

Botched ACA Rollout Hammers Obama; Job Disapproval Reaches a Career High
News

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Posted on : 2013/11/19 8:27:52

Barack Obama has been hammered by the botched rollout of the Affordable Care Act, with disapproval of his job performance reaching a career high, opposition to the new healthcare law up sharply and evidence of potential fallout in the midterm elections a year off.



Story by Gary Langer, ABC News, available at yahoo.com

The president's job approval rating has fallen to 42 percent in a new ABC News/Washington Post poll, down 13 percentage points this year and 6 points in the past month to match the lowest of his presidency. Fifty-five percent disapprove, a record. And 70 percent say the country's headed seriously off on the wrong track - up 13 points since May to the most in two years.

Other ratings of the president's performance have tumbled as well. He's at career lows for being a strong leader, understanding the problems of average Americans and being honest and trustworthy - numerically under water on each of these (a first for the latter two). His rating for strong leadership is down by 15 points this year and a vast 31 points below its peak shortly after he took office. In a new gauge, just 41 percent rate him as a good manager; 56 percent think not.

This poll, produced for ABC by Langer Research Associates, finds that the president's personal image has suffered alongside his professional ratings. Fewer than half, 46 percent, see him favorably overall, down 14 points this year to the fewest of his presidency. Fifty-two percent now view him unfavorably, a new high and a majority for the first time since he took office. It may matter: Personal popularity can provide a president with cushioning when the going gets rough. Losing it leaves the president more vulnerable.

ACA - Skepticism about the Affordable Care Act looks to be the driving force in Obama's troubles. Americans by nearly 2-1, 63-33 percent, disapprove of his handling of implementation of the new health care law. And the public by 57-40 percent now opposes the law overall, its most negative rating to date, with opposition up by 8 points in the past month alone.

Intensity of sentiment is running against the law and the president alike. At 46 percent, "strong" opposition to the ACA - a new high - outpaces strong support by a record 19 points. In terms of Obama's job performance overall, strong critics outnumber strong approvers by 2-1, 44-22 percent, with strong disapproval at another career high. He'd run evenly on strong sentiment as recently as last May.

Fifty-six percent describe the cancellation of health insurance policies that are deemed substandard under the law as "mismanagement" rather than a normal startup problem. Given the breakdown of the healthcare.gov website, a broad 71 percent favor postponing the individual mandate requiring nearly all Americans to have coverage. And the mandate's still widely unpopular in any case; 65 percent of Americans oppose it - a majority of them, strongly. Notably, even among those who support the individual mandate. 55 percent favor delaying it.

The poll produces evidence that the ACA could spell trouble for Democrats in the 2014 midterm elections. Americans by a 16-point margin, 37-21 percent, are more likely to oppose than to support

a candidate for Congress who favors Obamacare. That's opened up from an even score in July 2012. (Using an intensity rating - those who are "much" more or less likely to support a candidate who backs the ACA - it's still 15 points negative, vs. 2 points last year.)

The health care law looks most politically hazardous in the states that backed Mitt Romney in 2012; there Americans by 3-1, 46-15 percent, say they're more inclined to oppose than to support a candidate who favors the law. But the ACA's no help even in the blue states that backed Obama; while the division is far closer, 31 percent in those states are inclined to oppose an ACA-linked candidate, vs. 25 percent who'd be more apt to support one.

For all the ACA's troubles, Americans divide evenly, 49-49 percent, on whether the law simply is unworkable or the government can recover and implement it successfully. While its individual mandate is widely opposed, 58 percent support its requirement that companies with 50 or more employees provide coverage or pay a fine. And fewer than half - though a still-troubling 44 percent - think Obama "intentionally misled" the public when he said that people who liked their policies could keep them. (For comparison, there were four occasions in 2005-6 when majorities said George W. Bush had "intentionally misled" the American public on Iraq.)

TURN - The results overall represent a sharp turnaround in fortune for Obama and his party, which just a month ago were ascendant over the Republicans in views of the budget dispute that led to a partial government shutdown. Today 45 percent of Americans call Obama "too liberal," matching the high, and 46 percent say the same about the Democratic Party. And perhaps adding insult to injury, registered voters divide numerically in Mitt Romney's favor, 49-45 percent, if they had a mulligan for the 2012 presidential election. While the difference between the two is within the poll's error margin, Obama's support is 6 points below his actual showing a year ago.

Indeed, even with the stock market soaring and GDP and the jobs market gaining ground, disenchantment with Obama has damaged his most critical issue-specific approval rating, for handling the economy. Fifty-seven percent disapprove, up by 9 points since May and the most since March 2012.

Partisanship on all this is profound: Eighty-four percent of Democrats approve of Obama's job performance overall, while a mere 8 percent of Republicans agree - a gap that matches the widest of Obama's presidency.

Key, though, are views among political independents - and in this group just 33 percent now approve of Obama's work in office, while 63 percent disapprove. That's a career low for Obama among independents, down 21 points since January and 10 points in just the past month.

Similarly showing damage in the center, Obama's dropped by 17 points in approval among moderates since January, to 46 percent, compared with his losses among conservatives and Republicans (down 12 and 9 points, respectively, albeit to a far lower level).

At the same time, there's also one core support group in which Obama is hurting - young adults, a group he won by an historic margin in 2008, and strongly again in 2012. The president's overall approval rating has lost 23 points among adults age 18 to 29 since January, his steepest loss in any group. Their view that the country's headed in the wrong direction has gained 20 points since May. And in just the past month, opposition to the health care law has jumped by 16 points among under-30s, with strong opposition up by 21 points.

For all this, about as many Americans call both the Republican Party and the Tea Party political movement "too conservative" - 43 and 40 percent, respectively - as call Obama and the Democrats too liberal. And the number who say the Tea Party has too much influence over the GOP has nearly doubled, from 23 percent in spring 2010 to 43 percent now. That suggests the Republicans haven't left the doghouse so much as Obama and the Democrats, courtesy of the troubled start of the new

health care law, have joined them in it.

METHODOLOGY - This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Nov. 14-17, 2013, in English and Spanish, among a random national sample of 1,006 adults, including landline and cell-phone-only respondents. Results have a margin of sampling error of 3.5 points, including design effect. Partisan divisions are 31-24-37 percent, Democrats-Republicans-independents.

The survey was produced for ABC News by Langer Research Associates of New York, N.Y., with sampling, data collection and tabulation by Abt-SRBI of New York, N.Y.