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# If Obamacare Proponents Had Better Knowledge Of The Law, Would It Affect Their Support For It?

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The always thoughtful Bill Gardner [ponders](#) ObamaCare's enduring unpopularity. One of his data points, however, comes from [some pretty silly survey research](#).

Gardner writes:

“ [Jon Krosnick, Wendy Gross, and colleagues](#) at Stanford and Kaiser ran large surveys to measure public understanding of the ACA and how it was associated with approval of the law. They found that accurate knowledge about what's in the bill varied with party identification: Democrats understood the most and liked the law the most, independents less, and Republicans understood still less and liked the law the least. However, attitudes were not just tribal. Within each party, the more accurate your knowledge of the law, the more you liked it.

Krosnick and colleagues found that most people favor most of the elements of the ACA, but not everyone recognized that these elements were all in the plan. Many people also have false beliefs about the plan. For example, only 42% of Americans correctly understood that the law does not provide free treatment for illegal aliens. Only 21% of Americans approve of this imaginary feature of the plan.

This suggests that if the public understood the ACA perfectly, support for the law would be higher. Based on their model for how knowledge about the ACA is associated with approval for the law, Krosnick and colleagues project that in the unlikely case in which the public had perfect understanding of the law,

“ the proportion of Americans who favor the bill might increase from the current level of 32% to 70%.

Vox's Sarah Kliff [cutely](#) uses the researchers' conclusion to argue that if, [as Jonathan Gruber says](#), ObamaCare's authors tried to deceive the public, they did a terrible job.

A reporter asked me about the Stanford-Kaiser survey a while ago. Here's my response, lightly edited for clarity:

“ Generally, this is one of those surveys where:

1. If the survey taker’s understanding of the topic is correct, and
2. If the respondents agree with that understanding, then
3. The respondents will score well!

As if to confirm my suspicions, the second bullet point in the report’s abstract suggests the survey takers’ understanding of the topic might have an ideological tinge: “Correct understanding of the elements of the bill we examined varied with party identification: Democrats understood the most, independents less, and Republicans still less.” Riiiiight. The third bullet seems to confirm that Gruber was right: “Older people and more educated people have understood the elements of the bill we examined better than have younger and less educated people.” Then there’s this: “Most people have favored most of the elements of the ACA that we examined, but not everyone recognized that these elements were all in the plan.” I’m guessing these are some of those notorious survey questions that ask about benefits only, with no mention of the attached costs.

And what’s this? Nine out of the 12 provisions they ask about are benefits, and only three are costs.

Then have a look at the “provisions that were not in the ACA.” One of them is a disputed question: “Committees decide whether people get medical care (‘death panels’).” I can [demonstrate](#) that IPAB could decide whether Medicare enrollees get certain types of medical care, and there ain’t nothing the enrollee could do about it. Actually, the way they frame it in the survey is: “Create committees of people who will review the medical histories of some people and decide whether they can get medical care paid for by the federal government.” Which is weird: I’ve never seen death panels described as reviewing anyone’s medical records. Also weird is that Medicare *does* have panels that review the medical histories of some people and decide whether they can get medical care paid for by the federal government. Guess how people qualify for Medicare due to a disability or end-stage renal disease?

Another one, “Require some doctors and hospitals to treat illegal immigrants free of charge if they cannot afford to pay,” isn’t in the PPACA. But it is in another federal law: EMTALA.

Finally, one of these “not in the ACA” provisions clearly *is* in the law: “Require insurance companies to charge an additional fee of \$1,000 year to anyone who buys insurance from them and smokes cigarettes.” Insurers can, and do, charge smokers up to 50 percent more than others their age. That means that smokers often have to pay *more* than \$1,000 extra.

What I take from this survey is if Americans were bombarded with information disproportionately focusing on the law’s benefits, while being fed little information and sometimes misinformation about the law’s costs, then Americans would have what the authors call “Perfect Knowledge” and would favor the law.

Where do they get these people?

## What I’m wondering now is, if ObamaCare supporters had better knowledge of the law, would it affect their support for it?

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