

NATIONAL POLITICS | By Amy Walter, May 17, 2017

Will the GOP Fall Into the Enthusiasm Gap?



Another week of crazy at the White House begets another week of talk among the political chattering class about “when the GOP base will abandon” President Trump. Recent polling suggests that’s not happening. NBC, Gallup and Survey Monkey all show Trump with approval ratings among Republicans between 82 and 88 percent. Of course, it’s important to note that all these polls were taken before news broke of Trump’s Oval Office discussion of classified material with Russian officials and FBI Director Comey’s notes suggesting that the president asked him to drop the investigation into former NSA Director Michael Flynn.

However, just looking at the topline approval rating number to assess Trump’s support from the base misses a very important element: the enthusiasm behind that support. And, on that front, there’s been some very clear bleeding for Trump.

Survey Monkey polling puts Trump’s overall approval rating at 43 percent, with an 88 percent approval rating among Republicans. Good, right? But, Survey Monkey’s Mark Blumenthal notes that “while our overall approval trend lines have remained reasonably steady, Trump’s *strong* approval has dipped a bit since taking office... A lot of that drop,” writes Blumenthal, “came from Republicans, who fell 6 points from an average of 61 percent in February to 55 percent in April.”

Even among the core Trump cohort—older, white, white non-college and men—the percentage of those who “strongly” disapprove of the president is higher—or equal to—those who “strongly” approve of the job he’s doing.

| | Approve of job Trump is doing | Disapprove of job Trump is doing | Strongly Approve | Strongly Disapprove |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| White | 52% | 46% | 28% | 37% |
| White non-college | 57% | 41% | 31% | 31% |
| Age 55-65 | 51% | 46% | 29% | 37% |
| Men | 51% | 47% | 27% | 35% |

Survey Monkey, May 5-11, 2017

The Morning Consult poll found a similar pattern. Back in January, Trump voters gave him a 56 percent strong approval rating. Today, it's down to 49 percent.

Meanwhile, Democrats and those in the “Clinton cohort” are decidedly more enthusiastic in their disapproval of the president than Republicans are in their strong approval of him.

The Morning Consult poll found that Trump's “strong disapproval rating” among Clinton voters has gone from 60 percent in January to 70 percent today. The Survey Monkey poll found 74 percent of Democrats “strongly” disapproved of Trump, with young voters, whites with a college degree and African Americans at 50 percent or more “strongly” disapprove.

Then there's the matter of the most high-profile policy fight the president and his party are engaged in: health care reform. The enthusiasm gap is as pronounced here. The [NBC/Wall Street Journal poll](#) found that just 23 percent of Americans view the recently passed health care legislation as “a good idea,” while 48 percent pronounced it a “bad idea.” And, here's the enthusiasm problem: twice as many “strongly” disapprove of the bill as those who “strongly” support it (43 percent to 18 percent). Moreover, while just a little over half (52 percent) of Republicans think the House-approved legislation was a good idea, almost all Democrats (77 percent), think it's bad. These are the kinds of numbers that we saw on Obamacare back in 2010-2011. The lowest Obamacare polled among Democrats, according to [the Kaiser Health poll](#), which has been consistently tracking views of the legislation since 2010, was 52 percent in October of 2011. In October of 2010, just before Democrats were crushed in the mid-term election, Democratic approval of ACA was 69 percent while GOP disapproval was 79 percent.

Why does this matter? Enthusiasm translates into voting behavior. The more invested you are in your support—or opposition—to a candidate, the more likely you are to show up to the polls. Angry people show up; complacent people stay home.

To be sure, even a solid enthusiasm advantage for Democrats may not be enough. As [my colleagues and I have written about extensively](#), Democrats face significant geographic and demographic challenges in 2018. The national numbers are also less important than those in specific states and districts where the fight for control of Congress and statehouses will be taking place in 2018. In some key battleground states, one GOP strategist tells me, Trump still has “astronomical” support among GOP voters.

Democrats I talk with are also worried about a [tainted party brand](#) and the lack of a clear and compelling message. More than one Democrat I've spoken with in recent weeks has pointed with dismay to the results of [an ABC/Washington Post poll](#) that found that just 28 percent of Americans think that the Democratic Party is “in touch with the concerns of most people in the United States today.”

Bottom line: just because the “bottom” hasn't dropped out on Trump, doesn't mean he has the deep or enduring support of his party. The upcoming House special elections are going to give us some early clues about whether the enthusiasm gap is translating at the ballot box. But, the real test, of course, is 18 months—and about a million and a half news cycles—from today.