

NEW SMP-TMI NATIONAL SURVEY OF VOTERS ON THE SHUTDOWN: KEY FINDINGS AND TAKEAWAYS

These findings are drawn from a newly completed survey with a representative national cross section of 1,242 voters who say they are likely to vote or might vote in the 2026 midterm elections. The interviews were completed October 2-3 with an online panel matched to the voter file.

1. Voters continue to blame Trump and Republicans more than Democrats for the shutdown.

- By 52% to 40%, voters say that President Trump and Republicans in Congress are more to blame than Democrats in Congress for the federal government shutdown. Notably, voters in the center of the electorate (43% of all voters who are neither strong partisans nor strong ideologues) blame Trump and Republicans more by 54% to 33%. Trump is losing ground with non-MAGA Republicans (40% of all Republican voters), 25% of whom blame him and Republicans in Congress for the shutdown.
- The simple message that Trump and Republicans are in charge of the government has real power in reinforcing the recognition that they are to blame for the shutdown. Fully 68% of voters agree with this statement:

“Donald Trump is president and Republicans have majorities in both the House of Representatives and Senate. They have the power to keep the government open and the government shutdown is their responsibility.”

- Support for Democrats has risen since the start of the shutdown. Approval for Democrats in Congress has increased by 6 points from our previous poll, from 36% to 42%. Among rank-and-file Democratic voters, approval for Democrats has risen from 64% to 73%.

2. The healthcare issues that Democrats are championing in the shutdown fight are powerful with voters and cut across party lines. The longer and more aggressively that Democrats are litigating these issues in a shutdown fight, the bigger the price Republicans will pay for being on the wrong side of them.

- 57% of voters say that “preventing big increases in the cost of health insurance for 20 million Americans who get coverage through the ACA” is an **essential** priority in resolving the shutdown (with 22% more saying it is important, but not necessarily essential). This is a concern that cuts across the political spectrum: 84% of voters on the left, 57% of voters in the center, and 30% of voters on the right consider it to be essential.



- 54% of voters say it is **essential** to roll back the most damaging cuts to Medicaid that President Trump and Republicans made in their budget law earlier this year, including 87% of voters on the left, 51% of voters in the center, and 26% of voters on the right.
- When these Democratic priorities are laid out for voters (along with a third point on requiring Trump and Republicans agreeing to abide by any compromise), they report becoming more favorable to Democrats by 51% to 31%, with voters in the center more favorable by 52% to 27%. And knowing that Republicans in Congress oppose these priorities makes voters less favorable to them by 51% to 28%, with voters in the center less favorable by 54% to 22%.
- Highlighting Republican obstruction on healthcare is an extremely potent message for Democrats. Even when this message is explicitly identified as coming from “Democratic leaders” it has a strong reach across party lines:

At a time when families’ budgets already are badly squeezed, Congress needs to take action now to address the rising cost of healthcare and Republicans should not shut down the government by refusing to deal with the problem.

Fully 71% of voters agree with this statement, knowing it comes from Democratic leaders, including 46% who strongly agree. Nearly all voters on the left do (95%), as do 75% of voters in the center and 41% of those on the right.

No wonder, then, that Republicans are starting to feel the heat on healthcare. These results highlight the importance of continuing to raise these issues forcefully and giving them time to play out in the public’s consciousness.

3. While voters are concerned about a lengthy shutdown, addressing these healthcare priorities is even more important to them. Fighting for affordable healthcare is the high ground in this debate, even against Republican attacks about prolonging the shutdown

- By 62% to 31%, voters say that preventing huge increases in health insurance premiums for 20 million Americans is more important than avoiding a lengthy government shutdown (64% to 30% among voters in the center). Even voters who say they would be very concerned by a lengthy shutdown (32% of all voters) go on to say by 62% to 37% that preventing huge premium increases is more important to them than avoiding a lengthy shutdown.
- By 60% to 32%, voters say that stopping damaging Medicaid cuts that will eliminate health coverage for over 10 million Americans and force rural hospitals to close is more important than avoiding a lengthy government shutdown (59% to 32% among voters in the center). Voters who are very concerned about a lengthy shutdown prioritize stopping damaging Medicaid cuts over avoiding a lengthy shutdown by 64% to 34%.

4. In dealing with looming premium increases, voters want action now from Congress rather than a vague promise of talks later on.

- We described Republican and Democratic positions on the issue of extending premium tax credits as follows:

Republicans in Congress say they are willing to negotiate with Democrats later in the year on the possibility of extending tax credits for 20 million Americans who get health insurance through the Affordable Care Act, but they will not consider it as part of the current legislation to fund the government.

Democrats in Congress, on the other hand, say there needs to be action now to prevent huge increases in health insurance costs, rather than vague promises to talk about it later on.

Voters overall side with the Democrats' "action now" position by 57% to 43%. Voters in the center do so by 62% to 38%.

Other results from the survey reinforce the importance for Democrats to make clear their desire for genuine bipartisan compromise, but it would be a mistake to take the pressure off Republicans on premium tax credits by offering them a deal that has no real teeth to it.

5. There is strong disapproval among voters for Trump's pressure tactics, and Democrats can gain an advantage by calling Trump out and standing up to him. The most important message is that Trump is engaging these ugly retaliation tactics because he refuses to engage in serious negotiations with Democrats on a bipartisan compromise to end the shutdown.

- When told that "the Trump Administration is canceling or delaying major infrastructure projects in Democratic states as a way of retaliating against Democrats who are standing up to Trump," 64% say they disapprove of the Trump Administration's actions, including 46% who strongly disapprove.
- When told that "the Trump Administration is using the shutdown as a reason to undertake mass firings of federal employees and to terminate federal programs that Trump says are favored by Democrats," 64% also say they disapprove of these actions, including 47% who strongly disapprove.
- 61% of voters, including 68% of voters in the center, disapprove of President Trump and Republican leaders in response to the following: "President Trump and Republican leaders in Congress have refused to negotiate with Democrats on a bipartisan compromise to end the shutdown and say that Democrats must agree to their proposal for a 45-day extension of funding."