

Support for, or Opposition to, Health Care Reform Often Has Little to Do with What Is Actually Proposed

Less support for the Senate and House reform bills than for "President Obama's" proposals.

Public opinion is sometimes puzzling. Several polls have found strong public support for many of the proposals for health care reform contained in one or both of the bills passed by the Senate and the House of Representatives even among those who are opposed to the bills. What is actually in proposed legislation can be quite different from what people think is in it.

A new Harris Poll finds that opposition to the president's health reform proposals continued to increase, up from 41% in November to 45% in December and to 49% of all adults in late January (but just before the State of the Union address). This latest poll finds a 49% to 43% plurality of adults who are opposed. However, many elements of the bills are very popular.

These are some of the results of The Harris Poll of 2,576 adults surveyed online between January 18 and 25, 2010 by Harris Interactive.

Analysis by education

There is a strong correlation between support for the president's proposals and education. Majorities of those with no college education (by 51% to 36%) and of those with only some college education but no degree (by 51% to 43%) oppose the president's reform. College graduates are split (49% supporting and 46% opposing). Those with post graduate degrees strongly support the proposals by 61% to 37%.

Other interesting findings in this poll

- The polarization of political opinion is still very strong, with 85% of Republicans but only 16% of Democrats opposed to the president's proposals.
- A decisive 56% to 37% majority of Independents now oppose the president's reforms.
- Very similar pluralities oppose both the Senate and House bills (by 47% to 29% and 44% to 32%) with about a quarter of all adults who are not sure.

Another set of questions asked people about nine elements of one or both congressional bills, with majorities of the public favoring eight of the nine proposals.

Large majorities of the public are in favor of:

- Making costs and quality more transparent (by 87% to 5%);
- Simplifying and standardizing administration (by 76% to 14%);
- Testing new way to reimburse doctors and hospitals (by 75% to 14%);
- Creating an insurance exchange (by 73% to 16%);
- Preventing illegal immigrants from obtaining coverage (by 67% to 24%); and
- Allowing children to stay on their parents' insurance plans until they are 25 or 26 (by 65% to 26%).

Smaller but clear majorities also favor:

- Expanding Medicaid coverage to cover more low income families (by 59% to 31%); and
- A "public option" as a choice for people without insurance (by 54% to 36%).

However, most people, by a substantial 67% to 25%, are opposed to an individual mandate requiring everyone to have insurance.

It should be noted, however, that many people do not know very much about what is, and is not, in the two bills. In many cases therefore, this question is measuring the public's reactions to the proposals as they are described and not necessarily an opinion that they held before they were surveyed.

So what?

This and other polls have shown the growing opposition to the health care reforms proposed by President Obama. They have also shown widespread support for many of the goals underlying the proposals – such as a big increase in coverage of those now uninsured, the end of unpopular medical underwriting practices, steps to contain the cost of care and reduce the budget deficit. However, majorities of the public have come to believe that health care reform might

be good for others but not for them and that it would lead to higher taxes. Overall, however, there does seem to be a great deal of confusion and misinformation about what is, and what is not, being proposed. The extraordinary complexity of our health care system, and the complexity of the proposals to reform it, make it very difficult for most people to understand – and therefore, difficult to sell to the American people. This explains why more people favor reform in general than favor either the president’s or the proposed reforms in the Congressional bills.

TABLE 1
SUPPORT OR OPPOSE OBAMA’S REFORM PROPOSALS – TREND

“Even if you don’t know the details of his plan, how do you feel about President Obama’s proposals for health care reform?”

Base: All Adults

	Jan. 2009	July 2009	Aug. 2009	Sept. 2009	Oct. 2009	Nov. 2009	Dec. 2009	January 2010
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Support (NET)	50	42	49	49	45	40	43	43
Support strongly	25	20	24	26	23	23	19	20
Support somewhat	26	21	25	23	22	17	25	23
Oppose (NET)	20	38	40	41	45	41	45	49
Oppose somewhat	9	12	11	13	14	10	13	14
Oppose strongly	12	27	29	29	31	31	32	35
Not sure	29	20	11	10	11	18	11	9
Support minus oppose	+30	+4	+9	+8	-	-1	-2	-6

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 2

SUPPORT OR OPPOSE OBAMA'S REFORM PROPOSALS – BY PARTY

“Even if you don’t know the details of the plan, how do you feel about President Obama’s proposals for health care reform?”

Base: All Adults

	Total	Party ID		
		Republican	Democrat	Independent
	%	%	%	%
Support (NET)	43	10	77	37
Support strongly	20	3	42	13
Support somewhat	23	8	35	24
Oppose (NET)	49	85	16	56
Oppose somewhat	14	17	10	17
Oppose strongly	35	68	6	39
Not sure	9	4	7	7

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 3

SUPPORT OR OPPOSE OBAMA'S REFORM PROPOSALS – BY PARTY

“Even if you don’t know the details of the plan, how do you feel about President Obama’s proposals for health care reform?”

Base: All Adults

	Total	Education			
		High School or Less	Some College	College Grad	Post Grad
	%	%	%	%	%
Support (NET)	43	36	43	49	61
Support strongly	20	16	18	27	28
Support somewhat	23	20	25	22	33
Oppose (NET)	49	51	51	46	37
Oppose somewhat	14	14	13	16	16
Oppose strongly	35	37	38	30	22
Not sure	9	13	6	5	2

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 4

ATTITUDES TO THE SENATE AND HOUSE BILLS FOR HEALTH CARE REFORM

“Based on what you’ve read, seen or heard, do you support or oppose the health care plans put forth in each of the following?”

Base: All Adults

	SUPPORT (NET)	Strongly support	Somewhat support	OPPOSE (NET)	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose	Not sure
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
The bill passed by the U.S. House of Representatives	50	42	49	49	45	40	43
The bill passed by the U.S. Senate	29	20	11	10	11	18	11

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 5

SUPPORT FOR PROVISIONS IN THE BILLS

“The following are all in either, or both, the Senate and the House health care bills. Do you support or oppose each of them?”

Base: All Adults

	SUP-PORT (NET)	Strongly support	Some-what support	OPPOSE (NET)	Some-what oppose	Strongly oppose	Not sure
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Increase transparency so consumers know more about costs and quality.	87	59	28	5	2	2	8
Simplify and standardize the administration of health insurance for patients, doctors and hospitals.	76	45	31	14	8	7	10
Test different ways to reimburse doctors and hospitals designed to improve quality and reduce costs.	75	37	38	14	8	7	11
Create an ‘insurance exchange’ to give those who do not have insurance a list of plans they can choose from.	73	33	40	16	8	9	11
Prevent coverage of illegal immigrants.	67	52	15	24	13	11	9
Allow children to stay on their parents’ insurance plans until they are 25 or 26 years old.	65	34	31	26	15	12	9
Expand Medicaid coverage to more low income people.	59	29	30	31	16	16	9
Create a ‘public option’, a government run plan, as one of the choices to people who do not have insurance.	54	29	26	36	10	26	10
Require all Americans to have health insurance or pay a penalty.	25	9	16	67	20	47	8

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

Methodology

This Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States January 18 to 25, 2010 among 2,576 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online. All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

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