

Pennsylvania 2016 Pre-Election Poll on Policy and Governance



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PA Opinions on healthcare reform are mixed

Summary: Just 39% of Pennsylvanians have a favorable view of healthcare reform. These views, along with Pennsylvanians' priorities in reforming healthcare, are sharply divided along political party lines.

Healthcare reform thus promises to remain a politically charged issue in the 2016 elections and beyond.

Background

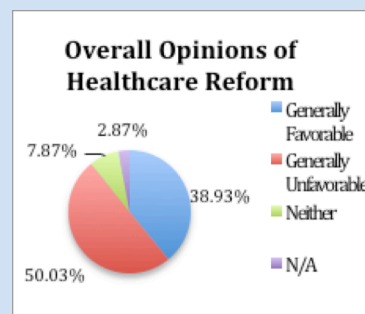
As residents of a populous and politically important state, Pennsylvanians' opinions on healthcare reform and the Affordable Care Act (ACA) hold obvious value for policymakers and analysts alike, particularly in advance of the November 2016 Presidential elections.

Despite being signed into law more than six years ago, the ACA, also known as ObamaCare, remains a highly political issue. Because of the politicized nature of the debate, opinions of the controversial law — which Republicans have repeatedly threatened to repeal or significantly change since its inception — in national surveys appear tightly linked to respondents' political ideology.

On the eve of the November elections, in the run-up to which healthcare reform remains a central issue, we seek to examine attitudes toward healthcare reform among Pennsylvanians, broken down by demographic variables including race, age, education level, and zip code, as well as party identification, as an indicator of perceptions

and trends nationwide. In this research brief, we explore factors influencing views on healthcare reform, and the degree of polarization of attitudes to the healthcare law among Pennsylvanians.

The survey data consist of responses from 660 randomly selected adult Pennsylvania residents. Each respondent was asked the following two questions about healthcare: "Given what you know about the healthcare reform signed into law in 2010, also known as the Affordable Care Act or ObamaCare, do you have a generally favorable or unfavorable opinion of it?" and "Is it more important for the government to reduce the cost of health care, or make sure that all citizens have health insurance coverage?"



Results

Mirroring responses to the January 2016 Kaiser Health Tracking poll surveying respondents across the US, the majority of Pennsylvania residents surveyed had a negative view of the ACA. Overall, 38.93% of Pennsylvanians expressed a favorable opinion, 7.87% a neutral opinion, and 50.03% a negative opinion about healthcare reform.

In response to the second question, those surveyed were roughly evenly divided on whether the government's main healthcare priority should be to ensure health coverage for all citizens (40%) versus reducing the cost of healthcare (38%); while 10% deemed both priorities equally important.

Subgroup Analysis

Opinions to the two healthcare poll questions vary greatly along demographic category (particularly race) and political affiliation. A significant majority of Republicans (86.06%) and

reported an unfavorable opinion of healthcare reform, while 77.56% of Democrats held a favorable opinion of healthcare reform. Independents were more evenly divided, with 40.15% expressing generally favorable views, and 51.09% expressing generally unfavorable views.

Opinions on the government's healthcare priorities were similarly split along party lines. More Republicans (54.63%) and Libertarians (47.37%) felt it was more important to reduce the cost of healthcare than guarantee universal coverage (20.98% and 26.32%, respectively). Among Democrats, the split was reversed – 63.26% believed coverage for all is most important, compared with 23.72% who believe reducing the cost of healthcare is top priority.

Other notable trends include:

- Those with the lowest income levels (below \$40,000) had the least favorable view of healthcare reform, while those in the \$130-140,000/year income bracket expressed the highest levels of approval.
- Respondents in the highest income bracket (over \$150,000 annual household income) were least concerned with reducing the cost of healthcare; in general, households making over \$90,000 were most concerned with ensuring all citizens have health insurance.
- The majority (68.48%) of Pennsylvanians who believe it is more important for the government to ensure healthcare coverage have a favorable view of the ACA, while most Pennsylvanians (70.28%) who feel the priority should be reducing the cost of healthcare have an unfavorable view.
- Women were slightly more likely to approve of healthcare reform than men (43.5% versus 36.94%); while the older the respondent, the

more likely they were to have a positive opinion of healthcare reform.

- Non-white Pennsylvanians -- most notably African-Americans (75%) -- were almost twice as likely (66.67%) than their white counterparts (37.83%) to view healthcare reform favorably. 81.4% of African-American respondents considered universal coverage more important than reducing costs, while white respondents (40.56%) considered cost reduction a priority over coverage for all (38.81%) by a slim margin.
- Approval of healthcare reform, and the prioritization of universal coverage over cost reduction increased progressively with education level, nearly doubling from high school diploma to graduate school in both categories.
- Pennsylvanians from the Democratic Northeast, Southeast, and Southwestern regions of the state had the highest approval ratings of healthcare reform, and prioritization of universal healthcare coverage.

Conclusion

Pennsylvanians' opinions on healthcare are highly polarized. Opinions vary dramatically with changing income level, education level, zip code, and more strikingly, political affiliation. Interestingly, race is the strongest predictor of opinions of healthcare reform. Furthermore, non-whites, the most educated, the wealthiest, and Democrats were far more likely to value universalization of coverage over reducing healthcare costs.

Analyzing opinions in Pennsylvania, a politically important state, can serve as a guidepost for designing healthcare policies that will satisfy different categories of voters on the politically charged issue of reform.

Methodology

Data consist of responses from 660 randomly selected adult Pennsylvania residents, who participated in the School of Public Affairs' Pennsylvania Pre-election Poll on Policy and Governance. This was an omnibus survey administered by telephone through the Center for Survey Research at Penn State Harrisburg between August 18 and October 15, 2016. The Center employed a dual-frame design consisting of both landline and cell phone samples, with 60.8% of respondents interviewed via cell phone and 39.2% interviewed via landline. The survey cooperation rates for the landline portion and cell portion of the sample were 73.4% and 60.1%, respectively. Responses were weighted by demographic criteria to enhance representativeness. Margin of error is +/- 4.0 percentage points with 95% degree of confidence.

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