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NATIONAL: 2018 HOUSE RACE STABILITY

Most voting blocs have dug in, but uncertainty remains

West Long Branch, NJ – Despite the onslaught of major news events, the *Monmouth University Poll* finds the race for control of the House of Representatives does not look much different in October than it did over the summer. Aggregated analysis of previously released polls in seven competitive districts finds that the underlying dynamics in this race have not shifted all that much, but some groups are more fluid than others. The polling confirms that key voting blocs for Democrats continue to be white women with a college degree as well as women of color. For Republicans, their key bloc is white men who did not graduate college. But the polling also points to two important variables that are driving uncertainty about Tuesday’s outcome: how many “new” midterm voters will show up and how will non-white men, particularly Latinos, divide their support.

“To an extraordinary extent, this cake was baked months ago. Both sides were dug in early and deep. However, there are a few factors where small shifts in key districts can have a significant impact on the national outcome. Non-midterm voters and Latino men are high on that list of factors,” said Patrick Murray, director of the independent Monmouth University Polling Institute.

This report presents key findings from tracking polls in CA48, NJ03, NJ07, NJ11, NY19, PA17, and WV03 conducted over the summer (mid-June to mid-September) and in October. The districts included in this analysis are mostly in the suburban Northeast region and the results should be viewed with that caveat in mind.

Summary

Democrats maintain a slight edge over Republicans across the seven districts polled. On average, likely vote intent in October’s polling was 49% for the Democratic House candidates and 46% for the Republican. This is virtually unchanged from the 47% to 43% edge Democrats held in this same group of districts over the summer. It is important to note that Republicans routinely won these seven districts by double digit margins in prior election cycles.

- ***Where voters live has an impact on the margin of support.*** Over the summer, Democrats were running ahead of prior performance in Democratic precincts and Republicans were running behind in Republican precincts. Republicans are still running behind in their base neighborhoods but the Democratic advantage in their own base neighborhoods has now fallen back in line with prior presidential outcomes. However, Democratic candidates are doing better now than they were over the summer in the most competitive precincts in their districts.
- ***“New” midterm voters are crucial to Democratic prospects.*** Monmouth’s modeling finds that about one-fifth of likely voters in competitive districts did not participate in either the 2014 or 2010 midterm elections. Democrats have a 12 point advantage with these “new” midterm voters, which is up from 4 points over the summer. The question for Tuesday’s election is what proportion of the electorate will these rare-to-never midterm voters comprise.
- ***Men of color, particularly Latinos, are a key swing group.*** Non-white men – driven largely by Latino voters in Southern California and other Sunbelt districts – may be the most fluid voting bloc in 2018. While they give Democrats a slight edge in their House vote, the poll finds that enthusiasm among non-white men supporting Republicans has increased since the summer while enthusiasm among non-white men supporting Democrats has declined.
- ***Health care versus immigration.*** Health care and immigration are the top two issues on voters’ minds. When health care is the top issue, Democrats do well. When immigration is the top issue, Republicans do well.

“Special elections over the past year have been held up as a barometer for what could happen in the fall. In most of those races we saw a sizable swing toward Democrats over the final four weeks of the campaign. There just hasn’t been that same shift in this general election. These districts remain unusually competitive given their past history. But these trends do not point to any clear ‘writing on the wall’ in terms of how the battle for control of Congress will turn out this year,” said Patrick Murray, director of the independent Monmouth University Polling Institute.

House vote intent by precinct type and past voting

Monmouth assigned a partisan strength score to each of the voting precincts in these districts based on presidential vote margins in 2012 and 2016. Over the summer, Democrats were running ahead of expectations in Democratic precincts and Republicans were running behind in Republican precincts. Republicans are still running behind in their base areas but Democratic candidates’ advantage in their own base neighborhoods has now fallen back in line with prior presidential outcomes. However, Democratic candidates are now doing better in the most competitive precincts in their districts than they were over the summer.

Polling finds that the respective parties maintain their edges in the most partisan types of precincts – those that gave their party’s presidential nominee an average margin of at least 25 points. Highly Democratic precincts supported the Democratic House candidate by 44 points (69% to 25%) on average in October, while highly Republican precincts supported the Republican candidate by a smaller 16 points (55% to 39%). However, these solid blue precincts include only 10% of the total electorate

while the solid red precincts hold a larger 23% of the electorate. Of note, there has been no significant shift in partisan support among voters living in these extremely partisan precincts since the summer.

There has been a shift in vote intention in competitive precincts as well as those that have leaned slightly Democratic in presidential voting. In competitive precincts – those where the average presidential victory margin was less than 5 points for either party – the Democratic House candidate got 54% support to 41% for the Republican in October. This 13 point advantage is wider than the 3 point edge (47% to 44%) that Democrats had in these precincts over the summer. The Republicans, however, made gains in leaning Democratic precincts where the average presidential margin was 5 to 9 points for the Democratic ticket. Whereas the Democrats had a 24 point advantage (58% to 34%) in these blue-leaning precincts over the summer, this was cut to 7 points (51% to 44%) in October.

2018 House Vote by Precinct Type								
Precincts where the 2012-16 average presidential vote margin was...	TOTAL	Dem +25 points	Dem 10-24 points	Dem 5-9 points	Competitive	Rep 5-9 points	Rep 10-24 points	Rep 25+ points
Summer								
<i>(Share of electorate)</i>		<i>(11%)</i>	<i>(10%)</i>	<i>(6%)</i>	<i>(14%)</i>	<i>(9%)</i>	<i>(28%)</i>	<i>(23%)</i>
REP candidate	43%	22%	36%	34%	44%	46%	46%	51%
DEM candidate	47%	64%	54%	58%	47%	42%	45%	38%
Dem net	+4	+42	+18	+24	+3	-4	-1	-13
October								
<i>(Share of electorate)</i>		<i>(10%)</i>	<i>(10%)</i>	<i>(6%)</i>	<i>(14%)</i>	<i>(9%)</i>	<i>(28%)</i>	<i>(23%)</i>
REP candidate	46%	25%	43%	44%	41%	47%	50%	55%
DEM candidate	49%	69%	54%	51%	54%	46%	44%	39%
Dem net	+3	+44	+11	+7	+13	-1	-6	-16

Source: [Monmouth University Poll](#), 2018 combined data (CA48, NJ03, NJ07, NJ11, NY19, PA17, WV03)

The GOP also made slight gains in solid Democratic precincts – those where the Democratic presidential candidate averaged a 10 to 24 point win – going from an 18 point deficit in the summer to an 11 point deficit in October. In solid Republican precincts (10 to 24 point win for the GOP candidate), the GOP candidate went from a slim one point edge to a 6 point lead. In leaning Republican precincts (5 to 9 point win for the GOP candidate), the GOP edge remained narrow – 4 points in the summer and one point in October.

“These results suggest that voters living in the most partisan neighborhoods of these districts dug in early and stayed there. The only places we saw a bit of movement were in precincts where party alignment is more evenly divided,” said Murray.

Another key group that will determine the outcome of these House races are voters who are likely to show up in a midterm election either for the first time or for the first time in a long while. About one-fifth of the polling’s likely electorate are voters who did not participate in either the 2014 or 2010 midterm elections – 19% in the summer and 21% in October. As one may expect, these are more likely to be younger voters. They are also somewhat more likely to be male and non-white. Importantly, they have been trending more Democratic this cycle. Over the summer, this group of “new” midterm voters gave Democrats a 41% to 37% edge across these seven districts. That margin grew to 53% Democrat to 41% Republican in October.

“This is a crucial piece of the puzzle for Democrats. Their prospects in these historically Republican districts relies largely on turning out voters who rarely or never vote in midterm elections,” said Murray.

Small shifts in voter interest

High interest in the current election among likely voters increased slightly from 73% over the summer to 77% in October. Among those supporting the GOP candidate, voters with high interest went from 71% to 75%. Among those supporting the Democratic candidate, high interest went from 79% to 81%. In other words, the interest gap went from an 8 point Democratic advantage in the summer to a 6 point advantage in October.

High Interest in House Election by Race/Education/Gender							
	TOTAL	White no college degree male	White no college degree female	White college educated male	White college educated female	Hispanic, black, Asian, other male	Hispanic, black, Asian, other female
Summer	73%	69%	67%	80%	76%	78%	68%
October	77%	75%	71%	83%	82%	76%	79%
<i>Among those supporting the Republican House candidate</i>							
Summer	71%	67%	65%	77%	73%	74%	n/a
October	75%	75%	68%	76%	77%	85%	n/a
<i>Among those supporting the Democratic House candidate</i>							
Summer	79%	76%	71%	86%	84%	81%	69%
October	81%	79%	76%	89%	87%	70%	78%

Source: Monmouth University Poll, 2018 combined data (CA48, NJ03, NJ07, NJ11, NY19, PA17, WV03)

Some specific voter blocs showed larger shifts in interest that are worth noting. Specifically, high interest among white men without a college degree who are supporting the GOP candidate went from 67% to 75%. Also, high interest among non-white men who are voting Republican increased from 74% to 85%. On the other hand, interest among non-white men voting Democratic dropped from 81% to 70%. The biggest increase in interest among voters supporting a Democrat for House was among non-white women, going from 69% to 78%.

“Democrats still maintain an advantage in voter enthusiasm but these small shifts show that the GOP was able to energize a key part of its base. The split in interest between men of color who are voting Republican compared with those who are backing the Democrat may be even more telling. These voters are going to help determine quite a few races in the Sunbelt. This shift is a warning sign for Democrats that they can’t reliably count on that voting bloc,” said Murray.

House vote intent by race/education/gender

There have been few major swings in the vote intentions of key voting groups by race, gender, and education since the summer. But small shifts among some groups could impact the outcome in a number of House races. The Republican base continues to rest on white voters without a college degree, particularly men. The GOP’s October advantage among non-college whites – 57% to 38% among men and 49% to 43% among women – is nearly identical to their standing with these groups over the summer. White men with a college degree continue to be evenly divided – 48% to 48% in October. And non-white women continue to give Democrats a near 50 point margin – 71% to 24% in October.

2018 House Vote by Race/Education/Gender							
	TOTAL	White no college degree male	White no college degree female	White college educated male	White college educated female	Hispanic, black, Asian, other male	Hispanic, black, Asian, other female
Summer							
<i>(Share of electorate)</i>		(21%)	(25%)	(18%)	(20%)	(8%)	(7%)
REP candidate	43%	54%	47%	46%	35%	34%	18%
DEM candidate	47%	35%	42%	48%	58%	53%	69%
Dem net	+4	-19	-5	+2	+23	+19	+51
October							
<i>(Share of electorate)</i>		(23%)	(26%)	(17%)	(19%)	(7%)	(8%)
REP candidate	46%	57%	49%	48%	34%	41%	24%
DEM candidate	49%	38%	43%	48%	62%	54%	71%
Dem net	+3	-19	-6	0	+28	+13	+47

Source: [Monmouth University Poll](#), 2018 combined data (CA48, NJ03, NJ07, NJ11, NY19, PA17, WV03)

Two groups, though, showed shifts of 5 to 6 points in their House vote intentions. White women with a college degree became more Democratic – going from a 58% to 35% vote lead in the summer to a 62% to 34% advantage in October. Non-white men – driven largely by Latino voters in this group – became less Democratic – going from a 53% to 34% preference for Democrats in the summer to a narrower 54% to 41% edge in October.

“Latino men make up a very small portion of the electorate in these seven districts. But in places like Southern California where they make up a much larger share of the vote, they could be a key swing group that determines the outcome,” said Murray.

Top issues in the race for the House

Monmouth’s October polling of these seven competitive districts found that health care (30%) is the top concern of voters in their choice for Congress and immigration takes the second spot (20%). Other issues asked about in the polls include taxes (14%), job creation (11%), gun control (11%), and abortion (8%). Voters who name health care as their top issue overwhelmingly prefer the Democrat in their local House contest (74% to 20%), while those who prioritize immigration just as overwhelmingly back the Republican candidate (74% to 22%).

“It’s not a matter of candidates trying to win voters over to their position on these issues. It’s a matter of making the campaign about the issues on which you already have a clear advantage. That’s why Democrats are hammering away at protecting pre-existing conditions and why Republicans have been going full throttle on border security over the past week,” said Murray. He added, “One reason Democrats are doing so well in the Northeast and Midwest has to do with concerns about health care costs. Republicans may do somewhat better in the Sunbelt because immigration is a more prominent issue. One question is whether recent GOP ads about immigrant crime and the president’s call to end birthright citizenship bolsters their base turnout or goes too far and turns off more moderate voters.”

2018 House Vote by Top Issue							
	TOTAL	Health care	Immigration	Taxes	Job creation	Gun control	Abortion
October only <i>(Share of electorate)</i>		<i>(30%)</i>	<i>(20%)</i>	<i>(14%)</i>	<i>(11%)</i>	<i>(11%)</i>	<i>(8%)</i>
REP candidate	46%	20%	74%	61%	61%	34%	51%
DEM candidate	49%	74%	22%	32%	32%	61%	47%
Dem net	+3	+54	-52	-29	-29	+27	-4

Source: [Monmouth University Poll](#), 2018 combined data (CA48, NJ03, NJ07, NJ11, NY19, PA17, WV03)

Presidential opinion

President Donald Trump’s job rating remains evenly divided in these seven competitive districts. It was 48% approve to 48% disapprove over the summer and 49% approve to 49% disapprove in October. There have been some shifts among key voting blocs, though. Approval of Trump among his base group of white men without a college degree has decreased from a net +36 rating to a +28 rating. There has been a slight improvement in Trump’s standing among non-white men, although it still remains negative – going from a net -15 points over the summer to -7 in October. There has also been a slight improvement in the president’s rating among non-white women, but opinion among this group continues to be overwhelmingly negative – going from -50 points to -43 points.

Trump Job Rating by Race/Education/Gender							
	TOTAL	White no college degree male	White no college degree female	White college educated male	White college educated female	Hispanic, black, Asian, other male	Hispanic, black, Asian, other female
Summer							
Approve	48%	67%	54%	48%	36%	41%	21%
Disapprove	48%	31%	44%	50%	63%	56%	71%
Net approve- disapprove	0	+36	+10	-2	-27	-15	-50
October							
Approve	49%	63%	53%	48%	36%	46%	28%
Disapprove	49%	35%	44%	51%	62%	53%	71%
Net approve- disapprove	0	+28	+9	-3	-26	-7	-43

Source: [Monmouth University Poll](#), 2018 combined data (CA48, NJ03, NJ07, NJ11, NY19, PA17, WV03)

METHODOLOGY

The *Monmouth University Poll* was sponsored and conducted by the Monmouth University Polling Institute. The results described in this release are drawn from live telephone interviews with likely voters in seven competitive U.S. House districts. The first wave of interviews (“Summer”) was conducted with 2,390 likely voters from mid-June through mid-September 2018. The second wave of interviews (“October”) was conducted with a separate sample of 2,523 likely voters in the same seven districts in October 2018. The individual districts included in this analysis are California-48, New Jersey-3, New Jersey-11, New Jersey-7, New York-19, Pennsylvania-17, and West Virginia-3. The results for each of these districts were all previously released by Monmouth. Information about the methodology for each of those individual polls can be found on [Monmouth’s website](#).

<i>DEMOGRAPHICS (weighted)</i>		<i>DEMOGRAPHICS (weighted)</i>	
Summer		October	
<i>Party Registration</i>	11% 18-34	<i>Party Registration</i>	11% 18-34
40% Republican	19% 35-49	39% Republican	20% 35-49
41% Democrat	35% 50-64	40% Democrat	34% 50-64
19% Neither	35% 65+	21% Neither	36% 65+
<i>Self-Reported Party ID</i>	85% White, non-Hispanic	<i>Self-Reported Party ID</i>	86% White, non-Hispanic
35% Republican	6% Hispanic	35% Republican	6% Hispanic
32% Independent	5% Black	31% Independent	4% Black
33% Democrat	3% Asian	34% Democrat	4% Asian
	1% Other		1% Other
47% Male		47% Male	
53% Female	54% No college degree	53% Female	56% No college degree
	46% 4-year college		44% 4-year college

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