

## Democrats' Modest Advantage on Health Care Has Increased – But It Is Still Modest

*Costs and coverage remain dominant issues*

Historically, health care issues have helped Democratic candidates and been dangerous for Republicans. In many elections, the Democrats have enjoyed large leads as the party best able to address the voters' concerns about health care. While making some gains over the last year, Democrats seem to have lost a lot of this advantage. With a year to go before the 2004 elections, the Democrats are still preferred over the Republicans as the "party which is more likely to do what you want about the health care issues which are important to you" but only by a 35% to 20% plurality.

While this is an increase in the Democratic lead compared to October 2002 (when it was only 31% to 21%), it is nothing like the lead that Democrats need, and would normally expect, on health care. Among people over 65, the Democratic lead (36% to 30%) is even smaller. This is important because older voters are much more likely than younger voters to be influenced in their votes by health care issues.

This issue of Health Care News is based on a nationwide survey of 2,056 adults surveyed online by Harris Interactive between October 21 and 27, 2003.

**Table 1**  
**Health Care May Influence Vote**

"Which party do you think is more likely to do what you want about the health care issues that are important to you?"

Base: All Adults

	October 2002	October 2003	Age 65 +
	%	%	%
Democrats	31	35	36
Republicans	21	20	30
Neither/no difference/both	33	32	28
Don't know	15	13	7

### ♦ EDITORS ♦

#### Humphrey Taylor

Chairman of *The Harris Poll*®

#### Robert Leitman

Group President, Health Care, Education & Public Policy

## A lot of health care issues are potentially important

Fifty percent or more of all adults say that they care “a great deal” about each of six different health care issues. The largest numbers care about the total cost of health care (71%), the cost and prices of prescription drugs (65%) and improving the quality of health care (62%). Other issues that large numbers of people care about are the future of Medicare (53%), a patients’ bill of rights (51%) and expanding health insurance to reduce the number of people who are uninsured (50%).

Interestingly, given that it is the subject of heated debate in Washington right now, a new Medicare drug benefit is something which fewer people care about than any of the other listed issues (but even here 41% care a great deal).

These numbers also confirm that it is **the price of prescription drugs which has become a much more important issue than the Medicare drug benefit** (65% compared to 41%).

**Table 2**

### A Lot Of People Care A Great Deal About Health Care Issues

“How much do you personally care about each of the following health care issues?”  
(Percent saying “great deal”)

Base: All Adults

	October 2002	October 2003	Age	Party I.D.		
			65+	Repub- lican	Demo- crat	Inde- pendent
	%	%	%	%	%	%
The total cost of health care	69	71	78	69	77	72
The cost and prices of prescription drugs	63	65	67	63	70	62
Improving the quality of health care	65	62	66	51	74	63
The future of Medicare	54	53	70	48	62	53
A patients’ bill of rights	52	51	54	41	59	50
Expanding health insurance to reduce the number of people who are uninsured	47	50	41	29	66	53
Protecting the public against bioterrorism such as Anthrax or smallpox attacks	56	49	54	54	56	39
A new Medicare drug benefit	44	41	45	35	49	40

## The influence of health care issues on voting

Almost half of all adults say that health care issues may influence the way they will vote. Interestingly, this belief has risen eight points (from 40% to 48%) since October last year.

Replies to questions such as this should always be treated with some caution. Most people do not fully understand all the forces that cause them to vote one way or another. And they tend to say they are influenced by more policy issues than is actually the case. Also, it is clear from our other polls that the economy and the packet of issues related to terrorism, national security and Iraq are, by a wide margin, important to more voters than are health care issues.

**Table 3**  
**Health Care May Influence Vote**

“Are there any health care issues in this election which may influence the way that you will vote?”

Base: All Adults

	October 2002	October 2003
	%	%
Yes, there are (may influence vote)	40	48
No, there are not	36	30
Don't know	23	21

## Which health care issues people think they will be most influenced by

When the 48% of all adults who say that their votes will be influenced by health care issues are asked which issues will have the most influence on them, the total cost of health care (30%) and expanding health care insurance to reduce the number of people who are uninsured (26%) top the list by a wide margin. However, these are very broad issues rather than more specific ones. The specific issues mentioned most often are the cost and prices of prescription drugs (12%) and the future of Medicare (7%).

It is interesting that only 3% mention protecting the public against bioterrorism, down from 9% at this time last year and only 3% mention a new Medicare drug benefit even though it is the burning health care issue of the day in Washington.

**Table 4**  
**Health Care Issues Which Will Influence How You Will Vote**

“Which one – if any – of these issues will have the most influence on how you will vote?”

Base: Likely voters who say health care issues may influence vote

	October 2002	October 2003
	%	%
The total cost of health care	21	30
Expanding health insurance to reduce the number of people who are uninsured	23	26
The cost and prices of prescription drugs	13	12
Improving the quality of health care	9	9
The future of Medicare	12	7
None of these	4	6
Protecting the public against bioterrorism such as anthrax or smallpox attacks	9	3
A new Medicare drug benefit	6	3
Don't know	2	3
A patients' bill of rights	1	1

## Methodology

This survey was conducted online within the United States between October 21 and 27, 2003 among a nationwide cross section of 2,056 adults. Figures for age, sex, race, education and number of adults in the household were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

In theory, with probability samples of this size, one could say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a statistical precision of plus or minus two percentage points of what they would be if the entire adult population had been polled with complete accuracy. Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in all polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. They include refusals to be interviewed (non-response), question wording and question order, and weighting. It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors. This online sample was not a probability sample.

*These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.*

## About Harris Interactive®

Harris Interactive ([www.harrisinteractive.com](http://www.harrisinteractive.com)) is a worldwide market research and consulting firm best known for *The Harris Poll*®, and for pioneering the Internet method to conduct scientifically accurate market research. Headquartered in Rochester, New York, U.S.A., Harris Interactive combines proprietary methodologies and technology with expertise in predictive, custom and strategic research. The Company conducts international research through wholly owned subsidiaries—London-based **HI Europe** ([www.hieurope.com](http://www.hieurope.com)) and Tokyo-based **Harris Interactive Japan**—as well as through the Harris Interactive Global Network of local market- and opinion-research firms, and various U.S. offices. EOE M/F/D/V

To become a member of the Harris Poll Online<sup>SM</sup> and be invited to participate in future online surveys, visit [www.harrispollonline.com](http://www.harrispollonline.com).

For more information, please contact us at:

877.919.4765  
or visit our website at  
[www.harrisinteractive.com](http://www.harrisinteractive.com)

Media inquiries, contact:  
Bonnie Hughes 585.214.7541