

Healthcare Industries Still Amongst Most Popular Targets for More Regulation but Support for Regulation Declines for Third Year in a Row

Every year at this time *The Harris Poll* asks a nationwide sample of adults which industries (of a list of industries, currently 17) they think should be more regulated by government – for example for health, safety or environmental reasons. The survey also asks the public which of these industries are generally honest and trustworthy.

In the latest survey conducted in October this year, we found that three healthcare industries continued to be very high on the list of those that should be more strongly regulated – below only the currently unpopular oil industry. However, for the third year in a row the percentage of people who want stronger regulation of these healthcare industries has declined.

These are the results of a nationwide sample of 2,010 U.S. adults aged 18 and over who were surveyed online between October 4 and 10, 2008.

Pharmaceuticals

In the latest survey, 48 percent of adults favor stronger regulation of “pharmaceutical and drug companies,” down from 57 percent, 55 percent and 51 percent who felt this way in 2003, 2004 and 2005, respectively. While Republicans (40 %) are less likely than Democrats (54%) or Independents (51%) to favor stronger regulation, the difference is not very large.

While fewer people now favor stronger regulation of the pharmaceutical industry, only seven percent of adults think that it is generally honest and trustworthy, and this number is actually lower (i.e. worse) than the 13 percent, 14 percent and nine percent recorded in the last three years (2003, 2004 and 2005, respectively).

Health insurance and managed care

The differences between health insurance and managed care companies have eroded somewhat as almost all major health insurance companies are also in managed care, and managed care organizations are a form of insurance. Public perceptions – using both descriptions – are similar, still very negative but, like attitudes to pharmaceuticals, somewhat better than they used to be.

This year 48 percent of adults want stronger regulations of health insurance and 41 percent want stronger regulation of managed care. However, these are down, respectively, from 59 percent and 60 percent in 2003, having declined every year since then.

However, the numbers of adults who believe health insurance and managed care companies are generally honest and trustworthy remain very, very low at seven percent and four percent.

Hospitals

Public attitudes toward hospitals are not as negative as attitudes toward pharmaceuticals and health insurance. However, 28 percent of adults want stronger regulation of hospitals, which is more than those who want stronger regulation of half the industries on the list, including life insurance (24%), telephone companies (23%), airlines (21%), car manufactures (19%) or banks (17%).

Hospitals do better, relative to other industries, on trust. Twenty-eight percent of the public thinks they are generally honest and trustworthy, just below supermarkets and banks but better than the other fourteen industries listed.

TABLE 1
Industries That Should Be More Regulated - Trend

“Which of these industries do you think should be more regulated by government – for example for health, safety or environmental reasons – than they are now?”

Base: All Adults

	2003	2004	2005	2006	Change 2003-2006
	%	%	%	%	%
Oil companies	52	48	55	54	+2
Pharmaceutical and drug companies	57	55	51	48	-9
Health insurance companies	59	56	46	48	-11
Managed care companies such as HMOs	60	55	43	41	-19
Electric and gas utilities	n/a	n/a	43	38	n/a
Tobacco companies	44	42	36	38	-6
Hospitals	35	35	28	28	-7
Life insurance companies	35	34	26	24	-11
Telephone companies	30	31	26	23	-7
Airlines	31	27	26	21	-10
Car manufacturers	24	24	24	19	-5
Packaged food companies	26	24	17	19	-7
Banks	21	20	19	17	-4
Online retailers	n/a	n/a	14	13	n/a
Computer software companies	11	9	8	7	-4
Computer hardware companies	8	8	7	7	-1
Supermarkets	10	8	6	6	-4
None of these	20	20	25	23	+3

Note: multiple-response question
n/a = industry not asked about that year

TABLE 2
Industries That Should Be More Regulated – by Party

“Which of these industries do you think should be more regulated by government – for example for health, safety or environmental reasons – than they are now?”

Base: All Adults

	Total	Party ID		
		Repub- lican	Democ- rat	Independ- ent
	%	%	%	%
Oil companies	54	43	62	56
Pharmaceutical and drug companies	48	40	54	51
Health insurance companies	48	41	55	47
Managed care companies such as HMOs	41	36	45	44
Electric and gas utilities	38	33	45	38
Tobacco	38	32	43	38
Hospitals	28	23	33	25
Life Insurance	24	22	25	25
Telephone Companies	23	21	26	20
Airlines	21	17	22	22
Packaged food companies	19	15	21	19
Car manufacturers	19	14	20	19
Banks	17	11	19	19
Online retailers	13	15	13	10
Computer software companies	7	6	8	5
Computer hardware companies	7	7	7	4
Supermarkets	6	5	8	5
None of these	23	29	16	24

Note: multiple-response question

TABLE 3
Industries That Are Generally Honest and Trustworthy - Trend

“Which of these industries do you think are generally honest and trustworthy – so that you normally believe a statement by a company in that industry?”

Base: All Adults

	2003	2004	2005	2006
	%	%	%	%
Supermarkets	40	42	39	34
Banks	35	40	34	31
Hospitals	34	35	34	28
Computer software companies	22	25	22	23
Computer hardware companies	27	29	27	20
Airlines	20	22	17	16
Packaged food companies	23	23	21	14
Electric and gas utilities	n/a	n/a	14	14
Online retailers	n/a	n/a	16	11
Life insurance companies	11	15	10	11
Telephone companies	12	13	11	10
Car manufacturers	14	18	13	9
Pharmaceutical and drug companies	13	14	9	7
Health insurance companies	7	9	9	7
Managed care companies such as HMOs	4	5	5	4
Oil Companies	4	4	3	3
Tobacco companies	3	4	4	2
None of these	37	32	37	40

Note: multiple-response question
n/a = industry not asked about that year

Methodology

This Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States between October 4 and 10, 2006 among 2,010 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race, education, region and household income 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.

All surveys are subject to several sources of error. These include: sampling error (because only a sample of a population is interviewed); measurement error due to question wording and/or question order, deliberately or unintentionally inaccurate responses, nonresponse (including refusals), interviewer effects (when live interviewers are used) and weighting.

With one exception (sampling error) the magnitude of the errors that result cannot be estimated. There is, therefore, no way to calculate a finite “margin of error” for any survey and the use of these words should be avoided.

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With pure probability samples, with 100 percent response rates, it is possible to calculate the probability that the sampling error (but not other sources of error) is not greater than some number. With a pure probability sample of 2,010 adults one could say with a ninety-five percent probability that the overall results have a sampling error of +/- two percentage points. However that does not take other sources of error into account. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

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

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