

Restore Public Trust Messaging Research Findings



Methodology

Global Strategy Group and GBA Strategies conducted an online survey of 1,012 registered voters nationwide, with an additional oversample of 400 registered voters in battleground congressional districts, from January 8th to 15th, 2019. This survey built on six focus groups conducted by GBA Strategies in December among soft partisans and independents in Charlotte, NC and Denver, CO.

Battleground congressional districts include:

AZ 2	CA 49	IL 6	KS 3	MN 2	NJ 3	NY 27	PA 5	TX 7	TX 32
CA 10	CA 50	IL 13	KY 6	MN 3	NJ 7	NC 9	PA 6	TX 10	UT 4
CA 21	CO 6	IL 14	ME 2	MN 8	NJ 11	OH 1	PA 7	TX 21	VA 2
CA 25	FL 26	IA 1	MI 6	MO 2	NM 2	OH 12	PA 10	TX 22	VA 7
CA 39	FL 27	IA 3	MI 8	MT 1	NY 11	OK 5	PA 14	TX 23	VA 10
CA 45	GA 6	IA 4	MI 11	NE 2	NY 19	PA 1	PA 16	TX 24	WA 8
CA 48	GA 7	KS 2	MN 1	NJ 2	NY 22	PA 4	SC 1	TX 31	

This deck refers to “Battleground Persuadables” throughout; this term refers to soft partisans (self-identifying Democrats or Republicans who don’t identify “strongly” with their party) and self-identifying independents in these battleground districts.

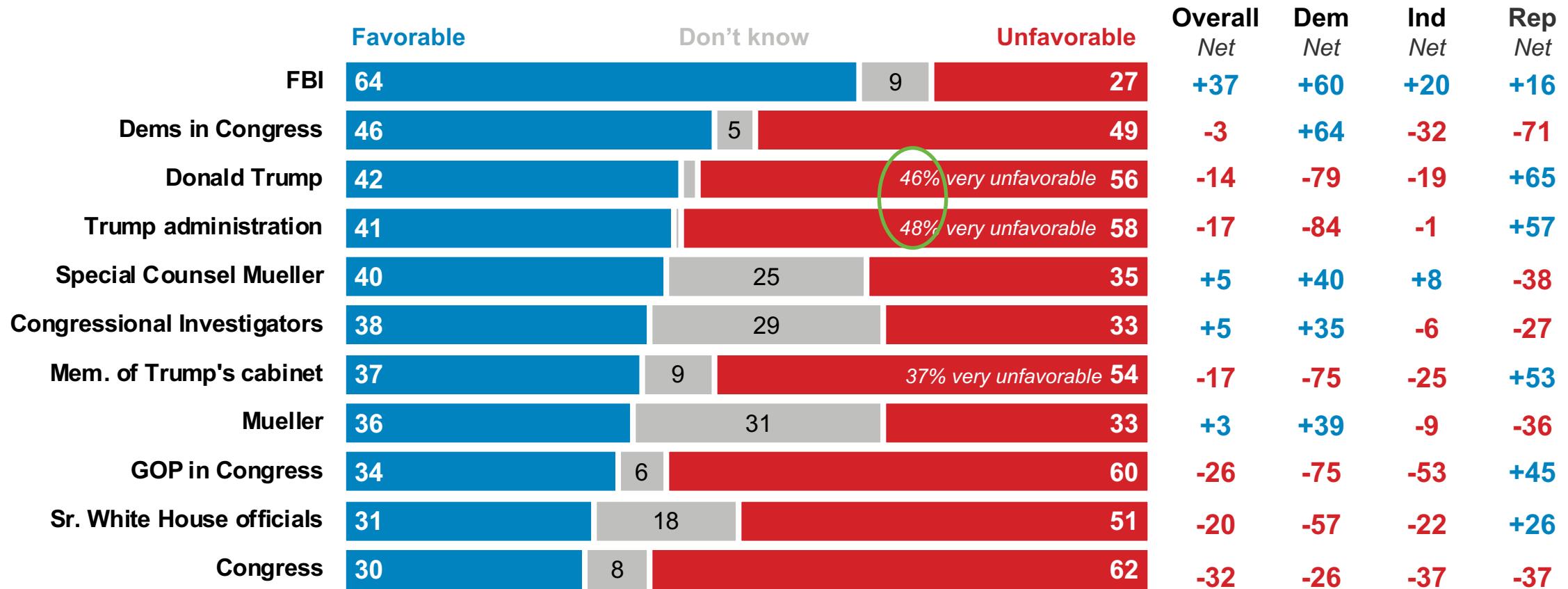
Key Findings

- Americans support Democrats in Congress investigating the Trump administration, and this support is durable even when investigations are under attack.
- The public's primary concern is about potential criminality over the process.
- Democrats favor a more confrontational stance of holding administration accountable, while "checks and balances" is more appealing to swing voters.
- The public is compelled by the argument that ***no one is above the law.***
- More concerning than possible self-enrichment is that the administration's actions are hurting regular Americans.
- When talking about Trump's taxes, emoluments, Russia, etc., focus on potential criminality and impact on people over self-enrichment.

Lay of the Land

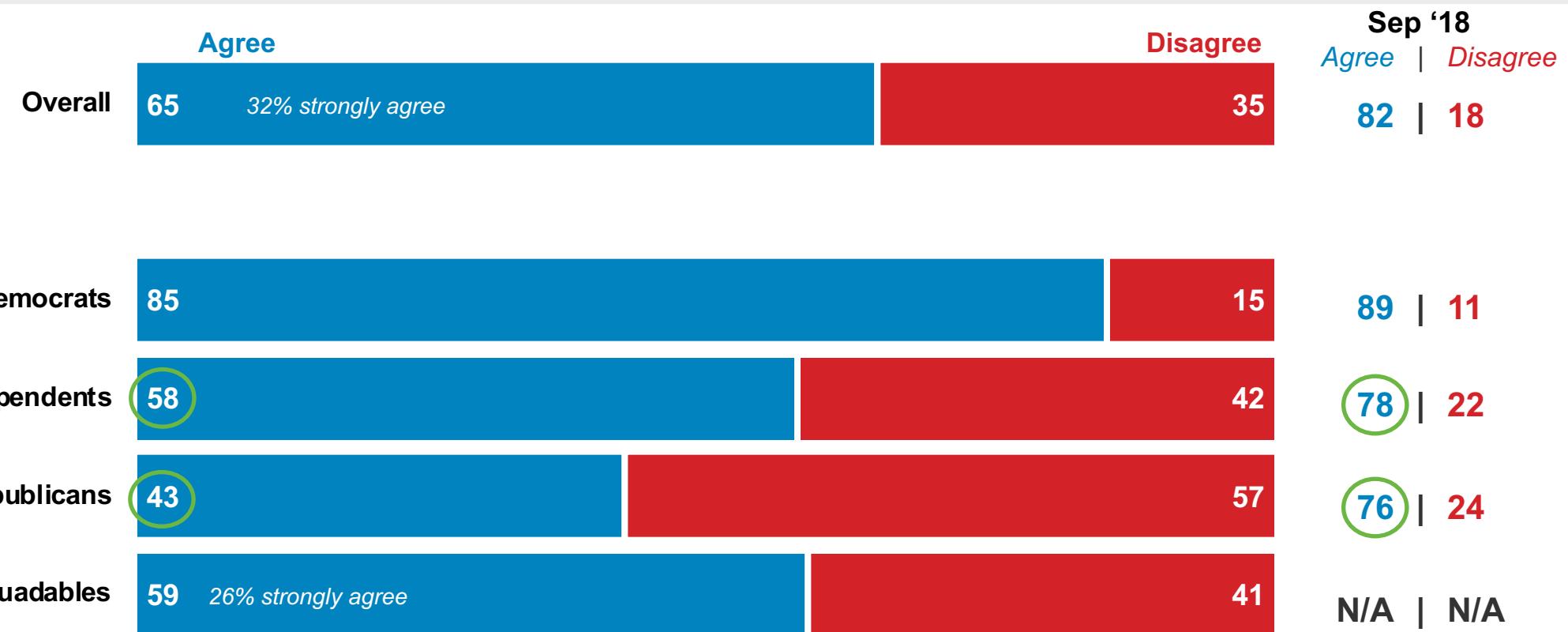
FBI remains popular across the board. Americans don't distinguish much between Trump, his administration, and his cabinet. While Independents hold largely negative views of Dems, a plurality remain undecided on Congressional investigators

Favorability of Public Figures and Groups



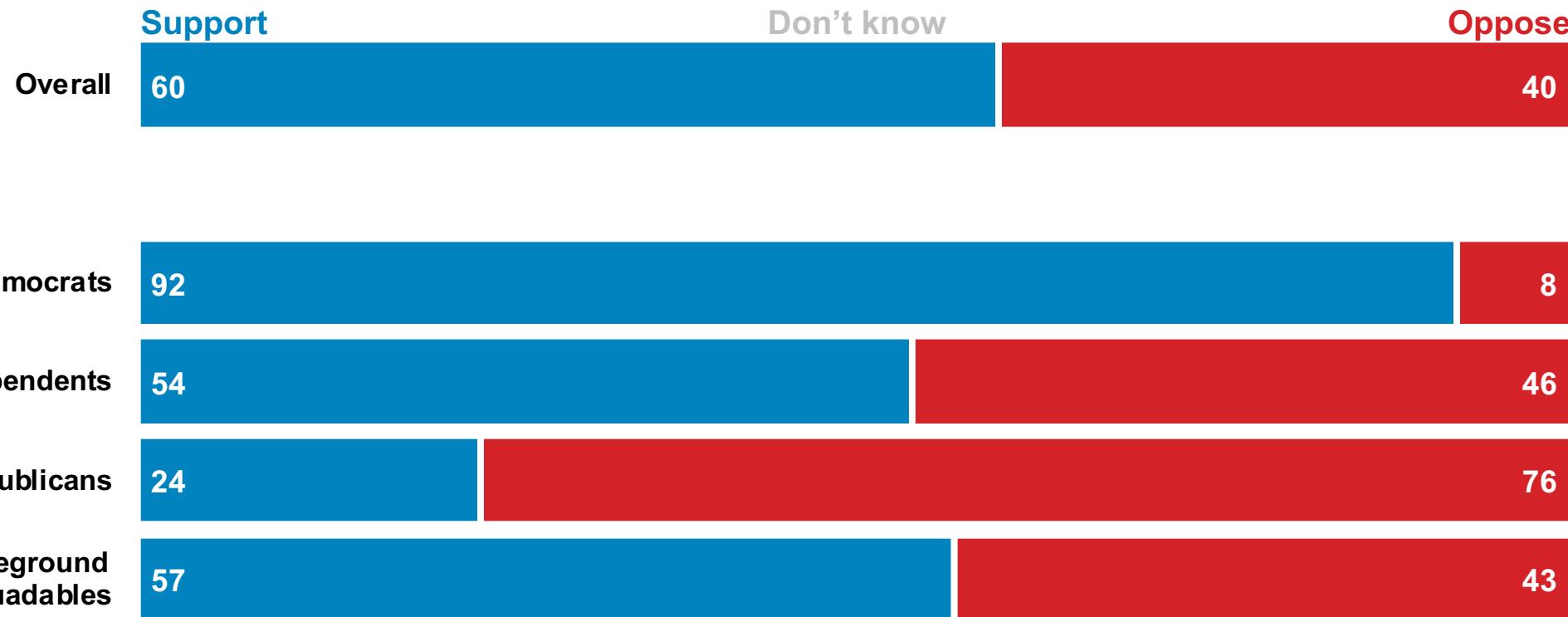
Voters believe it is appropriate for Congress to investigate the administration, though the issue has become much more politically polarized since Democrats took the House

Do you agree or disagree that Congress should be responsible for investigating senior officials in the Trump administration?

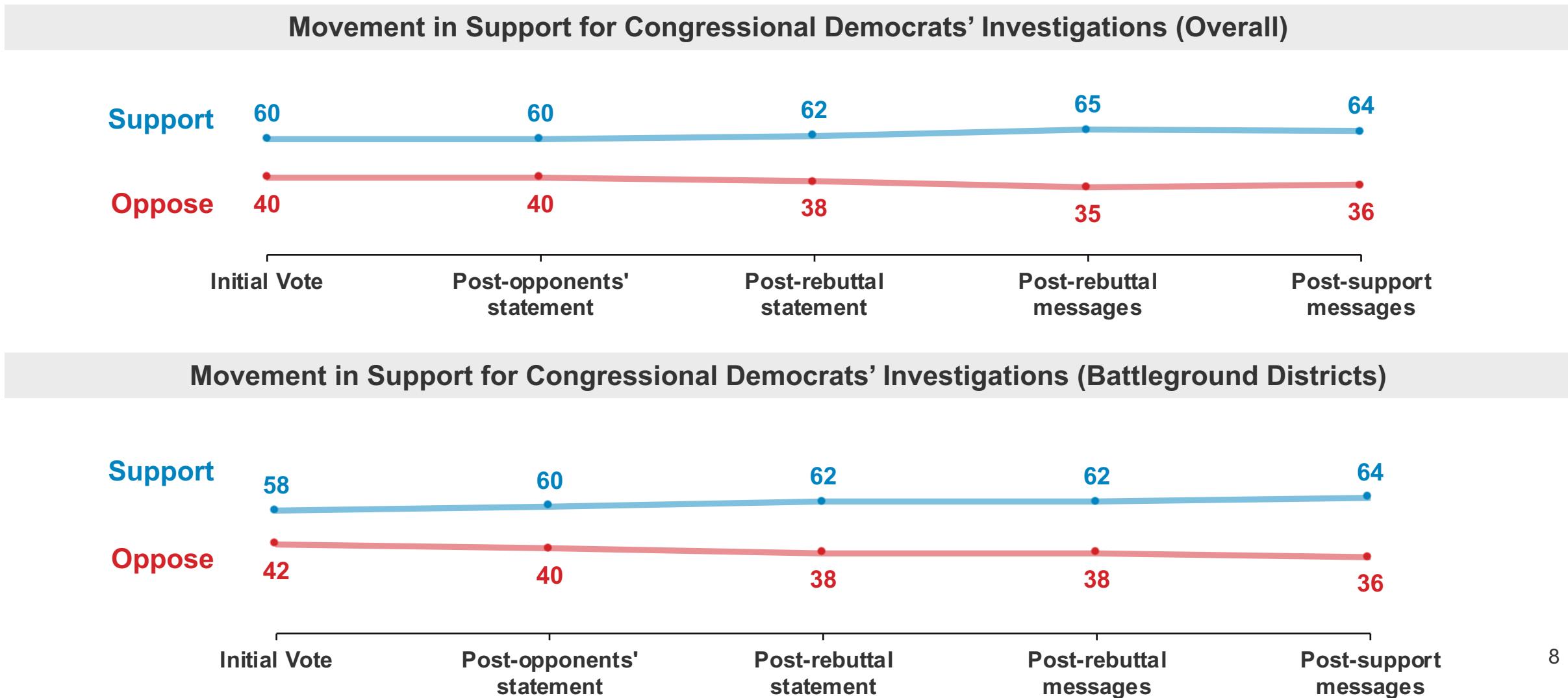


The public backs Congressional Democrats to do the job of investigating the administration

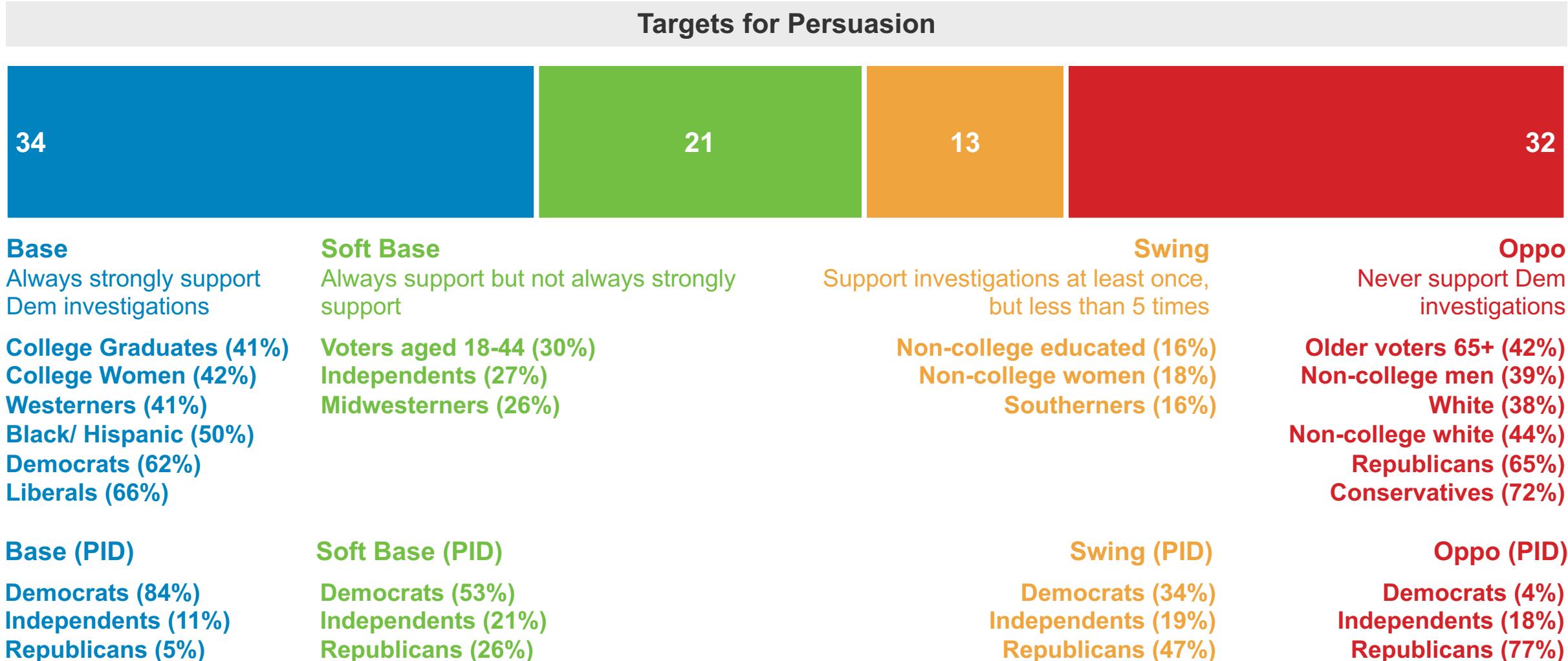
Do you support or oppose Democrats in Congress conducting investigations into senior officials in the Trump administration?



Support for investigation by Congressional Democrats is stable throughout the survey, reflecting how entrenched partisan attitudes are



With hard partisans in their corners, Independents and lower-information voters are the key targets to persuade on oversight issues



Messaging

Voters were randomly chosen to see one of two possible responses to a statement from opponents

Statements in Opposition and Support for Investigations

[OPPONENTS' STATEMENT] Opponents of investigations into the Trump administration say Democrats in Congress are conducting a politically-motivated witch hunt only because they hate President Trump and are still angry about the results of the 2016 election. Hearings and investigations will be a waste of taxpayers' time and money, causing gridlock that will prevent Congress from getting anything done on important issues - like health care or infrastructure. Democrats are going to use these hearings as a chance to score political points with their base, setting themselves up for the 2020 primary by attacking the Trump administration in front of the cameras.

[SUPPORTERS - CRIMINALITY]: Supporters of investigations into the Trump administration say that Congress has a responsibility to find out if the president and his administration have committed any crimes. No one is above the law. If crimes were committed, Congress must hold those responsible accountable. We need investigations to get to the facts - there is evidence of criminality in the Trump administration, as numerous officials have resigned under the cloud of ethics scandals. It's Congress' job to know whether or not the president and his administration has committed crimes, and through investigations we will be able to find out and hold officials accountable. (*READ TO HALF*)

[SUPPORTERS - TRANSPARENCY]: Supporters of investigations into the Trump administration say that oversight is Congress' constitutional responsibility, which is why it has long had a committee dedicated to investigating the government to look for abuses of public trust. Congress needs to make sure that there is transparency in all branches of government, including the Trump administration, so that we can protect Americans from officials who believe they are above the law and act against the interest of regular people. Through investigations, we'll be able to simply find out what the facts are, make sure that no one in the administration is hiding anything, and make judgments from there about the appropriate next steps. (*READ TO HALF*)

Criminality is more compelling than transparency, especially with persuadable voters

Support for Congressional Democrats' Investigations (AFTER TRANSPARENCY STATEMENT)



Support for Congressional Democrats' Investigations (AFTER CRIMINALITY STATEMENT)



The notion that “no one is above the law” stands out in our argument for congressional investigations, but voters are wary of wasting “taxpayers’ time and money” with “politically-motivated” investigations

Text Highlighting of Most Persuasive Language

Opponents Message

Opponents of investigations into the Trump administration say Democrats in Congress are conducting a **politically-motivated witch hunt** only because they hate President Trump and are still angry about the results of the 2016 election. Hearings and investigations will be a **waste of taxpayers' time and money**, causing gridlock that will prevent Congress from getting anything done on important issues – like health care or infrastructure. Democrats are going to use these hearings as a chance to **score political points** with their base, setting themselves up for the 2020 primary by attacking the Trump administration in front of the cameras.

Supporters Rebuttal - Transparency

Supporters of investigations into the Trump administration say that **oversight is Congress' constitutional responsibility**, which is why it has long had a committee dedicated to investigating the government to look for abuses of public trust. Congress needs to make sure that there is **transparency** in all branches of government, including the Trump administration, so that we can protect Americans from officials who believe they are **above the law** and act against the interest of regular people. Through investigations, we'll be able to simply find out what the facts are, make sure that no **one** in the administration is hiding anything, and make judgments from there about the appropriate next steps.

Supporters Rebuttal - Criminality

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Democrats and Independents worry Trump feels he is above the law

Focus Group Quotes – Fairness

“I just think that Trump feels like he’s superior, even without the presidency, that, you know, his money just makes him [think he’s] more superior to everybody else. That’s just the attitude he has: that no harm could be done to him, no matter what decision he made, and at the end of the day it’s going to be his way or no way. At any cost, he’s going to make sure that he’s on top. Whoever he has to bring down, destroy, or whatever.” – **Democrat**, Charlotte

We don’t have the executive privilege that we can claim so when we refuse a summons we go to jail. But he’s got executive privilege and the Supreme Court has upheld that even when it had someone that was actually a neutral, middle ground person.”
– **Democrat**, Denver

“He should be held to the same standard of the law that the rest of us are.” – **Democrat**, Denver

“Normal people aren’t allowed to [ignore subpoenas], so why should he?” – **Independent**, Denver

Voters widely agree with the principles of Congress providing checks and balances and holding Trump to the same standards as other presidents

Statements about Congressional investigations

					Battleground Persuadables	
Overall Dem.	Ind.	Rep.	Swing		% strongly agree	
61	81	58	39	49	56	[ABOVE THE LAW] No one is above the law. No matter the outcome of an investigation, we need to set a precedent so future presidents know what's right and what's wrong.
56	81	57	27	26	49	[ABOVE THE LAW - TRUMP] No one is above the law. Congress has investigated past Presidential administrations. The Trump administration shouldn't get a special pass.
51	72	50	27	33	51	[CHECKS - TRANSPARENCY] Part of the checks and balances established by the Constitution mean it's Congress' job to ensure transparency and make sure the presidential administration is acting appropriately.
51	75	49	22	35	41	[CHECKS - CRIMES] Part of the checks and balances established by the Constitution mean it's Congress' job to know whether the President or senior officials have committed any crimes.
48	71	44	23	33	44	[QUESTIONS] We won't know the outcome of an investigation until public hearings are held and records are read. Sometimes investigations take time. But it's still important to ask questions.
47	72	34	24	33	41	[ACCOUNTABILITY] This isn't about supporting or opposing Trump or his policies. This is about holding government accountable, transparency, and rooting out corruption.

Defending investigations by attacking Trump is far less effective

Statements about Congressional investigations

Overall Dem.	Ind.	Rep.	Swing	Persuadables	Battleground
					% strongly agree
45	72	43	14	30	34
					[THREATS] This isn't just about Trump's personal wealth. We need to identify threats to our democracy and the unintended consequences that might come with Trump's financial ties to other countries.
44	74	35	12	19	38
					[GUILT] With 36 indictments, 5 guilty pleas, and his former campaign chairman in jail, it seems likely that Trump has done something illegal or dangerous with his finances and his personal ties to other countries. It's Congress' responsibility to learn more.
44	65	37	21	35	38
					[DEFENSE] Investigations are a typical part of Congress' job. Barack Obama's administration faced investigations, as did George W. Bush's. Trump administration officials will be able to testify in their own defense and both parties will have a chance to ask questions.
43	64	35	21	22	34
					[MULTIPLE PRIORITIES] Congress can both investigate the administration and focus on issues like health care or infrastructure. With 435 members in the House and 21 committees - including an Oversight Committee - we don't have to pick just one priority.
42	71	35	10	23	33
					[HIDING] President Trump and members of his administration are only attacking the possibility of investigations from Congress relentlessly because they don't want the American people to know what's going on. They're acting like they have something to hide.

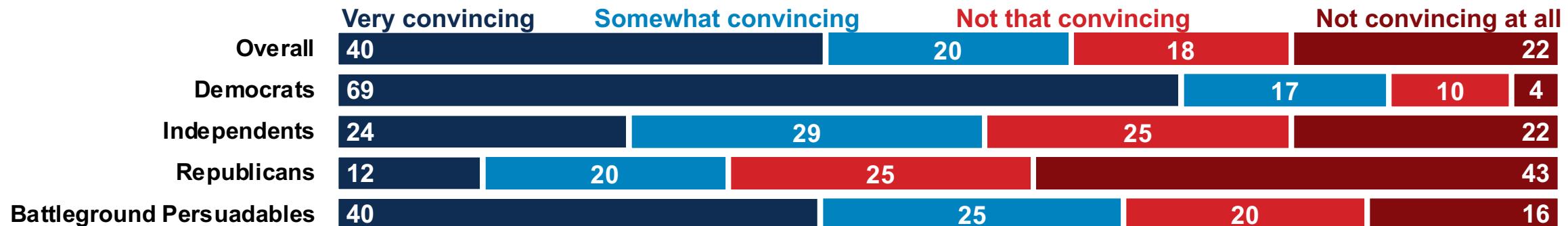
Among proactive messages for investigations, holding Trump to the same standards is again a key theme to hit; persuadables in battleground districts also have strong concerns about Russian meddling

Messages in support of Congressional investigations						
Overall	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.	Swing	Battleground	Persuadables
					% very convincing	
47	72	40	19	24	41	[ELECTIONS] Our intelligence agencies have all concluded Russia interfered in the 2016 presidential election. We need to protect the integrity and security of our elections so that it can never happen again.
44	71	42	14	26	38	[PAST PRESIDENTS] Unlike every other president and presidential candidate in the past four decades, President Trump has refused to release his tax returns. This became a tradition after a controversy over Richard Nixon's taxes so that Americans would know if there were any conflicts of interest. President Trump should be held to the same standard as all other presidents.
43	70	42	12	28	39	[SAME RULES] Because President Trump has refused to release his tax returns, we don't know if he's tried to take unfair advantage of the tax code or even committed outright fraud to avoid paying taxes. He should have to play by the same rules as everyone else.
42	63	42	19	33	34	[SAVINGS] Investigations could save money for taxpayers by serving as a watchdog over the administration's misuse of our tax dollars. One cabinet official spent \$139,000 upgrading his office doors, another was found to have wasted \$341,000 of taxpayer money on private charter planes and military aircraft for travel, and another spent \$31,000 on a dining set.
42	69	36	14	28	36	[COVER-UP] President Trump has refused to release his tax returns because he may be covering up shady or even illegal financial dealings. The American people have a right to know how the president earns his money...
41	67	36	13	22	33	[ETHICS] There have already been numerous serious ethics violations in the Trump administration and there may be more. Members of his cabinet have resigned after scandals from using private charter planes and military aircraft for travel to leasing a townhouse for below market-rate pricing from lobbyists to seeking special favors for his family members...
41	68	33	12	20	32	[OBSTRUCTION OF JUSTICE] No matter what happened in the 2016 presidential election, President Trump has tried to obstruct the Justice Department's independent investigation into Russian interference in the election by trying to make it harder for investigators to find out what really happened, by encouraging people to lie and by firing key staff.

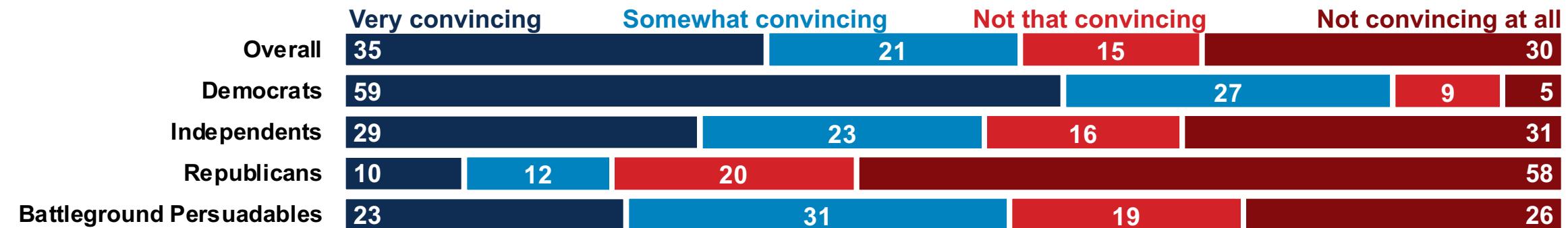
Acknowledging investigations take time, raises support for investigating collusion with Russia

Messages in support of Congressional investigations - Taxes

[COLLUSION - QUESTIONS] President Trump and his campaign may have actively worked with Russia and Vladimir Putin in order to win the 2016 presidential election. We won't know the outcome of an investigation until hearings are held and records are read. Sometimes investigations take time. But it's still important to ask questions.



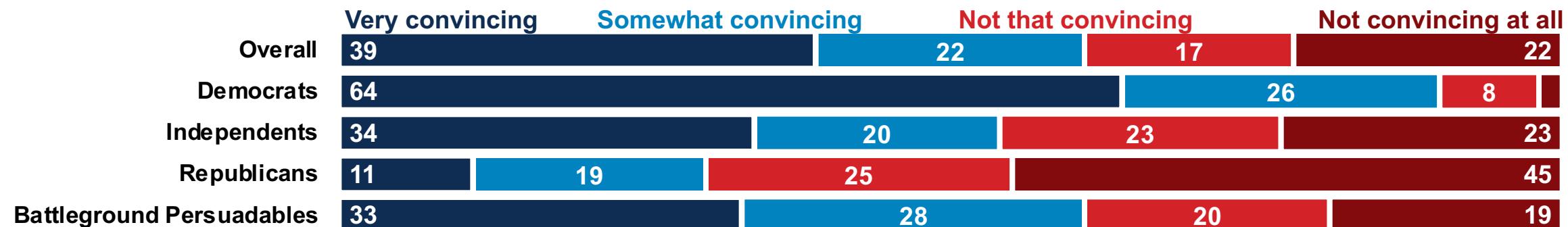
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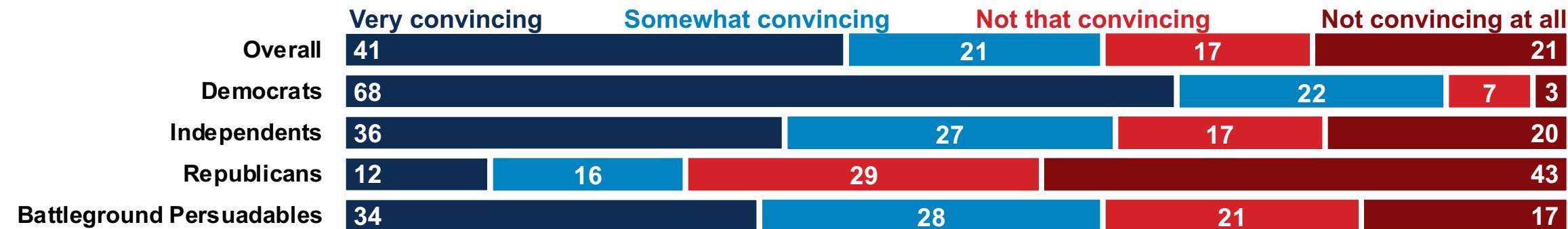
When it comes to Trump's taxes, persuadables and Independents are more concerned about whether he or his organization acted illegally to avoid taxes than knowing whether his policies are enriching him

Messages in support of Congressional investigations - Taxes

[SELF-INTEREST] Because President Trump hasn't released his tax returns, we don't know if the tax reform he and Republicans passed in 2017 directly benefited him. Without seeing his tax returns, we won't know if President Trump is manipulating the rules to put his own financial interests ahead of the interests of regular Americans on issues of taxes.



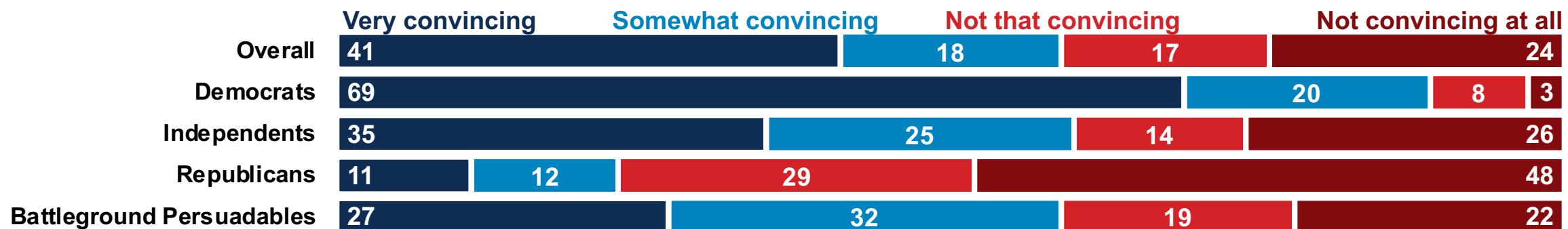
[TRUMP ORGANIZATION] President Trump and the Trump Organization have a long history of using shady and possibly illegal tactics to avoid paying taxes. We need to see his tax returns to determine if he is covering up more illegal tax activity to avoid paying taxes like everyone else.



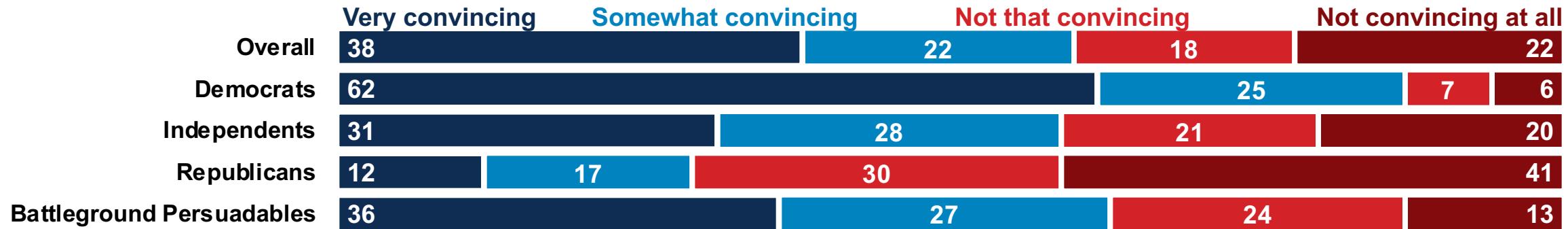
Emoluments messaging that focuses on specific connections between Trump and Saudi Arabia activates Democrats and Independents more than focusing on the generic threat to democracy

Messages in support of Congressional investigations - Emoluments

[EMOLUMENTS - SAUDI] By accepting payments from foreign governments to his hotels and other businesses, President Trump may be using the office to enrich himself and his family and potentially violating protections against corruption in the U.S. Constitution. Just after the 2016 election, a **Saudi-funded lobbyist booked 500 rooms at Trump's Washington, D.C. hotel.**



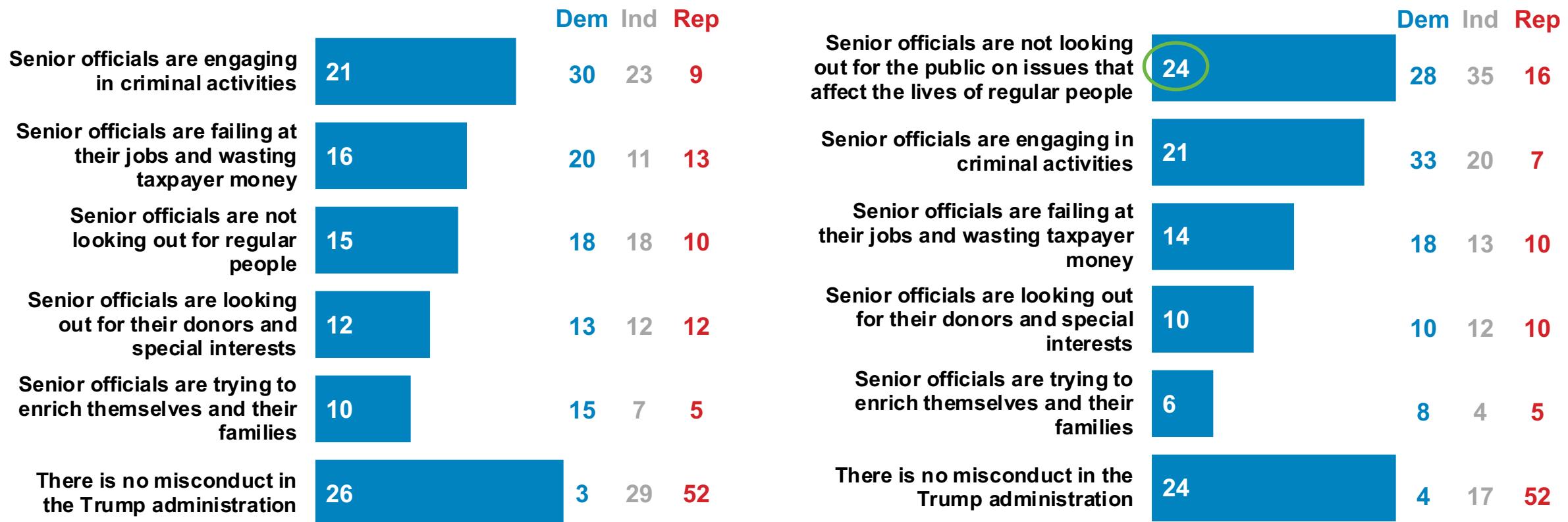
[EMOLUMENTS - THREAT] By accepting payments from foreign governments to his hotels and other businesses, President Trump may be using the office to enrich himself and his family and potentially violating protections against corruption in the U.S. Constitution. The President's ties to foreign governments could **threaten our democracy.**



Language

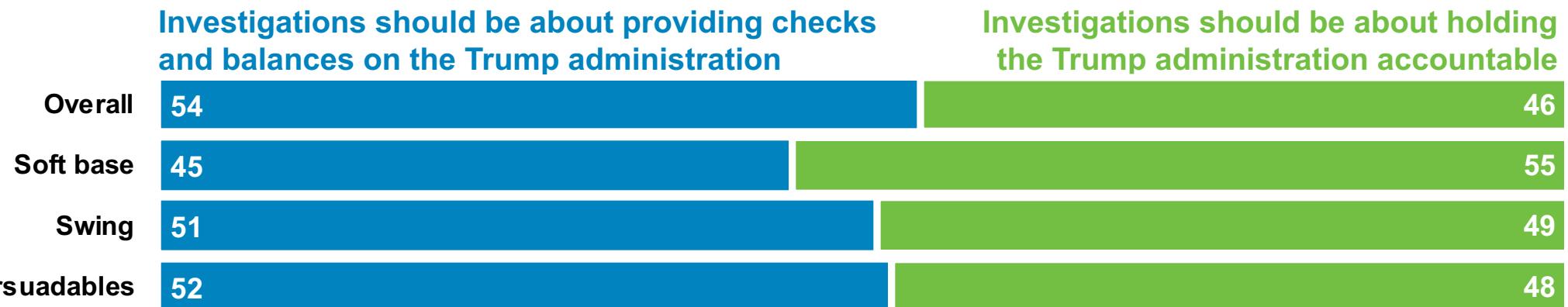
Voters say most important reasons for oversight are lack of “looking out” for the public on issues that affect the lives of regular people and the potential for criminal activity

Which best describes why you believe Congress should hold senior officials in the Trump administration accountable?

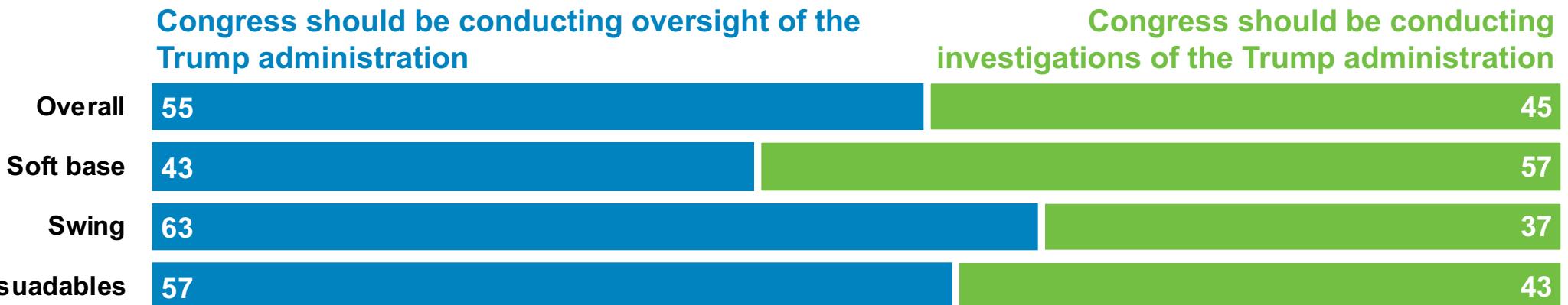


Swing voters favor “checks and balances” and “oversight” over “accountability” and “investigations”

Which of the following do you agree with more?



Which of the following do you agree with more?



“Oversight” and “checks and balances” don’t mean the same thing to everyone

Focus Group Quotes – “Oversight” and “Checks and Balances”

“The VA hospital they just built was how many billions over the budget? I think that’s a good reason to maintain oversight because that cost gets offset onto us and that is a huge oversight.” – **Democrat**, Denver

(M: “What does checks and balances sound like?”) “Like, checking it? Looking at it to see if things add up or not.” – **Democrat**, Charlotte

“You want to do what to the education department? You want to do what to health and human services? You want to do what to the environment? Ok let’s figure out why. Who said this was ok? That’s what oversight is, that’s their job.” – **Democrat**, Denver

“[Checks and balances is] something relative to money being spent or allocated to certain things, to see if it’s going to what it should be.”
 – **Democrat**, Charlotte

“I would say audits. They have to go in and conduct audits.” – **Republican**, Denver

Focus discussion of oversight on the harm being done to everyday Americans

Which best describes why Congress investigating the Trump administration is important for everyday Americans like you?



Which best describes why Congress investigating the Trump administration is important for everyday Americans like you?



Language recommendations

Language guidance

What to talk about...

- Harm to regular people
- Potential criminality
- Following the same rules as other presidents
- Transparency

What to say...

- Oversight
- Checks and balances on the Trump Administration
- No one is above the law
- Trump has a history of using potentially illegal tactics to avoid taxes

What not to talk about...

- Self-enrichment
- Political games/stunts
- Officials hiding

What not to say...

- Investigations
- Holding the Trump Administration accountable
- Trump is acting like he's hiding something
- Trump is hiding how his policies are benefiting him