

Iraq still the top issue, now followed by health care

As the 2008 presidential race gears up, the conflict in Iraq continues to dominate the list of issues that are important to the public, as it has for the past several years. Forty-four percent say Iraq is one of the most important problems for government to address, and just as many say the conflict tops the list of issues they want to hear the presidential candidates discuss. Iraq is the number one issue for self-reported Republicans, Democrats, and independents alike.

Concerns then turn to the domestic front, with health care as the second most-mentioned issue (29 percent say health care is one of the most important problems for the government to address, and 26 percent say they'd like to hear presidential candidates talk about it). Health care ranks second for Republicans, Democrats, and independents. Economic issues are next, followed by immigration, terrorism/national security, and education.

	What do you think is the most important problem for the government to address? Is there another problem you think is almost as important? (open-ended)				Thinking about the campaign for the presidential election in 2008, what two issues would you most like to hear the presidential candidates talk about? (open-ended)			
	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind
Iraq	44%	43%	50%	43%	44%	42%	51%	44%
Health care	29	28	31	29	26	22	30	26
Economy	13	10	20	10	18	18	20	20
Immigration	9	12	4	11	9	8	7	9
Terrorism/Nat'l security	8	14	4	8	6	14	3	6
Education	8	8	8	8	6	8	7	3

Within health care, focus is on cost and coverage

When asked specifically about the *health care* issues they'd like to hear the presidential candidates talk about, expanding coverage for the uninsured and health care costs both top the list. Coverage ranks just ahead of costs, no matter whether respondents are asked to respond to the question in their own words, or whether they are provided a list of five options that included coverage and costs as two choices.

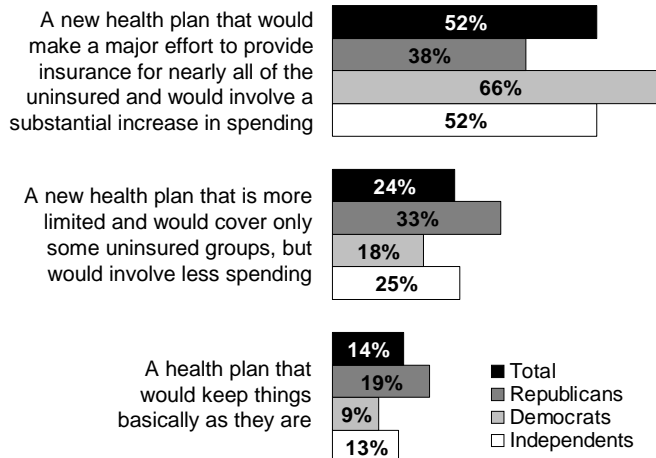
	What two health care issues would you most like to hear the presidential candidates talk about? (open-ended)				Which one of the following health care issues would you most like to hear the candidates talk about and focus on in any health reform plan they may develop? (choose from list)				
	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind	
Coverage/uninsured	35%	35%	37%	33%	Expanding coverage for uninsured	32%	22%	38%	32%
Health care costs	32	34	34	27	Reducing health care costs	31	38	28	31
Medicare/Rx drugs	22	17	23	24	Improving Medicare Rx benefit	12	10	15	11
Quality of care	3	2	2	4	Improving quality of care	12	16	7	14
Insurance issues	3	2	3	2	Reducing gov't spending on health	7	11	6	6

Methodology: This Kaiser Health Tracking Poll: Election 2008, the first in a new series, was designed and analyzed by researchers at the Kaiser Family Foundation. A nationally representative random sample of 1,233 adults was interviewed by telephone between March 8-13, 2007. The margin of sampling error for the survey is plus or minus 3 percentage points; for results based on subgroups, the sampling error is higher.

Democrats and independents interested in major push on uninsured

Half the public say they would like to see candidates propose a major new health reform plan that would provide almost universal coverage, even if it involved a substantial increase in spending. One quarter say they would like to see a less expensive, more limited plan, and about one in seven say they would like candidates to propose keeping things as they are now. Interest in major health reform legislation varies greatly across political parties, with Republicans (38 percent) significantly less likely than Democrats (66 percent) to say they would want a candidate to propose a costly push for greatly expanded coverage.

Thinking ahead to the presidential election in 2008, which ONE of the following three things would you like to see in a health care reform proposal from a candidate?



No candidate yet stands out on health (though Clinton gets most recognition)

At this early stage in the campaign, most people don't know or can't name a candidate who best represents their own views on health care (60 percent), or say that *no* candidate represents their views (8 percent). To the extent any candidate breaks out of the single digits, it is Hillary Clinton, who is named by 14 percent of Americans (and 27 percent of Democrats) as the person who best reflects their health care views. Senator Clinton has a significant edge among Democrats on this question, leading her nearest rival Senator Obama 27 percent to 8 percent, with Senator Edwards picking up 4 percent. Among Republicans and independents, no one candidate stands out as appealing on health care.

Similarly, most people don't know or can't name a candidate who is placing the *biggest emphasis* on health (45 percent), or say that *no* candidate is placing a big emphasis on health care issues (21 percent). Again, Clinton is the only candidate to score double digits, with 21 percent saying she is the candidate most focused on health care. Even Republicans put Clinton at the top of their list in this category (19 percent), though this percentage is dwarfed by the proportion who don't name any candidate (71 percent). Clinton's top ranking across all parties in this category is likely an outcome of her role in the health reform debate of the early 1990s, and may change as the campaign continues and other candidates talk more about their own positions on health care.

	Thinking about all of the candidates for president in 2008, regardless of political party or who you intend to vote for, which candidate BEST represents your own views on health care?				And still thinking about all of the candidates for president, regardless of political party and whether or not you agree with their views, which candidate do you think is placing the BIGGEST EMPHASIS on health care issues?			
	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind
Don't know/Can't name	60%	63%	48%	62%	45%	48%	39%	41%
No candidate	8	8	4	11	21	23	13	28
Hillary Clinton	14	7	27	9	21	19	28	20
Barack Obama	5	3	8	4	5	1	10	5
John Edwards	2	*	4	1	3	3	4	2
Rudy Giuliani	3	7	1	4	1	3	*	1
John McCain	2	4	1	2	1	1	1	*
Mitt Romney	1	2	*	1	*	1	--	--
Bill Richardson	1	*	1	1	*	*	*	--

With the first of the primaries for 2008 nearly a year away, a small group of the public (14 percent) say they would *only* vote for a presidential candidate who shares their views on health care. The vast majority (69 percent) say they would consider a candidate's position on health care as one of many important factors in their vote for president, and one in ten say they would not see health care as a major issue in their vote.

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