



Another Phony Obamacare Poll

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April 3, 2014

This week brought news of Obamacare securing 7.1 million enrollees and the expected jubilation from the White House. “This law is doing what’s it’s supposed to do,” a buoyant Obama said in late-afternoon [remarks](#) in the White House Rose Garden. The veracity of these numbers is questionable, as [many](#) have pointed out. But predictably, the media is doing its best to paint a rosy picture of the success of Obamacare, sharing all of the “[good news](#)” of the enrollment numbers.

ABC News and the Washington Post piled on with a poll of their own, demonstrating how public opinion has shifted in a favorable direction coincident with the President’s announcement of the enrollment numbers. “Public support for the Affordable Care Act narrowly notched a new high in the latest ABC News/Washington Post poll” they gleefully [report](#). But a closer look at the poll suggests otherwise.

Langer Research Associates, a professional research and polling firm, conducted the poll. They [pledge](#) to, “Ask only questions that in our professional judgment will produce meaningful, unbiased results.” So what did they ask that produced a new high in support for Obamacare?

Their [survey question](#) asked, “Overall, do you support or oppose the federal law making changes to the health care system?” What specific federal law? No mention of the Affordable Care Act or Obamacare. And what changes specifically? Is the question about the current federal law that makes those changes (Obamacare) or is it about a desire for using the federal law to make further changes? Words mean things. How these questions are phrased leads to different interpretations and answers.

I suspect most Americans are unhappy with aspects various federal health care laws and how these laws impact the health care system. This could be anything from Medicare and Medicaid to prescription drug prices to insurance rules. Any politician with aspirations for higher office has a proposal for changes to federal health care law, such as Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal’s recent [proposal](#). As do most of the think tanks such as the conservative [Heritage Foundation](#), the libertarian [Cato Institute](#), or the liberal [Center for American Progress](#). With groups across the political spectrum supporting using federal law to make changes in the current system, it’s surprising that the poll [showed](#) only 49 percent support rather than 99 percent. It seems most everyone wants the federal law to make changes to the health care system. But not everyone wants the same changes.

So what does this poll really tell us? That half the country wants changes to the status quo in the health care system. Not that they support Obamacare in its current state or any of the [19 changes](#) made in the law since passage.

Suppose the poll asked, “In general, do you support, oppose or neither support nor oppose the health care reforms that were passed by Congress in March of 2010?” This is a bit more specific and references Obamacare, not by name, but at least by the legislation passed by Congress in 2010. This poll, taken a week before the ABCNews/WashPost poll, by GfK Public Affairs & Corporate Communications, showed only [26 percent support](#) for Obamacare. Just a small difference in wording and support is cut in half from one poll to another.

And the results can be spun accordingly. The Washington Post [headline](#) about their own poll crows, “Democrats’ support for Obamacare surges.” Others [claim](#), “Nearly half of Americans support Obamacare.” And [some](#) see 49 percent as a majority, “New poll: More Americans now support 'Obamacare' than oppose it.” Yet an honest analysis based on the wording of the question suggests anything but such support.

The timing of the ABCNews/Wash Post poll release was choreographed perfectly, the day before President Obama’s Rose Garden remarks. A “[victory lap](#)” by the President and a public opinion poll to back it up. So much for polls producing “meaningful and unbiased results.”

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