



DEMOCRACY CORPS

C A R V I L L E ♦ G R E E N B E R G

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To: Friends of Democracy Corps
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Inside Trump's GOP: not what you think *Findings from focus groups, national phone survey, and factor analysis*

Four months before the election, *Democracy Corps* started conducting deep qualitative and quantitative research with the base voters who identify with the Republican Party. The findings paint a picture very different from the one that assumes the GOP is Trump's party. That realization reveals big opportunities for progressives in the remaining 90 days before the election.¹ *Democracy Corps* will be releasing further reports on how to take advantage of these opportunities.

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The conventional wisdom on President Donald Trump and the GOP is just wrong. Trump does indeed get a rousing response from Evangelical conservatives and Tea Party supporters, and they do emerge more determined to vote in 2018. But they form just half of the today's GOP. Catholic conservatives, secular conservatives, and moderates make up 53 percent of the GOP base, and they are much less passionate about Trump and less enthusiastic about voting in November.

President Trump's base strategy, as we see in this poll and viscerally in focus groups, elevates both the anti-Trump reaction among Democrats and doubts about Trump with half of his own party. This paradoxical result is evident in people's negative reactions after watching the president speak at a campaign rally touting his accomplishments. All the moderates, a majority of secular conservatives, and even some observant Catholics expressed serious discomfort with Trump's personal style and overclaims.

¹ *Democracy Corps* conducted a series of 6 focus groups among Republicans and Republican-leaning independents, including Evangelical conservative women and Tea Party men in Raleigh, NC on July 10th, millennial women and secular conservative men in Denver, CO on July 11th, and moderate women from Oakland County and Catholic conservative men from Macomb County on July 16th in Southfield, MI. This was followed by a national survey of 1,003 registered voters conducted July 19-26, 2018 via live telephone interviews with two-thirds reached on cell phones. The margin of error is +/- 3.1 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level; the margin of error is higher among subgroups. On behalf of *Democracy Corps*, *Catalist* conducted a factor analysis on Republican and Republican-leaning independent registered voters focusing on a battery of feeling thermometers tested in a 12-state battleground live telephone survey conducted on behalf of *Women's Voices Women Vote Action Fund* in April 2018.



Already one-in-ten Republicans, led by one-quarter of the moderates, say they would vote for John Kasich in a 3-way race against a Democrat and Donald Trump in 2020. Once you understand that the GOP is not united behind Trump, you see how many opportunities there are to persuade, demoralize and fracture the base further.

Republican voters are united in their views on immigration and fears of a white minority, kneeling during the anthem, and the need to demonstrate military strength. But many policy priorities of Trump and the GOP push a wedge between the Trump loyalists and the less enthusiastic Republicans. These include:

- Creating a conservative majority on the Supreme Court that will overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 decision that made abortion legal – pushes one-third of the less enthusiastic GOP to be less positive about the party's agenda.
- Ending the state Medicaid expansion that covers low-wage workers – 28 percent of the less enthusiastic GOP less positive.
- Cutting taxes for corporations – 34 percent of the less enthusiastic GOP less positive, including 42 percent of the women.
- Repealing the federal regulation that allows women to know whether they face pay discrimination – 26 percent of the less enthusiastic GOP less positive.
- Reducing environmental regulations and fuel efficiency standards to increase manufacturing and car production – 27 percent of the less enthusiastic GOP less positive.

In the final 90 days before the midterms, Donald Trump's base strategy will be in full force, but this research reveals that his messaging and persona divide Republicans and open the door for opportunistic progressives to appeal to the less enthusiastic GOP, particularly the women and millennials, on issues like women's choice, Medicaid and health care, and the environment.

The composition of Trump's GOP

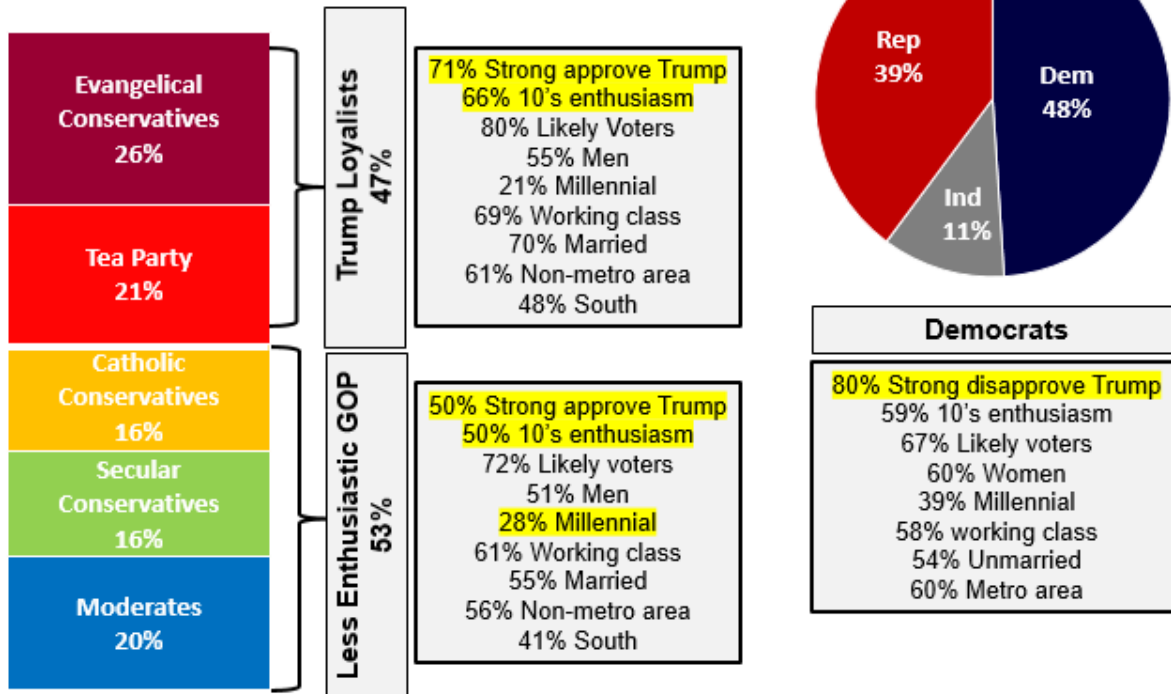
Trump has a genuine base among the Evangelical conservatives and Tea Party supporters of the GOP. They are the targets of his base strategy and he has raised their interest in voting by 15 points in the last three months. These Trump loyalists now express a greater interest in voting than the ardently anti-Trump Democrats (66 percent give the maximum '10' level of interest on a 1-to-10 interest scale, compared to 59 percent of Democrats).

But the Trump loyalists compose just under half of self-identifying Republicans and Republican-leaning independents. The remaining 53 percent of the GOP base consists of moderates (20 percent), secular conservatives (16 percent), and conservative or observant Catholics (16 percent). These are Republicans who are more likely to be millennials or unmarried. (Among those Republicans who are ideologically liberal or moderate, 29 percent are millennials.)



This half of the GOP is less enamored with Donald Trump and much less enthusiastic about the November elections (50 percent give the maximum '10' level of interest) compared to the Trump loyalists. Their interest level is also well below what is expressed by Democrats and, importantly, it has not budged in the last three months. As we know from our focus groups, they do not respond positively to watching Trump rallies, his main form of communication with his loyalist base.

Composition of the GOP base



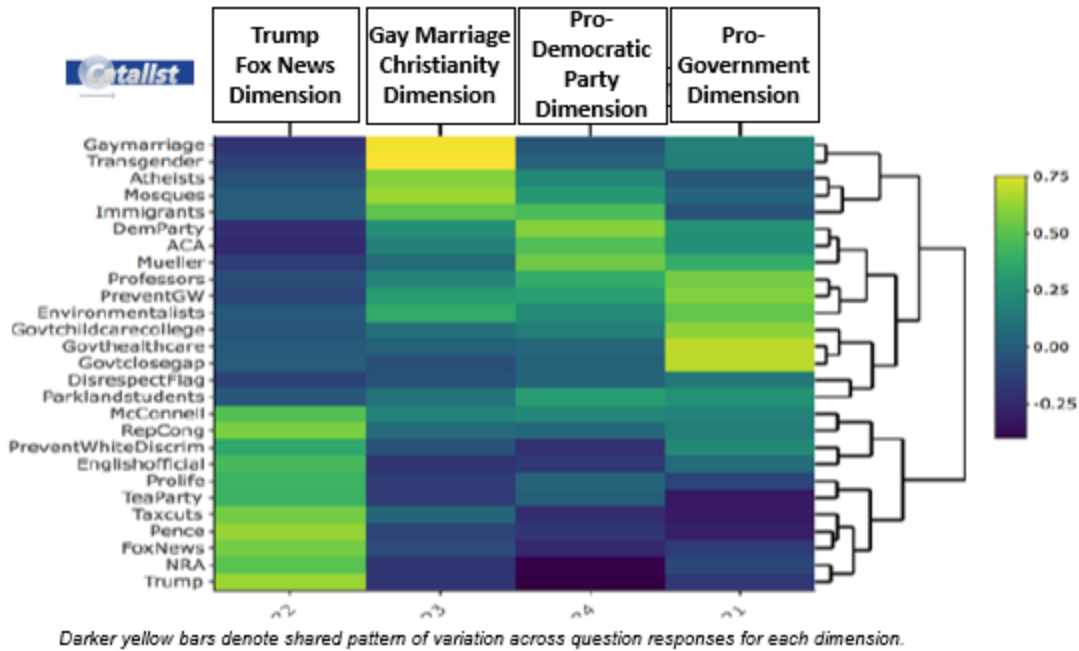
The loyalists and the less enthusiastic GOP may be divided over Trump, but they identify with the Republican Party for some powerful reasons. The GOP is united on immigration, concerns about assimilation, and the potential for discrimination against white people as they become a minority. They share the desire for a strong military and the need to express their patriotism by respecting the American flag.

To dig deeper into what values and beliefs define the Republican Party, *Democracy Corps* enlisted the help of the data scientists at *Catalist*. The resulting factor analysis of Republican responses to various feeling thermometers is displayed below and reveals the defining dimensions of the GOP mind.

The first defining dimension consists of positive attitudes towards Donald Trump and *Fox News*. The second dimension is defined by negative feelings towards gay marriage and transgender people, atheists, and mosques. Another is a pro-government dimension defined by positive reactions to government action to close the gap between rich and poor, to assist with the cost of childcare and college, and to prevent global warming. That dimension is also distinguished by favorable views of environmentalists.



Dimensions of GOP thinking: Catalyst factor analysis



Fractures & opportunities

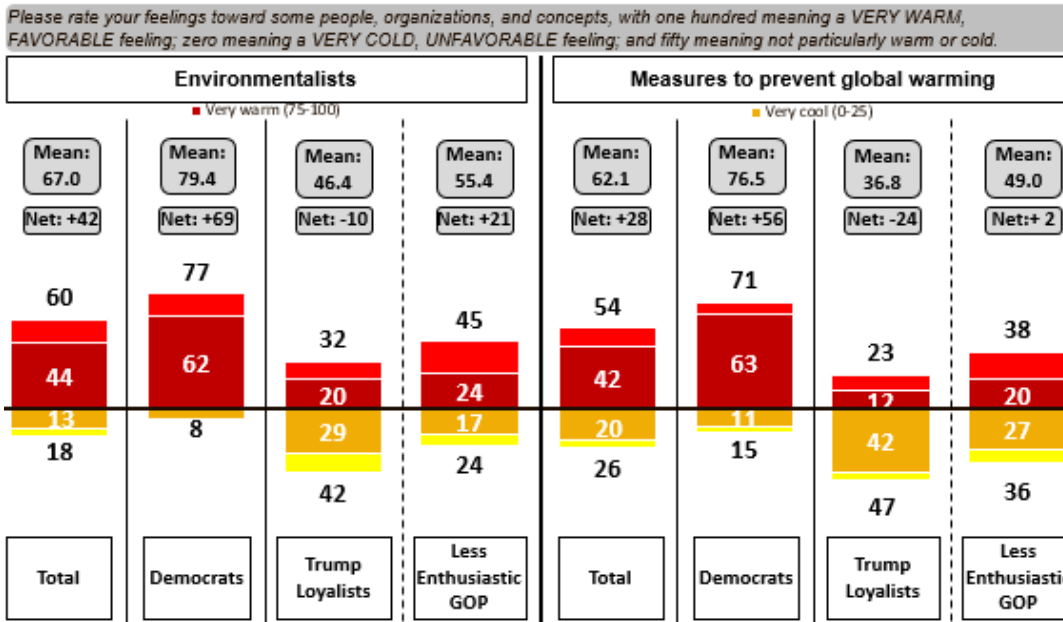
This factor analysis is also a powerful tool for revealing the potential areas for persuasion and potential areas where the GOP could be fractured further. The primacy of the Trump-*Fox* dimensions means GOP voters are polarized in their reactions to Trump and *Fox News*. That is produced by the Trump loyalists who love *Fox News* (51 percent very favorable) and the less enthusiastic GOP, only 49 percent of whom view *Fox* favorably. The anti-gay marriage/pro-Christianity dimension reveals there are blocs of the GOP base who are hostile to LGBTQ people and non-Christians, but also those who are more positive.

The pro-government dimension also has important implications because some factions of the GOP base are open to a bigger role of government. Trump loyalists strongly oppose government help with the cost of childcare or college, but a large majority of the less enthusiastic GOP women favor it, one-third strongly.

The pro-government dimension also helps explain the importance of the environment to some in the GOP, which was one of the biggest surprises in the focus groups and in our survey. The Trump loyalists are dismissive of environmentalists and worry about their overreach and extremism, but the other half of the GOP base worry about the Trump administration's actions on climate and environmental issues and feel environmentalists play a valuable role. The less enthusiastic GOP express positive views of environmentalists (by a two-to-one ratio) and a plurality favor measures to prevent global warming.

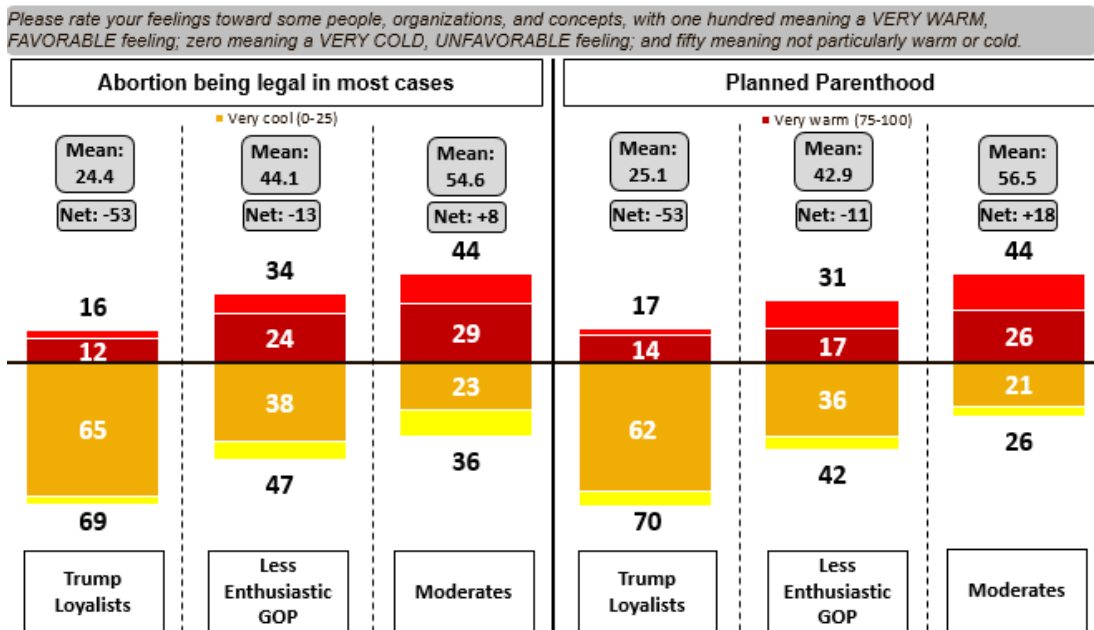


Environment and climate seriously divide the GOP



There is also a huge opportunity for polarization around choice, especially now that a conservative Supreme Court hostile to *Roe v. Wade* is a real possibility. The GOP is split wide open by abortion. Nearly 70 percent of Trump loyalists reject the notion of abortion being legal in most cases, 65 percent strongly. Conservative Catholics are also pro-life, but the one-in-five Republicans who are moderates are pro-choice and pro-Planned Parenthood. In our focus groups, lifelong Republican voters made repeal of abortion rights their bright red line – some even went so far as to say they would organize and become activists for the first time in their lives over it.

Trump's GOP split wide open by abortion



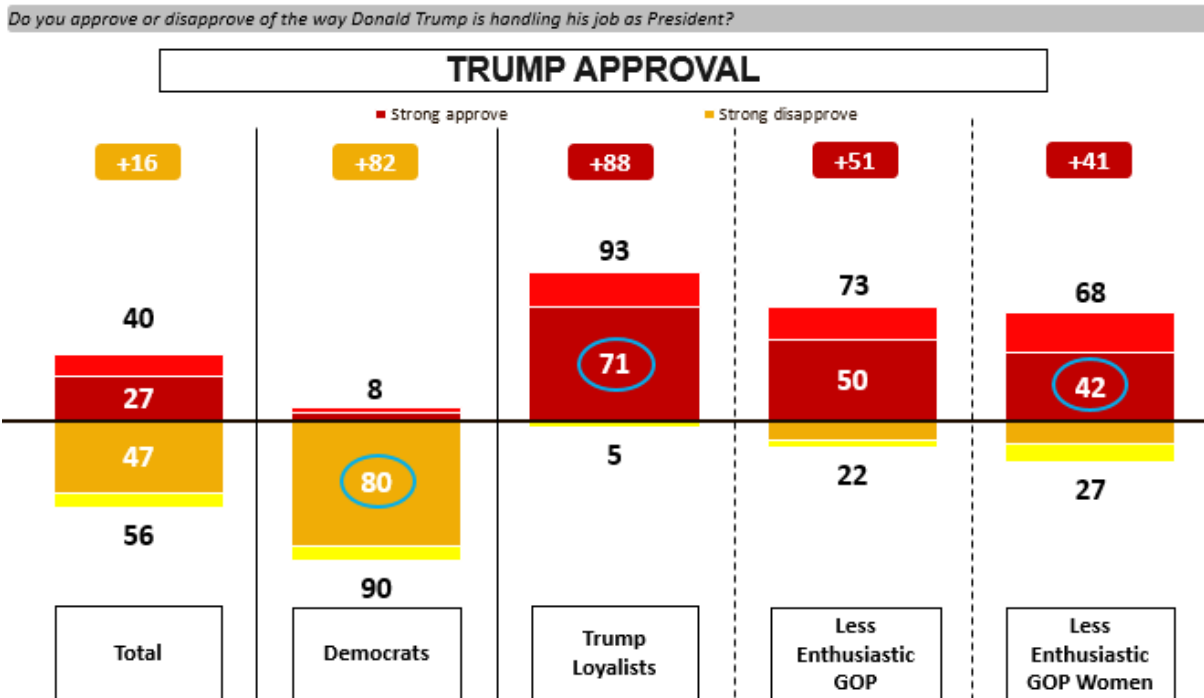


Disengagement and pull back

It is obvious that the reaction to Donald Trump is producing division between Republicans and Democrats as well as within the GOP. Already one-in-ten Republicans, including one-quarter of the GOP moderates, say they would vote for Independent John Kasich in a three-way race including Republican Donald Trump in 2020.

The Democrats are having an intense reaction to Donald Trump's presidency, but unlike the GOP, they are united. An astonishing 80 percent of Democrats strongly disapprove of Trump's job performance, well above the pro-Trump enthusiasm of even his most ardent supporters (71 percent of Trump loyalist strongly approve). His performance is even weaker among the rest of the Republican base: just 50 percent of the less enthusiastic GOP strongly approve of his performance and only 42 percent of the women among them are strongly approving.

Trump: anti-Trump reaction with Dems and modest outside base



Trump's base strategy works *against him* with Democrats and tops out with the GOP base itself, producing a generic ballot advantage and enthusiasm gap for Democrats that may be pushed further by opportunistic progressives.

Making the most of GOP dysfunctions

Once you stop thinking that the GOP is united and owned by Donald Trump, you can see the opportunities that the Trump dynamic creates for the persuasion of key targets and for division and polarization.

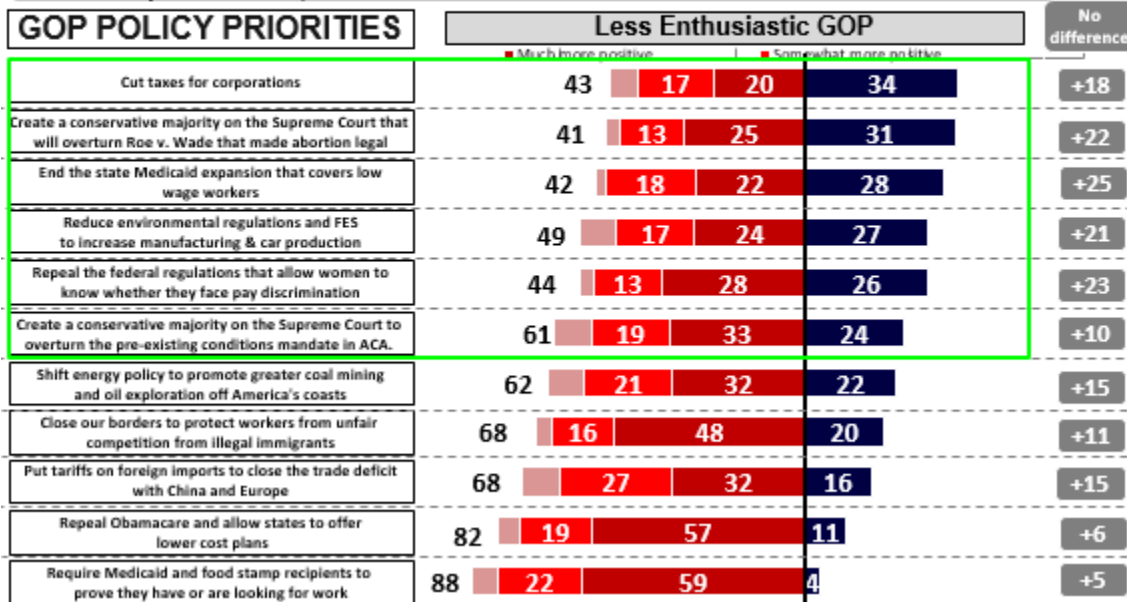


Republican voters are not all onboard with many of the policy priorities that have been pushed by Trump and the GOP. Policies like ending the state Medicaid expansion to cover low-wage workers and repealing regulations that prevent pay discrimination for women are positively received by less than half of Republicans (just 45 percent and 41 percent more positive, respectively). Barely half of Republicans respond positively to GOP policies like cutting taxes for corporations (54 percent) or creating a conservative majority on the Supreme Court that will overturn *Roe v. Wade* (51 percent).

Not only are many parts of the GOP agenda not appealing to the Republican base broadly, but the issues they are pushing are aggravating their vulnerabilities among the less enthusiastic half of the GOP base, especially the women. One-third of the less enthusiastic GOP say they are *less positive* about the Republican Party when they hear about their corporate tax cuts, and that rises to over 40 percent for the less enthusiastic GOP women. About one-third of the less enthusiastic GOP are also less positive after hearing GOP plans to create a conservative Supreme Court majority to repeal *Roe v. Wade*. Plans to end the state Medicaid expansion for low-wage workers and to repeal environmental regulations and fuel efficiency standards to increase manufacturing and car production lead over one-quarter of the less enthusiastic GOP to pull away from the Republicans. Three-in-ten of the less enthusiastic GOP women respond negatively to those policies.

1/3 of less enthusiastic GOP turn from party on corporate tax cuts & abortion

(ASKED OF GOP ONLY) Now I am going to read you some things being proposed by President Trump and the REPUBLICANS as part of their plan to make America better. After each item, please tell me whether that policy makes you feel more positive, less positive or if it makes no difference to how you feel about their plan.



The Special Counsel's investigation is another opportunity for second-guessing that may depress many Republicans and impact the elections ahead. We presented a scenario in which, in addition to the existing indictments against Russians, Robert Mueller indicts senior Trump campaign officials for "criminally cooperating with the Russians" and "issues a final report to Congress that concludes that President Trump obstructed justice." One-in-five Trump loyalists and one-third of the less enthusiastic GOP respond that "there should be accountability" if that were to happen.



This was a sentiment expressed by Republicans in our focus groups. They want to be sure that we deter others in the future, so our campaigns don't become even more dirty and corrupt.

Key parts of the GOP base can be reached if one looks past the talking heads' hype and President Trump's own spin. The reasons and the issues that will exacerbate the GOP divide are now clear for those who want to engage.

The state of the 2018 election

This national phone survey shows Democrats with a 9-point lead in the generic ballot among all registered voters. That is being pushed by stunning margins among white college-educated women and men (+23 and +9-point Democratic margins, respectively) and strong margins among millennials (+22-point margin). Critically, Republican candidates are only winning white seniors and white working class women by single-digit margins (+8 and +7-point margins, respectively).

Whether this generic ballot lead translates into a wave depends on the enthusiasm gap. The Democratic margin drops to just 4 points among those voters who qualify as "likely voters" under our current definition which uses past vote history. But the Democrats' lead grows to double-digits among voters with the highest interest in the election and the greatest stated intention to vote. In other words, Democratic enthusiasm must change the composition of the midterm electorate and bring in new voters, particularly millennials, to produce the margins needed for a big blue wave.

The enthusiasm gap could be even more decisive if progressives bring persuading and fracturing the GOP into their off-year strategy.

Democrats' blue wave still depends on enthusiasm gap

Thinking about the election for Congress in your district in November 2018, will you vote for -- the Democratic candidate or the Republican candidate? How certain are you that you would vote for the (CANDIDATE) -- are you very certain, somewhat certain or not certain at all?

