

Summary of Poll on Investigation of Russian Interference in the 2016 Election and Related Conduct of Trump and His Associates

I. Introduction

The American Constitution Society and Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington are partners on an initiative known as the Presidential Investigation Education Project to analyze and conduct public education on legal issues relating to the investigations of Russian interference in the 2016 election. This paper summarizes an online poll recently commissioned by the project to identify areas of particular public concern and gaps in awareness. Conducted in early August 2018, this online survey of 1000 individuals aged 18 and older across political parties addressed subjects including reaction to potential findings, various actions of Trump and his associates, and rationales for continuing the investigation, among other topics.

Most responses were polarized on party lines, with some variations. Key findings include:

- (1) Preventing foreign interference in elections and holding wrongdoers accountable are the most compelling rationales for continuing the investigation, and are top concerns across party lines.
- (2) A focus on Trump's lack of candor has particular impact on driving belief that Trump himself committed wrongdoing, and focus on Trump's deference to Russia also has a slight impact. A focus on convictions the Special Counsel has already obtained has particular impact on driving belief that Trump's associates committed wrongdoing. All three arguments -- lack of candor, Mueller conviction success, and deference to Russia -- as counter to the President's attacks on the Special Counsel investigation help at least a bit to move public opinion in support of the investigation.
- (3) Obstruction of justice relating to the inquiry is another top public concern across party lines, and people are more inclined to express concern about obstruction where the obstruction concerned commission of an underlying crime.
- (4) A majority believes the President should agree to an interview under oath with the Special Counsel, including a majority of those who identify as liberal to moderate Republicans and a majority of Independents.
- (5) People are more likely to view the Mueller inquiry as fair and support its continuation the more they are familiar with it.

II. Discussion

Compelling rationales for continuing Mueller inquiry

National security-related concerns were highest among reasons offered for supporting the Special Counsel's investigation. When asked to rank the importance of different reasons on a scale from not at all important to one of the most important, 40% said protecting the country from any foreign interference and 39% said addressing Russian interference specifically were among the most important reasons, and 75% said these reasons were at least somewhat important. Another top rationale across party lines was that getting real answers is the only way to put this matter behind us, with 73% saying this was at least somewhat important and only 27% saying it was not at all or not too important.

Rationales that focus more personally on the President drew sharper partisan division. For example, while 37% said one of the most important reasons for investigating was uncovering whether Trump or his family and associates have financial ties to foreign governments that make them security risks, 34% said this was not too important or not at all important.

These findings appear to be consistent with an August 27-28 Public Policy Polling and Law Works Poll that found that 67% of Republicans and 82% of independents either strongly or somewhat agree with the general proposition that it is important for the Special Counsel's investigation "to follow the facts wherever they lead."

Trump dishonesty is a particularly compelling argument driving a perception that Trump committed wrongdoing, and one of several arguments that drive support for the inquiry

Most respondents supported allowing the Special Counsel to continue his inquiry to its conclusion, with 52% saying it was important to continue and 37% saying it was not. Support for continuation increased to 55% in the context of discussions about Trump's lack of honesty and trustworthiness. Arguments about Trump's softness on Russia and Mueller's success in obtaining convictions also were somewhat effective in increasing support for the investigation when held up against lines of attack against the investigation.

A focus on Trump dishonesty was particularly effective in driving the perception that Trump himself committed wrongdoing, with the percentage of those holding this view increasing from 48% to 53% when hearing this argument (and from 54%-61% among Independents and cross-ideological partisans). A focus on Mueller convictions to date is particularly effective in driving a view that Trump campaign associates committed wrongdoing, with the percentage holding that view increasing from 49% to 52% after hearing that argument.

It merits note that the poll was conducted prior to the guilty verdict in the trial of top Trump campaign advisor Paul Manafort and guilty plea by his top aide and lawyer Michael Cohen. A *Washington Post* poll conducted on August 26-29 showed even [stronger support](#) for the special counsel investigation, with 63% supporting the investigation and only 29% opposing.

Obstructive conduct is among top public concerns

Respondents across party lines were concerned about obstructive conduct by the President. When asked to react to 25 different possible actions relating to the Russia investigation, a Trump self-pardon was considered “one of the worst” by the highest percentage of respondents, 44%, with another 32% saying this scenario was very bad or somewhat bad—and only 24% saying it was not too bad or not bad at all.

Several other obstruction-related scenarios also drew particular concern, with over 75% of respondents finding each the following to be “one of the worst,” “very bad,” or “somewhat bad” things that could have happened:

- Trump tried to cover up inappropriate contacts his staff or family had with Russia
- Members of Trump staff tried to cover up and mislead the FBI and Robert Mueller
- Trump obstructed justice
- Trump tried to improperly interfere with FBI and Special Counsel investigations into his campaign’s involvement with Russia

These findings are noteworthy in light of the fact that August *Washington Post* poll [found](#) that 53% of respondents (and 53% of self-identified independent voters) think that Trump has “tried to interfere with Mueller’s investigation in a way that amounts to obstruction of justice.”

A solid majority supports Trump agreeing to an interview under oath

Of all respondents, 54% believed President Trump should agree to an interview under oath with the Special Counsel, 30% said he should refuse, and 16% did not know. A majority of self-identified independents (53%) and a majority of self-identified liberal to moderate Republicans (51%) also believed Trump should agree to such an interview. However, there was a strong split on partisan lines regarding whether refusal to agree to an interview indicates guilt, with 81% of Democrats and only 8% of Republicans saying it would.

Familiarity with inquiry

Respondents who are more familiar with the inquiry were more likely to view it as fair and impartial and support its completion. Of those who had heard about the inquiry, 51% said they believed it was likely being conducted in a fair and impartial manner, while this view was held by 54% of those who had heard a lot and 25% of those had not heard about the inquiry. Similarly, 57% of those who had heard about the inquiry believed it to be important for it to continue through completion, while 39% of those who had not heard of it held this view.

Other Issues

The poll also covered Supreme Court issues and hypothetical impeachment scenarios:

- *Role of Supreme Court.* A majority believe it is either very important, important, or somewhat important for the Supreme Court to act a check on President Trump

- interfering with the Mueller investigation (54%), while an even greater majority support the more general proposition that the Court should act as a check on executive branch interference with criminal investigation of presidents (70%).
- *Impeachment.* At the time of polling, before Paul Manafort's conviction and Michael Cohen's guilty plea, a minority believed Congress should start impeachment proceedings based on Trump's involvement with Russia (34% yes-48% no). With respect to potential investigative results, more people felt that a finding that the President obstructed justice (47%-37%) should trigger impeachment proceedings than a finding that high-level individuals in his campaign involved Russians in the campaign (33%-46%). People believe impeachment should concern actions the President took, not actions by people under him.