

With recent discussions about policies impacting women’s reproductive health taking place in political circles and in the media, this month’s Kaiser Health Tracking poll finds that roughly three in ten women believe there is a “wide-scale effort to limit women’s reproductive health choices and services” in the U.S. today. The large majority of those who think such an effort exists perceive it to be a “bad thing,” and most of them say they are concerned about the issue. Four in ten women also report taking some sort of action related to these issues in the past six months, most commonly trying to influence a friend or family member’s opinion, donating to a non-profit focused on reproductive health, and contacting an elected official. Liberal women are more likely than moderate or conservative women to perceive a wide-spread effort to limit women’s reproductive health choices and services, and to say they’ve taken action on the matter. Still, it appears that reproductive health is likely to play at most a small role in the upcoming presidential election, as women (and all voters) continue to focus on the economy above all else. To the extent that the issue plays any role in the campaign, the advantage in terms of female voters’ trust goes to Barack Obama and the Democrats over Mitt Romney and the Republicans.

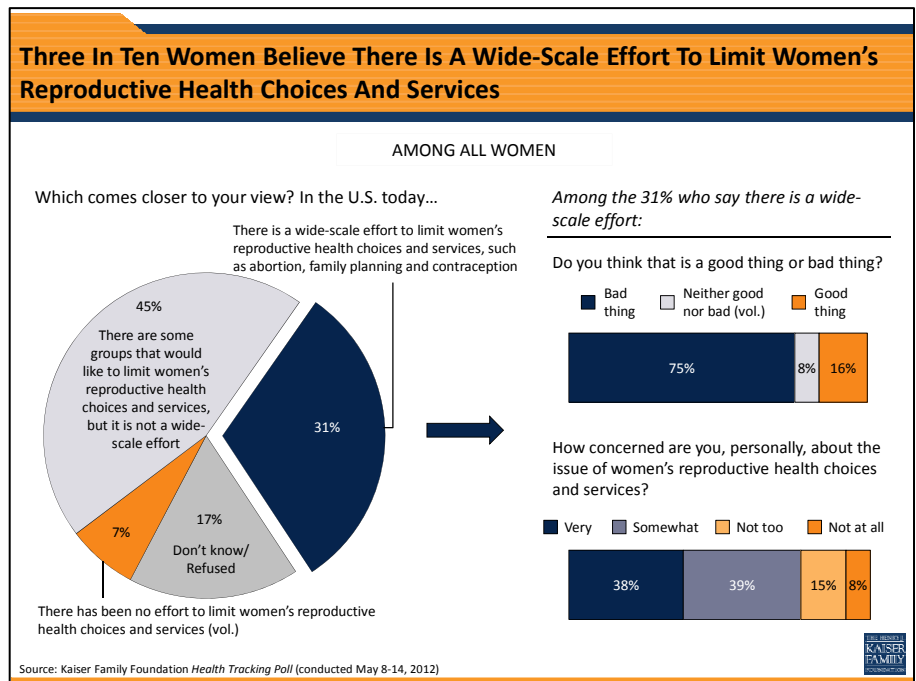
As policymakers and the public await the outcome of the Supreme Court case challenging the 2010 health care law (the Affordable Care Act, or ACA), public opinion on the law dipped somewhat in May, with unfavorable views now outnumbering favorable ones (44 percent versus 37 percent). With no clear majority in either camp, the public continues to prefer expanding the law or keeping it as is over repealing it, and most disapprove of “defunding” as a strategy for keeping all or part of the law from being put into place.

DO WOMEN THINK THERE IS A “WAR” ON WOMEN’S HEALTH?

In recent months, policies impacting women’s reproductive health have been the subject of much coverage in the news media, from controversies surrounding the federal requirement that health plans cover the full cost of birth control, to discussions about funding for Planned Parenthood at the state and federal level, to changes in various state laws regarding access to abortion. Some critics have charged that efforts to limit women’s access to reproductive and other health services are part of an ongoing “war on women,” while others have dismissed these claims as politics as usual. In light of these discussions, this month’s Kaiser Health Tracking poll takes a closer look at how women (and the public as a whole) feel about the current state of women’s reproductive health choices and services, including abortion, contraception, and family planning.

Roughly three in ten women (31 percent) believe that there is currently a “wide-scale effort to limit women’s reproductive health choices and services” in the U.S., while the largest share (45 percent) say there are some groups that would like to limit women’s reproductive health choices and services but it is not a wide-scale effort. Seven percent of women volunteer that no such effort exists, and nearly two in ten (17 percent) decline to offer an opinion.

Among women who believe there is a wide-scale effort to limit women’s reproductive health choices and services, a large majority see this as a “bad thing” (75 percent of those who see a wide-scale effort, representing 23 percent of women as a whole), while 16 percent (5 percent of all women) see it as a “good thing.” Similarly, 77 percent of women who see a wide-scale effort (24 percent of women as a whole) say they are personally “very” or “somewhat” concerned about the issue.



Men’s responses to these questions are similar to women’s, except that a somewhat smaller share of men overall believe in the existence of a wide-scale effort to limit women’s reproductive health choices and services and see this as a “bad thing” (17 percent of men versus 23 percent of women). Among the public overall, 28 percent say there is a wide-scale effort to limit women’s reproductive health choices and services, while 44 percent say there are some groups that would like to limit these choices and services but it is not a wide-scale effort.

Among women, Democrats are more likely than Republicans to say there is a movement to limit women’s reproductive health choices and services (36 percent versus 24 percent), but the largest gap is by ideology. Nearly half (49 percent) of women who identify as liberal say there is a wide-scale effort to limit these choices and services, including 42 percent who see this as a “bad thing.” By comparison, 18 percent of conservative women believe such an effort exists, including 8 percent who see it as a negative. A similar ideological divide exists among men, but the differences are not nearly as pronounced as they are among women.

WHICH COMES CLOSER TO YOUR VIEW? IN THE U.S. TODAY...							
	There is a wide-scale effort to limit women’s reproductive health choices and services, such as abortion, family planning, and contraception				There are some groups that would like to limit women’s reproductive health choices and services, but it is not a wide-scale effort	There has been no effort to limit women’s reproductive health choices and services (vol.)	Don’t know/ Refused
	Total	Good thing	Bad thing	Neither good nor bad (vol.)			
AMONG WOMEN							
All women	31%	5%	23%	2%	45%	7%	17%
Democrat	36	5	27	4	45	5	14
Independent	31	6	24	2	49	5	15
Republican	24	5	16	1	46	12	18
Liberal	49	4	42	3	37	3	12
Moderate	30	6	22	2	49	6	14
Conservative	18	6	8	3	52	11	19
AMONG MEN							
All men	25%	5%	17%	3%	42%	12%	21%
Democrat	33	7	22	4	43	11	13
Independent	26	3	19	4	40	12	21
Republican	21	6	13	2	52	12	14
Liberal	36	5	27	4	40	5	19
Moderate	29	5	22	2	46	11	14
Conservative	20	6	10	4	45	14	21
TOTAL PUBLIC							
All	28%	5%	20%	3%	44%	9%	19%
Democrat	35	6	25	4	44	8	13
Independent	28	4	21	3	44	9	18
Republican	23	6	14	2	49	12	16
Liberal	43	5	36	3	38	4	15
Moderate	30	5	22	2	47	9	14
Conservative	19	6	9	3	49	13	20

A lot of the discussion about women’s access to reproductive health services (particularly the requirement that health plans cover the full cost of birth control) has centered around the idea of religious freedom. Among women, we see some differences in the perception of a wide-scale effort to limit women’s reproductive health choices and services by religious identification. Overall, women who call themselves Evangelical Christians are somewhat less likely than Catholic women and non-Evangelical Christians to say there is a wide-scale effort to limit reproductive choices and services.¹ This may be a reflection of ideological differences between these groups, as half (50 percent) of Evangelical Christian women call themselves conservatives, compared with just under a quarter of Catholic women and about a third of other Christian women.

	Among women by religious affiliation		
	Catholic	Evangelical	Other Christian (non-Evangelical)
Which comes closer to your view? In the U.S. today...			
There is a wide-scale effort to limit women’s reproductive health choices and services, such as abortion, family planning, and contraception	36%	20%	30%
Good thing	8	5	3
Bad thing	22	16	23
Neither good nor bad (vol.)	5	0	3
There are some groups that would like to limit women’s reproductive health choices and services, but it is not a wide-scale effort	40	52	44
There has been no effort (vol.)	7	10	6
Don’t know/Refused	18	17	20
Would you say your views in most political matters are...			
Liberal	31	14	27
Moderate	38	32	35
Conservative	23	50	35

¹ There are not enough women who identify as non-Christians or have no religious affiliation to break out their responses separately.

TAKING ACTION ON THE ISSUE

A sizeable share of women (42 percent) report having taken some sort of action in the past 6 months in reaction to something they've seen, heard or read about women's reproductive health choices and services. The most frequently reported action is attempting to influence a friend or family member's opinion on the matter (23 percent), followed by donating money to a non-profit working on reproductive health issues (15 percent), and contacting an elected official (14 percent). Fewer say they've changed their mind about who to vote for (10 percent), donated to a political candidate or organization (9 percent), or contacted a media outlet (6 percent) regarding women's reproductive health issues. The share of women who report engaging in at least one of these activities is similar among those who perceive a wide-scale effort to limit women's reproductive health choices and services (46 percent) and those who do not believe such a wide-scale effort exists (41 percent). Again, ideology plays small role, with women who identify as liberals being somewhat more likely than moderates or conservatives to say they have engaged at least one of these activities in the past six months.

Perhaps surprisingly, men are as likely as women to report engaging in each of these actions; among men and among the public overall, 42 percent say they've done at least one of these things in the past six months in reaction to something they've seen, heard or read about women's reproductive health choices and services.

DURING THE PAST 6 MONTHS, HAVE YOU DONE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING SPECIFICALLY IN REACTION TO SOMETHING YOU'VE SEEN, HEARD, OR READ ABOUT WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CHOICES AND SERVICES?								
	Among women						Men	Total public
	All women	Wide-scale effort	Not wide-scale effort	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative		
Tried to influence a friend or family member's opinion	23%	27%	21%	30%	20%	22%	25%	24%
Donated money to a non-profit organization that works on women's reproductive health issues	15	15	15	21	15	12	12	14
Written to, emailed, or spoken with your Senator, representative or another elected official	14	18	13	20	15	11	11	13
Changed your mind about who to vote for	10	11	9	8	9	12	10	10
Donated money to a political candidate or political organization because of their positions on women's reproductive health	9	9	8	15	8	5	5	7
Written to, emailed, or called a newspaper, website, radio or television station	6	9	5	9	6	4	5	6
<i>Yes to any</i>	42	46	41	51	39	41	42	42

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE UPCOMING PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION?

While the general presidential election is still more than 5 months away, the survey provides an indication of the role that women’s reproductive health issues might play in the campaign and the election. First, it’s important to keep in mind that despite the substantial shares who report engaging on the issue of women’s health, when asked to say in their own words which issues they most want to hear candidates discuss in the campaign, registered voters—including men and women alike—focus on the economy and jobs above all else.

Six in ten women who are registered to vote name the economy as the top issue they want to hear about from candidates, followed far behind by health care (23 percent), social issues (12 percent), war and security (8 percent) and education (8 percent). While health care ranks lower than the economy as a campaign topic, it is notable that among registered voters, women are roughly twice as likely as men to name health care generally as an issue they’d like to hear about in the campaign (23 percent versus 12 percent). Just two percent of female registered voters name women’s health and other women’s issues as a top issue they want to hear about from candidates. If abortion is included, this rises slightly to 5 percent. Still, it is clear that the economy is the top issue for all groups of women voters, and many other issues rank above women’s reproductive health. Issue rankings are similar among men and among registered voters overall, with the economy clearly dominating the list.

THINKING ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN NOVEMBER, WHAT TWO ISSUES WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO HEAR THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES TALK ABOUT? (OPEN-ENDED)						
	Among women who are registered to vote				All men RVs	All registered voters
	All women RVs	Democrat	Independent	Republican		
Economy/Jobs (NET)	60%	58%	64%	69%	70%	65%
Health care (NET)	23	22	28	18	12	17
Social issues (NET)	12	13	10	13	10	11
Gay marriage	6	7	7	3	5	6
Abortion	3	2	3	4	1	2
Security/War (NET)	8	10	5	7	9	8
Education	8	12	8	2	4	6
Taxes	6	5	8	5	3	5
Immigration/Border control	6	2	5	9	3	4
Debt/Deficit/Budget/Government spending	5	2	6	11	10	8
Gas/oil prices	5	3	8	3	5	5
Women’s issues (including women’s health)	2	3	1	0	<1	1
Women’s issues (including abortion)	5	6	4	4	1	3

Female voters give President Barack Obama a clear advantage over presumptive Republican nominee Mitt Romney on the issue. When asked which candidate they trust more to “look out for the best interests of women” in general and to make decisions about women’s reproductive health in particular, more than half of women voters choose the president, while closer to a quarter pick Mr. Romney. There is a similar, but smaller gap in trust on these issues among male voters.

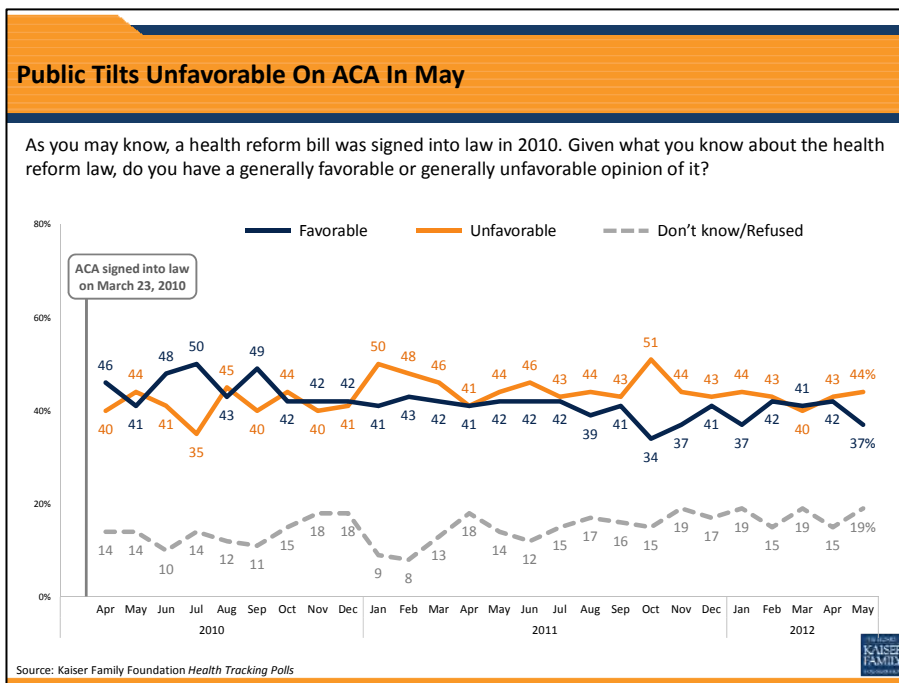
WHICH PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, BARACK OBAMA OR MITT ROMNEY, DO YOU TRUST TO DO A BETTER JOB...				
	Barack Obama	Mitt Romney	Neither (vol.)	Obama-Romney Diff
Among women who are registered to vote				
Looking out for the best interests of women	59%	25%	11%	+34
Making decisions about women’s reproductive health choices and services	54	22	15	+32
Among men who are registered to vote				
Looking out for the best interests of women	51%	34%	8%	+17
Making decisions about women’s reproductive health choices and services	49	32	14	+17
Among all registered voters				
Looking out for the best interests of women	55%	30%	10%	+25
Making decisions about women’s reproductive health choices and services	51	27	14	+24

Patterns of trust are similar when it comes to Democrats versus Republicans in Congress, with female voters giving Democrats a 35-point advantage over Republicans on women’s interests generally and a 34-point advantage on women’s reproductive health issues. Male voters give a somewhat smaller advantage to Democrats, but among voters overall, the trust gap between Democrats and Republicans remains at 24 points.

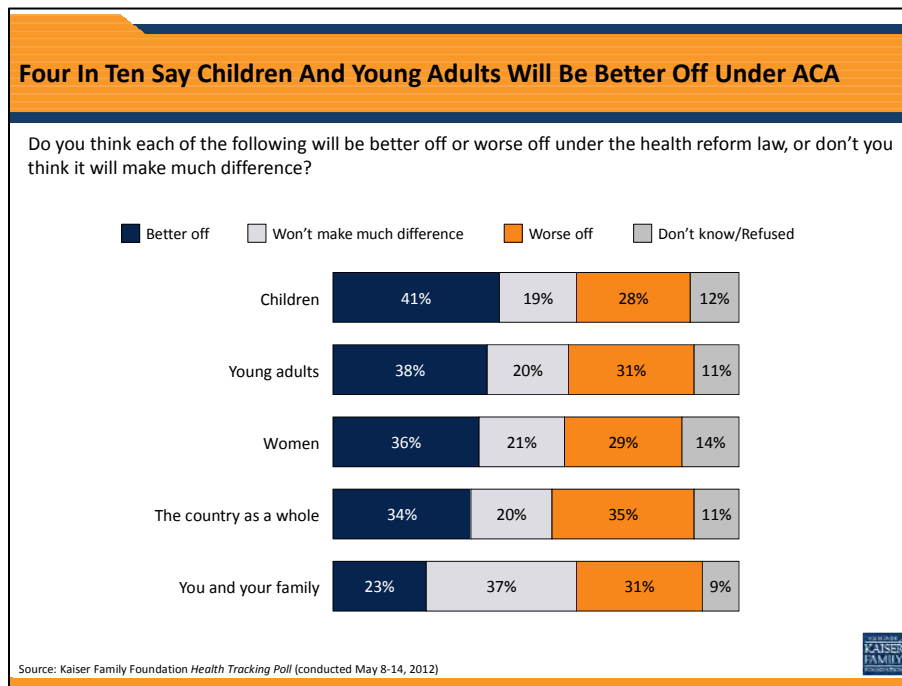
OVERALL, DO YOU TRUST THE DEMOCRATS IN CONGRESS OR THE REPUBLICANS IN CONGRESS TO DO A BETTER JOB...				
	Democrats	Republicans	Neither (vol.)	Dem-Rep Difference
Among women who are registered to vote				
Looking out for the best interests of women	56%	21%	14%	+35
Making decisions about women’s reproductive health choices and services	54	20	17	+34
Among men who are registered to vote				
Looking out for the best interests of women	41%	29%	16%	+12
Making decisions about women’s reproductive health choices and services	43	31	18	+12
Among all registered voters				
Looking out for the best interests of women	49%	25%	15%	+24
Making decisions about women’s reproductive health choices and services	49	25	18	+24

PUBLIC OPINION ON THE AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

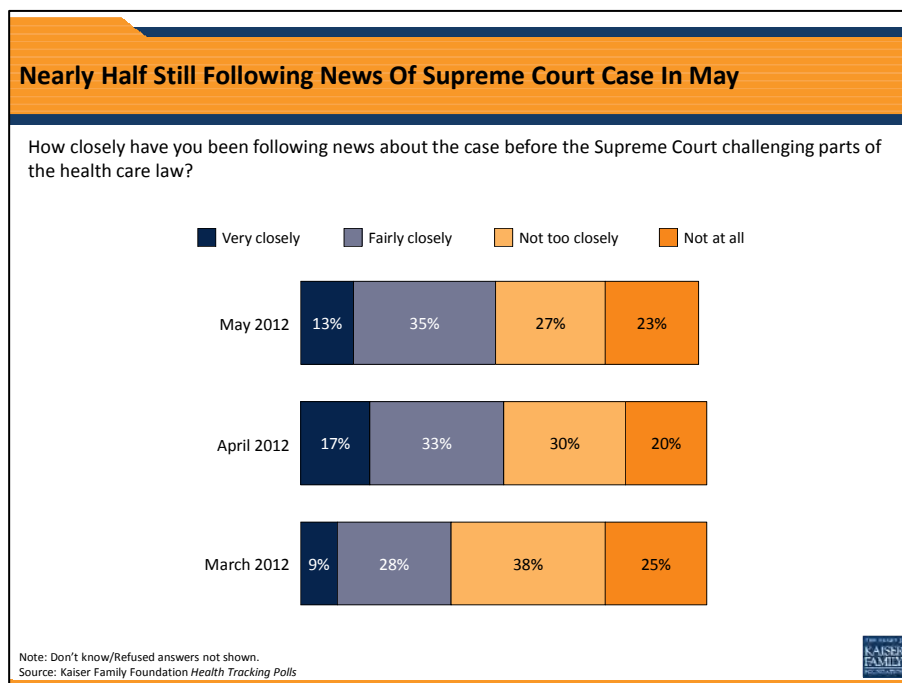
The share of the public with a favorable view of the ACA dropped 5 percentage points this month, with unfavorable views of the law now outnumbering favorable ones by a small margin (44 percent versus 37 percent). Still, as we’ve seen since the law was passed, neither supporters nor opponents of the law have a clear majority of the public on their side. Deep partisan divisions on the law remain, with 82 percent of Republicans viewing the law unfavorably and 62 percent of Democrats viewing it favorably.



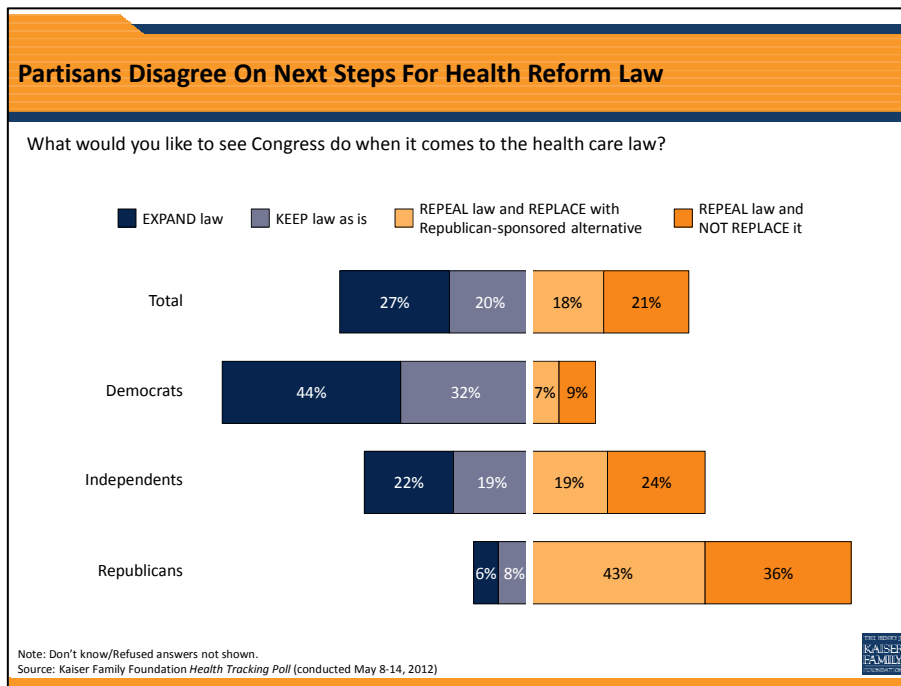
As in previous months, the public remains divided on whether the law will leave the country better off (34 percent) or worse off (35 percent). When it comes to their own families, a plurality (37 percent) doesn't expect to be impacted, while 31 percent expect to be worse off and 23 percent expect to be better off. Americans are more optimistic about the impact of the law on women, young adults, and especially children, with higher shares saying each of these groups will be better off under the law than worse off.



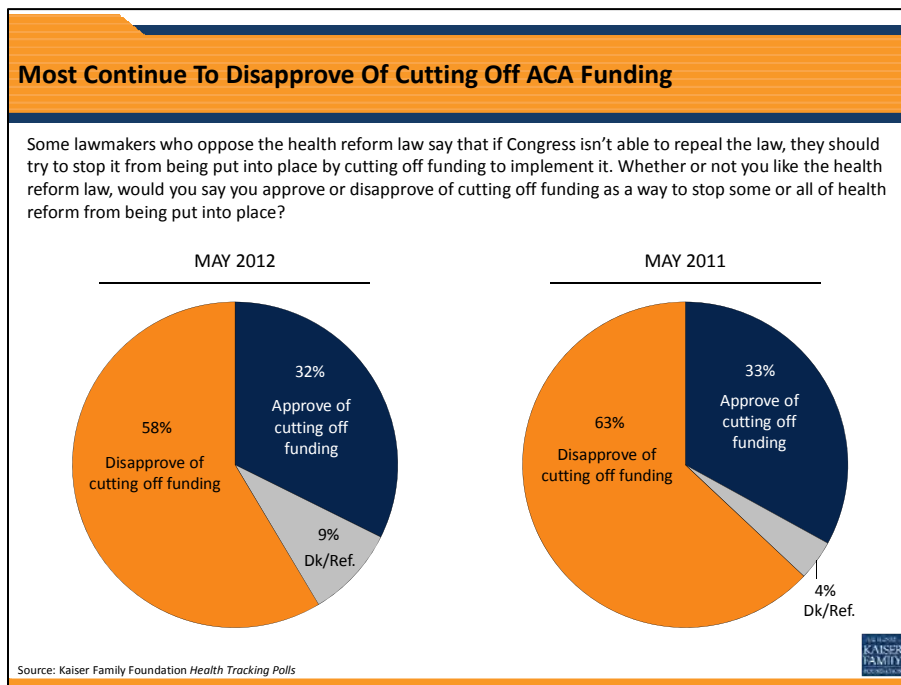
Despite a lull in news coverage about the case challenging the ACA, nearly half the public (48 percent) reports paying close attention to the Supreme Court case this month, nearly identical to the 50 percent who reported doing so in April.



As the public and policymakers wait for the outcome of the Supreme Court case, nearly half the public continues to prefer to see the law expanded (27 percent) or kept as is (20 percent), while four in ten say the law should be repealed and replaced with a Republican alternative (18 percent) or repealed and not replaced (21 percent). Again, wide partisan divisions continue with regard to next steps.



And as some in Congress continue to discuss ways to keep individual provisions of the law from being put into place, the idea of defunding the law is as unpopular now as it was one year ago, with about six in ten (58 percent) saying they disapprove of cutting off funding as a way to stop some or all of the law from being put into place, and roughly a third (32 percent) saying they approve of this strategy.



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, Bianca DiJulio, Sarah Cho, and Theresa Boston. The survey was conducted May 8-14, 2012, among a nationally representative random digit dial telephone sample of 1,218 adults ages 18 and older, living in the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii. Interviews conducted by landline (704) and cell phone (514, including 294 who had no landline telephone) were carried out in English and Spanish by Braun Research, Inc. under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International (PSRAI). The combined landline and cell phone sample was weighted to balance the sample demographics to match Census estimates for the national population on sex, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, nativity (for Hispanics only), region, and telephone usage.

All statistical tests of significance account for the effect of weighting. The margin of sampling error including the design effect is plus or minus 3 percentage points; for women it is plus or minus 5 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 and methodology of the polls can be viewed online at: <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/8315.cfm>.

This publication (#8315-F) is available on the Kaiser Family Foundation's website at www.kff.org.