

navigator*

Thursday, October 16th

Messaging on the Government Shutdown: A Guide for Advocates



Credit: Shutterstock/Lucky Photographer

Key Takeaways:

- The ongoing harms of the shutdown that trouble Americans most are millions missing paychecks. On those to come, economic fallout broadly, followed by delayed/diminished care for veterans, military families, kids, and pregnant women are most concerning.
- Americans worry more about rising health care costs than the shutdown on its own. Highlighting real numbers that impact broad populations – cost hikes across the board and millions losing coverage – land best, rather than targeted data points and technical language.
- Groups like seniors, cancer survivors, veterans, Americans with disabilities, and children are especially sympathetic victims of Republicans' health care policies.
- Democrats in Congress are positioned for positive views if they successfully defend health care in the shutdown: should they fail, they will take some heat.

Messaging Guidance:

Dos

- ✓ **Focus on health care.** Health care costs rising and Americans losing health care coverage remain the most concerning aspects of this shutdown, and stopping these outcomes is the top priority Americans have for Democrats in Congress. Keeping the debate on this terrain is crucial.
- ✓ **Keep the data points on health care harms broad in impact and specific in scope.** Americans are deeply concerned about millions of Americans losing health care, as well as costs doubling/increasing by 114%.
- ✓ **Make it personal by highlighting specific stories.** Lean into the impacts on sympathetic groups: seniors, cancer survivors and people with chronic illnesses, veterans and military families, Americans with disabilities, and children.
- ✓ **Make sure to drive home this is Trump and Republicans' shutdown.** Emphasize that they have control of the White House and Congress and refuse to negotiate – and will only pass a bill that cuts health care/raises health care costs.
 - **Highlight shutdown consequences with impact.** Lead with already missed paychecks – and that many will never receive that pay, and follow with potential for broad economic damage and delayed/diminished care and benefits for veterans, military families, pregnant women, and children.

Don'ts

- × **Stray too far from health care.** The past two waves of Navigator research confirm that keeping the conversation to health care is the best message for progressives.
- × **Lean as much on wonky policy without impacts for people.** Highlighting “enhanced premium tax credits” without explaining that they make health care more affordable will fail to reach Americans where they are/what they know.
- × **Narrow the impact.** Pointing to harms from Republicans’ health care policies at the broadest level/greatest scope is key – rather than communicating on just rural communities or other groups (helpful to highlight, but it must be in tandem with the broader consequences that more Americans will feel).
- × **Focus only on impacts on doctors and providers.** More Americans are patients than providers: including doctors and providers works, as long as the focus remains on patients and families first.

Most Concerning From Shutdown So Far: Failure to Pay Millions

Shutdown persuadables** are most concerned about millions not receiving their paychecks (54%), services for veterans and Social Security recipients stopping (39%), and critical food safety inspections stopping (29%).

Below is a list of consequences that have happened so far from the government shutdown. Which of the following two do you find most concerning, if any?

	% top two most concerning	Dem	Ind	Rep	MAGA Reps*	Non-MAGA Reps*	Shutdown Pers.**
Millions of Americans did not receive their paychecks on time and may never be paid for the time of the shutdown	61%	70	51	55	52	59	54
Basic customer services for veterans or Social Security recipients have stopped	37	33	42	41	37	46	39
Air travel has been delayed and canceled as air traffic controllers and TSA agents go unpaid and stop showing up to work	26	26	26	26	28	24	19
Some critical food safety inspections have stopped	23	27	24	19	21	16	29
Infrastructure projects, including upgrading the electric grid, roads, and bridges, have been cancelled or defunded	18	20	17	17	19	14	14
Clean energy projects have been cancelled	6	8	5	5	5	5	5

*"MAGA Republicans" are Republicans who identify as "a supporter of the MAGA movement" on a separate question, while "non-MAGA Republicans" are Republicans who do not consider themselves supporters of the MAGA movement or are not sure. **"Shutdown persuadables" are defined as those who say they do not blame the shutdown on either Democrats or Trump and Republicans, blame both of these equally, or don't know, and excludes leaners towards either group on a follow-up ask. Nationwide survey of 1,000 registered voters conducted October 9-October 13, 2025. For more info, visit navigatortresearch.org.

Most Concerning Potential Outcomes of Shutdown: Harm to Economy, Military Pay Delays, Loss of Food for Women/Children

Americans across the board are concerned about potential broad economic harms from the shutdown.

Below is a list of potential consequences of the government shutdown. Which of the following two do you find most concerning, if any?

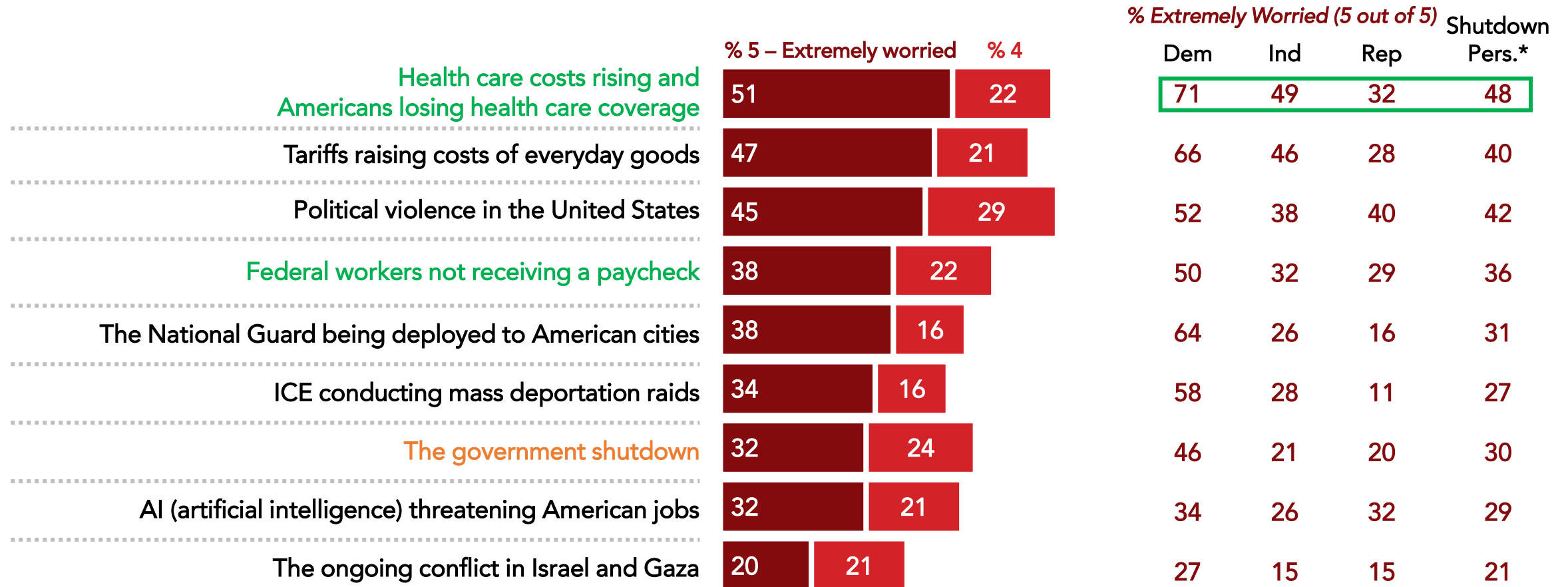
	% top two most concerning	Dem	Ind	Rep	MAGA Reps*	Non-MAGA Reps*	Shutdown Pers.**
The shutdown harming the U.S. economy, potentially costing billions of dollars each week and increasing unemployment	50%	55	45	47	45	51	47
U.S. military service members and veterans not getting paid and facing disruptions in health care and childcare services	42	33	44	50	54	45	34
Millions of children and pregnant women losing help affording healthy food and baby formula	41	52	36	31	31	31	42
Federal workers losing their jobs permanently	27	31	27	23	23	23	22
Delays or freezes in medical research to study things like cures for cancer	11	13	9	9	9	9	10

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Shutdown Impacts Are More Worrying Than the Shutdown Itself

More Americans are “extremely worried” about health care costs rising (51%) than “the government shutdown” on its own (32%).

Please indicate how worried you are about each item, where 1 means you’re not at all worried about that item and 5 means you’re extremely worried.

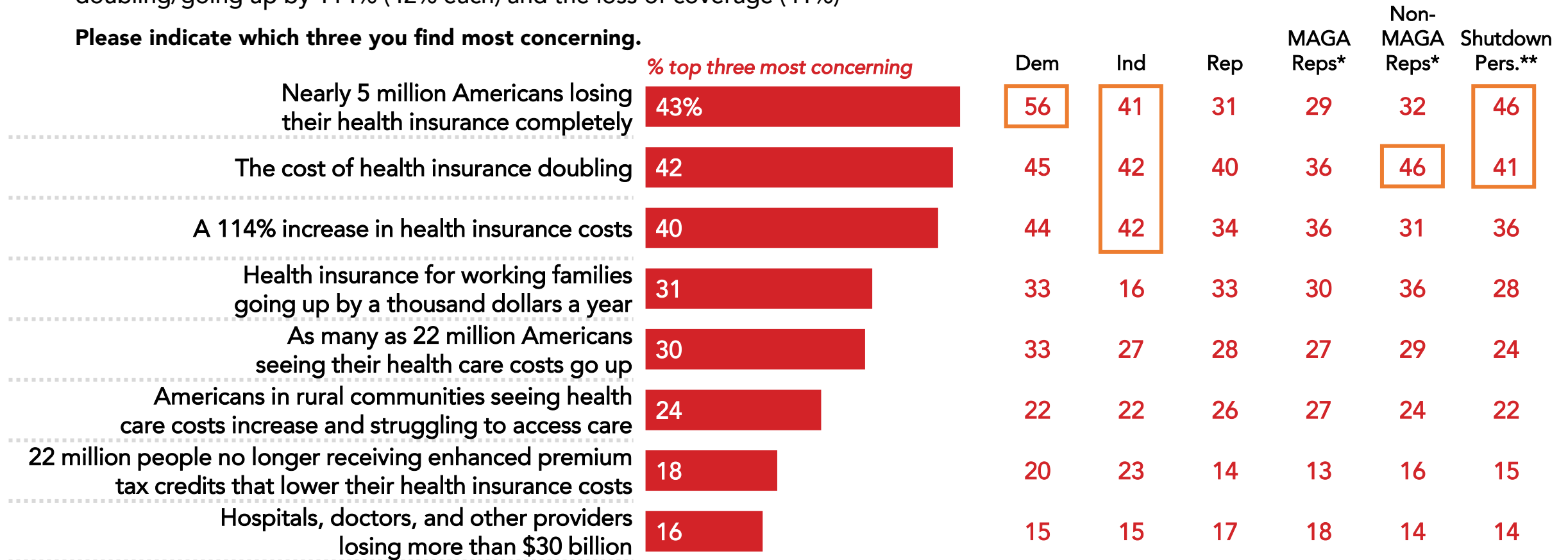


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Specific Health Care Cost Increases With Widespread Impacts Are Most Troubling; More Technical/Targeted Harms Are Less So

Democrats are most concerned by the loss of coverage for millions (56%), while independents are equally concerned by costs doubling/going up by 114% (42% each) and the loss of coverage (41%)

Please indicate which three you find most concerning.



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Seniors, Cancer Survivors, Veterans, Americans With Disabilities, Children Especially Sympathetic Victims of GOP Health Care Cuts

Please indicate how concerning you find each statement on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means it is not at all concerning and 5 means it is extremely concerning.

	% 5 – Extremely concerning		% Total Concerning (4%-5%)				Shutdown Pers.*
		% 4	Overall	Dem	Ind	Rep	
Seniors will struggle to afford prescriptions and nursing homes could have to cut care – or even close	57	18	75	89	67	64	74
Cancer survivors and people with chronic illnesses will lose coverage and face drastically higher costs	57	16	73	90	63	60	71
Many veterans will lose health care coverage, making it harder for them to get treatment for injuries and illnesses from their service	57	19	76	90	67	64	71
Americans with disabilities will lose health care coverage and face drastically higher costs	55	20	75	91	62	62	73
Children will lose health care coverage and schools could have to cut back on student health care, help for students with disabilities, and even school nurses	54	18	71	88	61	57	66
Middle class families will have to tighten their budgets as they see their health care costs more than double	51	23	73	88	62	62	68
Pregnant women and new mothers could struggle to access pre-natal care and health care for newborn babies	50	19	69	88	55	54	65
Families in small towns may now have to drive hours for both emergencies and regular doctors' visits, as hundreds of rural hospitals could close in part due to Medicaid cuts	50	23	73	89	59	60	71
Small business owners will struggle to afford health care coverage for themselves and their employees	44	28	71	88	60	57	67
Americans recovering from addiction will face cuts to substance abuse and mental health treatments	43	21	64	81	55	49	68

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Blocking Cuts to Health Care and Increases in Health Care Costs Are Most Important Priorities for Democrats in Congress

Republicans, including MAGA and non-MAGA Republicans*, most prioritize stopping increases in health care costs (34% and 38%, respectively), while shutdown persuadables** say stopping Medicaid and ACA cuts are most important (41%).

As elected officials negotiate over the shutdown, which of the following two items do you think should be the most important priorities for Democrats in Congress?

	% top two most important	Dem	Ind	Rep	MAGA Reps*	Non-MAGA Reps*	Shutdown Pers.**
Stopping cuts to Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act that would strip people of their health care	41%	52	42	29	27	32	41
Stopping Trump's overreach and abuse of power	33	55	34	11	9	14	30
Stopping increases in health care costs, including insurance premiums	31	27	26	36	34	38	27
Stopping increases in the costs of everyday goods due to tariffs	25	24	27	25	24	27	29
Stopping new tax breaks for the wealthy and big corporations	20	20	12	22	21	23	21
Stopping cuts to crucial federal programs, like medical research	12	10	7	15	19	10	8

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Democrats' Success in Protecting Healthcare in the Shutdown Has High Stakes

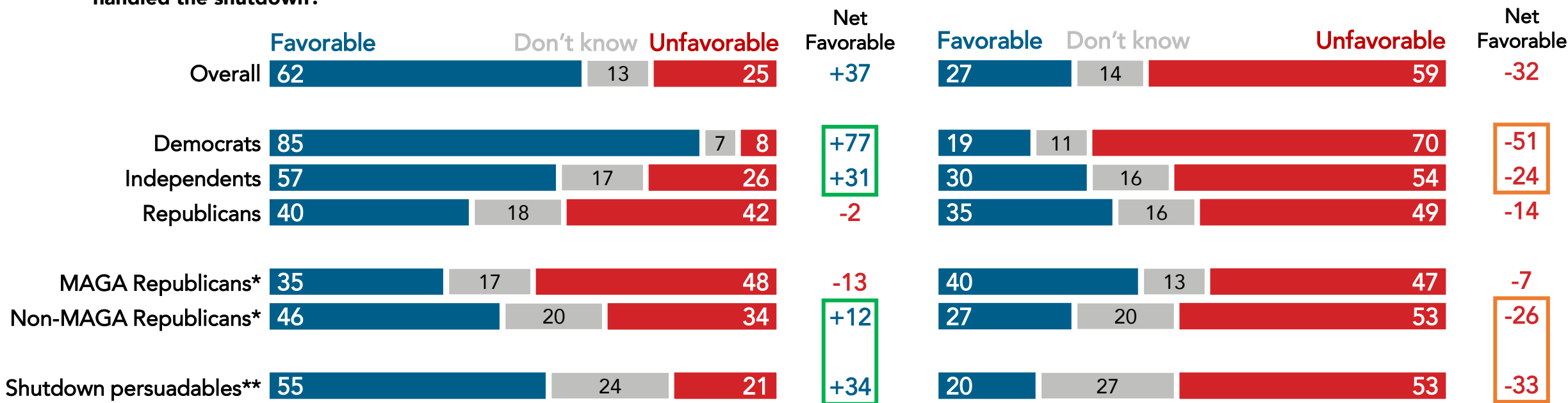
While independents say they would be net +31 favorable towards Democrats' handling if they succeed, they will be net -24 if they fail.

As you may know, the Democrats in Congress say they would vote to end the shutdown as long as Trump and the Republicans agree to a deal that extends health care tax credits and restores health care coverage for millions of Americans.

If a deal is reached on this to end the shutdown and restore health care, would that leave you with a favorable or unfavorable view of how Democrats in Congress handled the shutdown?

Another way the shutdown could end is if some Democrats vote to reopen the government **without any deal to restore health care**.

If the shutdown ends **without restoring any health care**, would that leave you with a favorable or unfavorable view of how Democrats in Congress handled the shutdown?



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About Navigator

In a world where the news cycle is the length of a tweet, our leaders often lack the real-time public-sentiment analysis to shape the best approaches to talking about the issues that matter the most. Navigator is designed to act as a consistent, flexible, responsive tool to inform policy debates by conducting research and reliable guidance to inform allies, elected leaders, and the press. Navigator is a project led by pollsters from Global Strategy Group and GBAO along with an advisory committee, including: Jessica Floyd, The Hub Project; Christina Reynolds; Mike Podhorzer; Jesse Ferguson, progressive strategist; Navin Nayak; Stephanie Valencia, EquisLabs; and Melanie Newman, Planned Parenthood Action Fund.

About the Study

Global Strategy Group conducted a public opinion survey among a sample of 1,000 registered voters from October 9-October 13, 2025. The survey was conducted online, recruiting respondents from an opt-in online panel vendor. Respondents were verified against a voter file and special care was taken to ensure the demographic composition of our sample matched that of the national registered voter population across a variety of demographic variables. The margin of error for the full sample at the 95 percent level of confidence is +/- 3.1 percentage points. The margin of error for subgroups varies and is higher.

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To learn more about Navigator:

<http://navigatorresearch.org>

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