

The Washington Post

Why Americans like Obamacare (and why they don't) — in two charts

BY SEAN SULLIVAN: March 27, 2014

Few -- if any -- laws have divided the public like the Affordable Care Act. Ever since President Obama signed the federal health-care law four years ago this week, Republicans have pilloried it while Democrats have defended it.

But why do the law's supporters like it? And why do opponents hate it? Thanks to a poll released this week by the Kaiser Family Foundation, we can answer these questions.

The public remains more negative (46 percent hold an unfavorable view) than positive (38 percent hold a favorable view) toward the law, overall. That's the way it's been for much of the last four years.

Kaiser asked respondents open-ended questions about why they favor the law and why they don't. By far the most popular reason for supporting the law: Expanded access to medical care and coverage. Cost comes in second. The third most popular reason is that it's good for the country. Here's a chart, courtesy of Kaiser, that breaks it all down:

FIGURE 5: In Their Own Words: Reasons For Favorable Views

AMONG THE 38% WHO HAVE A FAVORABLE VIEW: Could you tell me in your own words what is the main reason you have a favorable opinion of the health reform law?

Category	Percent Mentioning	Quotes
Expanding access to care and insurance	61%	<i>"Because it allows people without insurance the ability to get insurance."</i> <i>"Because a lot of people who otherwise would not have insurance will now have it."</i> <i>"Because I am able to keep my health insurance with my parents until age 26."</i>
Will make health care more affordable/control costs/lower costs	10	<i>"Because it makes health insurance affordable for people without insurance."</i> <i>"Because I think the health care system was too costly and the affordable health care act will cut costs."</i>
Country/people will be better off generally	7	<i>"It makes health care better for Americans."</i> <i>"It is beneficial to the general public."</i>

Opposition is driven by cost, distaste for the individual mandate, and a sense that the measure is an example of government overreach:

FIGURE 6: In Their Own Words: Reasons For Unfavorable Views

AMONG THE 46% WHO HAVE AN UNFAVORABLE VIEW: Could you tell me in your own words what is the main reason you have an unfavorable opinion of the health reform law?

Category	Percent Mentioning	Quotes
Cost concerns	23%	<i>"It's too expensive for regular people."</i> <i>"it's costing too much money. It's supposed to help people with low incomes and it's not."</i> <i>"Because it's a financial hardship on the U.S."</i>
Opposed to individual mandate/ Unconstitutional	17	<i>"Don't think it's right to penalize people who don't have health care."</i> <i>"It's unconstitutional, requiring people to have health insurance."</i>
Government-related issues	10	<i>"I don't like the government making personal decisions for me."</i> <i>"I believe the government should stay out of health care"</i> <i>"There is too much government in our personal choices."</i>

The fact that cost is an oft-cited reason why Americans like the law as well as a primary justification for why they dislike it speaks volumes for just how far apart the public is on the health-care debate. What one side sees as an attribute, the other side views as a problem.

Republicans and Democrats are already hitting on these themes in an effort to drive turnout in the November midterms. Republicans have been referencing Obamacare much more in the midterm campaign, given its unpopularity and troubled rollout. Expect to hear a lot more about government overreach and cost burdens from GOP candidates and groups.

Democrats have mostly adopted a keep-it-but-fix-it posture predicated on emphasizing the parts of Obamacare that are popular, like what it does to expand coverage, while underscoring efforts to fix the parts that are less popular.
