

Support for Obama’s “Health Reform Proposals” Drops and Majorities of Public Now Agree with Many of the Criticisms

Equal numbers now support and oppose the president’s proposals

New York, NY — October 21, 2009 — A new Harris Poll is bad news for the White House. Support and opposition for the president’s “proposals for health care reform” are now tied 45% to 45%. A month ago, a modest 49% to 41% plurality supported them.

The poll provides plenty of information to explain the strength of opposition to the president’s plans for reform. A very large number of people agree with the many different criticisms that have been made of the Democratic bills now being debated on Capitol Hill. Approximately two-thirds of all adults believe that we should reduce costs before expanding coverage, that the reforms will bring higher taxes, and that they would result in a government-run system.

These are some of the results of *The Harris Poll* of 2,293 adults surveyed online between October 5 and 12, 2009 by Harris Interactive.

Opposition increases

When President Obama was inaugurated, those who supported his “proposals for health care reform” outnumbered those who were opposed by more than two-to-one (50% to 20%). In Harris Polls in July and August, modest pluralities (of 42 and 49 percentage points respectively) supported his plans. Now for the first time as many people oppose as support them.

Health reform continues to be a deeply polarizing issue. Republicans oppose President Obama’s “proposals” by 79% to 14% (quotation marks are used because he is not committed to any one of the bills working their way through the Congress). Democrats support them by 75% to 16%, and Independents are split with 48% opposed, 44% in favor.

Agreement with criticisms of President Obama’s proposals

This Harris Poll asked people how strongly they agreed or disagreed with “eleven criticisms that have been made of the president’s health care proposals.” Majorities, from 51% to 68% agree with seven of them, and pluralities with another three. The results are striking, to say the least.

Approximately two-thirds of all adults agree that:

- “We should reduce the cost of health care before trying to provide insurance to more people,” by 68% to 23%.
- “The proposed reforms would result in higher taxes,” by 67% to 18%.
- “The proposed reform would result in a government-run health care system” by 65% to 22%.

Smaller majorities agree that:

- “The proposed reforms would reduce the choices many people now have,” by 55% to 32%;
- “Health insurance would be too expensive for many people to buy,” by 52% to 31%;
- “The proposed reforms would not be good for people like me,” by 51% to 31%;
- “The proposed reforms would make it harder for many people to get the care they need,” by 51% to 35%.

Pluralities also agree with two criticisms, that:

- “The proposed reforms would change the system too much when only minor changes are needed,” by 48% to 37%.
- “The proposed reforms would hurt Medicare,” by 45% to 30%.

On one criticism the public is divided with 43% agreement and 42% disagreeing is that “the system we have now is better than what the president is proposing.” A plurality disagreed with only one of the eleven criticisms, by 46% to 37%, that “the proposed reforms would create panels that would decide who should live and who should die.” But the remarkable finding here is that fully 37% believe this to be true.

Unsurprisingly, majorities of Republicans, agree with all eleven statements while most Democrats do not. Majorities of Independents agree with seven of the statements.

One word of caution

There is a tendency for some people to agree rather than disagree with statements presented to them. It should also be noted, after having been told that “these are some of the criticisms that have been made,” those surveyed were taken through the eleven criticisms without any statements in support of the proposals. It is possible that if similar questions were asked in a different way or a different context, the number agreeing with them might have been lower.

So what?

These Harris Poll results make dismal reading for the president, the Democrats and supporters of the Democratic reforms. Many commentators are somewhat confident that a reform bill will be passed as majorities of Democrats in both Houses, with or without any Republican votes, will vote for the final bill that emerges from the Conference Committee. However, if public opposition to the proposed reforms, and the very large number who agree with many of the criticisms, continue to grow, one wonders if some Democratic members of Congress, particularly the Blue Dog Democrats, will not support the bill that finally emerges.

TABLE 1
SUPPORT OR OPPOSE OBAMA’S REFORM PROPOSALS

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

Base: All Adults

	January	July	August	Sept	October
	%	%	%	%	%
Support (NET)	50	42	49	49	45
Support strongly	25	20	24	26	23
Support somewhat	26	21	25	23	22
Oppose (NET)	20	38	40	41	45
Oppose somewhat	9	12	11	13	14
Oppose strongly	12	27	29	29	31
Not sure	29	20	11	10	11

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 reforms?”

Base: All Adults

	Total	Party ID		
		Republican	Democrat	Independent
	%	%	%	%
Support (NET)	45	14	75	44
Strongly support	23	5	45	18
Somewhat support	22	10	29	26
Oppose (NET)	45	79	16	48
Somewhat oppose	14	17	9	16
Strongly oppose	31	62	7	31
Not sure	11	6	10	9

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

TABLE 3
AGREE/DISAGREE WITH SPECIFIC CRITICISMS OF THE PRESIDENT’S PROPOSALS

"These are some of the criticisms that have been made of the president’s health care proposals. Please say for each how strongly you agree or disagree with each."

Base: All Adults

		Strongly Agree	Some-what Agree	Some-what Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure	Totals	
							AGREE	DISAGREE
We should reduce the cost of health care before trying to provide insurance for people who don’t have it	%	42	26	12	11	9	68	23
The proposed reforms would result in higher taxes	%	45	22	9	9	15	67	18
The proposed reforms would result in a government-run health care system	%	42	23	12	10	13	65	22
The proposed reforms would reduce the choices many people now have	%	37	18	15	17	14	55	32
Health insurance would be too expensive for many people to buy	%	28	23	15	16	17	52	31
The proposed reforms would not be good for people like me	%	36	15	14	17	18	51	31
The proposed reforms would make it harder for many people to get the care they need	%	32	19	15	20	15	51	35
The proposed reforms would change the system too much when only minor changes are needed	%	28	20	15	22	14	48	37
The proposed reforms would hurt Medicare	%	27	18	14	16	25	45	30
The system we have now is better than what the president is proposing	%	27	16	16	26	14	43	42
The proposed reforms would create panels that would decide who should live and who should die	%	21	16	12	34	17	37	46

Notes:

1. Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.
2. Because this list only included “criticisms” and no arguments in favor of reform, it is possible that the numbers agreeing with these statements is somewhat inflated.

TABLE 4
AGREEMENT WITH CRITICISMS – BY PARTY

"These are some of the criticism that have been made of the president’s health care proposals. Please say for each how strongly you agree or disagree with each."

Base: All Adults

	Total	Party ID		
		Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
	%	%	%	%
We should reduce the cost of health care before trying to provide insurance for people who don’t have it	68	82	54	73
The proposed reforms would result in higher taxes	67	87	48	72
The proposed reforms would result in a government-run health care system	65	86	46	68
The proposed reforms would reduce the choices many people now have	55	82	30	60
Health insurance would be too expensive for many people to buy	52	72	34	55
The proposed reforms would not be good for people like me	51	77	30	52
The proposed reforms would make it harder for many people to get the care they need	51	78	29	52
The proposed reforms would change the system too much when only minor changes are needed	49	76	27	50
The proposed reforms would hurt Medicare	45	71	27	44
The system we have now is better than what the president is proposing	43	76	20	44
The proposed reforms would create panels that would decide who should live and who should die	37	60	22	36

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

Methodology

This Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States October 5 and 12, 2009 among 2,293 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.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

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