

Four in Ten Voters Dont See Either Obama or McCain Health Care Plan as Better for Them

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Among Those Who Do, Obama Has Only Modest Lead Over McCain

As part of the ongoing poll series, Debating Health: Election 2008, the Harvard Public Opinion Research Program at the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) and Harris Interactive® conducted a new survey focused on how voters think the presidential candidates' health care reform plans would affect them personally – rather than how they think the plans would affect the nation as a whole. The survey found that voters view the candidates' plans differently from this perspective.

Four in ten registered voters don't believe one candidate's health care plan would be better for them than the other. (This includes those who think there wouldn't be a difference for them between the plans (27%) and those who don't know if there would be (13%)). More voters think Senator Barack Obama's plan would be better for them than Senator John McCain's plan (33% vs. 27%). This survey was conducted September 17-21, 2008, by telephone among a national cross section of 935 registered voters in the United States.

"The most interesting finding is not that Obama does better than McCain (Obama has a more substantial lead in other polls about which candidate is better at handling health care), but that Obama's lead is narrower on these questions that focus on how the plans would affect them personally," says Humphrey Taylor, Chairman of The Harris Poll®. "These are not bad results for the McCain campaign."

Among several critical voting groups, many don't see one plan as offering an advantage to them over the other. Among independents, a majority either see no difference in whether the two candidates' health care plans would be better for them or don't know if there would be a difference (51%). Those who do feel there would be a difference are split in a statistical tie (26% for McCain vs. 24% for Obama). Among seniors, a near majority see no difference or don't know which plan would be better for them (46%), and those who do see a difference are also tied (27% vs. 27%).

"Ultimately independents are the key to winning this race, and at the moment they are up for grabs in terms of whether they see McCain's plan or Obama's plan as better for them," says Robert J. Blendon, Professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis at the Harvard School of Public Health.

On the other hand, certain segments do believe Obama's plan would serve them better. More women think Barack Obama's health care plan would be better for them personally than John McCain's plan (38% vs. 21%), even though a large share also thinks there would be no difference between the plans or doesn't know if there would be (41%). By comparison, men are tied even among those who think there would be a difference between the plans (29% vs. 32%). Thus, women appear to be driving Obama's current lead on this question. The uninsured are also more likely to think Obama's health care plan will be better for them (53% vs. 26%), as are the disabled (37% vs. 22%).

Obama's plan leads the most on the issue of providing insurance coverage. Those who are uninsured believe Obama's plan would be more likely to provide them with coverage (45% vs. 14%). And, people who are currently insured believe that they would be more likely to be protected from losing their insurance under Obama's plan (31% vs. 19%).

Obama has a smaller lead with respect to views of the cost and quality of health care under his plan. More people think Obama's plan would require lower payments from them (27% vs. 19%) and would deliver better quality of care for them (27% vs. 21%). But, the plans come out equally in terms of how long it would take to get an appointment with their doctor (19% vs. 18%) and how much they would pay in taxes (33% vs. 32%).

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