

NPR Poll: Obamacare more popular than President

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Manuel Balce Ceneta/AP

President Obama, with Vice President Biden, speaks about the Affordable Care Act April 1 in the Rose Garden.

A new bipartisan NPR poll shows approval numbers rising for Obamacare --which is now slightly more popular than its namesake. The [survey](#) of likely voters, conducted for Morning Edition by Democrat Stan Greenberg of Democracy Corps and Republican Whit Ayres of Resurgent Republic, shows the president's health care law is still unpopular but it might not be as heavy a millstone for Democrats as expected.

After a horrendous debut in October, the Affordable Care Act ended its enrollment period with more than 7 million people signed up. And our poll shows the law is viewed a little more favorably now. That's welcome news for the Democratic half of NPR's polling team, Stan Greenberg.

"The conventional wisdom that it's an unpopular program that hangs around the necks of Democrats is absolutely a misreading of the poll data," he says. "If you look at this poll for NPR, we asked whether you favor or oppose the Affordable Care Act or Obamacare. It comes out 47 percent support and 51 percent oppose, with the intensity on the opposition side."

In our poll, the number of people who intensely oppose the law is 12 points higher than those who strongly support the law — bad news for Democrats. But, Greenberg points out, 7 percent of likely voters in our poll oppose the law because it doesn't go far enough — presumably these are Democrats who wanted a single payer Medicare-for-all system. Whit Ayres — the Republican half of NPR's polling team, points to other data that suggests Obamacare will still be a great issue for Republicans this fall.

"First, more people oppose than support Obamacare, as has been the case since it passed. Second, the intensity is on the side of opposition and intensity drives voting behavior," he says. "Third, independents oppose Obamacare by 21 points in this survey and they hold the balance of power in this election."

Thad Boyer from Sioux City, Iowa, is a good example of why Republicans are so confident. Boyer describes himself as a weak Republican but:

"As a blue collar worker, as a law enforcement officer for almost 15 years, there's part of me that agrees with what Democrats stand for," he says.

Boyer says he could vote for either party this fall and there's one issue that will determine his vote.

"I would say healthcare. If the next candidate wants to stand behind Obamacare, I'll go Republican," he says.

In past mid-term elections when control of one or both houses flipped, there was a big enthusiasm gap between the two parties. In 2006, Democrats had the energy. In 2010, it was Republicans. This year's enthusiasm gap does favor the Republicans, but by only 7 points. Twenty-four-year-old Christina Chapman from Winston Salem, N.C., is just the kind of voter Democrats need to turnout this year. Chapman is still on her parents' health care plan. She supports Obamacare and the president .

"I tend to put most of the blame, I guess, on things going wrong with there being stalemates in Congress, as opposed to directly being the president's fault."

Like Chapman, 46 percent of likely voters in NPR's poll approve of the president --51 percent disapprove. That's almost identical to the health care numbers. On the generic ballot — where a hypothetical Democratic candidate runs against a hypothetical Republican — the two parties are virtually tied with the Democrat ahead — 44 to 43 percent.

Stan Greenberg says that's an improvement.

"The president's approval number of 46 percent is not a bad number, and if in fact it continues to edge up, you're not talking about the same kind of numbers when you had 39 percent or 42 percent approval. So the trend of all of those stuff is moving slowly," he says. "And I think this turning point of the Affordable Care Act will have an impact on his performance and also the energy of Democrats."

Whit Ayres doesn't think that will be enough to offset all the structural advantages Republicans have this year.

"The mid-term election in the sixth year of a President's term has been historically bad for the party in the White House. The demographics of mid-term elections mean more white and elderly voters, which favor Republicans. And the Senate seats up this year strongly favor Republicans with seven Democratic-held seats in red states and five in purple or swing states,"

he says. "All Republicans have to do is win half of those seats and they take control of the Senate."

Both Ayres and Greenberg do agree that control of the Senate is the measure of success in 2014.

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