

## Iraq top issue, followed by health care, for the government to address and for presidential candidates to discuss

As we head into Labor Day and the more traditional opening act of the presidential election campaign season, Iraq continues to lead the list of issues the public most wants the government to address, with 42 percent naming it as one of the top two issues. Health care is once again the second most mentioned issue, and the top domestic issue, with 27 percent citing it. The economy ranked third at 16 percent and immigration fourth (13 percent). Gas prices, which received intense media attention earlier in the summer, had increased in the public's issue rankings in June, but fell in this August tracking poll.

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)

Issue Rank	Total	Republicans	Democrats	Independents
1	Iraq (42%)	Iraq (38%)	Iraq (53%)	Iraq (41%)
2	Health care (27)	Terrorism (22)	Health care (35)	Health care (25)
3	Economy (16)	Health care (19)	Economy (14)	Economy (16)
4	Immigration (13)	Immigration (18)	Education (12)	Immigration (14)
5	Terrorism (11)	Economy (13)	Frustration w/gov't (8)	Terrorism (12)
6	Frustration w/gov't (9)	Frustration w/gov't (10)*	Immigration (6)*	Frustration w/gov't (10)
7	Education (7)	Taxes (10)*	Gas prices (6)*	Education (5)*
8	Gas prices (6)	Gas prices (6)	Terrorism (3)	Gas prices (5)*
9	Taxes (5)	Education (3)	Taxes (2)	Taxes (4)

\* indicates a tie

A key question from the presidential campaign perspective is what issues do constituents heading into the political party primaries care about. We find that self-identified Democrats and independents tend to agree about the top three issues for government to address – Iraq, health care, and the economy. However, for self-identified Republicans Iraq stays on top, but terrorism comes in at number two, followed by health care and immigration.

But perhaps more importantly, when we instead asked specifically about what they would most like to hear presidential candidates talk about in the campaign, a slightly different picture emerges. Iraq and health care are now the top two issues for Republicans, Democrats, and independents alike. In fact, for Democrats the same percentage mentions Iraq (42 percent) as says health care (42 percent) – the first time we have seen this and a dramatic change from our June tracking poll. Among Republicans, 32 percent cite Iraq as the most important issue, with health care coming in second at 21 percent, followed by terrorism at 16 percent and immigration and the economy, both at 15 percent.

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)

Issue Rank	Total	Republicans	Democrats	Independents
1	Iraq (38%)	Iraq (32%)	Iraq (42%)*	Iraq (43%)
2	Health care (30)	Health care (21)	Health care (42)*	Health care (25)
3	Economy (13)	Terrorism (16)	Economy (12)	Immigration (16)
4	Immigration (12)	Immigration (15)*	Education (9)	Economy (14)
5	Terrorism (7)*	Economy (15)*	Immigration (7)	Education (8)
6	Taxes (7)*	Taxes (10)	Taxes (6)	Terrorism (7)
7	Education (7)*	Gas prices (8)	Terrorism (3)	Taxes (6)
8	Gas prices (4)	Education (2)	Gas prices (2)	Gas prices (3)

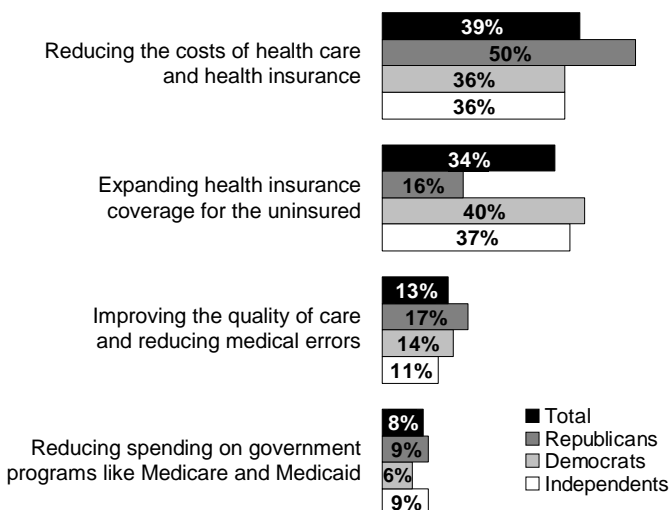
\* indicates a tie

## Within health care, focus is on cost (particularly for Republicans) and coverage (particularly for Democrats)

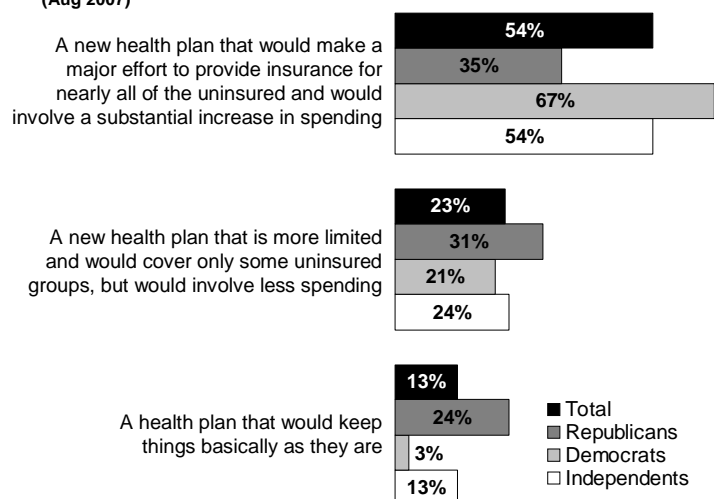
The public reports an interest in hearing presidential candidates discuss costs and coverage when asked specifically about *health care* issues they want to hear about. When asked to pick from a list, nearly four in ten (39 percent) say reducing the cost of health care and insurance is the issue they would most like to hear discussed, followed closely by expansion of health coverage for the uninsured (34 percent). About one in eight (13 percent) say they are most interested in hearing about improving quality of care and one in twelve (8 percent) choose reducing spending on government health programs.

Responses to this question differ greatly by political party, with Republicans choosing costs over coverage by a wide margin (50 vs. 16 percent), and a slight plurality of Democrats (40 percent) saying they would most like to hear candidates talk about expanding coverage for the uninsured, versus 36 percent who want to hear about costs. Independents are about evenly split between costs (36 percent) and coverage (37 percent).

Which ONE of the following health care issues would you most like to hear the presidential candidates talk about? (Aug 2007)



Which ONE of the following three things would you like to see in a health care reform proposal from a presidential candidate? (Aug 2007)



## Democrats & independents more likely than Republicans to want to hear about big push on uninsured

Overall, more than half the public (54 percent) say they would prefer to see a health reform approach that would make a major effort to cover most of those with no health insurance even if it involves an increase in spending on health, whereas about one in four (23 percent) prefer a limited new plan that would cost less but cover fewer uninsured, and one in eight (13 percent) would prefer keeping things as they are now. Majorities of Democrats (67 percent) and independents (54 percent) report a preference for a health plan with major changes, while Republicans are fairly even split between a major (35 percent) and minor (31 percent) plan. Nearly a quarter (24 percent) of Republicans would prefer to keep things as they are.

## Few people are likely to vote solely based on health

Consistent with our previous tracking results, only a small share of the public (11 percent) say they would *only* vote for a presidential candidate who shares their views on health care. Nearly three-quarters (74 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 (11 percent) say they would not see health care as a major issue in their vote. Democrats (14 percent) were more likely than Republicans (7 percent) to report that they would *only* vote for a candidate who shared their health care views, while independents mirrored results for the public overall.

## Still no single candidate who stands out on health (Clinton gets most recognition)

As we found in our last two tracking polls, a large majority of the public still doesn't know or can't name a candidate who best represents their views on health, or says that *no* candidate represents their views. While the share who were able to name a candidate in this question increased somewhat (from 32 percent to 41 percent) between March and June, it held steady in August at 41 percent.

Senator Hillary Clinton remains the top candidate on this question, with 19 percent of the public overall, and 35 percent of Democrats saying she best represents their health care views. Senator Clinton's numbers have inched up slightly on this question since March, when she was named by 14 percent of the public overall and 27 percent of Democrats (her share among independents has also inched up from 9 percent in March to 15 percent in August). Senator Barack Obama is the second ranking candidate on this question (named by 6 percent overall, and 9 percent of Democrats), and former Senator John Edwards ranks third (4 percent overall and 6 percent of Democrats).

Former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani remains the top pick among Republicans, with 8 percent of Republicans (and 3 percent of the public overall) saying he best represents their views on health. Former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney (5 percent of Republicans, 2 percent overall) is the next most mentioned candidate, followed by Senator John McCain and former Senator Fred Thompson (both named by 2 percent of Republicans, 1 percent overall).

August 2007	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?			
	Total	Republicans	Democrats	Independents
Don't know/Can't name/None	59%	68%	43%	63%
Named a candidate	41	32	57	37
Hillary Clinton	19	4	35	15
Barack Obama	6	3	9	7
John Edwards	4	1	6	3
Rudy Giuliani	3	8	1	4
Mitt Romney	2	5	<1	2
John McCain	1	2	1	1
Fred Thompson	1	2	0	1

Note: candidates named by less than 1 percent not shown. See trends in back for detailed data.

On the question of which candidate is placing the biggest emphasis of health, Senator Clinton again tops the list, with 27 percent naming her, followed by Senator Obama (6 percent) and former Senator John Edwards (5 percent). No Republican candidate was mentioned by more than one percent of the public. Again, the share mentioning Senator Clinton as the candidate most focused on health increased slightly overall from 21 percent in March to 27 percent in August.

August 2007	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	Republicans	Democrats	Independents
Don't know/Can't name/None	56%	62%	43%	57%
Named a candidate	44	38	57	43
Hillary Clinton	27	20	34	27
Barack Obama	6	4	9	5
John Edwards	5	2	7	6
Rudy Giuliani	1	3	<1	1
Mitt Romney	1	2	<1	1
John McCain	1	1	1	1

Note: candidates named by less than 1 percent not shown. See trends in back for detailed data.