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Health Care Helps Republicans in New Jersey

While President Obama's support among New Jersey Democrats remains strong, Republicans and independents have grown more wary of both the president and plans for health-care reform. According to the latest results from Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind, only 1-in-3 New Jersey voters (33%) say that the health-care reforms being proposed will benefit them and their families. Nearly half (46%) say that they would be worse off if the reforms pass, up substantially from 34% earlier in the summer, while those who say they're unsure how reform might affect them declined 10 points to 21% from 31% earlier in the summer.

"Nothing happened to change the minds of people who were already in favor of reform," said Dan Cassino, a political scientist and survey analyst at Fairleigh Dickinson, "but many people who weren't sure have turned decisively against it." In fact, 41% of likely voters now say they would instruct their member of Congress to vote against a health-care reform bill, while 37% say that they would ask their representative to support it.

In another indicator of voters' apprehension in the health-care debate, 42% say that the reforms would be bad for America. However, 44% of voters say that the reforms would be good for America regardless of how it impacts them. That compares to the 33% who say reform would benefit them personally: leaving 11% who believe that reform will be good for the country, but bad for them personally, a group evenly composed of Republicans, Democrats and independents.

While President Obama and his attempts to reform the American health-care system meet with increased skepticism, 56% of New Jersey voters say that they approve of the job Obama is doing as president, down from 61% in June. The percentage of Democrats approving of the President is stable (88), but 7-in-10 Republicans now say that they disapprove of the president, a jump of 11 points. His support is also substantially worse among independents: just 40% approve of the job he's doing, down from 52% at the start of the summer.

"It's not that the health-care debate is hurting the Democrats. It's that the health-care reforms have helped Republicans by giving them a rallying point," said Cassino. "The main impact of the health-care debate has been to reassert partisan divisions, turning Republican voters against Obama."

For the first time in Obama's Presidency, as many, if not more, New Jersey voters say the country is going in the wrong direction (46%) as think that it's on the right track (44%). This is another change driven by increasing disapproval among Republicans and independents.

"Polarization has been the norm in American politics for the last 15 years," said Cassino. "And these results show that the next few years aren't likely to be any different."

The survey also finds that voters' views of health-care reform vary significantly depending on their attentiveness. For example, among the least attentive voters, a majority (52%) say that they would be worse off if reform passed; only 20% say that they would be better off. But the most attentive voters split almost evenly on the issue (38%-41%). Similarly, the most attentive voters are almost twice as likely to say that the country will be better off if reforms are passed as those who are the least informed (48% vs. 27%). In the most striking difference, 46% of those who are the most attentive say they would instruct their member of Congress to vote for reforms; only 19% of the least informed say they want their representative to vote for it.

"The arguments over health-care reform have apparently swayed many attentive citizens," said Cassino. "But the rest of that battle may be fought over people who don't always pay attention."

That group remains far from convinced that reform will help them. It suggests that the White House has a long way to go and a lot of work ahead of it on this issue," Cassino concluded.

The Fairleigh Dickinson University poll of 715 likely voters statewide was conducted by telephone from August 24, 2009, through August 30, 2009, and has a margin of error of +/- 4 percentage points.

Tables, questions, and methodology available on the web at: <http://publicmind.fdu.edu>
Radio actuality line: (201) 692-2846. For more information, please call (201) 692-7032.

Methodology, Questions, and Tables

The most recent survey by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind was conducted by telephone from August 24, 2009 through August 30, 2009 using a randomly selected sample of 715 likely voters statewide. The margin of error for 715 randomly selected respondents is +/- 4 percentage points. Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error. This kind of error, which cannot be measured, arises from a number of factors including, but not limited to, non-response (eligible individuals refusing to be interviewed), question wording, the order in which questions are asked, and variations among interviewers. PublicMind interviews are conducted by professionally trained interviewers use a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system. Random selection is achieved by computerized random-digit dialing. This technique gives every person with a land-line phone number (including those with unlisted numbers) an equal chance of being selected. Results are mathematically weighted to match known demographics.

US1: In your opinion, do you believe that the country is moving in the right direction or do you believe it has gotten off on the wrong track?

	All	Men	Women	June	April	March	Jan
Right direction	44%	44	45	49	51	51	34
Wrong track	46%	49	43	41	37	37	52
Unsure/Refused	10%	6	11	11	11	12	13

Right/wrong direction trend

	July	Apr	Mar	Jan.	Oct. 2008
Right direction	49%	51%	51%	34%	13%
Wrong track	41%	37%	37%	52%	78%
Unsure/Refused	11%	11%	12%	13%	9%

US2: In general, do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President?

	All	Party			Race		Ideology		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	White	Non-white	Lib	Mod	Cons
Approve	56%	88	40	20	48	88	86	61	29
Disapprove	36%	8	48	70	43	8	9	31	62
Unsure	8%	4	12	10	9	4	5	8	8

Obama approval, previous measures

	June	April	March	Jan.*	June Party		
					Dem	Ind	Rep
Approve	61	66	66	72	86	52	28
Disapprove	29	22	21	10	9	30	59
Unsure/Refused	10	12	13	18	5	19	13

*January question asked how Obama was handling his transition to the presidency. Question US3 held for release

US3. Do you think you (and your family living there) will be better or worse off with the health care reforms that President Obama is currently proposing?									
		Age				Party			July
	All	18-29	30-44	45-59	60+	Dem	Ind	Rep	
Yes, better	33%	45	40	31	29	57	22	6	35%
No, worse	46%	35	42	51	46	17	55	83	34%
Don't know	21%	20	18	18	26	26	23	11	31%

US3. Do you think you (and your family living there) will be better or worse off with the health care reforms that President Obama is currently proposing?				
		Knowledge Scale		
	All	0	1	2
Yes, better	33%	20	35	38
No, worse	46%	52	46	41
Don't know	21%	28	19	21

US4. Regardless of how it impacts you, do you think the country will be better or worse off with the health care reforms that President Obama is currently proposing?									
		Age				Party			
	All	18-29	30-44	45-59	60+	Dem	Ind	Rep	
Yes, better	44%	58	50	43	37	70	32	14	
No, worse	42%	27	38	45	45	14	49	78	
Don't know	14%	16	12	12	18	16	19	8	

US4. Regardless of how it impacts you, do you think the country will be better or worse off with the health care reforms that President Obama is currently proposing?				
		Knowledge Scale		
	All	0	1	2
Yes, better	44%	27	47	48
No, worse	42%	51	41	39
Don't know	14%	22	12	13

US5. Would you advise your member of Congress to vote for or against a health care reform bill when they return to Washington in September, or do you not have an opinion?									
		Age				Party			
	All	18-29	30-44	45-59	60+	Dem	Ind	Rep	
For	37%	46	44	37	32	62	28	8	
Against	41%	27	37	45	44	12	48	79	
Unsure/Refused	22%	27	19	18	24	26	24	13	

US5. Would you advise your member of Congress to vote for or against a health care reform bill when they return to Washington in September, or do you not have an opinion?				
		Knowledge Scale		
	All	0	1	2
For	37%	19	39	46
Against	41%	47	41	38
Unsure/Refused	22%	34	19	16

Note: The poll also included two objective political knowledge questions, asking respondents to identify the position held by Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, and to identify which political party is most in favor of healthcare reform. About 1 in 6 respondents answered both questions correctly, and another 1 in 6 was unable to answer either. This scale of knowledge about the American political system strongly correlated with views on healthcare reform.

Do you happen to know what position John Roberts holds in government? [Open-ended]					
		Obama Approval		Party	
	All	Approve	Disapprove	Dem	Ind Rep
Anything relating to Chief Justice or Supreme Court	20%	19	23	17	29 21
Incorrect/DK/Ref	80%	81	77	83	71 79

And which party would you say is more in favor of healthcare reform?								
		Age				Party		
	All	18-29	30-44	45-59	60+	Dem	Ind	Rep
Democratic	80	70	86	86	72	87	76	74
Republican	6	19	4	3	8	3	4	11
DK/Refused	14	11	10	11	20	10	20	14

Two Question Objective Political Knowledge Scale					
		Obama Approval		Right/Wrong Track	
	All	Approve	Disapprove	Right	Wrong
0 right	16%	13	20	11	20
1 right	67%	68	66	68	67
2 right	17%	19	14	21	13

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