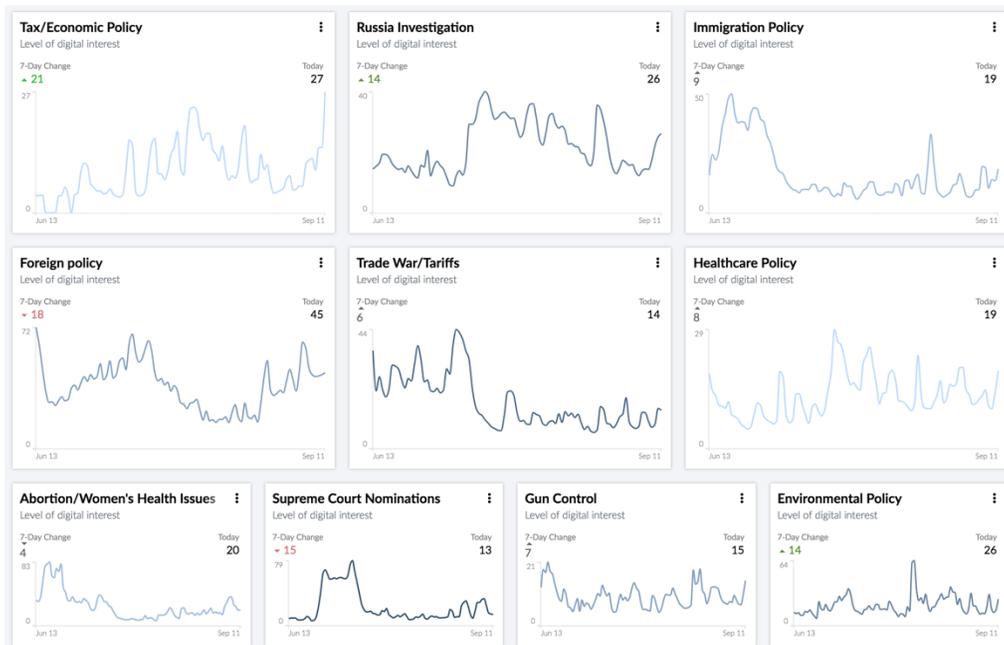


U.S. Midterms Signal Observer

September 11, 2018

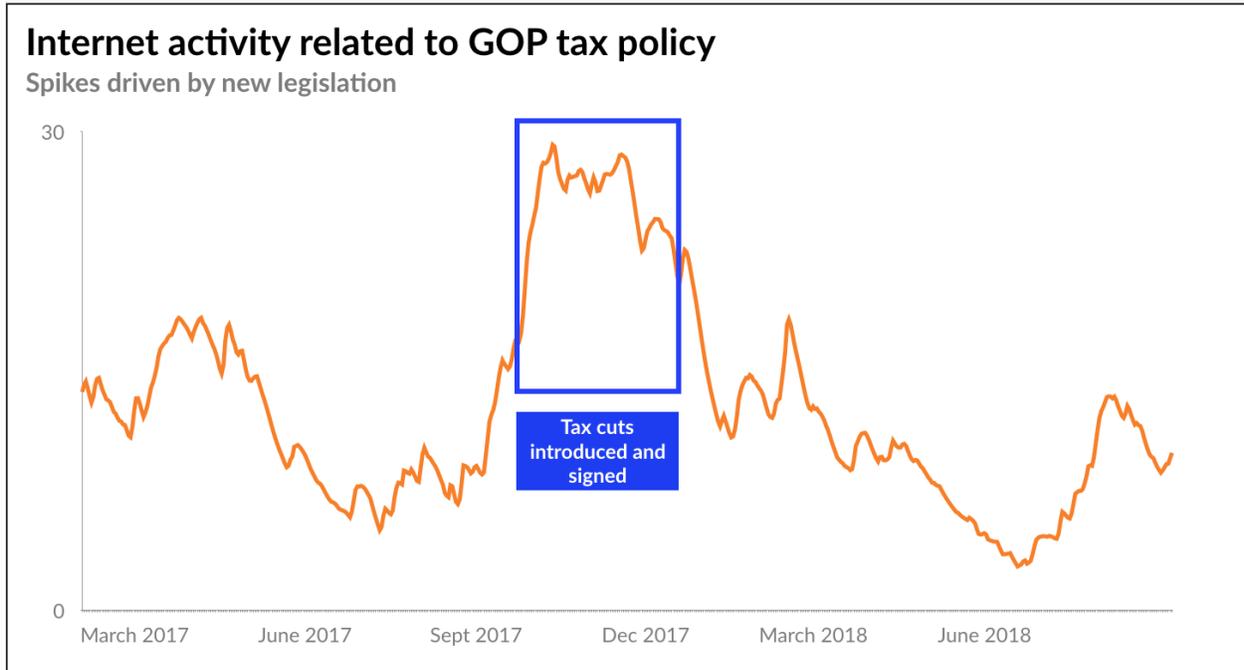


Predata’s U.S. Midterms signals capture the level of online activity related to issues of importance in the November 2018 elections. The signals—which cover issues ranging from the economy to the environment to the Russia investigation—provide an indication of which topics are most salient to voters at any given time.

Currently, the signals show that:

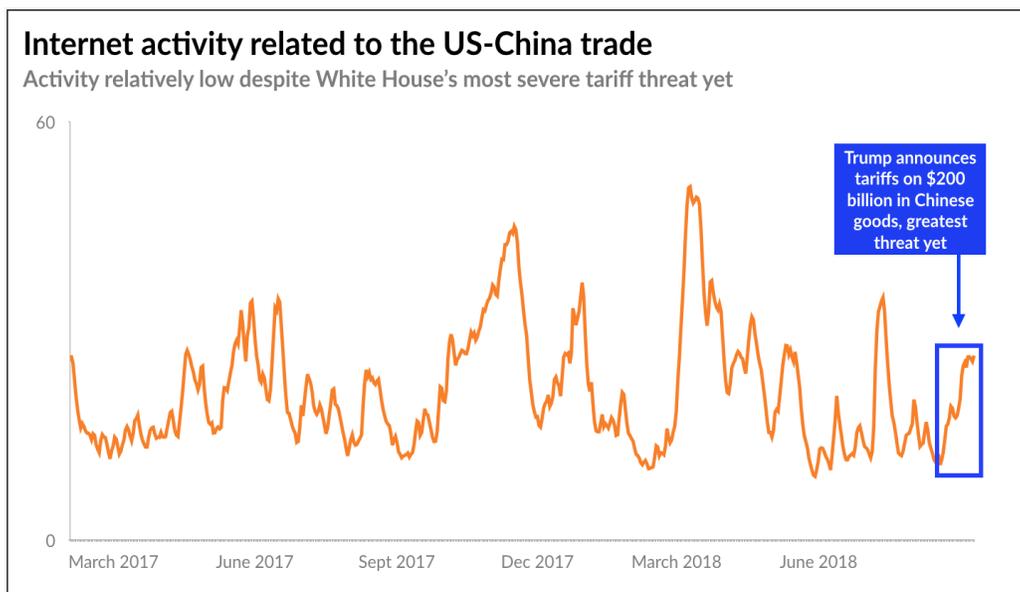
- Tax policy and the U.S. economy are consistently drawing attention online
- Despite a likely impending escalation in the U.S.-China trade war, online interest in the subject is relatively low.
- Limited online interest in Supreme Court issues suggests opposition around Brett Kavanaugh’s confirmation hearings may not materialize, despite the sense that his appointment could pose a threat to *Roe v. Wade*.
- Gun control is unlikely to be a salient issue for the Midterms.
- Interest in the Russia investigation trailed off following the Manafort trial but is poised to rebound.

Taxes: Attention to taxes again elevated



As the chart shows, online interest in taxes and tax policy surged towards the end of last year, as congressional Republicans pushed through the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017. The signal declined in the following months, as other issues came to the fore and some voters soured on the law, which polling shows had a 37-percent approval rating. In late July 2018, Republicans [released](#) another tax cut plan, aimed at energizing the base and focusing voter attention on the buoyant economy. Digital interest in tax policy is now elevated relative to its highest level in the last year and is moving upward.

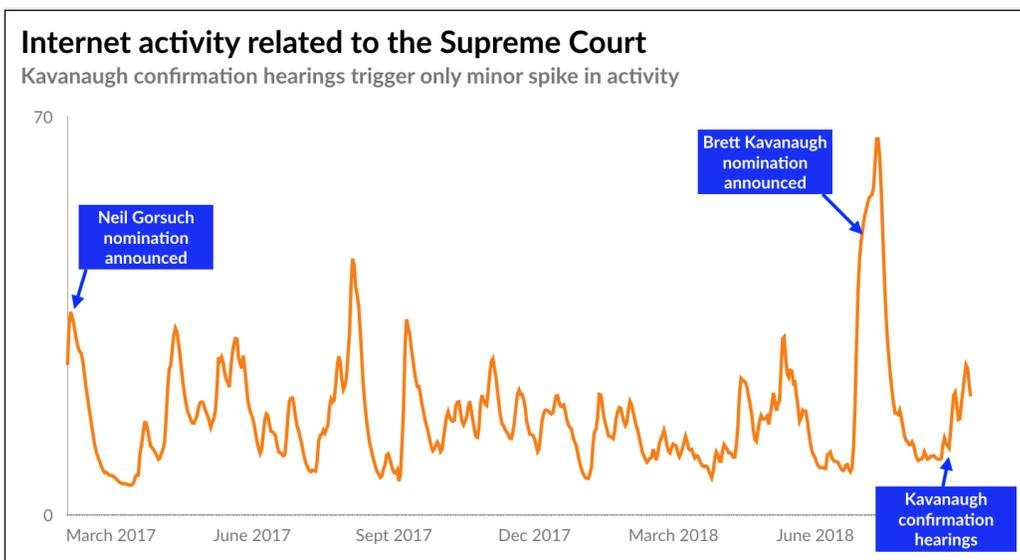
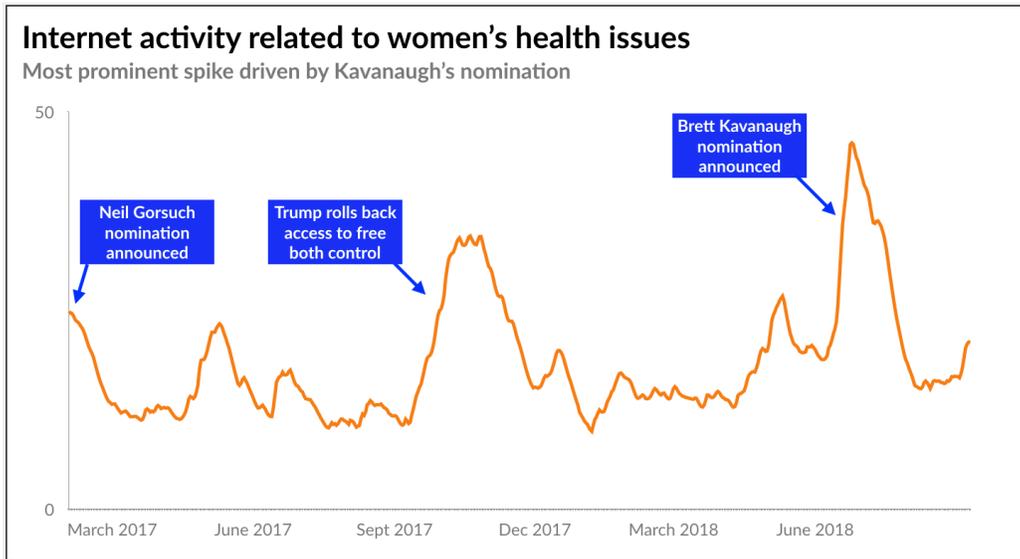
Trade: Escalation against China seems likely, but American public relatively disinterested



A Predata anticipatory signal measuring the likelihood of a trade dispute escalation remains high, indicating that the White House will follow through on a threat President Trump made last Friday to impose tariffs on \$200 billion in Chinese goods. That announcement came days after the anticipatory signal began climbing and reached its highest level since April 2018, when the White House announced and then implemented the first batch of tariffs against China.

Though this would be the largest escalation yet in the U.S.-China trade dispute by the Trump Administration, the American public did not pay the announcement a commensurately high level of interest compared to the levels of online interest in March 2018 when President Trump first targeted China with tariffs. That could mean that with the U.S. economy continuing to thrive, Trump's protectionist policies may not be a particularly salient issue for voters.

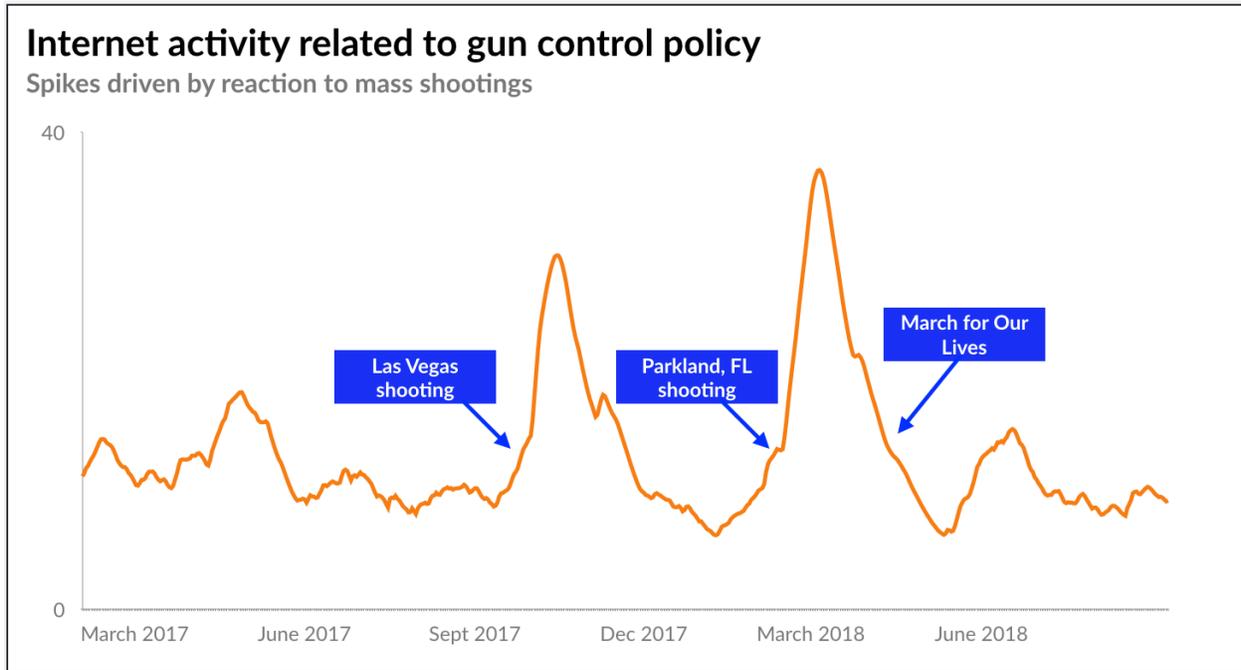
Women’s Health: Kavanaugh seen as greater threat to reproductive rights than Gorsuch



Attention to women’s health issues surged three major times during President Trump’s term—twice due to his nominees to the Supreme Court, and once due to the roll back of funding for government-subsidized birth control. The nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to replace retiring Justice Anthony Kennedy provoked a much stronger reaction in the digital realm than did the nomination of Neil Gorsuch. After the Kavanaugh nomination, Predata’s women’s health signal was driven by increased traffic on web pages related to *Roe v. Wade* and other Supreme Court cases that pertained to women’s health. The relatively heightened signal activity may mean that voters believe Kavanaugh’s appointment will be of great consequence to cases related to women’s health, perhaps even *Roe v. Wade*.

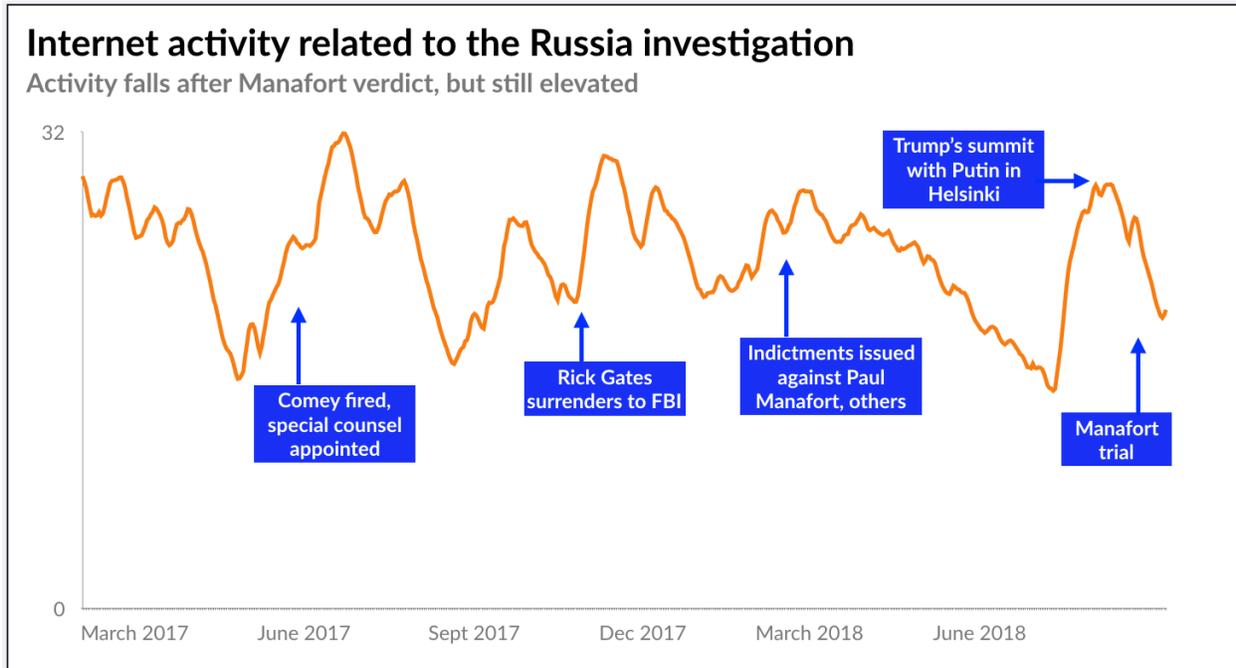
But, when compared to Kavanaugh’s nomination, there has been relatively limited activity related to the Supreme Court itself during Kavanaugh’s confirmation hearings. This likely means that resistance to his nomination may be limited.

Gun Control: Already out of public memory following tragedies last year



Digital interest related to gun policy and gun control has declined rapidly since the March for Our Lives protests in the spring of 2018. Recent controversies, like a proposal enabling people to 3D-print guns that was blocked by a judge late last month, have not spurred a renewed level of online interest in firearms policy; as the signal shows, American attention only turns to the gun debate after a mass shooting. Should another tragic shooting occur near the midterms, candidates from both parties could focus on the issue intently for a brief period of time. Barring that, the gun control debate will likely remain a secondary issue in the national conversation, although it may exhibit variation among different states.

Russia Investigation: American interest remains high



After a steady decline in internet interest in Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s investigation into Russian meddling in the 2016 election, the signal for the investigation leapt to its highest level of 2018 amid [Trump’s summit with Putin in Helsinki](#) and the subsequent trial of former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort. The signal has fallen slightly since the Manafort conviction, appears poised to pick back up. Overall, the signal demonstrates that developments in the investigation continue to draw the interest of the American public.

Other Predata U.S. Midterms signals, in brief:

Immigration Policy tracks interest in U.S. immigration laws, scandals, and related Supreme Court cases. The signal is currently muted, a sign that public attention in the digital realm has moved on from last month's family separation crisis.

Foreign Policy tracks interest in various Trump Administration policies, international visits, and treaties, and is designed to be a general barometer of public interest in the President's international activities. This signal is currently elevated, after the release of journalist Bob Woodward's book drove attention to national security officials who reportedly have been restraining the President.

Healthcare Policy tracks interest in Trump Administration policies, healthcare policies supported by Democratic politicians, and Supreme Court cases related to healthcare. The signal recently surged after left-leaning candidate victories in Democratic primary elections in New York and the Midwest—a reflection that those wins [may have galvanized](#) left-wing voters elsewhere in the nation.

Environmental Policies tracks interest in White House environmental policies, international climate-change treaties, and U.S. energy production. The signal is currently spiking, likely in response to the California wildfires and newly announced rollbacks of Obama-era pollution regulations.

More on this Report:

Terminology:

Signals measuring internet activity, also known as *descriptive signals*, are aggregates of the raw web traffic data. These signals are used to capture current trends and provide indications and warning around more idiosyncratic events. The signal's value indicates the relative level of aggregate activity, with 0 being the lowest and 100 being the highest since 2010.

Anticipatory Signals are generated by Predata's algorithms to be leading indicators for future events. The machine learning process identifies patterns of digital activity that preceded past events; when those patterns resurface, the resulting predictive signal increases, indicating higher likelihood of an event.

About Predata:

Predata is a platform for analyzing publicly available web activity metadata to measure political, social, and economic instability. Predata's software gathers metadata from tens of thousands of digital web sources each day. The system generates signals based on this data, measuring the activity of individual sources or collections of sources over time.

In addition to these quantitative measures of online activity, the Predata software uses a proprietary machine learning algorithm to identify predictive indicators. By correlating the metadata with geopolitical events, the Predata algorithm uses machine learning to identify activity patterns that occur ahead of historical training, generating predictive signals.

Predata has been used to provide context on and predict events ranging from civil unrest to terrorism to regime change.

For more information on this report, reach out to us at contact@predata.com.