Health Reform in the 2008 Presidential Election: Implications for the Future

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Key Findings from the Election (1)

• Health care second most important issue for Obama/ far below economy

• Health care seen as an economic problem by Obama voters

• Three-quarters of those picking health care voted for Obama

• Very high expectations from Obama voters that something big could happen in health care
Key Points (2) Implications for Future

• Supporters of Senators Obama and McCain differed *greatly* on views of future reform

• Obama vs. McCain voters–
  • Placed higher priority on broader health reform
  • Favored more expansive role for federal government in changing system/expanding coverage
  • Favored more government regulation of health care/less emphasis on private sector/individual responsibility
  • Favored less restrained overall federal health spending
  • Favored tax increases for upper-income people

• Vision of candidates/voters so disparate that in absence of one party control of Congress/Presidency, major reform hard to achieve

• Economic crisis likely to have major consequences on future health debates
Most Important Issue Facing the Country

- **Economy**: 65% (Obama voters), 60% (McCain voters)
- **Health care**: 13% (Obama voters), 5% (McCain voters)
- **War in Iraq**: 11% (Obama voters), 8% (McCain voters)
- **Energy policy**: 7% (Obama voters), 7% (McCain voters)
- **Terrorism**: 2% (Obama voters), 17% (McCain voters)

*National Exit Polls, November 2008.*
Problems faced as a result of changes in economy

% saying serious problem

- Paying for gas: 38%
- Paying health care/insurance: 33%
- Inadequate job income: 30%
- Paying rent or mortgage: 21%
- Paying for food: 20%
- Losing money on stock market: 19%
- Personal debt: 18%

How Worried Are You about Being Able to Afford the Health Care Services You Need?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Obama voters</th>
<th>McCain voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very worried</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat worried</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very worried</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all worried</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vote Distribution by Those Who Thought Health Care Most Important Issue

(9% of total voters)

- Obama: 73%
- McCain: 26%
- Other: 1%

*National Exit Polls, November 2008.*
Will the Outcome of the Presidential Election Make a Great Deal of Difference on Various Top Issues?

- **Iraq**
  - Obama voters: 62%
  - McCain voters: 69%

- **Economy**
  - Obama voters: 60%
  - McCain voters: 54%

- **Health Care**
  - Obama voters: 60%
  - McCain voters: 40%

- **Price of gas**
  - Obama voters: 29%
  - McCain voters: 28%

*Harvard School of Public Health/Harris Interactive poll of Registered Voters, October 16-19, 2008.*
Views of Obama vs. McCain Voters
Health Care Priorities for Next President

- Making health care/insurance more affordable: 46% (Obama voters), 44% (McCain voters)
- Expanding health insurance coverage for uninsured: 33% (Obama voters), 10% (McCain voters)
- Improving Medicare/Rx drug program: 9% (Obama voters), 14% (McCain voters)
- Improving the quality of care and reducing medical errors: 8% (Obama voters), 15% (McCain voters)
- Reducing spending on government health programs like Medicare and Medicaid: 2% (Obama voters), 13% (McCain voters)

Views of Health Care System

- So much wrong with our health care system that it needs to be completely overhauled
  - Obama voters: 28%
  - McCain voters: 16%

- Some good things about our health system, but major changes are needed
  - Obama voters: 55%
  - McCain voters: 40%

- Works pretty well, but minor changes are needed
  - Obama voters: 15%
  - McCain voters: 39%

- Works well and does not need to be changed
  - Obama voters: 1%
  - McCain voters: 4%

Who Should Have the Most Responsibility for Helping to Ensure that Americans Receive Health Insurance Coverage

- **Federal government**: 54% (Obama voters) vs. 20% (McCain voters)
- **Individuals themselves**: 18% (Obama voters) vs. 47% (McCain voters)
- **Employers and businesses**: 23% (Obama voters) vs. 30% (McCain voters)

Blenden et al, “Voters and Health Reform in the 2008 Presidential Election.” *NEJM*, November 6, 2008..
Preferred Health Insurance Coverage Policy

- **Obama voters**
  - Make major effort to provide health insurance to all/would involve substantial increase in spending: 65%
  - Work to provide health insurance for some of the uninsured/would involve less new spending: 26%
  - Keep things basically how they are: 5%

- **McCain voters**
  - Make major effort to provide health insurance to all/would involve substantial increase in spending: 26%
  - Work to provide health insurance for some of the uninsured/would involve less new spending: 36%
  - Keep things basically how they are: 31%

Importance to You that Health Care Proposal Not Raise Taxes

**Obama voters** vs. **McCain voters**

- **Most important consideration**
  - Obama voters: 12%
  - McCain voters: 23%

- **Very important consideration**
  - Obama voters: 33%
  - McCain voters: 47%

- **Somewhat important**
  - Obama voters: 42%
  - McCain voters: 26%

- **Not important at all**
  - Obama voters: 13%
  - McCain voters: 3%

### Who Should Have the Most Responsibility for Slowing the Rise in Health Care Costs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entity</th>
<th>Obama Voters</th>
<th>McCain Voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health insurance companies</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctors and hospitals</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The federal government</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals themselves</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers and businesses</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Priorities to Address Rising Health Care Costs

- **Obama voters**
  - Reducing the amount people pay for their health care and insurance: 57%
  - Reducing what the nation as a whole spends on health care: 21%
  - Reducing the amount employers pay to provide health insurance to their workers: 9%
  - Reducing future spending on government health insurance programs like Medicare and Medicaid: 6%

- **McCain voters**
  - Reducing the amount people pay for their health care and insurance: 44%
  - Reducing what the nation as a whole spends on health care: 24%
  - Reducing the amount employers pay to provide health insurance to their workers: 11%
  - Reducing future spending on government health insurance programs like Medicare and Medicaid: 12%

Future Federal Spending on Health Care
(% wanting spending increase)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>McCain voters</th>
<th>Obama voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medical care for veterans</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs to prevent disease and improve health</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicare</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs to protect against bioterrorism</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biomedical research</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicaid</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Future
Public’s Views of Federal Regulation of Business

Too much
- 2008: 28%
- 2002: 30%
- 1986: 41%

Too little
- 2008: 43%
- 2002: 37%
- 1986: 22%

Right amount
- 2008: 16%
- 2002: 24%
- 1986: 22%

“Don’t know” responses not shown.