

Iraq top issue, followed by health care, for the government to address and for presidential candidates to discuss

As we head into Labor Day and the more traditional opening act of the presidential election campaign season, Iraq continues to lead the list of issues the public most wants the government to address, with 42 percent naming it as one of the top two issues. Health care is once again the second most mentioned issue, and the top domestic issue, with 27 percent citing it. The economy ranked third at 16 percent and immigration fourth (13 percent). Gas prices, which received intense media attention earlier in the summer, had increased in the public's issue rankings in June, but fell in this August tracking poll.

What do you think is the most important problem for the government to address?
Is there another problem you think is almost as important? (open-ended)

Issue Rank	Total	Republicans	Democrats	Independents
1	Iraq (42%)	Iraq (38%)	Iraq (53%)	Iraq (41%)
2	Health care (27)	Terrorism (22)	Health care (35)	Health care (25)
3	Economy (16)	Health care (19)	Economy (14)	Economy (16)
4	Immigration (13)	Immigration (18)	Education (12)	Immigration (14)
5	Terrorism (11)	Economy (13)	Frustration w/gov't (8)	Terrorism (12)
6	Frustration w/gov't (9)	Frustration w/gov't (10)*	Immigration (6)*	Frustration w/gov't (10)
7	Education (7)	Taxes (10)*	Gas prices (6)*	Education (5)*
8	Gas prices (6)	Gas prices (6)	Terrorism (3)	Gas prices (5)*
9	Taxes (5)	Education (3)	Taxes (2)	Taxes (4)

* indicates a tie

A key question from the presidential campaign perspective is what issues do constituents heading into the political party primaries care about. We find that self-identified Democrats and independents tend to agree about the top three issues for government to address – Iraq, health care, and the economy. However, for self-identified Republicans Iraq stays on top, but terrorism comes in at number two, followed by health care and immigration.

But perhaps more importantly, when we instead asked specifically about what they would most like to hear presidential candidates talk about in the campaign, a slightly different picture emerges. Iraq and health care are now the top two issues for Republicans, Democrats, and independents alike. In fact, for Democrats the same percentage mentions Iraq (42 percent) as says health care (42 percent) – the first time we have seen this and a dramatic change from our June tracking poll. Among Republicans, 32 percent cite Iraq as the most important issue, with health care coming in second at 21 percent, followed by terrorism at 16 percent and immigration and the economy, both at 15 percent.

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)

Issue Rank	Total	Republicans	Democrats	Independents
1	Iraq (38%)	Iraq (32%)	Iraq (42%)*	Iraq (43%)
2	Health care (30)	Health care (21)	Health care (42)*	Health care (25)
3	Economy (13)	Terrorism (16)	Economy (12)	Immigration (16)
4	Immigration (12)	Immigration (15)*	Education (9)	Economy (14)
5	Terrorism (7)*	Economy (15)*	Immigration (7)	Education (8)
6	Taxes (7)*	Taxes (10)	Taxes (6)	Terrorism (7)
7	Education (7)*	Gas prices (8)	Terrorism (3)	Taxes (6)
8	Gas prices (4)	Education (2)	Gas prices (2)	Gas prices (3)

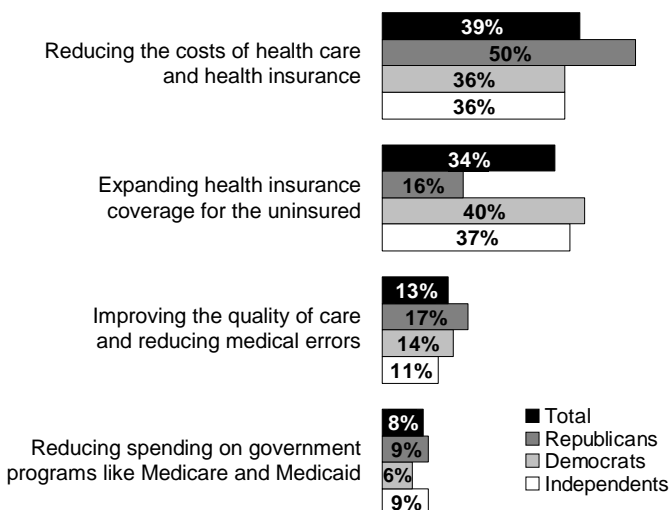
* indicates a tie

Within health care, focus is on cost (particularly for Republicans) and coverage (particularly for Democrats)

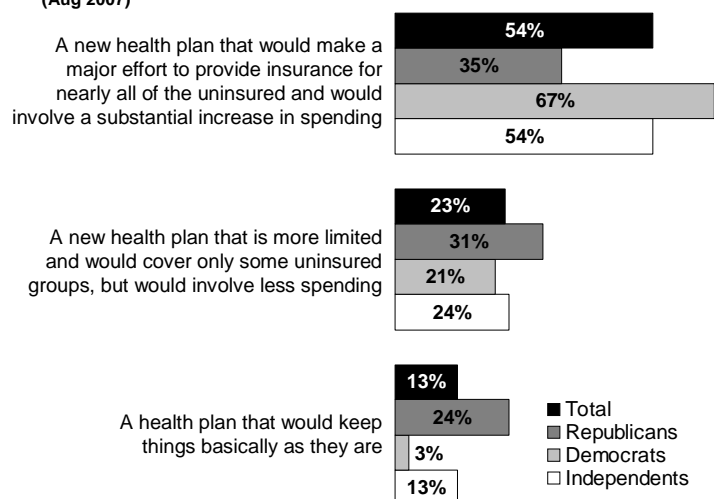
The public reports an interest in hearing presidential candidates discuss costs and coverage when asked specifically about *health care* issues they want to hear about. When asked to pick from a list, nearly four in ten (39 percent) say reducing the cost of health care and insurance is the issue they would most like to hear discussed, followed closely by expansion of health coverage for the uninsured (34 percent). About one in eight (13 percent) say they are most interested in hearing about improving quality of care and one in twelve (8 percent) choose reducing spending on government health programs.

Responses to this question differ greatly by political party, with Republicans choosing costs over coverage by a wide margin (50 vs. 16 percent), and a slight plurality of Democrats (40 percent) saying they would most like to hear candidates talk about expanding coverage for the uninsured, versus 36 percent who want to hear about costs. Independents are about evenly split between costs (36 percent) and coverage (37 percent).

Which ONE of the following health care issues would you most like to hear the presidential candidates talk about? (Aug 2007)



Which ONE of the following three things would you like to see in a health care reform proposal from a presidential candidate? (Aug 2007)



Democrats & independents more likely than Republicans to want to hear about big push on uninsured

Overall, more than half the public (54 percent) say they would prefer to see a health reform approach that would make a major effort to cover most of those with no health insurance even if it involves an increase in spending on health, whereas about one in four (23 percent) prefer a limited new plan that would cost less but cover fewer uninsured, and one in eight (13 percent) would prefer keeping things as they are. Majorities of Democrats (67 percent) and independents (54 percent) report a preference for a health plan with major changes, while Republicans are fairly even split between a major (35 percent) and minor (31 percent) plan. Nearly a quarter (24 percent) of Republicans would prefer to keep things as they are.

Few people are likely to vote solely based on health

Consistent with our previous tracking results, only a small share of the public (11 percent) say they would *only* vote for a presidential candidate who shares their views on health care. Nearly three-quarters (74 percent) say they would consider a candidate's position on health care as one of many important factors in their vote for president, and one in ten (11 percent) say they would not see health care as a major issue in their vote. Democrats (14 percent) were more likely than Republicans (7 percent) to report that they would *only* vote for a candidate who shared their health care views, while independents mirrored results for the public overall.

Still no single candidate who stands out on health (Clinton gets most recognition)

As we found in our last two tracking polls, a large majority of the public still doesn't know or can't name a candidate who best represents their views on health, or says that *no* candidate represents their views. While the share who were able to name a candidate in this question increased somewhat (from 32 percent to 41 percent) between March and June, it held steady in August at 41 percent.

Senator Hillary Clinton remains the top candidate on this question, with 19 percent of the public overall, and 35 percent of Democrats saying she best represents their health care views. Senator Clinton's numbers have inched up slightly on this question since March, when she was named by 14 percent of the public overall and 27 percent of Democrats (her share among independents has also inched up from 9 percent in March to 15 percent in August). Senator Barack Obama is the second ranking candidate on this question (named by 6 percent overall, and 9 percent of Democrats), and former Senator John Edwards ranks third (4 percent overall and 6 percent of Democrats).

Former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani remains the top pick among Republicans, with 8 percent of Republicans (and 3 percent of the public overall) saying he best represents their views on health. Former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney (5 percent of Republicans, 2 percent overall) is the next most mentioned candidate, followed by Senator John McCain and former Senator Fred Thompson (both named by 2 percent of Republicans, 1 percent overall).

August 2007	Thinking about all of the candidates for president in 2008, regardless of political party or who you intend to vote for, which candidate BEST represents your own views on health care?			
	Total	Republicans	Democrats	Independents
Don't know/Can't name/None	59%	68%	43%	63%
Named a candidate	41	32	57	37
Hillary Clinton	19	4	35	15
Barack Obama	6	3	9	7
John Edwards	4	1	6	3
Rudy Giuliani	3	8	1	4
Mitt Romney	2	5	<1	2
John McCain	1	2	1	1
Fred Thompson	1	2	0	1

Note: candidates named by less than 1 percent not shown. See trends in back for detailed data.

On the question of which candidate is placing the biggest emphasis of health, Senator Clinton again tops the list, with 27 percent naming her, followed by Senator Obama (6 percent) and former Senator John Edwards (5 percent). No Republican candidate was mentioned by more than one percent of the public. Again, the share mentioning Senator Clinton as the candidate most focused on health increased slightly overall from 21 percent in March to 27 percent in August.

August 2007	And still thinking about all of the candidates for president, regardless of political party and whether or not you agree with their views, which candidate do you think is placing the BIGGEST EMPHASIS on health care issues?			
	Total	Republicans	Democrats	Independents
Don't know/Can't name/None	56%	62%	43%	57%
Named a candidate	44	38	57	43
Hillary Clinton	27	20	34	27
Barack Obama	6	4	9	5
John Edwards	5	2	7	6
Rudy Giuliani	1	3	<1	1
Mitt Romney	1	2	<1	1
John McCain	1	1	1	1

Note: candidates named by less than 1 percent not shown. See trends in back for detailed data.

Methodology

This *Kaiser Health Tracking Poll: Election 2008*, the third in a series, was designed and analyzed by researchers at the Kaiser Family Foundation. A nationally representative random sample of 1,500 adults was interviewed by telephone between August 2-8, 2007. The margin of sampling error for the survey is plus or minus 3 percentage points; for results based on subgroups, the sampling error is higher.

June trends are from the second survey in the *Kaiser Health Tracking Poll: Election 2008* series, and are based on a nationally representative sample of 1,203 adults interviewed May 31-June 5, 2007 (margin of sampling error plus or minus 3 percentage points).

March trends are from the first survey in the *Kaiser Health Tracking Poll: Election 2008* series, and are based on a nationally representative sample of 1,233 adults interviewed March 8-13, 2007 (margin of sampling error plus or minus 3 percentage points).

Trends

1. To begin... What do you think is the most important problem for the government to address? Is there another problem you think is almost as important for the government to address? (OPEN-END)

Based on Half Sample (Note: mentions less than 5 percent not shown)

	TOTAL	REP	DEM	IND
Iraq				
Aug07	42	38	53	41
Jun07	43	36	50	45
Mar07	44	43	50	43
Health care				
Aug07	27	19	35	25
Jun07	28	18	33	29
Mar07	29	28	31	29
Economy				
Aug07	16	13	14	16
Jun07	11	12	10	12
Mar07	13	10	20	10
Immigration				
Aug07	13	18	6	14
Jun07	12	20	5	13
Mar07	9	12	4	11
Terrorism/nat'l security				
Aug07	11	22	3	12
Jun07	9	17	1	12
Mar07	8	14	4	8
Frustration with gov't/corruption				
Aug07	9	10	8	10
Jun07	9	8	8	9
Mar07	7	6	9	7
Education/schools				
Aug07	7	3	12	5
Jun07	5	4	7	4
Mar07	8	8	8	8
Gas prices/energy				
Aug07	6	6	6	5
Jun07	14	15	13	12
Mar07	4	4	5	4
Taxes				
Aug07	5	10	2	4
Jun07	4	5	4	3
Mar07	4	6	3	5
Don't know/Refused				
Aug07	8	4	9	9
Jun07	7	8	9	2
Mar07	11	7	8	11

2. Thinking about the campaign for the presidential election in 2008, what two issues would you most like to hear the presidential candidates talk about? IF R GIVES ONE ISSUE PROBE FOR SECOND: Is there another issue you'd like to hear about? (OPEN-END)

Based on Half Sample (Note: mentions less than 4 percent not shown)

	TOTAL	REP	DEM	IND
Iraq				
Aug07	38	32	42	43
Jun07	43	43	52	37
Mar07	44	42	51	44
Health care				
Aug07	30	21	42	25
Jun07	21	18	21	24
Mar07	26	22	30	26
Economy				
Aug07	13	15	12	14
Jun07	13	12	18	10
Mar07	18	18	20	20
Immigration				
Aug07	12	15	7	16
Jun07	18	20	14	20
Mar07	9	8	7	9
Education				
Aug07	7	2	9	8
Jun07	4	1	6	5
Mar07	6	8	7	3
Taxes				
Aug07	7	10	6	6
Jun07	4	5	3	3
Mar07	3	4	3	6
Terrorism/nat'l security				
Aug07	7	16	3	7
Jun07	7	16	2	6
Mar07	6	14	3	6
Gas prices/energy				
Aug07	4	8	2	3
Jun07	12	12	11	13
Mar07	3	4	5	3
Don't know/Refused				
Aug07	14	13	12	12
Jun07	9	13	6	8
Mar07	15	17	13	13

3. Next, thinking about the campaign for the presidential election in 2008, which ONE of the following health care issues would you most like to hear the presidential candidates talk about and focus on in any health reform plan they may develop? (READ AND RANDOMIZE 1-4)

Based on Half Sample

	TOTAL	REP	DEM	IND
Reducing health care costs	39	50	36	36
Expanding health insurance coverage for the uninsured	34	16	40	37
Improving the quality of care and reducing medical errors	13	17	14	11
Reducing spending on gov't health programs like Medicare/Medicaid	8	9	6	9
None of these (VOL)	3	4	1	2
Other issue (VOL)	2	1	1	3
Don't know/Refused	2	3	3	2

4. Now thinking specifically about HEALTH CARE, what two health care issues would you most like to hear the presidential candidates talk about? IF R GIVES ONE ISSUE PROBE FOR SECOND: Is there another health care issue you'd like to hear about? (OPEN-END)

Based on Half Sample

	TOTAL	REP	DEM	IND
Coverage/uninsured				
Aug07	37	24	48	38
Jun07	36	28	41	38
Mar07	35	35	37	33
Health care costs				
Aug07	32	30	31	35
Jun07	27	23	25	34
Mar07	32	34	34	27
Medicare/RX drugs				
Aug07	12	16	12	10
Jun07	16	16	19	14
Mar07	22	17	23	24
Insurance issues				
Aug07	5	3	7	5
Jun07	1	1	1	1
Mar07	3	2	3	2
Quality of care				
Aug07	2	1	3	2
Jun07	2	3	2	1
Mar07	3	2	2	4
Other health care issue				
Aug07	19	26	13	21
Jun07	21	26	20	22
Mar07	19	25	16	18
Non-health care issue				
Aug07	10	10	10	7
Jun07	12	12	14	13
Mar07	6	5	7	4
Don't know/Refused				
Aug07	17	22	17	14
Jun07	17	21	13	16
Mar07	17	17	15	17

5. Thinking about all of the candidates for president in 2008, regardless of political party or who you intend to vote for, which candidate BEST represents your own views on health care? (OPEN-END)

	TOTAL	REP	DEM	IND
Named any candidate (NET)				
Aug07	41	32	57	37
Jun07	41	33	58	32
Mar07	32	29	48	27
Hillary Clinton				
Aug07	19	4	35	15
Jun07	17	2	33	13
Mar07	14	7	27	9
Barack Obama				
Aug07	6	3	9	7
Jun07	9	4	15	7
Mar07	5	3	8	4
John Edwards				
Aug07	4	1	6	3
Jun07	3	1	4	3
Mar07	2	*	4	1
Rudy Giuliani				
Aug07	3	8	1	4
Jun07	3	9	1	3
Mar07	3	7	1	4
Mitt Romney				
Aug07	2	5	*	2
Jun07	3	6	*	2
Mar07	1	2	*	1
John McCain				
Aug07	1	2	1	1
Jun07	2	5	1	1
Mar07	2	4	1	2
Fred Thompson				
Aug07	1	2	--	1
Jun07	*	1	*	1
Mar07	*	*	--	--
Dennis Kucinich				
Aug07	*	--	*	1
Jun07	*	--	1	--
Mar07	*	--	--	*
Bill Richardson				
Aug07	*	--	1	1
Jun07	1	*	1	1
Mar07	1	*	1	1
Ron Paul				
Aug07	*	*	--	1
Jun07	*	*	--	*
Mar07	*	--	--	*
George W. Bush				
Aug07	*	1	--	*
Jun07	*	--	*	--
Mar07	*	*	*	1
Joe Biden				
Aug07	*	--	*	*
Jun07	*	--	*	--
Mar07	*	--	*	--
Mike Huckabee				
Aug07	*	*	--	--
Jun07	--	--	--	--
Mar07	--	--	--	--
Al Gore				
Aug07	*	--	*	--
Jun07	*	--	*	--
Mar07	*	--	*	1

	TOTAL	REP	DEM	IND
Ralph Nader				
Aug07	*	--	*	--
Jun07	--	--	--	--
Mar07	*	--	--	1
Alan Keyes				
Aug07	*	--	--	*
Jun07	--	--	--	--
Mar07	*	*	--	--
Other candidate				
Aug07	*	1	*	--
Jun07	*	1	*	1
Mar07	*	--	--	*
Democratic candidate, non-specific				
Aug07	2	*	4	1
Jun07	1	*	1	*
Mar07	2	*	4	1
Republican candidate, non-specific				
Aug07	1	4	--	1
Jun07	1	3	--	1
Mar07	1	3	--	1
Don't know/No candidate				
Aug07	59	68	43	63
Jun07	59	67	42	68
Mar07	68	71	52	73

6. And still thinking about all of the candidates for president, regardless of political party and whether or not you agree with their views, which candidate do you think is placing the BIGGEST EMPHASIS on health care issues? (OPEN-END)

	TOTAL	REP	DEM	IND
Named a candidate (NET)				
Aug07	44	38	57	43
Jun07	43	36	56	41
Mar07	34	29	48	31
Hillary Clinton				
Aug07	27	20	34	27
Jun07	23	17	32	21
Mar07	21	19	28	20
Barack Obama				
Aug07	6	4	9	5
Jun07	9	8	12	9
Mar07	5	1	10	5
John Edwards				
Aug07	5	2	7	6
Jun07	4	1	6	6
Mar07	3	3	4	2
Rudy Giuliani				
Aug07	1	3	*	1
Jun07	2	4	1	1
Mar07	1	3	*	1
Mitt Romney				
Aug07	1	2	*	1
Jun07	1	2	*	1
Mar07	*	1	--	--
John McCain				
Aug07	1	1	1	1
Jun07	1	1	*	1
Mar07	1	1	1	*
Bill Richardson				
Aug07	*	--	1	*
Jun07	*	--	1	--
Mar07	*	*	*	--
Dennis Kucinich				
Aug07	*	--	1	*
Jun07	*	--	*	*
Mar07	--	--	--	--
Mike Huckabee				
Aug07	*	*	*	--
Jun07	--	--	--	--
Mar07	--	--	--	--
Ron Paul				
Aug07	*	*	--	*
Jun07	--	--	--	--
Mar07	*	--	--	*
Fred Thompson				
Aug07	*	*	*	--
Jun07	*	--	--	*
Mar07	--	--	--	--
Al Gore				
Aug07	*	--	*	--
Jun07	*	--	--	--
Mar07	*	--	*	--
Joe Biden				
Aug07	*	--	--	*
Jun07	*	--	*	--
Mar07	*	--	*	--
Ralph Nader				
Aug07	*	--	*	--
Jun07	--	--	--	--
Mar07	--	--	--	--

	TOTAL	REP	DEM	IND
Other candidate				
Aug07	*	*	*	--
Jun07	*	--	1	*
Mar07	*	--	*	1
Democratic candidate, non-specific				
Aug07	2	2	3	1
Jun07	2	*	2	1
Mar07	1	--	3	1
Republican candidate, non-specific				
Aug07	1	2	*	*
Jun07	*	1	*	*
Mar07	1	2	*	*
Don't know/No candidate				
Aug07	56	62	43	57
Jun07	57	64	44	59
Mar07	66	71	52	59

7. Thinking about how the issue of health care might affect your vote for president, would you ... ?
(CATEGORIES READ IN ORDER AND REVERSE ORDER)

	TOTAL	REP	DEM	IND
ONLY vote for a candidate who shares your views on health care				
Aug07	11	7	14	11
Jun07	13	9	17	10
Mar07	14	7	17	15
Consider a candidate's position on health care as just one of many important factors				
Aug07	74	76	76	74
Jun07	68	67	67	74
Mar07	69	77	70	67
Not see health care as a major issue in your vote				
Aug07	11	12	6	12
Jun07	13	21	9	13
Mar07	10	11	7	11
Don't know/Refused				
Aug07	4	6	3	3
Jun07	5	2	6	3
Mar07	8	5	6	7

8. Which ONE of the following three things would you like to see in a health care reform proposal from a presidential candidate? Would you want your candidate to propose... (READ)? (Which would you want your presidential candidate to propose - a major plan OR a more limited plan OR to keep things as they are?)

	TOTAL	REP	DEM	IND
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				
Aug07	54	35	67	54
Jun07	53	36	72	49
Mar07	52	38	66	52
A new health plan that is more limited and would cover only some groups of the uninsured BUT would involve less new spending				
Aug07	23	31	21	24
Jun07	21	29	14	23
Mar07	24	33	18	25
A health plan that would keep things basically as they are				
Aug07	13	24	3	13
Jun07	17	26	8	19
Mar07	14	19	9	13
Don't know/Refused				
Aug07	10	10	9	9
Jun07	9	9	6	10
Mar07	11	10	8	10