



Should Congressional Incumbents be Concerned About the 2018 Midterm Elections?*

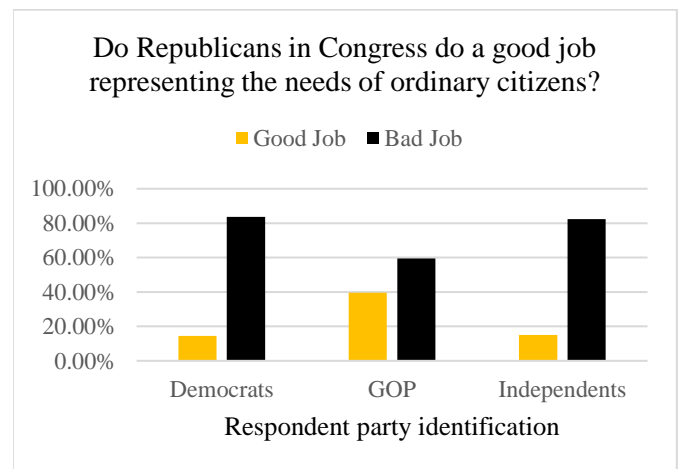
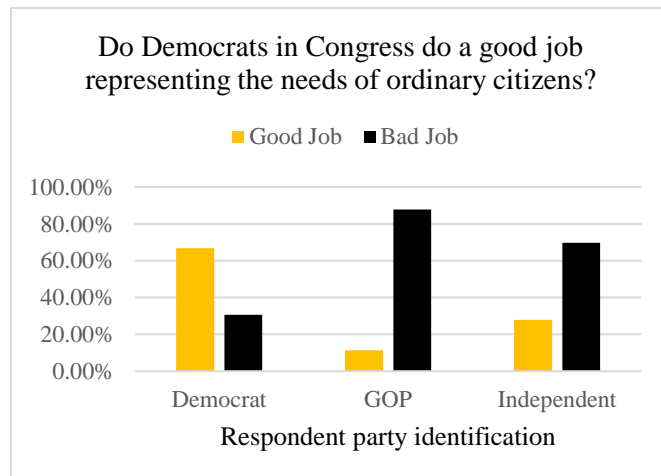
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In the wake of the November 7, 2017 elections in New Jersey and Virginia, headlines claimed the results were “[threatening Republicans in Congress](#)”, and “[offering fresh evidence that the ground is shifting beneath the GOP](#)”. While these results alone may not shed light on the national picture, pundits and politicians alike are wondering what to expect for the upcoming 2018 midterm elections.

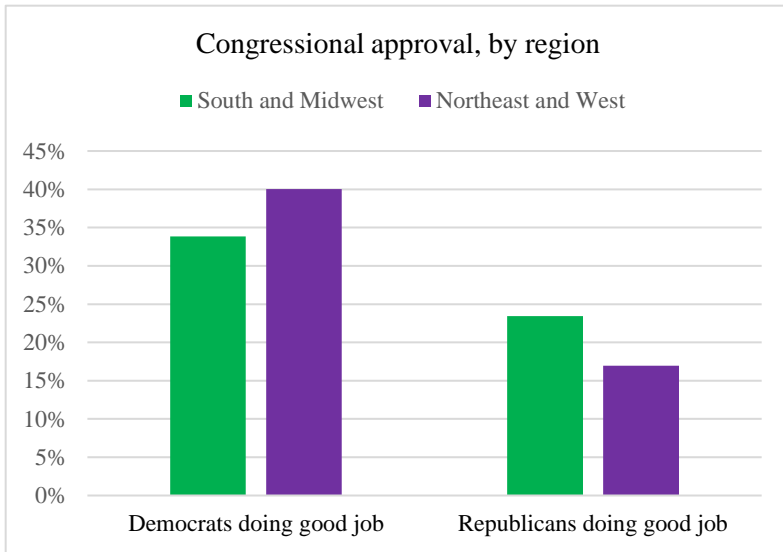
[Incumbents in particular are concerned](#). Recent research from a [September 2017 Washington Post-UMD poll](#) sheds some light on the disapproval Americans feel for the representatives of their own party. When compared with Congressional Democrats, Congressional Republicans are at a disadvantage.

- When asked if Congress does a good job or bad job representing the concerns of ordinary citizens, Republican respondents were tough on the GOP, while Democratic respondents were more supportive of Democratic representation.
- Sixty-seven percent of Democratic respondents thought their party did a “good” job representing ordinary citizens.
- Only 40% of GOP respondents felt their leaders in Congress were doing a good job representing their needs.



“Coastal Elites” vs. the South and Midwest

One claim made in the wake of the 2016 election was that the opinions of “[coastal elites](#)” differed from those of Middle America. [This map](#) shows the differences in electoral support between House members across the country, with Democrats faring better in the Northeast and West Coast. The data shows that even in areas that are often Republican strongholds, such as the South and Midwest, Republican Congressional members are unpopular. In these regions, more respondents felt that Democrats in Congress did a good job representing the needs of Americans than Republicans in Congress.

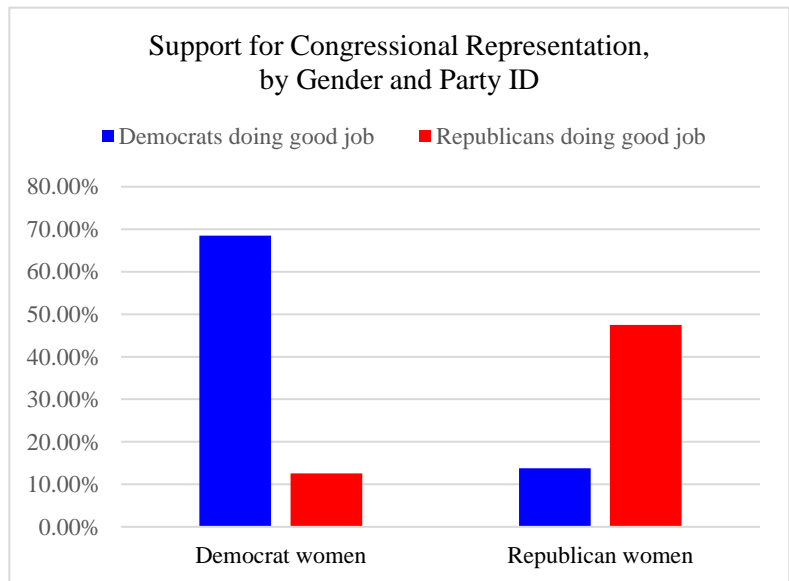


- Only 24% of Southerners and Midwesterners thought that Republicans in Congress were doing a good job representing their needs.
 - Yet in the South, respondents were more affirming of Democrats. Thirty-five percent of Southerners thought that Democrats were doing a good job representing their needs.
 - Those on the Northeast and West coasts gave Republicans a slightly lower score than their Southern and Midwestern counterparts—with only 17% stating that Republicans in Congress did a good job representing their needs.

Women and Party Identity

This year, increasing attention has been centered on the role women play in American politics. While the Women’s March on Washington in January kick-started their mobilization, 2017 has been most notably marked by the [increasing attention on sexual harassment](#), particularly at the hands of powerful politicians and celebrities. In order to maximize support from women voters, Republicans and Democrats alike are under pressure to be more responsive.

What does this mean for the support of women voters? Overall, more than three-in-four women (73%) disapprove of the job Republicans are doing in Congress while more than half of female respondents (57%) say the same about Democrats. When partisan leanings are considered, the disparity is much greater. Republican women are more approving of Republican representatives, and Democrats are more approving of Democratic representatives. But yet again, Republican women are less approving of Republican congressional representation than Democrat women are of their own party leaders.



- Among Republican women, only 48% approve of how Republicans in Congress are representing them.
- For Democrats though, 68% of the Democrat women surveyed approve of the way their party is representing them.

- Both Republican and Democrat women are very critical of the representatives of the opposite party (86% of Republican women think Democrats are doing a bad job, and 86% of Democrats feel Republicans are doing a bad job.)

Should incumbents be worried about the upcoming midterm elections? It appears Congressional Republicans should certainly be concerned. Our poll results show that even among assumed regional strongholds, Republicans have greater doubts about Republican representatives than Democrats have about Democrat representatives. And among women, a normally [politically active population](#), Republicans are not very supportive of their own party representatives in Congress. Needless to say, Republican incumbents have their work cut out for them, particularly in the South and Midwest, and among Republican women.

Appendix: Complete results (all weighted)

Appendix Table 1. Congressional Approval, by party identification

13a. Do you think each of the following generally do a good job or a bad job representing the concerns of ordinary citizens? Democrats in Congress	All Adults (1663)	Registered Voters (1356)	Non-Registered Voters (251)	Democrat (570)	Republican (402)	Independent (523)
Good Job	36.4%	35.2%	41.5%	66.8%	11.3%	27.8%
Bad Job	61.4%	63.5%	51.8%	30.7%	87.8%	69.8%
No response	2.2%	1.3%	7%	2.6%	1%	2.4%
13b. Do you think each of the following generally do a good job or a bad job representing the concerns of ordinary citizens? Republicans in Congress	All Adults	Registered Voters	Non-Registered Voters	Democrat	Republican	Independent
Good Job	20.8%	19.4%	27.5%	14.4%	39.5%	15.0%
Bad Job	77.1%	78.7%	68.7%	83.6%	59.4%	82.4%
No Opinion	2.1%	1.9%	3.9%	2.0%	1.1%	2.6%

Appendix Table 2. Congressional approval, by region

Region	Northeast	Midwest	South	West	Northeast +West	South + Midwest
13a. Do you think each of the following generally do a good job or a bad job representing the concerns of ordinary citizens? Democrats in Congress						
Good Job	44.7%	31.4%	35.2%	36.5%	40.0%	33.8%
Bad Job	54.5%	66.4%	62.0%	61.5%	58.5%	63.6%
No Opinion	0.8%	2.2%	2.8%	2.0%	1.5%	2.6%
13b. Do you think each of the following generally do a good job or a bad job representing the concerns of ordinary citizens? Republicans in Congress						
Good Job	15.9%	22.5%	24.0%	17.8%	17.0%	23.5%
Bad Job	82.0%	76.0%	74.2%	79.0%	80.3%	74.8%
No Opinion	2.0%	1.5%	1.9%	3.2%	2.7%	1.7%

Appendix Table 3. Congressional approval, by gender and party ID

	Total female	Republican female	Democrat female
13a. Do you think each of the following generally do a good job or a bad job representing the concerns of ordinary citizens? Democrats in Congress			
Good Job	41.2%	13.8%	68.5%
Bad Job	57.0%	85.7%	31.2%
No response	1.8%	0.5%	0.3%
13b. Do you think each of the following generally do a good job or a bad job representing the concerns of ordinary citizens? Republicans in Congress			
Good Job	24.2%	47.5%	12.6%
Bad Job	73.4%	52.0%	86.4%
No response	2.4%	0.5%	1.0%

*Michael J. Hanmer, Associate Professor of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland and Research Director for the Center for American Politics and Citizenship, contributed to this report.

The Washington Post-University of Maryland Poll is a joint venture between the Washington Post and faculty in the Center for American Politics and Citizenship in the Department of Government and Politics, in the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences, at the University of Maryland.