



## **Trib poll: Majority remains unsold on Obamacare**

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Five years since President Obama signed his watershed health care law, a Tribune-Review poll finds about 53 percent of Americans believe the Affordable Care Act remains a detriment to the country.

Only 31 percent think Obamacare ought to be repealed in full and 46 percent want it to be restructured or replaced. Twenty percent prefer no change to the law, according to the national poll conducted for the Trib by Susquehanna Polling & Research in Harrisburg.

Political analysts said the mixed emotions mirror an uneven split among Americans helped and hurt by the law, which mandates health insurance for most citizens and offers subsidies for the poor.

“Essentially, people who have expanded coverage are the winners. But we should remember that was a relatively small portion of the population. It was only about 15 percent of Americans who were uninsured,” said Michael Tanner, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Cato Institute.

The Trib poll, which reached 1,009 legal residents from Jan. 15 to 25, had a margin of error of 3.09 percentage points. About 27 percent called Obamacare the president's biggest accomplishment — roughly the same number who called it his biggest failure.

Provisions of the law started taking effect in 2010 and continue this year, ranging from free preventive medical services to a medical device tax and the so-called health insurance marketplace, which offers private plans to many lower-income Americans through a federal website.

More than 11 million Americans have signed up for private coverage through Obamacare exchanges, topping the administration's stated goals for 2015, the White House reported last week.

“It's working a little better than we expected,” Obama said in a prepared statement.

Yet high-profile complaints about the law's implementation, including a glitch-prone website that debuted in 2013, helped solidify opposition early from critics who have philosophical differences, policy scholars said.

They said that dissent hasn't softened much as coverage premiums rise, some people lose long-held policies and others blame the law for any complications with their insurance, no matter the cause.

In Billings, Mont., Trib poll respondent Jason Sims said he will pay a \$1,200 federal penalty this year for refusing to insure his family of five through Obamacare. He said a basic plan with a high deductible and high co-pays would have cost about \$400 a month through an insurance exchange.

“The cost they think is affordable doesn't seem to be,” Sims, 39, said of the government's approach. He is self-employed and owns an auto body shop.

At the same time, Chris Maynard, 62, of Eastlake, Ohio, applauded the law's ban on discrimination against people with pre-existing medical conditions. She doesn't think Obamacare goes far enough to curb profit-making in the health care sector, she said.

“I don't think hospitals should be for-profit, and I don't think insurance companies should be in the business of health care at all,” said Maynard, who is raising her 12-year-old granddaughter. “I don't think anybody should be in the business of making a profit off of somebody trying to be healthy.”

Earlier polling shows a majority of Americans support specific parts of Obamacare when asked about them specifically, said Christopher Borick, director of the Institute of Public Opinion at Muhlenberg College in Allentown. He said popular provisions include expanded insurance coverage for young adults on their parents' policies, and Medicaid expansion.

Overall enthusiasm for Obamacare in Pennsylvania is similar to the national numbers turned up in the Trib poll, Borick said.

Pollster Jim Lee, who directed the Trib poll, noted 53 percent of Republican respondents favor repealing Obamacare in full. That suggests contenders for the GOP presidential nomination in 2016 might make the law a focal point as they prepare for Republican primary races, he said.

But “I'm not really sure it becomes the defining issue in the primaries next year, once we're into four years of the implementation of the law,” Lee said.