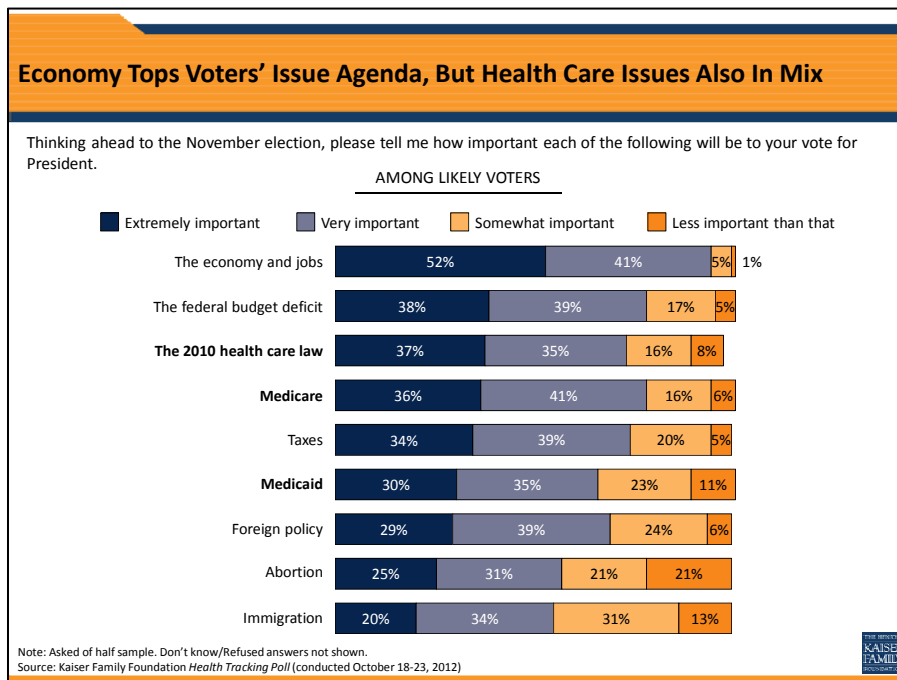


One week before the 2012 presidential election, health policy issues including Medicare and the Affordable Care Act (ACA) remain a factor in voters' views of the race, though they continue to be eclipsed by the economy as the primary concern on voters' minds. The October Kaiser Health Tracking survey also finds that President Barack Obama's edge over Governor Mitt Romney as the candidate trusted by more voters on most health policy issues remains, though his edge has narrowed over the course of the past month. Meanwhile, views on the president's signature health reform law continue to be deeply divided based on the public's own partisan views, and the proportion who say they are "angry" about the law is matched by the share that say they are "enthusiastic". Governor Romney's proposal to change Medicare from a defined benefit program to one based on defined contributions (also known as a premium support system) continues to lack majority support. Seniors overwhelmingly oppose the premium support concept being advanced by Governor Romney and running-mate Congressman Paul Ryan, but this has not necessarily translated into an advantage for President Obama; senior voters trust President Obama and Governor Romney about equally when it comes to handling the future of Medicare, and publicly released vote choice polls suggest Governor Romney's advantage with seniors is at least as wide as then candidate Senator John McCain's was in 2008.

## HEALTH ISSUES IN THE MIX FOR VOTERS, BUT NO CONTESTING ECONOMY AS TOP ISSUE

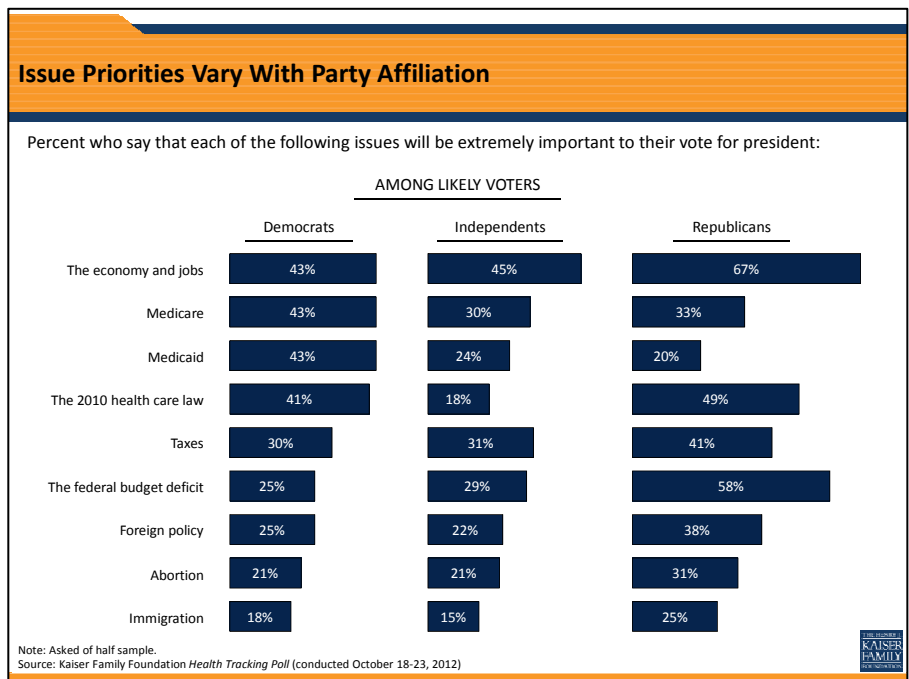
The economy is clearly at the forefront of most voters' minds this year, but health care issues remain in the mix, even if they are not front and center. In the October Kaiser Health Tracking Poll, about a third of likely voters named the Affordable Care Act (37 percent), Medicare (36 percent), and Medicaid (30 percent) as "extremely important" to their vote, compared to about half that said the same about the economy and jobs (52 percent).<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> In this findings report, likely voters are defined as those that reported being registered to vote and either 'absolutely certain' or 'probably' planning to vote.

This agenda does vary by partisan affiliation: Among Democratic likely voters, the economy (43 percent) shares top billing with health issues—Medicare (43 percent), Medicaid (43 percent), and the ACA (41 percent). Among Republican likely voters, however, the economy has more of a lock (67 percent), with the budget deficit—an issue which fades in importance among Democrats and independents—ranked second (58 percent). The 2010 health law ranks third among Republicans (49 percent), with Medicare even further down the list (33 percent). For likely voters that consider themselves independents, the economy is the clear frontrunner, with taxes, Medicare, and the budget deficit tied for second.

While there has been much focus on the agenda of women voters in recent weeks, women don't differ significantly from men in terms of their issue agenda, with the one exception that they are somewhat more likely to say abortion is extremely important to their vote (31 percent compared to 18 percent of men).



#### PRESIDENT OBAMA HOLDS NARROW EDGE ON MOST HEALTH ISSUES

With the presidential election around the corner, President Obama continues to hold the Democratic party's traditional edge as the candidate voters are more likely to trust on several health care issues, from reproductive health, to the ACA, Medicaid and health costs, though this edge has narrowed since September, concurrent with the tightening seen in vote preference polls.<sup>2</sup> Governor Romney has now pulled nearly even with the president among likely voters on which candidate would do a better job determining the future of Medicare, with 46 percent naming President Obama and 41 percent his Republican challenger (a gap that is not statistically

President Obama Holds Narrowed Edge On Most Health Policy Issues			
AMONG LIKELY VOTERS: Which candidate, Barack Obama or Mitt Romney, do you trust to do a better job...			
		OCTOBER	SEPTEMBER
...making decisions about women's reproductive health choices and services			
	Barack Obama	51%	52%
	Mitt Romney	33%	32%
	<i>Obama-Romney percentage point difference</i>	<i>+18</i>	<i>+20</i>
...determining the future of the 2010 health care law			
	Barack Obama	48%	53%
	Mitt Romney	40%	36%
	<i>Obama-Romney percentage point difference</i>	<i>+8</i>	<i>+17</i>
...lowering health care costs for people like you			
	Barack Obama	46%	51%
	Mitt Romney	39%	35%
	<i>Obama-Romney percentage point difference</i>	<i>+7</i>	<i>+16</i>
...determining the future of the Medicaid program			
	Barack Obama	46%	53%
	Mitt Romney	39%	35%
	<i>Obama-Romney percentage point difference</i>	<i>+7</i>	<i>+18</i>
...determining the future of the Medicare program			
	Barack Obama	46%	52%
	Mitt Romney	41%	36%
	<i>Obama-Romney percentage point difference</i>	<i>+5</i>	<i>+16</i>

significant). Meanwhile, the president's largest advantage continues to be on women's reproductive services, where he is trusted by 51 percent of likely voters compared to 33 percent for Governor Romney. On the remaining issues—the ACA, health costs, and Medicaid—President Obama holds a single digit advantage (in the range of 7 to 8 percentage points). In September, he held double digit advantages on the same issues.

<sup>2</sup> For a more in-depth, over-time look at Americans' views of which party is better suited to address health issues, see Kaiser Family Foundation, "Whom Does the Public Trust More on Health Care and Medicare?", October 2012, <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/8371.cfm>.

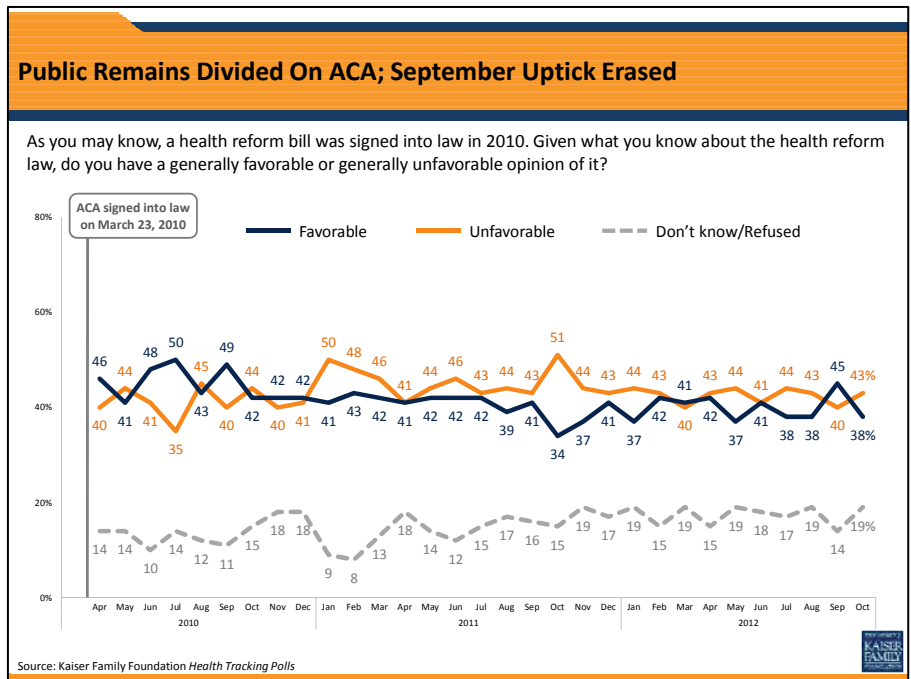
Democrats and Republicans are, not surprisingly, more likely to trust the top of their own party’s ticket, while independents are much more divided on all issues except women’s health, where President Obama’s advantage rises to 25 percentage points.

The first presidential debate placed renewed focus on each candidate’s strategy for insuring people with pre-existing conditions. Perhaps because of President Obama’s backing of the Affordable Care Act—provisions of which are targeted at making it easier for Americans with chronic illnesses to get health coverage—voters are also substantially more likely to say that people with pre-existing health conditions would have a better chance of getting health insurance under an Obama administration (52 percent) than a Romney administration (28 percent).

**NO SUBSTANTIAL MOVEMENT ON ACA DESPITE CAMPAIGN; LAW CONTINUES TO DIVIDE PUBLIC**

The health care law whose fate continues to be a key topic of discussion in the presidential race also continues to divide the public every bit as much as it has since passage. After a bump up in favorability last month, Americans this month divide on the law 38 percent favorable, 43 percent unfavorable and 19 percent unable to provide an opinion, identical to where they were in August. Beneath this split, most Democrats continue to support the president’s signature domestic legislation, most Republicans dislike it, and independents continue to tilt more narrowly toward opposition.

The October survey suggests that the law is motivating both opponents and proponents in roughly equal proportion. While Republicans maintain a longstanding intensity edge on the issue (with a larger share of Republicans saying they feel “very unfavorable” toward the law than the share of Democrats that feel “very favorable”), it is also true that the share that say they are “angry” (28 percent) about the law is balanced with the share that say they are “enthusiastic” (29 percent). And voters with favorable views of the law are just as likely as voters with unfavorable views to say the ACA will be extremely important in their vote choice (39 and 38 percent respectively).



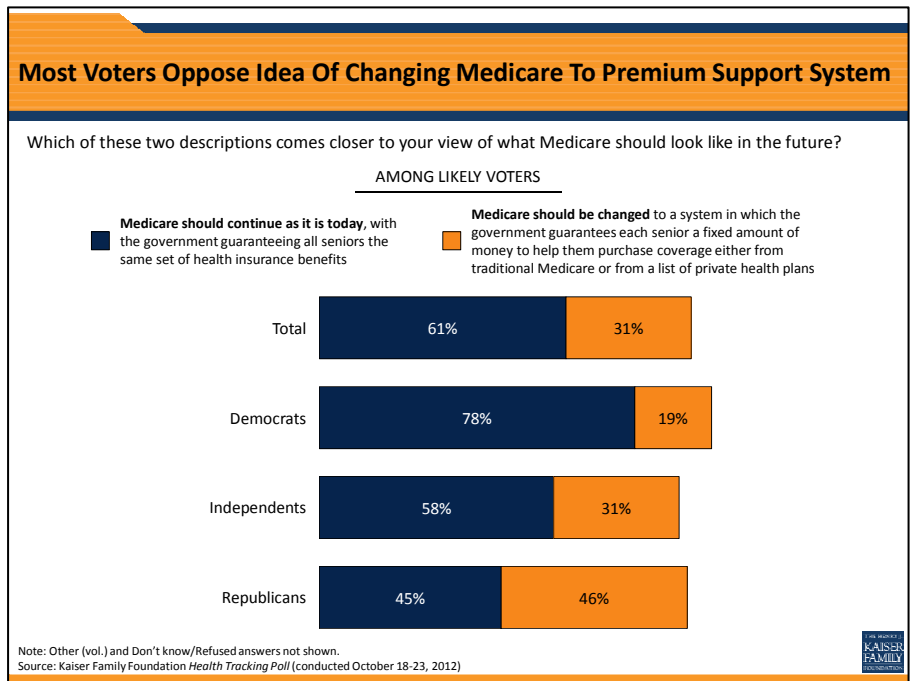
Equal Shares of ACA Opponents and Supporters Say Law Is Important To Their Vote		
Please tell me how important the 2010 health care law will be in your vote for president	Among likely voters with favorable view of ACA	Among likely voters with unfavorable view of ACA
Extremely important	39%	38%
Very important	35%	33%
Somewhat important/less important than that	21%	26%

More than two years after its passage, confusion about the law also remains fairly widespread. Currently 41 percent of Americans say they are confused about the ACA, compared to 55 percent immediately after its passage.

## PROPOSAL TO CHANGE MEDICARE TO PREMIUM SUPPORT SYSTEM REMAINS UNPOPULAR WITH MOST VOTERS

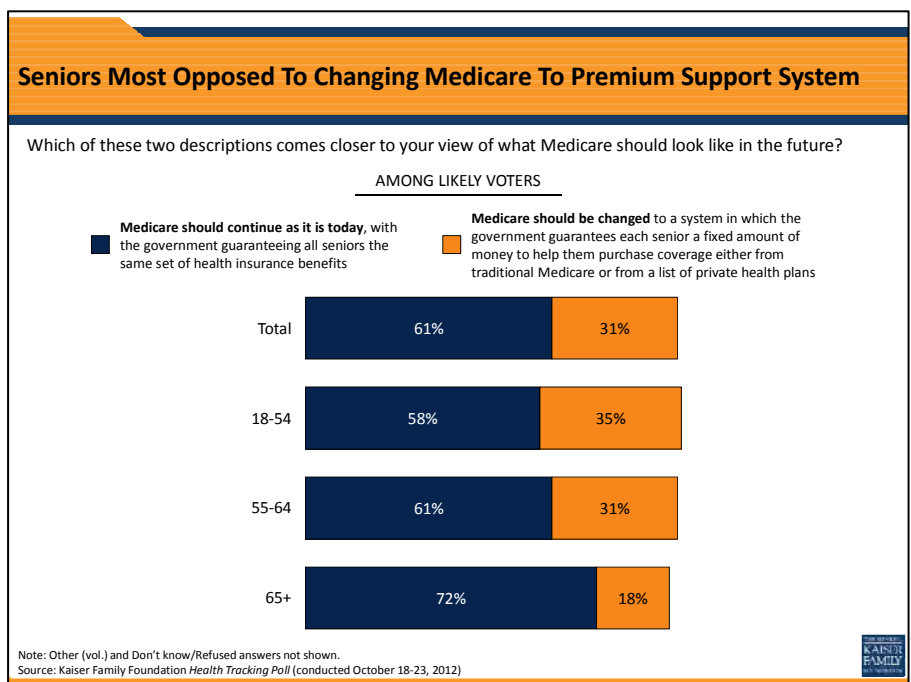
A notable part of Governor Mitt Romney’s platform on health policy is his proposal to change Medicare to a premium support system, in which the government would guarantee each senior a fixed amount of money to help them purchase coverage either from traditional Medicare or from a list of private health plans. As has been true in nearly all the public polling on this issue this year, the October tracking poll finds most likely voters (61 percent) would prefer to keep Medicare as it is today, with the government guaranteeing all seniors the same set of health insurance benefits, rather than make the change (31 percent).<sup>3</sup> It’s worth noting, however, that extensive argument testing in the September tracking survey suggested that opinion on this issue is still quite malleable and could be moved by persuasive messaging in a national debate.<sup>4</sup>

There are clear patterns in views on changing Medicare by partisan affiliation and by age, though in no party group or age group does a clear majority back the proposed change to the program. Overall, a large majority of Democratic likely voters (78 percent) back the Medicare status quo, joined by 58 percent of independents. Republican voters are quite divided on the issue: 45 percent want to keep Medicare as is, 46 percent would be willing to change to a premium support system.



## SENIORS, HEALTH POLICY AND THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE

Seniors stand out this election season as being more likely than other voters to oppose both candidates’ key health policy proposals: they have for some time been more likely to have unfavorable views of the ACA, and they are the age group least likely to want to see Medicare changed to a premium support system.<sup>5</sup> Overall, 39 percent of those voters aged 65 and up say that the Affordable Care Act will leave seniors worse off, compared to 25 percent that say they will be better off, a negative tilt that is even more pronounced among likely voters nearing Medicare age (those aged 55 to 64). Seniors are also the age group most likely to oppose the change to premium support: 72 percent of senior likely voters oppose the idea, compared to 58 percent of voters under age 65.



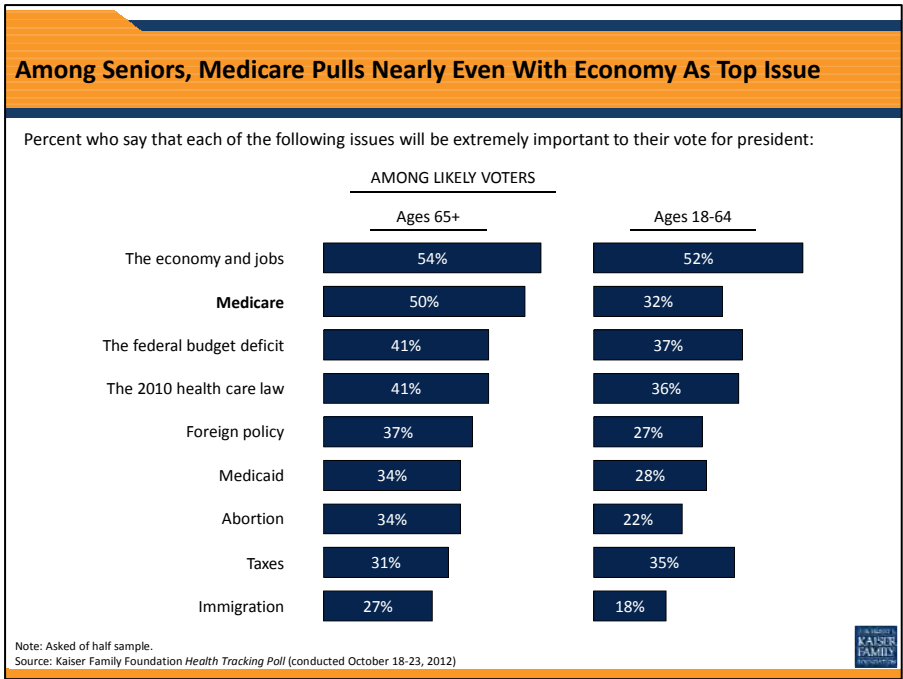
<sup>3</sup> For a wide ranging look at all public polling on premium support over the past 15 years, see Kaiser Family Foundation, “Polling on Medicare Premium Support Systems Over Time”, October 2012, <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/8370.cfm>.

<sup>4</sup> See September Kaiser Health Tracking Poll, <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/8361.cfm>.

<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed look at this issue, see Kaiser Family Foundation, “Seniors and the 2012 Presidential Election”, October 2012, <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/8372.cfm>.

At the same time, seniors are more likely than younger voters to say Medicare will matter to their presidential vote: While the economy still tops the list for seniors (54 percent of seniors say it is extremely important to their vote), Medicare follows as a close second, named by 50 percent. The ACA ties for third with the deficit among senior voters, named by 41 percent.

Although seniors overwhelmingly oppose the premium support concept being advanced by Governor Romney and running-mate Congressman Paul Ryan, this has not necessarily translated into an electoral advantage for President Obama. Overall, 72 percent of senior likely voters say they prefer to keep the Medicare status quo, while 18 percent would back a change to premium support, the lowest level among any age group. Despite this, senior voters (and those nearing retirement age) are more likely than younger voters to say they trust Governor Romney with the future of Medicare (see table). And publicly released horse race polls suggest Governor Romney's advantage among seniors is at least as wide as then-candidate Senator John McCain's was in 2008.

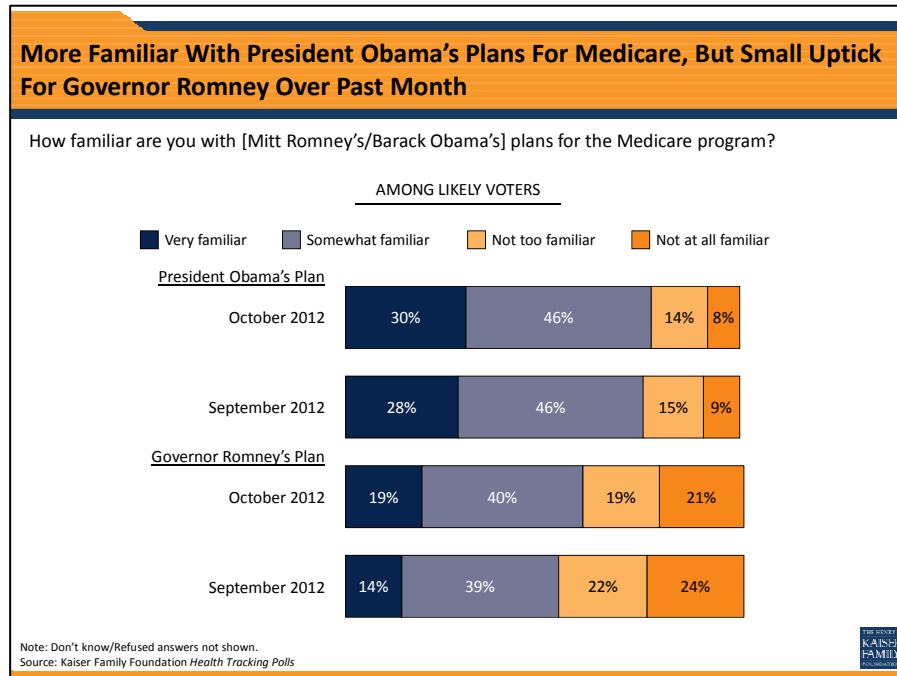


#### Younger Voters More Likely to Trust President Obama with Medicare's Future, But President's Advantage Disappears Among Older Voters

<i>AMONG LIKELY VOTERS: Which presidential candidate, Barack Obama or Mitt Romney, do you trust to do a better job determining the future of the Medicare program?</i>				
	All	18-54	55-64	65+
Barack Obama	46%	49%	40%	43%
Mitt Romney	41%	36%	53%	48%

## HOW MUCH DO VOTERS FEEL THEY KNOW ABOUT THE CANDIDATES' PLANS FOR HEALTH POLICY?

President Obama's plans for the ACA and Medicare are familiar to larger shares of voters than Governor Romney's, but as the campaign progresses, the share that say they are familiar with the Republican candidate's plans in this area has risen somewhat. Overall, at least three in four likely voters say they are at least somewhat familiar with President Obama's plans for the Affordable Care Act and the Medicare program, compared to about six in ten that say the same about Governor Romney's platform (up seven percentage points for the ACA and six for Medicare from last month).



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 18-23, 2012, among a nationally representative random digit dial telephone sample of 1,215 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). Computer-assisted telephone interviews conducted by landline (704) and cell phone (511, including 282 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 the full sample. Margin of error for likely voters is plus or minus 4 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/8381.cfm>.

This publication (#8381-F) is available on the Kaiser Family Foundation's website at [www.kff.org](http://www.kff.org).