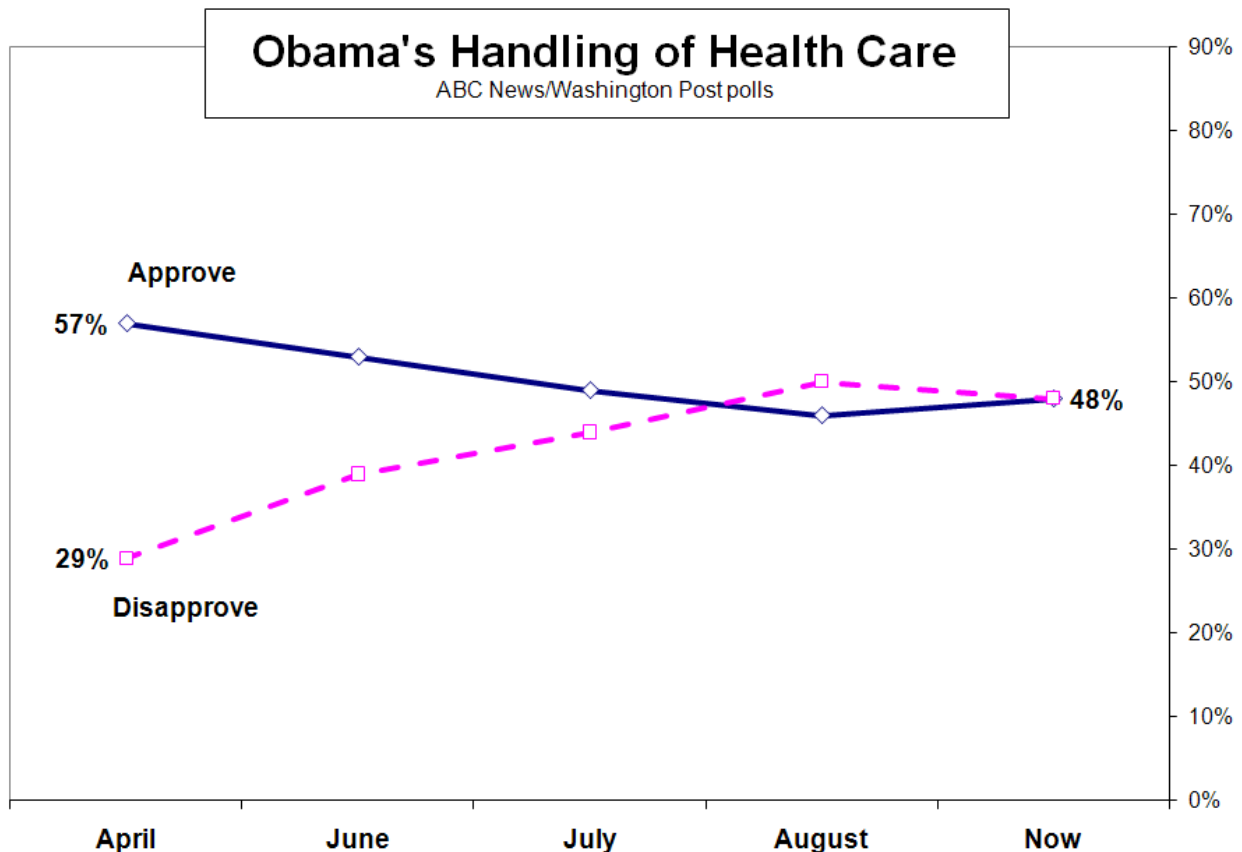


Obama's Address Not a Game-Changer; Challenges for Health Reform Still Loom

Bottom-line views on health care reform have stabilized but failed to improve since President Obama addressed the nation, leaving him with a continued challenge in selling his plan to a public that remains skeptical about its benefits and costs alike.

Obama shows some improvement. He's stanching his losses, shored up his base and gained on a few specifics. But his speech was no game-changer: Americans in this ABC News/Washington Post poll divide by 48-48 percent on his handling of the issue and by 46-48 percent on the reform package itself, both essentially the same as their pre-address levels.



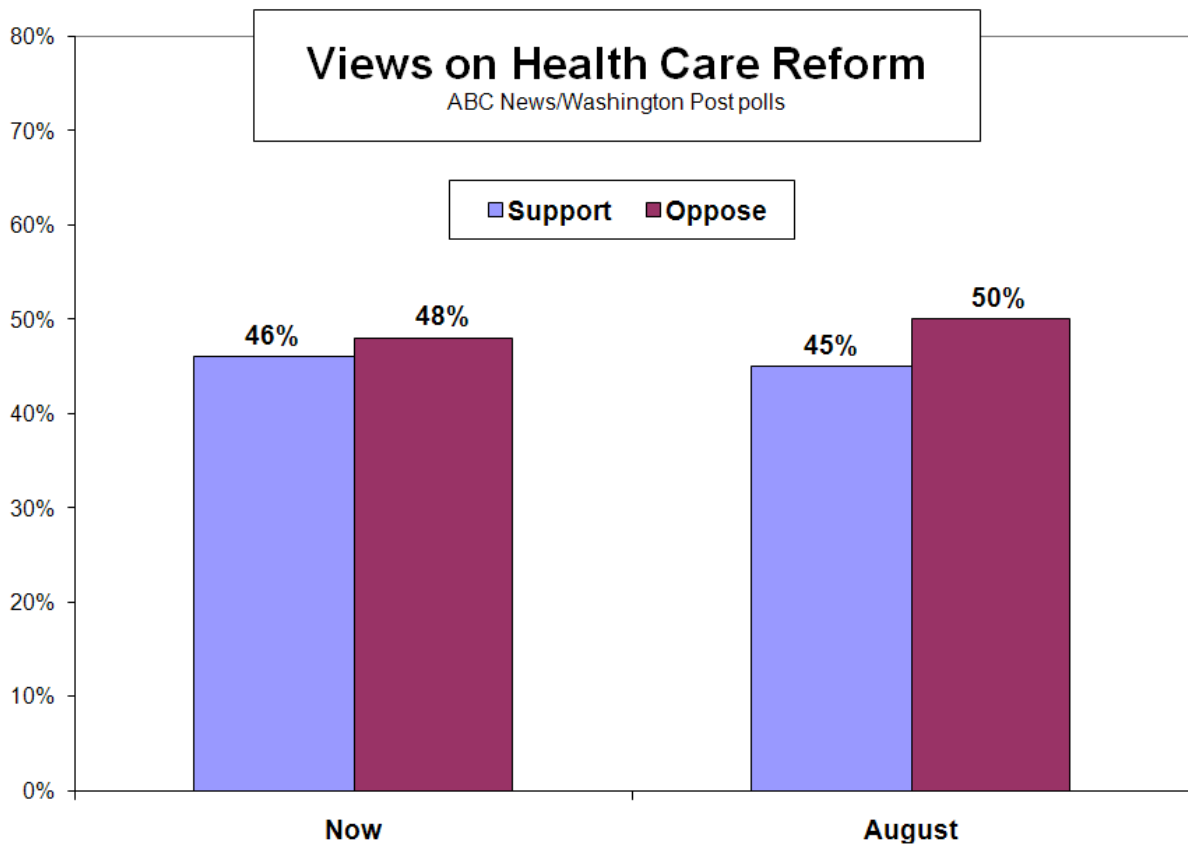
More continue to think reform will worsen rather than improve their own care, costs and coverage. There's still a nearly even split on whether it'll improve care for most people in general. More think it'll weaken rather than strengthen Medicare. And nearly two-thirds think it'll boost the already vast federal deficit.

Perhaps worst for the president, in interviews following his nationally televised address to a joint session of Congress, Americans by 54-41 percent say that the more they hear about health care reform, the less they like it. And while he still leads the Republicans in Congress in trust to handle reform, he's lost 7 points in this measure, and they've gained 9, since June.

Still, Obama has possibilities. He's cut into suspicions that reform will force change on people who don't want it – albeit just to an even split. And if the much-debated “public option” is dropped, support for reform inches ahead, albeit to a still-tepid 50 percent, while opposition slips to 42 percent.

In making their case, both parties face a fundamental challenge: Democratic allegiance has slipped to a two-year low in this poll and Republican affiliation is back near its lowest ever; instead 43 percent of Americans now identify themselves as independents, the most since ABC/Post polls began 28 years ago.

HEALTH CARE: SPLIT – The results do not show wholesale opposition to health care reform; rather, on the most basic measures, essentially an even division. Given the level of concerns, that underscores the extent of dissatisfaction with the current system, the vein Obama has sought to mine. Indeed more still say reform is necessary (53 percent, though down from 58 percent in June) than say it'll do “more harm than good” (44 percent).

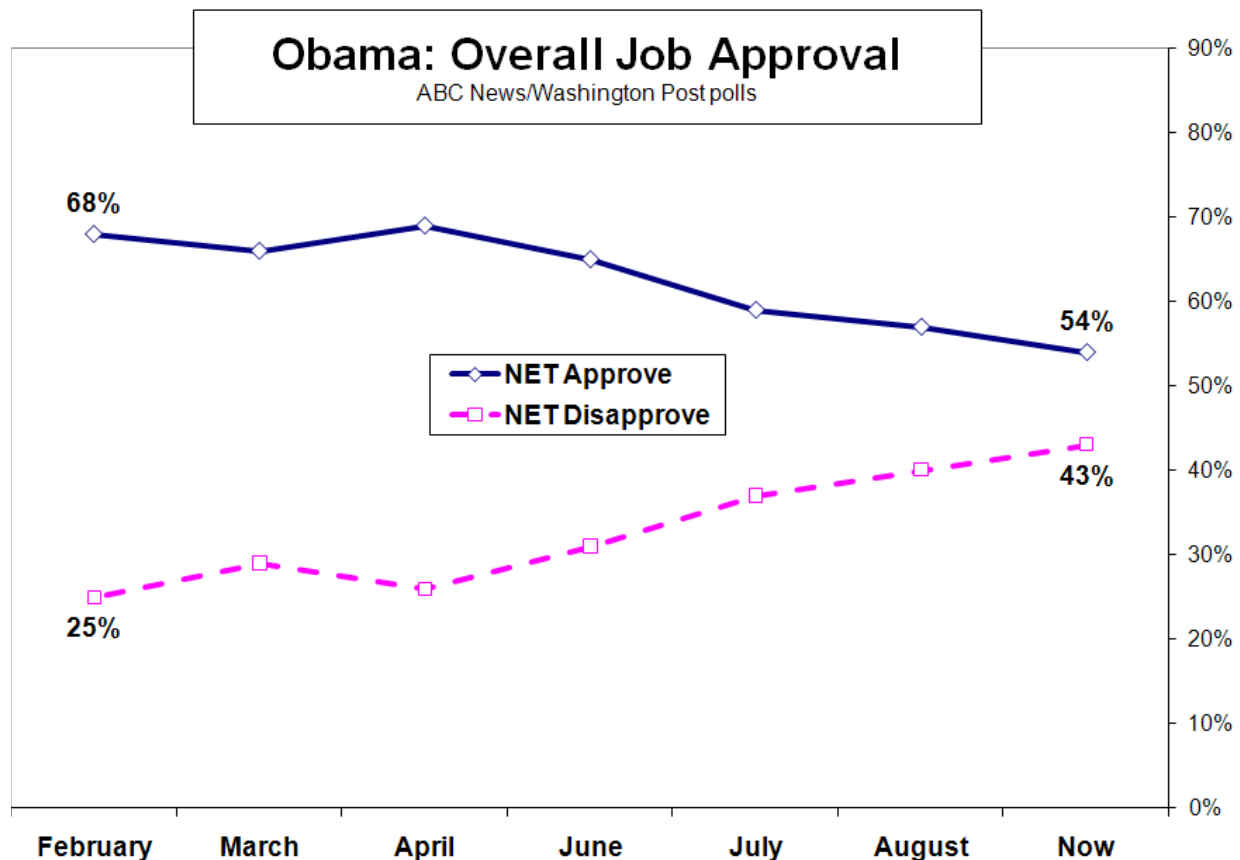


On the plus side for Obama, this is the first ABC/Post poll since April in which his support for handling of health care did not lose ground. There's been a slight gain in his "strong" support. In addition to the president's continued if diminished lead over the Republicans in trust to handle the issue, he has a large advantage in being seen as trying to cooperate on it.

Perhaps most useful for Obama, there's been some moderation in the potential downside of support for his plan in Congress. Last month 26 percent of Americans said they'd be much more likely to vote against a member of Congress who supported his plan; today that's eased to 17 percent. Twelve percent say they'd be much more apt to support a pro-reform member.

Bill Clinton took an immediate but short-lived 13-point bounce in support out of his health care address Sept. 22, 1993. Obama shows no such gain. The questions now are whether the current division holds – and if so whether it's enough for the arm-twisting in Congress that lies ahead.

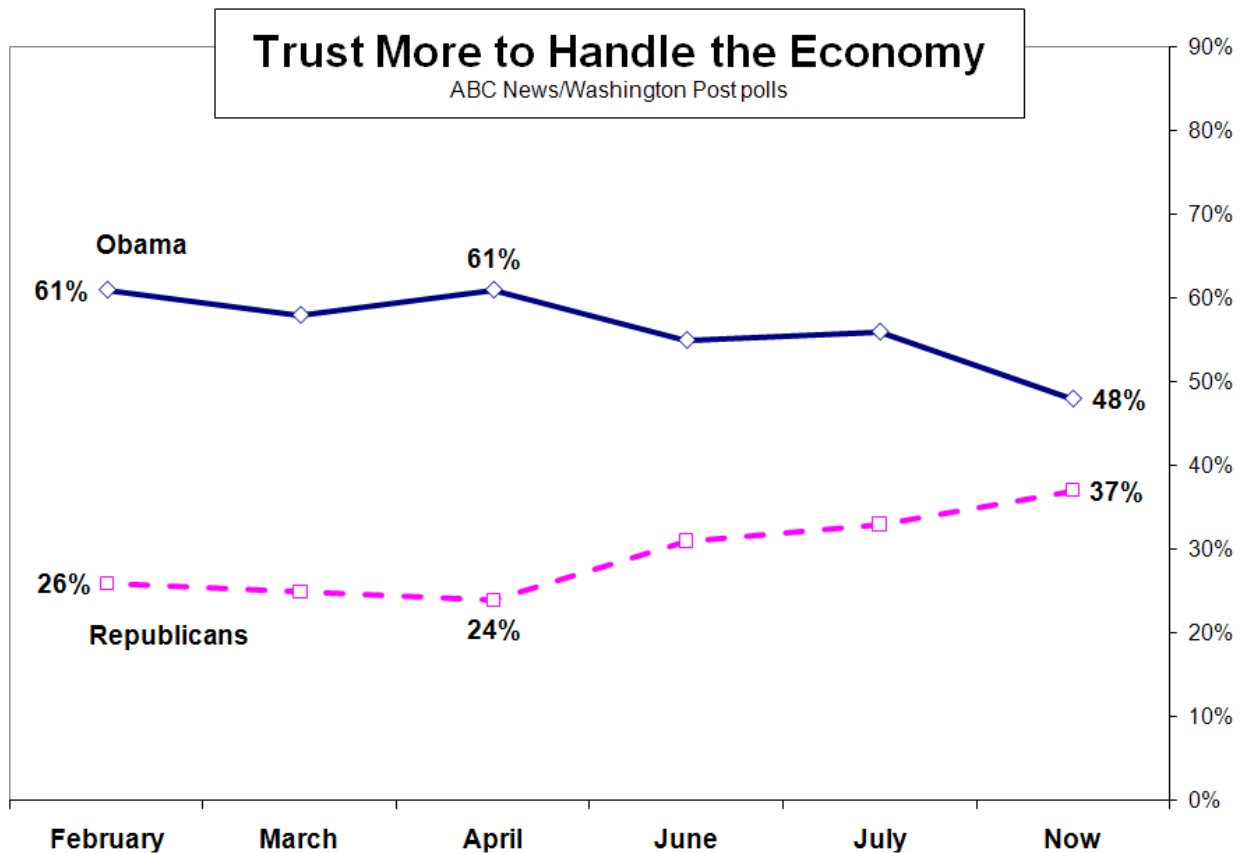
OTHER RATINGS – Most broadly, the president now has a 54 percent overall job approval rating, with 43 percent disapproving, continuing the erosion in his support since April as the inaugural honeymoon's faded and he's taken ownership of the country's problems.



His overall approval has slipped to 49 percent among independents, not significantly different from last month but his first mark under 50 percent in this quintessential swing group. It's 87 percent among Democrats vs. 15 percent among Republicans, a vast partisan gap.

Nearly as many Americans now “strongly” disapprove of the president, 31 percent, as strongly approve, 35 percent. From his best in February, his strong approval is down by 8 points; his strong disapproval, up by 14. It’s risen sharply among moderates and independents (by 15 and 16 points, respectively) as well among conservatives and Republicans (by 23 and 29 points).

With 9.7 percent unemployment, the economy is critical. Obama gets a tepid 51 percent approval rating for handling it. In an especially weak rating, just 39 percent approve of his handling of the deficit, a new low, while 55 percent disapprove. And most notably, his advantage in trust to handle the economy has contracted from 61-24 percent in April, the record for a president over the opposition party in polls since 1991, to a much narrower 48-37 percent now.



The number of Americans who say Obama’s doing a better job than they expected has subsided from 54 percent in April to 42 percent now; those who say he’s doing worse, meanwhile, has grown from 18 percent then to 31 percent now.

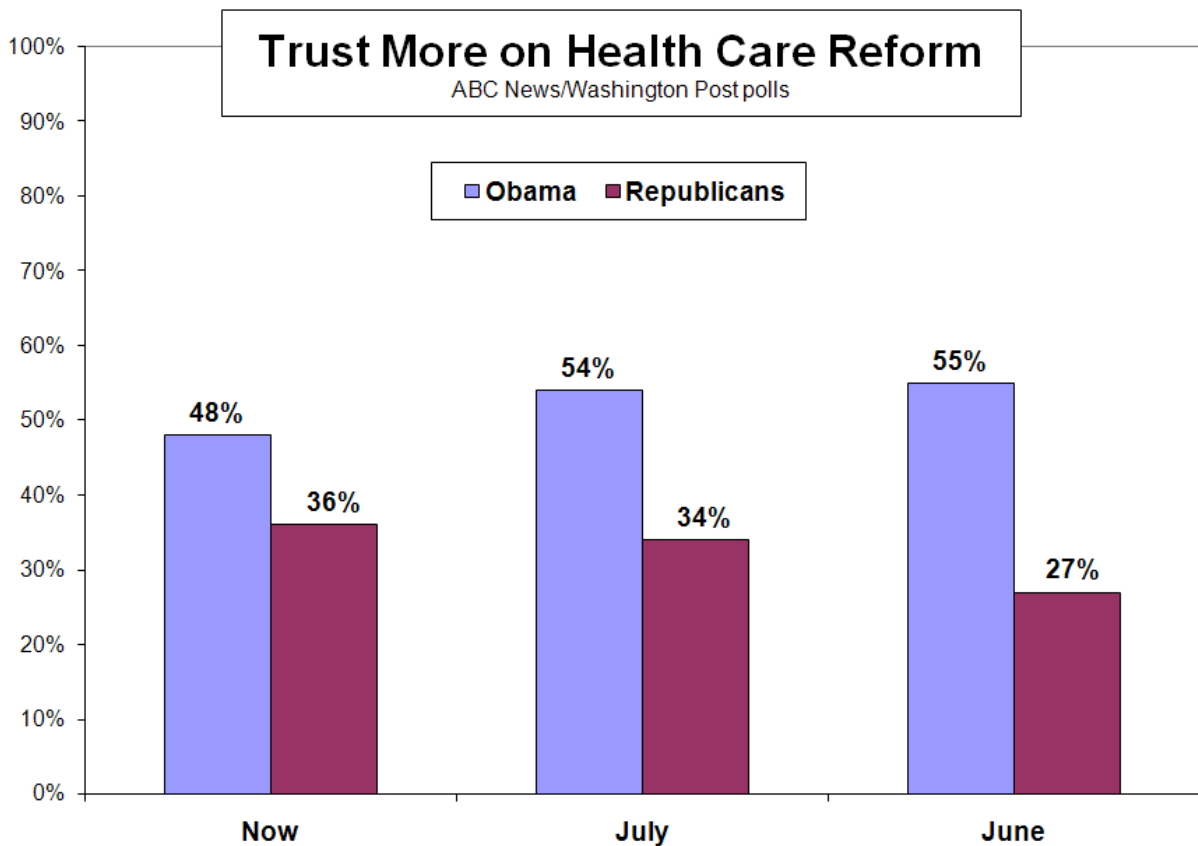
Nonetheless, while 39 percent call Obama “too liberal,” up 10 points from the pre-inauguration level, that’s no higher than it was just before the election, and about the same as the number who, at the peaks, saw John McCain, and George W. Bush before him, as “too conservative.”

And Obama has a potentially important ace in the hole: his personal popularity. Sixty-three percent of Americans have a favorable opinion of him overall, 40 percent “very” favorable. That’s well down from its peak, 79 percent in January, but still quite positive. His favorable rating among Republicans, though, has dived from 54 percent then to 24 percent now.

PARTY TIME – While the Republicans have moved closer to Obama on some issues, they haven’t gained in allegiance overall. Just 21 percent of Americans in this poll identify themselves as Republicans, matching the number in April and the fewest since the record low in ABC/Post polls, 19 percent in September 1983.

Instead, as noted, the number identifying themselves as Democrats has slipped to 32 percent, compared with averages of 35 percent this year and 36 percent in 2008. The previous high for independents, now 43 percent, was 41 percent in July and in an early 1996 poll. The number of independents wasn’t so high last month (34 percent), leaving the durability of these readings unclear. But it certainly doesn’t make the task of partisan persuasion easier for either side.

The Democrats still do retain the upper hand; Americans trust them over the Republicans to handle the nation’s main problems by a substantial 48 percent to 28 percent – although less broad than the 56-23 percent Democratic advantage in December, a 27-year record.



Testing Obama vs. the Republicans in Congress, the president leads in trust to handle health care reform by 48-36 percent. That's down, though, from 55-27 percent in June and, like many other basic health care measures, puts him under 50 percent. Obama also leads in trust to handle the deficit, and, as noted, the economy, but again by smaller margins than previously.

Also, specific to health care, the president and his party far outpoint the Republicans in being seen as making a "good-faith effort" to cooperate – 50 percent say Obama and the Democrats in Congress are trying to cooperate on reform, vs. 31 percent who say the same of the Republicans. And many more chiefly blame the Republicans for the negative tone of the debate, 31 percent, than the Democrats, 17 percent. But a plurality, 49 percent, blames both sides equally.

There's a challenge for Obama and the Democrats embedded in these views: Even as the Republicans are seen as less cooperative, 71 percent say the president and his party should try to change their reform proposals to win Republican support, rather than pushing ahead without it.

PUBLIC OPTION – On specifics in the health care plan, 55 percent support a so-called public option, with 42 percent opposed – slightly less opposition than in last month's 52-46 percent division, but still shy of the initial reaction in June, 62-33 percent support.

That June poll found that support for a public option drops dramatically if it would put many private insurers out of business, as critics claim. This poll shows a flip side: Support for a public option swells to 76 percent if it were available only to people who can't get coverage from a private insurer. The increase is most dramatic among Republicans, a 32-point gain to 59 percent support; and seniors, a 33-point gain to 68 percent. Something like this was suggested by Obama, who said in his address the option would be available only to people who "don't have" insurance; herein may be a path to compromise.

Some proponents of reform have described a public option as an essential element; Obama, on the other hand, has not. And as noted, without a public option, this poll finds support for reform's remaining elements at 50-42 percent. (Despite some threats, support among liberals is nearly as high without a public option as with one.)

OTHER ELEMENTS – Another element of reform, limiting medical malpractice awards, is popular, with 63 percent support, up from 57 percent in June. On the other hand it's back to a split on taxing insurance companies when they sell high-end, so-called Cadillac insurance policies – 45 percent in favor, 48 percent opposed. And if the insurance companies passed on the tax by raising the prices of those policies, opposition soars to 71 percent.

Some of the compunctions are considerable. Sixty-five percent think reform would increase the deficit. Forty percent think it'd weaken Medicare, about twice the 22 percent who think it'd strengthen that popular program. Among seniors, 56 percent think reform would weaken Medicare, explaining why opposition to reform peaks in their ranks.

Perhaps most basic are these: Americans divide, 35-38 percent, on whether reform would make the quality of care for most people better or worse (the rest expect no change). More think it would make their own care worse rather than better, by 32-16 percent; their own costs worse, by

40-20 percent; their own coverage worse, by 37-11 percent. Even among the uninsured, just 51 percent think reform would improve their own coverage. And none of these advanced after the president's address.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Sept. 10-12, 2009, among a random national sample of 1,007 adults, including landline and cell-phone-only respondents. Results for the full sample have a 3.5-point error margin. Click [here](#) for a detailed description of sampling error. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, PA.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollingunit>

Media contact: Cathie Levine, (212) 456-4934.

Full results follow (*= less than 0.5 percent).

1. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as president? Do you approve/disapprove strongly or somewhat?

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
9/12/09	54	35	19	43	12	31	3
8/17/09	57	35	21	40	11	29	3
7/18/09	59	38	22	37	9	28	4
6/21/09	65	36	29	31	10	22	4
4/24/09	69	42	27	26	8	18	4
3/29/09	66	40	26	29	9	20	5
2/22/09	68	43	25	25	8	17	7

2. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Obama is handling [ITEM]? Do you approve/disapprove strongly or somewhat?

9/12/09 - Summary Table*

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No op.
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
a. Health care	48	32	15	48	10	38	4
b. The economy	51	28	24	46	13	33	2
c-e. held for release.							
f. The federal budget deficit	39	17	22	55	13	42	6

*Full sample asked items a,b; half sample asked items c,d; other half sample asked items e,f.

Trend where available:

a. Health care

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
9/12/09	48	32	15	48	10	38	4
8/17/09	46	27	19	50	8	42	5
7/18/09	49	25	24	44	11	33	7
6/21/09	53	27	26	39	10	29	9

4/24/09 57 NA NA 29 NA NA 13

b. The economy

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
9/12/09	51	28	24	46	13	33	2
8/17/09	52	27	25	46	13	33	2
7/18/09	52	29	23	46	10	35	3
6/21/09	56	28	28	41	13	27	3
4/24/09	58	31	28	38	13	25	4
3/29/09	60	34	25	38	12	26	3
2/22/09	60	NA	NA	34	NA	NA	6

f. The federal budget deficit

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
9/12/09	39	17	22	55	13	42	6
8/17/09	41	19	22	53	12	41	5
7/18/09	43	19	24	49	11	38	8
6/21/09	48	22	26	48	13	35	5
4/24/09	51	NA	NA	43	NA	NA	7
3/29/09	52	NA	NA	43	NA	NA	5

3. Overall, which party, the (Democrats) or the (Republicans), do you trust to do a better job in coping with the main problems the nation faces over the next few years?

	Democrats	Republicans	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
9/12/09	48	28	3	19	2
2/22/09	56	30	3	9	3
12/14/08	56	23	3	15	3
5/11/08	53	32	2	10	2
10/8/06	54	35	2	7	2
9/7/06	47	38	1	10	4
6/25/06	48	38	1	10	3
5/15/06	50	36	1	11	3
4/9/06	51	37	1	9	2
3/5/06	42	40	2	14	2
1/26/06	51	37	1	8	3
12/18/05	47	42	1	8	2
11/2/05	49	37	3	9	3
6/5/05	46	41	1	9	2
8/11/03	39	40	3	10	7
12/15/02	41	44	2	11	2
10/27/02 LV	39	51	2	5	2
9/26/02	39	46	3	8	4
7/15/02	42	45	2	7	4
1/27/02	40	44	3	10	4
4/22/01	47	40	4	7	3
7/23/00	42	42	2	9	6

Call for full trend to 1982.

4. Who do you trust to do a better job handling [ITEM] - (Obama) or (the Republicans in Congress)?

9/12/09 - Summary Table*

Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
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a. The economy	48	37	1	12	2
b. Health care reform	48	36	1	12	3
c. The federal budget deficit	50	36	1	12	1
d. held for release.					

*Half sample asked items a,b; other half sample asked items c,d.

Trend where available:

a. The economy

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
9/12/09	48	37	1	12	2
7/18/09	56	33	1	9	2
6/21/09	55	31	2	9	2
4/24/09	61	24	2	11	2
3/29/09	58	25	1	14	2
2/22/09	61	26	1	9	3

b. Health care reform

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
9/12/09	48	36	1	12	3
7/18/09	54	34	1	10	1
6/21/09	55	27	2	11	4

c. The federal budget deficit

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
9/12/09	50	36	1	12	1
7/18/09	54	35	*	9	2
6/21/09	56	30	2	9	2

5. Would you say Obama is doing a better job as president than you expected, a worse job, or what? Is that much better/worse or somewhat better/worse?

	----- Better -----			----- Worse -----			As expected	No
	NET	Much	Smwht	NET	Smwht	Much	(vol.)	opinion
9/12/09	42	18	24	31	13	18	25	2
4/24/09	54	25	29	18	10	9	23	4
2/22/09	46	18	28	14	8	7	31	9

6. Overall, do you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of Barack Obama? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	----- Favorable -----			----- Unfavorable -----			No	
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion	
9/12/09	63	40	23	35	12	24	2	
4/24/09	72	46	26	26	11	15	2	
1/16/09	79	50	29	18	9	9	3	
11/2/08	LV	63	47	16	33	7	26	4
10/23/08	LV	63	47	16	34	7	27	3
10/11/08	RV	64	44	20	33	12	21	3
9/7/08	RV	58	35	23	36	12	24	7
8/22/08	RV	62	37	25	34	13	21	4
6/15/08		63	35	28	33	12	21	4
4/13/08		56	28	28	39	14	25	5
1/12/08		63	31	32	30	14	16	7
11/1/07		51	21	30	36	16	20	13

2/25/07	53	21	33	30	16	14	16
1/19/07	45	NA	NA	29	NA	NA	25
12/11/06	44	21	22	23	17	6	33

7. Do you think Obama's views on most issues are too (liberal) for you, too (conservative) for you, or just about right?

	Too liberal	Too conservative	About right	No opinion
9/12/09	39	5	53	3
4/24/09	33	4	62	2
1/16/09	29	4	65	2
10/31/08 LV	39	3	56	2
10/21/08 LV	40	2	55	4
10/20/08 LV	39	2	55	4
10/11/08 RV	37	4	55	4
6/15/08	36	5	52	7
3/2/08	31	6	56	7

8-16 held for release.

17. Overall, given what you know about them, would you say you support or oppose the proposed changes to the health care system being developed by (Congress) and (the Obama administration)? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	Support			Oppose			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
9/12/09	46	30	16	48	12	36	6
8/17/09	45	27	18	50	10	40	5

18. How much do you feel you know about Obama's proposals to change the health care system - a great deal, a good amount, only some or hardly anything?

	More			Less			No opinion
	NET	Grt. deal	Good amt.	NET	Some	Hardly Nothing (vol.)	
9/12/09	55	19	36	44	31	12	1

19. Which of these comes closest to your own view: (The more I hear about the health care plan, the more I like it) or (The more I hear about the health care plan, the less I like it).

	More I like it	Less I like it	No opinion
9/12/09	41	54	5

Compare to: Clinton's health care plan

	More I like it	Less I like it	No opinion
2/27/94	44	51	5
11/14/93	41	53	6

20. Do you have some form of health insurance or health care coverage, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
9/12/09	86	14	0
8/17/09	85	14	*

Call for full trend.

21. Just your best guess, if the health care system is changed, do you think the quality of [ITEM] will get (better), get (worse), or remain about the same?

9/12/09 - Summary Table

	Better	Worse	Same	No opinion
a. your health care	16	32	50	2
b. health care for most people	35	38	24	2

Trend:

a. your health care

	Better	Worse	Same	No opinion
9/12/09	16	32	50	2
8/17/09	19	33	47	2
6/21/09	16	31	50	3

Compare to: Under Clinton's plan, do you think the quality of the health care you receive will get better, get worse, or stay the same?

	Better	Worse	Same	No opinion
7/17/94	20	39	38	4
1/23/94	19	33	42	6
11/14/93	20	36	42	3
10/10/93	19	34	44	3
9/22/93	27	27	42	5
9/19/93	19	31	46	4

b. health care for most people

	Better	Worse	Same	No opinion
9/12/09	35	38	24	2
8/17/09	37	38	23	2

Compare to: Do you think the quality of health care for most Americans will get better, worse or stay the same?

	Better	Worse	Same	No opinion
11/14/93	39	27	29	4
10/10/93	39	29	30	3
9/22/93	50	19	25	5
9/19/93	36	29	31	4

22. And if the health care system is changed do you think [ITEM] will get (better), get (worse), or remain about the same?

9/12/09 - Summary Table

	Better	Worse	Same	No opinion
a. (IF INSURED) Your health insurance coverage	11	37	49	2
b. (IF NOT INSURED) Your ability to get health insurance	51	13	35	2
c. Your health care costs	20	40	38	3

Trend:

a. (IF INSURED) Your health insurance coverage

Better	Worse	Same	No opinion
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9/12/09	11	37	49	2
8/17/09	14	40	43	3

b. (IF NOT INSURED) Your ability to get health insurance

	Better	Worse	Same	No opinion
9/12/09	51	13	35	2
8/17/09	56	10	30	4

c. Your health care costs

	Better	Worse	Same	No opinion
9/12/09	20	40	38	3
8/17/09	19	41	37	3

23. Would you support or oppose having the government create a new health insurance plan to compete with private health insurance plans? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	----- Support -----			----- Oppose -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
9/12/09	55	33	22	42	11	31	3
8/17/09	52	33	19	46	11	35	2
6/21/09	62	NA	NA	33	NA	NA	5

24. (IF OPPOSE/NO OPINION FOR A GOVERNMENT PLAN) What if this government-sponsored plan was available only to people who cannot get health insurance from a private insurer - in that case, would you support or oppose it?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
9/12/09	47	47	6

23/24 NET

	----- Support -----			Oppose	No opinion
	NET	At first	Now do		
9/12/09	76	55	21	24	*

25. Say health care reform does NOT include the option of a government-sponsored health plan - in that case would you support or oppose the rest of the proposed changes to the health care system being developed by (Congress) and (the Obama administration)?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
9/12/09	50	42	8

26. Which comes closer to the way you feel: government reform of the nation's health care system (is necessary to control costs and expand coverage), or government action on health care (will do more harm than good)? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	----- Necessary -----			-- More harm than good --			
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	No opinion
9/13/09	53	36	17	44	14	30	3
8/17/09	51	35	16	46	10	35	3
6/21/09	58	34	23	39	15	24	3

27. (Do you think it's possible to reform the health care system in a way that people who have coverage now can keep it without any changes if they want to), or (do you think health care reform will require everyone to make changes, whether they want to or not)?

	Reform possible without changes	Reform will require changes	No opinion
9/12/09	49	48	3
6/21/09	38	58	4

28. Would you support or oppose a law that requires all Americans to have health insurance, either getting it from work or buying it on their own?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
9/12/09	51	47	2
6/21/09	49	47	4

29. Do you think the health care plan creates too much government involvement in the nation's health care system, not enough government involvement or about the right amount?

	Too much	Not enough	Right amount	No opinion
9/12/09	45	12	41	1

30. Medicare is the government health insurance program for people 65 and over. Do you think health care reform would (strengthen) the Medicare program, (weaken) Medicare or have no effect on it?

	Strengthen	Weaken	No effect	No opinion
9/12/09	22	40	32	6

31. Do you think Obama and the Democrats in Congress should try to change the health care reform bill so some Republicans in Congress will also support it, or should they try to pass health care reform without Republican support?

	Try to change it to get Republican support	Try to pass it without Republican support	No opinion
9/12/09	71	25	4

32. Do you think the Republicans in Congress are or are not making a good faith effort to cooperate with Obama and the Democrats on health care reform?

	Are	Are not	No opinion
9/12/09	31	62	7

33. Do you think Obama and the Democrats in Congress are or are not making a good faith effort to cooperate with the Republicans on health care reform?

	Are	Are not	No opinion
9/12/09	50	44	6

34. Who do you blame more for the negative tone of the health care debate - (Obama and the Democrats in Congress), (the Republicans in Congress), or both sides equally?

	Obama and Democrats	Republicans	Both equally	Other (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
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9/12/09 17 31 49 1 1 1

35. Say a candidate for Congress supports the proposed changes to the health care system being developed by (Congress) and (the Obama administration). Would that make you more likely to [support] that candidate for Congress, more likely to [oppose] that candidate, or wouldn't it make much difference in your vote? (IF SUPPORT/OPPOSE) Are you much more likely to support/oppose that candidate or somewhat more?

	---- Support ----			---- Oppose ----			No difference	No opinion
	NET	Much	Smwt	NET	Smwt	Much		
9/12/09	22	12	10	23	7	17	54	1
8/17/09	23	14	9	32	6	26	43	2

36. Would you support or oppose a law limiting the amount of money someone can collect if they win a lawsuit after being injured by bad medical care?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
9/12/09	63	34	3
6/21/09	57	42	2

37. In order to help pay for health care reform, would you support or oppose a federal tax on insurance companies when they sell high-cost health insurance policies with unusually high levels of benefits, known as Cadillac policies?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
9/12/09	45	48	7

38. (IF SUPPORT TAXING INSURANCE COMPANIES) What if insurance companies respond to this tax by raising the price of those policies - in that case would you support or oppose this tax?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
9/12/09	49	50	1

37/38 NET

	Support	----- Oppose -----			No opinion
	NET	At first	Now do		
9/12/09	23	71	48	23	7

39. Just your best guess, do you think health care reform would increase the federal budget deficit, decrease it, or have no effect? (IF INCREASE) Do you think it would increase it a great deal or somewhat?

	----- Increase -----			Decrease	No effect	No opinion
	NET	Grt deal	Somewhat			
9/12/09	65	39	26	9	24	2

40-42 held for release.

END