ARTICLE

Dealing with Disruption: Congressional Republicans' Responses to Donald Trump's Behavior and Agenda

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Donald Trump's rhetoric, character, actions, and policy agenda have regularly posed strategic dilemmas for congressional Republicans. While Trump and much of his agenda are broadly unpopular, he has continued to enjoy strong support from the Republican voters who form their core electoral support. In this article, we analyze congressional Republicans' responses to several of Trump's most widely reported and controversial actions and comments as well as his legislative agenda. We find that congressional Republicans' personal and legislative positions on Trump reflected their electoral circumstances, their prior reactions to Trump during the campaign, and their ideological leanings. We also consider the positions adopted by congressional Democrats, who faced a more conventional problem of adapting to the president's level of local support.

Keywords: Congress, Democrats, Republicans, Trump, 2018 elections

Donald Trump has vexed Republican politicians ever since he surged ahead of the crowded field pursuing the 2016 Republican nomination in the fall of 2015 (Jacobson 2017a, Figure 2). His nomination was opposed by every living former Republican nominee, a host of conservative luminaries (National Review Online 2016), and most congressional Republicans who would be on the ticket with him.[1] They offered multiple reasons, pointing variously to his character—citing his narcissism, mendacity, vulgarity, misogyny, ignorance, demagogy, racism, and instability—to his unorthodox positions on the economy (opposition to free trade and entitlement reform) and foreign policy (questioning traditional alliances, praising Vladimir Putin), and to his dubious devotion to social conservatism (Jacobson 2016). They also feared his candidacy would wreak disaster on the

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1. Only 11 representatives and two senators had endorsed him before he clinched the nomination (King and Arank 2016).

rest of the Republican ticket and cost them control of Congress (Bernstein 2015; Cornwell 2016; Gerson 2016; Kamisar 2015).

All of Trump's liabilities were on recurrent display during the primary and general election campaigns: his remarkable ignorance of basic institutional features of the political system and the fundamentals of U.S. foreign and domestic policy (Miller 2015); his flagrant lying that had fact checkers working overtime (*Washington Post* 2016); his checkered business career featuring questionable dealings, bankruptcies stiffing stockholders and suppliers, and a phony "university" (Buettner and Bagli 2016; Fahrenthold 2016).[2] This record was not lost on the electorate, which gave Trump the lowest ratings on the American National Election Studies' (ANES) "feeling thermometer" of any candidate in the series going back to 1968 (Jacobson 2018).[3]

Any endorsement of Trump, let alone a close association with him, appeared to carry serious electoral risks. On the other hand, deserting him was equally risky, and therein lay the dilemma. If Trump appalled Republican leaders and conservative intellectuals, he enjoyed widespread support among ordinary Republicans as well as some conservative talk radio and Fox News personalities eager to capitalize on a right-wing populist surge. He found backers in all of the party's ideological factions, but with support concentrated among less educated blue-collar Republicans, especially men, resentful of their eroding economic prospects and declining cultural centrality (Jacobson 2017a). Republican candidates ignored the anger and energy of Trump's supporters at their peril; rejection of Trump could look like a rejection of a large and riled-up segment of their own base.

The Republicans' dilemma came to a head with the surfacing of the *Access Hollywood* video of Trump boasting of sexual assaults on women, exposed on October 6, 2016, and followed by multiple accusations of sexual harassment from victims (Blau 2016).[4] In a previous article (Liu and Jacobson 2018a), we examined how Republican House and Senate candidates positioned themselves regarding Trump before and after this event. We found that, unsurprisingly, their ultimate choice reflected strategic adaptation to state and district conditions: Candidates in competitive districts were significantly more likely to say they would not vote for him, whereas candidates with securely Republican or hopelessly Democratic constituencies were more likely, however reluctantly in some cases, to support him. In the end, 87% of Republicans elected to the House in 2016 from the 221 Republican-leaning districts ended up supporting Trump, compared to 50% of those elected from the 20 competitive or Democratic-leaning districts.[5] Republican Senate candidates also acted strategically; eight withdrew their support after the *Access Hollywood* tape, but three, including two incumbents from very red states, later switched back to

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2. Trump University settled a fraud lawsuit for $25 million after the election.

3. Trump's 38 degrees was three standard deviations below the average for previous Republican candidates.

4. Trump denied all of these accusations.

5. For the difference, $\chi^2 = 18.4$, $p < .001$; competitive is defined by the 2012 presidential vote; Republican-leaning districts are those in which the district-level major party vote for Barack Obama was at least two points lower than his national share, Democratic-leaning districts, at least two points higher, and competitive districts, within two points of the national vote.

supporting Trump.[6] By Election Day, 86% of those in safe Republican states were backing Trump, compared to 46% in competitive states (Liu and Jacobson 2018a). Among all Senate Republicans sitting in the 115th Congress (2017–18), 41 said they had, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, voted for Trump while 11 said they had not;[7] among Republican representatives, 205 had voted for Trump while 36 had not.

Despite their well-founded fears, the stances the Republican candidates took toward Trump had in the vast majority of cases almost no detectable effect on their electoral fortunes, if only because partisanship dominated voting up and down the ticket. Despite some real reservations, Republican voters stuck with Trump in overwhelming numbers, and likewise with their party's House and Senate candidates (Jacobson 2017b). With no revolt against Trump by ordinary Republicans, how Republican candidates managed their association with him turned out not to matter except, perhaps, in a small handful of House districts (Liu and Jacobson 2018a).

The 115th Congress

The Republicans' Trump problem did not end with the 2016 election. Trump's performance during his first two years in office perpetuated their original dilemma: His conduct continued to provide ample reason to think that he was unqualified by temperament, intellect, experience, and political acumen for the job (Jacobson 2018), yet nothing he said or did weakened his grip on the Republican base. Congressional Republicans watched unhappily as Trump struggled to establish a coherent, functioning administration amid multiple investigations of Russian meddling in the 2016 election involving several senior Trump appointees and conceivably Trump himself. His flair for bizarre tweets stirring up side-show conflicts and sometimes contradicting his administration's own policies contributed to the image of a chaotic and erratic White House operation (Bannon 2017; Jackson 2018; Jacobson 2017c; Scherer and Altman 2016). His thin-skinned narcissism, ignorance, meanness, bigotry, and instability were on regular public display, as was his shameless mendacity.[8] He routinely attacked the legitimacy of any institution that declined to do his bidding, including the judiciary, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Department of Justice, the intelligence services, at times the Republican Congress, and always the news media. Trump proved a difficult and unreliable legislative partner who invariably blamed congressional Republicans (along, of course, with the Democratic minority) for any failures or setbacks on their common agenda.

In the face of all this, however, most of Trump's original voters held firm, discounting any negative news as either "fake" or irrelevant. Some of his supporters share his opinions, sensibilities, and antipathies; others appreciate his assaults on President Barack

6. These two were Mike Crapo (ID) and John Thune (SD).

7. The nonsupporters were concentrated in the west: Murkowski and Sullivan (AK), McCain and Flake (AZ), Gardner (CO), Lee (UT), and Heller (NV). The others were Graham (SC), Collins (ME), Sasse (NE), and Portman (OH).

8. By the end of 2018, the count of "false and misleading claims" compiled by the *Washington Post* exceeded 7,700; by August 2019 the total had grown beyond 12,000 (Kessler, Rizzo, and Kelly 2019).

Obama's regulatory legacy, efforts to cut taxes on corporations and the wealthy, and nomination of conservative judges (notably justices Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh). Just as doubts about Trump's suitability for the office did not prevent them from voting for him in 2016 (Jacobson 2017b), many ordinary Republicans have continued to tolerate Trump's sometimes distasteful behavior in return for his support of their policy goals. In contrast, Democrats and most independents have rejected both his person and his policies, and ratings of Trump's performance have been the most polarized for any president on a record that goes back to Harry Truman. On average in the 45 Gallup surveys taken during 2018, 87% of Republicans but only 8% of Democrats approved of Trump's performance, producing a 79-point gap, easily eclipsing the previous election-year record set by George W. Bush in 2006 (71 points).

Trump's more outré words and actions have regularly left Republican leaders in Congress and elsewhere scrambling to avoid endorsing them without offending him or his supporters. Whatever their true opinions of the president, they have to deal with the reality that he is much more popular among ordinary Republicans than they are. For example, Trump's average net favorability rating (percent favorable minus percent unfavorable) among Republican identifiers in the 52 weekly *Economist*/YouGov surveys taken during 2018 (*N* = 26,673) was +72, compared with +58 for the Republican Party generally, and +30 for the Republican Party in Congress, +24 for House Speaker Paul Ryan, and –7 for Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell. Other data confirm Trump's popular ascendancy over his congressional party in the eyes of Republican partisans. Asked in a CNN survey in May 2018 in whom they had more confidence to handle the major national issues, 64% of Republican respondents said Trump and 26% said Congress.[9] Asked in 10 NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* surveys taken in 2018, "Do you consider yourself to be more of a supporter of Donald Trump or more of a supporter of the Republican Party?" an average of 56% of Republicans chose Trump and 38% chose the party.[10]

Insofar as Trump was competing with the Republican establishment for the hearts and minds of Republican voters, he was the manifest winner. Congressional Republicans acknowledged the victory by their reactions to the president. Senators John McCain, Bob Corker, and Jeff Flake, expressing sentiments thought to be fairly widespread among congressional Republicans, strongly criticized Trump's character, behavior, and governance (Mascaro 2017). But they were free to do so only because they could ignore the Republican electorate. McCain's health precluded any future run, but Corker and Flake chose to end their careers rather than face almost certain defeat in primaries as the price of speaking out against Trump. They read their party accurately. In the October 29–31, 2017, *Economist*/YouGov survey, Trump's net favorability rating among Republicans was +65, while McCain's was –36; Corker's, –32; and Flake's, –37.[11]

In addition to Trump's strength with the base, congressional Republicans also needed Trump's help in achieving their legislative goals. A unified Republican

9. See http://cdn.cnn.com/cnn/2018/images/05/09/rel5d.-.2018.pdf.

10. See http://media1.s-nbcnews.com/i/today/z_creative/181489%20NBCWSJ%20December%20 Poll%20(12-16-18%20Release).pdf.

11. Democrats, in contrast, expressed net favorable opinions of all three; see https://today.yougov. com/news/2017/11/01/flake-corker-mccain-losing-ground-republicans/.

government offered the opportunity to undo Obama's legacy on health care, financial regulation, and environmental protection as well as to cut taxes for wealthy individuals and corporations and slash spending for social welfare programs. These actions would be pleasing to their contributors and most of their voters, although their popularity among Republicans was overshadowed by their greater unpopularity among everyone else—just like Trump and his agenda generally. More Americans have consistently opposed than favored his proposals and policies regarding health care, taxes, immigration (including building a wall, cutting legal immigration, and banning Muslims), the environment (withdrawing from the Paris Accords, expanding coal production, building the Keystone pipeline), and banning transgender people from the military. Only on trade issues— which split both parties—has support and opposition been balanced.[12]

For congressional Democrats, Trump presented a more familiar problem. They had no need to hold their fire regarding his personal actions—indeed, their supporters were nearly unanimous in their condemnation of his character and conduct in office—but those representing states and districts that had voted for Trump in 2016 had to consider the risks of opposing elements of his policy agenda that might be popular locally. As always, Democrats representing constituencies that were balanced or leaned Republican had no choice but to compile voting records to the right of their party's median in order to hold their seats, and this would be true regardless of who is president.

The Republican Congress Reacts to Trump

How did congressional Republicans respond to the challenges posed by Trump's behavior and legislative agenda during his first two years in office? To answer this question, we gathered data on two dimensions of Trump support. The first is personal, determining how Republican senators and representatives have reacted publicly to some of his most controversial acts and statements: specifically, the firing of FBI director James Comey (May 2017), his tweet banning military service for transgender people (July 2017), his characterization of some marchers with neo-Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan in Charlottesville as "very fine people" (August 2017), his objection to immigrants from what he called "shithole countries" (January 2018), and the forced separation of immigrant children from their families at the Mexican border (June 2018). The polling data in Table 1 on these events summarize the predicament. On one hand, most Americans were in every case critical of Trump, by majorities ranging from 55% to 73% depending on the question; the supportive minority ranged from 17% to 38%. A large majority of independents and a huge majority of Democrats consistently rejected Trump's actions. On the other hand, Trump had Republican majorities on his side regarding all but his "shithole countries" comment. Only on this last question, then, were congressional Republicans free to criticize Trump's actions without going against a majority of their partisans. Most ordinary Republicans even approved of separating immigrant children from their families

12. The relevant survey data can be found at Pollingreport.com.

TABLE 1
Polling on Selected Trump Acts and Statements

I. James Comey's firing:

a. "What do you think is the real reason President Trump fired FBI Director Comey?" (Fox News Poll, May 21–23, 2017)

	All	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Comey's actions were harming the Trump presidency	60	93	56	24
Comey's actions were hurting the FBI	29	4	25	61

b. "Just your best guess, do you think Trump fired former FBI Director James Comey in order to protect himself or for the good of the country?" (ABC News/*Washington Post* Poll, June 2–4, 2017)

	All	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
To protect himself	61	88	63	22
For the good of the country	27	7	20	71

c. "Donald Trump and James Comey have given differing accounts of private meetings that were held between them when James Comey was the Director of the FBI. Whose account of these meetings do you believe more, Donald Trump's or James Comey's?" (CBS News Poll, June 15–18, 2017)

	All	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
James Comey's	57	84	55	24
Donald Trump's	31	8	29	64

d. "Do you think that President Trump fired former FBI Director James Comey because President Trump had lost confidence in his ability to lead the FBI well, or do you think President Trump fired former FBI Director James Comey to disrupt the FBI investigation into potential coordination between the Trump campaign and the Russian government?" (Quinnipiac Poll, December 6–11, 2017)

	All	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Disrupt investigation	57	91	61	14
Lost confidence	34	5	31	71

II. Banning transgender people from the military:

"Do you think transgender people should be allowed to serve in the U.S. military, or not?" (Quinnipiac Poll, July 27–August 1, 2017)

Quinnipiac Poll, July 27–August 1, 2017

	All	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Should	68	91	72	32
Should not	27	7	23	60

Quinnipiac Poll, January 25–28, 2019

	All	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Should	70	94	75	40
Should not	22	3	16	50

(Continues)

TABLE 1
(Continued)

	All	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
III. Trump's response to Charlottesville:				
CBS News, August 14–17				
Approve	34	10	32	67
Disapprove	55	82	53	22
Quinnipiac Poll, August 14–17				
Approve	32	4	30	69
Disapprove	60	90	61	21
ABC News/Washington Post, August 16–20				
Approve	38	6	28	62
Disapprove	56	84	55	19
Fox News, August 27–29				
Approve	35	4	29	72
Disapprove	56	91	59	18

IV. Characterization of Haiti and African countries:

"From what you've heard or read, do you think the remarks about [Haiti and countries in Africa] were acceptable for a President to make, or not acceptable for a President to make?" (CBS News Poll, January 13–16, 2018)

	All	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Acceptable	17	3	16	38
Not acceptable	73	95	73	41

V. Border separations:

a. "As you may know, some families seeking asylum from their home country cross the U.S. border illegally and then request asylum. In an attempt to discourage this, the Trump administration has been prosecuting the parents immediately, which means separating parents from their children. Do you support or oppose this policy?" (Quinnipiac Poll, June 14–17, 2018)

	All	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Support	27	7	24	55
Oppose	66	91	68	35

b. "As you may know, the Trump administration has changed its policy toward immigrants who are detained at the U.S. border for coming into the country illegally. More of them are being criminally charged and sent to jail even if their children are with them and, as a result, there has been a significant increase in the number of young children who have been separated from their parents at the border and placed in government facilities. In general, do you approve or disapprove of this?" (CNN Poll, June 14–17, 2018)

(Continues)

TABLE 1
(Continued)

	All	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Approve	28	5	27	55
Disapprove	67	92	68	34

c. "Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Trump is handling the situation involving children who have been separated from their parents at the border?" (Quinnipiac Poll, June 27–July 1, 2018)

	All	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Approve	36	5	31	76
Disapprove	60	94	64	17

d. "Do you think the policy of separating children from their parents at the border was a violation of human rights, or don't you think so?" (Quinnipiac Poll, June 27–July 1, 2018)

	All	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Yes	60	95	60	21
No	36	3	36	71

at the border both before and after Trump's June 20, 2018, reversal of this policy in the face of widespread national and international outrage.

Congressional Republicans faced a similar though less taxing problem regarding Trump's major legislative agenda items: majorities of ordinary Republicans supported them, but the public as a whole did not. The various options proposed for repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act (ACA) were typically favored by less than a quarter of the public, with more than half opposing them (Guskin and Clement 2017). Even among Republicans, support was tepid, with an average of a bit over 50% in favor.[13] Trump's and the Republicans' greatest first-year legislative success, the major tax cut legislation enacted in December 2017, won approval from less than 40% of the public, although in this case it received strong support from Republican identifiers.[14] Trump's immigration agenda was also generally unpopular. Support for building a wall on the Mexican border remained flat through Trump's first two years in office, averaging 37%, with opposition averaging 58%.[15] Again, the wall was quite popular among Republicans but widely panned elsewhere.[16] More people said they wanted an increase (24%) than the decrease (17%) in legal immigration Trump proposed (54% would leave totals unchanged).[17] Huge majorities favored a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants brought to the United States as children, but most rejected tying this move to other far less popular changes in immigration laws proposed by the administration.

Neither did the public as a whole support Trump's budget proposals. Of 12 items in his first budget, for example, only two were supported by majorities (more money for veterans' health care and a larger military); of the rest, six were supported only by Republican pluralities, and four were rejected by partisans of all persuasions. The four included cuts to spending on medical research, transportation, after-school programs, and low-income assistance for heating and electricity.[18] Trump's actions on the environment (withdrawing from the Paris Accords, expanding coal production, building the Keystone pipeline, and cutting spending on climate change research) have also been unpopular generally, though usually supported by majorities of Republicans.[19]

Despite the general unpopularity of Trump's agenda, congressional Republicans have an easier time coping with the tension between supporting Trump and offending the wider public on policy issues than they do on Trump's conduct as president. First, most of

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13. The comparable averages were 10% among Democrats and 23% among independents; see the polling results at http://www.pollingreport.com/health.htm.

14. Initially quite unpopular, with an average of about 27% of Americans viewing it favorably in December 2017, the tax bill had become a bit more popular by early 2018; during the election year, an average of 39% viewed it favorably, compared to 47% unfavorably (Quinnipiac, CBS News, ABC News/*Washington Post*, Gallup, and Monmouth University polls). Typically, three-quarters of Republicans viewed it favorably, and three-quarters of Democrats viewed it unfavorably; see www.pollingreport.com/budget.htm.

15. Averages from 44 surveys are reported at http://www.pollingreport.com/immigration.htm.

16. In six polls taken early in 2018, 79% of Republicans supported the wall, compared to 9% of Democrats and 33% of independents.

17. Even among Republicans, only 26% wanted to reduce legal immigration. See the Quinnipiac Poll results for February 2–5, 2018, at https://poll.qu.edu/national/release-detail?ReleaseID=2517.

18. Quinnipiac Poll, March 16–21, 2017, at https://poll.qu.edu/national/release-detail?ReleaseID=2444.

19. See the data at http://www.pollingreport.com/enviro.htm.

them share Trump's preferences on such things as health care, taxes, and regulation even if these are not widely popular, for they are standard-issue Republican positions reflecting the preferences of their core voters, activists, and campaign donors. Second, their leaders have considerable control over the legislative agenda and so are able to shape the options voted on, adapting Trump's agenda to their own necessities and keeping potentially difficult votes off the table. Loyalty to Trump and party on roll-call votes coincides more readily than loyalty to Trump and normal standards of decency and governance.

Republican Reactions to Trump's Conduct

To measure congressional Republicans' reactions to Trump's controversial and generally unpopular actions, we collected information on their public statements regarding the five events referenced in Table 1. We chose this set because the events and Republican responses to them were widely reported in the news media, and a substantial number of members felt compelled to chime in, if only because reporters were besieging them with queries. Our codings of Republican senators' responses are reported in Table 2. The data on the Comey firing and Charlottesville comments are taken from the five-category ratings published in October 2017 in the *Washington Post* (Lewis et al. 2017). We acquired data on the other three events through comprehensive Google searches of news outlets, making judgments where possible about the strength of their critical or supportive statements. In the few cases in which senators offered different observations at different times, we coded the most recent statement except in the case of family separations, for which responses before Trump backed down on the issue are the more revealing. We conducted a similar search to collect the public responses of House Republicans to this same set of events, and their distributions are listed in Table 3.

Representatives were considerably less likely to have any recorded critical or supportive response (average of 30%, compared to 62% of senators). This is no doubt partly due to neglect: the news media usually give them much less attention than senators. But it is also the case that many of them ignored media requests for comments. With less information for making nuanced distinctions, we stuck with a simple trichotomy for three of the issues—critical, neutral or no comment, or supportive. The exceptions are the Comey firing, in which case members who clearly condemned the act and, additionally,

TABLE 2
Distribution of Republican Senators' Responses to Trump's Conduct

	Comey firing	Transgender people in the military	Charlottesville	Shithole countries	Family separation
Very critical (2)	5	19	10	14	14
Somewhat critical (1)	12	12	11	4	8
Neutral/no comment (0)	17	11	25	29	17
Somewhat supportive (−1)	6	6	3	5	7
Very supportive (−2)	12	4	3		4

Source: See text.

TABLE 3
Distribution of Republican Representatives' Responses to Trump's Conduct

	Comey firing	Transgender people in the military	Charlottesville	Shithole countries	Family separation
Very critical (2)	5				23
Somewhat critical (1)	28	32	23	17	36
Neutral/No comment (0)	156	196	212	219	53
Somewhat supportive (−1)	53	13	6	5	82
Very supportive (−2)					42

Source: See text.

called for appointment of a special prosecutor, could be identified, and for family separation, for which the range of responses, from full support to strongly critical, could be identified. For both sets of legislators, we factor-analyzed their reactions to these five events and used the results to create an index of criticism of Trump, which for analytical purposes we rescaled to range from 0 to 1 (1 being most critical of Trump, 0 least critical).[20] For Republican senators, the mean on this index was .50 (standard deviation [SD] = .25) and for Republican representatives, .45 (SD = .15).

In considering variables that might explain Republicans' propensity to criticize or defend their president for these actions and comments, we naturally looked first for an electoral connection (Mayhew 1974), expecting that the more popular Trump was among Republicans' voters, the less likely they were to criticize his behavior. Trump's support among Republicans remained remarkably stable, with little variation over his first two years in office, and he retained the backing of a very large majority of the people who voted for him. On average in the 52 weekly *Economist*/YouGov polls taken during 2018, 91% of people who said they had voted for Trump approved of his performance; only 7% disapproved, with no significant trend over this period. Examining Gallup's data, we found that Trump's average state-level approval ratings in 2017 were correlated with his 2016 vote share at .97.[21] Thus, we use the latter as a proxy for his current local standing, which allows a clean comparison between the senators and representatives (we lack district-level approval numbers for the latter). Obviously, our expectation is that the higher Trump's vote in their constituencies, the less critical congressional Republicans will be of Trump.

A second consideration is how supportive of Trump the congressional Republican was before he was elected president. As noted earlier, we found in previous work that Republicans were more likely to refuse to support Trump's candidacy in states and districts that were competitive or leaned Democratic. We would thus expect nonsupport in 2016 and the extent of criticism in the 115th Congress to be positively correlated if only because both are related to the same electoral circumstances, and indeed they are:

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20. In both cases, a principal-component factor analysis uncovered a single dimension, with eigenvalues of 2.15 for the representatives and 2.44 for senators, and factor loadings ranging from .57 to .77 on the five variables.

21. Regressing Trump's statewide approval rating on his 2016 vote, the resulting equation is 1.12 (1.40) + .777 (.025) Trump vote, adjusted R^2 = .95. Data are from Saad (2018).

for senators the correlation is .59 and for representatives .44, with both significant at $p < .001$. But we also expect that those Republicans who declined to support Trump before the election might also be more inclined to criticize his behavior in office than their electoral circumstances might otherwise dictate, for Trump continued to display many of the traits that had first repelled them.

We also expected that more moderate Republicans (as measured by their first-dimension nominal three-step estimation [NOMINATE] scores for the 115th Congress) would be more critical of Trump, for they have fewer reasons to defend him to further shared policy goals. In addition, we suspected that retiring and female members might be more critical, the former because they did not have to worry about offending Trump's supporters in their party base, the latter because of his treatment of women. As already mentioned, Trump's most vocal Republican critics in the Senate were at the end of their careers, and we found in our earlier study that incumbent Republican women were significantly less likely to say they were voting for Trump (Liu and Jacobson 2018a). However, although Republican women tended to be more critical of Trump, the difference was insignificant in both chambers with or without controls for local partisanship. Similarly, prospective retirees tended to be more critical of Trump, but the difference was insignificant except in a House equation with no controls ($b = .08$, $p = .10$). Republican retirements from the House were clearly strategic in 2018—the lower Trump's vote in the district, the more likely they were to bail (Jacobson 2019a)—and thus with the Trump vote controlled, the retirement variable is no longer significant ($b = .04$, $p = .22$). Because gender and retirement ultimately added nothing to the explanatory power of our equations, we dropped them from our analyses, the results of which appear in Table 4.

The dependent variable for the equations in Table 4 is the Trump criticism index (scored 0 to 1); the independent variables are scaled to match. Although we have more nuanced measures (Liu and Jacobson 2018a), we use a simple dichotomy for measuring support for Trump in 2016; it indicates the final position taken by the Republican regardless of preelection vacillating.[22] The regression results suggest that House Republicans' public comments on Trump's conduct reflect all three considerations: their electoral circumstances, their support for Trump in 2016, and their ideological leanings as revealed by roll-call votes. For representatives, the difference between the lowest and highest values for the Trump vote, opposition to Trump, and NOMINATE score predict differences of .27, .10, and .16, respectively, on the 0–1 dependent variable. For senators, opposition to Trump and his vote share in 2016 were sufficiently collinear to render the vote share effect insignificant once opposition is controlled. Differences between the highest and lowest values on the three independent variables predict differences of .12, .32, and .28 on the criticism scale. The effects of opposition to Trump in 2016 and roll-call ideology are thus considerably larger for senators than for representatives. In sum, the extent to which congressional Republicans criticized or defended Trump's more questionable statements and actions depended on a mix of electoral considerations, ideological leanings, and preelection opinions of the president.

22. The results are virtually identical when we substitute our more nuanced measures for obvious reasons: among House Republicans, for example, the dichotomous version correlates with the five-category version at .954 and with the three-category version at .995.

TABLE 4
Determinants of Congressional Republicans' Reactions to Donald Trump's Conduct

	I	II	III
Senators			
Trump's vote share (0 to 1)	–1.226*	–.500	–.470
	(.469)	(.440)	(.415)
Opposed Trump (0 to 1)		.320**	.323***
		(.075)	(.073)
NOMINATE score (–1 to 1)			–.349*
			(.173)
Constant	1.236***	.730**	.883**
	(.284)	(.271)	(.273)
Adjusted R^2	.11	.34	.38
N	50	50	50
Representatives			
Trump's vote share (0 to 1)	–.788***	–.614***	–.554***
	(.096)	(.096)	(.095)
Opposed Trump (0 to 1)		.131***	.105***
		(.023)	(.024)
NOMINATE score (–1 to 1)			–.204***
			(.058)
Constant	.936***	.810***	.876***
	(.059)	(.060)	(.058)
Adjusted R^2	.22	.31	.35
N	232	232	232

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses; the dependent variable takes values from 0 (least critical) to 1 (most critical); see text for a description of its construction.
$*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.$

Support for Trump's Agenda

Congressional Republicans' opinions of Trump's character and behavior would not automatically influence their positions on his agenda. Insofar as Trump's policy goals coincide with theirs, objections to his person might be set aside in responding to his legislative proposals. Trump's presence in the White House removed the barrier Obama had posed to their ambitions, and Trump seemed willing to concede legislative details to Republican congressional leaders. Still, they had the usual electoral reasons to consider state or district sentiments, along with their own ideological dispositions, in deciding how to vote on the floor. In this section, we examine constituency and individual determinants of support for Trump's agenda, while also making some comparisons to congressional Democrats, who were also motivated to consider constituents' partisan leanings in casting their votes.

To examine support for Trump's agenda broadly defined, we rely on the website FiveThirtyEight, which publishes an ongoing tally for every senator and representative listing their percentage support for Trump's preferences (Bycorre 2019). The measure is expansive, including votes on nominees for the courts and executive branch (in the

Senate), repealing Obama-era regulations, the budget and other resolutions, and hurricane disaster relief, as well as various ordinary legislative items. The measure for the 115th Congress is based on 96 votes in the House and 84 in the Senate. Some of these items were consensual, which explains some of the comparatively high level of support for Trump's agenda among Democrats evident in Figures 1 through 4. The first two plot Trump's support against Trump's vote share in the state or district, and the next two, against the member's NOMINATE score for the 115th Congress.[23]

Visual examination of Figures 1 and 2 suggests Democrats in both chambers were more inclined than Republicans to adapt to their constituencies in responding to Trump's preferences. In the Senate, a much larger share of Democrats than Republicans represented states won decisively by the other party's candidate and were thus under strong electoral pressure to depart from their party's norm.[24] In the House, however, more Republicans served districts Clinton won (23) than Democrats served districts Trump won (12), and as a group these Republicans were nearly as loyal to Trump (average, 92.7%) as those from districts Trump won (93.4%). Figures 3 and 4 reveal an alternative explanation for variations in Republican defection rates: ideology. These results must be interpreted cautiously because some of the votes used to compute the NOMINATE scores are also used for FiveThirtyEight's Trump support scores. But the figures suggest that these two measures are distinguishable and that members' roll-call-defined ideologies have a nonlinear relationship with Trump support. Senate and House Republicans at the far right and the far left of the scale (relative to others in their party) were less supportive of Trump's agenda than those in the middle of the scale. The relationship is also nonlinear for Democrats, but in their case, support for Trump rises at an increasing rate as they become relatively more conservative.

A more precise take on these relationships and estimates of the effect of the member's expressed personal attitude toward Trump (as measured by whether or not they backed him in 2016) appear in the regression equations in Table 5. Republican support for Trump's agenda is unrelated to state or district electoral leanings. However, Republican senators who had publicly refused to support Trump's candidacy were less likely to support his agenda, although the effect is smaller and no longer significant when the senators' ideological location is added to the equation. The nonlinear effects of ideology are acknowledged by including a quadratic NOMINATE term; the coefficients for both terms are highly significant with opposite signs, confirming that Trump's support was significantly lower among the most moderate and most conservative Republican senators. Not surprisingly, these outliers abandoned Trump on different sets of votes. The two most moderate Republicans, Susan Collins (ME) and Lisa Murkowski (AK), for example, defected on votes regarding repeal of the ACA, the environment, and abortion, whereas the two most conservative Republicans, Rand Paul (KY) and Mike Lee (UT), defected on various budgetary votes to express their hard-core fiscal conservatism.

23. The NOMINATE data are from the Voteview website at https://voteview.com/congress/senate and https://voteview.com/congress/house. Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal originated the measure, and Jeffrey Lewis is continuing and updating their work.

24. Twelve Democrats represent states won by Trump, six by 60% or more of the vote, whereas only three Republicans represent states won by Clinton, with a maximum of 53% of the vote.
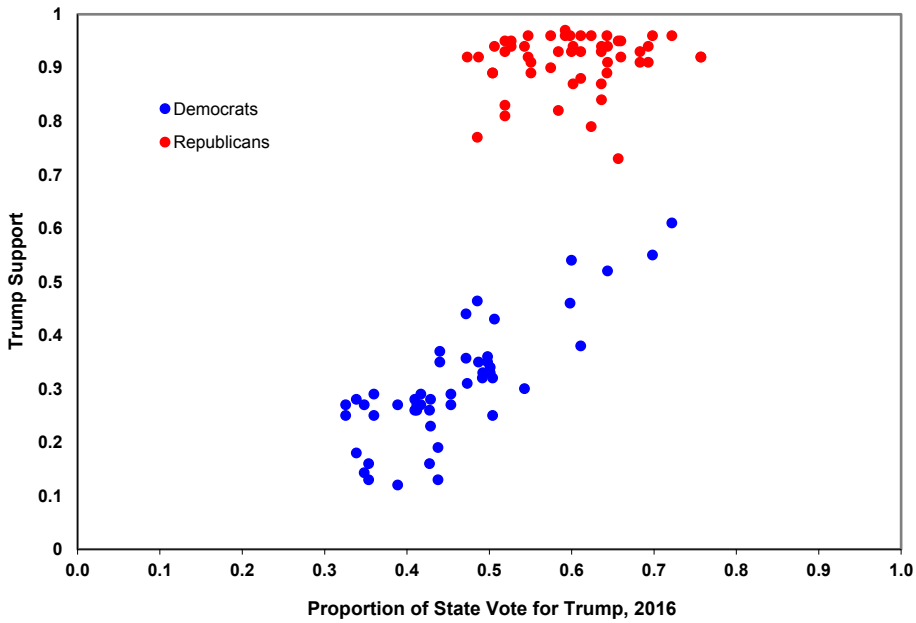
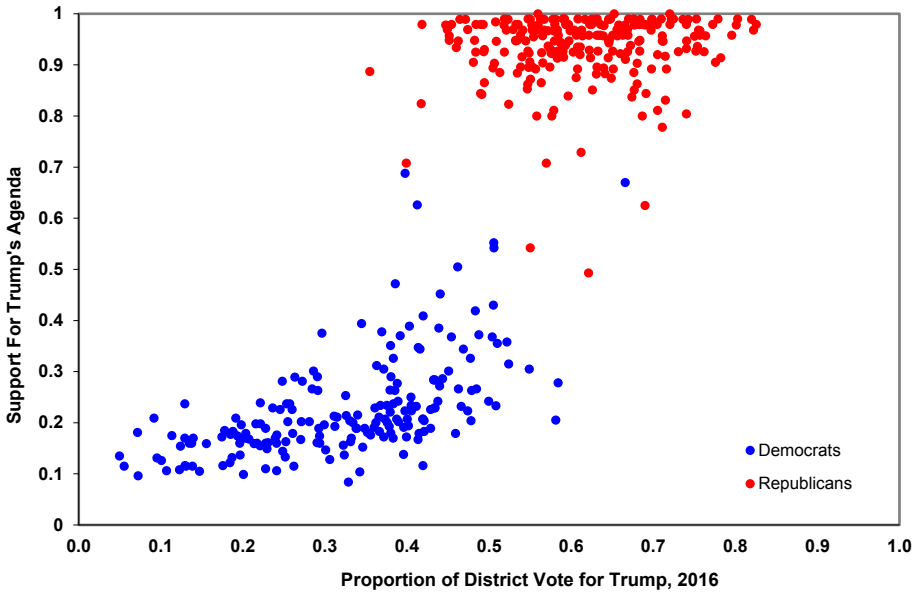**FIGURE 1.** State Vote for Trump and Support for His Agenda in the Senate.

FIGURE 2. District Presidential Vote and Support for Trump's Agenda in the House, 115th Congress.
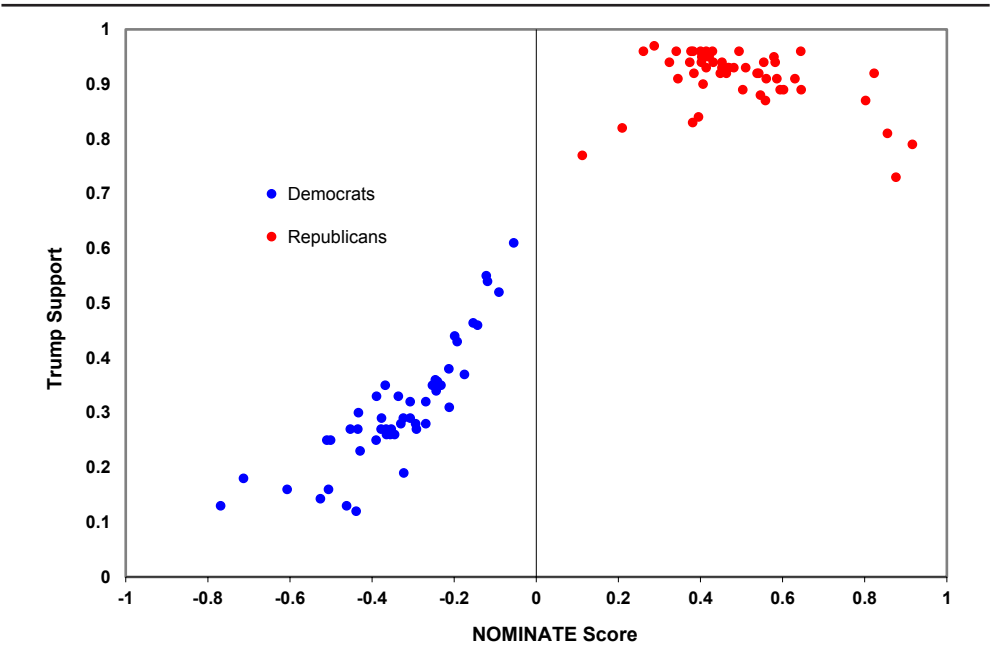
FIGURE 3. Senators' NOMINATE Scores and Support for Trump's Agenda, 115th Congress.
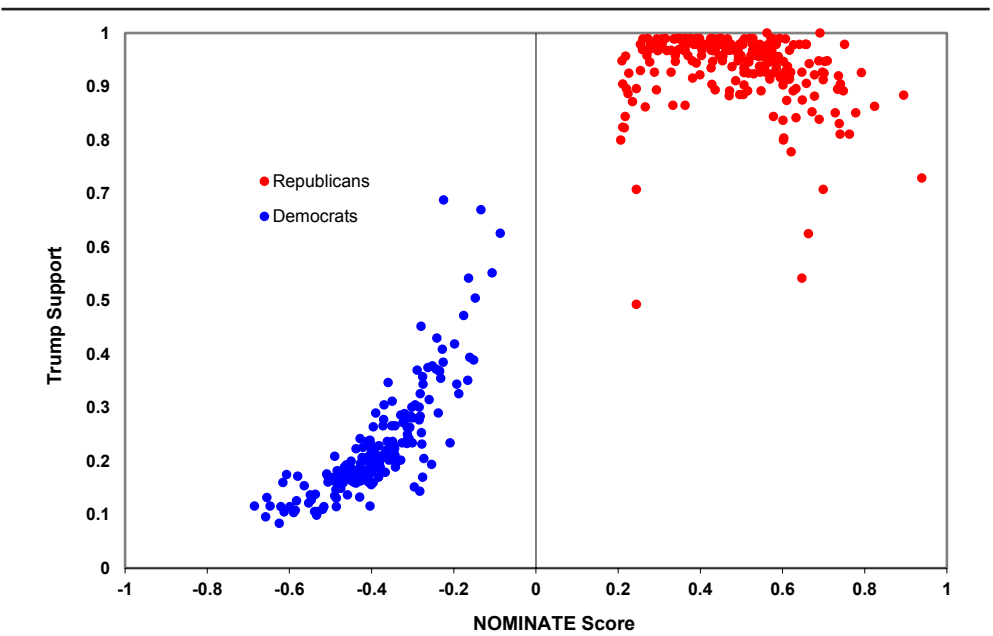

FIGURE 4. Representatives' NOMINATE Scores and Support for Trump's Agenda, 115th Congress.

TABLE 5
Determinants of Congressional Republicans' Support for Trump's Agenda

	I	II	III	IV
Senators				
Trump's vote share (0 to 1)	.110	−.031	.059	.013
	(.106)	(.104)	(.112)	(.081)
Opposed Trump (0 to 1)		−.062***		−.020
		(.018)		(.018)
Critical of Trump (0 to 1)			−.043	−.015
			(.032)	(.028)
NOMINATE (−1 to 1)				.723***
				(.168)
NOMINATE, squared				−.759***
				(.150)
Constant	.844***	.942***	.896***	.762***
	(.064)	(.064)	(.075)	(.073)
Adjusted R^2	.00	.19	.02	.52
N	50	50	50	50
Representatives				
Trump's vote share (0 to 1)	.058	.055	.025	.021
	(.050)	(.053)	(.057)	(.052)
Opposed Trump (0 to 1)		−.002		.000
		(.010)		(.013)
Critical of Trump (0 to 1)			−.042	−.062
			(.034)	(.034)
NOMINATE score (−1 to 1)				.879***
				(.195)
NOMINATE, squared				−1.029***
				(.161)
Constant	.899***	.902***	.939***	.787***
	(.030)	(.033)	(.045)	(.055)
Adjusted R^2	.00	.00	.00	.21
N	232	232	232	232

Note: The dependent variable is coded to take values from 0 to 1 (proportion of votes consistent with Trump's preferences).
***$p < .001$.
Source: See text.

Support for the Trump agenda among House Republicans was unaffected by Trump's vote in the district or their position on Trump in 2016; it is related only to the members' ideology, again in a nonlinear way, and again with members at the extremes defecting from Trump on different sets of issues: labor, environment, firearms, and tax cuts among the moderates; fiscal policy and some libertarian rejections of government surveillance authority on the far right of the Republican spectrum.

Finally, it is noteworthy that in neither chamber did a Republican member's response to Trump's more problematic words and deeds have any significant influence on support for his agenda. The (insignificant) coefficients suggest that agenda support among Trump's strongest critics would be only about two percentage points lower than

that of his strongest defenders in the Senate, and one percentage point lower in the House. Objections to Trump's behavior did not prompt Republicans to desert him on the floor.

The Democrats

Consistent with what we observe in the figures, both electoral and ideological variables help explain variations in support for Trump's agenda among House and Senate Democrats (Table 6). Democrats were thus much more responsive than Republicans to local voting patterns in their reactions to Trump's agenda. The better Trump did in the state or district, the higher his support, and that support rose at an increasing rate the more moderate the Democrat. As a robustness check, we replicated the analysis of support for Trump's agenda by both parties using the CQ Roll Call presidential support scores for the 115th Congress as the dependent variable, and the results were virtually indistinguishable from those reported here—no surprise, as the FiveThirtyEight and CQ measures are highly correlated (from .92 to .98 across parties and chambers).

Comparing Dimensions

Congressional Republicans reacted in distinctive ways to Trump's conduct and legislative agenda. The correlations between the criticism index and support for Trump's positions on the floor were negative, to be sure, but quite weak: –.11 in the House, –.22 in the Senate. House and especially Senate Republicans were clearly more inclined to criticize Trump's behavior than to vote against his agenda, and at least on items that got to the floor for a vote—no small caveat—Republicans stuck with Trump (and their party) at very

TABLE 6
Determinants of Congressional Democrats' Support for Trump's Agenda

	Senators		*Representatives*	
	I	*II*	*I*	*II*
Trump's vote share (0 to 1)	.973***	.342***	.537***	.113*
	(.102)	(.099)	(.053)	(.039)
NOMINATE score (–1 to 1)		1.073***		1.841***
		(.183)		(.187)
NOMINATE, squared		.764***		1.435***
		(.204)		(.226)
Constant	–.137**	.409***	.059***	.679***
	(.048)	(.076)	(.019)	(.045)
Adjusted R^2	.65	.86	.34	.71
N	49	49	194	194

Note: The dependent variable is coded to take values from 0 to 1 (proportion of votes consistent with Trump's preferences).
*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
Source: See text.

high rates, averaging 91.0% in the Senate and 93.5% in the House (Table 7). Of course, Trump's agenda and the congressional Republicans' agenda were, in the great majority of cases, the same. Still, there are some subtle differences in support levels. As the regression equations indicated, those who had not supported Trump in 2016 were more likely to be critical and less likely to support his proposals, although only among senators is the latter difference statistically significant. General party loyalty among Republicans as recorded by CQ was even higher than their loyalty to Trump, although members who did not vote for Trump in 2016 were also marginally more likely to vote against their party's majority.

The Electoral Connection

The influence of electoral considerations on members' reactions to Donald Trump varied across dimensions, chambers, and parties. Such considerations evidently shaped the pattern of public responses by Republicans to some of Trump's more controversial statements and actions, although more strongly and consistently in the House than in the Senate. State or district voting patterns did not, however, influence Republicans' support for Trump's positions on the floor. In contrast, the floor votes of Democrats in both houses were strongly influenced by district voting patterns even when their general roll-call ideology, also related to these patterns, is taken into account.

Electoral pressures generally affected most congressional Republicans and Democrats differently. Only three senators and 23 Republican representatives in the 115th Congress served constituencies that had preferred Clinton. With ordinary Republicans so supportive of Trump, most Republican members had much more reason to fear primary challenges—backed by Republican activists, donors, and independent spending groups—they might

TABLE 7
Summary of Republicans' Responses to Trump, 115th Congress (Percentages)

		2016 Vote	
	All	*For Trump*	*Not for Trump*
Senate	(50)	(39)	(11)
Criticism index × 100	50.0	42.2	77.6***
No criticism of Trump	22.0	28.2	0.0*
Critical on at least two items	60.0	51.3	90.9**
Support for Trump's agenda	91.0	92.4	86.4***
Party loyalty (CQ scores for 115th Congress)	96.7	97.4	94.4**
House	(232)	(198)	(34)
Criticism index × 100	45.2	42.6	60.7***
No criticism of Trump	63.8	70.7	23.5***
Critical on at least two items	16.8	10.6	52.9***
Support for Trump's agenda	93.5	93.6	92.9
Party loyalty (CQ scores for 115th Congress)	95.0	95.6	91.3***

Note: Number of members is in parentheses. Significance of difference between members voting for Trump and others:
[†]$p < .10$; *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

face if they broke with the president than from tying themselves too closely to him. Trump's erstwhile advisor Steve Bannon made this threat explicitly, and the preemptive retirements of Flake and Corker made it clear that it was not dismissed as idle (Isenstadt 2017). The primary defeat of Representative Mark Sanford (SC 1) illustrated the risk. A sharp critic of Trump, Sanford had the fourth lowest Trump agenda support score (.71) of any Republican member, and Trump had endorsed his challenger. The only other Republican primary loser, Robert Pittenger (NC 9), had a Trump support score of .98 and defended Trump's behavior (he was in the bottom 5% on the criticism scale), but he still lost an election in which the main issue was who was more pro-Trump. That very few Republican incumbents found themselves in Sanford's position suggests that most were careful to avoid becoming targets; with only a few exceptions, even those most critical of Trump's behavior supported his agenda as loyally as other Republicans.

The 2018 Election

How, if at all, did members' reactions to Trump influence their fates in the 2018 midterm election? Back in 2016, with only a few possible exceptions, Republican candidates' positions on Trump turned out to have almost no detectable effect on their electoral fates, as partisanship dominated voting up and down the ticket (Liu and Jacobson 2018a). We anticipated the same for Republican incumbents in 2018 (Liu and Jacobson 2018b) and for similar reasons, although we did not fully appreciate how extraordinarily nationalized, president-centered, and party-centered the 2018 midterm election would become. It featured the widest partisan differences in evaluations of a president's performance, the strongest connection between those evaluations and the vote choice, and the highest levels of party-line voting ever recorded for a midterm (Jacobson 2019a). It also produced the highest midterm turnout rate in a century, with a particularly large surge among Democratic voters (Jacobson 2019b).

Combined with his general unpopularity—approval ratings in the low 40s—Trump's centrality to the vote choice in 2018 worked against Republican House candidates, and they lost a net 40 seats, including 30 defended by incumbents, while not a single Democratic incumbent lost in the general election. However, the same conditions favored Republicans in the battle for the Senate, where Democrats faced the most adverse array of contests faced by any party since senators have been popularly elected. Of the 35 seats in play in 2018, Democrats held 26, ten of them in states won by Trump in 2016, and five with more than 59% of the major party vote. Republicans defended only nine seats and only one in a state won by Hillary Clinton: Nevada. They lost that seat plus an open seat in Arizona while defeating four Democratic incumbents in Trump states for a net gain of two.

The House results suggested that few voters were willing to make fine distinctions among Republican incumbents that might protect them from a broad negative referendum on the president, at least in districts where it might make a difference. The evidence is in Table 8. The first equation regresses the Republican incumbent's percentage share of the major-party vote on Trump's district vote in 2016, the index of criticism of Trump,

TABLE 8
Reaction to Trump and 2018 Election Results for Incumbent House Republicans

	All	Trump's Vote in 2016	
		<55%	>55%
Trump's 2016 vote share	.72***	.29*	.78***
(percent)	(.04)	(.14)	(.04)
Critical of Trump (0 to 1)	4.93**	−.53	5.00*
	(1.74)	(2.87)	(2.30)
Democrat's spending (log)	−1.36***	−1.19	−1.35***
	(.18)	(.78)	(.19)
Republican's spending (log)	.15	−.55	−.12
	(.38)	(1.28)	(.41)
Constant	28.80***	62.35***	27.81***
	(6.30)	(15.60)	(6.91)
Adjusted R^2	.88	.40	.85
N	189	42	147

Note: The dependent variable is the percent of the major party vote won by the Republican incumbent.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

and campaign spending by the two candidates (in logged form to account for the diminishing returns to spending).[25] The Trump vote has by far the largest effect (alone it explains 84% of the variance), and campaign spending works as usual in ordinary least squares (OLS) equations, with the challenger's but not the incumbent's spending having a major impact on the results (Jacobson and Carson 2016).

This equation also suggests that a more critical stance toward Trump helped Republican incumbents; the coefficient indicates that vote share for the most critical member is estimated to be 4.7 percentage points higher than for the least critical member with the other variables controlled. However, when we split districts into those where Republicans were most vulnerable—defined as those in which Trump received less than 55% of the vote in 2016—and the rest, the effect is significant only in the districts where it was least likely to swing the election. In districts where Trump was most likely to be a problem for Republicans, the incumbent's stance toward him had no discernible effect on the vote. The incumbent lost 24 of these 42 contests (57%), and the outcome was unrelated to the level of criticism or support for Trump; on average, the losers were actually a bit more critical than the winners (.60 compared to .51 on the scale, $p = .10$). The electoral benefit of expressing greater criticism of Trump thus accrued exclusively to Republican incumbents in relatively safe districts, and even here it did not protect several of them from defeat. The five losers in this set (of 147, 3.3%) were again more critical of Trump than those who won (.51 on the scale compared to .41 for the winning incumbents, $p = .05$). A logit version of the first equation in Table 8, with winning or losing replacing vote share as the dependent variable, confirmed that a Republican's stance toward Trump did not significantly affect who won the seat.

25. Spending totals for each candidate include money spent by the candidates' campaigns and independent spending on their behalf by party and outside groups; see Jacobson (2019b) for details.

TABLE 9
Trump's Vote in 2016 and the Fates of Republican Incumbents in 2018

Trump vote, 2016 (percent)	Percent criticizing Trump on		Electoral fate in 2018		
	No items	Two or more items	Won	Lost	Percent losing
<45	0	75	0	4	100
45–50	23	77	3	10	77
50–55	48	24	15	10	40
55–60	60	15	43	4	8
>60	79	4	104	1	1

What obviously shaped the Republicans' fates was Trump's prior support in the district, a point summarized in Table 9. The lower Trump's vote in the district, the more likely the Republican was to criticize his behavior, but the degree to which he or she did so made no difference in the outcome; critics were as likely as noncritics to lose in all of these categories. In general, the weaker Trump's performance was in 2016, the higher the spending by and for the Democrat in 2018, the greater the increase in Democratic vote turnout over 2014 or 2016, the larger the vote swing to the Democrat, and hence the higher the rate of defeat for Republican incumbents (Jacobson 2019b); the incumbents' stances on Trump did not affect the strength of the opposition they attracted. Their fates were also unaffected by their level of support for the president's agenda; when this variable replaces the criticism index in the equations in Table 8, its coefficient is small and insignificant. Jointly, the two Trump variables contribute nothing to the explanation of votes or victories for Republicans in districts where local partisanship left them vulnerable.

What of incumbent House Democrats? None lost in the general election, only three won less than 55% of the major party vote, and the smallest margin of victory for any of them was 52.1–47.9 (Colin Peterson, MN 7). They easily held onto the eight districts they defended that had been won by Trump in 2016, averaging 56% of the vote. Still, it is worth considering whether strategic support for Trump's agenda (Figure 2 and Table 6) made any difference in how well they performed in the election. The evidence in Table 10 suggests that it did, although it was far from decisive. The first equation indicates that, controlling for Trump's vote in the district and campaign spending by the candidates, support for Trump's agenda had a positive but insignificant effect on the Democrat's vote. However, when Trump support is interacted with his 2016 vote share, all of the relevant coefficients are highly significant, and the interaction term indicates that the effects of Trump agenda support depended on his strength in the district; the higher his vote, the more positive the effect of supporting him on the floor. Examination of the coefficients indicates that greater support for Trump would enhance the Democrats' vote share in districts where he won more than 42.3% of the vote, as he did in 32 of these districts; below this level, greater support for Trump's agenda has a negative effect on the Democrat's vote.[26] Still, the substantive effects were quite small. In the seven districts where Trump's vote fell between 50 and 55%, the Democrats' vote would be predicted to be 1.3 points

26. These and the other estimates discussed here were calculated by setting the spending variables at their averages.

TABLE 10
Support for Trump's Agenda and 2018 Election Results for Incumbent House Democrats

	I	II
Trump's 2016 vote share (percent)	–.74***	–.88***
	(.03)	(.05)
Support for Trump's agenda (0 to 1)	3.44	–31.99***
	(3.60)	(9.38)
Trump support × Trump vote share		.78***
		(.19)
Democrat's spending (log)	.72	.89
	(.52)	(.50)
Republican's spending (log)	–1.01***	–1.04***
	(.17)	(.16)
Constant	93.88***	98.34***
	(6.57)	(6.30)
Adjusted R^2	.90	.91
N	134	134

Note: The dependent variable is the percent of the major party vote won by the Democratic incumbent.
***$p < .001$.

lower if their support for Trump had been at the party average of .23 rather than their average of .40; it would be predicted to be 2.1 points lower if their support matched that of the least supportive Democrat, .08. In the 12 districts where Trump won between 45 and 50%, the predicted vote would have been about 0.4 points lower had they matched the party average, and 1.0 points lower had they matched the party lowest figure.

In none of these cases would the incumbent have been predicted to lose with even the minimal level of support for Trump's agenda. In one case, however, a record of backing Trump's agenda was almost certainly essential to reelection. Colin Peterson was the only Democratic incumbent defending a district won by Trump with more than 55% of the vote—a lot more, 66.6%. He also supported Trump's agenda to the greatest extent of any Democrat (.67) and had the narrowest victory margin (noted earlier). The equation projects that had his support for Trump been less than .44, which is two standard deviations above the Democratic mean, he would have lost.

In another year, without a national tide so favorable to Democrats, strategic adaptation to the district might have mattered to a larger number of the party's incumbents. But the highly nationalized and partisan elections that have become the norm make it exceedingly difficult for members to use personal records to insulate them from national partisan forces. When the lagged district presidential vote explains 95% of the variance in the midterm House vote, as it did in 2018, little room is left for individual members' actions to make a difference; tellingly, incumbency was worth no more than a couple of points in 2018 (Jacobson 2019b).

On the Senate side, only six Republicans sought reelection, too few for systematic analysis. The one loser, Dean Heller of Nevada, was defending a state that had gone for Clinton in 2016. His levels of criticism of Trump and support for the president's agenda were close to his party's averages, but it is doubtful that greater separation from Trump would have saved him.

Of the 23 Senate Democrats seeking reelection, 10 were from states won by Trump, and four of them lost. Supporting Trump on the floor did not reliably ward off defeat in these states. With one exception, the six winners were not unusually supportive, with scores ranging from .25 to .38, close to the party mean of .31; the four losers were all more supportive than this, with scores ranging from .43 to .55. The exception was Joe Manchin of West Virginia, who had the highest Trump support score (.61) and the toughest state for a Democrat to hold (72% for Trump in 2016). Like Peterson in the House, it is very unlikely that Manchin could have won reelection had he not compiled a record of consistent support for Trump's agenda. Still, Jon Tester won reelection in Montana, where Trump won 61% in 2016, with a support score of only .38, although it was a very close call, with 50.8% of the vote.

Overall, the message from 2018 for House Republicans is that modulating their reactions to Trump with an eye to local sentiments may be necessary but not at all sufficient to ensure political survival. The same holds for Senate Democrats. It is easy to imagine wrecking a career by taking positions on Trump that defy local preferences (as would pro-Trump Republicans in Democratic-leaning states or districts, or anti-Trump Democrats in states or districts that voted for Trump, or anti-Trump Republicans facing primary electorates)—so easy that members rarely do so. But being critical of Trump was not enough to save vulnerable Republican House incumbents (Table 9), and greater support of Trump's agenda was not enough to save most Senate Democrats in the most strongly pro-Trump states.

Among other things, these electoral realities help to explain the continuing reluctance of congressional Republicans to criticize Trump (e.g., for the xenophobia and racism he exhibited in July 2019, in telling four Democratic women of color, three of them U.S. born, to go back to the countries they came from). Criticizing Trump has only downsides for Republicans who wish to remain in Congress. It irks their base without attracting compensating support from Democrats. It also threatens to make Trump less popular outside of solid Republican circles, and because their electoral fates are, by the evidence of 2018, so closely tied to his public standing, anything that hurts Trump is also likely to make their own reelections more difficult. Those who nonetheless find they cannot remain silent have another option—leaving the party (as did Justin Amash, MI 3, in 2019) or retiring from Congress. During Trump's tenure through August 2019, 55 Republicans had voluntarily left the House, 7 the Senate. Not all of them were Trump critics, to be sure, but voluntary retirements and defeats, along with the influx of several new pro-Trump senators in 2018, has left Republican contingents in both houses with fewer members inclined to criticize their president. Silence in the face of Trump's transgressive behaviors may be their best short-term strategy, but it does not bode well for their party's long-term reputation and prospects.

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