Donald Trump and the Parties:

Impeachment, Pandemic, Protest, and Electoral Politics in 2020

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Abstract

Analyses of public opinion data covering every administration from Harry Truman's to Barak Obama's confirm that the public's judgment of the president's character, commitments, and performance have shaped affect toward the president's party and its other leaders, beliefs about where it stands on issues, assessments of its competence in managing domestic and foreign affairs, its drawing power on election day, and its appeal as an object of personal identification in both the short and long runs. The question of whether Donald Trump's bizarrely unorthodox presidency would have the same kind of impact is no longer in doubt: Trump is having a stronger impact on attitudes toward the parties—and that partisan priors are having a stronger impact on opinions of him—than of any of his post-war predecessors. This paper reviews a selection of the evidence for this conclusion and considers why it pertains. It documents how the public has reacted to Trump's performance as president and examines how attitudes toward the president and the parties have shaped and been shaped by reactions to signal events of Trump's presidency: his impeachment and acquittal, the coronavirus crisis, and the protests following the police killing of George Floyd. It also considers Trump's past and prospective influence on the electoral fates of down-ballot Republican candidates and his longer-term impact on the strength and composition of the Republican and Democratic coalitions.

Analyses of public opinion data covering every administration from Harry Truman's to Barack Obama's reveal a strong reciprocal relationship between popular evaluations of presidents and their parties and, though usually to a lesser extent, their partisan rivals as well. The public's judgments of the president's character, commitments, and performance have shaped affect toward the president's party and its other leaders, beliefs about where it stands on issues, assessments of its competence in managing domestic and foreign affairs, its drawing power on election day, and its appeal as an object of personal identification in both the short and long runs. Of course, existing partisan attitudes strongly condition both initial and subsequent reactions to a president, but these priors are continually updated in response to his performance in office. By shaping attitudes toward the parties, presidents also influence the extent which Americans are polarized along party lines; the more divided partisans are about the president, the more divided they are in their evaluations of the parties (Jacobson 2019a).

The question of whether Donald Trump's bizarrely unorthodox presidency would have the same kind of impact is no longer in doubt: the extensive survey data available to date make it clear that Trump is having a stronger impact on attitudes toward the parties—and that partisan priors are having a stronger impact on opinions of him—than of any of his post-war predecessors. In this paper, I review a selection of the evidence for this conclusion and consider why it pertains. I begin by documenting how the public has reacted to Trump's performance as president and then examine how attitudes toward the president and the parties have shaped and been shaped by reactions to signal events of Trump's presidency: his impeachment and acquittal, the coronavirus crisis, and the police killing of George Floyd and its aftermath. Finally, I consider his past and prospective influence on the electoral fates of down-ballot Republican candidates and his longer-term impact on the strength and composition of the Republican and Democratic coalitions.

Divided Opinions of Donald Trump

Trump has earned the most polarized presidential job approval ratings in modern American history, but his new record is only the latest extension of a long-term trend. The partisan divide in opinions of presidents has been widening for several decades, reaching new highs during the presidencies of his immediate predecessors, George W. Bush and Barack Obama. The trend is summarized in Figure 1, which displays the annual averages in the partisan

gap in presidential approval ratings in Gallup Polls taken since the Truman administration.[1] The

gap expanded in stages, initially with Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton, then further with George

W. Bush and Barack Obama, and finally to new extremes during Trump's presidency. Since the

beginning of 2019, the partisan difference in opinions of Trump's performance has averaged a

remarkable 83 points in these surveys, with 90 percent of Republicans but only 7 percent of

Democrats approving of his job performance.   Moreover, despite the constant turmoil and
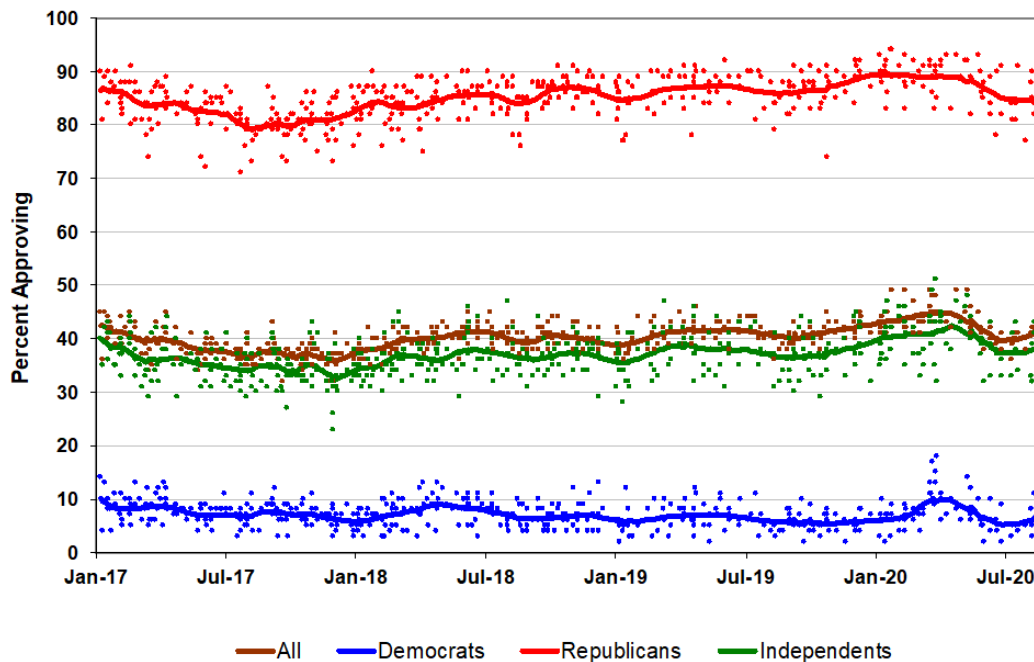
Figure 1 Partisan Differences in Presidential Job Approval
1945-2020
(Annual Averages from Gallup Polls)
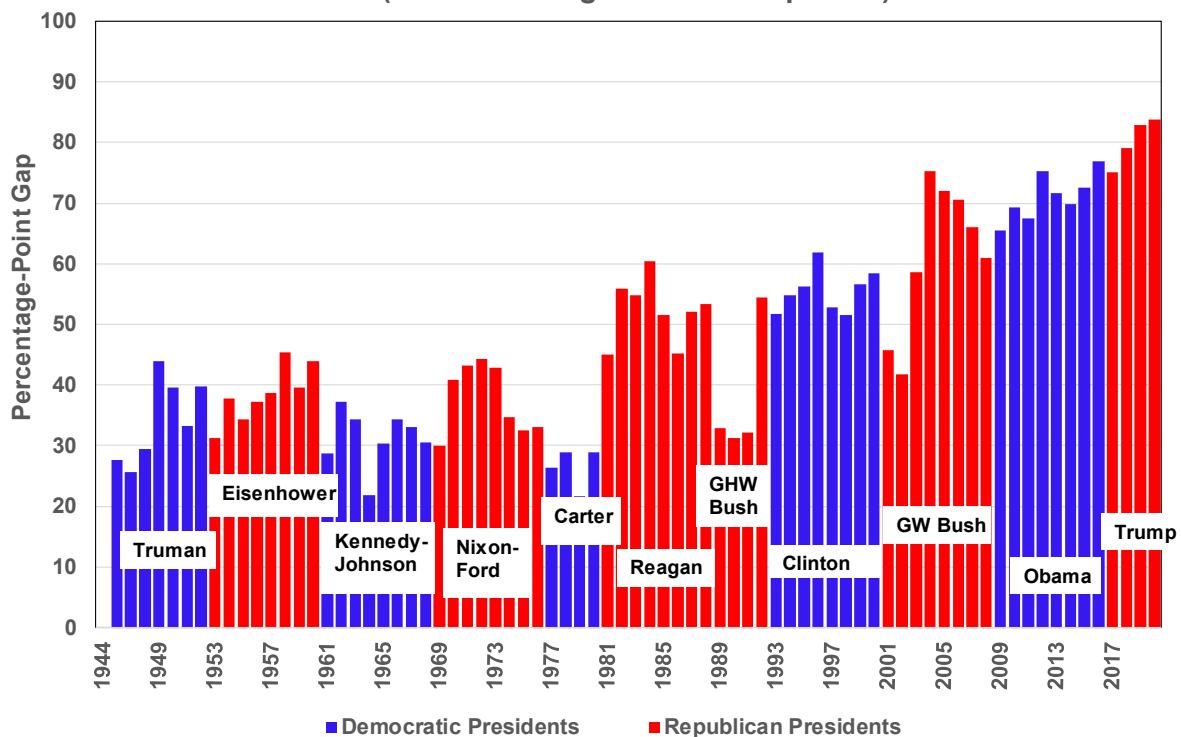
periodic shocks that have characterized his presidency, aggregate opinions of Trump's

performance have also been unusually stable, more so than for any other president during the

comparable period of his presidency (Jones 2020b). They have not been entirely immutable, to

be sure, but they have been far less responsive to events in Trump's than in previous

administrations.

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[1] The gap is calculated as difference in the percentage approving the president's job performance between respondents identifying with the president's party and those identifying with the rival party.

Figure 2 Approval of Trump's Job Performance, 2017-2020

Source: 469 ABC News/*Washington Post*, CBS News, CNN, Gallup, IBD-TIPP, Marist, Monmouth, NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, Pew, Grinnell/Seltzer, Kaiser, AP/NORC, and Quinnipiac polls.

As Figure 2 shows, Trump's overall standing with the public has varied over a narrow range around the 40 percent mark.[2] His approval ratings dipped during his first year in office amid the failed attempt to repeal the Affordable Care Act but recovered after that issue was off the table, replaced by the successful effort to enact tax cuts in December 2017. His ratings increased a couple of points around the time of his impeachment, as Republicans and some Republican-leaning independents rallied to his side. They rose another couple of points in March 2020 as the coronavirus pandemic took hold, but that small surge, fueled mainly a portion of Democrats and independents willing to rally around the president in a time of national crisis, quickly faded, depressed by unfavorable reviews of his response to the protests spawned by Floyd's murder by a policeman in late May as well as a new surge in COVID-19 cases during the summer (I will have more to say about the public's reaction to these events later).

Partisans have expressed very divergent views of the Trump from day one, but differences have widened over time, reaching a then-record high of 87 points (approval by 94

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[2] The mean for all respondents in Figure 2 is 40.0, with a standard deviation of 2.9.

percent of Republicans, 7 percent of Democrats) in the January 2020 Gallup Poll taken while impeachment proceedings were underway.[3] Remarkably, that record was eclipsed in Gallup's June 2020 survey, with 91 percent of Republicans but only 2 percent of Democrats approving, leaving an 89 point gap. Partisan opinions of Trump's performance have grown stronger as well as more disparate. In the Quinnipiac Polls, for example, the proportion of Republicans who approve strongly of Trump's performance grew from below 60 percent in late 2017 to 75 percent during the impeachment process; the proportion of Democrats who disapprove strongly hit 91 percent. The same trends appear in other surveys that regularly probe the strength of approval or disapproval.[4]

The extreme divergence in opinions of Trump reflect his genius for stoking division and a political career built on mobilizing grievances, sowing discord, spinning lies, and savaging critics (Jacobson 2020b). The hostility Trump excites among ordinary Democrats is a predictable response to his conduct as a campaigner and during his time in office. The trafficking in white identity politics, xenophobia, racism, and misogyny that characterized his campaign has continued unabated. His narcissism, meanness, authoritarian impulses, and contempt for democratic norms and institutions have grown ever more obvious during his time in the White House. His agenda has consisted largely of assaults on Obama's legacy on health care, the environment, financial regulation, taxes, foreign policy, immigration, and trade. He routinely accuses Democratic leaders of treason, corruption, and hatred of America while peppering them with puerile schoolyard taunts. He tweets out crude rants against anyone in politics or the media who deigns to criticize him and vilifies any institution—the judiciary, the FBI, the Department of Justice, the intelligence services, at times the congressional Republican Party, and always the news media (even, on occasion, Fox News)—that declines to do his personal bidding. He disparages traditional allies and fawns over authoritarian rulers. His management of the executive branch has been a chaotic combination of incompetence and indifference, with slipshod vetting of dubious appointees, record turnover at all levels, and the

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[3] A Quinnipiac poll of registered voters taken during the same month found a 91- point partisan gap, with 94 percent of Republicans but only 3 percent of Democrats approving; https://poll.qu.edu/national/release-detail?ReleaseID=3654 https://poll.qu.edu/national/release-detail?ReleaseID=3654.

[4] For example, the exact same trends appear in the *Economist*/YouGov series of weekly surveys, but with lower overall levels of strong approval and disapproval; the trends are also virtually identical if favorability toward Trump replaces approval of his job performance.

hollowing out of crucial departments such as State and Homeland Security.[5] And all of this accompanied by rising torrent of transparent, self-serving lies. [6] That Trump's approval ratings among Democrats have been as low as 2 percent a half-dozen major polls is stunning but not surprising.

To the enduring bafflement of his critics, none of the particulars that have made Trump so repugnant to ordinary Democrats has eroded his support among ordinary Republicans. Indeed, a majority evidently share his opinions, grievances, and resentments, admiring what Democrats despise about him: his America-first nationalism, disdain for non-white immigrants and assertive minorities, attacks on mainstream news media as "enemies of the people," defiance of elite and expert opinion, mistrust of government institutions, contempt for Democratic leaders and their party, and blanket assault on Obama's legacy. With Trump's encouragement, many of his supporters see his enemies as their enemies and view any attack on him as an attack on them, not least those conservative Christians who regard him as their divinely appointed defender (Hendon 2019, Restuccia 2019). Even Republicans who find Trump's manner and character off-putting have continued to support him for his policies on taxes, deregulation, trade, and immigration, as well as his stacking the federal courts with conservative judges. Letting "Trump be Trump" is a price they have been willing to pay for these results. And before the coronavirus pandemic crashed the economy, they could point to steady economic growth, very low unemployment, and a booming stock market as additional reasons to praise his performance.

The radically divergent perspectives on Trump have been reinforced by news coverage of his presidency. Mainstream news organizations have been quick to point out his lies, instability, trampling of democratic norms, alienation of allies, and incompetence in staffing and managing the executive branch. They have offered heavy and detailed coverage of investigations into his campaign's Russia connections, the payoffs to silence paramours, the pressure on Ukraine to investigate Joe Biden, the flaws in his responses to the coronavirus crisis, his racist tropes in response to Black Lives Matter protests, and a variety of other questionable actions. The implicit but unmistakable subtext of this coverage is that Trump is unqualified by character,

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[5] At the end of Trump's third year in office, 250 of the top 742 most important appointments requiring Senate approval remained unfilled; based on data reported at https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/trump-administration-appointee-tracker/database/, accessed December 2, 2019; see also Tempas (2020).
[6] By July 2020, Trump's count of false and misleading statements exceeded 20,000 and was up to an average of 23 per day (Kessler, Rizzo, and Kelly 2020)..

temperament, knowledge, and experience for the office he holds. Trump's response has been to make mainstream news sources the target for his supporters' wrath, attacking them as "enemies of the people" and purveyors of "fake news" in a continuing effort to delegitimize their reporting and avoid accountability for his actions.

Conservative news and opinion outlets have offered a wholly contrary perspective on Trump. His friendliest coverage comes from conservative talk radio and Fox News personalities who routinely deliver uncritical praise or, if that is too much of a stretch, labored rationalizations for his actions, along with constant disdain for his critics. Trump reportedly spends hours a day watching a coterie of Fox pundits who echo and guide his rhetoric and policy prescriptions (Rapur 2019). Fox's regular audience of older white conservatives give Trump very high marks on virtually everything he does; thus, for, example, for example, a survey taken in late April 2020 found that among the quarter of respondents for whom Fox was the most trusted news source, 92 percent approved of Trump's handling of the coronavirus pandemic; among the other three quarters, 30 percent approved.[7] The media ecosphere thus gives both enthusiasts and detractors ready access to sources of information that validate rather than challenge their views of Trump.

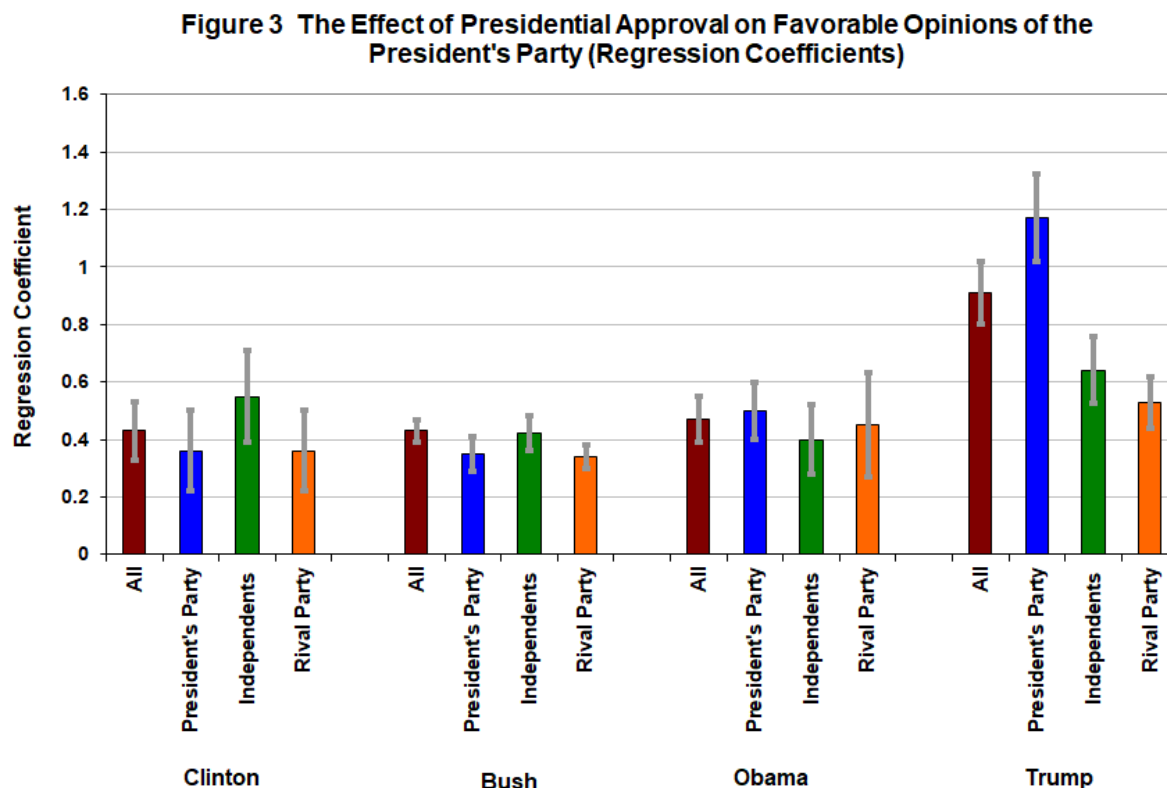## Trump's Effect on Attitudes Toward the Parties

Considering the strong reactions Trump provoked, it is not surprising that his effect on popular attitudes toward the parties was also unusually strong. I have detailed the evidence in previous papers (Jacobson 2018, 2020a) and so will offer a shorter review here as a prelude to considering the specific cases of impeachment, the coronavirus crisis, and anti-racism protests. Figure 3 provides one illustration of Trump's special impact on affect toward his party. It displays the coefficients (with error bars indicating the 95 percent confidence interval) from regressing the percentage of respondents with favorable opinions of the president's party on the percentage approving of his job performance among all respondents and among partisan subgroups.[8] Clearly, aggregate opinions of Trump have had a larger impact on aggregate

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[7] Suffolk University Poll , April 21-25, 2020.
[8] The equations also control or favorability toward the rival party in order to account for a more general bias for or against parties. The full equations, estimated with survey sponsor fixed effects to control for sometimes substantial house effects, are reported in the Appendix. The data are from surveys reported by Quinnipiac, Fox News, CNN, *Economist*/YouGov, CBS News/*New York Times*, Gallup, Monmouth University, Suffolk University, Grinnell

opinions of his party than had opinions of his recent predecessors, especially among Republicans and all respondents taken together. Opinions of Trump have also had an unusually large impact on aggregate opinions of the Republicans in Congress and their leaders, again especially for all respondents and for the Republican subset, with coefficients for these categories even larger than for party favorability generally (see Jacobson 2020a, Figure 6).

Figure 3 The Effect of Presidential Approval on Favorable Opinions of the President's Party (Regression Coefficients)

A president's impact on attitudes toward the rival party is usually much smaller but varies according to circumstances. Trump's impact on opinions of the Democratic Party, measured as in Figure 3 (regressing favorable opinions of the Democratic Party on approval of Trump) produces a coefficient of -.38, compared to -.52 for Clinton, -.11 for G. W. Bush, and -.22 for Obama. Both Trump and Clinton were impeached by a House run by the opposition, so it makes sense that approval would have a larger negative effect during their administrations (see Jacobson 2020a, Figures 7 and 8).

The association between opinions of Trump and the parties at the individual level is also stronger than the comparable links for his predecessors, and it has tightened during his time in office. Table 1 displays average levels of congruence between ratings of the president's performance and opinions of the parties during the four most recent administrations. For the president's party, opinions are congruent when the respondent approves of the president's performance and holds a favorable view of his party or disapproves and holds an unfavorable view. For the rival party, opinions are congruent when the respondent approves of the president's performance and has an unfavorable opinion of the rival party or disapproves and has a favorable opinion of the rival party.[9] The data show that congruence has grown across these presidencies and has been highest during Trump's. Congruence is almost always greater for opinions of the president's party than for opinions of the rival party (true for 98 percent of the individual surveys and for all surveys taken since the Bush administration), but the gap is smaller for Trump.

Table 1. Congruence of Opinions of the President's Performance and Opinions of the Parties

All Years	President's Party	Rival Party	Number of Polls
Bill Clinton	78.6	68.8	70
George W. Bush	81.9	70.3	113
Barack Obama	83.1	70.4	111
Donald Trump	85.3	77.8	164
Reelection Year			
Bill Clinton (1996)	82.7	73.1	12
George W. Bush (2004)	86.2	74.7	16
Barack Obama (2012)	85.8	76.7	17
Donald Trump (2020)	88.8	80.7	11

Note: Opinions are congruent when respondent approves of the president's performance and has a favorable [unfavorable] opinion of the president's [rival] party or disapproves of the president's performance and has an unfavorable [favorable] opinion of the president's [rival] party.
Sources: Clinton, Bush and Obama: ABC News/*New York Times*, CBS News/*Washington Post*, CNN, Gallup, Pew, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Time Magazine* polls; Trump: *Economist*/YouGov polls.

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[9] The analysis includes only respondents who express opinions of the president and the party.

In all three previous administrations, congruence has been greatest during the year the president was running for reelection, and by a statistically significant margin.[10] The Trump administration is proving to be no exception. Congruence has grown rather steadily over his term for opinions of both parties generally and for the congressional parties specifically (Jacobson 2020a, Figure 9), reaching a peak early in 2020 during the impeachment trial.[11]

Trump and Negative Partisanship

Trump's impact on attitudes toward the parties also registers in the continuing growth of "negative partisanship"—dislike of the other party—which has been a major component of the trend toward greater polarization in the electorate (Abramowitz and Webster 2016, 2018; Groenendyk 2018; Iyengar and Krupenkin 2018.). Analyses of the ANES time series show that feelings toward the rival party as measured by the 0 to 100 degree "feeling thermometer" have become much colder over the past several decades, falling from an average of just under 50 degrees in 1980 to a record low of 23 degrees when Trump and Hillary Clinton faced off in 2016.[12] Trump's continuing contribution to negative partisanship is evident in a pair of Pew surveys taken November 29-December 12, 2016, and September 3-15, 2019. Respondents reported identical average thermometer scores for their own partisans in both surveys, 67 degrees for Democrats, 68 degrees for Republicans. In contrast, the average scores for the rival party's adherents fell significantly between surveys, from 34 to 23 degrees in Democrats' ratings of Republicans, and from 36 to 23 degrees in Republicans' ratings of Democrats. In 2016, 56 percent of Democrats and 58 percent of Republicans rated people in the other party below 50 degrees; in 2019, the respective figures were 79 percent and 83 percent. The correlation between Trump's thermometer score and the party scores also strengthened substantially, from .64 to .81

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[10] The difference between reelection years and other years is significant at p<.001 in every case except for the Democratic Party during the Bush administration (p<.007).

[11] The same trend regarding the parties in Congress is found in the Morning Consult poll series (N=93), with congruence growing from 77 percent to 87 percent for Republicans in Congress favorability, from 70 percent to 81 percent for Democrats in Congress favorability, between 2017 and early 2020. These surveys are accessible though https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/trump-approval-ratings/?ex_cid=rrpromo.

[12] The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org). These materials are based on work supported by the National Science Foundation under grant numbers SES 1444721, 2014-2017, the University of Michigan, and Stanford University.

for Republicans, from -.41 to -.64 for Democrats, between the surveys. Strongly divergent reactions to Trump have thus aggravated mutual partisan antipathy.[13]

In sum, reactions to Trump have had a larger effect on how American regard both parties than had reactions to any of his recent predecessors. One result is that the partisan gap in favorability toward the parties both generally and in Congress has reached its widest point on record during his administration. The average partisan difference in the incidence of favorable opinions of the parties generally was 65 percentage points under Clinton, 69 points under Bush, 70 points under Obama, and is at 73 points so far under Trump (from January 2020 onward, 77 points); the respective figures for the parties in Congress are 48 points, 45 points, 47 points, and 61 points (for 2020, 72 points). Regressing the partisan gap in favorable opinions of the president's party on the partisan gap in presidential approval produces coefficients of .61 for Clinton, .30 for G.W. Bush, .52 for Obama, and .99 for Trump; the respective coefficients for the partisan gap in favorable opinions of the rival party are -.24, -.07, -.33, and -.49. Trump's influence on the extent of polarization in party affect has thus been about twice that of these other presidents.

Impeachment, Pandemic, and Protest

Impeachment

Partisan differences in opinions of both Trump and the political parties reached their widest points during impeachment proceedings in late 2019 and early 2020. Partisan priors totally dominated popular responses to the allegation that Trump had illegally withheld military aid to the Ukraine to coerce its government into opening investigations targeting Joe Biden, a prospective opponent in 2020, and pursuing the spurious notion that it was Ukrainian hackers who intervened in 2016 to help Hillary Clinton rather than Russian hackers intervening to help him. Trump, characteristically, refused to admit that his dealings with Ukraine were other than "perfect" and mounted a defense replete with lies, misdirection, silenced witnesses, dubious readings of the Constitution, and boorish attacks on Democratic leaders (Zhouli 2020, Woodward and Yen 2020). His behavior reinforced the case for impeachment in the eyes of

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[13] The partisan gap in thermometer ratings of Trump grew from 52 degrees to 64 degrees between the two surveys; the Pew questions refer to "Republicans" and "Democrats" rather than to the "Republican Party" and "Democratic Party" as in the ANES questions; the ANES referents almost always elicit colder responses from the other party's identifiers.

Democrats, but the vast majority of ordinary Republicans accepted his claim that he was the victim of a partisan witch hunt and rallied to his side, giving him their highest approval ratings yet (Figure 2).

From the beginning, partisans were very far apart on virtually everything related to impeachment, and opinions remained largely unchanged between announcement of a formal House impeachment inquiry in September 2019 and the end of the process in February 2020. Large majorities of Democrats believed that Trump tried to get the Ukrainian government to investigate Biden and his son by withholding military aid and that doing so was an impeachable offense. At the time of the Senate trial in January, they were nearly unanimous in accepting as true the charges in the two articles of impeachment, that Trump had abused his power and obstructed Congress, and afterward 90 percent said they disapproved of his acquittal by the Senate. Equally large Republican majorities took the positions that Trump didn't do what he was accused of and even if he did, it was justified and not an impeachable offense. They overwhelmingly rejected the premises of both articles of impeachment, and 95 percent approved of his acquittal.[14]

It is instructive to compare public opinion data on Trump's impeachment with those of Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton. Figures 4a-c display the trends in support for the impeachment and conviction of each by all respondents and by partisan subgroups.[15] As the Watergate revelations unfolded, support for impeaching Nixon rose gradually among all respondents, although a bit more steeply for Democrats than for Republicans, but not until the last poll before Nixon resigned in August 1974 did a majority of Americans favor expelling him. During 1974, the partisan gap in support for impeachment averaged 40 points, which is where it ended up, with 71 percent of Democrats and 31 percent of Republicans favoring his removal from office.[16] In the end, Nixon's loss of support in Congress was bipartisan, and he resigned after the tapes confirmed his involvement in the Watergate coverup and Republican congressional leaders told him he would be impeached and convicted if he did leave voluntarily. Nixon's resignation preempted impeachment, so we do not know how partisan opinion would have evolved had the process continued to its conclusion, but a Gallup Poll taken at the end of August 1974 found

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[14] For a detailed examination of polling data on impeachment related matters, see Jacobson (2020a), pp. 30-34.
[15] Trends for independents in all three data sets match the trends for all respondents very closely and are omitted to avoid clutter.
[16] The data are from 14 Gallup Polls taken between June 1973 and August 1974.

large bipartisan majorities saying the charges against him were serious (Republicans, 65 percent, Democrats, 87 percent, independents, 78 percent), that he was guilty (74 percent, 88 percent, and 80 percent), and that he should have resigned (79 percent, 65 percent, and 65 percent[17]). A broad cross-party popular consensus thus favored the outcome.

**Figure 4a Support for the Impeachment and Conviction of Richard Nixon**
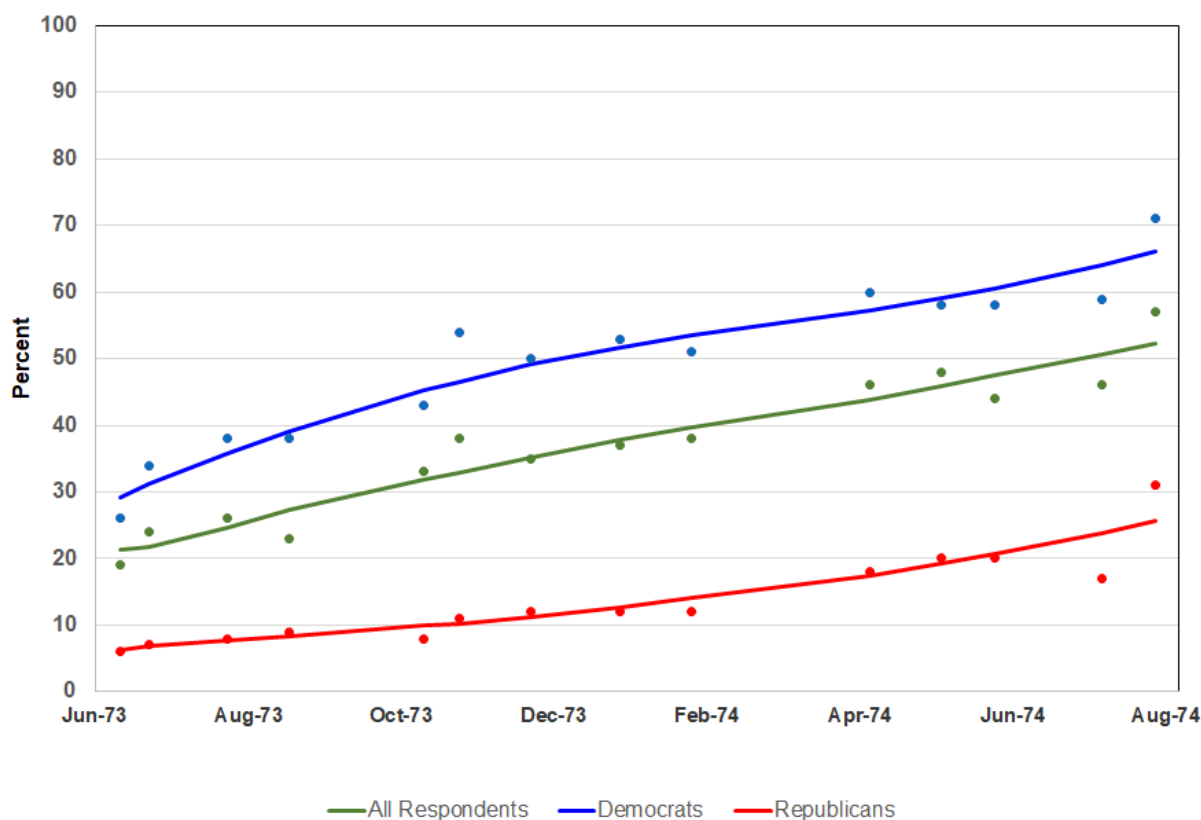
The patterns for Bill Clinton differed in several ways. Overall public support for impeachment never rose above 40 percent.[18] It grew over time among Republicans as details about his tawdry affair with Monica Lewinsky emerged, with a substantial uptick when Kenneth Starr's report, accusing Clinton of perjury and obstruction of justice while trying to cover up the affair, was published in September 1998. But Democrats were unmoved, accepting the argument

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[17] Some Democrats and independents evidently wanted the process to run to completion, believing resignation got him off the hook to easily.

[18] Data are from ABC News/*Washington Post*, CBS News/*New York Times*, and Gallup polls archived at the Roper Center.

that Clinton's behavior was sleazy but a private transgression that did not warrant impeachment (Jacobson 2000). In the end, about 70 percent of Republicans favored removing Clinton, about the same as the proportion of Democrats who had favored removing Nixon, but only about 12 percent of Democrats agreed with them, leaving the partisan gap at a little under 60 percentage points. Partisan differences in Congress were considerably wider. In in the House, 223 of the 228 Republicans voted for at least one of the four articles of impeachment brought against Clinton, while only 5 of the 205 Democrats voted for any of them. In the Senate, no Democrat vote for conviction on either of the two articles that passed the House; 45 of 55 Republicans voted for conviction on at least one of them.

Figure 4b Support for the Impeachment and Conviction of Bill Clinton
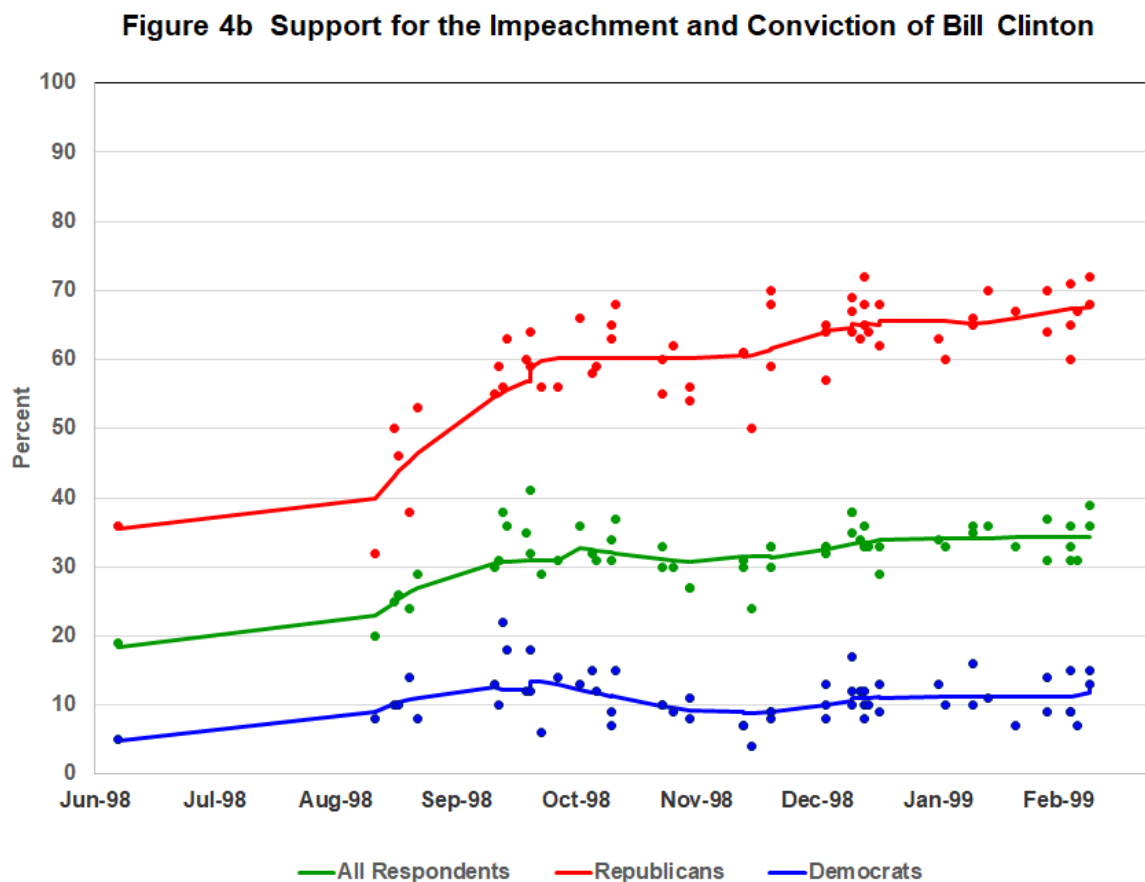
Notice that for Nixon and Clinton, about a third of rival party identifiers were ready to impeach from the time the question was first posed. The comparable figure for Trump was much higher, 70 percent, testimony to Democrats' deep antipathy toward Trump and their doubts about

the legitimacy of his election.[19] Their support for impeachment dipped a bit when the Mueller Report did not confirm Trump's direct collusion with Russia in 2016 but went up sharply when his attempt to extort Ukraine became public and the House Democrats began impeachment proceedings. As with Clinton, Trump's partisans stuck with him throughout the impeachment process, becoming even less supportive of impeachment at the end and leaving an average partisan gap of nearly 80 points.

Figure 4c Support for the Impeachment and Conviction of Donald Trump
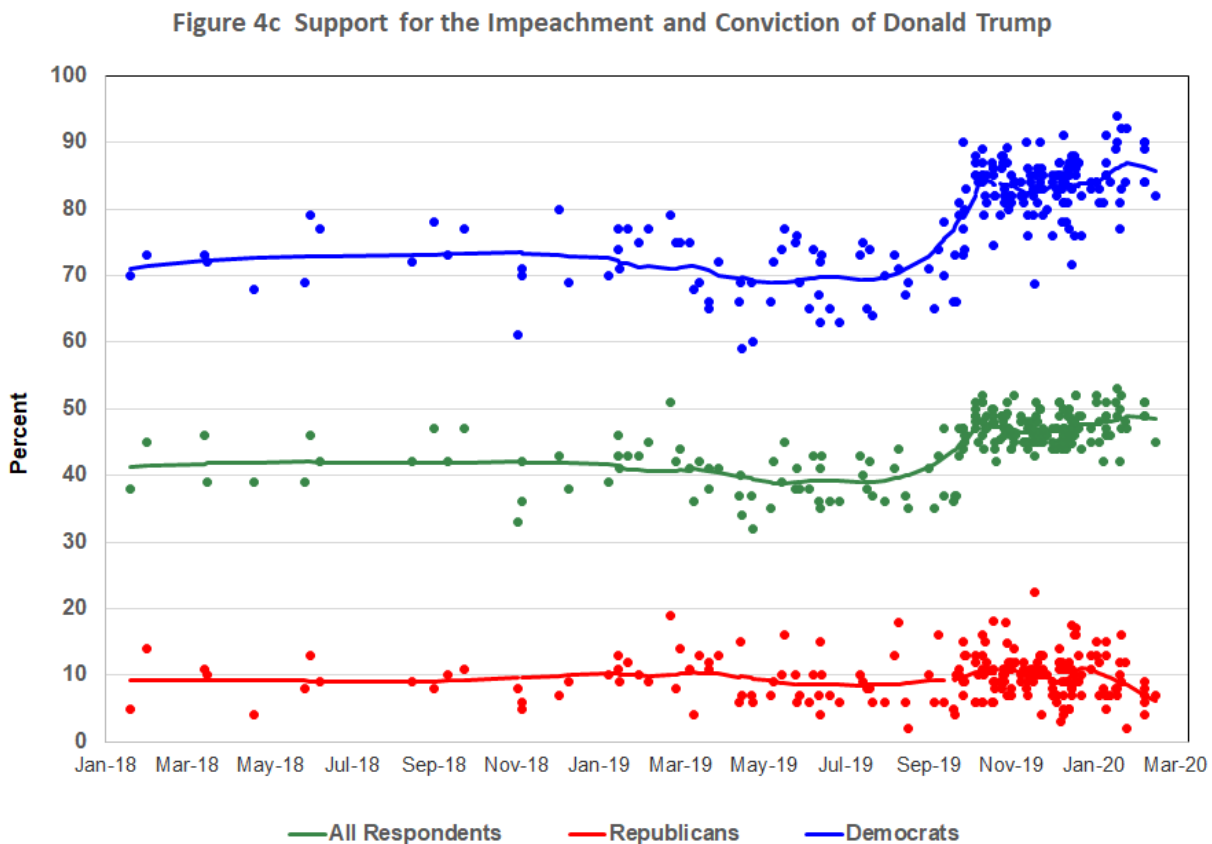
It is obvious from the public opinion data why Trump's impeachment took the course it did in Congress. No House Republican voted for either of the two articles of impeachment; only two Democrats voted against both articles, and one of them switched to the Republican side the next day. After the trial in the Senate, every Republicans but one, Mitt Romney of Utah (on the first count, abuse of power) voted for Trump's acquittal, while every Democrat voted to convict

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[19] Responding to an April 2017 Gallup Poll, 56 percent of Democrats said they did not accept Trump as a legitimate president (Saad 2017). Data in figure 4-c are from ABC News/*Washington Post*, NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, Marist/NPR, Suffolk University, Quinnipiac, Emerson College, CNN, Fox News, Morning Consult, Economist/YouGov, CNBC, Global Strategies Group, PPRI, Public Policy Polling, Survey USA, and Ipsos surveys.

on both counts. The nearly perfect party line votes in Congress mirrored the sentiments of partisans in the electorate even more completely than the Clinton impeachment votes. Trump's acquittal was never in doubt because his support among ordinary Republicans never wavered.

The impeachment process left people thinking better of their own party and a bit worse of the other. As Table 2 shows, partisans on both sides, but especially Republicans, became more favorably disposed toward their own parties in 2020 (the change was registered during impeachment but has been sustained since). Favorable opinions of the rival party generally, already rare, changed little, but favorable opinions of the rival party in Congress diminished significantly ($p < .05$ in both cases). Impeachment also strengthened the connection between attitudes toward Trump and attitudes toward the parties; levels of congruence rose to their highest point of his presidency, 89 percent congruent for the Republican Party generally, 86 percent for the Republicans in Congress, and 80 percent for the Democratic Party on both questions. These were all record highs for this measure.

Table 2. Partisan Opinions of the Parties

| | Republicans | | Democrats | | |
	Own Party Favorable	Other Party Favorable	Own Party Favorable	Other Party Favorable	N
Party Generally					
2017	75.6	10.8	80.0	10.5	69
2018	81.0	9.1	82.4	8.9	78
2019	84.2	10.2	86.5	9.0	73
2020	87.5	9.3	86.3	9.7	51
Party in Congress					
2017	59.1	11.8	68.5	11.0	84
2018	66.0	9.4	71.4	8.9	87
2019	71.6	9.2	78.1	8.4	113
2020	80.3	7.9	79.5	7.9	30

Note: N indicates the number of surveys averaged; data are from Marist, Suffolk, Quinnipiac, Monmouth, CNN, Fox News, Morning Consult, Grinnell, *Economist*/YouGov, Global Strategies Group, Morning Consult, CBS News, Pew, and G.W. Battleground polls.

The fight over Trump's impeachment also affected opinions of each party's principal congressional leader, House speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell.

Figure 5 displays the monthly averages from the weekly *Economist/*YouGov polls of partisan's opinions of the leaders (percentages favorable toward their own party's and unfavorable toward the other party's) during Trump's presidency. The trend lines peaked around the beginning of 2020 when the impeachment debates were in full swing, although they were generally rising even before the onset of impeachment.[20] Not coincidentally, two other rising trends also peaked in January 2020—congruence between opinions of Trump and opinions of the two leaders, reaching 82 percent for Pelosi (up from 78 percent in 2019) and 84 percent for McConnell (up from 77 percent in 2019).

Figure 5 Opinions of Nancy Pelosi and Mitch McConnell
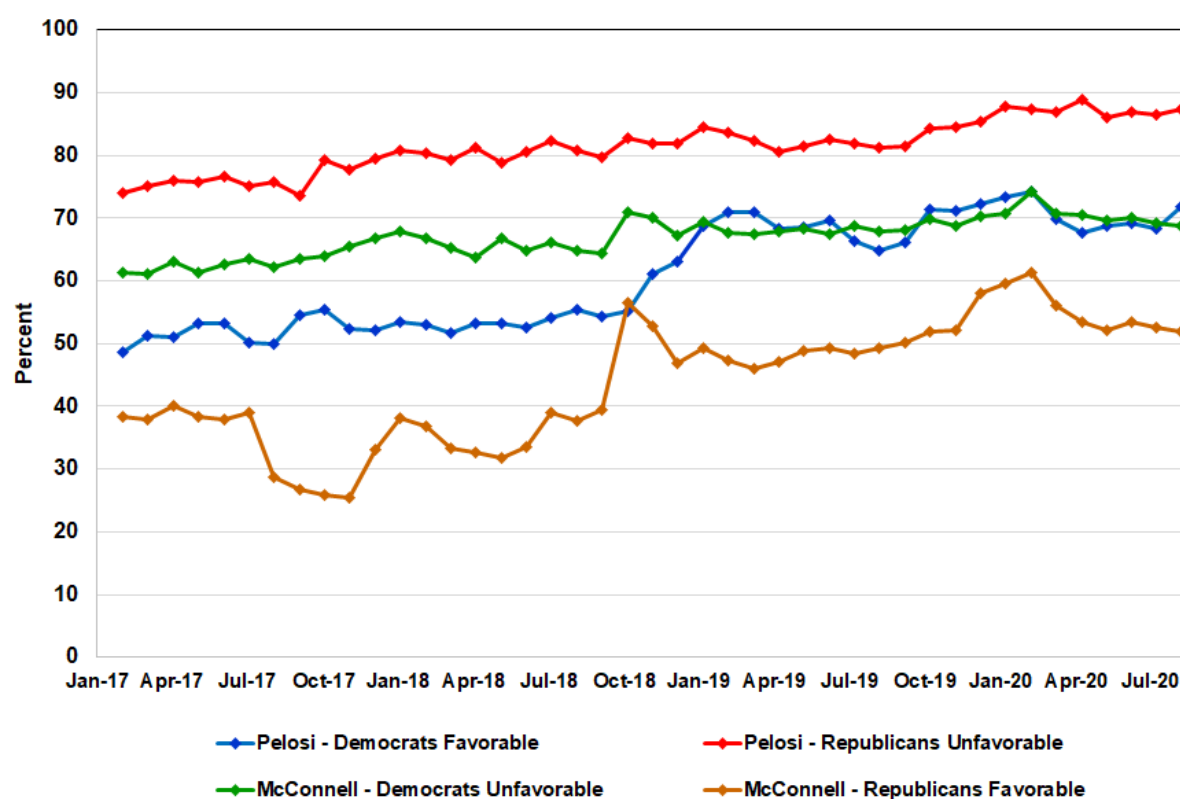
The differences in partisan attitudes across the three impeachment periods highlight the growth of polarization since the 1970s and Trump's extraordinary influence on popular opinions

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[20] The same was true for partisan opinions of Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer.

of the parties and their leaders. With Trump as the focal object, partisan divisions in Washington and the electorate reached new extremes by the beginning of Trump's fourth year in office.

The Coronavirus Crisis

While the impeachment spectacle was absorbing the nation's attention, the coronavirus was spreading quietly from China to the rest of the world, not least the United States, which eventually led the world in confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths. The pandemic's devastating social and economic fallout gave Trump the defining challenge of his presidency. A deeply divided nation suddenly faced a crisis that called for a coherent, focused, and collaborative response from both elected leaders and the public. Uniting the country against a common threat is basic to the president's job description, and the moment clearly cried out for unifying national leadership. Trump claimed the mantle of wartime president but could summon neither the will nor capacity to craft and stick to a unifying message. He stuck instead to his standard playbook as the crisis unfolded, using his press briefings and tweets to praise himself and rewrite history while issuing crude attacks on anyone in politics or the media who dared to question his administration's decidedly questionable performance. In a crisis demanding coordinated, methodical, and informed national action, Trump continued to preside as always: impulsively, erratically, and ignorantly, with contradictory messages that extended to floating quack remedies and cheering on populist protests against his own administration's recommended policies (Shear and Mervosh 2020, Broad and Levin 2020; Gearan and Wagner 2020).

Beginning in early January 2020, the administration had received a series of warnings from intelligence agencies, biodefense experts, and epidemiologists in and out of the government that this new coronavirus had the potential to kill tens of thousands of Americans if steps were not take to halt its spread and treat its victims (Lipton et al. 2020). Trump's response was to discount the threat, essentially wishing it away: "It's one person coming in from China, and we have it under control. It's going to be just fine" (January 22); "Looks like by April . . . when it gets a little warmer, it miraculously goes away" (February 12); "One day, it's like a miracle, it will disappear" (February 27); "We're prepared, and we're doing a great job with it. And it will go away. Just stay calm. It will go away" (March 10) (Stevens and Tan 2020).   Trump downplayed the threat because taking it seriously would require closing down large parts of the

economy (as it eventually did), wrecking the foundation of his case for reelection: record high stock prices, record low unemployment, and solid economic growth (as it eventually did).

Trump's wishful thinking, distrust of experts and career civil servants, chaotic administrative style, and unquenchable thirst for flattery, along with internal disputes among his administration's officials, led to tardy, disorganized, and often mismanaged efforts to address the crisis. His bans on travel from China and, weeks later, from some European countries were too little and too late. He resisted calling for social distancing, with school and business closures, until March 16, weeks after his scientific advisors had concluded these steps were essential, a delay that research suggests meant many more cases and deaths (Fowler, et al., 2020; Pei, Kandula and Shaman 2020).

The administration's initial recommendation was for a two-week shut-down, but the growing number of cases forced an extension; Trump floated the idea of opening by Easter (April 12) but it, too, was sunk by rising cases and deaths. Trump was eager for states to reopen as soon as possible so the economy could recover before the November election but did not want the blame if they opened too soon and infections spiked again. This was behind his head-snapping reversal on who could decide when states could relax restrictions, claiming "total authority" over the decision on April 13, taking the opposite position the very next day, saying "the governors are responsible" and "have to take charge" (Gittleson and Phelps 2020). It apparently dawned on him that exercising this (imaginary) total authority would make him responsible for the consequences.

Trump's U-turn revealed his overriding goal: to avoid responsibility at all costs for any defects in his administration's response to the crisis while taking credit for any successes in mitigating it. The defects were indeed glaring, with shortages of protective masks, ventilators, and testing kits, along with badly disorganized procurement and distribution operations that left state and local governments competing with each other and the federal government for crucial supplies (Abutaleb, et al., 2020). These and other obvious shortcomings in the federal government's handling of the crisis were an international embarrassment and put Trump on the defensive. Rather than concede any of them, he insisted his administration's responses had all been "perfect," blaming variously China, the World Health Organization, Barack Obama, Joe Biden, and Democratic governors for whatever was amiss. And, characteristically, Trump raged at anyone in politics or the media who suggested he might be accountable for any of it.

In the weeks following his March 13 declaration of a national emergency, Trump presided over a series of daily prime-time press briefings that for a time became his substitute for the "Keep American Great" campaign rallies he could no longer hold. His performance, detailed in a study reported in the *Washington Post,* was vintage Trump. The study calculated that over at three-week period in April, Trump held forth for a total of 13 hours, "including two hours spent on attacks and 45 minutes praising himself and his administration, but just 4½ minutes expressing condolences for coronavirus victims." He "attacked someone in 113 of the 346 questions he answered," and "87 of his comments or answers — a full 47 minutes — included factually inaccurate comments" (Bump and Parker 2020).

Vintage Trump provoked a vintage response, ending any prospect for a broader rally of the kind presidents normally inspire when taking the lead in national emergencies. Trump enjoyed a small bump up in public approval (Figure 2) but it was short lived. His approval ratings among Democrats briefly rose above single digits briefly but soon fell back to where they had been before he declared the national emergency. Among Republicans, approval ratings stayed in the high 80s through May before falling a few points over the next two months. Evaluations of his handling of coronavirus pandemic itself were also highly polarized, although initially less so than his overall approval ratings. By May the two ratings had converged among Democrats and all respondents, as is evident from the data in Figure 6, which show the averages of approval and disapproval of Trump's dealings with the pandemic and his overall approval ratings in the same set of polls over two-week intervals from February through late August 2020.[21] In February Trump enjoyed net positive ratings on the pandemic but a substantial share of respondents did not yet have an opinion. As the threat grew during early March, disapproval rose, but after Trump's mid-March declaration of a state of emergency and his new status as a wartime president, his numbers improved, with approval on the pandemic exceeding disapproval (and his overall approval ratings) by about 5 points. By April, however, Trump was underwater again as news stories about the administration's belated and disorganized responses to the crisis circulated and the number of cases and deaths kept growing; as new cases rose sharply in July,

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[21] The number of polls averaged is 7 for February, 16 for March 1-16, 25 for March 16-31, 19 for April 1-15, 23 for April 16-30, 13 for May 1-15, 17 for May 16-30, 24 for June 1-15, 20 for June 15-30, 16 for July 1-15, 15 for July 16-31, and 26 for August 1-25.. Data are from polls reported at FiveThirtyEight at https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/coronavirus-polls/?ex_cid=rrpromo.
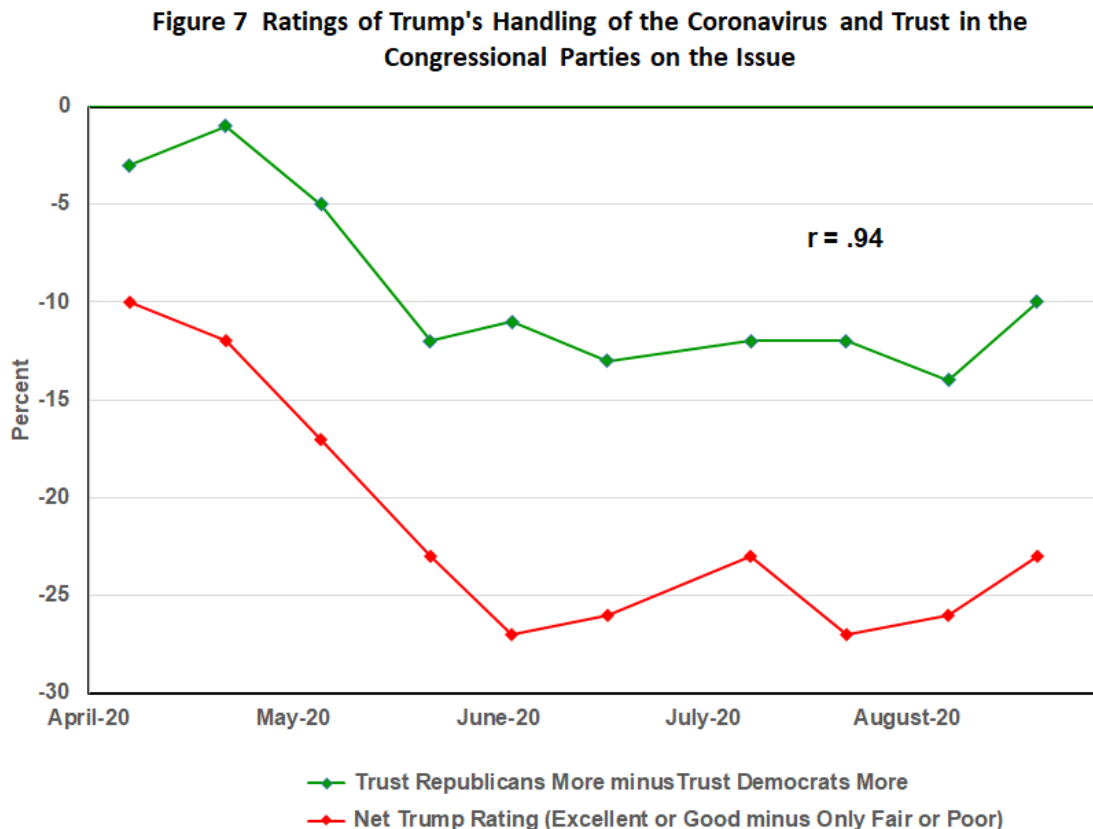
approval on handling the pandemic declined further before reviving slightly in August. This was a drag on Trump's overall ratings, for the consistency between respondents' opinions of his handling of the coronavirus and his job more generally increased from 86.4 percent for February-March to 89.6 percent for April-May and to 91.8 percent for June-August.

Figure 6 Approval of Trump's Handling of the Coronavirus Crisis
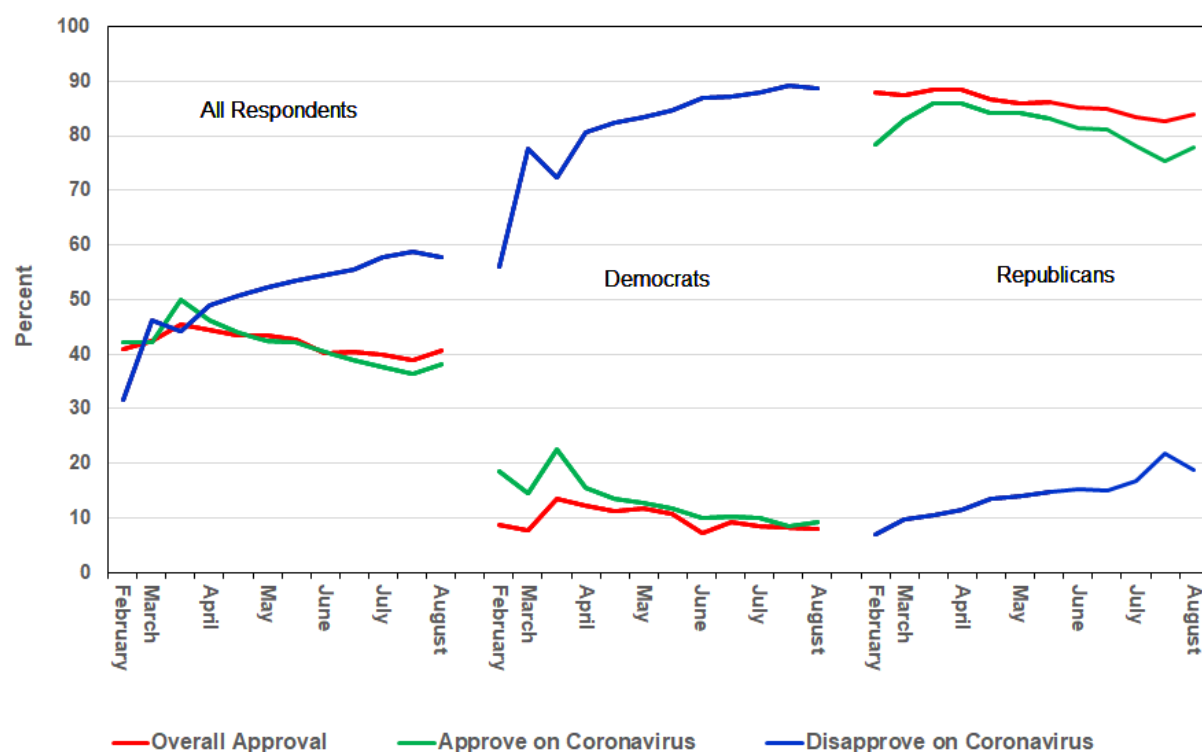
The pattern for Democrats indicates a modest rally to a national leader in a time of crisis, with approval of Trump's handling of the pandemic exceeding 20 percent during the last half of March. Republicans gave Trump high approval ratings initially but were less united in praising his handling of the crisis than they were in approving of his overall job performance, and negative appraisals became more common between February and late July. Assessments of Trump's handling of the crisis were thus initially less polarized than opinions of his general job performance but grew more so over time. Responses of independents track those of the full population but were consistently 5-6 points more negative about Trump's coronavirus performance; the July-August averages were 30 percent approving, 60 percent disapproving.

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Survey data from this period provide a small but revealing illustration of how presidents influence their party's reputation for competence in a policy domain (Jacobson 2019a, chapter 4). From early April through late August, ten Morning Consult polls asked respondents to rate Trump's handling of the coronavirus as excellent, good, only fair, or poor, and in the same survey asked which party in Congress they trusted more to deal with the crisis. The results are plotted in Figure 7. Net assessments of Trump (percent excellent or good minus percent fair or poor) and net congressional party trust track closely, with the data points correlated at .94 (p<.001). As reviews of Trump's performance became more negative, congressional Republicans lost ground on the issue. The relationship also held for partisan subgroups: Democrats (r=.92, p=<.001), Republicans (r=.90, p<.001), and independents (r=.83, p=.003).[22]

Figure 7 Ratings of Trump's Handling of the Coronavirus and Trust in the Congressional Parties on the Issue

Trust Republicans More minus Trust Democrats More

Net Trump Rating (Excellent or Good minus Only Fair or Poor)

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[22] The slopes from regressing party trust on Trump performance vary by party; for all respondents, the coefficient is .69 (s.e.=.09), for Democrats, .96 (s.e.=.15), for Republicans, .47 (s.e.=.08), and for independents, .60 (s.e.=.15); Morning Consult polls were accessed through FiveThirtyEight.

Partisanship colored not only opinions of Trump's performance but also how people viewed the pandemic and policies addressing it. Party differences on the order of 20 to 40 percentage points appear in survey questions asking about the severity of the crisis, whether the American death toll is under- or overstated, how soon and how fast to open states up for business, and whether the priority should be protecting public health or getting the economy back on track. Republicans were much more inclined than Democrats to say the crisis is overblown, favor an early relaxation of restrictions, and put the economy ahead of public health (Danmiller 2020; Pew Research Center 2020b). Trump's refusal for months to wear a protective mask himself in public and his laissez-faire stance toward their use by others, against the advice of virtually all public health experts, contributed to making this simple but essential step to contain the pandemic another point of contention in the partisan culture wars, with reported mask usage 30 percentage points higher among Democrats than among Republicans in Gallup Polls taken in May and June (Brenan 2020). In midsummer the partisan battle shifted to K-12 schools, with Trump demanding that they fully open for the fall and many states and school districts refusing to do so out of fear for the health of students and teachers. In the July 12-14 *Economist*/YouGov poll, only 32 percent of respondents thought that schools should be all or mostly in person, while 58 percent said school should be mostly or entirely online. Most Republicans followed Trump in supporting the first option (56 percent to 37 percent), while most independents (19 percent to 56 percent) and Democrats (15 percent to 77 percent) did not. A comparable 40-point partisan gap appears in other surveys covering the issue.

As at every previous occasion when Trump's actions had raised questions about his fitness to serve as president—the video tape of him bragging of assaulting women, the payment to cover up his dalliance with a porn star, the attempt to extort Ukraine to go after Biden—people who were not already supporters condemned his behavior, while those who were remained unshaken. By any objective measure, Trump's handling of the pandemic was deficient on multiple fronts. To his Democratic (and "never Trump" Republican) detractors, Trump's performance simply reconfirmed in the starkest way his utter unfitness for the office, and in circumstances where thousands of American lives were on the line. That it did not erode his support from a large majority of ordinary Republicans revealed once again their readiness to ignore, disbelieve, discount, or reject as irrelevant any information suggesting that he might not deserve their backing; such sustained exercises in motivated reasoning signal strong motivation,

firmly rooted in identity politics (Jardina 2019, Mason 2018, Ahler 2018). And as always, Trump supporters could turn to Fox News and other right-wing media for validation; in addition to the survey results mentioned earlier, a Pew survey take in March found 63 percent of respondents for whom Fox was their main source of news rated Trump's handling of the crisis "excellent" compared to 23 percent of the public generally (Gramlich 2020). Trump's effort to fabricate an alternative reality in which his handling of the crisis deserved nothing but praise largely succeeded with his core supporters. Not every Republican was buying it, however, and the sale became tougher as cases surged in the summer (Figure 6).

Beset by the pandemic, Trump stuck to the pugnacious, unscripted style that had enabled his hostile takeover of the Republican Party, got him elected in 2016, and seen him through various sex scandals, the Mueller investigation, and impeachment, but it proved a poor fit to the radically altered circumstances of his presidency. Rather than unite the country around his leadership, Trump left it nearly as polarized over his response to the communal disaster as it had been over his earlier impeachment and acquittal.[23] As a result, the gravest and most disruptive crisis to hit the United States since the Second World War did almost nothing to disrupt existing partisan configurations—at least until it was joined by a second national crisis.

Protests Against Racism

The second national crisis hit on May 25 and, combined with a later national surge in COVID-19 cases, began to erode Trump's standing with the public, a shift that, if sustained, threatened both immediate and longer-term damage to his and his party's future. The excruciating video of a white Minneapolis policeman killing a Black arrestee, George Floyd, by kneeling on his neck for almost nine minutes while his colleagues stood by watching, provoked a series of demonstrations in all 50 states against racially biased policing and systemic racism more broadly. Although some protests turned violent, strong majorities, including majorities of whites, supported the protesters and the idea that bias against blacks and other minorities was indeed systemic and demanded remedial action.[24] News stories documenting persistent racial inequalities across multiple dimensions proliferated, and favorable opinions of the "Black Lives

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[23] In the July 5-7 *Economist* /YouGov poll, 15 percent said the coronavirus crises had united the country more, 54 percent said it had divided it more; the question elicited only modest partisan differences, with 58 percent of Democrats, 55 percent of independents, and 49 percent of Republicans saying it had divided the country more.
[24] See the relevant surveys at https://www.pollingreport.com/race.htm.

Matter" movement rose sharply, reaching a net 25-30 points positive in June (Cohn and Quealy 2020).

Trump's response to these events again proved ill-suited to the moment. His past advocacy of aggressive policing, scorn for assertive Blacks, and sympathy for white supremacists, aimed at connecting with his conservative white base, now put him firmly on the wrong side of majority opinion, but he made no effort to adapt. He sought to frame the protests as a "law and order" issue, focusing on the violence he blamed on radical leftists and threatening to use the military to impose order, but most Americans found these responses deficient. On average in June through mid-August polls, 57 percent of Americans disapproved while only 34 percent approved of his handling of the protests.[25] Democrats were predictably and overwhelmingly critical (8 percent approving, 88 percent disapproving), but independents' opinions were also decisively negative (28 percent approving, 59 percent disapproving), and even Republicans were less supportive than they had been of his handling of the coronavirus pandemic, let alone of his overall performance (71 percent approving, 21 percent disapproving).[26] This reduced his broader support among Republicans only slightly—his overall approval ratings averaged 85 percent in these same polls—but declines among Democrats and especially independents brought Trumps overall ratings back down to around 40 percent (Figure 2).

In the face of these reaction, Trump doubled down on race-baiting rhetoric, posing as defender of the confederate flag and the statues of rebel generals erected as markers of white dominance in the post-reconstruction South (Best 2020), and retweeting a video of a supporter shouting "white power" at demonstrators in Florida (Haberman 2020). His edition of the old Republican "southern strategy" verged on parody, and the country had evolved enough since the days of Nixon and Ronald Reagan to worry Republican leaders about the damage it might do to their party's prospects in an increasingly diverse and racially progressive electorate (Costa and Rucker 2020). They were right to worry. Democrats had "owned" the issue of race relations for decades and continued to do so during Trump's presidency. The surveys taken in 2018 and 2019 that asked which party was better at handling the issue gave the Democrats a sizable advantage

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[25] Data are from ABC News, Ipsos, Sienna College/*New York Times*, Emerson College, Fox News, *Washington Post*, Global Strategies, CNN, IBD/Tipp, Ipsos, *Economist*/YouGov, CBS News, and Quinnipiac polls.
[26] Averages from 34 June-August polls taken by 13 polling organizations and accessed through listings provided by FiveThirtyEight at https://fivethirtyeight.com/.

(Table 3), reiterating findings from decades past.[27] In line with assessments of his handling of the protests, Trump's ratings on race relations more generally were among his lowest on any issue, with no discernable trend during his presidency and very little variation (s.d.=2.2). Trump's disadvantage in comparison with Biden on handling race relations matched his party's, and in the 14 of these surveys that asked about who would be better at handling a list of other issues, this was almost always Trump's worst and Biden's best issue.

Table 3. Opinions on Handling Race Relations

	Trump Approval on Handling Race Relations (2017-2020, N=36)	Party Better on Race Relations (2018-2019, N=4)		Trump or Biden Better on Handling Race Relations (2020, N=16)	
	Approve	Republicans	Democrats	Trump	Biden
All Respondents	33.6	30.5	53.3	32.4	54.8
Democrats	5.8	5.3	88.5	3.3	91.0
Independents	28.0	28.8	50.5	25.9	52.0
Republicans	71.8	67.7	16.3	73.4	14.8

Note: Number of surveys averaged is in parentheses; data are from Fox News, AP-NORC, CNN, Quinnipiac, Gallup, Suffolk, Kaiser, Morning Consult, GW Battleground, Marist/NPR and NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* surveys.

The partisan breakdowns show that very few Democratic respondents rated Trump or his party superior on the issue, which is hardly surprising. But independents also skewed heavily against both, and even Republicans were considerably less supportive of their side than on other issues. If Trump's handling of racial issues inspired any crossover voting, it would be by Republicans. Making racial fear-mongering a focus of his campaign thus seemed unwise, but Trump persisted. Rolling out his campaign themes in Tulsa on June 20 during his first mass rally in three months, Trump portrayed protestors as "thugs" and attacked Democrats as radical anarchists who would let criminals run wild and destroy America as we know it. He also celebrated his administration's coronavirus policies, claiming they had saved millions of lives. The event was widely panned as a failure, not only because the 19,000 seat arena was only a

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[27] In three surveys taken in 1991 and 1992 (two Gallup, one CNN), the averages were 31 percent Republican, 50 percent Democrat.

third full after promises of overflow crowds, but also because Trump's rhetoric seemed so out of touch with what most Americans felt about the racial injustices inspiring the protests and the virus' continuing threat (Montanaro 2020).

The presidential horserace polls taken in early summer reflected the poor reviews of Trump's handling of the two crises, with Joe Biden's lead rising from average of about 5.7 percentage points from March through May to about of 9.3 points nationally in June through mid-August. Biden also assumed sizable leads in the key swing states.[28] The movement toward Biden is evidence that political attitudes had not become so completely entrenched that nothing could move them. It derived from increasing support for Biden among all partisan categories, but with Democrats and independents contributing more (up an average of 3.3 points each in net preferences) than Republicans (up 2.4 points). These swings echo the Trump approval trends in Figure 2, which show his ratings dipping for each partisan category during this period. The vast majority of partisans who expressed a preference in these polls still favored their party's nominee—94.9 percent of Democrats and 92.6 percent of Republicans—but Republicans were a bit less inclined to loyalty than they had been earlier in the year and Democrats a bit more so.[29]

Trump's Electoral Effect

The public's negative opinions of Trump's responses to the coronavirus crisis and the protests against racism sent other Republicans who would be on the ballot with him running for cover although in deference to his supporters, few were openly critical of the president (Milbank 2020, Blake 2020, Alemany 2020). They had good reason to worry about Trump's declining ratings and Biden's lead in the polls. All postwar presidents, both while running themselves and at the midterm, have affected the electoral fates of candidates for lower offices, but again Trump's influence has been, by almost every measure, more pervasive than that of any of his postwar predecessors. I have already analyzed Trump's influence on congressional elections in 2016 (shared symmetrically with Hillary Clinton, of course) and 2018 in some detail (Jacobson 2017, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c; Jacobson and Carson 2020) and so note only a few salient points here.

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[28] Detailed national and state data are available from FiveThirtyEight at
https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/polls/president-general/
[29] Data on horserace polls are from FiveThirtyEight at https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/polls/?ex_cid=irpromo.

In 2016, according to the ANES time series data, ticket splitting between presidential and House or Senate candidates reached a six-decade low. The correlations between district- and state-level party vote shares for the House and Senate candidates and the president were at record levels of .95 and .94, respectively (Jacobson and Carson 2020, 208). Only 34 of 435 House seats and not a single Senate seat went to the party with the smaller share of the presidential vote in the district or state. In the ANES data, the effect of the presidential vote on the House vote was the largest yet estimated (even controlling for party identification, which also had its largest estimated effect; see Jacobson and Carson 2020, 209). This election was followed in 2018 by the most partisan, polarized, nationalized and president-centered midterm election of the post-war era. Opposition to Trump inspired a record number of Democratic women to run for Congress, levels of campaign spending dramatically higher than in any previous election year, especially on the Democratic side, and the highest midterm voter turnout in a century (Jacobson 2019c). If nothing else, Trump has been an unrivaled promoter of civic engagement.

He is also an unrivaled influence on voting preferences. Figure 8 displays the trend since 1946 in the individual-level relationship between presidential approval and the prospective House vote measured by the congruence between presidential approval and support for the president's party's candidate in response to the generic vote question, averaged across the available surveys.[30] The markers are color coded to indicate midterm elections and, in presidential years, whether or not the president was running for reelection. The congruence levels for Trump in the 2018 midterm cycle and so far in the 2020 election cycle, at 93.0 and 92.8, respectively, extend a long upward trend into record territory. Congruence in pre-election generic polls predicts congruence in post-election surveys very accurately, and in 2018 the average across post-election polls was 93.3 percent, the highest on record (Jacobson 2019b), The historical patterns are the same for both House and Senate candidates and 2018 was no exception, with congruence averaging 94.1 percent in 12 pre-election Senate polls and 92.8 percent in the two post-election polls posing the relevant questions.[31]

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[30] Responses are congruent when respondents approve of the president and support his party's candidate or disapprove of the president and support the other party's candidate; only respondents who evaluate the president and express a candidate preference are included in the analysis. The number of surveys for each election cycle varies from 5 to 96, with an average of 24. There were no pre-election polls for 1972 and 1976 asking the necessary questions; the entries for these years are from the ANES post–election surveys.
[31] The 12 Senate pre-election observations are from Quinnipiac Polls; the post-election observations are from the CCES and the ANES Pilot Study.

Figure 8 Congruence of Presidential Approval and the Generic House Vote, 1946-2020

● Running for Reelection ● Not Running for Reelection ● Midterm
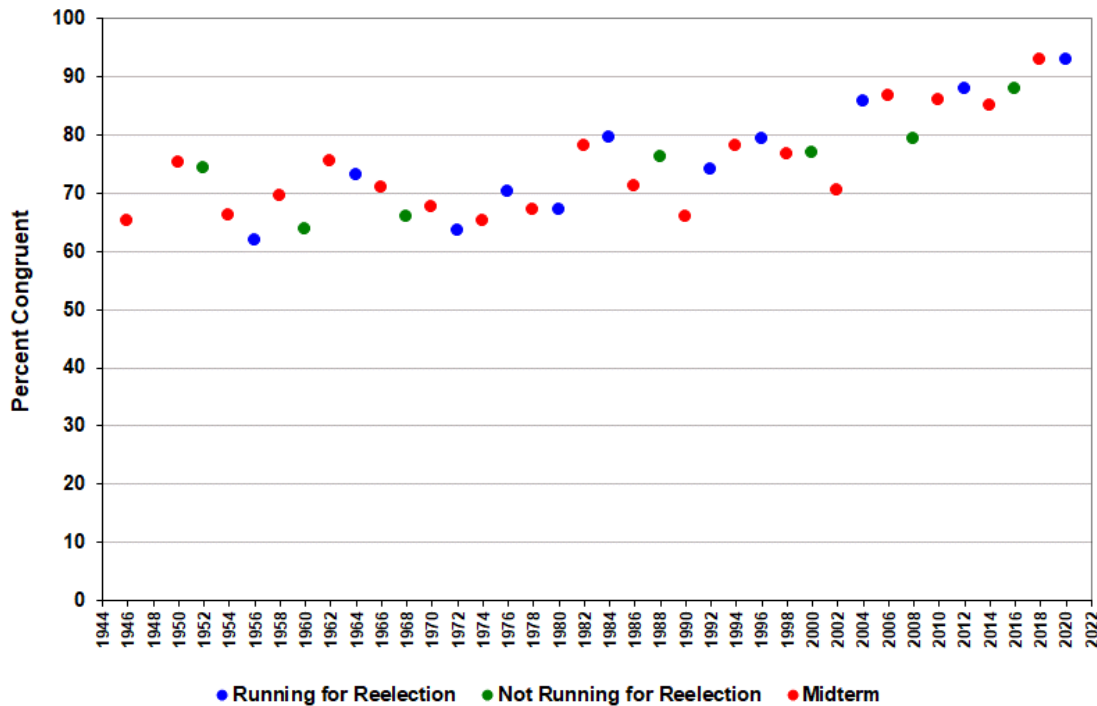
    In the past, congruence between approval and the congressional vote choice in years when presidents have sought reelection has tended to grow as election day approaches, so the link between opinions of Trump and the prospective congressional vote could strengthen further over the rest of 2020.[32] These and other data suggested that ticket-splitting would be even rarer in 2020 than it was in 2016; in the weekly Nationscape surveys taken during the first seven months of 2020, only 6.8 percent of prospective voters said they would split their ticket in House races, and only 6.9 percent in Senate races (Tausanovitch and Vavreck. 2020), compared with the all-time ANES ticket-splitting lows of 10.2 and 10.6 percent, respectively, in 2016. In the seven *Economist*/YouGov surveys taken mid-June through mid-August, a mere 3.1 percent of registered voters reported split preferences. These numbers will no doubt rise when actual as opposed to generic congressional candidates became involved, but Trump's standing with the public in November nonetheless promises to be extraordinarily consequential for down-ballot

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[32] The average level of congruence in the *Economist*/YouGov polls across the four quarters of 2019 was 89.9, 91.7, 92.4, and 93.4 percent, respectively, and reached 94.2 percent in the first half of 2020.

candidates, When Biden's lead rose by an average of 3.5 points in early summer, the Democrats' advantage in generic House polls rose by 2.5 points to an average of 8.6 points.
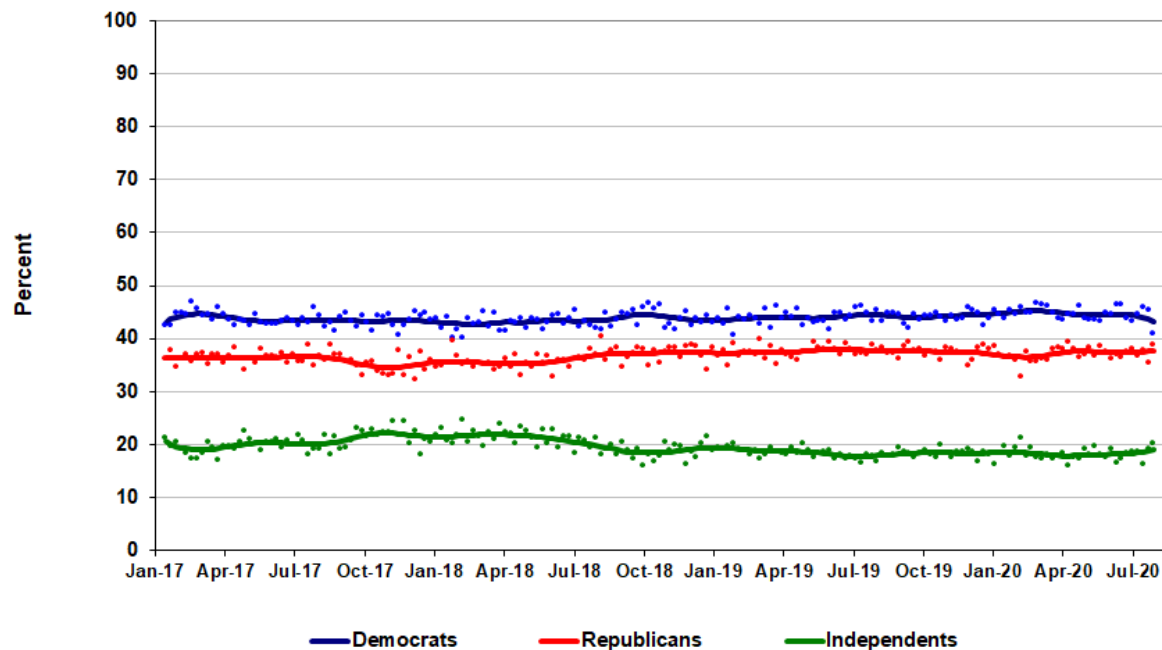
Party Identification

Trump's effect on the Republican Party's fortunes will almost certainly extend well beyond its performance at the polls in 2020. All previous postwar presidents have had an impact on individual and aggregate party identification and therefore the national partisan balance. Although party identification is among the most stable of political attitudes, the relative proportion of self-identified Republicans and Democrats in the electorate—macropartisanship— has varied directly with the approval ratings of the president (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 1998; Green, Palmquist and Schickler 1998; MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson 1989; Jacobson 2019a).   Presidents have also influenced mass partisanship more durably through generational imprinting; their successes or failures inform the relatively malleable partisan attitudes of voters joining the electorate during their administrations, who then tend to carry these attitudes forward through later adulthood (Jacobson 2019a).

Macropartisanship

Opinions of Trump's performance during his first three plus years in office have been, as noted, both extremely polarized and uncommonly stable. With so little variation in evaluations of Trump, the aggregate distribution of partisans in the electorate has been largely stable as well. This is evident in the data from the weekly *Economist*/YouGov surveys displayed in Figure 9. Democrats have maintained a steady lead in macropartisanship, and the proportion identifying with the party has not varied significantly. The proportion of Republicans has varied by only a couple of points, mainly through shifts in and out of the independent category, and it is now about where it was at the beginning of Trump's presidency. The same stability pertains if independent leaners are excluded from the partisan categories, although the proportion classified as independents is of course much larger. Party identification series reported by other

organizations that poll the question regularly have also been stable during the Trump administration.[33].

Figure 9 Party Identification 2017-2020, *Economist*/YouGov Series (Including Leaners)

Source: 186 weekly *Economist*/YouGov surveys.

Individual Changes

Despite this aggregate stability, some panel evidence points to a direct Trump effect on party identification at the individual level. For example, the stability of party identification reported in the pre- and post-election waves of the 2018 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (Ansolabehere, Schaffner, and Luks, 2019) varied with opinions of Trump across the two waves.[34] For initial Republicans who approved or Democrats who disapproved of his performance in both waves, party identification was extremely stable, with fewer than two percent shifting to independent and fewer than one percent moving to the other party. Among

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[33] These include the CBS News, ABC News/*Washington Post*, Fox News, Pew, and Morning Consult surveys. Gallup reported a sizable swing to the Democrats in their June 2020 polls after previously documenting three plus years of stability (Jones 2020a, 2020b) but it was not sustained in the July and August surveys.
[34]Independent leaners are included as partisans; the substantive results are the same if they are treated as independents; for information on this survey, see (Ansolabehere, Schaffner, and Luks, 2019).

those whose opinions of Trump in both waves ran contrary to their initial party identification, about 17 percent changed between waves, some to independence but most to the other party. But the proportion afflicted by such cross-pressures was quite small, 5.5 percent of Democrats, 7.8 percent of Republicans. Shifts by initial independents out of that category were also systematically related to their opinions of Trump across both waves, with about 24 percent shifting identification to the appropriate party if their opinions of Trump were consistently positive (to Republican) or negative (to Democrat), and only 4 percent doing the opposite. Thus although few respondents changed their party identification over the relatively brief time between survey waves, the changes that did occur clearly reflected opinions of Trump—which were also very stable, with 95.6 percent giving the same evaluations in both waves.[35]

The Longer Run

Past presidents have influenced mass partisanship in the long as well as the short run through a kind of generational imprinting. People tend to adopt partisan identities early in adulthood that after a few elections stabilize and become resistant to more than transient change (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002). Political events and personalities therefore have their most lasting influence during the stage in life when partisan identities are being formed. Partisan identities can change—the movement of less educated whites into the Republican column during the Obama years, for example—but durable long-term presidential effects nonetheless show up as systematic variations across generations in aggregate partisanship that reflect attitudes toward presidents and parties formed when each age cohort first became politically aware (Ghitza and Gelman 2014; DeSilver 2014; Hopkins 2014; Pew Research Center 2007, 2011, and 2015; Jacobson 2019a).

Analysis of Gallup data from 2009-2015 showed that Americans coming of age since the Clinton administration had become increasingly Democratic in their partisan leanings, with the net Democratic advantage in party identifiers growing to about 16 percentage points among people who entered the electorate during the G.W. Bush and Obama administrations (Jacobson 2019a). This advantage corresponded to, among other things, an age gradient in presidential

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[35] The average time between waves for a respondent was 33 days, with a standard deviation of 9.2 days. Only 6.8 percent reported a different party identification in the second wave; 5.4 percent moved in or out of the independent category, 1.4 percent moved to the other party; see Jacobson 2020a for more details.

approval. The gradient was small for Bush, with approval in Gallup polls during his second term averaging 33 percent among respondents under 30, 38 percent among older voters (Table 4)   It was much larger for Obama, with approval averages of 56 percent among the youngest cohort, 41 percent among the oldest cohort. The age gradient in approval of Trump's performance has

Table 4. Presidential Approval by Age Cohort

Age Category	G.W. Bush	Obama	Trump
18-29	33	56	29
30-49	41	48	37
50-64	38	45	46
65+	36	41	47

Note: Data for Bush are from his second term.
Source: Gallup Polls (130 for Bush, 376 for Obama, 85 for Trump).

been even steeper, with a gap of 18 points between the youngest and oldest cohorts. Not coincidentally, Democrats have retained a large advantage in party identification among younger voters (Table 5).   In the *Economist*/YouGov surveys, the Democrats enjoy a 22-point advantage among respondents under 30 and a 13-point advantage among those between 30 and 49. Only among people 65 or older do Republicans constitute the plurality. Part of the difference across age cohorts derives from demographics. Trump's approval ratings from whites in these polls has averaged 47 percent, from nonwhites, 25 percent, and the proportion of whites drops from 84 percent for the 65+ cohort down to 54 percent for those under 30. But Democrats also enjoy an advantage among the youngest white cohort of about 12 percentage points. The implications of these data are clear: If, as in the past, initial party identification anticipates life-time party identification, the Republicans' share of electorate will decline for years to come as today's older voters are replaced by millennials and post-millennials. The Republican Party's difficulties in attracting younger voters predate Trump, but his retrograde stance on cultural matters and indifference or hostility to their views on such issues as climate change and racial justice has added to them (Kromer and Deckman 2020, Scott 2020).

Table 5. Party Identification by Age Cohort, 2017-2020

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		Democrats	Independents	Republicans
All Respondents				
Under 30		50	23	28
30-49		45	23	32
50-64		41	18	40
65+		39	13	47
White Respondents				
Under 30	(54%)	46	19	34
30-49	(64%)	39	22	40
50-64	(76%)	35	18	47
65+	(84%)	35	13	52

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Note: The percentage of whites in each age cohort is in parentheses.
Source: *Economist*/YouGov surveys; N for all respondents is 265,413, for white respondents, 192,063

The Party Coalitions

Like aggregate partisanship generally, the demographic composition of the party coalitions has remained relatively stable during Trump's presidency. Obama had made his party more attractive to people who were younger, better educated, minority, female, socially liberal, and cosmopolitan in tastes and outlook, while making it less attractive to people who were none of those things: older, white, less educated, male, and socially conservative, and insular (Jones 2019; Bartels 2018). The Democratic coalition at the time of Trump's election was thus disproportionately young, single, female, secular, urban, non-white, LGBTQ, and highly educated. The Republican coalition was overwhelmingly white and skewed older, married, religiously observant, male, less educated, and resident in smaller cities or rural communities. For the most part, the groups leaning Democrat comprise growing segments of the population, those leaning Republican, shrinking segments, but a movement of older, less educated white voters into the Republican Party during the Obama years had offset the demographic trends favoring the Democrats (Jacobson 2019a). Since then, the coalitions have stabilized, with group reactions to Trump's presidency largely reinforcing the demographic lines of cleavage in place at the time of his election (Pew Research Center 2020a). Differential growth across demographic

groups thus continues to work against the Republican Party. The Census Bureau projects the United States to become majority non-white in about 25 years (Frey 2018), a prospect animating the racially tinged fear-mongering Trump routinely uses to agitate his base (e.g. Herndon 2019).

The 2020 Election and Trump's Legacy

Donald Trump has so far had a stronger impact than any of his postwar predecessors on how people regard his party and its leaders (and, to a lesser degree, the rival party and its leaders), on past and prospective electoral choices, and, potentially, on the evolving social composition of the party coalitions. Trump's takeover of the Republican Party has been complete, if not entirely uncontested (Bacon 2019; Rappaport, Reilly, and Stone 2020, Galvin 2020). Criticism from congressional Republicans, common while Trump was pursuing the nomination and still heard early his presidency, had by the time of his impeachment virtually disappeared, as critics departed, fell silent, or morphed into ardent defenders. Nearly half of Republican representatives who were in Congress when Trump became president will no longer be there in 2021—at least 115 of the 241, with more likely to be added to the list once the election results are in.[36] The unusually high number of Republican departures attest in part to the discomfort some more conventional Republicans have felt serving in the party of Trump. Their actual and aspiring Republican replacements have hailed from a world in which 85-90 percent of their partisans approve of Trump's performance and are more inclined to think of themselves as Trump than as party supporters.[37] Aware of this reality, ambitious Republicans in Republican-leaning states and districts have campaigned as Trump loyalists, sparring in primaries over who is most devoted. Inevitably, some have sought to emulate his truculent style and inflammatory rhetoric (Johnson 2018). Even if Trump departs after 2020, he will leave behind a cohort of leaders and a party marked with his brand.

Gratifying for Trump, perhaps, but problematic for the Republican Party. From the beginning of his pursuit of the White House in 2015, Trump has focused almost exclusively on securing his base, organizationally as well as rhetorically (Galvin 2020), making little effort to

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[36] David Wasserman of the *Cook Report* kindly gave me this number in a personal communication, July 18, 2020.
[37] The NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll has asked Republican respondents in 30 surveys taken 2017-2020, "Do you consider yourself to be more of a supporter of Donald Trump or more of a supporter of the Republican Party?" On average, 52 percent have said Trump, 40 percent, the Republican Party; Trump has been preferred in all but 4 of these surveys, including all 6 taken in 2020.

expand his and thus his party's appeal to voters beyond it. His reelection campaign is shaping up to be no exception, but die-hard Trump enthusiasts are too few to reelect him. Catering exclusively to their sentiments in the political climate prevailing in the summer of 2020 clearly dimmed his prospects and thus those of Republicans on the ticket with him. Trump's approach alienated some swing voters while helping to unify Democrats behind Joe Biden after their contentious nomination process.

The durability of Biden's current lead is unknowable at this writing, although the common expectation is that the race will tighten as the election draws nearer. For that to happen, Trump's approval numbers will have to improve. If they do, and with so few voters either undecided about Trump or willing to cross party lines, the outcome will hinge on turnout, with victory going to the party that does the better job of mobilizing its supporters, particularly in swing states. Inciting fear and loathing of the other side, a Trump specialty, will doubtless be a favorite motivating tactic. By March, Democratic campaign ads were already using Trump's own words to slam his response to the coronavirus crisis (Sargent 2020).[38] Desperate to change the subject, Trump renewed his attack on Obama, this time with the absurd accusation that he was guilty of criminal conspiracy in initiating the Russia investigation back in 2016. Meanwhile, one son, Donald Jr., circulated a meme from the sewers of the internet implying Joe Biden was a pedophile, while the other, Eric, claimed the coronavirus shut-downs were a Democratic plot to keep Trump from holding his signature mass rallies and that the virus would "magically" disappear after November 3 (Bruney 2020). The Trump family's misdirection, blatant lies, and revival of white identity politics foreshadows a campaign of unbounded deception and ugliness. With Trump raising the bogus specter of massive voter fraud and playing coy about accepting the electorate's verdict (Mansoor 2020), the potential for electoral chaos and a constitutional crisis in November has received—and deserved—considerable attention (e.g., Klaas 2020, Cohen 2020)

Whatever it is, the electorate's ultimate verdict on Trump will be profoundly consequential for the future of the parties, the United States and the world. Even if his racially-charged fear-mongering fails to deliver victory, the party image it conveys will not soon fade, especially if would-be Republican successors opt to blame his defeat on his incompetent

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[38] G. Sergent, "A Brutal New Ad Uses Trump's Own Words Against Him," *Washington Post*, March 20, 2020.

handling of the COVID-19 crisis rather than popular rejection of white nationalist identity politics, and act accordingly. But win or lose, the political fractures Trump has exploited and deepened are likely to endure for a long time to come. The cultural and economic trends threatening the status and identities of the older, non-college whites who make up the core of Trump's support show no signs of reversing. With or without Trump, his party faces a severe demographic challenge. It remains doubtful that Republican efforts to rig the electoral system in their favor through gerrymandering (Associated Press 2017, Daley 2019, Jacobson and Carson 2020) and voter suppression (Cobb 2018, Hakim and Wines 2018, Anderson 2018) can hold back the demographic tide indefinitely. But efforts to stem that tide or to "make America great again" by turning back the political and cultural clock, even as the coronavirus pandemic's uneven impact and rising demands for social justice have highlighted the nation's deep economic and racial inequities, are sure to generate fierce partisan conflicts far beyond the 2020 election, with consequences that will shape party images and loyalties for decades to come.

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Appendix

Table A1. The Effect of Presidential Approval on Favorability Toward the President's Party

	Constant	S.E.	Presidential Approval	S.E	Other Party Favorability	S.E	Adjusted R^2	N
Clinton								
All	24.4***	5.9	.43***	.05	.11	.07	.64	79
Pres. Partisans	57.3***	7.4	.36***	.07	-.01	.11	.56	71
Independents	-4.0	8.6	.55***	.08	.49***	.12	.48	71
Rival Partisans	18.4*	9.3	.36***	.07	-.09	.10	.53	71
Bush								
All	16.7***	4.2	.43***	.02	.19*	.08	.78	143
Pres. Partisans	59.0***	2.5	.35***	.03	-.00	.09	.59	113
Independents	6.1	3.9	.42***	.03	.36***	.08	.74	113
Rival Partisans	5.5	6.6	.34***	.02	.04	.08	.78	113
Obama								
All	17.2***	2.6	.47***	.04	.13**	.04	.62	248
Pres. Partisans	42.7***	5.0	.50***	.05	-.04	.09	.64	144
Independents	9.2**	3.3	.40***	.06	.29***	.07	.56	144
Rival Partisans	-1.4	2.6	.45***	.04	.07*	.03	.59	144
Trump								
All	-25.9***	2.7	.91***	.05	.60***	.05	.79	279
Pres. Partisans	-18.8**	6.89	1.17***	.08	.09	.12	.56	276
Independents	-10.3***	2.6	.65***	.06	.48***	.06	.56	276
Rival Partisans	5.4*	2.4	.53***	.05	-.01	.03	.59	277

Note: The dependent variable is the proportion of respondents with favorable opinions of the indicated party; the independent variables are the proportion with favorable opinions of the other party and the proportion of approving of the president's job performance; estimated with survey sponsor fixed effects.
Source: Gallup, ABC News/*Washington Post*, CBS News/*New York Times*, CNN, Time, *Los Angeles Times*, Pew, Fox News, Quinnipiac, Battleground, Bloomberg, Global Strategy Group, Monmouth, Suffolk, and *Economist*/YouGov surveys.