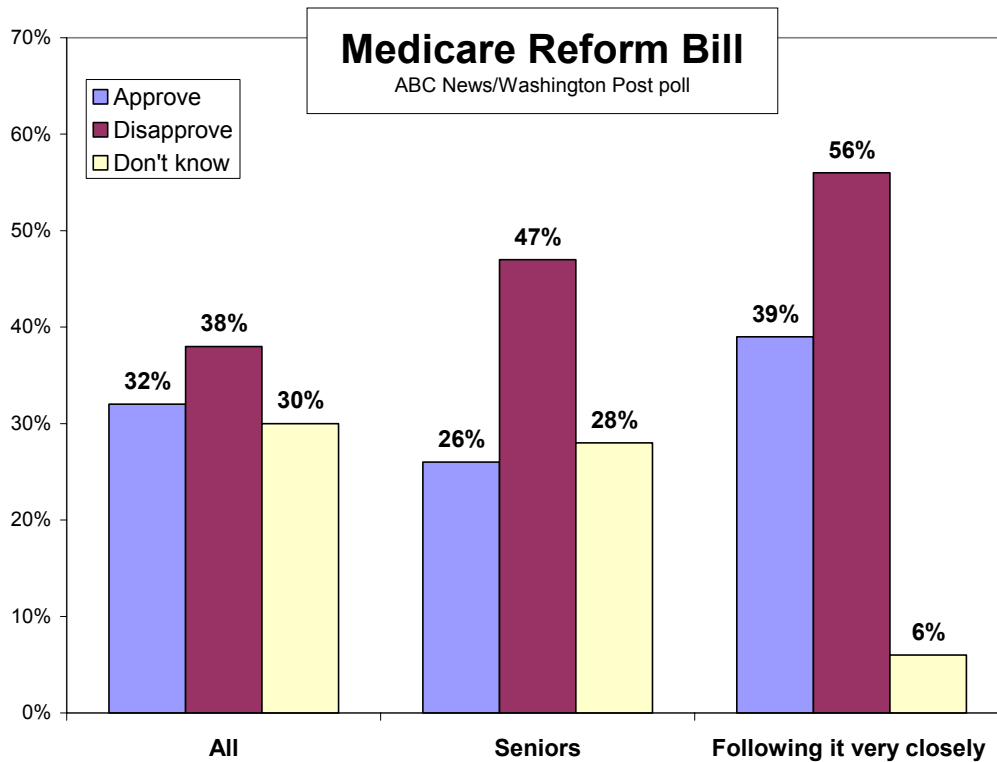


Muted Reception Greet Medicare Reform Bill

Americans are casting a skeptical eye on the Medicare changes signed into law by George W. Bush: More disapprove than approve of the legislation, with doubts peaking among senior citizens and among those who've been following the issue most closely.

Among all Americans, 38 percent disapprove of the Medicare changes, slightly more than the 32 percent who approve (many, 30 percent, are withholding judgment). But it's a broader spread – 47-26 percent disapproval – among senior citizens, and a similar 46-32 percent disapproval in the next age group, 55- to 64-year olds.

Moreover, disapproval is highest among the one-sixth of the public – many seniors among them – who've been following the issue most closely. Most people in this highest-attention group, 56 percent, disapprove of the plan; indeed many of them disapprove “strongly.” People who know more about it, this result suggests, like it less.



PARTISAN – There’s a partisan political aspect to views of the plan; it’s far more popular among Republicans (49 percent approve, while 23 percent disapprove) than among others. Democrats disapprove by 52-22 percent; independents, by 41-30 percent.

It follows, then, that the legislation has not delivered any immediate political boost to the president. His overall job approval rating in this poll is 53 percent; not up and if anything slightly down from its recent level (57 percent last month and 56 percent in October).

	Medicare changes		
	Approve	Disapprove	No opin.
All	32%	38	30
Following it very closely (17%)	39	56	6
65+	26	47	28
55-64	32	46	23
Republicans	49	23	28
Independents	30	41	30
Democrats	22	52	26

The intensity of views on the Medicare changes underscores the public’s response. Just seven percent of Americans “strongly” approve, while nearly three times as many, 19 percent, strongly disapprove. Strong disapproval rises to 30 percent of seniors and, as noted, 45 percent of those who’ve been following the issue closely. Fourteen percent of Republicans strongly approve – but twice as many Democrats strongly disapprove.

ATTENTION – Just over half of Americans, 52 percent, have been closely following news about the Medicare changes; 17 percent have been watching “very closely.” Close attention peaks among senior citizens – 79 percent of them have been closely following the issue, 36 percent very closely. Young adults, farthest away from such cares, have been paying the least attention.

	Following the Medicare issue		
	Closely (NET)	“Very” closely	Not closely
All	52%	17	47
Age 65+	79	36	20
Age 55-64	65	26	35
Age 18-34	33	7	67

The \$400 billion plan includes Medicare’s first prescription drug benefit, starting in 2006; critics say the benefit is inadequate. The public’s tepid response to this plan compares unfavorably to the results of an ABC News poll in July, when three in four Americans backed the idea of a prescription drug benefit for seniors.

MONEY MATTERS – In addition to Republicans, approval of the law peaks, at 45 percent, among people with household incomes of more than \$100,000 a year; 29 percent in this group disapprove. (This even though the legislation raises some premiums for

higher-income Medicare recipients.) In lower-income households, 31 percent approve of the changes, while 41 percent disapprove.

There's also something of gender gap. While 37 percent of men approve of the Medicare changes, 29 percent of women agree; 43 percent of women disapprove, compared with 32 percent of men. Among other factors, women live longer, and they're also more apt to be Democrats.

Polls, some sponsored by groups with an interest in the debate, have had varying results on the Medicare changes. This one avoided language describing specifics of the legislation, instead simply asking respondents if they'd been following news "about the changes in the Medicare program that were voted on by Congress," and whether they approve or disapprove of those changes.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News poll was conducted by telephone Dec. 3-7, 2003, among a random national sample of 1,029 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by David Morris.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:
http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/Poll_Vault/Poll_Vault.html

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Results follow:

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

	-----Approve-----			-----Disapprove-----			No opin.
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	
12/7/03	53	32	21	40	27	13	7
11/16/03	57	34	23	39	28	11	4
10/29/03	56	30	26	42	29	13	2
10/13/03	53	33	20	43	29	13	4
9/30/03	54	34	20	44	29	15	2
9/13/03	58	35	23	40	27	14	2
9/7/03	56	34	22	41	28	13	4
8/11/03	59	37	22	37	23	14	4
7/10/03	59	35	24	38	25	13	3
6/22/03	68	45	23	29	18	11	4
4/30/03	71	50	22	26	9	17	3
4/16/03	74	52	22	23	14	9	3
4/9/03	77	58	19	20	14	6	4
4/3/03	71	54	16	25	19	7	4
3/23/03	68	NA	NA	27	NA	NA	4
3/20/03	67	NA	NA	28	NA	NA	5
3/2/03	62	38	23	35	22	13	4
2/23/03	60	NA	NA	34	NA	NA	6
2/9/03	64	42	21	34	20	14	3
2/1/03	62	41	21	34	22	13	4

1/28/03	62	43	19	36	23	13	2
1/27/03	59	39	21	37	22	15	4
1/20/03	59	36	23	38	22	16	2
12/15/02	66	37	28	32	20	12	2
11/4/02 LV	67	45	23	31	20	12	1
11/3/02 LV	67	45	22	32	20	12	1
11/2/02 LV	67	47	20	32	23	9	1
10/27/02 All	67	39	28	29	16	13	4
10/27/02 LV	68	47	21	30	16	14	3
9/26/02	67	42	25	30	18	12	3
9/8/02	71	42	28	27	15	12	3
7/28/02	69	39	31	28	14	14	3
7/15/02	72	42	31	25	13	12	2
6/17/02	74	42	32	22	13	9	4
6/9/02	77	41	36	20	11	9	3
5/19/02	76	48	28	22	13	8	3
4/21/02	78	47	31	20	10	9	2
3/28/02	79	49	30	18	10	8	3
3/10/02	82	52	30	16	7	9	2
1/27/02	83	56	27	14	7	7	3
12/19/01	86	64	22	12	6	6	2
11/27/01	89	69	21	9	5	4	1
11/6/01	89	65	24	9	4	5	2
10/9/01	92	76	16	6	3	3	1
9/27/01	90	70	20	6	3	3	4
9/13/01	86	63	23	12	6	5	2
9/9/01	55	26	29	41	22	20	3
8/12/01	61	28	33	31	17	14	8
7/30/01	59	28	30	38	22	17	3
6/3/01	55	27	28	40	22	18	6
4/22/01	63	33	30	32	16	16	5
3/25/01	58	NA	NA	33	NA	NA	8
2/25/01	55	NA	NA	23	NA	NA	22

2. As you may know, Medicare is the government health insurance program for people 65 and over. How closely have you been following news about the changes in the Medicare program that were voted on by Congress late last month - very closely, somewhat closely, not too closely or not closely at all?

	-----Closely-----			-----Not closely-----			
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not too	Not at all	No opin.
12/7/03	52	17	35	47	23	24	*

3. Given what you know about it, do you approve or disapprove of the Medicare changes voted on by Congress last month? Do you approve/disapprove strongly or somewhat?

	-----Approve-----			-----Disapprove-----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	opin.
12/7/03	32	7	25	38	19	19	30

END