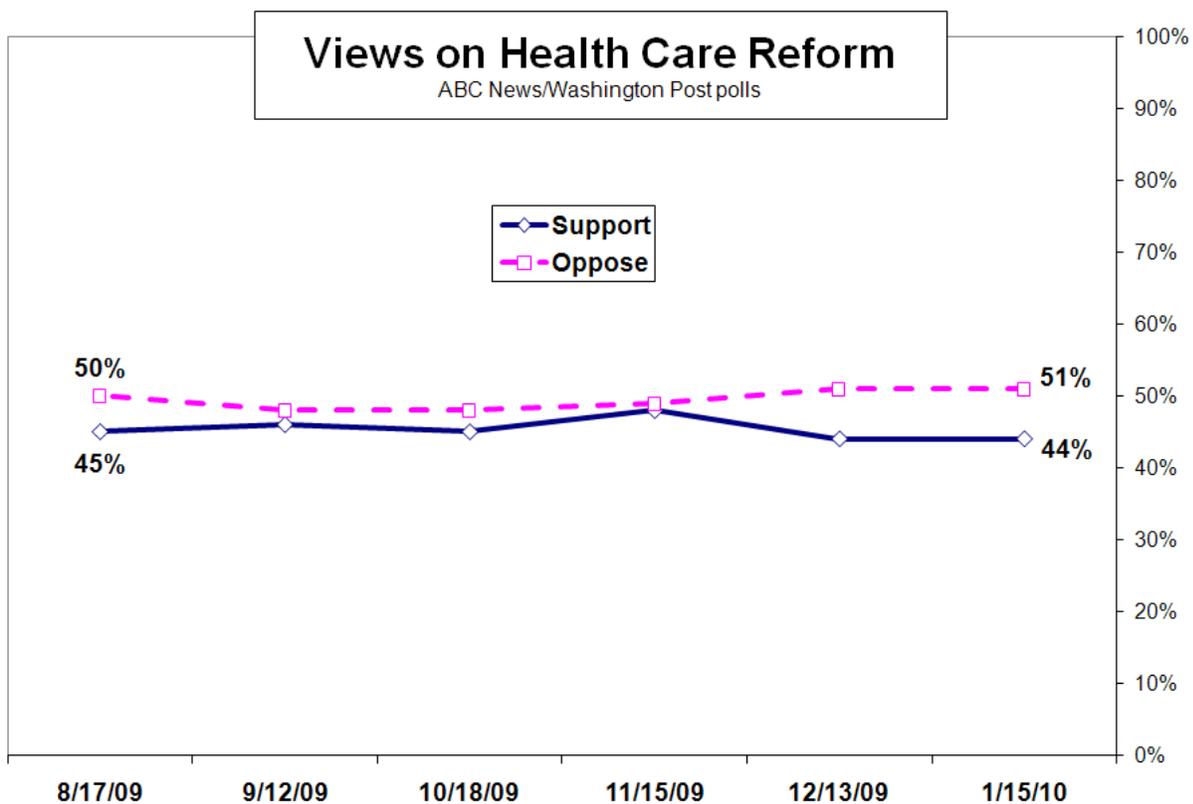


In the Health Care Sausage-Making, Public Attitudes Remain Unchanged

Six months of heated debate and messy legislative sausage-making have shifted almost no one's mind on health care reform: Bottom-line public attitudes today, tilting negative but not broadly so, are essentially the same as they've been since August.

Fifty-one percent of Americans oppose the proposed changes to the health care system being developed by the Obama administration and Congress. Forty-four percent are in favor, with the rest undecided. That's identical to what it was a month ago.

Indeed, despite the changing components of the plan, opposition has hovered in a narrow 3-point band in each of six ABC News/Washington Post polls since August, and support's been between 44 and 48 percent. At 51-44 percent, each today is a single point from its average, 50-45 percent.



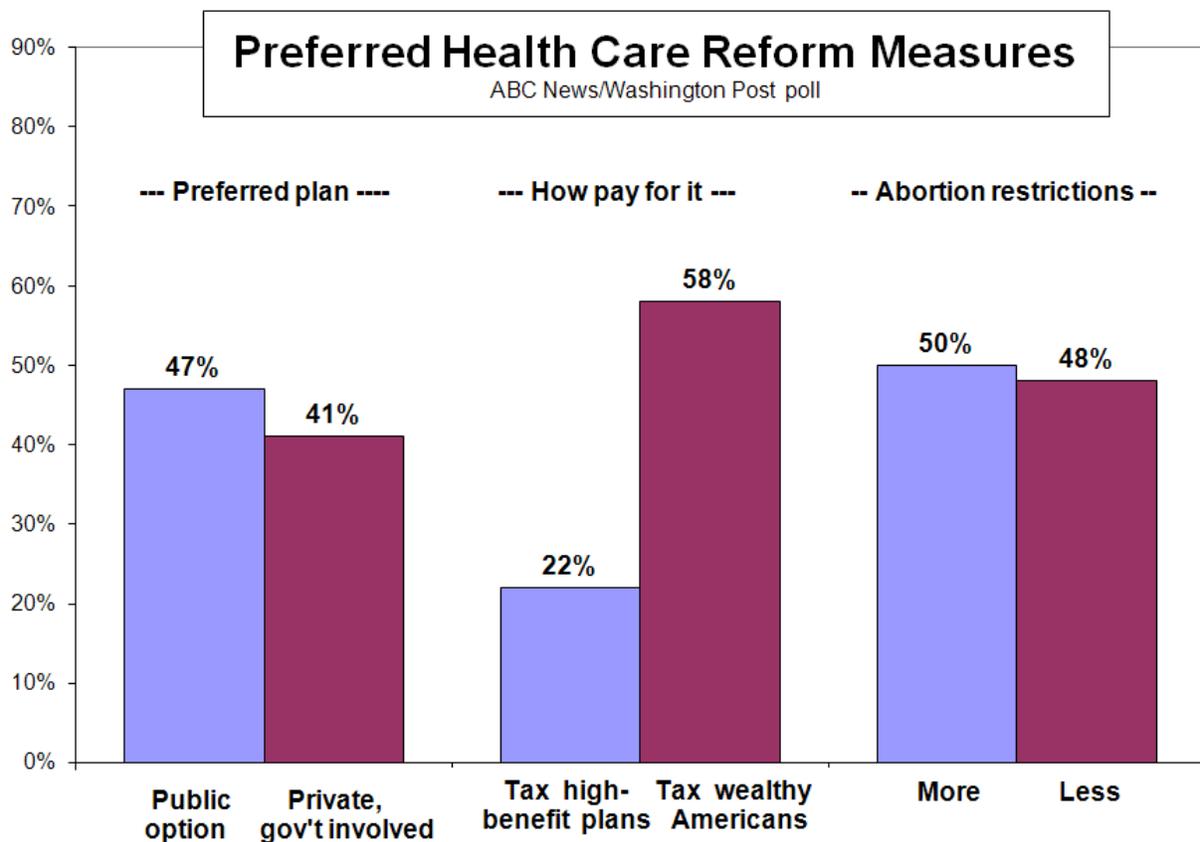
Nonetheless, in the last two readings more Americans have opposed than supported the measure, something that couldn't be said, giving polling tolerances, in the earlier polls. And what clearly

has lost ground is the intensity of sentiment among supporters. At its peak, in September and again in November, 30 percent of Americans “strongly” backed the proposed changes. With the plan still going through its many iterations that’s dropped to 22 percent, a new low. Substantially more, 39 percent, are strongly opposed, a number that’s held steadier.

With the Senate returning to Washington today, the intensity of opposition is one factor that may weigh on lawmakers up for re-election next fall. Twice as many Americans say they’d be much more apt to oppose a candidate who backed the plan, 24 percent, as to support one, 12 percent. Independents – swing voters in many contests – split about the same, 26 percent vs. 10 percent.

CHANGES and CONCERNS – Changes in the hopper as House and Senate Democrats hammer out their differences may not help. While there’s reportedly a compromise on taxing high-benefit health plans, Americans by 58-22 percent prefer higher income taxes on wealthier Americans instead. And a public option, widely reported as dead, gets slightly more support than the alternative, private plans with terms negotiated by the government – a 47-41 percent split.

The public divides evenly on a third point of contention, the level of restrictions on abortion coverage in health plans in which the government’s involved.



Like the bottom-line support, concerns about the plans are steady as well. Fifty-six percent think the new system would end up costing more than the current health care system – the opposite of

its intended effect. Fifty-three percent think their own health care costs would be higher. And just 38 percent think the quality of their care would improve. (Other elements of reform have been more attractive, such as covering the uninsured and prohibiting limitations on coverage for pre-existing conditions.)

STABLE – It appears that bottom-line views have been so stable since August because they’re based heavily on factors such as partisanship, ideology and attitudes on the appropriate role of government – all basic beliefs that tend not to change quickly.

Support for the plan peaks at 74 percent of Democrats, 71 percent of liberals and 70 percent of people who favor a larger government that provides more services. Opposition stands at 85, 74 and 67 percent, respectively, among Republicans, conservatives and people who favor a smaller, less active government. Nothing in the debate has changed these fundamentals.

Nonetheless, attitudes on reform do reflect a missed opportunity for President Obama. When he raised it as a top priority in April – at his peak of popularity overall – 57 percent of Americans approved of his handling of health care. That quickly subsided as details were advanced and the debate was engaged – 53 percent approval in June, 49 percent in July, 46 percent in August.

Today it’s 44 percent, matching its low last month, with 52 percent disapproving – numbers almost precisely matching views on the plan itself. And again intensity is against him: Many more strongly disapprove than strongly approve of the president’s work on health care reform. 43 percent vs. 24 percent.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Jan. 12-15, 2010, among a random national sample of 1,083 adults, including landline and cell-phone-only respondents, with an oversample of African Americans (weighted to their correct share of the population) for a total of 153 black 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).

1-25 previously released or held for release.

26. On another subject: 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
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
1/15/10	44	22	22	51	12	39	5
12/13/09	44	25	19	51	11	40	5
11/15/09	48	30	18	49	10	39	3

10/18/09	45	26	19	48	12	36	7
9/12/09	46	30	16	48	12	36	6
8/17/09	45	27	18	50	10	40	5

27. The plan could include a government insurance option only for people who can't get private insurance, the so-called public option. Or instead it could have the government negotiate with private insurers to have them offer these people insurance that meets government specifications. Which of these two approaches would you prefer - the public option or the alternative?

	Public option	Alternative	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
1/15/10	47	41	1	8	3

28. The plan could include (a tax on high-benefit health plans), or (a higher income tax on wealthier Americans). Which of these two approaches would you prefer?

	A tax on high-benefit health plans	Higher income tax on wealthier Americans	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
1/15/10	22	58	2	16	2

29. Insurance plans in which the government is involved could be forbidden from covering abortions. Or they could have an option for people to buy private coverage for abortions separately through these plans. Which of these two approaches would you prefer - the one that's more restrictive on abortion coverage or the one that's less so?

	More restrictive	NET	----Less restrictive--- Less	None (vol.)	No opinion
1/15/10	50	48	46	2	2

30. In the long run, do you think [ITEM] if (the changes that have been proposed become law) or if (the current system is left as it is now)?

1/15/10 - Summary Table

	Changes become law	Current system left as it is now	Same either way (vol.)	No opinion
a. Your own health care will cost you more	53	35	7	6
b. The quality of health care you receive will be better	38	50	7	5
c. The country's health care system overall will cost more	56	37	3	4

Trend:

a. Your own health care will cost you more

	Changes become law	Current system left as it is now	Same either way (vol.)	No opinion
1/15/10	53	35	7	6
12/13/09	53	33	6	8

b. The quality of health care you receive will be better

Changes	Current system	Same either	No
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	become law	left as it is now	way (vol.)	opinion
1/15/10	38	50	7	5
12/13/09	37	50	6	6

c. The country's health care system overall will cost more

	Changes become law	Current system left as it is now	Same either way (vol.)	No opinion
1/15/10	56	37	3	4
12/13/09	55	35	3	7

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

	Yes	No	No opinion
1/15/10	87	13	0
12/13/09	82	17	*
11/15/09	84	15	1
10/18/09	85	15	0
9/12/09	86	14	0
8/17/09	85	14	*
6/21/09	84	16	0
9/30/07	88	12	*
9/12/06	87	13	0
4/19/05	87	13	*
10/13/03	83	17	0
7/12/98	86	14	*
8/27/97	81	19	*
11/13/95	85	15	0
7/17/94	86	14	*
11/14/93	87	13	0
10/10/93	87	13	*

32. 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		
1/15/10	22	12	10	31	7	24	45	2
11/15/09	25	13	12	29	8	20	45	1
9/12/09	22	12	10	23	7	17	54	1
8/17/09	23	14	9	32	6	26	43	2

33-43 previously released or held for release.

END