

As Republican delegates prepare to meet in Tampa for the party's nominating convention later this month, two new Kaiser polls shed light on the priorities and policy positions of their fellow partisans nationwide. Despite the ongoing focus on the GOP's opposition to the 2010 health care law, Kaiser's August Health Tracking Poll suggests that the Affordable Care Act (ACA) isn't Republicans' top health care priority, with larger shares mentioning Medicare and the cost of health care and coverage as being important to their vote. And when it comes to Medicare, as has been widely reported, a new Washington Post/Kaiser survey—fielded before the announcement that Representative Paul Ryan (R-WI) would join Governor Mitt Romney at the top of the Republican ticket—finds that even a majority of Republicans (55 percent) prefer the idea of keeping Medicare's status quo rather than changing to a system in which seniors are guaranteed a fixed amount of money that could be used to purchase coverage from a private plan. Even though over four in ten Republicans (44 percent) say they don't yet have a "basic understanding" of what Governor Mitt Romney is proposing to do on health care if elected, a majority believe his approach to health care would be different than that of President Barack Obama, and most trust him to make the right decisions about the future of the ACA. The two surveys also shed light on the often, but not always, contrasting views of Democrats as they prepare for their own convention next month, as well as measuring familiarity with two of the most recently implemented provisions of the 2010 health care law.

HEALTH POLICY, THE ISSUE AGENDA AND THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES: A PRE-CONVENTION LOOK

The nation's economic challenges clearly top the list of important election issues for Republicans, Democrats and independents alike this year, with polls suggesting that health care comes in next for all three groups, even though the issue is a distant second rather than a close one. But a recent survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation and the Washington Post¹ shows that health care may be registering as an election issue for a larger share of the public than those rankings suggest. That's because the cost of health care shows up high on the list of national economic issues

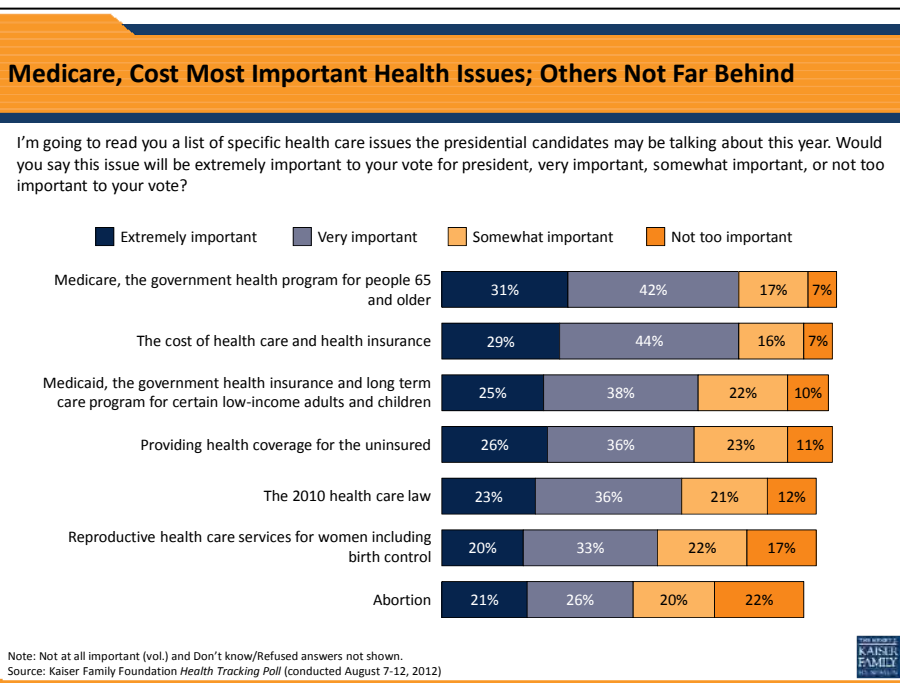
worrying the public, second only to the job situation: 44 percent name the cost of care as one of their top two economic concerns, compared to 59 percent that talk about jobs, and 37 percent that mention the budget deficit.

Asked in this August Kaiser Health Tracking Poll to focus more narrowly on the various health policy issues currently percolating and the ways each might impact their November vote, Americans put a priority on Medicare and health care costs, with over seven in ten naming each as "extremely" or "very" important. The Affordable Care Act falls somewhat further down the list, though it is still named by six in ten as important. Overall, the entire list is not greatly differentiated, and the proportion saying each health care issue is "extremely important" to their vote hovers between roughly twenty and thirty percent.

TABLE 1: COST OF HEALTH CARE SECOND ONLY TO JOB SITUATION AS TOP ECONOMIC WORRY

Which of the following national economic issues worries you most? Is there another one of these issues that worries you?	TOTAL	Dem	Ind	Rep
The job situation	59%	63%	60%	55%
The cost of health care	44	49	40	41
The federal budget deficit	37	22	39	56
The cost of college education	20	28	16	14
Problems in the housing markets	13	14	14	10

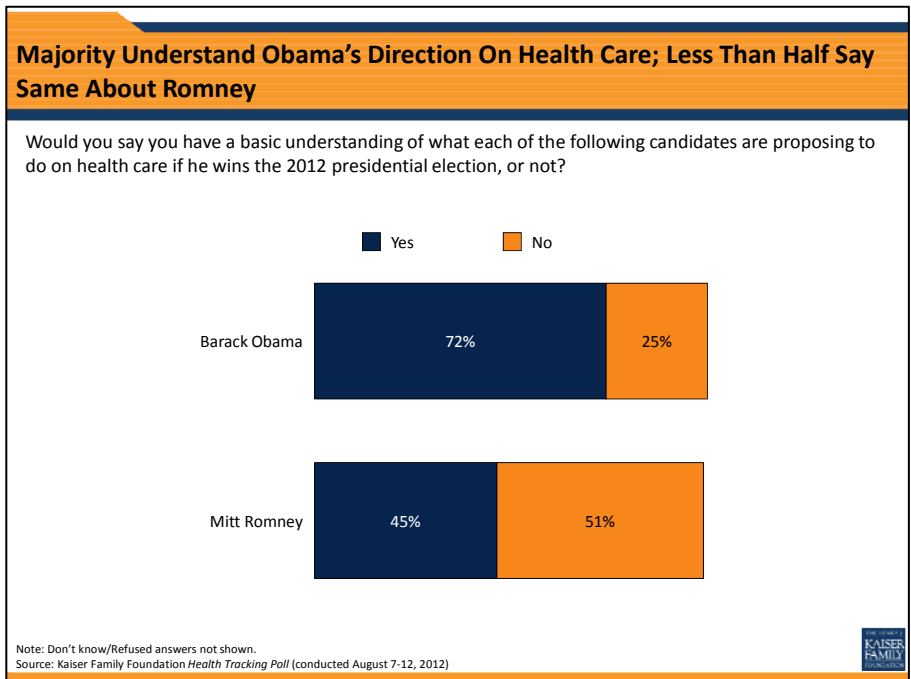
Source: Washington Post/KFF Dimensions of Partisanship survey, conducted July 25-August 5, 2012



¹ Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation Dimensions of Partisanship survey, conducted July 25-August 5, 2012 among a nationally representative random digit dial telephone sample of 3,130 adults, conducted on both landline and cell phones. See http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/polling/washington-postkaiser-family-foundation-poll-july/2012/08/11/09a9f314-e3fb-11e1-89f7-76e23a982d06_page.html.

Meanwhile, over the course of the year the parties' two standard bearers have differentiated themselves in the eyes of the public on health care issues. In January, only 44 percent of Americans saw Barack Obama and Mitt Romney as different on health care policy, with a quarter unsure how to compare the two candidates. This month, fully 72 percent see them as different.

Still, half of the country (51 percent) does not yet have a basic idea of what Governor Romney is proposing to do on health care if he should be victorious in November, compared to 45 percent that say they do understand the Republican nominee's proposed course of action. President Obama's general course—in the wake of his advocacy of the Affordable Care Act—is more well-known: 72 percent say they have a basic understanding of his direction on health care. Overall, a somewhat larger share of Americans would trust President Obama to make the right decisions about the future of the 2010 health care law than would trust Governor Romney: 53 percent would trust Obama, compared to 40 percent that would trust Romney.



ON THE EVE OF THE GOP CONVENTION: A SNAPSHOT OF REPUBLICAN VIEWS ON HEALTH POLICY

THE COST OF HEALTH CARE AND MEDICARE TOP REPUBLICANS' PRIORITY LIST

Asked about the health care issues that will impact their vote this fall, Republicans' top concern is not the Affordable Care Act (ACA) but instead the cost of health care and coverage, named by two-thirds as important to their vote. Following this is an issue much in the news now that Republican presidential nominee Governor Mitt Romney has selected Representative Paul Ryan as his running-mate: Medicare, named by six in ten Republicans as important to their vote. Two other issues more narrowly qualify as being important to a majority of Republicans, albeit a narrow majority: 54 percent say the Affordable Care Act will be an issue in their vote, and 52 percent name abortion. Unlike Democrats and independents, fewer than half of Republicans say that Medicaid or the uninsured are going to be important factor in their electoral choice.

TABLE 2: TOP HEALTH CARE ISSUES BY PARTY ID				
Percent who say each of the following health care issues is extremely or very important to their vote for president	Total	Dem	Ind	Rep
The cost of health care and health insurance	73%	78%	73%	67%
Medicare	73	80	74	61
The 2010 health care law	59	64	60	54
Abortion	47	49	43	52
Medicaid	63	77	64	43
Providing health coverage for the uninsured	62	80	61	41
Reproductive health care services for women including birth control	53	68	52	37

REPUBLICANS, LIKE DEMOCRATS, OPPOSED TO CUTTING MEDICARE BENEFITS, WARY OF PRIVATIZATION

When it comes to Medicare, one of the most notable aspects of Republicans' views is how uncharacteristically similar they are to those of Democrats and independents, according to this month's Post/Kaiser poll. A large majority of Republicans (69 percent) say they are opposed to reducing Medicare benefits, even in the service of deficit reduction. At the same time, roughly six in ten Republicans would support cuts in benefits if they were targeted only at high income seniors. In both cases, these views put Republicans on the same side of the issue as Democrats, a rare occurrence of late.

Please tell me if you would support or oppose each of the following to help reduce the nation's budget deficit	Total	Dem	Ind	Rep
Reducing Medicare benefits				
Support	21%	14%	24%	28%
Oppose	77	85	73	69
Reducing Medicare benefits for those with high incomes				
Support	63	65	66	61
Oppose	35	33	32	36

Source: *Washington Post/KFF Dimensions of Partisanship* survey, conducted July 25-August 5, 2012

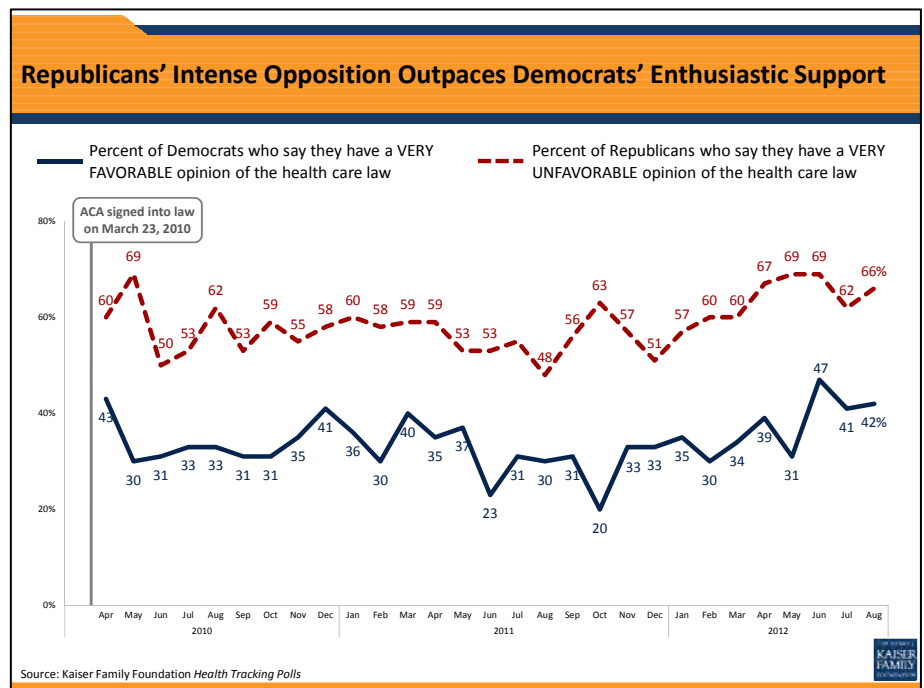
At the same time, a majority of Republicans (55 percent) currently say they prefer that Medicare continue as a defined benefits program, rather than changing to a system in which seniors are guaranteed a fixed amount of money to be used to buy coverage either from Medicare or from a private plan, an option supported by 39 percent of Republicans. Here again, the balance of opinion among Republicans puts them closer to the views of Democrats and independents than usual in this area. This issue is set up to be an important one this fall given Representative Ryan's advocacy of moving toward some sort of premium support model, though both Representative Ryan and Governor Romney have explicitly stated that any such change would not impact today's seniors but would take effect for younger people when they become eligible for Medicare in the future.

Which of these two descriptions comes closer to your view of what Medicare should look like in the future?	Total	Dem	Ind	Rep
Option A: Medicare should continue as it is today, with the government guaranteeing all seniors the same set of health insurance benefits	58%	68%	53%	55%
Option B: Medicare should be changed to a system in which the government guarantees each senior a fixed amount of money to help them purchase coverage either from traditional Medicare or from a list of private health plans	36	29	42	39

Source: *Washington Post/KFF Dimensions of Partisanship* survey, conducted July 25-August 5, 2012

GOP OPPOSITION TO ACA STAYS STRONG

Republicans and Democrats may see eye to eye on some aspects of Medicare, but they couldn't disagree more when it comes to the ACA, as any poll watcher can tell you. Since passage, most Republicans have objected to the law, while most Democrats have approved of it. In August, 80 percent of Republicans say they have an unfavorable view of the health reform law, with 66 percent saying their view is "very unfavorable." Republicans' intensity on the issue as measured by the proportion that report feeling "very unfavorable" rather than just "somewhat unfavorable" has outstripped positive intensity among Democrats over the past two years, as the chart to the right demonstrates, and has been at a consistently high point over the past several months of electioneering.



If this isn't clear enough, six in ten Republicans say their own families will be worse off under the ACA, and three in ten say they have already been negatively affected by the law. Three-quarters want to see the law repealed, while just as many Democrats want to keep or perhaps even expand it.

However, Republicans hold favorable views towards some elements of the law. About two-thirds like the requirement that insurance companies provide easy-to-understand plan summaries, and half have favorable views about the creation of health insurance exchanges, the provision of subsidies to lower and moderate income Americans needing coverage, and access to no-cost preventive services.

THE GOP AND THE CANDIDATES

The large majority of Republicans (79 percent) believe that their nominee’s views on health care are different than those of the incumbent president. At the same time, though, over four in ten (44 percent) say that they don’t have a good understanding of what Governor Romney is proposing to do on health care. Still, overall, eight in ten have at least some trust in the candidate to make the right decisions about the ACA.

	Total	Dem	Ind	Rep
Percent who say they have a basic understanding of what each of the following candidates are proposing to do on health care if they win the 2012 election				
Barack Obama	72%	80%	71%	71%
Mitt Romney	45	40	46	54
Percent who say they trust each of the following candidates at least “somewhat” to make the right decisions about the future of the health care law				
Barack Obama	53	86	51	17
Mitt Romney	40	16	40	80

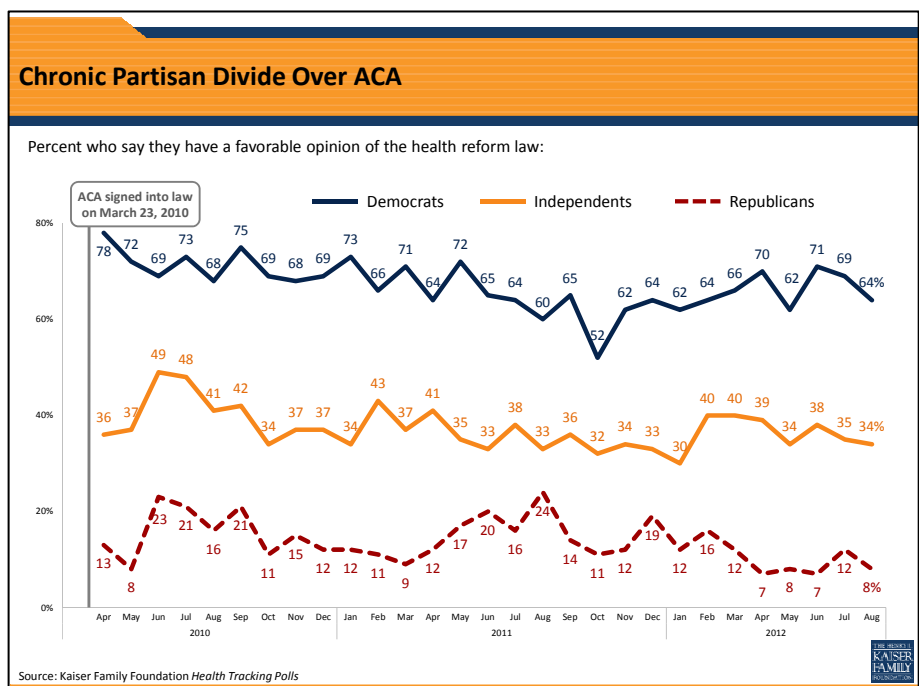
AS DEMOCRATS WAIT IN THE WINGS, A BRIEF CLOSE-UP ON THE HEALTH POLICY VIEWS OF THE PRESIDENT’S PARTY

As they stand by for their own early September convention in Charlotte, Democrats put a high priority on a range of health care issues. Health care costs are a clear second behind jobs in the list of national economic concerns among Democrats, and it’s difficult to distinguish their top health policy concern because so many issues seem important at once. Roughly eight in ten each say that Medicare, the uninsured, health care costs *and* Medicaid are important to their vote, demonstrating significantly more interest than Republicans in the federal program currently providing health coverage help to low income families.

As noted above, Democrats share with Republicans a preference for keeping Medicare as it is rather than switching it to a premium support system (68 percent prefer to keep the current system, compared to 29 percent that would back the change). They are also opposed to cutting Medicare benefits as a way to reduce the federal budget deficit (85 percent oppose), unless those cuts are targeted only at the rich, in which case two in three would be supportive.

Democrats also have maintained their support for the ACA over two years of continuous political debate over the issue, even though the intensity of that support pales in comparison to the intensity of Republicans’ opposition. This month, 64 percent of Democrats say they have a favorable view of the law, 73 percent want to keep the ACA or expand it, and 28 percent say they have already benefited from its provisions.

Democrats are united in trusting President Obama with the future of the health reform law: 86 percent say they do, while only 16 percent would trust Governor Romney, a scenario which is a mirror image of Republicans’ view of the situation. Eight in ten say they have a basic idea of where President Obama will go next on health care; only half that number understand what Governor Romney has planned in this arena.



SENIORS AND MEDICARE

As Medicare takes front and center stage with the reinvigorated focus on the ‘Ryan plan’ that comes with the addition of Republican House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan to the GOP ticket, ever more attention is being paid to the views of seniors. According to the Post/Kaiser poll, a clear majority of those aged 50 and up prefer to keep the Medicare program as it today, with that view being particularly predominant among those aged 65 and older, today’s Medicare recipients, 71 percent of whom would like to see Medicare stay as it is. Those under age fifty are more likely to be open to changing the system to some version of a premium support plan, with those aged 18 to 29 divided on the subject 51 to 46 percent—though in no age group does the general idea gain majority support.

TABLE 6: MOST SENIORS PREFER TO KEEP MEDICARE AS IS				
Which of these two descriptions comes closer to your view of what Medicare should look like in the future?	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
Option A: Medicare should continue as it is today, with the government guaranteeing all seniors the same set of health insurance benefits	51%	52%	63%	71%
Option B: Medicare should be changed to a system in which the government guarantees each senior a fixed amount of money to help them purchase coverage either from traditional Medicare or from a list of private health plans	46	42	31	23

Source: *Washington Post/KFF Dimensions of Partisanship* survey, conducted July 25-August 5, 2012

Eight in ten seniors are opposed to reducing Medicare benefits as a way to aid in reducing the budget deficit, a view in which they are joined by strong majorities in younger age groups. About six in ten seniors would support reducing Medicare benefits for wealthier Americans, however, a view which again puts them in the mainstream of opinion among other age groups.

TABLE 7: SENIORS VIEWS ON REDUCING MEDICARE BENEFITS SIMILAR TO THEIR YOUNGER COUNTERPARTS				
Please tell me if you would support or oppose each of the following to help reduce the nation’s budget deficit	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
Reducing Medicare benefits				
Support	28%	22%	17%	17%
Oppose	70	75	82	81
Reducing Medicare benefits for those with high incomes				
Support	64	63	64	59
Oppose	33	36	33	38

Source: *Washington Post/KFF Dimensions of Partisanship* survey, conducted July 25-August 5, 2012

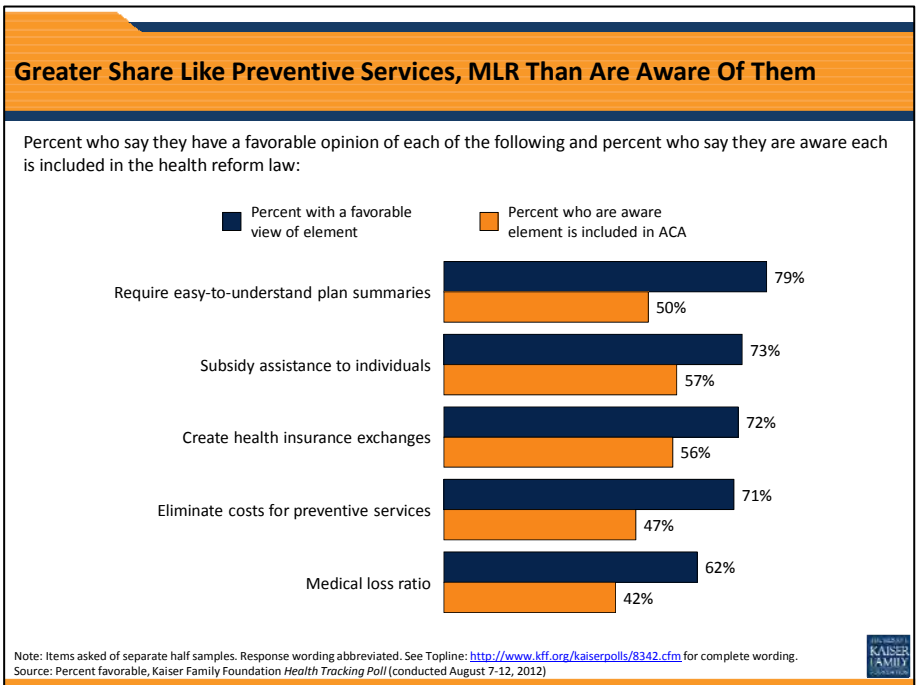
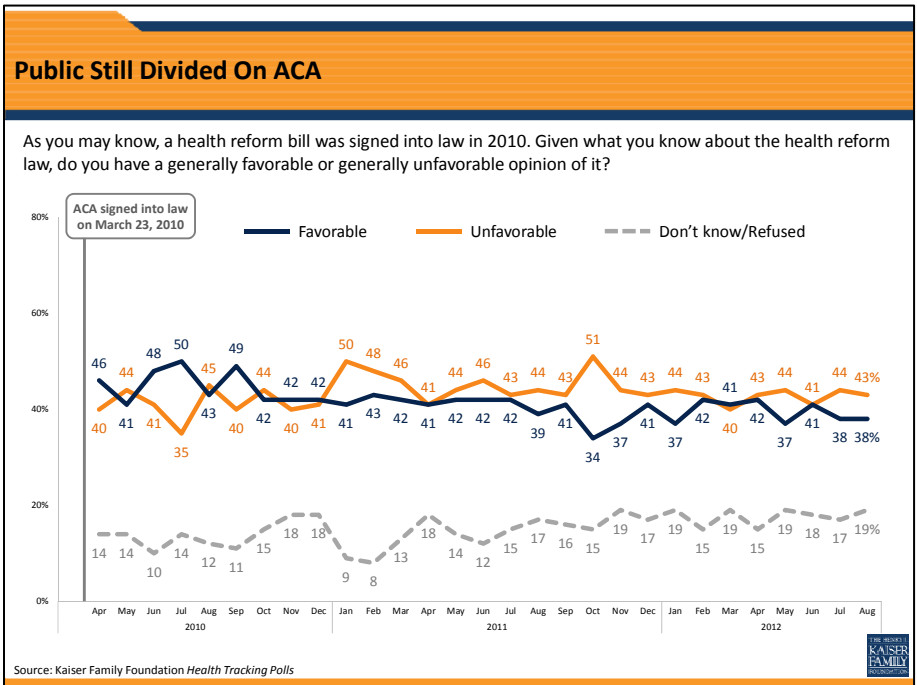
THE ACA: BIG PICTURE UPDATE

Overall favorability of the health reform law remains divided and virtually unchanged from last month, with 38 percent favorable and 43 percent unfavorable. Americans also continue to be split on whether the law will leave their families and the nation better or worse off.

While the public is divided on the law overall, the popularity of individual elements of the ACA endures. Eight in ten have a favorable view of the requirement that insurance companies provide easy-to-understand plan summaries, seven in ten like the subsidies, exchanges, and preventive services benefit, and six in ten have a favorable opinion of the medical loss ratio. In all of these cases, the proportion that would hold a favorable view toward these provisions is larger than the share that is actually aware the provision is included in the health law.

August 1st marked the roll-out of two of the provisions whose popularity is measured in the August tracking poll: the medical loss ratio and the preventive services benefit. Under the medical loss ratio, most insurers that did not spend at least 80 percent of premiums on medical care were required to issue a rebate to their customers by the first of the month. Even though estimates suggest that less than five percent of Americans actually received a rebate, awareness of this provision has increased somewhat over the past several months—42 percent are now aware of this provision, compared to 35 percent in March.

Full coverage of eight recommended preventive services for women, including the controversial birth control coverage requirement, also went into effect at the beginning of the month and just under half (47 percent) are aware that the law “eliminate[s] out-of-pocket costs for many preventive services”, up 10 percentage points since March. Still, while awareness of these two recently implemented provisions seems to be on the rise, more than half continue to be unaware that the law does either of these things.



As more elements of the Affordable Care Act are rolled out, one in five Americans (19 percent) now say their families have benefited in some way from the law, representing the highest point in Kaiser polling thus far. Topping the list of benefits is expansion of insurance and no cost health services, including yearly well visits and women’s preventive services, followed by the extension of dependent coverage and lower costs. A small, but measurable number reported receiving a rebate or credit from their insurer.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS... POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE PERSONAL IMPACTS (selected quotes from open-ended responses)	
Among the 19% who say they have personally benefited from the health reform law: In what ways would you say you have benefited from the health reform law?	Among the 19% who say they have been negatively affected by the health reform law: In what ways would you say you have been negatively affected by the health reform law?
<i>“My drugs are more cheaper, I save 400 dollars a month from insurance”</i>	<i>“My premiums went up 200 dollars a month”</i>
<i>“I have a pre-existing condition. If I lose my job, when 2014 comes around, I will not be denied insurance because of my pre-existing condition”</i>	<i>“My brothers’ business is not certain on how the health care reform bill is going to cost them”</i>
<i>“It is a change towards social care for people who need help”</i>	<i>“It’s expanded the national debt”</i>
<i>“Our 26 year old son is covered for a couple of years because of that. We all benefit when things that are more equitable are put into a law”</i>	<i>“Not all of the doctors are on board”</i>
<i>“Already received rebate from insurance company; friends have gotten benefits too”</i>	<i>“Couldn’t afford health care in the first place and now I’m going to be penalized for not having it”</i>
<i>“Because it helped get insurance for the ones who needed it”</i>	<i>“I think we are paying more for less coverage”</i>
<i>“Free screenings for breast cancer and colonoscopy”</i>	<i>“Our premiums went up and carrier went out of business. The insurance company sold out because couldn’t keep up with the laws”</i>
<i>“Senior coverage is better, my prescriptions are cheaper, my grandchildren are now covered through their parents’ coverage. It would have been a ridiculous amount for my granddaughter to pay for coverage while she was going to college”</i>	<i>“There are a lot of things in that bill like additional taxes. There’s just a lot of hidden fees in the bill and I’m not sure that all of it will pay for health care”</i>

An identical share (19 percent) say they have been negatively affected by the ACA, with the primary reason being cost, followed by concerns about health benefit cuts. Still, those who say they have been impacted, either positively or negatively, remain the minority: 64 percent say they have not felt any ramifications of the law.

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 August 7-12, 2012, among a nationally representative random digit dial telephone sample of 1,208 adults ages 18 and older, living in the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii (note: persons without a telephone could not be included in the random selection process). Most of the interviews were conducted before Representative Paul Ryan was named as the vice presidential nominee, although a few were conducted after the announcement. Computer-assisted telephone interviews conducted by landline (702) and cell phone (506, including 285 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).

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 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/8342.cfm>.

Several questions from the *Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation Dimensions of Partisanship* survey were included in this analysis. More information on that survey can be viewed online at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/polling/washington-postkaiser-family-foundation-poll-july/2012/08/11/09a9f314-e3fb-11e1-89f7-76e23a982d06_page.html.

This publication (#8342-F) is available on the Kaiser Family Foundation’s website at www.kff.org.