



DATA FOR *PROGRESS*

# THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM IS FUCKED.

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Recently, Data for Progress and YouGov Blue conducted polling on voters' attitudes toward Medicare for All, the current healthcare system, and other policies to reform healthcare in the United States. While most commentary and much polling has focused on how voters feel about potential changes to the healthcare systems, pundits have mostly ignored the extent to which voters dislike the current system.

We asked voters to rate whether they approved or disapproved of certain aspects of our current healthcare system, and to say whether they thought the government should be more involved or less involved in the provision of health insurance and health coverage. We find that voters view the current system as deficient, and desire more government intervention.

## Executive summary

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- ▶ Voters overwhelmingly support additional government involvement in the provision of healthcare
- ▶ Voters strongly approve of the ultimate objective of universal coverage, even if it means more government involvement in healthcare
- ▶ Voters want more government involvement in the expansion of insurance coverage and in the quality of the insurance that is provided
- ▶ The government programs responsible for providing healthcare to the poor, the elderly, and to veterans are by far the most popular parts of the status quo
- ▶ The Affordable Care Act is responsible for the most popular part of private insurance acquisition, which is the inability of insurers to refuse customers on the basis of pre-existing conditions
- ▶ Voters overwhelmingly disapprove of the fact their insurance companies can deny claims for any reason, and disapprove of the uncertainty foisted on them by the uneven coverage networks that are dictated by health insurance companies, including different sets of doctors, hospitals, and providers depending on the plan
- ▶ Ultimately, uncertainty in the current system is the common cause of voters' dissatisfaction with healthcare currently. New policies that help provide coverage and resolve ambiguities in the current system are overwhelmingly popular

## Voters support additional government involvement to help expand access to healthcare

Early in our survey, we asked voters if they felt the government should be doing more or less on healthcare at all. We asked voters,

*Even if its not exactly right, when it comes to healthcare coverage, which of the following is closer to your view?*

<1> *The government should be doing more when it comes to ensuring access to healthcare coverage*

<2> *The government should be doing less when it comes to ensuring access to healthcare coverage*

<3> *Don't know*

A clear majority of voters support additional government action on health care. About 57 percent of voters said the government should be doing more, with just 30 percent saying the government should be doing less. Consistent with some of [our recent work](#) showing voters want the government to be doing more to bring down the cost of care, voters also want the government to be doing more to expand access to care.

## The most popular parts of the current system are the parts administered by the government, or obligated by legislation

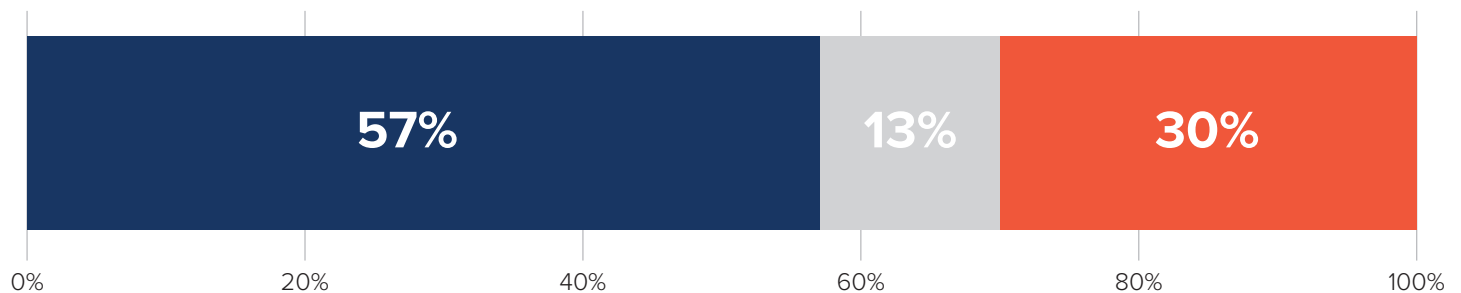
We asked voters to consider the benefits of the current system of healthcare provision in the United States. Those elements covered aspects of the current system such as the relatively high ability of private businesses to make choices for their employees, as well as parts of the system that are partially or solely run by the government, or required by government policy. Specifically, our battery asked,

*While some would like to reform the healthcare system, others say there are benefits to the current system. Next, you will see some elements of the current healthcare system. For each of the following, please say whether you [support or oppose] or are unsure how you feel about that element of our current healthcare system.*

- *Employers are allowed to change health insurance plans at any time*
- *Health insurance provided through employers is subsidized by the government*
- *Government-managed healthcare markets where individuals can purchase health insurance with subsidies from the government*

### BELIEVE GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE DOING MORE/LESS IN HEALTHCARE

GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE DOING MORE NOT SURE GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE DOING LESS



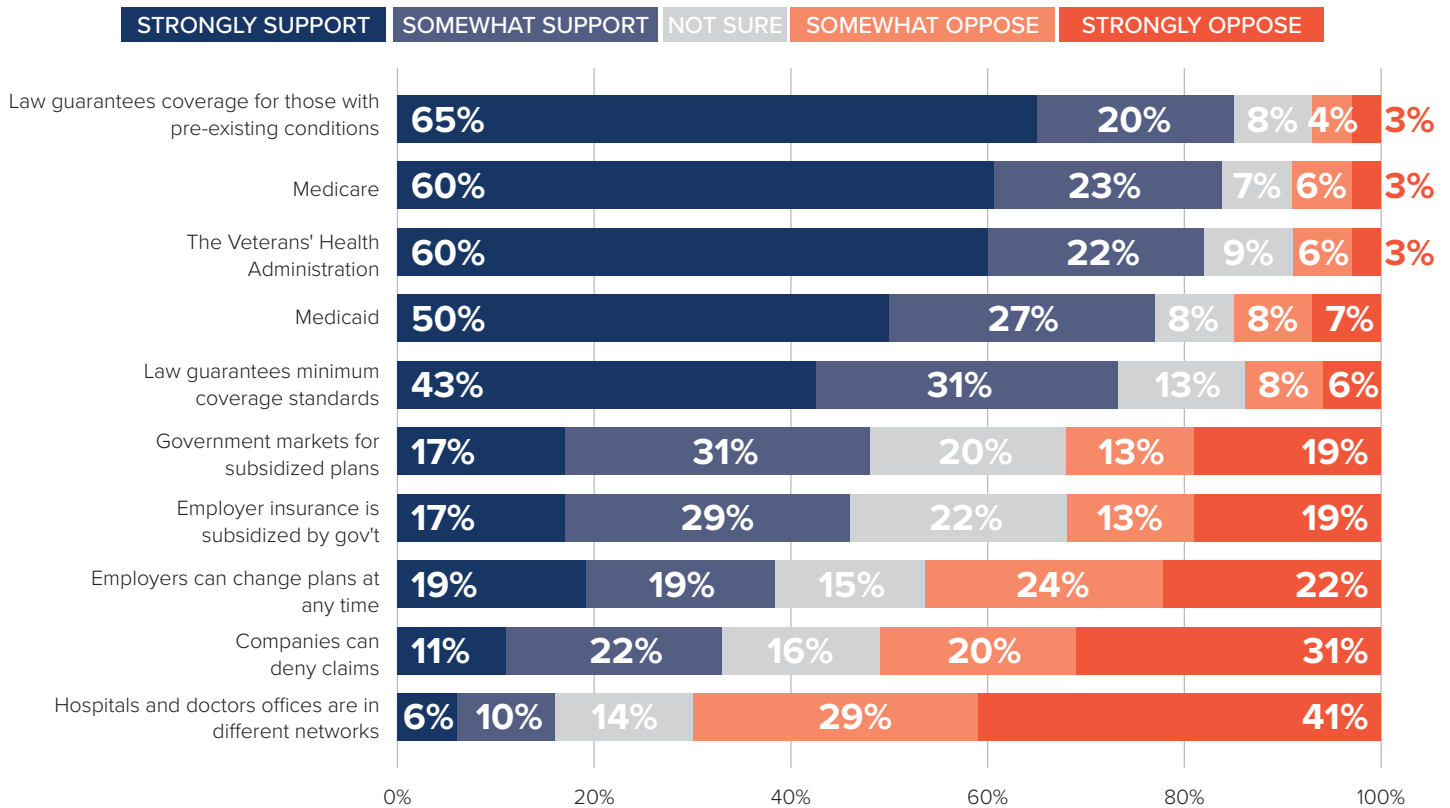
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- The law guarantees that health insurance companies must cover people with pre-existing conditions
- The law guarantees minimum standards of coverage that all private insurance companies must meet to sell health insurance
- The Medicaid program, which provides insurance coverage to low-income adults and children
- The Medicare program, which provides insurance coverage to Americans over 65
- The Veterans Health Administration, which provides healthcare for veterans
- Health insurance companies can deny claims if they deem them invalid claims
- Hospitals and doctors' offices are in different insurance networks, meaning that some claims will not be covered by an individual's insurance

For each of these, voters could respond if they strongly supported, somewhat supported, somewhat opposed, strongly opposed, or were unsure how they felt about each of those policies.

The following plot breaks down the level of support for, or opposition to, various elements of the current system. Voters overwhelmingly approve of government-run healthcare providers like Medicare, Medicaid, and the Veterans' Health Administration, with each earning about 80 percent support. About 83 percent of voters approve of Medicare itself, with 82 percent approving of the Veterans' Health Administration, and 77 percent approving of Medicaid. The most popular part of the current system, the component of the Affordable Care Act forbidding insurance companies from turning away customers on the basis of pre-existing conditions, received fully 85 percent support from voters.

### SUPPORTS FOR ELEMENTS OF CURRENT SYSTEM



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Additionally, voters clearly approve of policies that, while not directly resulting in the government provision of insurance, strongly regulate the kind of insurance that providers can offer, and how they must offer it to potential customers. For example, voters overwhelmingly approve of requiring minimum coverage standards in any healthcare plan, with 74 percent of voters supporting that aspect of the current system and just 14 percent opposing it. The “Obamacare markets,” the state government exchanges, are also popular by a 48-32 margin among voters. Subsidies for employer-provided insurance are narrowly supported, by a 36-32 margin overall.

On the other hand, uncertainties in the system attributable to choice of plan and to the differences between networks clearly polled unfavorably. By a 51-33 margin, voters opposed the fact that insurance companies can deny claims, which typically result in customers failing to receive compensation for a claim or having to litigate a claim with their insurer. Even moreso, by a 70-16 margin, voters opposed the fact that differences in private insurance networks can result in “patchwork coverage,” i.e., situations where certain elements of a healthcare provider are covered by a plan but not others. Situations like these include cases where a certain hospital will accept a customer’s insurance, but the private company that owns an ambulance transporting a customer to that hospital does not, resulting in fees that an insurer may not have to cover. The possibility of employers changing plans is also unpopular, with 46 percent of voters opposing this possibility compared to 38 percent who support it.

## Americans want the government to be more involved in providing healthcare access, but not running individual facilities

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Additionally, we asked voters a battery concerning whether they felt the government should be more involved or less involved in certain elements of the healthcare system. Each of these items included some

aspect of the current healthcare system, or some overall objective of policy such as the price and availability of coverage.

Specifically, we asked voters,

*Next, you will read about some aspects of the healthcare system. For each of those, please say whether you think there should be more government involvement in that aspect of the healthcare system, less government involvement, or if you are unsure.*

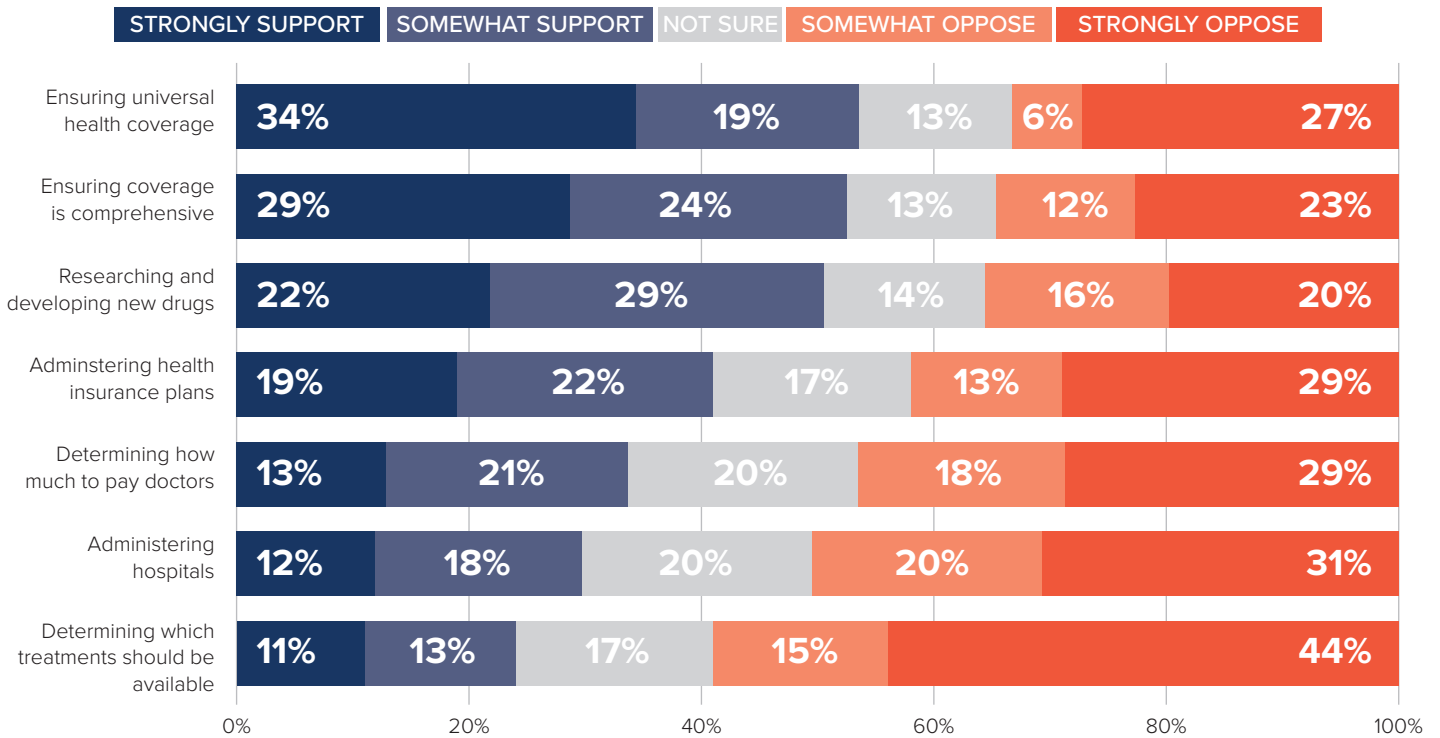
*For each aspect of the healthcare system, say how much the government should be involved:*

- Ensuring universal health insurance coverage
- Ensuring that health insurance coverage is comprehensive
- Administering health insurance plans
- Determining how much to pay doctors
- Determining which treatments should be available to patients
- Researching and developing new drugs
- Administering hospitals

For each of these, voters answered if they believed the government should be much more involved, somewhat more involved, somewhat less involved, much less involved, or were unsure how they felt about each of these aspects of the healthcare system.

An outright majority of voters want to see more government involvement in ensuring universal health insurance coverage, with 53 percent of voters supporting and just 33 percent of voters opposing such an objective. As with our previous battery, which showed that voters clearly approved of having minimum standards for the provision of health insurance, 53 percent of voters supported and just 35 percent of voters opposed more government involvement in ensuring that insurance coverage is comprehensive.

## SUPPORT FOR MORE OR LESS GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM



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In [past research we have shown clear evidence](#) that voters support more government involvement in ensuring the equitable development and provision of life-saving drugs, and we replicate that finding here. Fully 51 percent of voters support and just 36 percent of voters oppose more government involvement in the research and development of new pharmaceutical drugs which, [in past work, we have shown](#) explicitly involves both negotiating prices and directly providing common and life-saving medication.

Opinion in other areas of government involvement is more mixed. Voters are evenly split on more government involvement in *administering* plans, if not providing them. Voters are more skeptical of government involvement in determining the salaries of doctors and in the direct administration of hospitals. As such, while we have clear evidence that voters support government policy to expand coverage, evidence is more mixed on whether or not government should be running individual medical centers.

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## Conclusion

While most commentary on Medicare for All has focused on what might change with a Medicare for All system, here we focus on views of the present system. We find that voters are overwhelmingly supportive of the public aspects of the current system (such as Medicare), and dislike many aspects of the private system, such as out-of-network doctors. On the basic question of whether the government should be doing more in the healthcare system, voters are overwhelmingly supportive of more government action.

## Methodology

On behalf of Data for Progress, YouGov Blue fielded a survey of 1,005 US registered voters on YouGov's online panel. The survey fielded from 10/30/19-10/31/19 and was weighted to be representative of the population of registered voters by age, race/ethnicity, sex, education, US Census region, and 2016 Presidential vote choice.