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2020 election survey: Public option is most popular health reform

Les Masterson - Last updated: Sep. 23, 2019

Most Americans agree that health care is one of the most pressing issues in the 2020 presidential election. However, there is a sharp divide on how to improve [health care](#).

In a new survey of 500 people (Democrats -- 35%; Republicans -- 35%; Independents -- 27%), Insure.com found that Americans are itching to vote. We found that 89% of respondents plan to vote in 2020, including 4% who haven't voted before. Ninety-five percent of Republicans and 94% of Democrats say they expect to vote. That's compared to 81% of Independents.

Health care is a critical issue in the 2020 presidential race. In terms of importance, 38% rated health care as a 5 (most important) and 37% chose 4. Another 20% rated it as a 3. Only 6% gave it only a 1 or 2.

Democrats are more likely to consider health care an important issue. Eighty-five percent of Democrats rated health care a 5 or 4 in terms of importance. Republicans also believe the topic is an important election issue -- 75% of Republicans ranked it a 5 or 4. However, a smaller portion (68%) of Independents ranked it a 5 or 4.

When asked about the most important health care issue for the 2020 presidential race, reducing health insurance cost was number one for Democrats, Republicans and Independents. The results show that any health care reform plan needs to tackle cutting health costs.

Here are the overall results:

- Reducing health insurance cost -- 40%
- Improving health care quality -- 16%
- Medicare for all -- 16%
- Access to health insurance -- 14%
- Repealing the Affordable Care Act (ACA) -- 8%
- Strengthening/protecting the ACA -- 6%

We found consistent support for cutting health insurance costs, but the political parties differ on other health issues. Here are the top three health care issues by party:

Democrats

1. Reducing health insurance cost -- 33%
2. Medicare for all -- 22%
3. Access to health insurance -- 21%

Republicans

1. Reducing health insurance cost -- 47%
2. Improving health care quality -- 19%
3. Repealing the ACA -- 18%

Independents

1. Reducing health insurance cost -- 38%
2. Medicare for all -- 20%
3. Improving health care quality -- 19%

No Democrats surveyed and only 5% of Independents support repealing the ACA. Our findings show there's still Republican support for going back to health insurance before the health law.

So, even though Republicans on Capitol Hill have moved on from repealing the ACA, one-fifth of Republicans surveyed said wiping out the law remains their number one health care issue.

Public option, Medicare for all has support

Democratic candidates for president have been debating the best health care plan. Medicare for all has gotten most of the publicity, but Insure.com found a public option is the most popular among respondents. A public option would keep private insurance in place, but allow people to choose a government plan if they want it.

Candidates like Sens. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Bernie Sanders (I-VT) back a Medicare for all plan. That proposal would eliminate private health insurance and replace it with government health plans. Meanwhile, Kamala Harris' (D-CA) Medicare for all plan would keep private insurance. Harris' plan would eliminate employer-sponsored health insurance and replace it with heavily-regulated Medicare plans offered by private insurers -- similar to Medicare Advantage.

Here are the full results:

- Public option -- 28%
- Medicare for all (only government health plan -- no private health insurance) -- 21%
- Medicare for all (private insurers offer Medicare Advantage-type plans) -- 21%

- Repeal the Affordable Care Act and go back to health insurance before the ACA -- 16%
- Strengthen the Affordable Care Act without adding a public option -- 7%
- Keep things exactly as they are now -- 7%

Overall, more than two-thirds of respondents said they're looking for significant changes in health care (either Medicare for all or a public option). A small minority want incremental or no change in health care.

How did the results differ by political party? We found Democrats and Independents support either type of Medicare for all plan, while more than one-third of Republicans back an ACA repeal.

Democrats

- Medicare for all (no private insurance) -- 27%
- Medicare for all (with private insurance) -- 27%
- Public option -- 25%

Republicans

- Repeal the ACA and go back to health insurance before the ACA -- 35%
- Public option -- 31%
- Medicare for all (with private insurance) -- 13%
- Medicare for all (no private insurance) -- 10%

Independents

- Medicare for all (no private insurance) -- 28%
- Public option -- 27%
- Medicare for all (with private insurance) -- 23%

The results show that Republicans back former Vice President Joe Biden's public option more than either Democrats or Independents. A public option was considered too extreme during the process that led to the ACA. Now, almost one-third of Republicans in the survey back the idea.

We also found pessimism about how both political parties are handling health care. When asked which political party does a better job with health care, Insure.com found Democrats come out on top, but "Neither" isn't that far off.

- Democrats -- 38%
- Republicans -- 28%
- Neither -- 34%

Not surprisingly, Democrats believe their party does a better job with health care. Republicans think they do better, too. However, more than one-quarter of Republicans don't believe either party does well with health care.

Independents are even less optimistic. Nearly two-thirds of Independents don't think either party does a good job with health care.

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