



Focusing Debates on Trump's Honesty, Tax Fairness, and Government Shutdowns

Welcome to NAVIGATOR — a project designed to better understand the American public's views on issues of the day. This edition features findings from a national online survey of 1,116 registered voters conducted January 28-31, 2019. This includes 1,012 voters sampled nationwide and an additional 104 interviews with no partisan lean.

Every month, we pick a few topics for exploration. The topics we selected aren't meant to cover every part of every issue area, but rather provide a unique insight into what Americans say and believe about issues that matter. This month we focused on:

Topic 1: Why does Trump lie and why does it matter?

Americans agree: The president lies. But showing how these lies reveal self-interest and cause damage to the country is more compelling when considering policy positions than focusing on President Trump's personal character.

Topic 2: What do Americans think about taxing the super-rich?

The public is divided over which party should handle "taxes" in the abstract – but Democrats have a clear advantage if the conversation focuses on who pays what.

Topic 3: With new allegations of financial crimes and political corruption swirling around the White House, what are Americans most – and least – worried about?

Whether directly or indirectly connected to President Trump, allegations of wrongdoing continue to emerge involving his allies and business ventures. But some allegations, like accepting bribes or favors from foreign governments, generate more concern than others, like campaign finance violations.

Navigator's Special Release: What are the best reasons against another government shutdown?

Policy-makers wanting to avoid another shutdown can make their best case by keeping Donald Trump's political gamesmanship and selfishness at the center of the debate.

Americans believe the president tells lies, and not just small ones.

The American people broadly agree Donald Trump's relationship with the truth is fraught. One independent analysis counted over 8,000 "false or misleading statements" made by the president since taking office, and the public already believes the president is unusually dishonest.*

- Over half (**53% of Americans and 53% of independents**) believe Donald Trump "lies more often" than previous presidents, compared to 41% who say he lies about as often (30%) or less often (11%).
- Doubts about Trump's honesty also cross political lines: **even self-identified Republicans are evenly divided between lying "sometimes" or "often" (49%) and "seldom" or "never" (51%).**
- And among the 92% of Americans who believe Trump lies at least sometimes, most (55%) tend to believe plenty of them are "**big lies about very important things.**"

With virtual consensus that the president is not always truthful, what do Americans think is the deeper problem and how can policy-makers and other communicators speak to those concerns?

Don't waste time counting up the lies. Remind Americans why the president is being dishonest and that it's not about what's best for the country.

Many of the president's supporters continue standing by him, even while acknowledging he lies quite a bit. Four in ten (40%) of those who approve of the president's job performance say he often or sometimes lies, 54% say he makes misleading statements, and 65% say he exaggerates the truth. Many Americans have likely found ways to minimize or rationalize his mistruths. As advocacy and policy efforts are developed, the president's lies can best be countered not by tallying up all his lies or framing him as a compulsive liar, but rather reminding people that he lies for self-interested reasons – to protect or boost himself – not necessarily to advance the best policy positions for the country. **It's not about reciting the lies, it's about highlighting the motives and the repercussions.**

Even if you don't agree with either side completely, who do you agree with more:

Those who say Trump is a compulsive liar who just can't help himself. According to one count he has made more than 8,000 false or misleading claims since becoming president — around 6 per day.

Those who say Trump may bend the truth from time to time, but you can trust him to tell you what he thinks is best for the country — and do what is needed to get there.

Total



Independents



Those who say Trump lies all the time to protect himself from political or legal problems, and at the end of the day he will always put that first even when it's not the best for the country.

Those who say Trump may bend the truth from time to time, but you can trust him to tell you what he thinks is best for the country — and do what is needed to get there.

Total



Independents

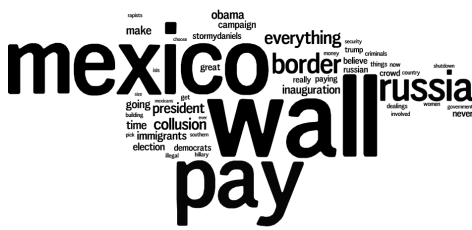


While there is no single, predominant risk, a clear theme emerges about presidential dishonesty – damage to the presidency and how a president has the ability to lead, both in world affairs and when the country is facing crisis. **Losing the trust of allies or negotiating partners (34%), degrading the dignity of the presidency (32%), endangering democracy by breeding distrust (30%), and crippling the president in potential crises (26%)** – all worry significant segments of the public. Increasing legal risk to the president (14%) and sending the wrong message to young people (14%) are lesser concerns.

*Kessler, Glenn; Rizzo, Salvador; Kelly, Meg (21 January 2019).

"President Trump made 8,158 false or misleading claims in his first two years". The Washington Post. Retrieved 10 February 2019.

What is the biggest lie of them all? Many Americans point to Trump's signature policy issue: the border wall, which he claimed Mexico was going to pay for. Secondly, people volunteer that Trump lies about Russia/collusion and about President Obama, among other things. (Note: This survey was conducted immediately after the conclusion of a five-week long government shutdown triggered by demands for funding a wall at the U.S.-Mexico border).

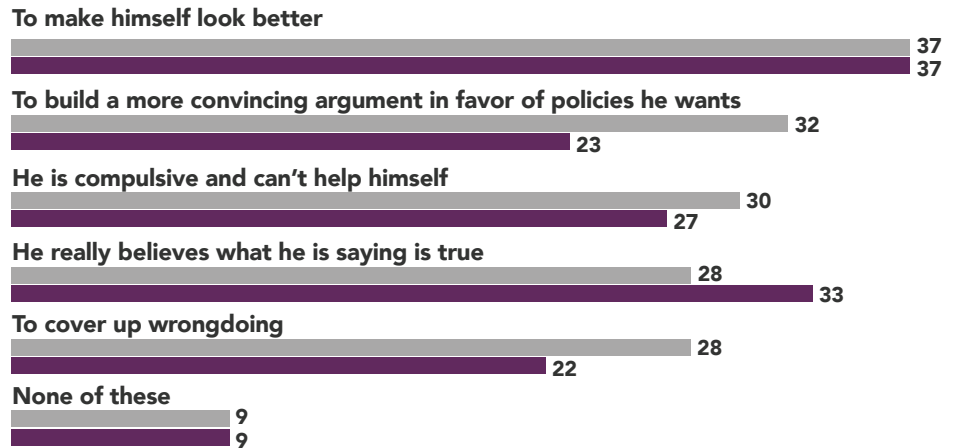


Many Americans believe Trump lies out of self-interest, but they also see that presidential dishonesty has consequences.

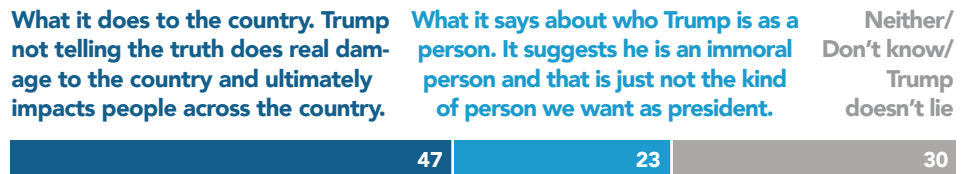
When pushed, Americans are far more likely to say that what is most troubling about Trump not telling the truth is that it **does real damage to the country**.

Below are some possible explanations for why Donald Trump might not always tell the truth. Which, if any, do you think are true most often?*

■ Total ■ Independents



Thinking more about Donald Trump not telling the truth, which of the following troubles you more?*



*Asked of 92% of respondents who say Donald Trump ever lies.

Who Likes Fact-Checkers

Observers looking for a neutral arbiter on the truth often turn to fact-checking organizations like Factcheck.org. But perception of these groups is highly skewed, with Democrats expressing favorable opinions and non-Democrats lukewarm at best, making fact-checkers ineffectual when countering false or misleading statements by already polarizing figures like Donald Trump.

■ Democrats ■ Independents ■ Republicans

% with a favorable opinion of

Independent fact-checkers



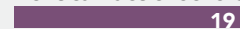
Political fact-checkers, such as Politifact or FactCheck.org



Independent fact-checkers



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More information about raising taxes on the super-wealthy increases support for doing so.

Since last summer, the two parties have been essentially tied on who could best handle “taxes” (this month: 41% Democrats, 42% Republicans; June 2018: 40% to 40%). However, when it comes to *specific groups to be taxed*, a Democratic advantage emerges: they lead by 8 points on “deciding what tax rates must be paid by the middle class” and by 12 points on “deciding what tax rates must be paid by multi-millionaires.” **The upshot: progressive tax policy advocates should keep the focus on who pays what.**

When freshman Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez suggested people with incomes over \$10 million should be taxed at a rate of 70%, some observers said it was a politically toxic idea. But the truth is the American people are supportive, especially once they hear an explanation of marginal tax rates.

To test exactly how giving more information on the proposal affects support, Navigator asked about the tax rate in two phases. First, all respondents were asked if they support “introducing a 70% marginal tax rate on income over \$10 million.” Even in this framing, 48% support, 28% oppose and 24% are undecided.

When those who are unsure or opposed read more information about the meaning of “marginal tax rate,” support grows to 55% overall while opposition barely moves (29%). The support is broad-based: while just half of Republicans (50%) oppose the plan, 39% back it, along with 47% of independents and 73% of Democrats. The policy defies the growing political gap between whites with and without college degrees, as majorities of each group support a 70% rate on income over \$10 million, and even lower-income Republicans support it by an 11-point margin, 46% to 35%.

Which party is better on taxes? It depends...

Who would you trust more to handle the following issues?

■ Democrats in Congress ■ Don't Know ■ Republicans in Congress

Taxes



Deciding what tax rates must be paid by middle class Americans*



Deciding what tax rates must be paid by multi-millionaires*



For a 70% tax rate, more information on marginal rates leads to higher support.

Initial question: Do you support or oppose introducing a 70% marginal tax rate on income over \$10 million?

Support

Not sure

Oppose



Follow-up for opponents and undecideds: As you may know, a marginal tax rate is a tax rate applied to each additional dollar of income over a certain income bracket. This means that, if the marginal tax rate is increased to 70% for income over \$10 million, a tax of 70 cents will be paid on every dollar made over \$10 million, but a lower tax rate is paid on the income below that amount (currently, for unmarried people the rate for income over \$500,000 is 37%).

■ Initial support ■ New support



Democrats



Independents



Republicans



White college



White non-college



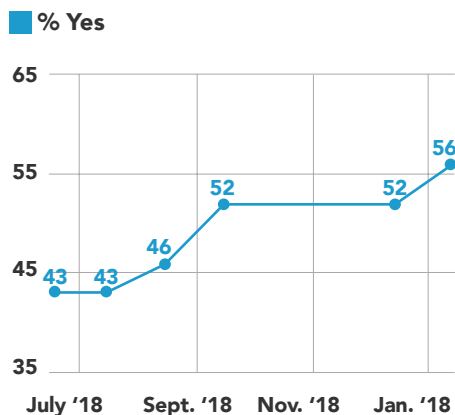
Black/Hispanic



Americans are more worried about bribery and pay-to-play than campaign finance violations.

The Special Counsel investigation and associated investigations into President Trump, his campaign, and his inner circle have grown so expansive, it can be hard for even the most keen observers to keep up. The latest Navigator finds **the share of Americans who believe the investigation has “uncovered crimes” has risen to a high of 56% – up 13 percentage points from 43% when Navigator first asked this question in June 2018.** Moreover, support for the investigation continuing tied its all-time high in our tracking (57% support it continuing, and 36% want it shut down), but despite this, this survey suggests the public may still have a lot to learn about what exactly the allegations are. For progressives making the case that the investigation is in the public interest, there are also specific allegations worth focusing on more than others.

To the best of your knowledge has the [investigation into Donald Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign and any Russian government involvement in the 2016 election] uncovered any crimes?



There are two dimensions to focus on when talking about allegations and Trump – familiarity and gravity.

There are many allegations – and criminal charges and convictions – in the news relating directly or indirectly to Donald Trump. Results show that some of these have yet to fully permeate the public consciousness and even then, not all are seen as especially serious.

To test the perceived seriousness of certain categories of wrongdoing and awareness of allegations against Trump – without one question tainting the other – Navigator showed half of respondents a question about the seriousness of wrongdoing without mention of Trump, and showed the other half of respondents a question about which crimes the Trump Organization may have been involved in. One clear result: **bribery and the involvement of organized crime worry people most of all.** But the activity Americans are most likely to associate with the Trump Organization – the violation of campaign finance laws – is among the least troubling.

HALF SAMPLE: Which of the following do you think are most serious?

Accepting bribes or favors from foreign governments

55

Doing business with people involved in organized crime

44

Bribing foreign governments

32

Engaging in pay-to-play politics

30

Money laundering

28

Violating campaign finance laws

17

Self-dealing

13

HALF SAMPLE: Which of the following do you think the Trump Organization has been involved in?

Violating campaign finance laws

46

Accepting bribes or favors from foreign governments

41

Engaging in pay-to-play politics

35

Self-dealing

33

Bribing foreign governments

29

Money laundering

28

Doing business with people involved in organized crime

27

Hush money not a top concern. But perjury is.

Drilling down into specific reports, the campaign finance-related allegations – regarding hush money payments made on behalf of Trump to cover up alleged affairs – are again among the least concerning for most Americans. On the other hand, the possibility the president directed his personal attorney to lie under oath or that his business was used to launder money appear to be much more troubling allegations in the eyes of the public. So, while efforts to cover-up crimes may be perceived as “worse” than some of the original crimes themselves, there are also crimes (such as money laundering or fraud) that concern plenty of Americans too.

Below are some specific allegations that have emerged from the Special Counsel investigation and related reports. Please indicate how concerning you find each one.

■ Extremely concerning ■ Very concerning

Allegations that...

Donald Trump directed his personal lawyer to lie under oath to Congress



Donald Trump's businesses have been used for money laundering



Donald Trump illegally used his non-profit foundation as a personal fund to settle lawsuits and make private purchases



Donald Trump pursued a deal to develop a skyscraper in Moscow during the 2016 election and the deal involved giving Russian President Vladimir Putin a \$50 million penthouse in the building for free



Major donors to the Trump inauguration received political favors



During the 2016 campaign, Donald Trump directed his lawyer to pay hush money to women who claim they had affairs with Trump



The shutdown entered the public consciousness in ways other political controversies did not, and Americans say “enough.”

It was a major event: 71% percent of Americans have heard “a lot” about the five-week-long shutdown, the longest in history. A political event that makes this kind of impact is a rarity.

- Our post-election November poll found that just 28% had heard a lot about the firing of Attorney General Jeff Sessions.
- As of May 2018, a whole year after Robert Mueller’s appointment, only 49% of Americans had heard a lot about the Special Counsel investigation.
- Even the family separation crisis, ongoing for months when Navigator asked about it in July 2018, was very familiar to only 60% of Americans.

One thing that may set the shutdown apart from other major political controversies is how many people saw its impacts firsthand: a third (34%) report knowing someone directly affected by the shutdown or else having been personally affected themselves.

There is also agreement about who was responsible for allowing the shutdown to last as long as it did. Fifty-three percent (53%) of Americans blame President Trump and his Republican allies in Congress over Democrats (39%). While partisans unsurprisingly blame the other side, more independents blame Trump and the GOP (48%) than blame Democrats (34%).

“Enough with the shutdowns.”

Despite President Trump and his allies trying to make the shutdown about his border wall, the public is widely opposed to shutting down the federal government as a negotiation tactic. Americans widely reject the use of shutdowns “even if it’s for an important issue or cause” they believe in, with nearly all Democrats, but **also 71% of independents and even 43% of Republicans in agreement.**

Regardless of what you thought about the recent shutdown and thinking about the future... Which of the following statements do you agree with?

Enough with the shutdowns — it is never right to shut down the federal government, even if it’s for an important issue or cause that I believe in.

I would support shutting down the federal government in the future if it meant making progress on an important issue or cause that I really believe in.

Total

68

32

Democrats

90

10

Independents

71

29

Republicans

43

57

On the brink of another shutdown, progressives should focus on nearer-term, urgent matters of unpaid workers' personal finances and public safety.

During the shutdown, there was a steady stream of news covering its many consequences, such as national parks and monuments closing across the country, billions of dollars in lost economic activity, and potential cuts to food assistance affecting millions. Yet from a list of consequences, **Americans showed most concern for workers going without paychecks and for safety services not getting done.**

Save for Later

Messaging on the broader economic impact of the shutdown should not be abandoned forever. Public perception of the strength the economy is down nine percentage points from +22 net positive in December. And when asked which consequence from the shutdown concerned people the most – harm to federal workers, harm to the economy, harm to one's own life, and public safety – the economy came second. This may be an argument for the long term; but in the short term, Americans are more preoccupied with the immediate pain and risks.

Below are some specific things that reportedly occurred due to the shutdown. Please indicate how concerning you find each one...

■ **Extremely concerning** ■ **Very concerning**

For the first time ever during a shutdown some of those enlisted in the U.S. military had to work without being paid, leaving their families to rely on food pantries and donations to get through their daily lives.*

52

26

800,000 federal employees went without pay for more than a month, leaving many unable to keep up with bills, pay for food, and get through day-to-day life, while many others were indirectly hurt and won't even receive back-pay.

51

20

Many air traffic controllers, air marshals, and TSA agents were overworked or unable to keep coming into work without pay, leaving airports understaffed and causing long lines, flight delays and severe risks to safety and national security.

51

22

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) suspended routine food inspections which normally inspect 80% of the food we eat – leaving people across the country vulnerable to dangerous foodborne illnesses.

45

23

FBI agents were either furloughed or working without being paid and they said it became a serious national security threat – they lost some confidential sources permanently, had to postpone indictments, and shut down investigations.

42

23

Food stamp programs that feed millions of Americans, including many children and elderly people, were at risk of losing funding due to the shutdown.

39

19

By some estimates the shutdown cost the U.S. economy over \$1 billion a week, and even one of President Trump's own economic advisors said it could mean there is zero economic growth for the first quarter of 2019.

37

27

National Parks have had to close down or open with limited staff and limited access to facilities, hurting local tourism industries and causing damage to the parks.

25

21

**Asked to half sample*

Looking ahead, the most convincing arguments against a shutdown put Trump's political gamesmanship and selfishness at the center of the debate.

President Trump declared in December he would be proud to initiate a shutdown in the name of border security, and he later called his demand for a wall a response to an urgent crisis. But many Americans don't believe these were his real motivations and are most persuaded by the case that he was driven by stubbornness and ego.

Of four messages tested, **the most effective messaging emphasizes that Trump's shutdown hurt people for the sole purpose of him getting his way.** Overall, 59% of Americans find this argument convincing; 43% found it very convincing, suggesting this is stronger than an argument that emphasizes a wall being ineffective (32% very convincing). The key to the argument is *who* Trump's shutdown hurt and *why* he hurt them: *"The bottom line is that Donald Trump took the paychecks of hundreds of thousands of Americans hostage and was hurting people to try to get what he wants. It was wrong and it should not be rewarded."*

Americans side with the argument that Democrats "have already shown they care about border security" over "they should take Donald Trump's concerns... more seriously" (52% to 48%). But this margin is narrower than the 36-point margin by which Americans say, "enough with the shutdowns," or the 28-point margin by which they say Trump is bringing out the worst in Washington – a sentiment shared by political independents and even a narrow majority of white non-college Americans. **Progressives should be diligent in keeping conversations about the shutdown centered on the people more than the policy matter.**

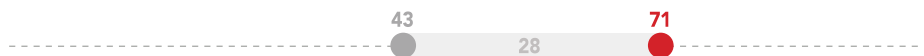
Hurting people for political gain is an especially persuasive argument with a critical group of independents and Republicans who blame Trump for the shutdown.

This already cross-pressured group – call them "Non-Democratic Doubters" – make up 13% of the electorate but are almost unanimous (93%) in finding the argument about hostage-taking convincing. Seven in ten (71%) find it "very" convincing, 21 points ahead of the next-best argument with this group. The argument is also the strongest with independents (59% convincing, 43% very) and whites without a college degree (49% convincing, 35% very), a group that tends to be more supportive of Trump. The second-best argument makes it even more explicit about motivations: for Trump this isn't about border security – it's about Trump.

% who say each statement was a "very convincing" reason to oppose providing funding for a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border in exchange for ending the government shutdown.

■ Total ■ Non-Democratic Doubters

The bottom line is that Donald Trump took the paychecks of hundreds of thousands of Americans hostage and was hurting people to try to get what he wants. It was wrong and it should not be rewarded.



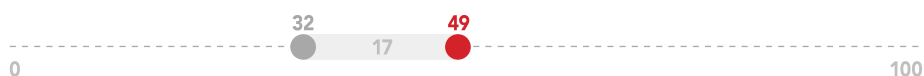
This shutdown was not even really about border security for Donald Trump. It was about his ego — he wanted to be able to say he beat the Democrats and then to build a permanent, concrete monument to his presidency along the southern border.



Border security is important, but building a wall like Donald Trump is asking is the wrong way. Lawmakers should not agree to spend taxpayer money on a medieval solution to a modern day problem even if the government gets shut down.



The whole shutdown debate was based on a broken promise: Donald Trump said Mexico would pay for the wall. So, lawmakers should not agree to spend taxpayer money to build it.



The bottom line: While progressives can, and should, continue to make their case about border security and the problems with Trump's wall, they should make habit of punctuating every conversation by highlighting the motivations behind the shutdown and the immediate consequences for working families. This is where progressive messaging best resonates with the public.



Bonus Points

Roger Stone's time in the barrel

- In December, only 29% of Americans knew enough about Trump advisor Roger Stone to have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of him. Since his arrest by the FBI last month that number has shot up to 51%, almost entirely on the "unfavorable" side of the ledger (8% are favorable now, 43% unfavorable).
- Stone does reserve a small reservoir of support among Republicans, 18% of whom view him favorably (and 25% unfavorably). Stone's personal ratings are actually slightly positive among two particular subsets: those who strongly approve of President Trump's job performance (35% to 20%) and among Republicans who go to Fox News as one of their main sources of news (28% to 23%).

Americans are past "reaching across the aisle."

- Republicans and Democrats alike often say they are "reaching across the aisle" as a nod to bipartisanship and perhaps an appeal to the middle. However, communicators should consider dropping this metaphor from their vocabulary.
- In a direct head to head, Americans – on both sides of the aisle, and in the middle – prefer their representatives to drop the reference to political divisions altogether in favor of "working together" or "finding common ground."

Even though the options may sound similar, please indicate which one you think is more important when it comes to political disagreements.

Reaching across the aisle

Finding common ground

Total

18

82

Democrats

17

83

Independents

12

88

Republicans

23

77

Reaching across the aisle

Working together

Total

9

91

Democrats

10

90

Independents

8

92

Republicans

8

92

navigator*

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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 GBA Strategies along with an advisory committee, including: Andrea Purse, The Hub Project; Arkadi Gerney, The Hub Project; Christina Reynolds, EMILY's List; Delvone Michael, Working Families; Felicia Wong, Roosevelt Institute; Mike Podhorzer, AFL-CIO; Jesse Ferguson, progressive strategist; Navin Nayak, Center for American Progress Action Fund; Ron Klain, Revolution; and Stephanie Valencia, Latino Victory Project.

To learn more about Navigator: <http://navigatorresearch.org/>

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About the Study

Global Strategy Group conducted a public opinion survey among a sample of 1,116 registered voters between January 28-31, 2019. This includes 1,012 voters sampled nationwide and an additional 104 interviews among political independents with no partisan lean. The survey was conducted online, recruiting respondents from multiple opt-in online panel vendors. Respondents were verified against a voter file and special care was taken to ensure that the demographic composition of our sample matched that of the national registered voter population across a variety of demographic variables.