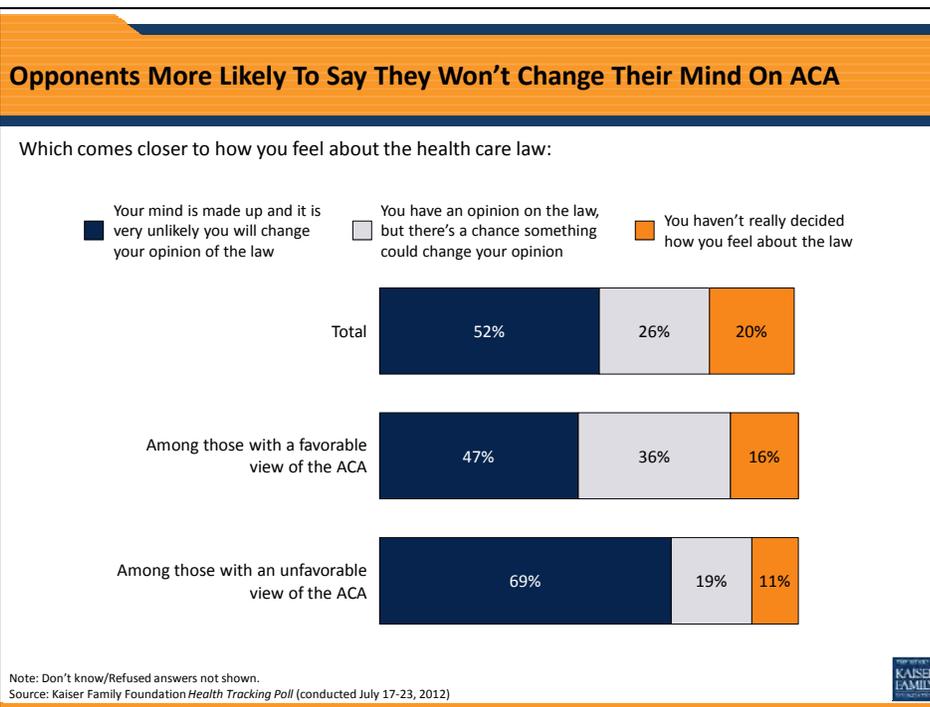


This month's second Health Tracking Poll¹ reports in further depth on public opinion toward the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in the wake of last month's key Supreme Court decision. When it comes to the individual mandate, the Court's verdict that the controversial provision is constitutional as a tax appears to have had little impact on opinion, with upwards of six in ten viewing the mandate unfavorably whether it is described as a "tax" or as a "fine". There is confusion over who will be subject to the tax penalty under the mandate: the poll finds that one in five Americans believe they will have to pay a penalty in 2014, even as experts suggest the share will be considerably smaller. The ACA's Medicaid expansion is supported by two in three Americans. But the Court's decision giving states the option to decide whether or not to expand Medicaid has created a new arena for ACA controversy and partisan disagreement. The poll finds that 49 percent of people support expanding Medicaid in their own state while 43 percent say they prefer to keep their state's status quo. As with most ACA-related controversies, the public splits sharply along partisan lines on whether their state should undertake the expansion, with 75 percent of Democrats favoring it and 66 percent of Republicans opposed. Opinion on the ACA remains steady this month, continuing a year of a roughly even divide, even as just over four in ten Americans say they could still change their minds on the law and a slightly larger share than last month say they would back the law's repeal. The poll also finds evidence of issue fatigue when it comes to health reform. Just over half of Americans are "tired of hearing lawmakers debate the health care law and would like for them to move on to other issues," while 44 percent say it is important to continue the debate over the law's future.

DESPITE TWO YEARS OF OPINION STABILITY, FOUR IN TEN SAY THEY COULD STILL CHANGE THEIR MIND ON ACA; NARROW MAJORITY SAY READY FOR HEALTH DEBATE TO END

Despite two years of stability in opinion toward the Affordable Care Act (ACA), more than four in ten Americans this election season say that they could still change their minds on the law, according to Kaiser's July Health Tracking Poll. Overall, 46 percent say they are up for grabs in their view of the law—with 20 percent saying they haven't really decided how they feel at all, while 26 percent say they have an opinion but there's a chance something could change it. Just over half—52 percent—say their mind is made up and is very unlikely to change.

Those in the 'up for grabs' group are on the whole younger and more likely to be members of racial or ethnic minority groups. Reflecting, perhaps, their longstanding higher intensity on the issue, the law's opponents are also much more likely than its proponents to say their minds are firmly made up and are unlikely to change (69 percent, compared to 47 percent).



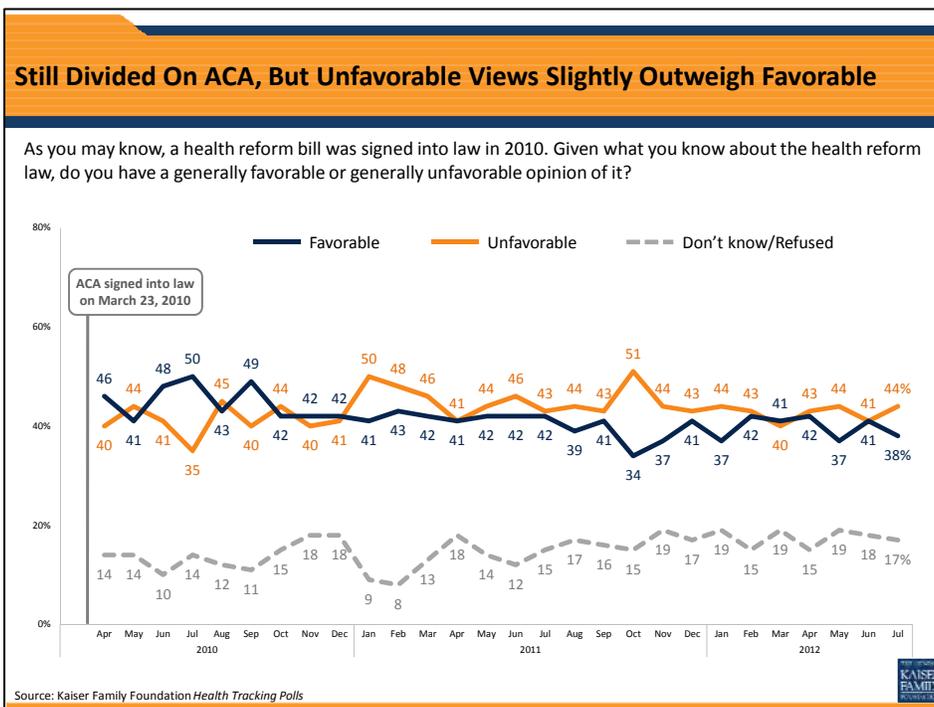
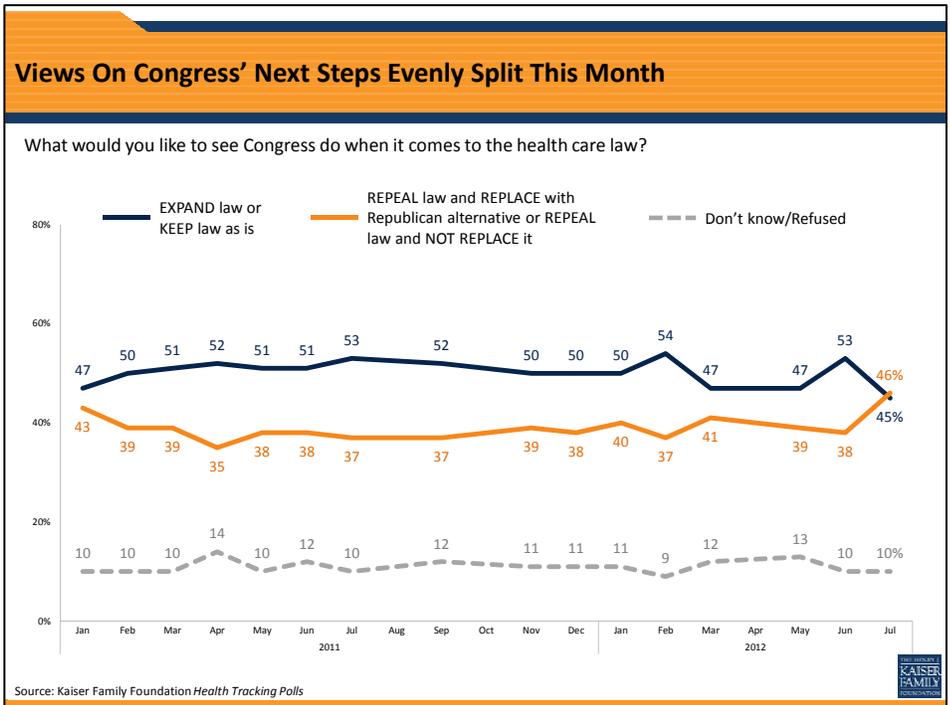
¹ Kaiser Family Foundation, *Kaiser Health Tracking Poll: Early Reaction to Supreme Court Decision on the ACA*, June 2012. See <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/8329.cfm>.

When it comes to next steps for the law, in this poll the public was evenly split: 45 percent want to keep the ACA as it is or expand it, while a roughly equal proportion (46 percent) want to see the law repealed, a shift from last month's survey, which was fielded immediately after the Supreme Court's ACA decision. Among the group that back repeal, half hope to see the law replaced with a Republican alternative, half would like to go back to the status quo. (Note that earlier this month the U.S. House voted to repeal the ACA, even though the measure is unlikely to move forward in the Senate.)

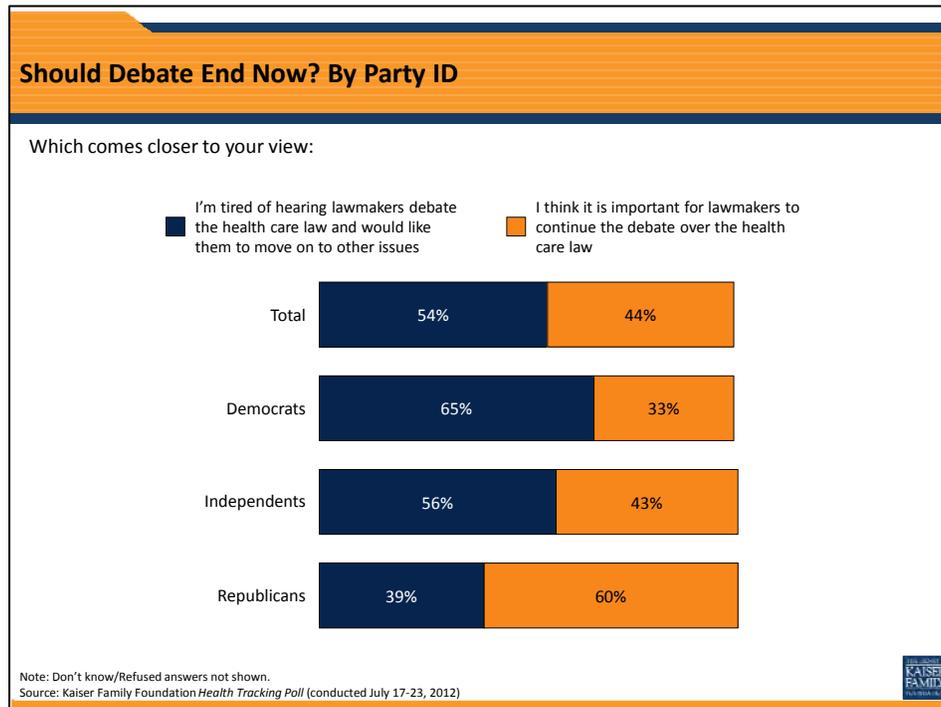
Meanwhile, a narrow majority of the public continues to oppose the idea of cutting off the law's funding as a way to stop it from being implemented. Fifty-six percent disapprove of this strategy, while 35 percent approve. As is the case on most things related to the ACA, partisan

differences persist. Eighty-three percent of Democrats and 55 percent of independents disapprove of stopping the law by cutting off its funding, while 62 percent of Republicans approve of this idea.

Americans remain roughly divided on the ACA as a whole, with unfavorable views of the law slightly outweighing favorable views this month, 44 percent to 38 percent. There was also little change in the balance between the share of Americans that think the law will leave them better off and those that say the law will leave them worse off.



The poll finds there may be some issue fatigue when it comes to health reform. Just over half of Americans (54 percent) agree that they are “tired of hearing lawmakers debate the health care law and would like them to move on to other issues”, while 44 percent say it is important to continue the debate over the law’s future. This may in part be driven by the public’s cynicism regarding lawmakers’ intentions: majorities say both opponents and proponents are speaking out on the law more for political reasons than because they want to do the right thing for the nation. Republicans and Democrats divide as expected on the question of ending the debate, while among independents, 56 percent say they would prefer to move on and 43 percent say they think it is important to continue with the debate.



PUBLIC'S INITIAL VIEWS OF THE MEDICAID EXPANSION

Many of the key decisions regarding ACA implementation will take place in the states, particularly given the Supreme Court’s decision regarding state’s options when it comes to the ACA’s proposed Medicaid expansion. A KFF issue brief on that decision described it this way:

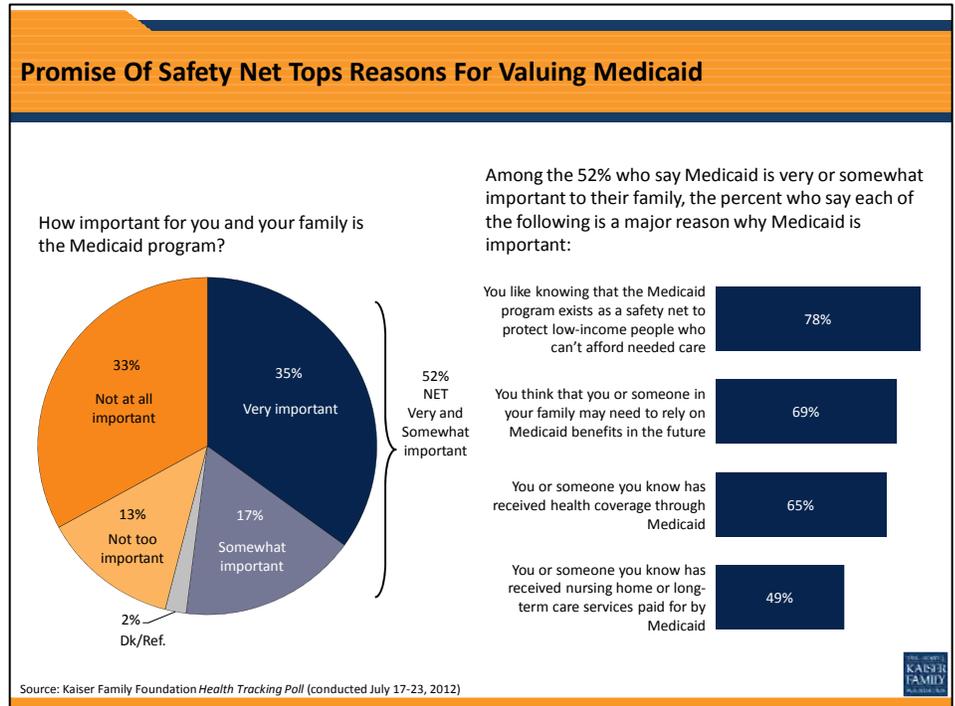
The practical effect of the Court’s decision makes the Medicaid expansion optional for states because, if states do not comply with the Medicaid expansion, the Secretary may withhold only ACA Medicaid expansion funds; she may not withhold all or a part of a non-compliant state’s federal funds for the rest of the Medicaid program.²

Public opinion on this decision is somewhat difficult to sort out, in part because national surveys are limited in obvious ways in terms of shedding light on the nuances of opinion state by state, but also because of the complexity of the policy decisions involved, which require some basic understanding of a state’s current Medicaid eligibility standards, how the ACA would have changed those standards, and then how the Court decision further adjusts that picture.

² Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured, *A Guide to the Supreme Court’s Affordable Care Act Decision*, July 2012. See <http://www.kff.org/healthreform/8332.cfm>.

The July survey does, however, suggest several things about the fundamentals of public opinion as it relates to the Medicaid program. First, about half of Americans do think of Medicaid as a program that is important to their family. Overall, 52 percent say it is at least somewhat important to their own family, a proportion which is significantly higher among those in low-income households (69 percent).

When those that see Medicaid as important are asked why, their top-ranking reason is the comfort provided by knowing there is a safety net for lower income families that can't afford health care. Many also say that either knowing someone that has received coverage through Medicaid, or thinking that someone in one's own family *will* need Medicaid coverage, are major reasons for their support of the program. Eight in ten Americans say that if they were uninsured, needed health care and qualified for Medicaid, they would enroll in the program themselves.



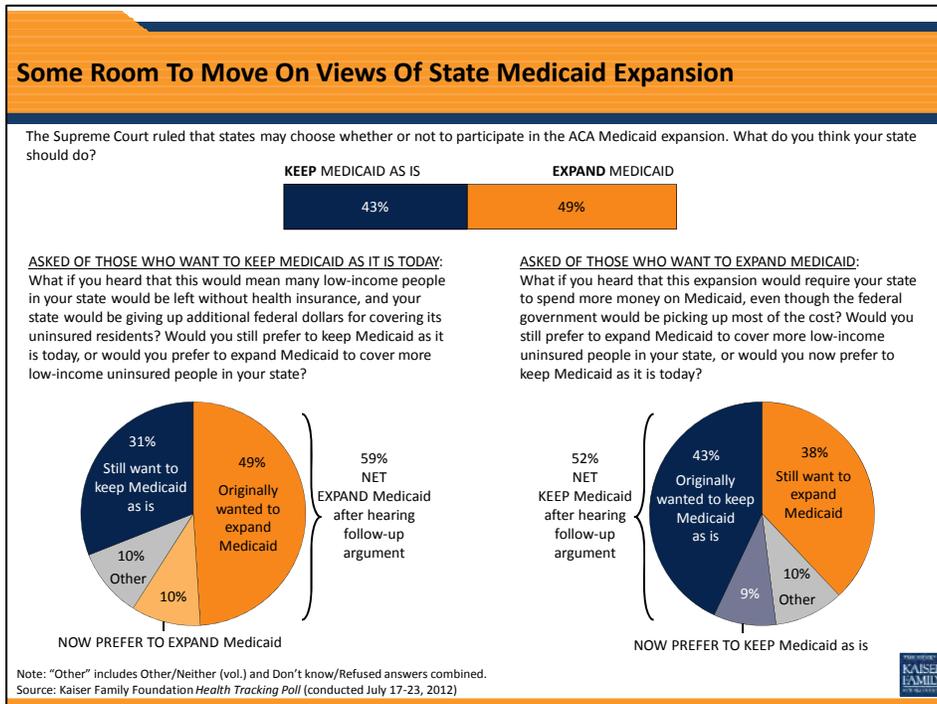
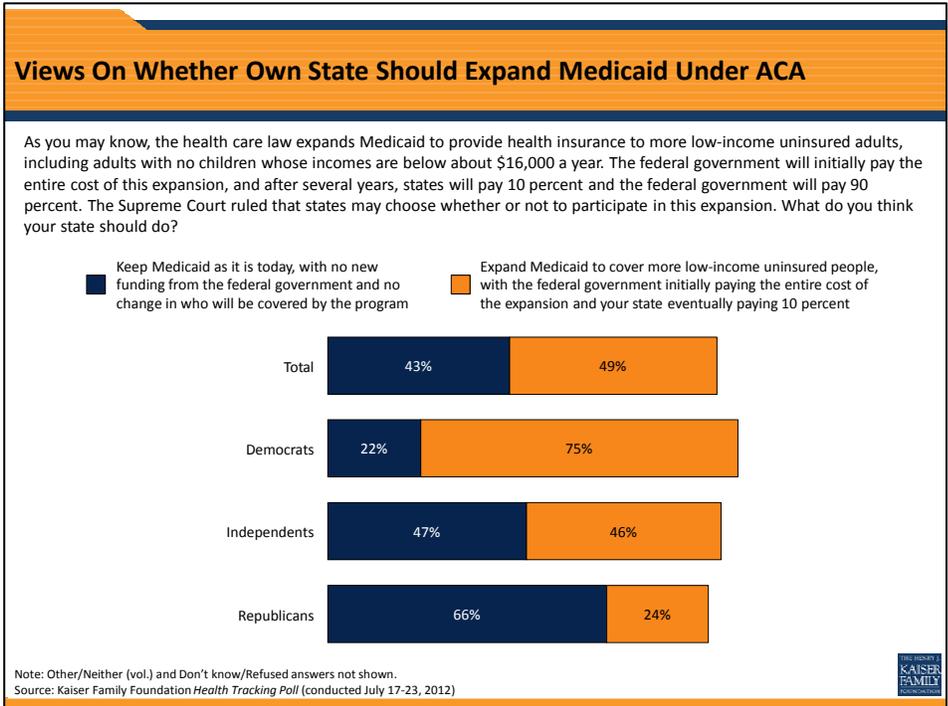
The second factor is that as a general concept, the Medicaid expansion has consistently garnered majority support as a free-standing provision. Overall this month, two in three Americans have a favorable view of “expand[ing] the existing Medicaid program to cover more low-income, uninsured adults,” a finding that has been quite consistent over the past eight months of polling. But third, as has been true of the law overall, this support varies widely by Americans’ self-described partisan affiliation, with nearly nine in ten Democrats and two-thirds of independents backing the idea of the expansion, while close to six in ten Republicans *oppose* it.

MOST SUPPORT MEDICAID EXPANSION AS GENERAL CONCEPT				
The law will expand the existing Medicaid program to cover more low-income, uninsured adults. Would you say you feel favorable or unfavorable about that?				
	Total	Dem	Ind	Rep
Favorable	67%	87%	67%	39%
Unfavorable	30	11	28	57

In the wake of the Supreme Court decision, considerable attention has been paid to the question of whether states will opt for the ACA Medicaid expansion, with this debate following partisan lines. Public opinion on whether people’s own state should opt for the expansion follows that pattern. Asked whether they would prefer their own state to participate in the Medicaid expansion, 49 percent support the expansion and 43 percent prefer to keep the program as it is today. Three in four Democrats support an expansion in their state, and 66 percent of Republicans support keeping their state’s Medicaid status quo. Independents are evenly divided 46 percent support expanding their state’s Medicaid program under the ACA, 47 percent oppose.

The July survey also suggests there may be some room to move views of the state Medicaid expansion. When those opposed to expansion were told that “this would mean many low-income people in your state would be left without health insurance, and your state would be giving up additional federal dollars for covering its uninsured residents”, overall support for expansion rose from 49 percent to 59 percent.

On the flip side, when those who support the expansion were told that this “would require your state to spend more money on Medicaid, even though the federal government would be picking up most of the cost”, 52 percent preferred staying with their state’s status quo.



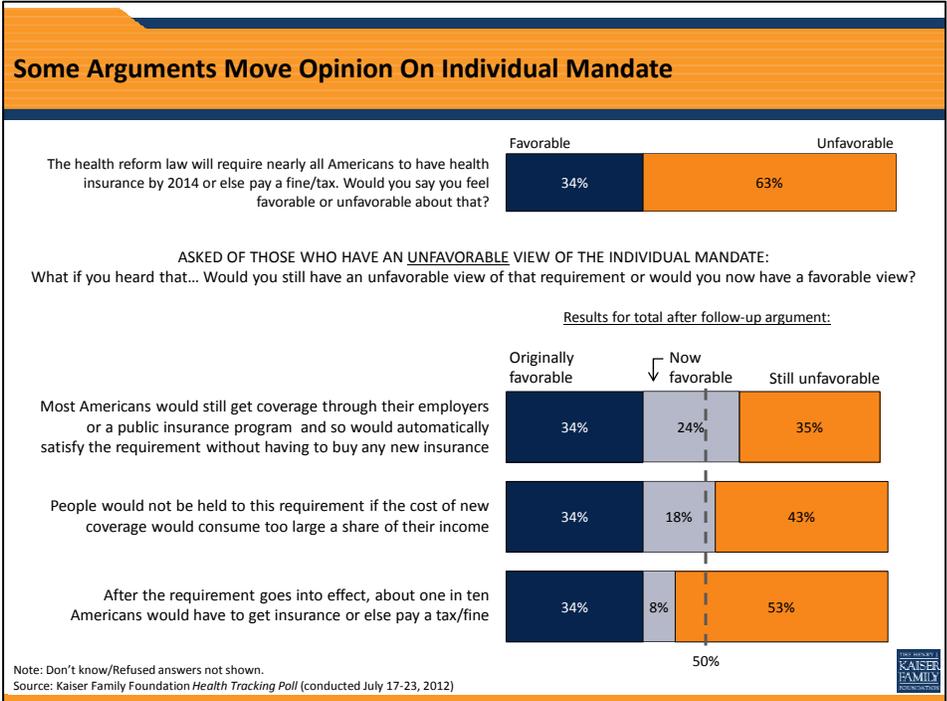
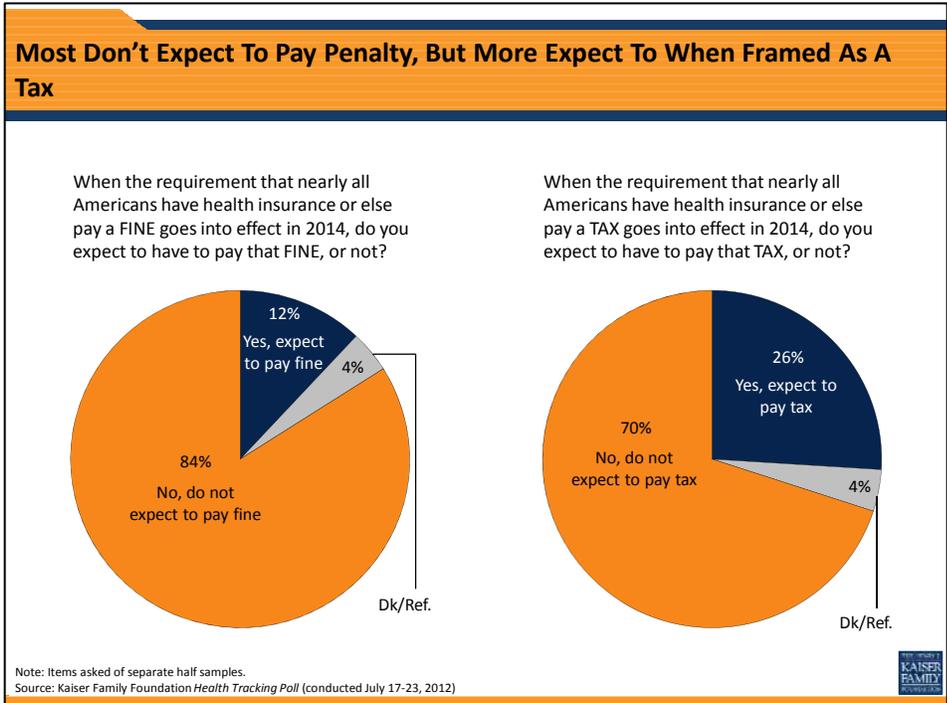
WHETHER TAX OR FINE, INDIVIDUAL MANDATE REMAINS UNPOPULAR AS ONE IN FIVE SAY THEY EXPECT TO PAY PENALTY

The July survey suggests that the individual mandate remains unpopular no matter whether it's labeled a fine or a tax, a distinction that has become the focus of discussion since the Supreme Court's June ruling. Overall, 66 percent of Americans say they have an unfavorable view of the controversial ACA provision when it is labeled as a "fine," while 61 percent have negative views when it is called a tax.³ The mandate continues to be frequently raised by the law's opponents as they campaign against the law this election season.

Current polling suggests that there is some confusion among the public as to whether they should expect to have to pay the penalty due to lack of appropriate coverage. According to the poll, nearly one in five Americans is under the impression that they will be subject to the penalty in 2014. Meanwhile, experts estimate that substantially fewer—roughly one in ten Americans—will find themselves in the position of deciding between obtaining health coverage or paying the penalty. Since some portion of this group will decide to purchase health insurance, the subset that does end up subject to the tax penalty will be smaller than one in ten. The public opinion bottom line: a substantial number of people are anticipating a financial hit that will never come.⁴ Interestingly, twice as many individuals that hear the penalty described as a "tax" anticipate they will have to pay it as do in that group that hear it described as a "fine" (26 percent compared to 12 percent).

Providing Americans with information about the mandate does go some way in improving their view of the provision. The most persuasive argument to move mandate opponents to supporters

continues to be the reminder that most Americans would still get insurance through an employer or a public program and would not be impacted by this requirement. After hearing this, a clear majority of 58 percent have a favorable view of the provision. A narrower majority (52 percent) have a favorable view after hearing that there is an exemption for those Americans that would have to pay too high a share of their income for coverage. However, relatively few of those that oppose the mandate are moved by learning that roughly one in ten Americans will have to get insurance or else pay a penalty.



³ The two items were administered to separate half samples, so each group heard only one version of the wording.

⁴ Kaiser Family Foundation Health Reform Source, *The Individual Mandate: How Sweeping?* March 2012. See <http://healthreform.kff.org/notes-on-health-insurance-and-reform/2012/march/the-individual-mandate-how-sweeping.aspx>.

Just over half (53 percent) of all Americans say they feel less favorably about the mandate after hearing that the penalty for non-compliance would start off at about \$100 per person and eventually rise to \$700 per person (the amounts dictated by the law). Another one in ten (11 percent) say it makes them feel more favorable, while a third (32 percent) say that fact doesn't change their opinion about the mandate at all.

CREEPING TOWARD THE FALL ELECTION

With less than 100 days to go until the presidential election, President Obama has a narrow edge over presumptive Republican presidential nominee Governor Mitt Romney on a series of health care issues, though this advantage lessens when looking only at those who say they are most likely to vote. This month, over four in ten choose President Obama as the candidate they trust to handle Medicare, Medicaid and the issue of rising health costs, compared to just over three in ten that name Romney. The president has a similar 11 percentage point advantage on handling the future of the ACA (down from 19 points in May).

WHICH CANDIDATE, PARTY TRUSTED TO HANDLE HEALTH POLICY ISSUES						
	Which presidential candidate, Barack Obama or Mitt Romney, do you trust to do a better job with each of the following?			Do you trust the Democrats in Congress or the Republicans in Congress to do a better job with each of the following?		
	Obama	Romney	Obama–Romney Difference	Democrats	Republicans	Dem–Rep Difference
Handling the Medicare program	45%	34%	+11	40%	33%	+7
Dealing with the future of the 2010 health care law	45	34	+11	37	32	+5
Handling the Medicaid program	44	34	+10	38	33	+5
Lowering health costs for people like you	43	33	+10	38	34	+4

The nearly identical ratings across the four health issues suggests that at this point of the summer, Americans are not distinguishing between the nuances of the two candidates' positions on various health care issues, but rather have a more general picture in mind. President Obama's advantage on these four health policy issues shrinks to roughly seven percentage points among registered voters, and roughly three percentage points among the group that says they are most likely to vote.

Democrats have traditionally enjoyed an advantage over Republicans on health care, but that gap is currently quite narrow, with the president's own party underperforming Obama himself. Similar shares say they trust the Democrats in Congress as the Republicans to do a better job handling Medicaid, the ACA, and lowering health care costs. The Democrats retain an edge over the GOP on handling Medicare.

METHODOLOGY

This *Kaiser Health Tracking Poll* is the second of two polls to be released this month looking at public opinion on the Affordable Care Act in the wake of the Supreme Court's decision in the case challenging the law. The poll was designed and analyzed by public opinion researchers at the Kaiser Family Foundation led by Mollyann Brodie, Ph.D., including Claudia Deane, Sarah Cho, and Theresa Boston. The survey was conducted July 17-23, 2012, among a nationally representative random digit dial telephone sample of 1,227 adults ages 18 and older, living in the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii (note: persons without a telephone could not be included in the random selection process). Computer-assisted telephone interviews conducted by landline (703) and cell phone (524, including 292 who had no landline telephone) were carried out in English and Spanish by Braun Research, Inc. under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International (PSRAI). The combined landline and cell phone sample was weighted to balance the sample demographics to match Census estimates for the national population on sex, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, nativity (for Hispanics only), region, and telephone usage.

All statistical tests of significance account for the effect of weighting. The margin of sampling error including the design effect is plus or minus 3 percentage points. For results based on other subgroups, the margin of sampling error may be higher. Note that sampling error is only one of many potential sources of error in this or any other public opinion poll.

The full question wording and methodology of the polls can be viewed online at: <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/8339.cfm>.

This publication (#8339-F) is available on the Kaiser Family Foundation's website at www.kff.org.

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