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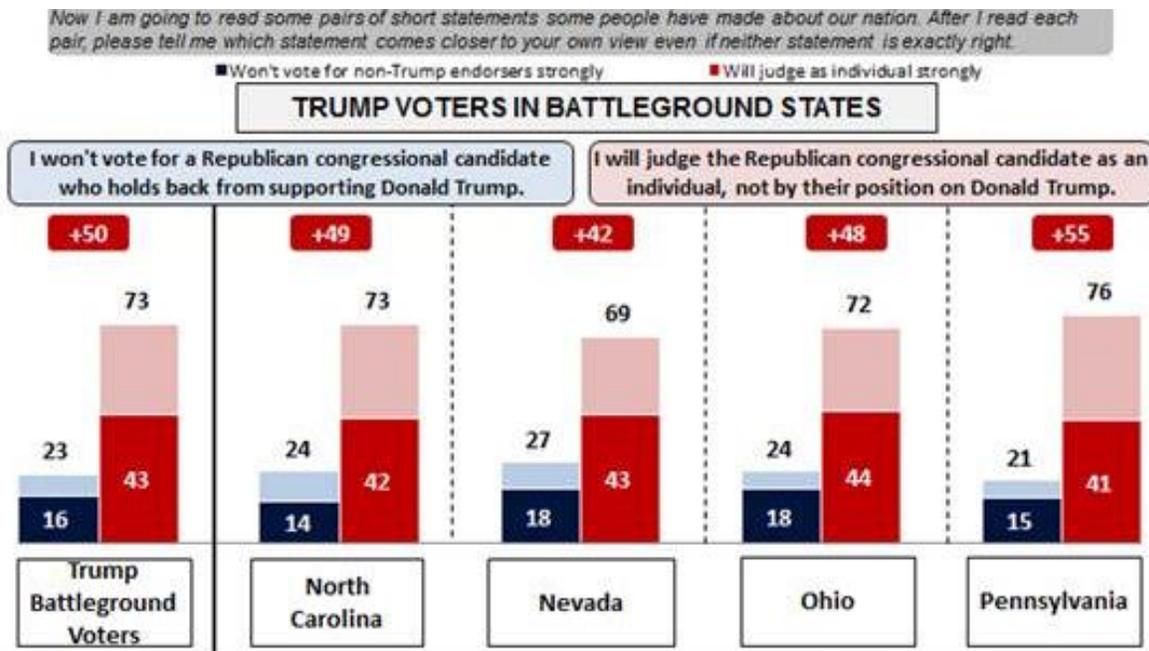
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## Trump Scorched Earth Plan Threatens Downballot Republicans

*The path for Republican candidates just got a whole lot narrower*

For at-risk Republican candidates, wrestling with how to run vis-à-vis Donald Trump is nothing new. Distancing yourself from Trump risks alienating his hardcore supporters, but embracing Trump could push away moderate Republicans and swing voters turned off by the GOP nominee. Until recently it seemed they may have their cake and eat it too. A season of attempts to tie them to the unpopular GOP nominee had failed as a 48 percent plurality of voters believed “most Republicans do not share Donald Trump’s ideas.” Republican Senate candidates were running 7 points ahead of Trump across the battleground and their maintaining control of the upper chamber was more likely than not.

Donald Trump’s determination to publicly admonish Republicans withdrawing support in reaction to his sexually aggressive 2005 remarks snapped the tightrope those candidates walked. [Democracy Corps’ September battleground survey for WVWVAF](#) found almost *one-quarter of Trump voters in the most contested states are prepared to punish a Republican congressional candidate who holds back from supporting Donald Trump.*





Polls conducted after last Friday’s revelations confirm the price of abandoning the top of the ticket. In the Politico/Morning Consult poll, [74 percent of Republicans said GOP leaders should continue to back the embattled nominee](#) and the NBC/Wall Street Journal poll found [67 percent of Republicans and Republican leaning Independents wish the same of GOP congressional candidates](#).

We will watch the “post-video” polls to see whether candidates like John McCain, Kelly Ayotte, Joe Heck, and Pat Toomey are overcoming that deficit with enough “Never Trump” Republicans. For now, two things are clear. First, an “unshackled” Donald Trump has reinvigorated Democratic hopes of retaking the U.S. Congress. Second, Democrats must change their message to take advantage of this new opportunity because the well-covered flight from Trump undermines attempts to connect downballot Republicans to the GOP nominee.