

*Last week's midterm election resulted in historic gains for Republicans and a shift in party control of the House of Representatives. In the wake of this shift, there has been much discussion of the role that health care reform may have played in the Democrats' losses, and what the change in leadership could mean for the future of the law that was enacted in March. This month's Health Tracking Poll, which was conducted during the four days following the midterm election and, allowed people to say in their own words in an open-ended question what influenced their vote, found that health care played a role but not a dominant one, ranking behind factors like the economy, party politics, and candidate characteristics. To the extent people were thinking about health reform at the voting booth, it appears that the law was more often at the forefront of opponents' minds than supporters. However, it is unclear how much public support House Republicans will find should they attempt to repeal or dismantle the law. Overall, about a quarter think the law should be entirely repealed and another quarter think only parts should be repealed, while about two in ten think the law should be left as is and another two in ten want to see it expanded. Still, even among those who voted for Republican candidates and those who say they want to repeal parts or all of the law, majorities still want to keep some of its most popular provisions.*

## WHAT ROLE DID HEALTH REFORM PLAY IN VOTERS' CHOICES IN THE MIDTERM ELECTION?

The national exit polls asked voters to choose from a list of four issues the one that was the most important facing the country, but they did not more specifically focus on which factor played the biggest role in influencing their 2010 vote. While several polls taken before and after the election asked people to choose from a list of issues, or to say whether their vote was in support of or against President Obama, for example, none asked voters to say in their own words what was most important to their vote.

In our tracking poll we used a somewhat different approach, allowing voters to say in an open ended question why they voted as they did rather than giving them a list to choose from. Further we asked about the *factors* influencing their vote rather than restricting them to just naming *issues*. When naming in their own words the biggest factors influencing their vote for Congress, voters' top response centered around the economy and jobs (29 percent said this was one of the top two factors in their vote). Also common were responses related to voting for or against a specific party (25 percent) and specific attributes of the individual candidates, such as their character, experience, or personality (21 percent). Health care ranked fourth on the list, with 17 percent saying health care or health reform was one of the top factors in their vote. Other issues such as government spending and the budget deficit (9 percent), general dissatisfaction with the way things work in Washington (8 percent), and taxes (5 percent) trailed behind health care.

When presented with a closed-ended question asking them to choose between four bigger picture factors that could have affected their vote, four in ten voters (39 percent) chose the direction of the nation as a whole, while about one in five each chose the candidates' character and experience (19 percent), specific national issues (17 percent), and local or state issues (17 percent). Those who voted for Republican candidates for Congress were almost twice as likely as those who voted for Democrats to say their vote was motivated by the direction of the country as a whole (51 percent vs. 29 percent), while Democratic voters<sup>1</sup> were more likely to say they voted based on candidate characteristics (25 percent vs. 13 percent) or local and state issues (21 percent vs. 13 percent).

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...
"The economy – we need jobs, jobs, jobs!"
"He was [the] incumbent. I liked his track record while he's in office."
"Make the president have the support he needed in Congress."
"The socialist agenda of the current White House."
"The health care [law], I think it's unconstitutional; that's the only reason and it's not right."
"Republicans said they would repeal health care reform; I wanted that done away with."
"The Republicans have been obstructive the way they have been working with the Obama administration."
"I wanted the Democratic Party to have a little more time to prove what they were trying to do. I just thought the tide had changed too quickly and people were expecting too much too soon."

<sup>1</sup> Note: Throughout this document, "Democratic voters" refers to those who said they voted for the Democratic candidate for the House of Representatives in their district, and "Republican voters" refers to those who reported voting for the Republican candidate. In this survey, 59 percent of the public overall reported voting in the midterm election, which is much higher than the estimated 41.5 percent of the voting-eligible population that actually turned out to vote. Vote over-reporting is common in public opinion surveys, and is a particular concern for data quality if one party's supporters over-report at higher rates than the other party's supporters. In this survey, 43 percent of voters reported voting for the Democratic candidate for Congress and 46 percent for the Republican (2 percent said they voted for some other candidate, 3 percent said they didn't remember, and 6 percent refused to say). If these responses are re-calculated based on those who reported a vote, 47 percent report voting for the Democrat and 51 percent for the Republican. This is close to the current estimates of the national vote count of 45 percent Democrat, 52 percent Republican. The demographic profile of voters by age and gender in this survey is also similar to national exit polls.

TOP TWO FACTORS IN THE VOTE: ECONOMY AND PARTY HEAD THE LIST			
Total Mentions of Each Factor	All voters	Voted Democrat	Voted Republican
Economy/Jobs	29%	24%	34%
Vote based on political party	25	30	23
Candidate attributes/performance	21	25	17
Health care/Health care reform	17	13	21
Budget deficit/Government spending	9	3	15
Dissatisfied with government/way Washington works	8	4	12
Taxes	5	4	6
Didn't name specific factor*	16	19	10

\*Includes "No particular issues/Everything/Don't know/Refused." Only responses of 5% or more among all voters shown.

To the extent people were thinking about health reform at the voting booth, it appears the law's opponents had an advantage over its supporters. Nearly six in ten (59 percent) of the "health care voters"<sup>2</sup> who said that reform was one of the top two factors influencing their vote backed a Republican candidate for Congress, compared with 44 percent of other voters. Fifty-six percent of those who say their voting decision was driven in part by health care say they have a "very unfavorable" view of the health reform law (compared

to a third of other voters), and similar shares say they expect their own families (56 percent) and the country as a whole (58 percent) to be worse off under the law. Nearly half (49 percent) of those who voted with health care on their minds say they are angry about the law. A similar share (45 percent) say they want the entire law repealed, while another quarter (26 percent) say they want parts of the law repealed. A quarter of these voters want to keep the law as it is (11 percent) or expand it (15 percent), fewer than the almost four in ten of non-health care voters who say the same (38 percent).

Demographically, health care voters look similar to other voters, and despite pre-election speculation that seniors angry about health reform would show up at the poll in droves, health care voters are no more likely than other voters to be age 65 and older (24 percent vs. 23 percent). In terms of their party identification, health care voters are about equally likely as non-health care voters to identify as Republican (35 percent vs. 30 percent), but they are nearly twice as likely to be Republican-leaning independents (21 percent vs. 12 percent).

PROFILE OF HEALTH CARE VOTERS: MORE REPUBLICAN, MORE PESSIMISTIC ABOUT REFORM LAW		
	Percent of health care voters who...	Percent of other voters who...
<b>Voted for:</b>		
The Democratic candidate	35%	44%
The Republican candidate	59	44
<b>Say they are:</b>		
Tea Party supporter	49%	33%
Enthusiastic about health reform law	25	35
Angry about health reform law	49	36
<b>View the health reform law as:</b>		
Very favorable	13%	22%
Somewhat favorable	17	23
Somewhat unfavorable	8	12
Very unfavorable	56	33
<b>Think the health reform law will make them and their family:</b>		
Better off	19%	25%
It won't make much difference	19	32
Worse off	56	37
<b>Think the health reform law will make the country as a whole:</b>		
Better off	26%	40%
It won't make much difference	10	13
Worse off	58	41

(Table continued on next page)

<sup>2</sup> "Health care voters" refers to those who named health care or health care reform as one of the top two factors in deciding their vote for Congress.

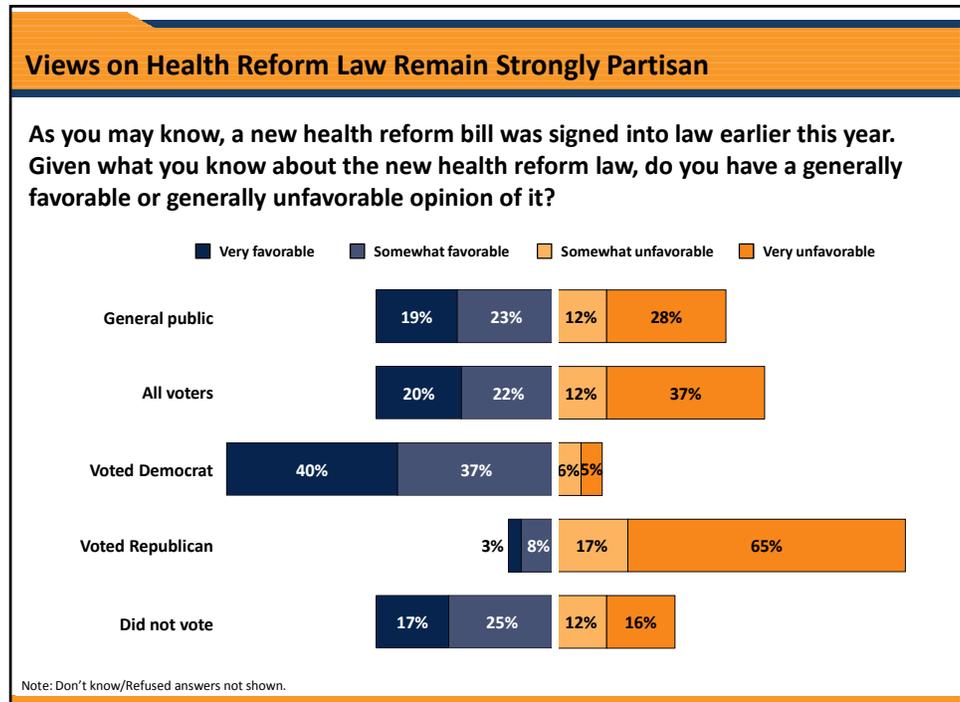
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	Percent of health care voters who...	Percent of other voters who...
<b>Think lawmakers should:</b>		
Expand the law	15%	22%
Leave the law as is	11	16
Repeal parts of the law	26	24
Repeal the entire law	45	29
<b>Are age:</b>		
18-29	10%	8%
30-49	37	35
50-64	28	31
65+	24	23
<b>Self-identify as a:</b>		
Democrat	28%	35%
Independent lean Democrat	6	10
Independent/Don't lean	10	13
Independent lean Republican	21	12
Republican	35	30

Just about one in five voters (19 percent) say the candidates in their area discussed the health reform law “a lot” during their campaigns, and another three in ten say they discussed the law “some.” Nearly half say the candidates discussed the health reform law “only a little” (30 percent) or “not at all” (15 percent). Republican voters (57 percent) are somewhat more likely than Democratic voters (45 percent) to say the candidates spent more than a little time discussing health reform during their campaigns.

**TRACKING OPINIONS OF THE HEALTH REFORM LAW**

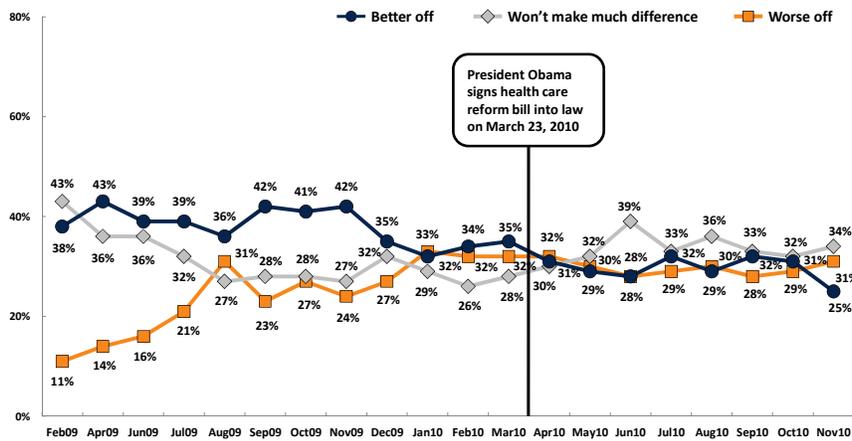
Overall, the public remains fairly evenly divided in their opinions of the health reform law. This month, 42 percent of the public holds a favorable view of the law, 40 percent have an unfavorable view, and 18 percent decline to offer an opinion on the law. But among those who voted in the midterm election, views tilt more negative, with 42 percent favorable and 49 percent unfavorable. Not surprisingly, views of the health reform law continue to divide sharply along partisan lines, with more than three-quarters of Democratic voters saying they have a favorable view of the law and just over eight in ten Republican voters reporting an unfavorable view.



Among those with an unfavorable view of the health reform law, nearly half (45 percent) say their negative opinion is mainly driven by the specifics of what the health reform law does, while a third (33 percent) say it is more about what the health reform law says about the general direction of Washington.

## Perception of Positive Personal Impact Falls To New Low

Do you think you and your family will be better off or worse off under the new health reform law, or don't you think it will make much difference?



Note: "Depends" (vol.) and Don't know/Refused answers not shown.

Just a quarter of the public (25 percent) now says they expect their own families to be better off under the health reform law, which is the lowest share since KFF began tracking this question. About a third each continue to think their own family will be worse off under the law (31 percent) or that it won't make much difference (34 percent). The public remains split on whether the country as a whole will be better (38 percent) or worse off (36 percent) under the law, while 16 percent say it won't make much difference.

At both ends of the emotional spectrum, roughly a third of the public overall continues to say they are "enthusiastic" (35 percent) and "angry" (32 percent)

about the health law. Not surprisingly, these emotions again divide along partisan lines, with 59 percent of Democratic voters feeling enthusiastic, and the same share of Republican voters feeling angry. As we've seen over the last few months, the vast majority (76 percent) of those who report feeling angry say they are more angry about the general direction in Washington, with health reform being one of many things upsetting them, while just a small share (22 percent) of this group says they are angry about health reform in particular.

The public continues to perceive the health reform law as complicated, with nearly half (52 percent) saying they are confused about the law. Confusion is particularly common among seniors; 57 percent of them say they are confused about the law, the highest of any age group.

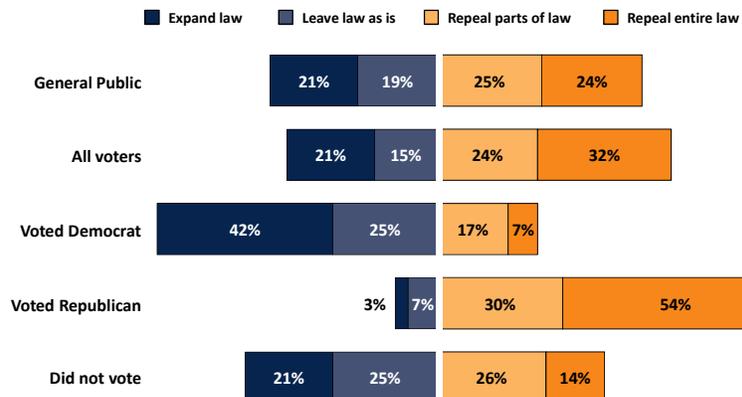
### WHAT NEXT FOR HEALTH REFORM?

While pundits and policymakers debate what the change in House leadership means for the future of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, the public appears divided as to what should happen next. About half think the law should be repealed, either entirely (24 percent) or in part (25 percent), while four in ten think it should be left as is (19 percent) or expanded (21 percent).

Among those who voted in the midterm election, the partisan divide is once again clear: more than eight in ten Republican voters want to see the law repealed entirely (54 percent) or in part (30 percent), while two-thirds of Democratic voters want to see it expanded (42 percent) or left as is (25 percent).

## About Half Want to Repeal All or Part of Law

Which of the following comes closest to your view of what lawmakers in Washington should do with the new health reform law:



Note: Don't know/Refused answers not shown.

Still, majorities of Americans, and in some cases, even majorities of Republican voters, want to keep many of the key provisions of the new law. For example, more than seven in ten say lawmakers should *keep* provisions that provide tax credits to small businesses (78 percent), gradually close the Medicare doughnut hole (72 percent), prohibit insurance companies from denying coverage based on pre-existing conditions (71 percent), and provide financial help to lower-income Americans to help them purchase coverage (71 percent). Fewer, but still more than half (54 percent), support keeping increases in the Medicare payroll tax on upper income Americans. The big exception among the provisions considered is the requirement that individuals have health insurance or else pay a fine, which two-thirds of Americans (68 percent) say they want to see repealed.

Large majorities of Democratic voters favor keeping each of the six provisions with the exception of the individual mandate, on which they tilt in favor of repeal (49 percent say repeal, 44 percent say keep). Among Republican voters, half or more say lawmakers should keep the prohibition on pre-existing condition exclusions (61 percent), small business tax credits (59 percent), and the gradual closing of Medicare’s doughnut hole (50 percent), while majorities want to repeal the Medicare payroll tax increase (69 percent) and financial help to low and moderate income Americans (54 percent). An overwhelming 88 percent of Republican voters want to repeal the individual mandate.

<b>MEASURING SUPPORT FOR INDIVIDUAL PROVISIONS OF REFORM: DEMOCRATIC VOTERS BACK ALL EXCEPT INDIVIDUAL MANDATE; REPUBLICANS BACK THREE OF SIX</b>						
<b>Element of Health Reform Law</b>	<b>General Public</b>		<b>Voted Democrat</b>		<b>Voted Republican</b>	
	<b>Keep</b>	<b>Repeal</b>	<b>Keep</b>	<b>Repeal</b>	<b>Keep</b>	<b>Repeal</b>
The law provides tax credits to small businesses that offer coverage to their employees	78%	18%	92%	6%	59%	36%
The law gradually closes the Medicare prescription drug “doughnut hole” or coverage gap so seniors will no longer be required to pay the full cost of their medications when they reach the gap	72	22	87	8	50	41
The law will provide financial help to low and moderate income Americans who don’t get insurance through their jobs to help them purchase coverage	71	24	85	12	39	54
The law will prohibit insurance companies from denying coverage because of a person’s medical history or health condition	71	26	82	16	61	35
The law will increase the Medicare payroll tax on earnings for upper income Americans	54	39	75	20	27	69
The law will require nearly all Americans to have health insurance or else pay a fine	27	68	44	49	9	88

Some individual provisions remain quite popular even among those who say the entire law should be repealed. About half of those who say they want to repeal the entire law say lawmakers should keep provisions that provide tax credits to small businesses (51 percent) and prohibit pre-existing condition denials (49 percent). More than four in ten (43 percent) of those supporting all-out repeal want to keep improved Medicare prescription drug benefits, and three in ten (31 percent) of this group wants to keep financial help for lower income Americans.

<b>MEASURING SUPPORT FOR INDIVIDUAL PROVISIONS OF REFORM: SEVERAL PROVISIONS POPULAR EVEN AMONG THOSE WHO SAY THEY WANT REPEAL</b>			
<b>Element of Health Reform Law</b>	<b>Among BOTH those who say parts of the law or the entire law should be repealed (49% of the public)</b>	<b>Among those who say parts of the law should be repealed (25% of the public)</b>	<b>Among those who say the entire law should be repealed (24% of the public)</b>
The law provides tax credits to small businesses that offer coverage to their employees	68%	85%	51%
The law will prohibit insurance companies from denying coverage because of a person's medical history or health condition	62	75	49
The law gradually closes the Medicare prescription drug "doughnut hole" or coverage gap so seniors will no longer be required to pay the full cost of their medications when they reach the gap	60	77	43
The law will provide financial help to low and moderate income Americans who don't get insurance through their jobs to help them purchase coverage	55	78	31
The law will increase the Medicare payroll tax on earnings for upper income Americans	37	55	19
The law will require nearly all Americans to have health insurance or else pay a fine	11	19	4

#### 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 Liz Hamel, Claudia Deane, Sarah Cho, Bianca DiJulio, and Theresa Boston. The survey was conducted November 3 through November 6, 2010, among a nationally representative random sample of 1,502 adults ages 18 and older, including 1,017 adults who say they voted in the mid-term elections. Telephone interviews conducted by landline (1,000) and cell phone (502, including 252 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 and the sample of 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/8120.cfm>.

Additional copies of this publication (#8120-F) are available on the Kaiser Family Foundation's website at [www.kff.org](http://www.kff.org).