

Kaiser's final Health Tracking Poll before the midterm elections finds few changes in the public's mindset toward health reform. While views on reform tightened somewhat this month, the big picture remains the same, with Americans evenly divided between support for and opposition to the new law and those most likely to turn out to vote on Nov. 2 tilting towards the negative. It's not clear how much these views will impact voter behavior next month, however, as only one in ten voters currently name health reform as the issue driving their vote. The October survey finds some evidence confirming the conventional wisdom that Republican voters are more enthused this fall: a greater proportion of Republicans express strong opposition to the bill than Democrats express strong support; and those independents inclined to vote Republican are more likely than their Democratic-leaning counterparts to say that a Congressperson's vote on reform will sway them. But the poll also provides evidence of Democrats' persisting support for the new law: Just over half of Democrats say they feel "enthusiastic" about the law, roughly equal to the proportion of Republicans who are "angry" about it; Democrats are about as likely as Republicans to say the passage of reform makes them more likely to vote this fall; and a Congressperson's vote in favor of reform is nearly as much of a plus for Democratic voters as it is a minus for Republican voters. Finally, a special look at seniors confirms that this age group continues to be among the more negative on the new law, even as, for the first time since passage, seniors are more likely than younger voters to say that health reform will be a top factor in their vote choice, although the percentages remain small (17 percent versus 9 percent).

ONE MONTH FROM ELECTIONS, PUBLIC REMAINS DIVIDED ON REFORM

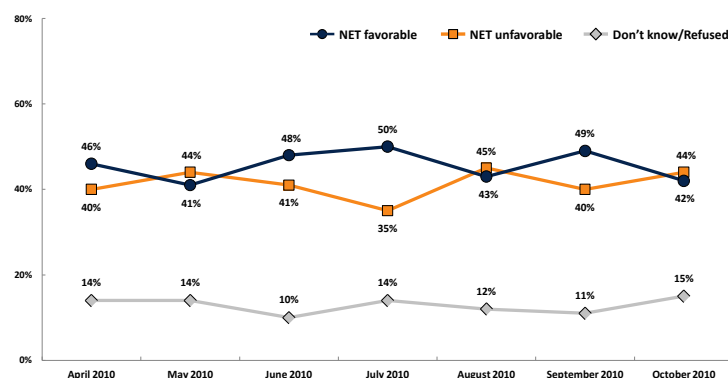
Views on health reform have tightened back up in October, with 42 percent saying they have favorable views of the new law, 44 percent holding unfavorable views and 15 percent not able to offer an opinion. This continues a pattern familiar since reform passed in which positive and negative views of the new law each move within a relatively narrow band, with the resulting picture repeatedly reflecting a very divided American public. In the October survey, 28 percent said they would support immediate repeal of the law, similar to last month.

TABLE 1

Given what you know about the new health reform law, do you have a generally favorable or generally unfavorable opinion of it?			
	All	Registered Voters ¹	Likely Voters ²
NET favorable	42%	40%	39%
NET unfavorable	44	46	49
No opinion	15	14	12

Views on Health Reform: Remains Divided

As you may know, a new health reform bill was signed into law earlier this year. Given what you know about the new health reform law, do you have a generally favorable or generally unfavorable opinion of it?

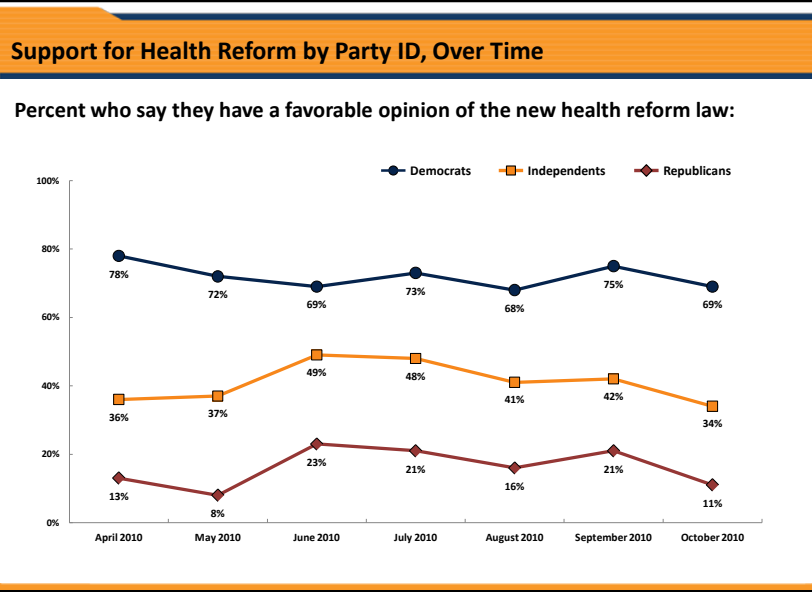


While the public overall is divided in their opinion of the new reform law, likely voters – those who say they are registered to vote and “absolutely certain” to turn out on Nov. 2 – are somewhat less positive, with negative appraisals outstripping positive ones 49 percent to 39 percent.

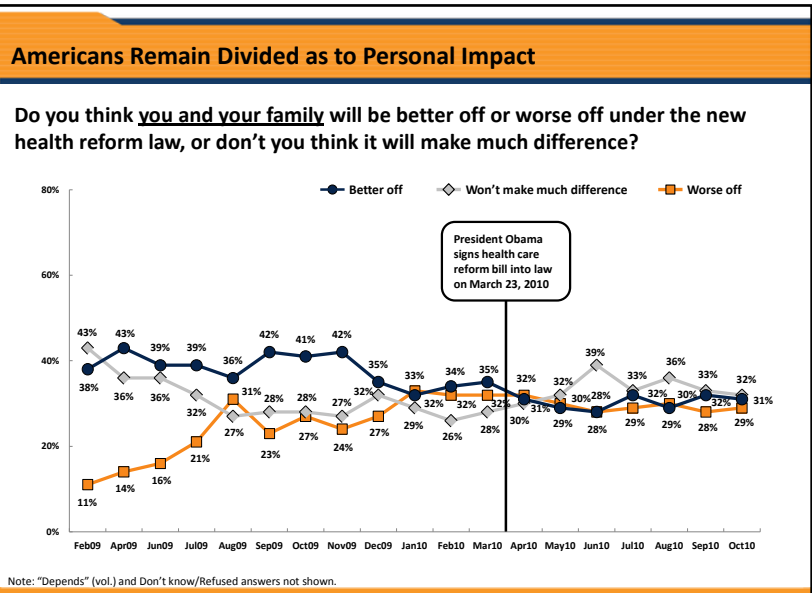
¹ Registered voters are those who self-identified as being registered to vote, n=1,073.

² Likely voters are those who self-identified as being registered to vote, and say they are “absolutely certain” they will vote in the Congressional elections this November, n=866.

Underlying this is a long-running consistency in public opinion on health reform: the extreme partisan nature of Americans' views. A month from the midterm elections, Democrats remain overwhelmingly in favor of the new law, as they have been since passage in March, with about seven in ten holding positive views. Republicans, however, are even more likely to be opposed: almost eight in ten oppose the law, including a majority (60 percent) who say they have "very unfavorable" views of reform (nearly twice the number of Democrats who feel extremely positive about the law). Independents as a group currently tilt against the law, 49 percent unfavorable compared to 34 percent favorable, with 18 percent undecided. The proportion of independents with favorable views of the law has dropped since the summer, when it had hit a high of 49 percent.



Meanwhile, since last November, the proportion of Americans who believe their own family will benefit in some way from reform has hovered at about one in three.



In terms of Americans' emotional reaction to reform, disappointment and confusion were the most commonly expressed emotions in October, each named by nearly half. Though confusion ticked up last month in a possible response to the higher volume of campaign season, we did not see a continuing increase this month, and in fact the proportion who reported feeling confused about health reform dipped slightly from 53 percent in September to 47 percent now. Next on the list is a positive emotion: 41 percent say they

TABLE 2

Percent who say that each of the following describes their feelings about the health reform law:

Disappointed	48%
Confused	47
Pleased	41
Enthusiastic	30
Angry	28

feel pleased about reform. About three in ten say they feel enthusiastic, a roughly equivalent proportion to the 28 percent of the public who say they feel angry, with both numbers fairly stable over the past few months. Among those who say they are angry, the large majority (75 percent) say that it is the general direction of Washington, with health reform as one example, that is spurring their anger, rather than it being directed at the new law in particular (21 percent).

Asked to elaborate on their positive or negative views of reform, those in favor of the law talked mainly about increasing Americans' ability to get health care and health insurance. Those with unfavorable views topped their list with concern about the costs of the new law, the process by which it was passed, and the role of the government. A sampling of their responses are below:

TABLE 3

Why do you have a FAVORABLE view of reform?	Why do you have an UNFAVORABLE view of reform?
<i>"Has to begin somewhere, doesn't have to have everything in it, over time will add more; gets the kids covered, companies cannot turn you away if you're ill, it's a good start. [It was] hard enough to get this one passed. [It's] detrimental to not have everyone covered we have a right to be covered."</i>	<i>"Because the health care reform [law] is like 2,785 pages long and there could not be any possible way that all of Congress, legislature, and government could have read it all the way through. There is no way of knowing everything about it and the public is totally clueless as to exactly what it is."</i>
<i>"I think it is about time they do something about people maxing out their insurance caps and their pre-existing conditions."</i>	<i>"I do not think it is equitable and I think it will cost too much and it will contribute to the deficit. It is a movement towards socialistic medicine."</i>
<i>"Because I think the insurance companies have been ripping us off."</i>	<i>"I want a single payer plan. I want the government to fund health care for everyone in the U.S."</i>
<i>"It covers college students [such] as myself to finish their education and not have to burden themselves with insurance premiums. It allows me to stay on my parents' insurance."</i>	<i>"It's almost impossible for anyone to understand it because it's so long and involves too many things that don't involve health care."</i>
<i>"Good for everyone in the country; it covers more people, it covers children, it's fair, it's the right thing to do."</i>	<i>"I just don't think it's fair to force insurance on people. If we could afford it I think everyone would have it."</i>
<i>"Because it helps the average person more than any health bill has in years."</i>	<i>"Since it went into effect it doubled my health insurance and I had to cancel it. Now I have no health insurance."</i>
<i>"I think everyone in this country has a right to health insurance without going bankrupt."</i>	<i>"It was put together behind closed doors. The government is doing too much money spending."</i>
<i>"It will benefit the average hard working American who can't afford health care."</i>	<i>"I think it is unfair to the middle class."</i>
<i>"What we had before was not working."</i>	<i>"I don't think it will benefit the American people."</i>
<i>"I am a nurse and I work with people that are poor – no one is doing anything to help and we need a system that meets the needs of all people, not just the ones who can pay for it."</i>	<i>"I am on Medicare – sick and tired of seeing others be given anything. I want to be able pick a doctor of [my] choice."</i>
<i>"I was laid off about nine months ago and with the new health reform law it took care of me."</i>	<i>"It is a government takeover – they have exchanged health care for all with health care being rationed out."</i>
<i>"As a senior citizen it gets rid of the donut hole, it helps me."</i>	<i>"I provide for my family's health care and so should every other American."</i>
<i>"Our old system is bankrupting our nation."</i>	<i>"It costs too much and we can't afford it."</i>
<i>"We need some kind of health law. Health insurance is so high you can't afford it, it's so expensive that for me and my wife alone it's over 466 a month."</i>	<i>"I'm unfavorable because you can't pick your own doctors and hospitals; the state will have too much to say about one's medical health."</i>

WILL HEALTH CARE PLAY A ROLE IN VOTERS' DECISIONS AT THE BALLOT BOX?

Whatever Americans' views on health reform, will the new law be in the forefront of voters' minds when they head into the ballot box in November? Not for most people. If you ask voters to name the top issue in their vote, it's the economy that continues to top the list, named by just over a third (35 percent) as the most important issue in their vote for Congress. Behind that are dissatisfaction with government, named by 10 percent, and then health care reform, also named by 10 percent.

The broad outlines of this priority list are fairly similar across Democrats, Republicans and Independents, though the latter two groups are more likely to mention their dissatisfaction with government and somewhat less likely to mention the economy. While health care ranks slightly differently across the three groups, it is named by an equivalently sized proportion among each (about one in ten).

TABLE 4

Most important issue to their vote	All Likely Voters	Registered Voters			
		All	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.
The economy and jobs	33%	35%	41%	34%	29%
Dissatisfaction with government	12	10	3	12	18
<i>Health care reform</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>
The war in Afghanistan	9	8	9	8	9
The budget deficit	7	6	3	8	8
Taxes	6	5	6	6	4
Immigration	3	4	3	3	5
Energy policy	2	2	3	2	<1

It's worth keeping in mind, too, that voters are twice as likely to say that the direction of the nation as a whole is more important to their vote than any specific national issue (35 percent compared to 16 percent), with substantial groups also saying they prioritize things other than national issues, such as 21 percent who will be voting on state or local matters, and another 23 percent who focus more on specifics about the particular candidates.

REPUBLICANS, DEMOCRATS, HEALTH REFORM AND THE ELECTION

One of the themes of this election is the 'enthusiasm gap' between Republican and Democratic voters, with surveys and anecdotal evidence suggesting that the former group is more motivated to vote this year. The October tracking survey finds some evidence that the intensity of Republicans' negative associations with health reform may outstrip Democrats' positive associations, but also finds evidence that the new reform law is in some ways equally motivating for the Democratic base that backed it from its inception.

Starting with the biggest picture – views of the law in the abstract, divorced from electoral consequences – it's clear that, as discussed above, intensity of opinion on the new law itself is on the side of Republicans, with substantially more Republicans expressing strong opposition than Democrats expressing strong support. But other measures in the survey provide a different perspective. For example, looking at strong emotions associated with reform, we find that a roughly equivalent proportion of Democrats as Republicans feel intensely about the law. Just over half (53 percent) of Democrats say they feel "enthusiastic" about health reform, compared to 58 percent of Republicans who feel "angry". (Worth noting: while both groups are smaller among independents, the angry outnumber the enthusiastic two to one, 33 percent to 17 percent.)

TABLE 5

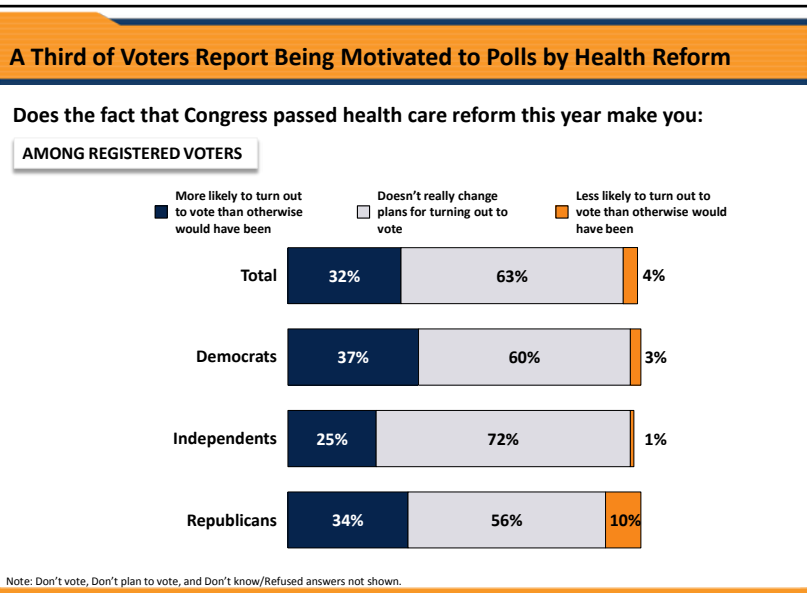
	Registered Voters		
	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.
Pleased	67%	27%	10%
Enthusiastic	53	17	9
Confused	40	49	51
Angry	9	33	58
Disappointed	24	55	80

When it comes to voters' reactions to a candidate who voted 'yes' on health reform, we find an advantage for opponents of the law, but not a large advantage. Overall, six in ten Republicans say a 'yes vote' makes them less likely to back a candidate for Congress, but nearly as many Democrats (52 percent) say it makes them more supportive. To the extent that there are differences between the two camps, it is more pronounced when it comes to those voters who call themselves independents but also confirm that they tend to vote with one party or the other. Specifically, there is more of an enthusiasm disparity between those independents who lean toward the Republicans (65 percent say they would be more likely to oppose) and those who lean toward Democrats (44 percent of whom would be more likely to support).

TABLE 6

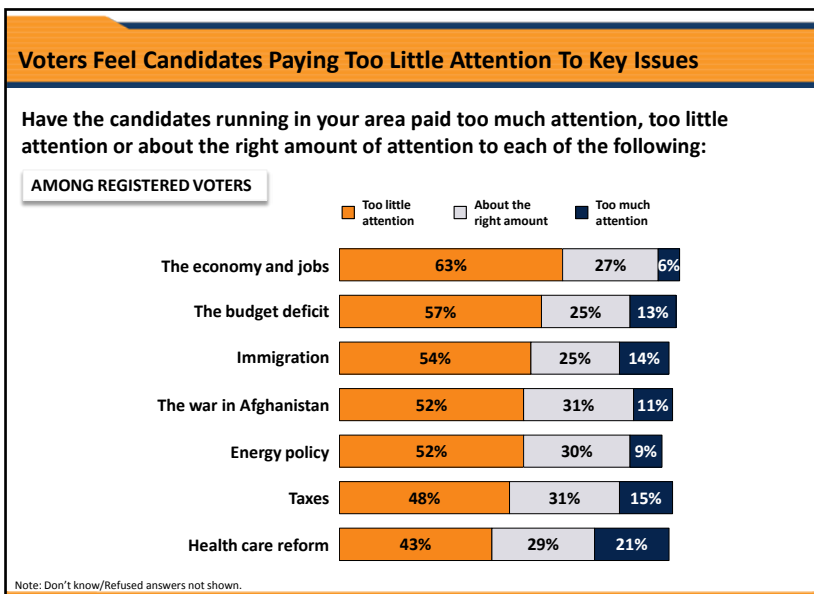
Say a candidate for Congress voted FOR the health reform law. Would that make you...					
Among Registered Voters	Democrat	Independent			Republican
		Leans Democrat	Doesn't lean	Leans Republican	
More supportive	52%	44%	10%	4%	9%
Much more likely to support	33	21	5	<1	6
Somewhat more likely to support	19	23	5	3	3
More opposed	6%	9%	24%	65%	59%
Somewhat more likely to oppose	3	7	10	16	14
Much more likely to oppose	3	2	14	49	45
Wouldn't make much difference in your vote	39%	45%	64%	30%	26%

As much as measuring voting intentions, it is figuring out who will actually turn out to vote that is the key to understanding election outcomes. The question then is whether health reform seems to be driving people to the polls, and if so, is it more likely to be driving the law's opponents or proponents. In the October poll, about a third of registered voters (32 percent) say the passage of health reform makes them more likely to turn out than they otherwise would have been, while nearly two thirds (63 percent) say it doesn't affect their plans for voting, both figures similar to last month. Breaking this down by party identification, however, there's somewhat of a change in pattern from September: whereas last month Republicans were somewhat more likely to report being motivated to turn out by health reform, this month Republicans and Democrats are roughly even in reporting that they are more likely to go to the polls because of the new law.



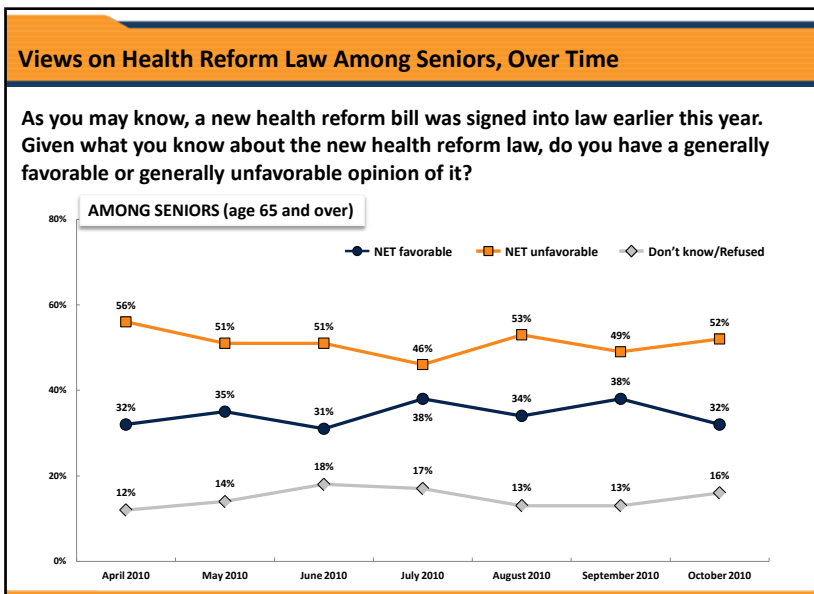
EVALUATING THE CAMPAIGNS

Most voters seem somewhat dissatisfied with the amount of attention candidates are paying to various top issues, with roughly six in ten saying their local candidates haven't paid enough attention to the economy and jobs or the budget deficit, and closer to five in ten saying their candidates haven't talked enough about immigration, the war in Afghanistan, energy policy or taxes. Interestingly, of the seven issues considered, the most mixed views are on health reform, where a relatively low 43 percent say they want to hear more, and a relatively high 21 percent say they've heard too much.



If there's one thing Americans have in common when evaluating the continuing partisan, campaign debates on the merits of the health reform law, it is their cynicism about the candidates' motivation. Overall, nearly two thirds of the public (64 percent) say that the partisan debates over health reform stem more from "both sides ...trying to use the issue for their own political advantage", compared to 29 percent who say that Republicans and Democrats are divided because they "fundamentally disagree about the right policy for the country." Even a narrow majority of Republicans (52 percent) see the debate as based on political calculations.

A LOOK AT SENIORS



Unlike the public overall, among seniors negative views of health reform have outstripped positive ones since passage, with opinion holding relatively steady over the course of the fall campaigns. Currently, about a third (32 percent) of seniors hold favorable views, half (52 percent) unfavorable views, and a sixth (16 percent) have no opinion. These proportions are quite similar among those seniors most likely to vote (34 percent favorable, 53 percent unfavorable). Not surprisingly, given their opposition to the health reform law compared to the non-elderly, seniors are also somewhat more likely to feel disappointed (58 percent, versus 45 percent of younger voters) and even angry (36 percent versus 27 percent) about the new health reform law.

These differences could be magnified by the election given the fact that for the first time since passage, seniors are more likely than younger voters to say that health reform will be a top factor in their vote choice this November, with 17 percent naming it compared to 9 percent of those under age 65. The poll does not suggest, however, that the passage of health reform is impacting seniors' plans to turn out to vote differently than those of younger voters. Seniors are no more likely than younger voters to say that the passage of health reform has increased their likelihood of going to the polls.

TABLE 7

	Registered Voters	
	Seniors (65 +)	Under 65
Of the issues you said would be extremely important to your vote for Congress in November, which one would you say will be most important?		
The economy and jobs	26%	37*%
Dissatisfaction with government	12	10
Health care reform	17*	9
The war in Afghanistan	6	9
Budget deficit	7	6
Taxes	6	5
Immigration	3	4
Energy policy	1	2
Does the fact that Congress passed health care reform make you:		
More likely to turn out to vote	30%	33%
Doesn't change plans	65	63
Less likely to turn out to vote	3	4

*indicates statistically significant difference between seniors (65+) and those under age 65

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 October 5 through October 10, 2010, among a nationally representative random sample of 1,202 adults ages 18 and older, including 1,073 adults who say they are registered to vote. Telephone interviews conducted by landline (801) and cell phone (401, including 172 who had no landline telephone) were carried out in English and Spanish by Princeton Survey Research Associates. The margin of sampling error for the total sample is plus or minus 3 percentage points. Margin of sampling error for registered voters is plus or minus 3 percentage points. For results based on other 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, results, charts and a brief on the poll can be viewed online at <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/8115.cfm>.

This publication (#8115-F) is available on the Kaiser Family Foundation's website at www.kff.org.