Pew Research Center

As Midterms Near, Democrats Are More Politically Active Than Republicans

No partisan gap in views of election's importance

About Pew Research Center

As Midterms Near, Democrats Are More Politically Active Than Republicans

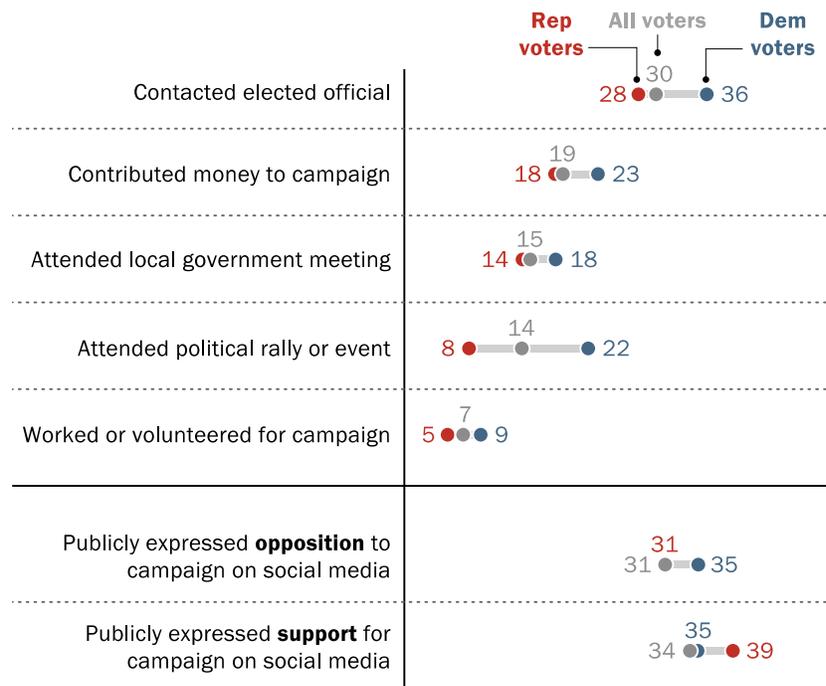*No partisan gap in views of election's importance*

Across a range of political activities – from attending political rallies to donating to campaigns – voters who back Democratic candidates for Congress are reporting higher levels of political activity than GOP voters. But both sets of voters share a view that the upcoming election is important: About three-quarters in both parties say it "really matters" which party wins control of Congress in this fall's election.

The new national survey by Pew Research Center, conducted July 30-August 12 among 4,581 adults, including 4,000 registered voters, finds that 14% of voters say they have attended a political rally, protest or campaign event in the past year.

Among registered voters who favor the Democratic candidate in their House district, 22% say they have attended a political event, compared with just 8% of those who support the Republican candidate.

Democrats more likely than Republicans to engage in politics; no significant gaps in online activism

% of registered voters who have _____ in the last year

	Rep voters	All voters	Dem voters
Contacted elected official	28	30	36
Contributed money to campaign	18	19	23
Attended local government meeting	14	15	18
Attended political rally or event	8	14	22
Worked or volunteered for campaign	5	7	9
Publicly expressed **opposition** to campaign on social media	31	31	35
Publicly expressed **support** for campaign on social media	39	35	34

Note: Republicans voters are those who favor the Republican candidate in their House district; Democratic voters are those who favor the Democratic candidate.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 30-Aug. 12, 2018.

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The differences are more modest in the shares saying they have donated to political campaigns; still, 23% of Democratic voters say they have done this in the past year compared with 18% of Republican voters. Democratic voters are also more likely to have contacted an elected official (36% vs. 28%) and volunteered for a campaign (9% vs. 5%).

However, Republican voters are slightly more likely than Democrats to say they have expressed support for a candidate on social media (39% vs. 35%), while Democrats are a bit more likely to have expressed opposition to a candidate on social media (35% vs. 31%).

Among Democratic voters, large educational gap in political activism

% of registered voters who have participated in at least one activity in last year (attended event, volunteered for campaign, contacted elected official, contributed money to a candidate/group)
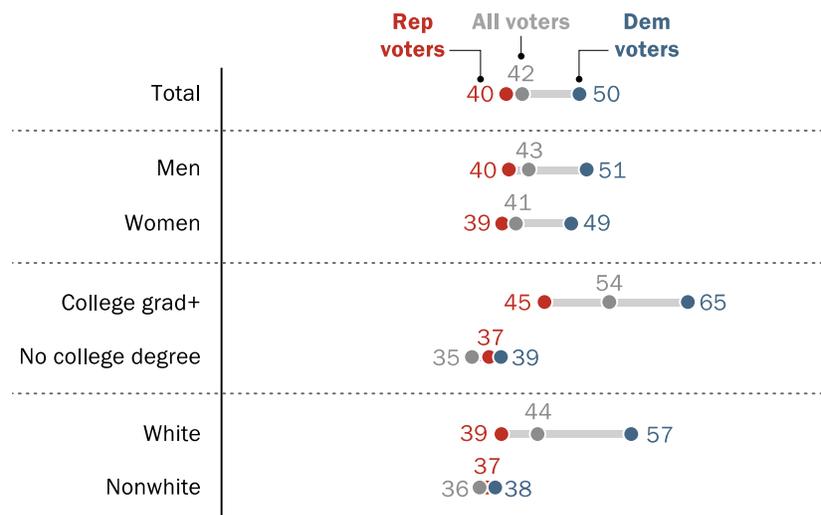
Note: Republicans voters are those who favor the Republican candidate in their district; Democratic voters are those who favor the Democratic candidate. Whites include only those who are not Hispanic; Nonwhites include all Hispanics.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 30-Aug. 12, 2018.

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Overall half of Democratic voters (50%) report having participated in at least one of four campaign-related activities asked about on this survey (excluding social media activities). This compares with 40% of Republican voters.

In both parties, especially among Democrats, there are educational differences in reported political activism. Nearly two-thirds of college graduates who support the Democratic candidate in their House district say they have engaged in at least one of the four political activities, compared with 39% of Democratic voters who have not completed college. Among Republicans, the educational differences are less pronounced (45% of college-plus Republican voters, compared with 37% of non-college Republicans).

The survey finds no significant gender differences in political activism among voters in either party. About half of men (51%) and women (49%) Democratic voters say they have engaged in one

of the four activities, compared with roughly four-in-ten men (40%) and women (39%) Republican voters.

## No partisan gap in views of importance of midterms

Given a four-point scale on the importance of partisan control of Congress, a majority of registered voters (68%) place themselves at the top of the scale, meaning it really matters to them which party gains control. This opinion has changed little since February, when 65% said which party gained control of Congress really mattered.

Large majorities of voters who support a Democratic candidate (78%) or a Republican candidate (75%) say partisan control of Congress really matters; among those who do not express a preference for a major party candidate or say they are unsure, far fewer (23%) say it really matters.

While the overall partisan gap is modest, it varies substantially within subgroups of voters. For example, nearly seven-in-ten Democratic voters who are younger than 35 (69%) say it really matters which party wins control of Congress, compared with less than half of younger Republican voters (44%). By comparison, there is no partisan gap in these views among voters 50 and older.

Fewer than half of younger GOP voters say control of Congress 'really matters'

% of voters who say it really matters which party wins control of Congress
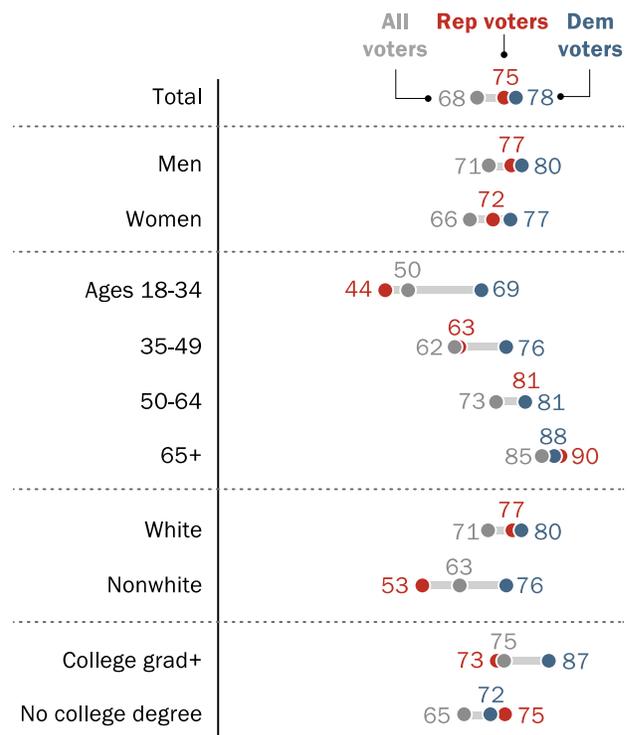
Notes: Republicans voters are those who favor the Republican candidate in their House district; Democratic voters are those who favor the Democratic candidate. Whites include only those who are not Hispanic; Nonwhites include all Hispanics.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 30-Aug. 12, 2018.

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Age differences in levels of political activism

Older voters are more likely than younger voters to report participating in many forms of political engagement. The divide is starkest in political contributions: In both parties, those 65 and older are about three times as likely as those under 35 to have made a financial contribution to a candidate or groups working to elect a candidate.

In contrast to most other forms of participation, younger voters – both Republicans and Democrats – are more likely than older voters to say they have attended a political rally, protest or campaign event in the past year.

Over four political engagement measures, the partisan gap between supporters of Democratic candidates and supporters of Republican candidates generally holds up across different age groups.
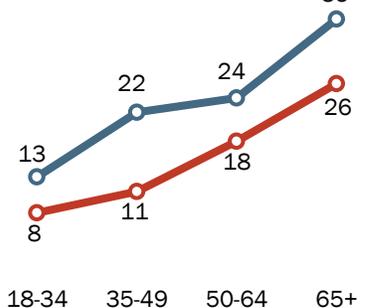
Political activism more common among older than younger voters, except in attendance at events

% of registered voters who have _____ in the last year

Contacted any elected official
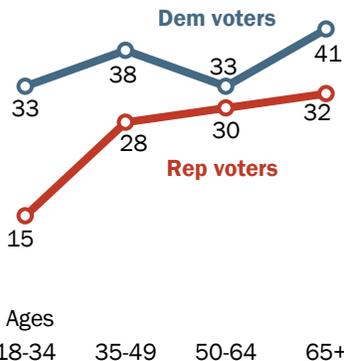
Dem voters
33 38 33 41

Rep voters
15 28 30 32

Ages
18-34   35-49   50-64   65+

Contributed money to a candidate running for public office or to a group working to elect a candidate

13 22 24 35

8 11 18 26

18-34   35-49   50-64   65+

Attended a political rally, protest or campaign event

26 24 21 19

12 8 6 7

18-34   35-49   50-64   65+

Worked or volunteered for a political party, candidate or campaign

9 7 12 12

7 6 3 5

18-34   35-49   50-64   65+
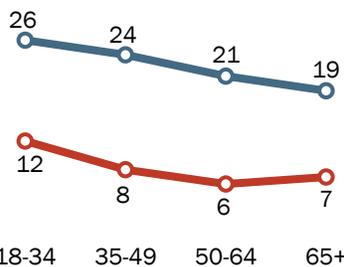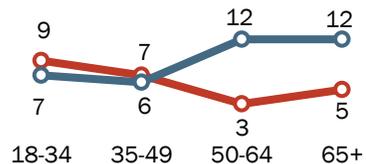
Note: Republicans voters are those who favor the Republican candidate in their House district; Democratic voters are those who favor the Democratic candidate.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 30-Aug. 12, 2018.

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Political activism on social media

Overall, fairly comparable shares of Republican and Democratic voters say they have used social media to publicly express support or opposition for a candidate, elected official or political campaign on Facebook, Twitter or other social media.
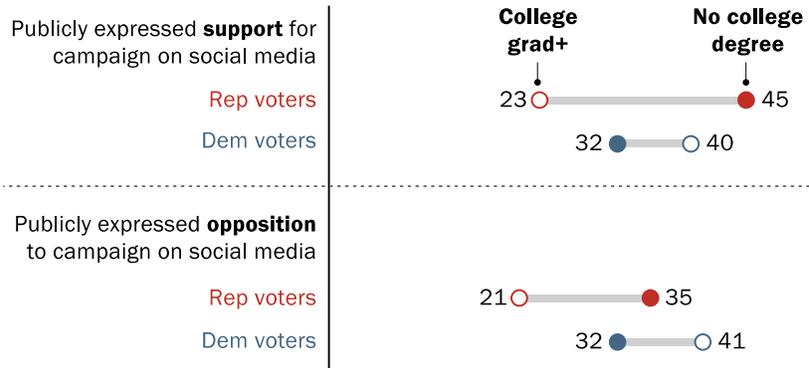
However, there are substantial educational differences within parties – and the patterns differ among Republican and Democratic voters.

Non-college GOP voters are more politically active on social media than Republican college graduates

% of voters who have _____ in the last year

Publicly expressed **support** for campaign on social media

	College grad+	No college degree
Rep voters	23	45
Dem voters	32	40

Publicly expressed **opposition** to campaign on social media

	College grad+	No college degree
Rep voters	21	35
Dem voters	32	41

Note: Half of respondents were randomly assigned to receive the "support" item and the other half received the "opposition" item.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 30-Aug. 12, 2018.

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Supporters of Republican candidates with a college degree are substantially less likely than those without a college degree to say they have used social media to express support or opposition for candidates, elected officials, or political campaigns on social media.

The opposite pattern holds among Democratic supporters. Democrats with a college degree are significantly more likely than those without a four-year degree to say they have expressed support or opposition to political figures on social media.

Acknowledgements

This report is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of the following individuals:

Methodology

The American Trends Panel (ATP), created by the Pew Research Center, is a nationally representative panel of randomly selected U.S. adults recruited from landline and cell phone random digit dial surveys. Panelists participate via monthly self-administered Web surveys. Panelists who do not have internet access are provided with a tablet and wireless internet connection. The panel is being managed by GfK.

Data in this report are drawn from the panel wave conducted July 30-August 12, 2018, among 4,581 respondents. The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 4,581 respondents is plus or minus 2.4 percentage points.

Members of the American Trends Panel were recruited from several large, national landline and cellphone random digit dial (RDD) surveys conducted in English and Spanish. At the end of each survey, respondents were invited to join the panel. The first group of panelists was recruited from the 2014 Political Polarization and Typology Survey, conducted January 23 to March 16, 2014. Of the 10,013 adults interviewed, 9,809 were invited to take part in the panel and a total of 5,338 agreed to participate.[1] The second group of panelists was recruited from the 2015 Pew Research Center Survey on Government, conducted August 27 to October 4, 2015. Of the 6,004 adults interviewed, all were invited to join the panel, and 2,976 agreed to participate.[2] The third group of panelists was recruited from a survey conducted April 25 to June 4, 2017. Of the 5,012 adults interviewed in the survey or pretest, 3,905 were invited to take part in the panel and a total of 1,628 agreed to participate.[3]

The ATP data were weighted in a multi-step process that begins with a base weight incorporating the respondents' original survey selection probability and the fact that in 2014 some panelists were subsampled for invitation to the panel. Next, an adjustment was made for the fact that the propensity to join the panel and remain an active panelist varied across different groups in the sample. The final step in the weighting uses an iterative technique that aligns the sample to population benchmarks on a number of dimensions. Gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and region parameters come from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2016 American Community Survey. The county-level population density parameter (deciles) comes from the 2010 U.S. decennial

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1 When data collection for the 2014 Political Polarization and Typology Survey began, non-internet users were subsampled at a rate of 25%, but a decision was made shortly thereafter to invite all non-internet users to join. In total, 83% of non-internet users were invited to join the panel.

2 Respondents to the 2014 Political Polarization and Typology Survey who indicated that they are internet users but refused to provide an email address were initially permitted to participate in the American Trends Panel by mail, but were no longer permitted to join the panel after February 6, 2014. Internet users from the 2015 Pew Research Center Survey on Government who refused to provide an email address were not permitted to join the panel.

3 White, non-Hispanic college graduates were subsampled at a rate of 50%.

census. The telephone service benchmark comes from the July-December 2016 National Health Interview Survey and is projected to 2017. The volunteerism benchmark comes from the 2015 Current Population Survey Volunteer Supplement. The party affiliation benchmark is the average of the three most recent Pew Research Center general public telephone surveys. The internet access benchmark comes from the 2017 ATP Panel Refresh Survey. Respondents who did not previously have internet access are treated as not having internet access for weighting purposes. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. Interviews are conducted in both English and Spanish, but the Hispanic sample in the American Trends Panel is predominantly native born and English speaking.

The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Survey conducted July 30-August 12, 2018

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus …
All registered voters	4,000	2.6 percentage points
Half form	1,976 (min.)	3.6 percentage points
Republican voters	1,530	4.1 percentage points
Half form	753 (min.)	5.9 percentage points
Democratic voters	2,032	3.6 percentage points
Half form	1,008 (min.)	5.1 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

The July 2018 wave had a response rate of 84% (4,581 responses among 5,475 individuals in the panel). Taking account of the combined, weighted response rate for the recruitment surveys (10.1%) and attrition from panel members who were removed at their request or for inactivity, the cumulative response rate for the wave is 2.4%.[4]

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4 Approximately once per year, panelists who have not participated in multiple consecutive waves are removed from the panel. These cases are counted in the denominator of cumulative response rates.

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2018 PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S AMERICAN TRENDS PANEL
WAVE 37 JULY
FINAL TOPLINE
JULY 30 – AUGUST 12, 2018
TOTAL N=4,581

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

ASK ALL:
MATTERSCONG Thinking about how you feel about the 2018 congressional election, where would you place yourself on the following scale?

[FLIP THE LABELS FOR HALF OF RESPONDENTS LEAVING THE SCALE ALWAYS 1→4]

Jul 30- Aug 12 2018		Jan 29- Feb 13 2018
62	1 = Really matters which party wins control of Congress	57
17	2	19
10	3	10
10	4 = Doesn't really matter which party wins control of Congress	12
*	No answer	1

DO NOT ASK IF RSTATE=11 DC, ELSE ASK ALL [N=4,566]:
CONG   If the elections for the U.S. House of Representatives were being held TODAY, would you vote for… **[RANDOMIZE ORDER OF RESPONSE OPTIONS 1 AND 2]**
ASK IF 'NOT SURE' (CONG=4) OR NO RESPONSE TO CONG (CONG=99) DO NOT ASK IF RSTATE=11 DC:
CONGA   As of TODAY, do you LEAN more to… **[RANDOMIZE ORDER OF RESPONSE OPTIONS 1 AND 2 IN THE SAME ORDER AS CONG]**

BASED ON REGISTERED VOTERS [N=3,986]

Jul 30- Aug 12 2018		Jan 29- Feb 13 2018	Oct 3-27 2014	Sep 15- Oct 3 2014	May 30- Jun 30 2014
39	Rep/Lean Rep candidate in your district	38	39	42	38
46	Dem/Lean Dem candidate in your district	47	43	47	42
5	Another/Lean to another candidate	5	4	5	5
10	Not sure	10	12	6	14
*	No answer	*	*	*	*

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

ASK ALL:

CIVIC_ENG_ACTYR   Here's a list of activities some people do and others do not. Please indicate if you have done each of the following activities in the past year. **[RANDOMIZE]**

		Yes, in the past year	No, not in the past year	No answer
a.	Attended a political rally, protest or campaign event			
	Jul 30-Aug 12, 2018	13	86	1
b.	Worked or volunteered for a political party, candidate or campaign			
	Jul 30-Aug 12, 2018	7	92	1
c.	Contacted any elected official			
	Jul 30-Aug 12, 2018	27	72	1
d.	Contributed money to a candidate running for public office or to a group working to elect a candidate			
	Jul 30-Aug 12, 2018	16	83	1
e.	Attended government meetings in your community, such as city or town council meetings			
	Jul 30-Aug 12, 2018	14	85	1

ASK IF FORM 1 or 2 [N=2,269]

f.F12.	Publicly expressed your support for a candidate, elected official or political campaign on Facebook, Twitter or other social media			
	Jul 30-Aug 12, 2018	30	70	1

ASK IF FORM 3 or 4 [N=2,312]

g.F34.	Publicly expressed your opposition to a candidate, elected official or political campaign on Facebook, Twitter or other social media			
	Jul 30-Aug 12, 2018	28	70	1

See here for trend on previous question about civic engagement.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE