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Summary



Kaiser Family Foundation

***Health Poll Report Survey:  
Voters on Health Care and the 2006  
Elections***

***October 2006***

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## Voters on Health Care and the 2006 Election

Worries about the rising cost of health care lead a list of registered voters' personal concerns this election season, but health care as a political issue remains mired in the pack, far less salient than Iraq. To the extent that health care issues do matter, it is concerns about costs and the uninsured that top the list. There continues to be a gender gap when it comes to health care, with women voters both more worried about personal health care concerns and more likely to bring those concerns to the ballot box.

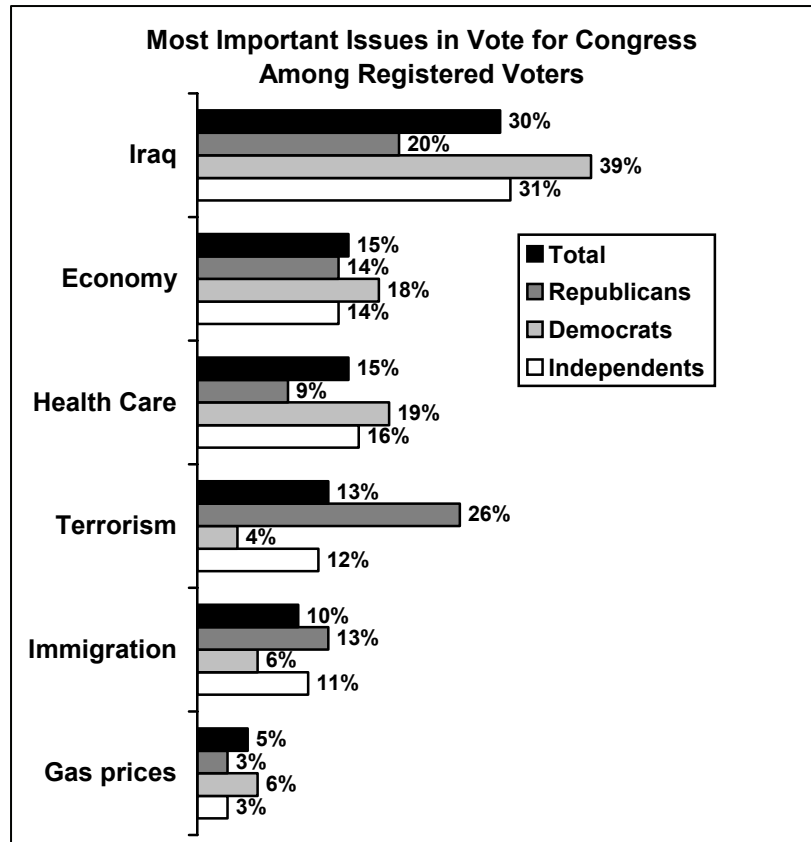
At the same time, the intense national focus on progress in Iraq may be distracting attention from a widespread feeling that Congress has neglected domestic issues.

Issues overall are only part of the mix for voters this year. Roughly a third say they're going to the ballot box ready to vote on a candidate's stands on the issues, but just as many say they're voting on views of the candidate's abilities and character, and one in four say they are looking at how the nation is doing overall.

### Most important national issue: Iraq by a long shot

Iraq continues to dominate the issue landscape this election season, with twice as many (30 percent) choosing the conflict from a list of six top issues as naming any other. Clustered beneath Iraq are three other issues, virtually indistinguishable in terms of extent of support: health care (15 percent), the economy (15 percent) and terrorism (13 percent). Immigration draws nearly as much support (10 percent), while gas prices were named by 5 percent of voters.

Voters aged 65 and up were not more likely to name health care as their top issue (14 percent did). They were, however, even more likely than younger voters to name Iraq (37 percent).



The issue agenda continues to vary widely by partisan identification. Iraq leads the list for Democrats and political independents, but terrorism is the top choice of Republican voters (26 percent, compared to only 4 percent of Democrats). Immigration is a bigger issue among the GOP (13 percent, compared to 6 percent of Democrats), while health care is more important to Democrats (19 percent selected it as a top issue, compared to 9 percent of Republicans).

Women are significantly more likely than men to name health care as a top voting issue (19 percent, compared to 10 percent of men).

***Most important issues for registered voters: ranked by gender***

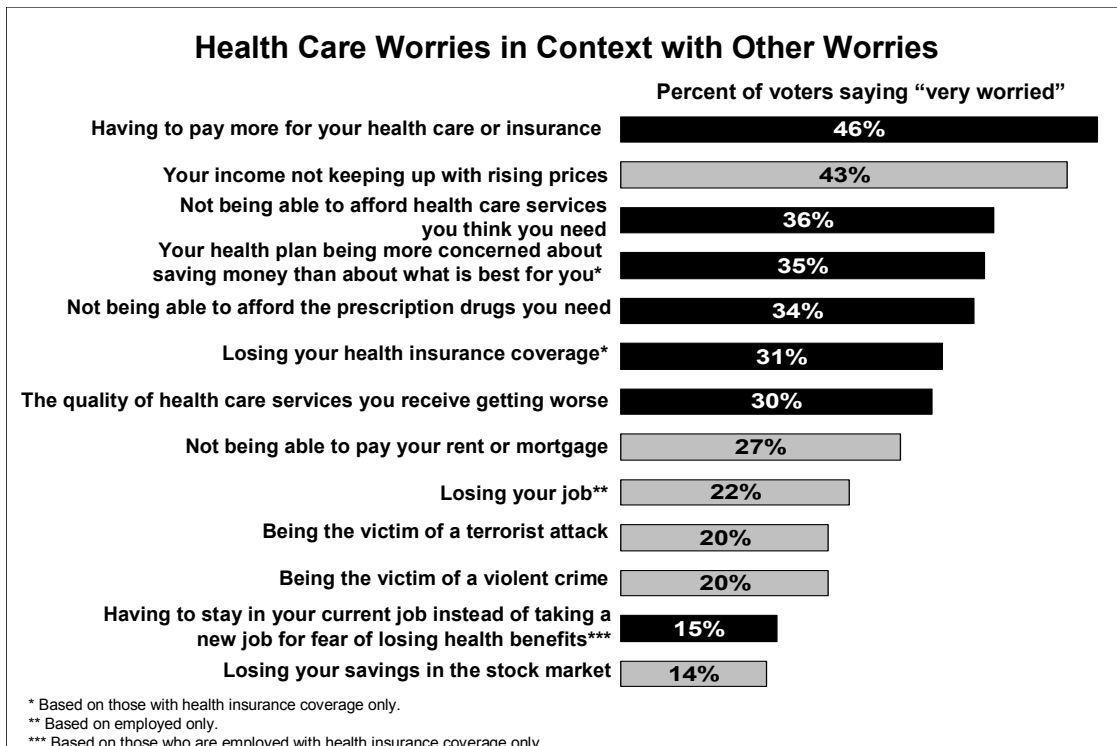
Men		Women	
33%	Iraq	27%	Iraq
14	terrorism	19	health care
13	economy	17	economy
12	immigration	12	terrorism
10	health care	8	immigration
5	gas prices	5	gas prices

**Around the kitchen table, worries about rising health costs lead a list of personal concerns; overall health-care related worries at '06 high**

Though health care doesn't lead the list of voting issues this year, worries about rising costs for health insurance and medical care led a list of thirteen possible concerns.

Nearly half of voters (46 percent) said they were "very worried" about "having to pay more for your health care or health insurance." This was twice the number who were equally worried about being the victim of a violent crime (20 percent) or a terrorist attack (20 percent), or about losing their job (22 percent).

The only concern which ranked in the neighborhood of health costs was a general concern about personal income not keeping up with rising prices (43 percent were very worried).



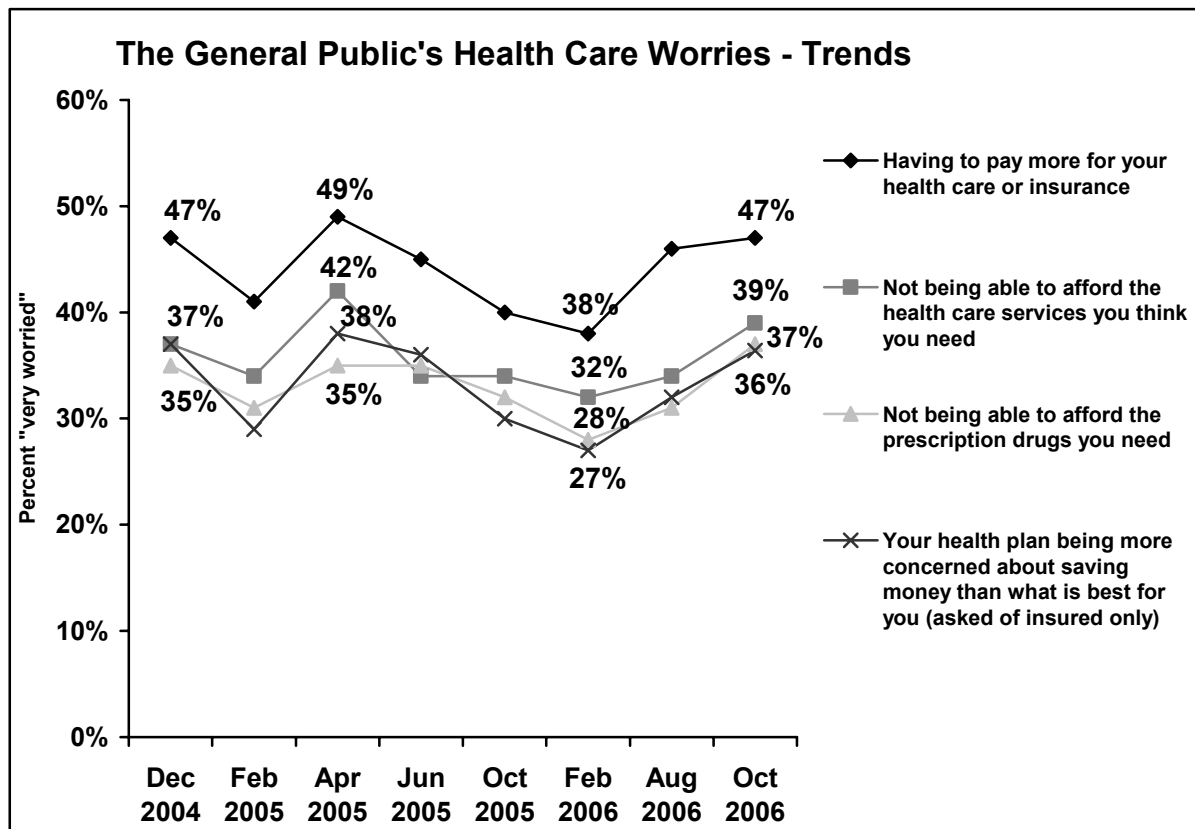
There is a consistent gender gap when it comes to health worries, with female voters significantly more likely to say they are “very worried” about all the health-related concerns covered on the survey, particularly those related to keeping, and affording, medical care.

Percent of registered voters saying they are "very worried"			
	Men	Women	Difference
Paying more for health care or insurance	40%	51%	11 pts.
Not being able to afford health care you need	30	42	12 pts.
Health plan more worried about saving money than what's best for you	29	41	12 pts.
Not being able to afford prescription drugs you need	28	40	12 pts.
Losing health insurance coverage	26	36	10 pts.

The new survey also found that, after a year of decline, the level of personal concern on health care issues among the general public began to increase again at the start of 2006 and has continued to climb.

This month’s survey marked an annual high in the percentage of Americans who reported being “very worried” about: being able to afford the health care services they need; being able to afford the prescription drugs they need; and playing second fiddle to their health plan’s own needs.

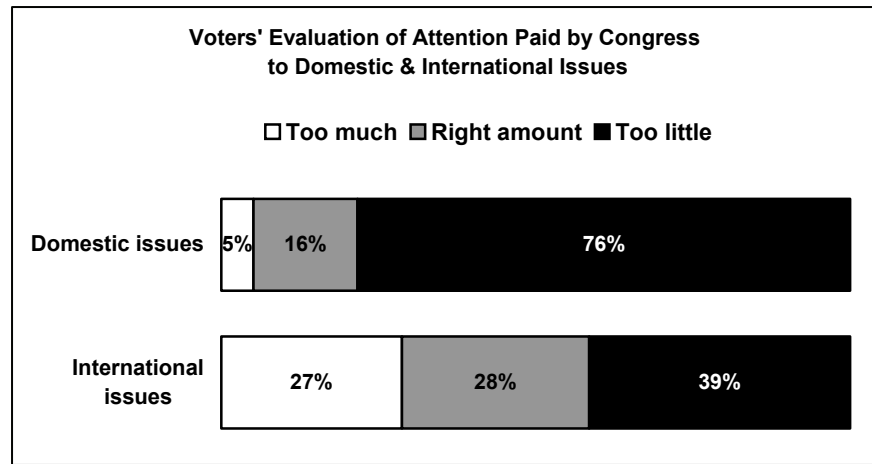
The increase in concern across 2006 was driven largely by women.



## Domestic issues getting short shrift

Iraq’s predominance this election season may be camouflaging a widespread feeling that Congress has not paid enough attention to domestic issues

Three in four voters (76 percent) said Congress has paid too little attention to domestic issues “like the economy, education and health care”, while only 39 percent said the same about “international and national security issues like Iraq, Iran and terrorism.”



In fact, 27 percent of voters said Congress had paid too much attention to international issues, compared to 5 percent who said the same about domestic matters.

Democrats and political independents were overwhelmingly likely to say domestic issues were being underserved (more than eight in ten in each group did so). Republicans were less likely to hold this view, but still a majority of GOP voters – 55 percent – said domestic issues were not getting enough attention.

	Republicans	Democrats	Independents
Too much	7%	3%	4%
Too little	55	88	82
Right amount	33	7	12

	Republicans	Democrats	Independents
Too much	17%	33%	29%
Too little	32	44	38
Right amount	46	18	26

## Costs and the uninsured two key health issues in the election

Asked which specific health care issues might influence their vote this year, 20 percent said cost concerns would be the most important element in their choice, and nearly as many (18 percent) pointed to the number of Americans without health insurance. These two issues stood out even more as the dominant concerns among health care voters (that group that named health care as the driving issue in their vote, representing 15 percent of registered voters).

The two ranked tops among both women and men, though women were more likely to prioritize the uninsured (23 percent, compared to 14 percent for male voters). For women, then, the uninsured topped the list of health care issues, while for men it was costs. Democrats and independents were significantly more likely to name the uninsured than Republicans (23 percent and 21 percent respectively, compared to 9 percent of Republicans).

Medicare and the recently implemented prescription drug benefit were somewhat less salient to the voting public overall. Five percent said Medicare in general was the most important health issue to their vote, another 5 percent named the prescription drug program. But Medicare and the Part D prescription drug program together ranked at the top of seniors health care voting lists. Overall, 22 percent named one of the two (11 percent each), with the uninsured (17 percent) following close behind as a concern. Fourteen percent of seniors named cost issues.

Hot button issues like abortion and stem cell research were also named as most important by similarly sized groups of voters (7 percent and 4 percent, respectively). Among Republicans, abortion (14 percent) was second only to cost concerns (18 percent) as a health-related voting issue.

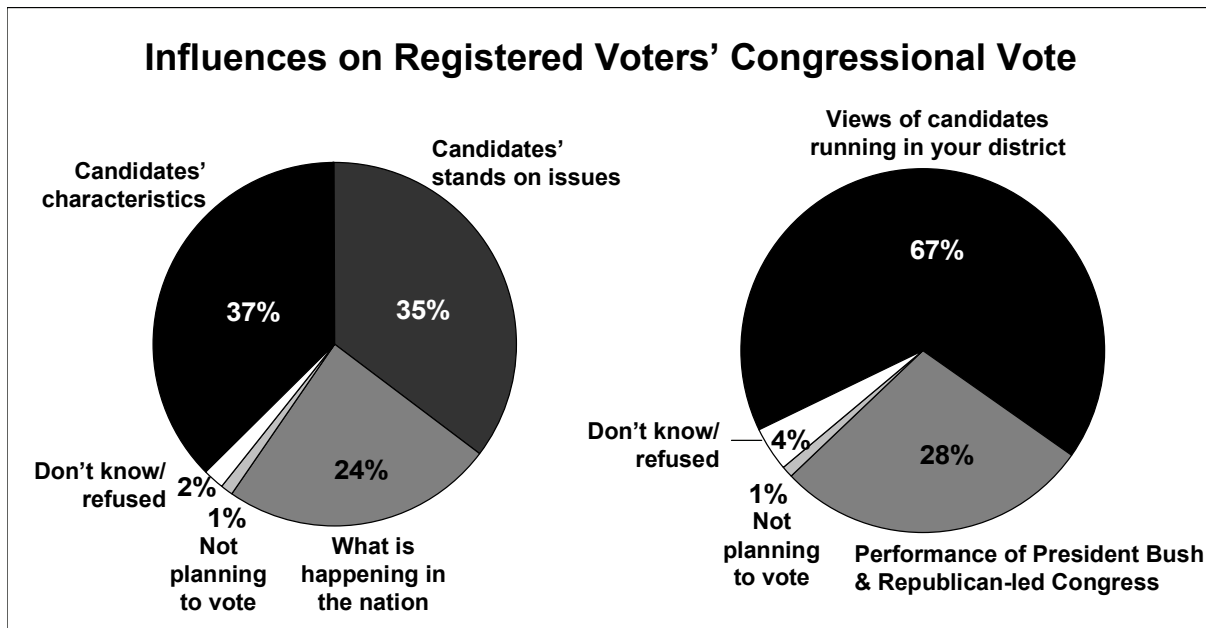
For a third of the country, no one health issue ranked as critical to their vote this year.

Most important health issue to Congressional vote (asked of all voters)								
	All Voters	Under 65	65 plus	Rep.	Dem.	Indep.	Men	Women
None	34%	37%	24%	41%	29%	39%	39%	30%
Cost	20	21	14	18	23	17	20	19
Uninsured	18	19	17	9	23	21	14	23
Part D/Medicare (NET)	10	8	22	8	11	9	9	11
<i>Part D</i>	5	4	11	3	6	5	4	6
<i>Medicare</i>	5	4	11	5	5	4	5	5
Abortion	7	7	10	14	5	5	7	8
Stem cell research	4	4	4	4	3	6	6	3
Quality	3	3	4	2	5	2	3	3
Malpractice	1	1	2	3	0	2	2	1

## Local races, with a look to the nation

Most voters say that decisions about which candidate to back in the upcoming elections are local: 67 percent said that their vote will be based “more on your views of the candidates running in your district.” But for nearly three in ten (28 percent), the election is more about “the performance of President Bush and the Republican-led Congress.”

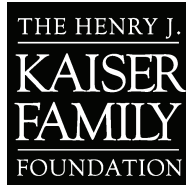
Asked more specifically: about a third (35 percent) said they would be voting on their candidates’ stands on the issues, while roughly the same number (37 percent) said they were looking more at the candidates’ values, experience and character. A quarter (24 percent) said that, rather than issues *or* candidates, they were reacting to their “perception of what is happening in the nation as a whole”.



### Methodology

The Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Poll Report Survey: Voters on Health Care and the 2006 Elections* was conducted and analyzed by researchers at the Kaiser Family Foundation. A nationally representative sample of 1,200 adults ages 18 and older – including 1,052 self-reported registered voters – was contacted by telephone by Princeton Survey Research Associates International between October 5 and October 10, 2006. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Results reported here are shown based on registered voters except where noted.

The margin of sampling error for the survey is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on all registered voters and for results based on all respondents. For results based on smaller subsets of voters, the margin of sampling error is somewhat higher. Note that sampling error is only one of many potential sources of error in this or any other public opinion poll.



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