in ten registered voters (44 percent) said either health care or Medicare would be one of the two most important issues determining their vote for president (these voters were defined as “health care voters”). However, among those who were identified as “health care voters”, and among registered voters in general, there was no single health care issue that stood out as a priority in determining their vote. About two in ten registered voters chose making Medicare financially sound (20 percent) and increasing the number of Americans with health insurance (19 percent) as the most important health care issue deciding their vote, while about one in seven chose protecting patients’ rights in health plans (15 percent) and helping seniors pay for prescription drugs (14 percent), and around one in ten chose regulating the cost of medicines (11 percent) and helping families with the cost of caring for elderly and disabled family members (11 percent).

Specific Health Care Issues in the 2000 Presidential Election

Which ONE of these do you think will be the MOST important in deciding your vote (for president in 2000)?
(asked of those who say they are registered to vote)



*Registered voters who said health care or Medicare would be one of the two most important issues deciding their vote for president.

Source: Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University *Issues in the 2000 Election: Health Care* (conducted July 5- July 18, 2000)

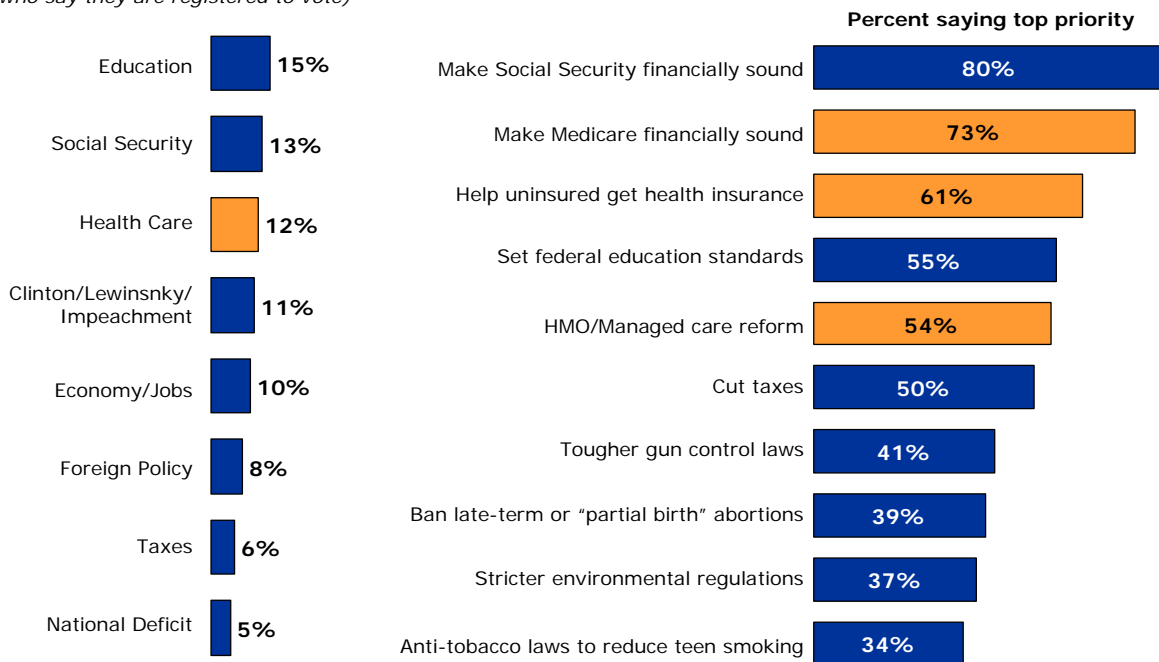
Historical Perspective: Health Care in the 1998 Congressional Election

In the 1998 congressional election, health care was not a top issue determining people's votes, ranking well below where it did in the previous two elections. However, health care ranked somewhat higher as a priority for the next Congress to address. In an open-ended question asked of voters after the election, five issues were named by at least 10 percent of voters as the most important priority for the president and new Congress to address in the next year, including education (15 percent), Social Security (13 percent), health care (12 percent), the Lewinsky matter and the possible impeachment of President Clinton (11 percent), and the economy/jobs (10 percent). When given a list of specific priorities Congress might try to address, keeping Social Security (80 percent) and Medicare (73 percent) financially sound were seen by voters as the top priorities. Other health care issues chosen as the top priority by a majority of voters were helping the uninsured get coverage (61 percent), and passing HMO/managed care reform laws (54 percent).

Health Care in the 1998 Congressional Election

Now I have some questions about what the President and the new Congress should try to accomplish in the next year. What do you think is the single MOST important issue or problem they should deal with? (multiple responses allowed) (asked of half of all those who say they are registered to vote)

Now, I'm going to read you a list of some different things the President and the new Congress might try to do in the next year. Should this be one of their TOP priorities, important but a lower priority, not too important, OR should this not be done? (asked of half of all those who say they are registered to vote)



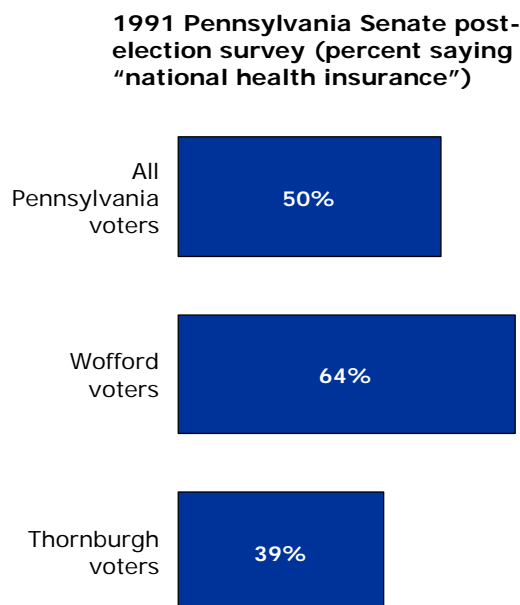
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health *Post-Election Survey* (conducted Nov 4-Dec 6, 1998)

Historical Perspective: Health Care Reform and the 1992 Presidential Election

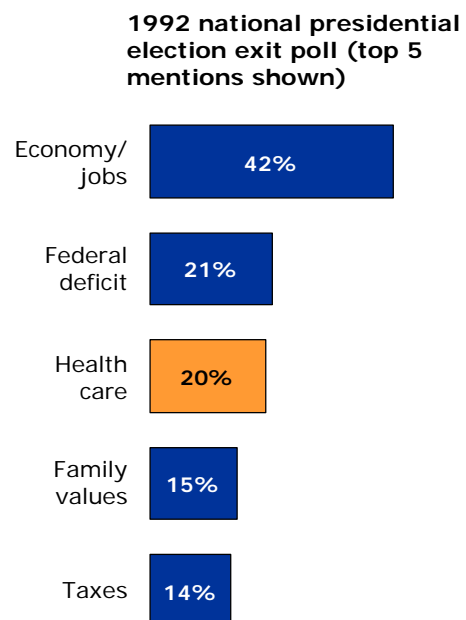
An early indication that health care could be a prominent voting issue in the 1992 presidential election emerged from the outcome of a special senatorial election in Pennsylvania in November 1991, in which Democrat Harris Wofford defeated Republican Richard Thornburgh by a margin of 55 percent to 45 percent. In a post-election survey, half (50 percent) of those who voted in the election named national health insurance as one of the top two issues in deciding their vote. Among those who voted for Wofford, the share naming national health insurance as a top issue was 64 percent, compared with 39 percent of those who voted for Thornburgh. In addition, 30 percent of those who voted for Wofford (and 15 percent of those who voted for Thornburgh) said national health insurance was the single most important factor determining their vote. Though there was some discussion of health care by the candidates during the campaign, health care did not play as decisive a role in the presidential election in 1992, ranking third as an issue, far behind the economy/jobs, and just behind the deficit.

Health Care Reform and the 1992 Presidential Election

Which two issues mattered most in deciding how you would vote for Senator? *(asked of those who say they voted in the 1991 Pennsylvania special Senate election)*



Which issues mattered most in deciding how you voted for President? *(asked of those who voted in the 1992 presidential election)*



Sources: Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health *1991 Pennsylvania Presidential Primary Survey* (Nov. 5-6, 1991); 1992 National election exit poll conducted by Voter Research and Surveys