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Are voters paying attention?

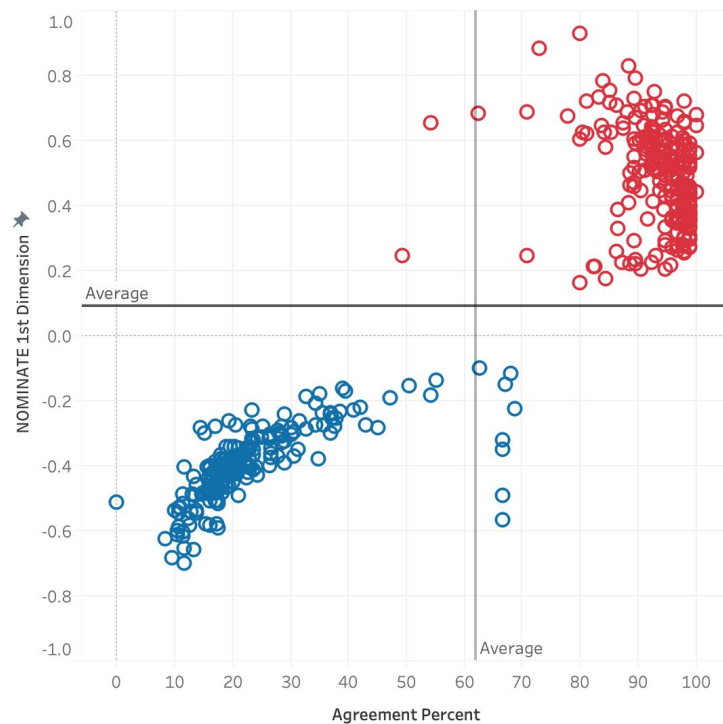
Some Congressional Democrats agree with President Trump more often than some Republicans do, and aren't being punished for it by voters.

The 115th Congress was by no means a nonpartisan one — among the bills passed by the Congress that occupied President Trump's first two years were tax cuts for corporations and a bill allowing states to withhold funding from women's healthcare provider Planned Parenthood. However, according to data collected by Five Thirty Eight and the University of California, Los Angeles, some of the Democratic representatives re-elected in 2018 agreed with President Trump on congressional bills over 60 percent of the time regardless of their party or their ideology.

The Department of Political Science and Social Science Computing at UCLA tracks Congressional members' ideology using the Dynamic Weighted Nominal Three-step Estimation, or DW-NOMINATE, a concept developed by two researchers at Carnegie-Mellon University that uses past voting history to assign a numerical value to ideological position. The scores range from extremely liberal at -1 to extremely conservative at 1.

Below, Republicans and Democrats are plotted in red and blue according to their DW-NOMINATE score and the percentage of times they agreed with President Trump on a bill passing through the chamber.

Ideology and party don't reliably predict how often a representative will agree with President Trump

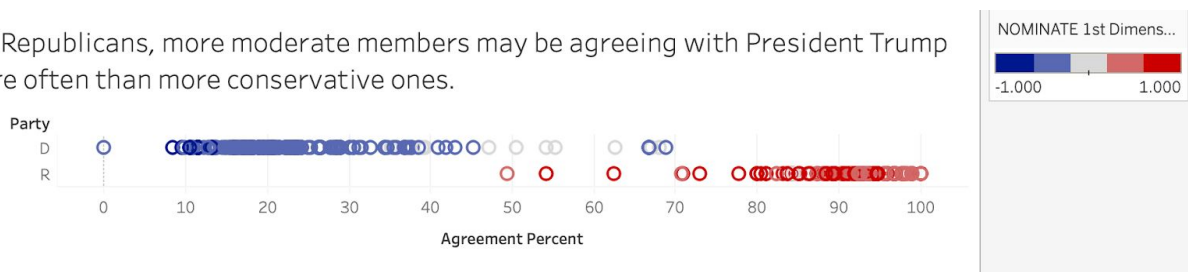


The data reveals strong party unity on the side of the Republicans, the vast majority of whom agree with President Trump 80 to 100 percent of the time, regardless of variations within their individual ideological conservativeness. Democrats, on the other hand, show a clearer relationship between their ideology and the rate at which they agreed with President Trump — the more liberal a member, the less likely they were to agree with the Republican president.

However, there is one subset of Democratic representatives who all agreed with President Trump over 60 percent of the time, despite some being more liberal than others. None of these members came from former Republican districts, and they seem to have escaped relatively unpunished by their constituents — seven of the eight ran for their seat again, and all but one were able to win it. (The one outlier is former Michigan Representative Brenda Jones, who was elected in a special election to finish out the rest of former Representative John Conyers's term after his resignation, and was beaten in her 2018 primary by current Representative and "Squad" member Rashida Tlaib.)

Here's the same data plotted in a different way. In this case, more ideologically polarized members are represented in a darker color than their more moderate colleagues.

For Republicans, more moderate members may be agreeing with President Trump more often than more conservative ones.

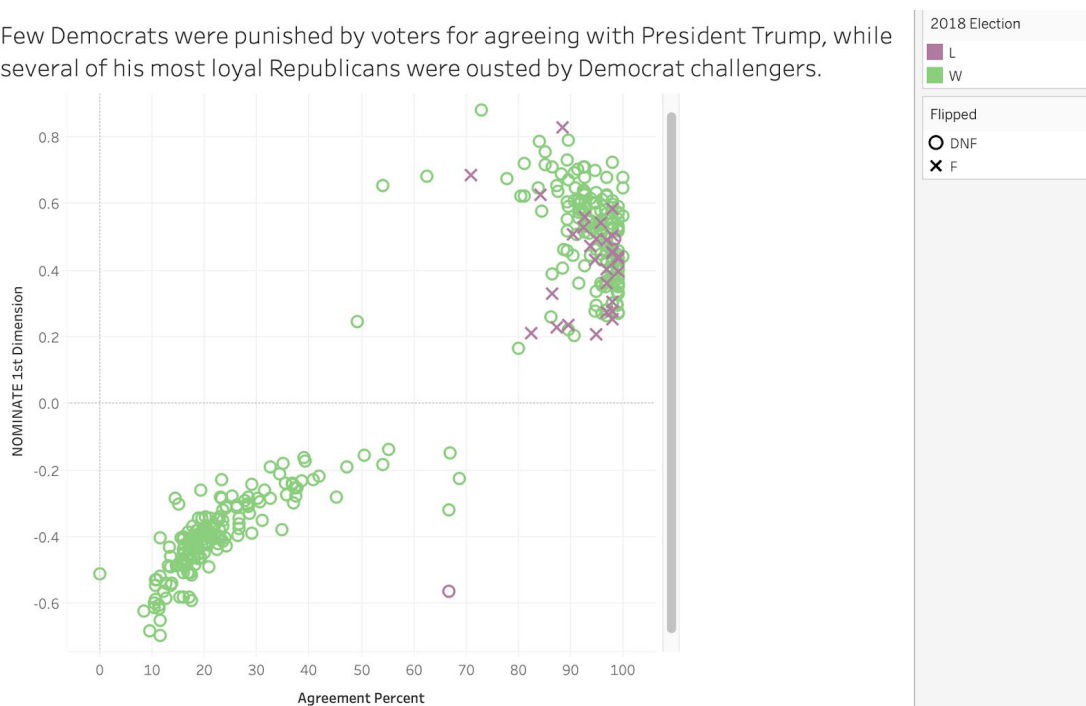


This reveals an interesting trend within the Republican party: it is the more ideologically moderate Republicans that occupy the furthest right position on the graph, agreeing with President Trump the most often.

This voting pattern represents a large disparity between President Trump's approval ratings and how often he gets his way with the House: polling from Five Thirty Eight reveals that President Trump's approval rating among Americans has never exceeded 46 percent, while this data shows the House agreed with him 62 percent of the time on average.

This disparity doesn't translate to re-election results. This is the same visualization as the first one, but only showing members who ran for re-election. Those who won can be seen green, while those who lost are represented in purple. Circles and squares communicate districts that did or did not flip party alignment from the 2016 to 2018 election.

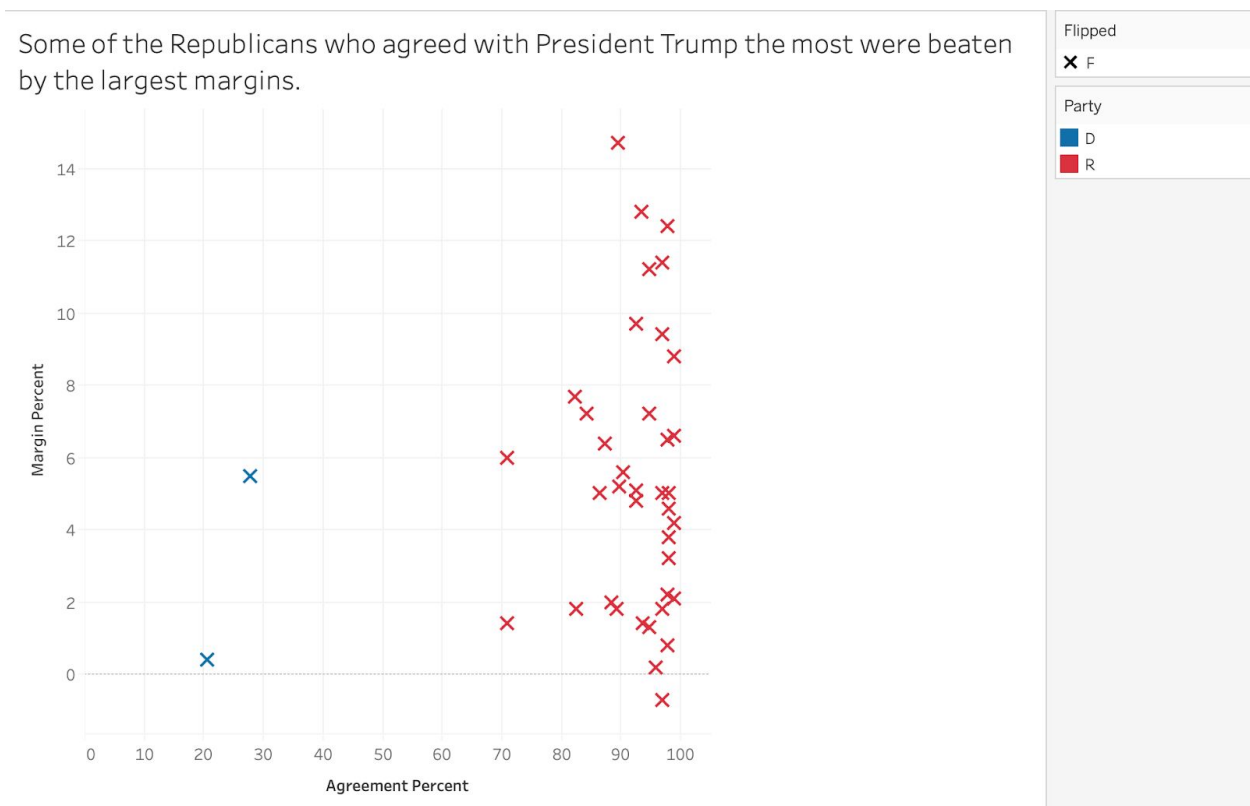
Few Democrats were punished by voters for agreeing with President Trump, while several of his most loyal Republicans were ousted by Democrat challengers.



(This data also excludes Pennsylvania, which underwent redistricting between the 2016 and 2018 election, in some cases forcing incumbents into the same district, in others creating districts with no incumbents running.)

The only Democrat running for re-election who failed to win their seat was the aforementioned Brenda Jones, who simply lost to a fellow Democrat. Meanwhile, several of President Trump's most loyal Republican representatives lost to new Democratic challengers.

A look at their margins reveals that it was the Republicans that agreed with him the most that lost by the largest margins.



(This data includes two Democrats who chose not to seek re-election in 2018 and whose districts were then flipped Republican. It also includes one Republican who garnered a greater percentage of the vote than his Democratic challenger, but nevertheless lost in a ranked-voting system.)

This data provides an interesting perspective into the growing narrative of the “Never Trumper” movement: the group of voters who may vote for the Democratic candidate in 2020 simply to remove Donald Trump from the White House. This data suggests it may be anti-Trump Republican voters carrying the bulk of the work opposing Trump by voting out their candidates

that supported him in Congress, while Democratic “Never Trumpers” may be voting in ideologically liberal Democrats and no longer paying attention from there.

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Source list:

<https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/congress-trump-score/>

<https://govtrackinsider.com/the-115th-congress-in-review-76efbaadf03d>

<https://voteview.com/data>

<https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2016/results/house>

<https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/trump-approval-ratings/>