

Prescription Drugs: Potent Politically

Conventional wisdom portrays prescription drugs as a potent issue mainly among the nation's elderly. But a new ABC News poll suggests that it's in another group – middle-aged Americans – where drug coverage may have its greatest political clout.

That's because it's at age 45, not 65, where differences appear. Most younger adults don't take prescription drugs regularly, and don't rate the issue particularly high in their presidential vote. But people age 45 and up are much more likely to do both those things.

Interest in the issue does peak among older Americans, age 61 and up. But it's also high among 45- to 60-year-olds – and it's middle-aged people who are the nation's most reliable voters. Exit poll data show that 60 percent of 45- to 64-year-olds voted in the 1996 presidential election, the highest turnout for any age group, by a large margin.

	Age 61+	Age 45-60	Age <45
Call prescription drugs "very important" in presidential vote	75%	64	46

POPULAR – While its importance varies by age, providing Medicare coverage for prescription drugs is broadly popular across age groups, as well as across political and ideological lines. Eighty-nine percent of Americans support it, and 72 percent say they'd support it even if it meant they'd have to pay more into the Medicare system.

TAKE TWO - One reason middle-aged and older Americans give the issue greater importance is that they're more likely than younger adults to take prescription drugs on a regular basis. Among people older than 60, nearly seven in 10 take drugs regularly; among people 45-60, it's 54 percent. Among younger people, just 23 percent do so.

	Age 61+	Age 45-60	Age <45
Take prescription drugs regularly	69%	54	23

That experience matters: Among regular users of prescription drugs, 67 percent call this a very important issue in their vote. But among those who take prescription drugs less often (or not at all), just 50 percent call it very important.

This poll also finds that women are more likely than men to call the prescription drug issue very important in their vote. That continues a pattern of women giving greater

importance than men to a broad array of issues. (Women also are more likely to take prescription drugs regularly; 48 percent do so, compared to 31 percent of men.)

UPPER HAND – Democrat Al Gore currently has the upper hand on this subject; 49 percent say they trust him to do a better job handling the issue of prescription drug benefits for the elderly, compared to 34 percent for George W. Bush. That's mainly because Republicans are less confident in Bush on this issue than Democrats are in Gore.

METHODOLOGY – This survey was conducted May 7-9 among a random national sample of 1,013 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Field work by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:
<http://www.abcnews.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>

Here are the full results:

4. How important will handling the issue of prescription drug benefits for the elderly be to you in deciding how to vote in the 2000 presidential election in November - very important, somewhat important, not too important or not important at all?

	---Important---		----Not important---		No
	Very	Somewhat	Not too	Not at all	opin.
5/9/00	56	28	10	5	1

5. (Asked of half sample) Which presidential candidate, (Gore) or (Bush), do you trust to do a better job handling the issue of prescription drug benefits for the elderly?

	Gore	Bush	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opin.
5/9/00	49	34	2	6	9

6. Would you support or oppose having the Medicare insurance program cover prescription drug expenses for senior citizens?

	Support	Oppose	No opin.
5/9/00	89	7	4

7. (Asked of those who support drug coverage in Q6) What if it meant you'd have to pay more into the Medicare system - in that case would you support or oppose having Medicare cover prescription drug expenses for senior citizens?

	Support	Oppose	No opin.
5/9/00	81	15	4

8. Do you personally take prescription drugs on a regular basis, or only occasionally?

	Regularly	Occasionally	Never (vol.)
5/9/00	40	45	15