



A Guide for Advocates

How to Link Republicans in Congress to Donald Trump

Welcome to NAVIGATOR — a project designed to better understand the American public's views on issues of the day and help advocates, elected officials, and other interested parties understand the language, imagery and messaging needed to make and win key policy arguments. This edition features findings from a national online survey of 1,028 registered voters conducted August 2-5, 2018. 100 additional interviews were conducted among political independents with no partisan lean.

Every month, we pick a few topics for exploration. The topics we select aren't meant to cover every issue area facing the progressive community, but rather to give actionable advice on how to talk about key issue areas. This month we focused on:

Topic 1: What does the Trump Factor mean for congressional candidates in the midterms?

Donald Trump may not be running for anything this November, but he might as well be. The president is a drag on his party, and Democrats can press the advantage by labeling incumbent Republicans as **spineless** or **Yes Men** too afraid of losing power if they don't do what Trump says.

Topic 2: Where is public opinion moving on big issues like the Special Counsel investigation, family separation, and taxes?

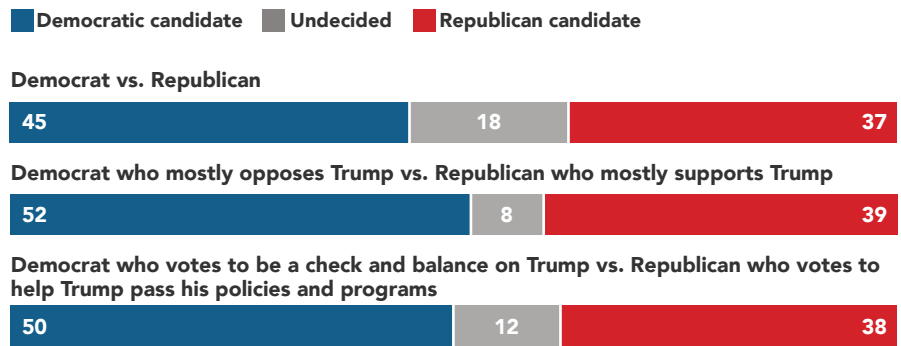
Tracking data suggests stories about Paul Manafort's trial, the Helsinki summit, and Trump's Twitter blow-ups may be increasing Americans' support for the Special Counsel investigation to continue. Public opinion about the Trump Administration family separation policy remains overwhelmingly negative, while the Republican tax plan may be fading from view.

Democrats lead the generic ballot. Mentioning Trump widens that lead.

With just over 80 days to go until Election Day and primary season wrapping up, candidates across the country are turning their sights on the general election campaign. This year's midterm election will be the first since Donald Trump took office. While his name won't be on the ballot, history and polling both suggest the president will be on the minds of many of the voters in the ballot box, with his upside-down approval ratings (39% approve and 57% disapprove in this survey) dragging down candidates across the country. **The remaining questions are: where do Democrats make the biggest gains by linking candidates to Trump – and how do they make that case?**

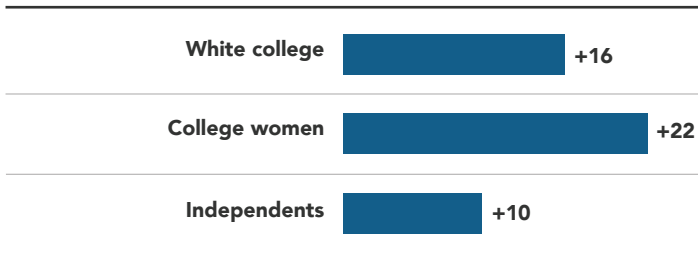
As of now, Democrats have a lead of 8 points (45% to 37%) on a generic congressional ballot among likely voters. But the Democratic lead is wider (+12) when it is explicitly framed as a choice between a generic Democrat who will provide a “check and balance on Trump” and a Republican who will “help Trump pass his policies and programs.”

The Democratic lead is roughly the same (+13) – and also wider than the initial generic congressional ballot – when the framing is a Democrat who simply “opposes Trump” versus a Republican who will “support Trump”.



But there are differences in how key groups of voters react to each framing for the race, and “check and balance” is the better framing for avoiding backlash among those who are generally more supportive of Trump.

Framing an election as an opponent of Trump vs. a supporter of Trump helps boost support for the Democrat with...



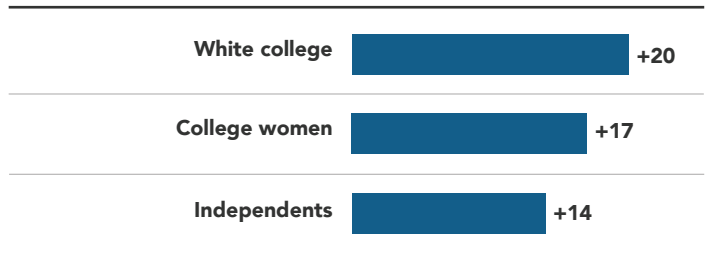
... But there is some backlash among:



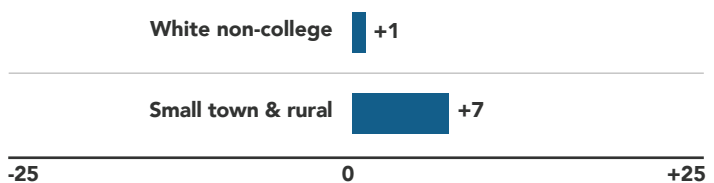
-25 0 +25

All numbers among likely voters.

Framing an election as a check and balance on Trump vs. someone who will mostly pass his agenda helps boost support for the Democrat with...



... While avoiding backlash and even giving some license to Trump-friendly audiences to leave Republicans:



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It's not that voters think every Republican is just like Trump. It's that voters think Republicans are too afraid and too desperate to keep their power to stand up to him.

Voters believe elected Republicans should show more independence. But what's the best way to talk about it?

All told, 67% say at least a few Republicans are "too close to Trump." Yet there are many options for describing this relationship – rubber stamps, copycats, Yes Men – and they do not all resonate in the same way.

Yes Men language especially resonates with independents

What do voters believe is motivating Republicans on Trump? A deal with the devil.

Voters don't think every Republican agrees with Trump or is just like him. Voters think Republicans voting with Trump "95% of the time" are simply making a political calculation. The top three reasons identified by independents were all similar – that Republican members want to keep power in Congress, that they are afraid Trump will turn on them, and that they're Yes Men who are doing what they're told.

Why do you think it is that some Republicans vote with Trump 95% of the time or more?

■ Total ■ Independents

They think it is important to side with their party to keep their power in Congress



They're afraid Donald Trump will publicly attack them or his supporters will abandon them



They mostly agree with Donald Trump's policy views and want him to succeed



They're **Yes Men** who are just doing what they're told



They believe Americans want Congress to work with Donald Trump to pass his agenda



They want something out of Donald Trump, like fundraising money or political support



None of these

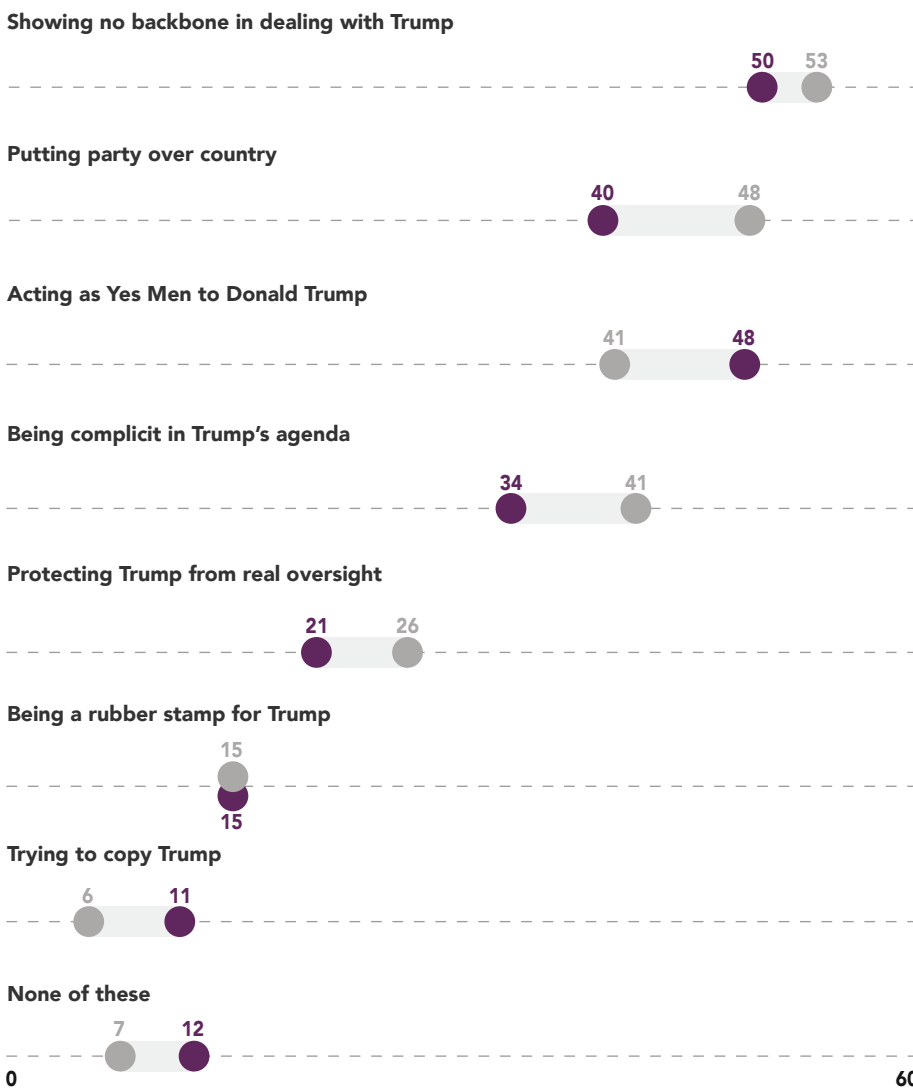


What they are doing: showing no backbone, putting party over country, and acting like Yes Men.

When communicating to persuadable voters about the “95 Percent”-ers, don’t say these Republican elected officials are a “rubber stamp” for Trump, or that they are trying to copy him. Also avoid language that may sound too much like a partisan attack (“complicit” does well with Democrats – but not with independents or Republicans).

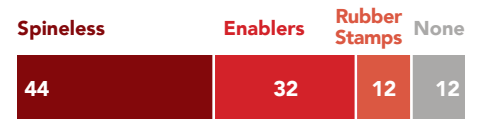
Which of the following phrases best describes what Republicans who are too close to Donald Trump are doing?

■ Total ■ Independents



What they are: Spineless Yes Men.

Which of the following words best describes these Republicans in Congress who are too close to Donald Trump?



There are ways to get specific about how Republicans are too close to Trump.

Show, don't just tell. While every race is different, there are clear examples of how the current Republican-led Congress has failed to show real independence from the president. These examples can remind voters of what it means to have a Congress full of spineless Yes Men.

Lack of oversight, lack of accountability, lack of independence – all effective proof points to demonstrate lack of backbone or show just how often they say “Yes”.

All other things being equal, independent voters say they would be “less likely” to vote for a member of Congress who...

■ Much Less Likely ■ Somewhat Less Likely (Among independent voters)

Doesn't provide strong oversight over the Trump Administration and misuse of taxpayer money by Administration officials



Has campaigned with Trump



Criticized Trump during the 2016 presidential election but now stands with him



Has voted in line with Trump 95% of the time



Won't commit to protecting Robert Mueller's special counsel investigation



Supports Donald Trump's policies on immigration



Sides with Donald Trump in criticizing U.S. intelligence agencies like the CIA and FBI



Criticizes Trump for his tweets but votes to pass Trump's agenda



Got fundraising money from Trump

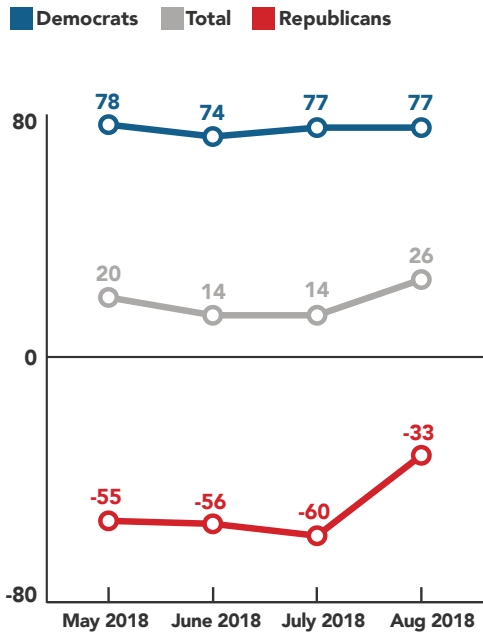


There is evidence of growing support for the Special Counsel investigation.

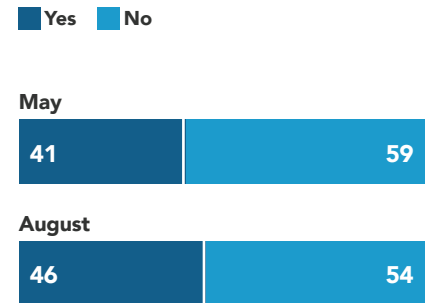
Support for continuing the investigation is stronger than ever. Navigator Research has tracked support for the ongoing investigation into Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign since May. Support for keeping it going has been steady for months, but rose this month – after Paul Manafort's trial began and after Trump held his now-infamous Helsinki press conference with Vladimir Putin. **Voters now support keeping the investigation going by 26 points (57-31%) compared to 14 points in July and June.** Support for shutting it down has fallen off by 8 points; meanwhile, the share who say the investigation has uncovered crimes has ticked up to 46%, from 41% in May.

The key movers on the special counsel investigation are Republicans, with whom net opposition has fallen significantly, from +60 to +33.

Net support (% support minus % oppose) for continuing the investigation

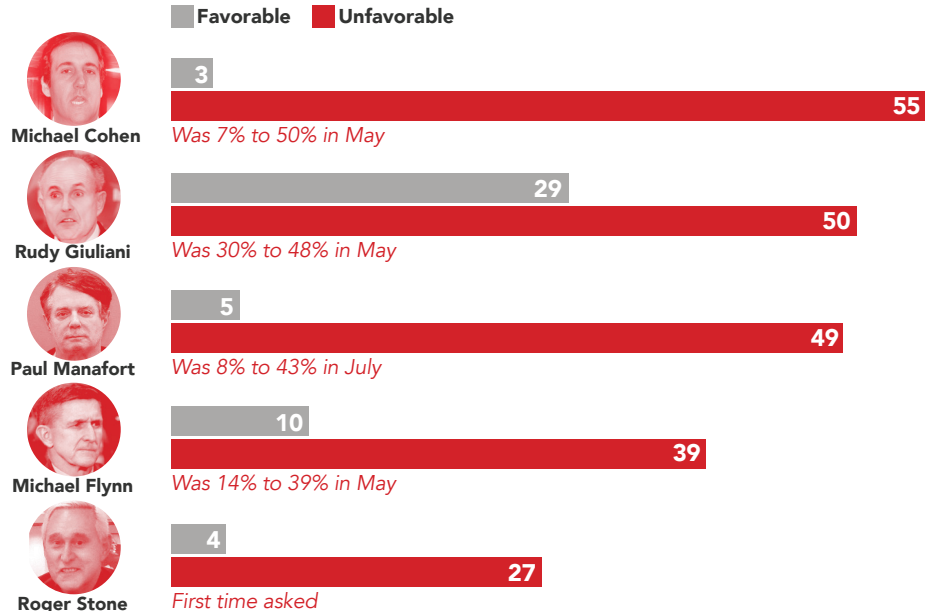


To the best of your knowledge, has the investigation uncovered any crimes?



Paul Manafort and Michael Cohen have become better known – and more notorious.

The characters from Trump's orbit that have become associated with or directly implicated in the Special Counsel investigation inspire almost zero sympathy, even among groups of voters who generally approve of Trump.

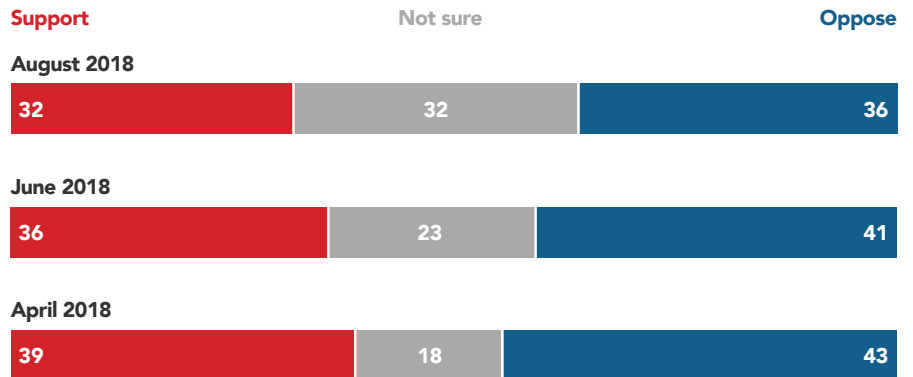


Support for – and opposition to – the Republican tax plan are both falling. Opposition to Trump’s family separation policy has grown even stronger.

The tax plan is fading from view.

Republicans in Congress are hoping to cash in politically on their one major legislative accomplishment this November, but voters don’t appear to be buying it: support for the bill is fading with the share of undecideds rising 14 points over the past four months. This gives progressives more space to continue defining the issue to win the tax fight. The share who say they “don’t know” if the tax bill increases or decreases their own taxes has also gone up nearly 10 points since June.

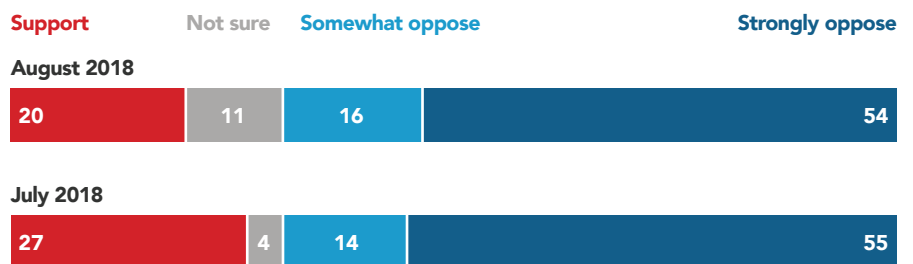
Do you support or oppose the Republican tax plan recently passed by Congress?



Family separation remains salient.

As the Trump Administration struggles to reconnect parents with the children that were taken away due to the family separation policy, opposition to that particular policy remains overwhelming (69% oppose, including 54% who strongly oppose).

Do you support or oppose the policy of separating children from their parents when attempting to cross the border?





Bonus Points

SCOTUS Opinion

- Brett Kavanaugh, Donald Trump’s nominee to replace retiring Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, has underwater personal ratings, with just 15% favorable, 28% unfavorable, and 57% unable to give an opinion.
- While Republicans are more favorable than unfavorable toward Kavanaugh (by 36% to 8%), views are negative on net among Democrats (2% favorable, 44% unfavorable) and independents (5% to 29%).

Dictator Envy

- When forced to choose between a statement claiming Donald Trump “ultimately respects the checks and balances of our system of government” and one claiming that he “thinks of himself as a dictator, not a president,” the latter argument wins, by a substantial 59% to 41% margin, including by 2:1 (67% to 33%) among independents.

Putin Pressure on Trump Approval

- Among Republicans, Donald Trump’s overall approval rating is 84% approve to 14% disapprove. However, and in the wake of the Helsinki summit, his job approval is much lower when it comes to how he is handling “U.S. relations with Russia and Russian President Vladimir Putin” – just 67% approve, and 22% disapprove with his own party.
- This makes the Russia issue one potential wedge between Trump and his usual base. The same is true for whites without a college degree, who approve overall by 52% to 44%, but disapprove, on balance, when it comes to Russia (38% approve, 42% disapprove).

■ Approve
 ■ Not sure
 ■ Disapprove

Trump approval as president



Trump job approval on U.S. relations with Russia and Vladimir Putin



Among Republican voters

navigator*

navigatorresearch.org



About Navigator

In a world where the news cycle is the length of a tweet, our leaders often lack the real-time public-sentiment analysis to shape the best approaches to talking about the issues that matter the most. Navigator is designed to act as a consistent, flexible, responsive tool to inform policy debates by conducting research and reliable guidance to inform allies, elected leaders, and the press. Navigator is a project led by pollsters from Global Strategy Group and GBA Strategies along with an advisory committee, including: Andrea Purse, The Hub Project; Arkadi Gerney, The Hub Project; Christina Reynolds, EMILY's List; Delvone Michael, Working Families; Felicia Wong, Roosevelt Institute; Mike Podhorzer, AFL-CIO; Jesse Ferguson, progressive strategist; Navin Nayak, Center for American Progress Action Fund; Ron Klain, Revolution; and Stephanie Valencia, Latino Victory Project.

To learn more about Navigator: <http://navigatorresearch.org/>

About the Study

Global Strategy Group conducted a public opinion survey among a base sample of 1,028 registered voters, along with 100 additional interviews among independents with no partisan lean, between August 2-5, 2018. The survey was conducted online recruiting respondents from multiple opt-in online panel vendors. Respondents were verified against a voter file and special care was taken to ensure that the demographic composition of our sample matched that of national registered voter population across a variety of demographic variables.

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