

Confidence in Government on National Security Matters: October 2017

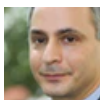
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In July we began [a polling project](#) to measure public confidence in government institutions on national security matters on an ongoing basis. This month, we are able greatly to expand the number of questions that we are testing, over a range of subjects. To ensure that we're giving adequate analysis to our results, we're breaking up October's results into four different posts. This first one continues and expands upon our previous work on confidence in the various parts of the government to handle national security, as well as perceptions of the two major political parties' handling of national security. We will have other posts in the coming days that (1) compare confidence in the President's handling of specific national security matters to that of the military; (2) examine public attitudes around intelligence authorities and electronic surveillance in light of the debate to reform Section 702; and (3) examine public attitudes on the Mueller investigation and foreign influence

Over this last weekend in October, we once again used [Google Surveys](#), which is supporting this project with a large in-kind donation of access to its survey platform, to ask a variety of

questions related to national security. Respondents are internet users over 18 who answer “surveywall” questions on websites that use Google Opinion Rewards for Publishers to access content or mobile users who answer questions on the Google Opinion Rewards app. Surveys appear on a network of more than 1,500 sites, including USA Today and the Financial Times. For more information on Google Surveys’ methodology, including questions regarding sampling bias and inferred demographics, please see [Google’s white paper](#) on the topic. Benjamin Wittes and Emma Kohse also discussed criticisms and advantages of the Google Surveys methodology at some length [in this paper](#).

We began with four questions on confidence in government institutions that we have asked in the previous three months. This month, we have added a question about public confidence in the military on national security matters. We also asked several questions about perceptions of the political parties on national security, which we began asking survey respondents in August.

This data show that public confidence in Congress and the President when it comes to national security is trending downward for the second straight month. Confidence in the intelligence community remains high, though nowhere near as high as the military, which enjoys an extremely high level of public confidence. The data also show once again that the public has low confidence in both political parties when it comes to national security, with Republicans maintaining a slight edge but with wide variations across gender and age groups.

Confidence in Institutions: Continued Bad News for the President and Congress, Good News for the Military

From October 25 to October 2017, we used Google Surveys to ask respondents the following questions about confidence in institutions:

- How much confidence do you have in the Congress to protect U.S. national security?
- How much confidence do you have in the federal courts to protect U.S. national security?
- How much confidence do you have in the President to protect U.S. national security?
- How much confidence do you have in the intelligence community to protect U.S. national security?
- How much confidence do you have in the military to protect U.S. national security?

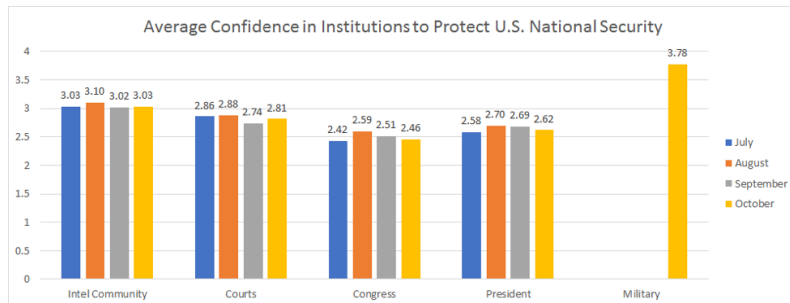
Last month, we noted that confidence in the President and Congress had declined slightly since the previous two months. This month we see that trend continue with average confidence for the President falling to 2.62 in October from 2.69 in September, and confidence in the Congress falling to 2.46 in October from 2.51 in September (on a scale of 1—representing—No Confidence—to 5—representing High Confidence). The level of confidence in Congress is especially abysmal, with respondents being four times as likely to report having no confidence in Congress when it comes to national security (29 percent), than those reporting high confidence (7 percent).

On the other hand, the public's confidence in the federal courts and the intelligence community increased marginally from September to October, from 2.74 in September to 2.81 in October for the federal courts and from 3.02 in September to 3.03 in October for the intelligence community.

It's hard to see any kind of trend in either of these directional movements, particularly if one looks at the four months we have been running the survey. The confidence numbers for all of these institutions have fluctuated within a pretty tight range over that time, so the variation may well be statistical noise with no real trend yet visible. These four months

provide a useful and relatively stable baseline against which we can assess clearer movement as it develops over time.

This month, we added one core institution to our confidence metric: the military. While confidence in the intelligence community remained high, as it has since July, even it is dwarfed by the public's confidence in the military when it comes to national security. With an average score of 3.78 on our confidence scale, the military is by far the most trusted government institution when it comes to protecting U.S. national security. A full 37 percent of respondents reported having high confidence in the military; that is five times the percentage of people that reported having high confidence in Congress, and three times as many as reported high confidence in the intelligence community.



Republicans Trusted More than Democrats on National Security, but Confidence is Low in Both Parties

In October, as in September and August, we also asked respondents about their perceptions of the political parties when it comes to national security, specifically:

- How much confidence do you have in the Republican Party to protect U.S. national security?
- How much confidence do you have in the Democratic Party to protect U.S. national security?

As in August and September, confidence in the parties was low. While the Republican Party holds a slight advantage over the Democratic Party—mean confidence scores of 2.64 for the GOP and 2.61 for the Democrats—for both parties the

modal response was “no confidence,” with 39 percent of respondents selecting this choice for both parties.

To further investigate the public’s confidence in the political parties on national security, this month we also asked a separate question:

- Looking ahead for the next few years, which political party do you think will do a better job of protecting the country from international terrorism and military threats?

This question mirrors the wording of a Gallup question asked every September, though unlike Gallup, we allow respondents to choose “Neither” or “Don’t know,” in addition to allowing them to choose either political party. Respondents saying “Neither” or “Don’t know” are then given an additional question that forces them to choose between parties, namely:

- If you had to choose, which major party would do a better job of protecting the country from international terrorism and military threats, which party do you prefer?

Expanding the answer-choice appears to radically change the results. While Gallup found Republicans held a 13 point advantage (51 percent to 38 percent) in September, our results show a much smaller Republican edge of 28 percent to 22 percent, with 25 percent of respondents saying they “Don’t Know” and 24 percent responding “Neither.” Forcing respondents who choose these latter two options as an initial matter to choose between the parties results in a threepoint advantage for the Democratic Party on the secondary question (51.6 percent to 48.4 percent).

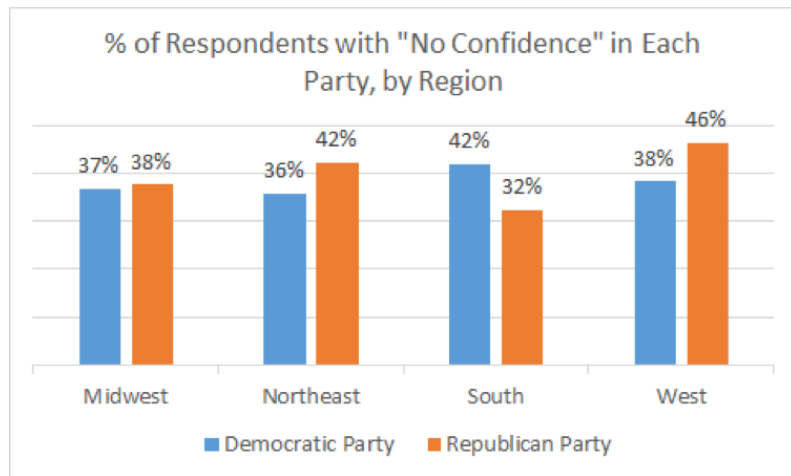
In short, while the result is consistent with the confidence result as to the individual parties asked separately. There is a small but notable preference as an initial matter for the GOP on national security matters, but it largely disappears when one forces undecideds to choose. Another way to think about it is to say that the Republican base is more confident than the Democratic base on national security matters, but that undecideds are leaning Democratic right now.

Significant Geographic Differences in Party Confidence

The age and gender gaps on party trust, which we had previously identified, were also evident in October, with older and male respondents trusting Republicans more and younger and female respondents trusting Democrats more. Rather than reiterate those results, here we focus on the significant geographic divides in party confidence on national security. Sample sizes of 3,269 and 3,301 for our questions about Republican and Democratic Party confidence, respectively, give us the latitude to see meaningful differences across regions.

The results are unsurprising in one sense: the Republican dominated South is much less confident in Democrats, and the Democratic dominated Northeast and West are much less confident in Republicans. A near-majority of respondents in the Western U.S. (46 percent) report having no confidence in the Republican Party when it comes to protecting national security.

However, the results are surprising in another sense: in every region and for both parties, the modal response is “no confidence.” Even in the Republican dominated South, 32 percent of respondents said they had “no confidence” in the Republican Party when it comes to protecting U.S. national security. And similarly, 36 percent of Northeasterners have “no confidence” in the Democratic Party. This provides further evidence that the public generally has low levels of confidence in both parties when it comes to national security.



This analysis was originally published on [Lawfare](#).