



# U.S. RULE OF LAW TRENDS & THE 2024 ELECTION

# Acknowledgements

*U.S. Rule of Law Trends and the 2024 Election* was produced by the World Justice Project under the oversight of Alejandro Ponce and Tanya Weinberg and the executive direction of Elizabeth Andersen.

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The data collection for the General Population Poll used for this report was conducted by Alicia Evangelides, Joshua Fuller, and Natalia Rodríguez Cajamarca. Sampling, fieldwork, and data processing were in charge of YouGov, Nordic.

Mariana Lopez was the graphic design lead for this report with support from Enrique Paulin.

This report was made possible with the support of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs' Office of Europe and Asia (INL). The views expressed in this report are those of the survey respondents and do not necessarily represent the views of the United States government.

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# ABOUT THIS REPORT

**EFFECTIVE RULE OF LAW** reduces corruption, combats poverty and disease, and protects people from injustices large and small. Strengthening the rule of law is an important objective for governments, donors, and civil society organizations around the world. To be effective, rule of law development requires clarity about the fundamental features that define the rule of law, as well as an adequate basis for its evaluation and measurement.

*U.S. Rule of Law Trends and the 2024 Election* presents question-level data drawn from the General Population Poll (GPP), an original data source designed and collected by the World Justice Project (WJP). It is among the data sources that inform the annual WJP Rule of Law Index®, the world's leading source of original, independent rule of law data. Since 2016, the Index has identified a global rule of law recession, including in the United States.

The GPP was conducted through online interviews to a nationally representative sample of 1,046 U.S. households between June 10 and June 18, 2024. This poll was designed to capture data on the experiences and perceptions of ordinary people regarding a variety of themes related to the rule of law and the integrity of the electoral process.

*This report represents the voices of the American people and their perspectives on weakened U.S. rule of law ahead of the 2024 presidential election.*

This report presents data derived from the General Population Poll in two thematic sections, each highlighting a distinct dimension of the rule of law from the perspective of people in the United States. The sections cover public perceptions and attitudes towards accountability, authoritarianism, trust in institutions, and the rule of law. In *U.S. Rule of Law Trends and the 2024 Election*, we also introduce new insights related to the 2024 presidential election. The survey now captures detailed perceptions of electoral authorities, voting rights, the integrity of the electoral process, acceptance of electoral results, trust in electoral actors, and public views on the judiciary's independence, particularly in scenarios where courts might need to intervene in electoral outcomes.

# EXECUTIVE FINDINGS

*U.S. Rule of Law Trends and the 2024 Election provides a comprehensive overview of how respondents perceive and experience the rule of law in the United States and their perceptions about the institutions governing the 2024 presidential elections. The results from the World Justice Project (WJP) General Population Poll 2024 show a deterioration in the public's perception of the rule of law in the country compared to previous years.*

## SECTION 1

### Rule of Law and Trust

A majority of Americans view the current state of the rule of law in the United States negatively, despite their positive associations with the concept of rule of law itself. This dichotomy reflects growing concerns over the actual implementation and integrity of the rule of law in the country. While both Democrats and Republicans overwhelmingly agree on the critical importance of the rule of law for the future of the United States, its democracy, and their own lives, these shared beliefs mask deeper concerns about the erosion of government accountability and institutional trust.

Since 2013, public perception of government accountability has declined, with a 30 percentage-point drop in respondents who believe high-ranking government officials would be held accountable for breaking the law. Although this perception improved slightly between 2021 and 2024, accountability remains a critical issue, and the public's views are increasingly divided along partisan lines. Compared to 2018, a greater percentage of Democrats believe that high-ranking government officials are held accountable for misconduct, while views among Republicans have grown increasingly pessimistic.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, the erosion of the rule of law values is evident, with declining percentages of Americans favoring citizen participation over government efficiency and believing that the president should always obey the law and courts. Moreover, there has been a slight increase in those who believe it is unnecessary for people to obey the laws of a government they did not vote for, indicating a potential weakening of civic responsibility and respect for legal frameworks.

The public's confidence in institutions designed to check executive power, such as Congress and the courts, has also diminished since 2013, although there was a slight recovery in this confidence between 2021 and 2024. Interestingly, the only group that has seen a net increase in confidence to stop illegal actions by the president is the citizens themselves. This suggests a shift towards people's faith in grassroots accountability rather than institutional checks.

Partisan differences complicate these trends. Historically, Republicans have reported greater trust than Democrats in both citizens and institutions to check executive authority, but Republicans' confidence has eroded since 2018, while Democrats' confidence has increased. By 2024, Democrats' trust in all checks on executive authority exceeded Republicans'.

Overall trust in many key institutions has decreased since 2018, with a particularly pronounced decline in confidence in judges and the media. Trust in local government officials has increased slightly, but national officials are more trusted overall. Partisan differences persist, as Democrats generally trust media, executive, and judicial officials more than Republicans, who maintain higher trust in the police than do Democrats. Since 2018, Democrats' trust has declined most significantly in the media, while Republicans' trust has declined most significantly in prosecutors and judges. These trends underscore a growing polarization in perceptions of institutional integrity and fairness.

Generally, public perception of the justice system's fairness and independence has significantly deteriorated since 2018, though there has been a notable improvement in the perceived independence of prosecutors between 2021 and 2024. These shifts are also influenced by political affiliation, with Democrats showing increased confidence in the fairness and independence of the justice system, while Republicans' confidence has deteriorated sharply.

<sup>1</sup> The 2024 General Population Poll was conducted between June 10-18. Both a Supreme Court decision on presidential immunity and the conviction of a sitting U.S. Senator occurred after data collection concluded.

## SECTION 2

### Perceptions of the 2024 Presidential Election

The 2024 presidential election is poised to be a deeply polarizing event, with confidence in the electoral process heavily dependent on political affiliation. Democrats generally express more confidence in the fairness and legitimacy of elections compared to Republicans with the notable exception of voting rights, as Republicans are more likely to believe that voting is equally accessible and convenient for all citizens.

The legitimacy of the 2024 presidential election is also in question, with approximately one-third of respondents indicating they would not accept the election's results if their preferred candidate does not win. This sentiment is particularly strong among Republicans, nearly half of whom say they would not accept the election results if the Democratic candidate wins. This points to a potential crisis of legitimacy that could undermine the stability of the electoral process.

In the event of contested election results, Democrats are more likely than Republicans to trust local and state election workers, courts, and Congress to fairly determine the outcome, while Republicans place greater trust in the Supreme Court. This divergence in trust reflects broader partisan divisions in perceptions of institutional integrity and fairness.

The findings of the WJP General Population Poll 2024 in the U.S. underscore the mounting challenges to the rule of law in the United States, which ranked 26th out of 142 countries in the 2023 *WJP Rule of Law Index®*. While the public continues to express a broad commitment to rule of law principles, the erosion of trust in key institutions, growing partisan divides, and the increasingly precarious perception of accountability pose significant threats to the nation's democratic foundation. The United States, long regarded as a global standard-bearer for democracy and the rule of law, now faces internal weaknesses that threaten this status.

As the 2024 presidential election approaches, the stakes are high. The deepening polarization and mistrust, especially concerning the electoral process and the judiciary, highlights the need for renewed efforts to restore faith in the rule of law. Without such efforts, the United States risks further erosion of its democratic institutions and the very principles that have long underpinned its global leadership in the rule of law. The path forward must involve addressing these issues head-on, strengthening citizens' understanding of U.S. government and electoral processes, fostering a more inclusive, transparent, and accountable legal system, and ensuring that all Americans, regardless of political affiliation, can trust in the fairness and impartiality of the nation's institutions.

## **Section I: Rule of Law and Trust**

- 9 Perceptions of the Rule of Law
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# Perceptions of the Rule of Law

Chart 1

## Americans Hold Negative Views on the State of U.S. Rule of Law Today

Americans tend to associate the notion of rule of law with positive sentiments, but they associate the current state of the rule of law in the United States with negative sentiments.



Source: WJP General Population Poll 2024

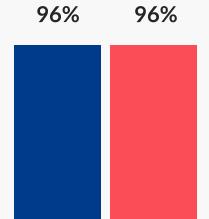
Chart 2

## Both Democrats and Republicans Consider Rule of Law to Be Crucial

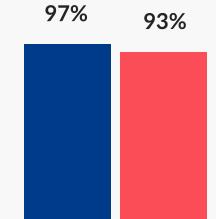
Regardless of political affiliation, the percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree that rule of law is essential or important to the future of the country, U.S. democracy, and their own lives consistently exceeds 90%.

● Democrats ● Republicans

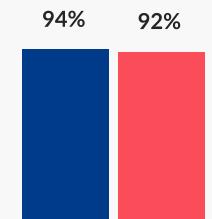
| The future of the United States



| U.S. democracy



| Your own life



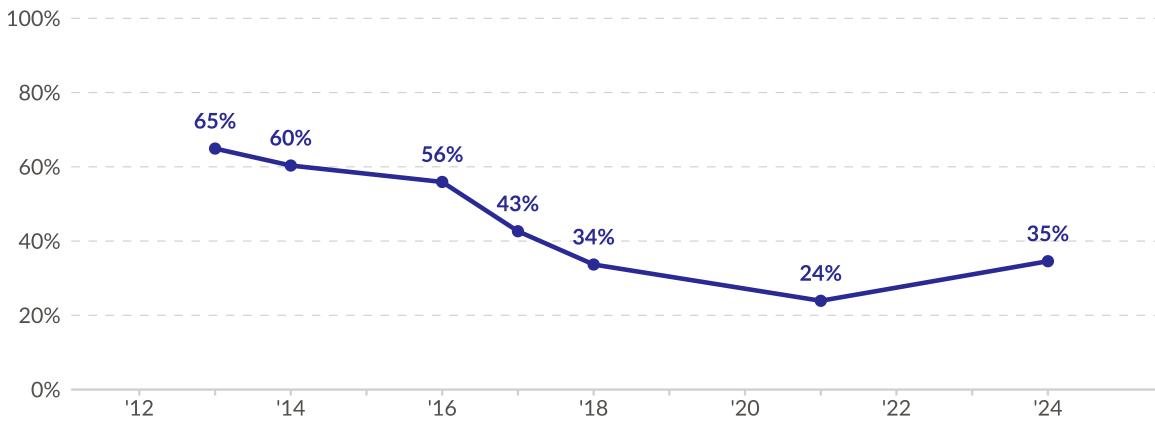
Source: WJP General Population Poll 2024

# Government Accountability

## Chart 3.1

### Perceptions of Accountability Remain Low

Since 2013, the proportion of respondents who agree or strongly agree that high-ranking officials would be held accountable for breaking the law has dropped 30 percentage points. However, this figure increased between the 2021 and 2024 polls.



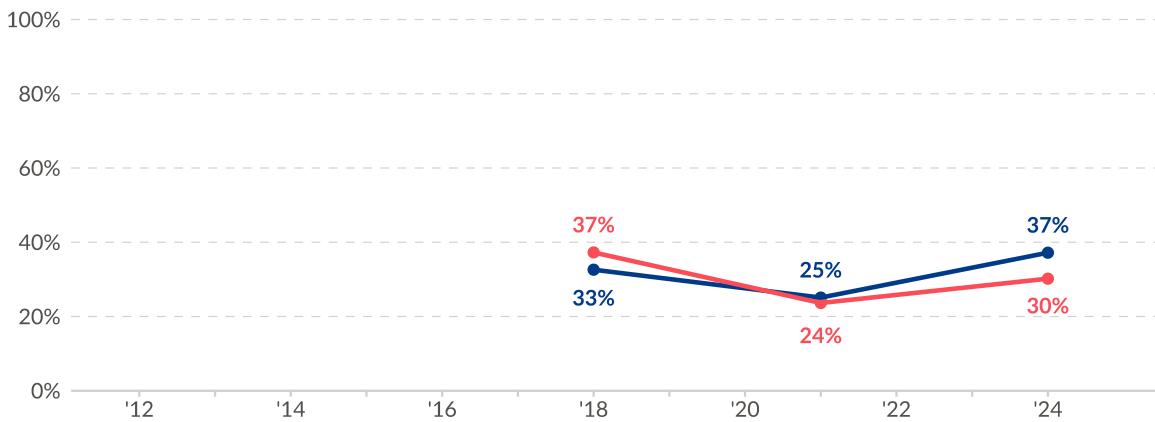
Source: WJP General Population Poll 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2021, and 2024

## Chart 3.2

### Perceptions of Accountability are Conditional on Party Affiliation

In 2021, Democrats' and Republicans' views nearly converged at a low point of Americans' perceptions of government accountability. Compared to 2018, though, the percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree that high-ranking government officials would be held accountable for breaking the law in 2024 has increased for Democrats but decreased for Republicans.

● Democrats    ● Republicans



Note: Chart 3.2 shows the proportion of respondents who agree or strongly agree that high-ranking officials would be held accountable for breaking the law, disaggregated by party affiliation.

Source: WJP General Population Poll 2018, 2021, and 2024

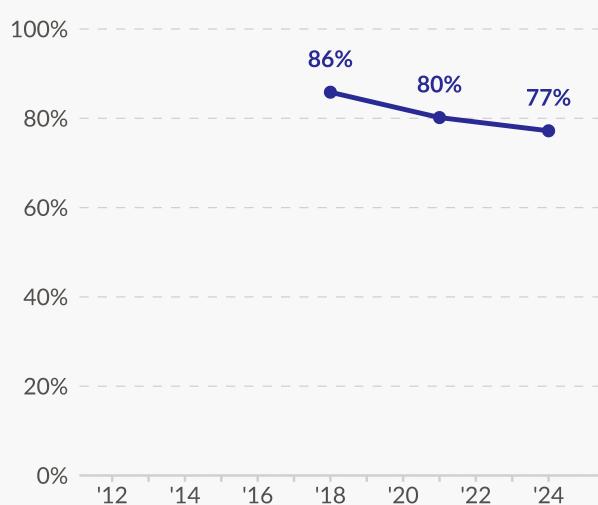
# Authoritarianism

Chart 4

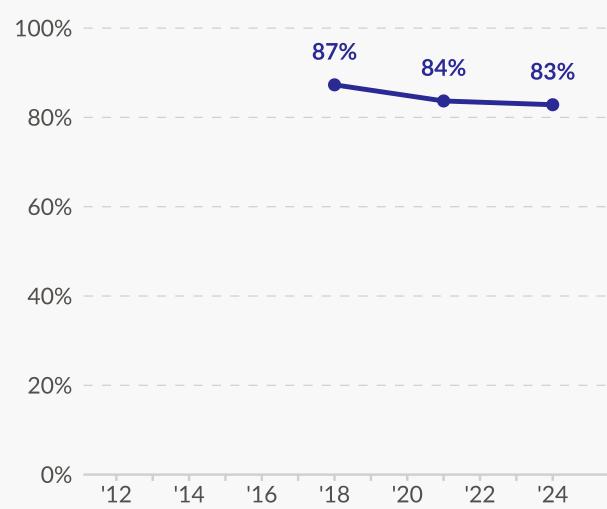
## Most Americans Value Rule of Law Principles, Despite Eroding Majority

Since 2018, the percentage of respondents who favor citizen participation over government efficiency has decreased by almost 10 percentage points. Likewise, the percentage of respondents who believe the president must always obey the law has decreased. The percentage of people who say it is important to obey the government has not changed significantly since 2018, while the percentage of people who now say it is not necessary to obey the laws of a government you did not vote for has increased.

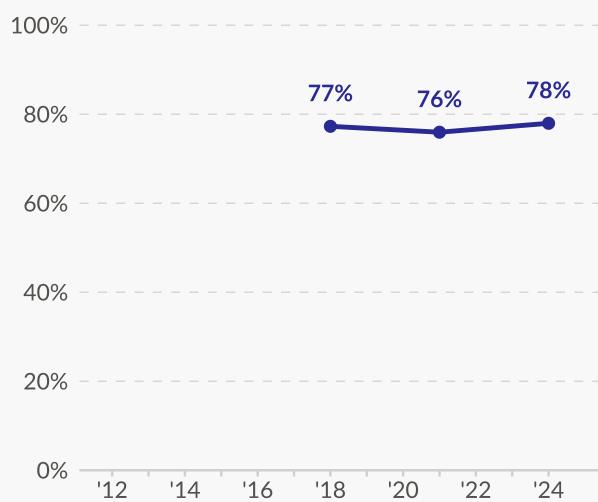
| It is important that citizens have a say in government matters, even at the expense of efficiency.



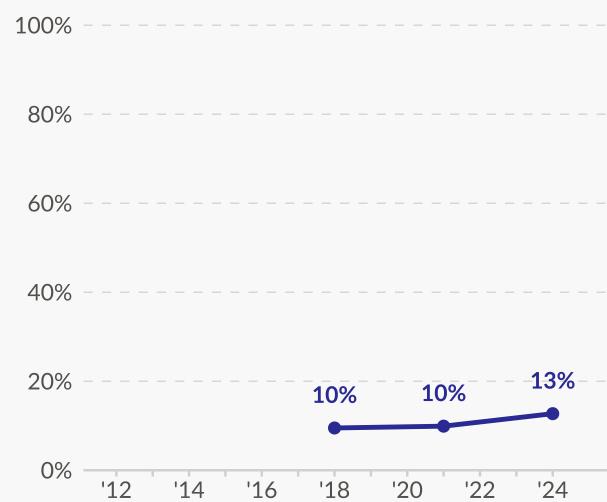
| The President must always obey the law and the courts.



| It is important to obey the government in power, no matter who you voted for.



| It is not necessary to obey the laws of a government that you did not vote for.



### Chart 5

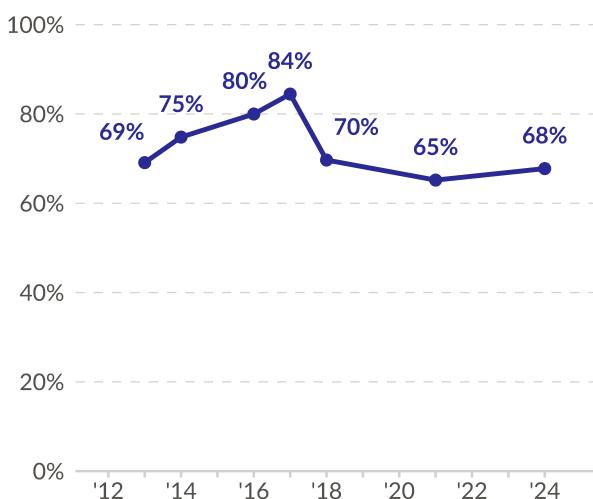
## Confidence in Institutions to Check Executive Power Has Increased but Remains Below Pre-2018 Levels

The percentages of respondents in the United States who agree that Congress and the courts could hypothetically stop a president's illegal actions follow a similar pattern since 2013, with reported levels of confidence peaking in the 2016 and 2017 polls followed by a pronounced dip in the 2018 and 2021 polls. While respondents' levels of confidence has increased for all three groups since 2021, the only group that saw a net increase in the percentage of Americans who believed it could stop a president's illegal actions since 2013 was citizens.

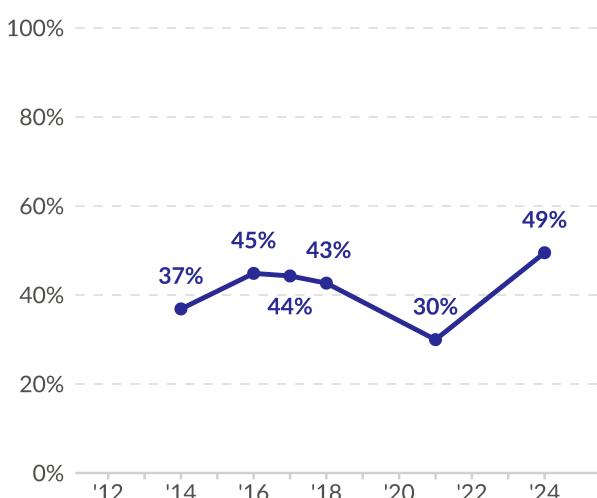
### Congress



### Courts



### Citizens



Source: WJP General Population Poll 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2021, and 2024

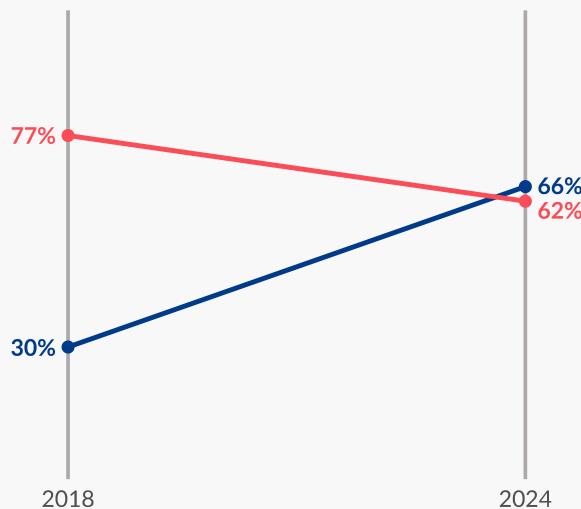
### Chart 6

## Democrats Are More Likely to Trust That Executive Power Can Be Constrained by a Variety of Actors

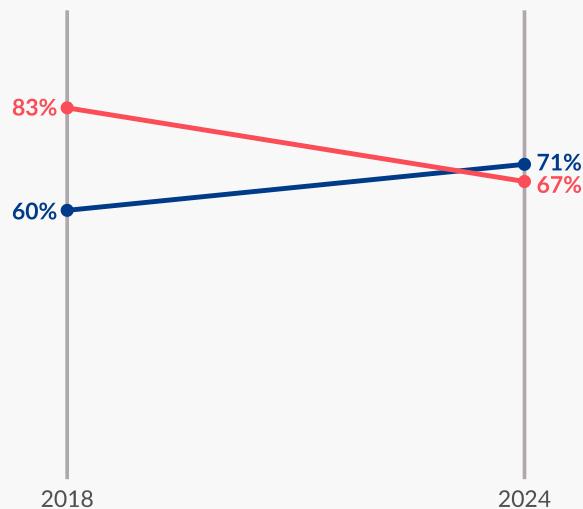
Between 2018 and 2024, the percentage of Democrats who believe that courts and Congress could hypothetically stop a president's illegal actions has increased significantly, while the percentage of Republicans that hold the same belief has decreased significantly. A similar but less striking pattern is observed when looking at the percentage of people who trust citizens to constrain government powers.

● Democrats ● Republicans

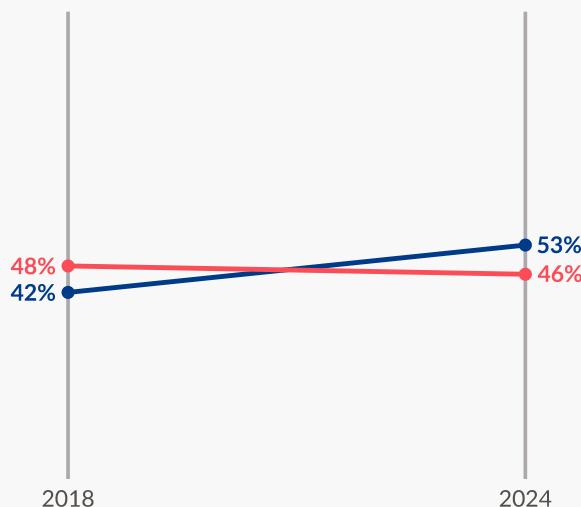
■ Congress



■ Courts



■ Citizens



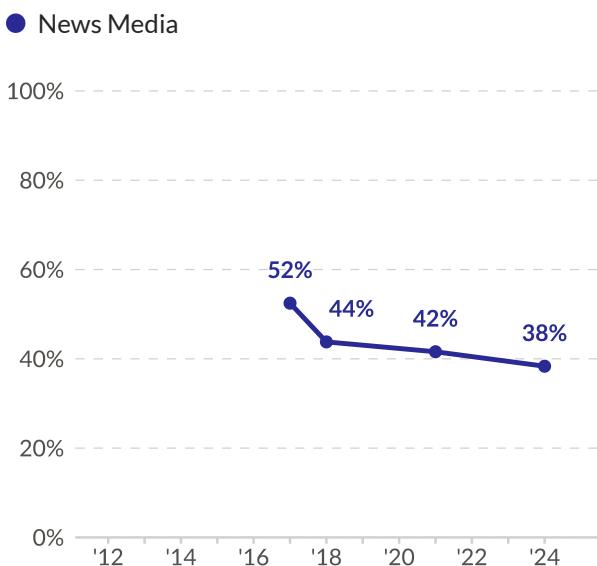
# Trust

Chart 7

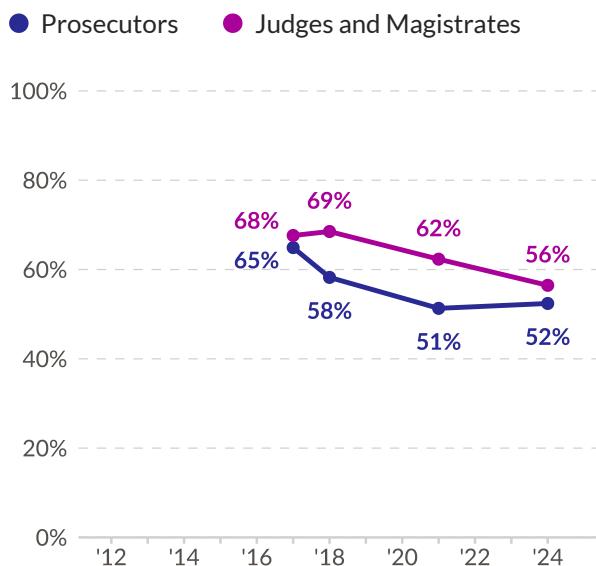
## Trust in Many Institutions Has Eroded Since 2018

In most cases, the percentage of respondents who express having a lot or some trust in institutions decreased between the 2018 and 2024 polls. Trust in judges and magistrates declined the most during that time, falling 13 percentage points. Only trust in local government officials is higher in 2024 than 2018, though Americans still report higher levels of trust in officials working at the national level.

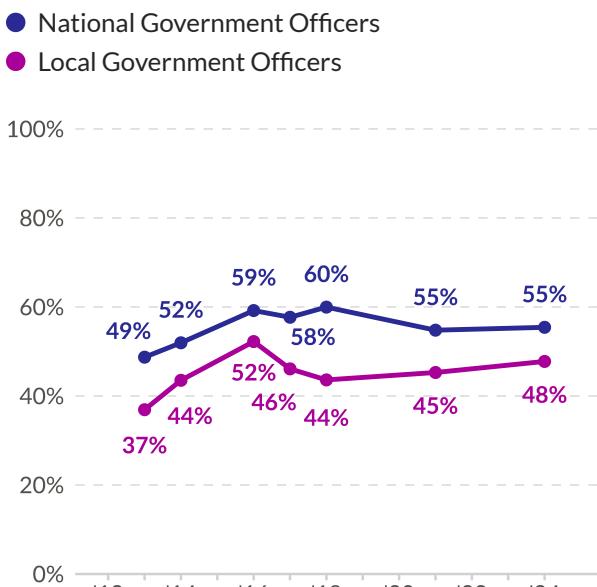
### The News Media



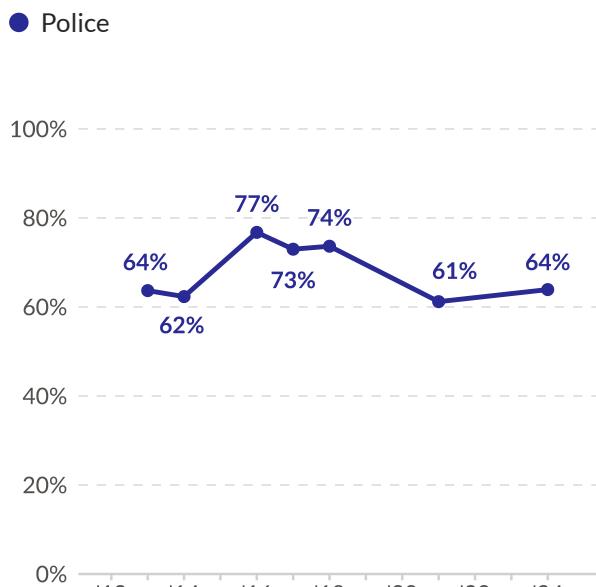
### Justice System



### Executive Branch



### The Police



Source: WJP General Population Poll 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2021, and 2024

### Chart 8

#### Democrats Are More Likely Than Republicans to Trust Institutions, Apart from the Police

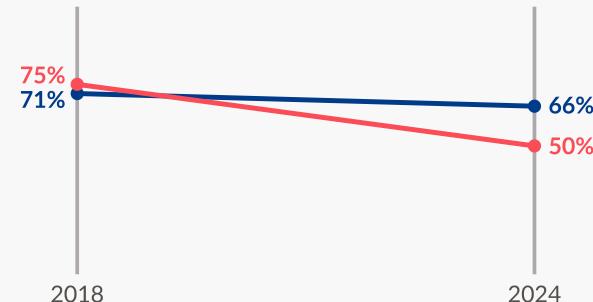
Since 2021, Democrats have gained trust in executive officials and law enforcement, but have lost trust in judges and the media. The percentage of Democrats who express a lot or some trust in the media, executive officials, and judicial officials is consistently greater than the percentage of Republicans who report the same. Republicans consistently report higher levels of trust in the police, though that percentage has decreased since 2018.

● Democrats ● Republicans

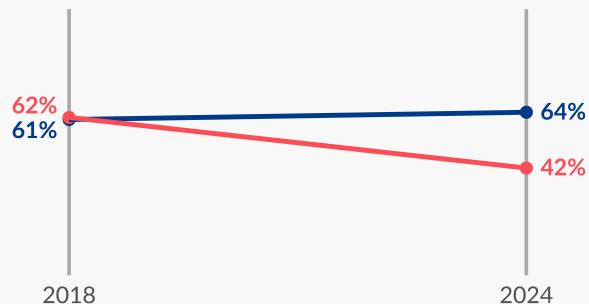
##### News Media



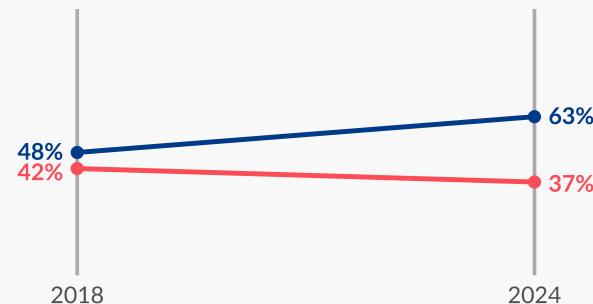
##### Judges and Magistrates



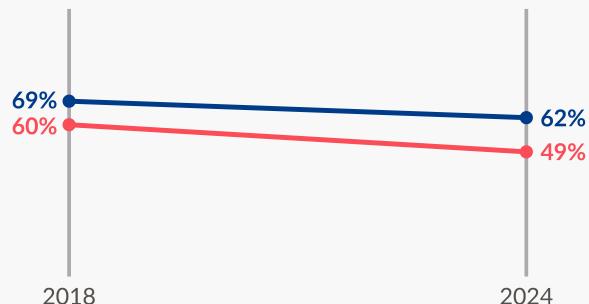
##### Prosecutors



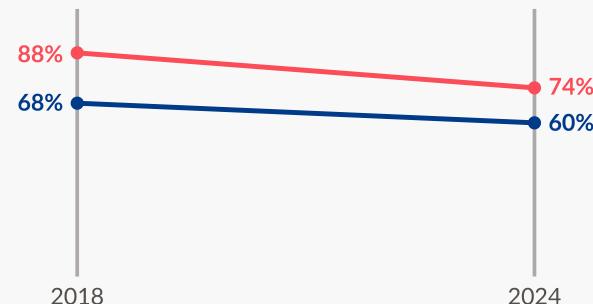
##### National Government Officers



##### Local Government Officers



##### The Police



# Perceptions of the Judiciary

Chart 9

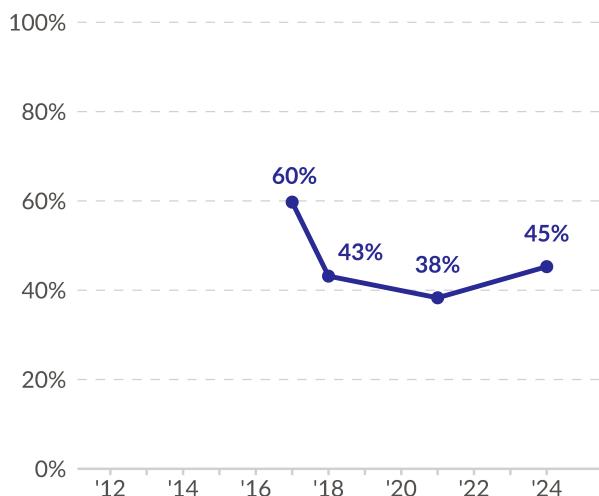
## Perceptions of Independence and Fairness of the Justice System Have Eroded Since 2018

The percentage of respondents that perceive the justice system as fair and independent remains below pre-2018 levels. However, the perception of prosecutorial independence show a marked increase between 2021 and 2024.

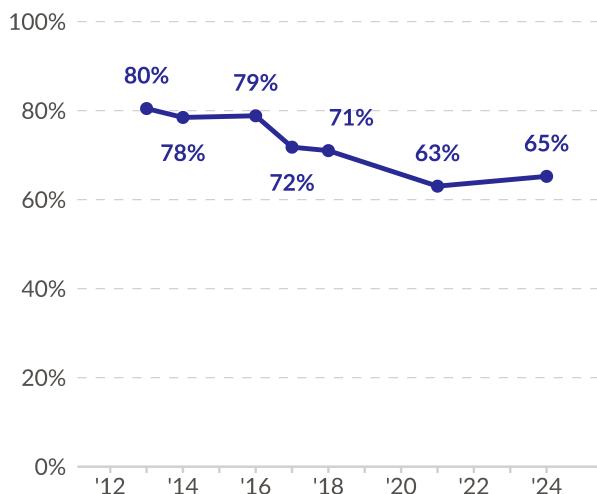
Judges decide cases in an independent manner.



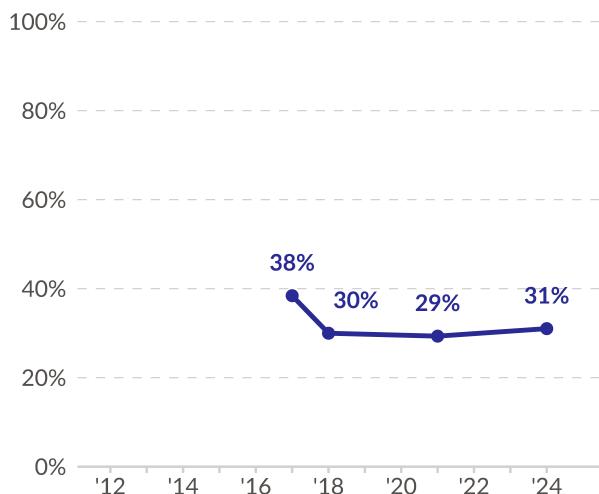
Prosecutors prosecute crimes in an independent manner.



Courts guarantee everyone a fair trial.



Courts are not biased towards money or influence.



Source: WJP General Population Poll 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2021, and 2024

### Chart 10

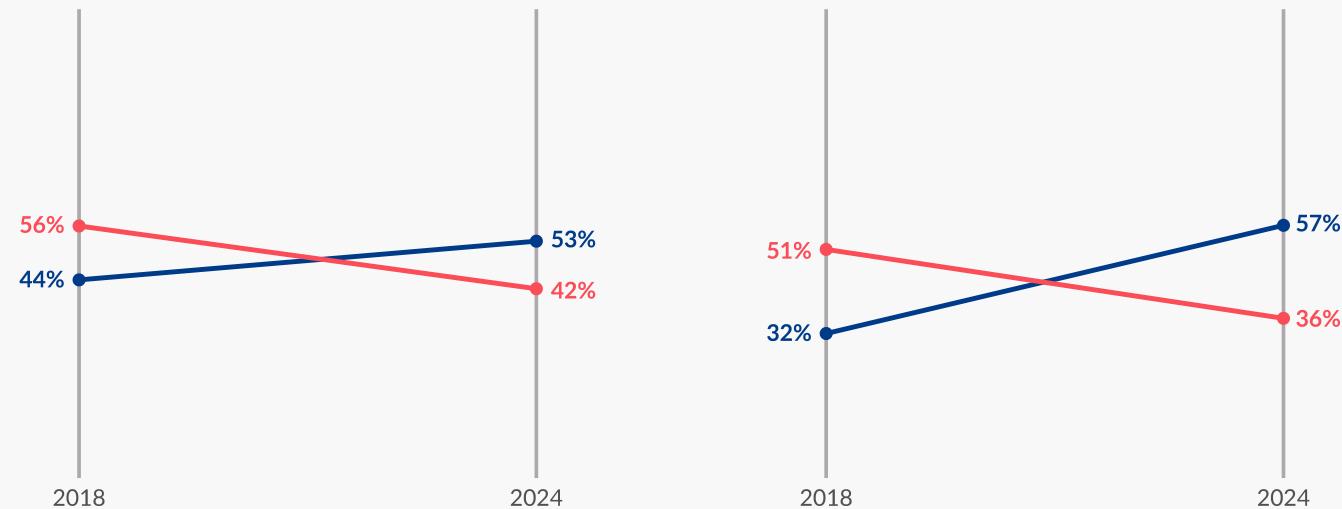
## Perceptions of the Independence and Fairness of the Justice System Show Different Trends Depending on Political Affiliation

In 2018, Republicans held more positive views on the independence and fairness of the Justice System than Democrats. However, since then, Republicans' perceptions have deteriorated while Democrats views have improved across all four evaluated dimensions of justice system performance. As a result, Democrats now report more positive views than Republicans when asked about their perceptions of the fairness of courts and the independence of judges and prosecutors.

● Democrats ● Republicans

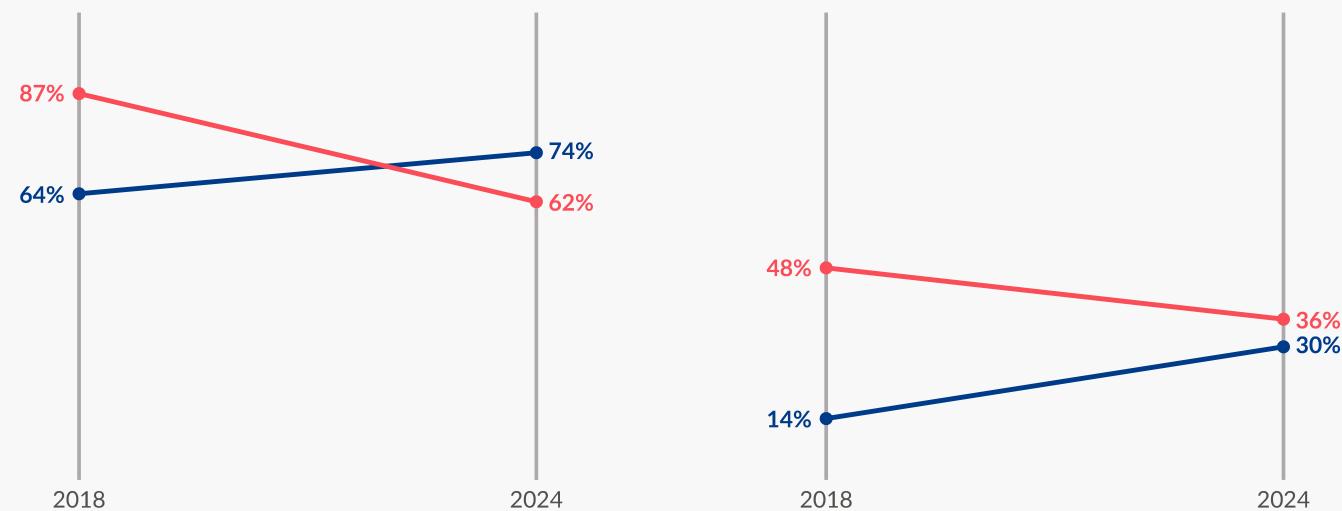
Judges decide cases in an independent manner.

Prosecutors prosecute crimes in an independent manner.



Courts guarantee everyone a fair trial.

Courts are not biased towards money or influence.



## Section II: Perceptions of the 2024 Presidential Election

19 Integrity of the Electoral

Process

20 Hypothetical Situations

# Integrity of the Electoral Process

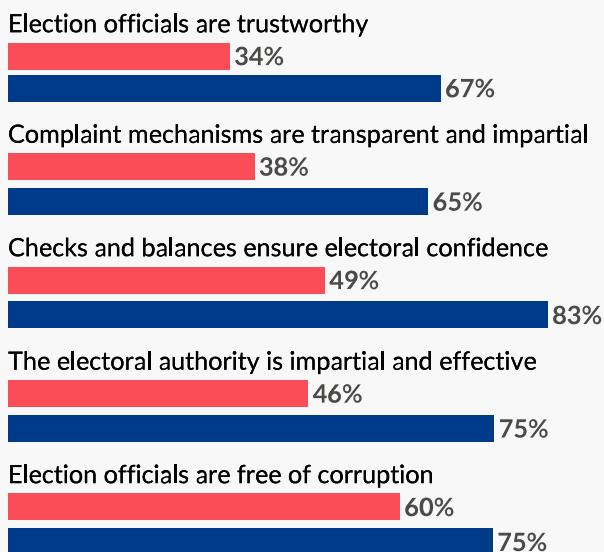
Chart 11

## Confidence in Elections is Dependent on Political Affiliation

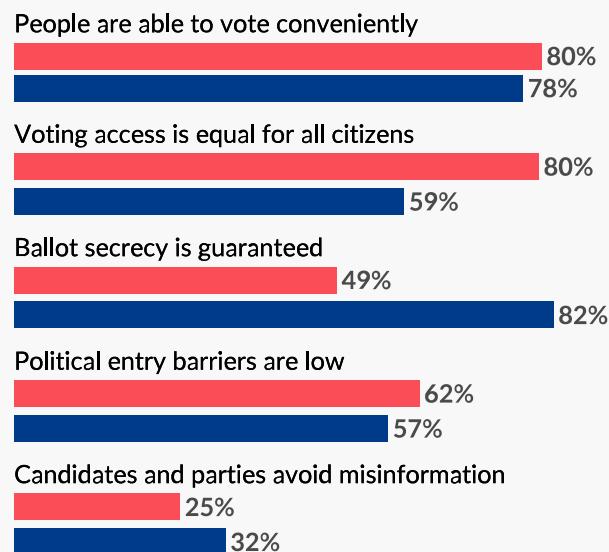
In most cases, the percentage of Democrats who agree or strongly agree with the following positive statements about the electoral process significantly exceeds the percentage of Republicans who do so. The only deviations from this trend concern voting rights, where Democrats are less likely than Republicans to believe that voting in the United States is equally accessible and convenient for all citizens.

● Democrats ● Republicans

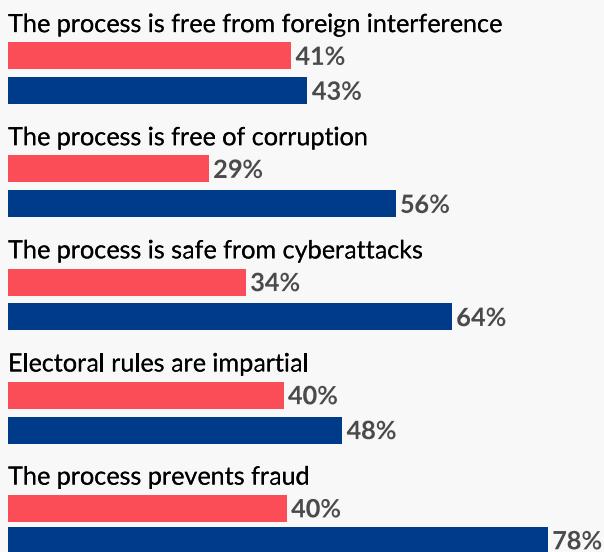
### Electoral Authorities



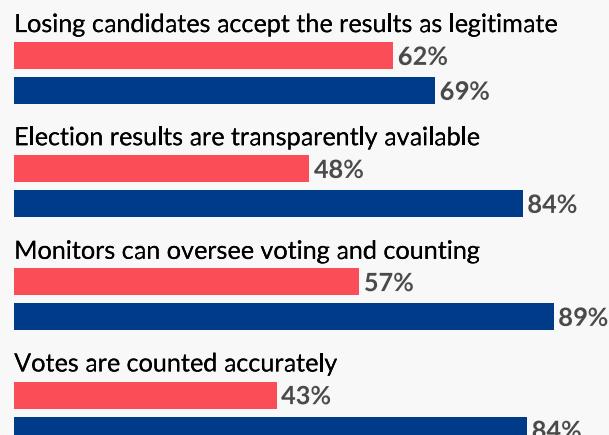
### Voting Rights and Politics



### Electoral Process



### Electoral Results and Vote Counting



# Hypothetical Situations

Chart 12

## For Many Americans, Election Legitimacy Will Depend on Who Wins

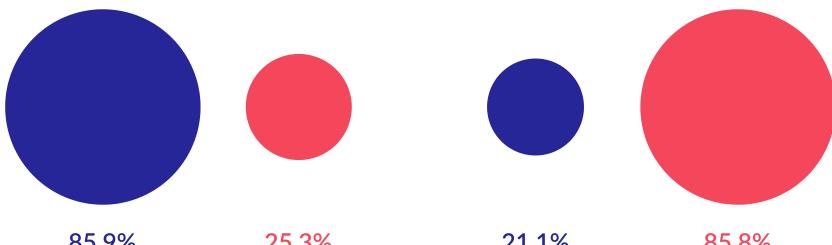
Overall, around one-third of respondents said they would not accept 2024 presidential election results as legitimate if their favored candidate did not win. This infographic shows how Democrats and Republicans said they would respond to election results based on the winning candidate. A total of 46% of Republicans and 27% of Democrats said they would not accept election results as legitimate if the other party's candidate won. Those figures include the 14% of all Republicans and almost 11% of all Democrats who said they would take action to overturn election results if the other party won. What type of action—whether legal or illegal—was not specified in the survey question.

● Democrats ● Republicans

### IF THE DEMOCRAT CANDIDATE WINS

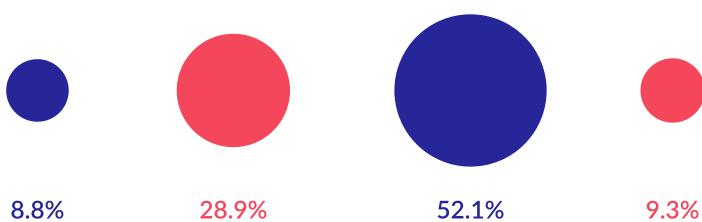
Accept the results as legitimate...

...and support their presidency



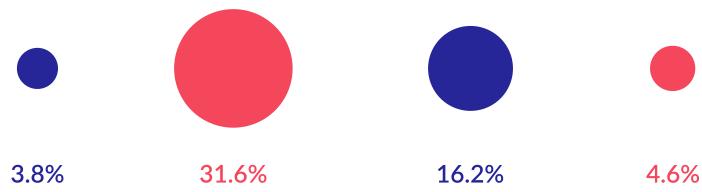
### IF THE REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE WINS

...and oppose their presidency



Will not accept the results as legitimate...

...but do nothing



...and take action to overturn them



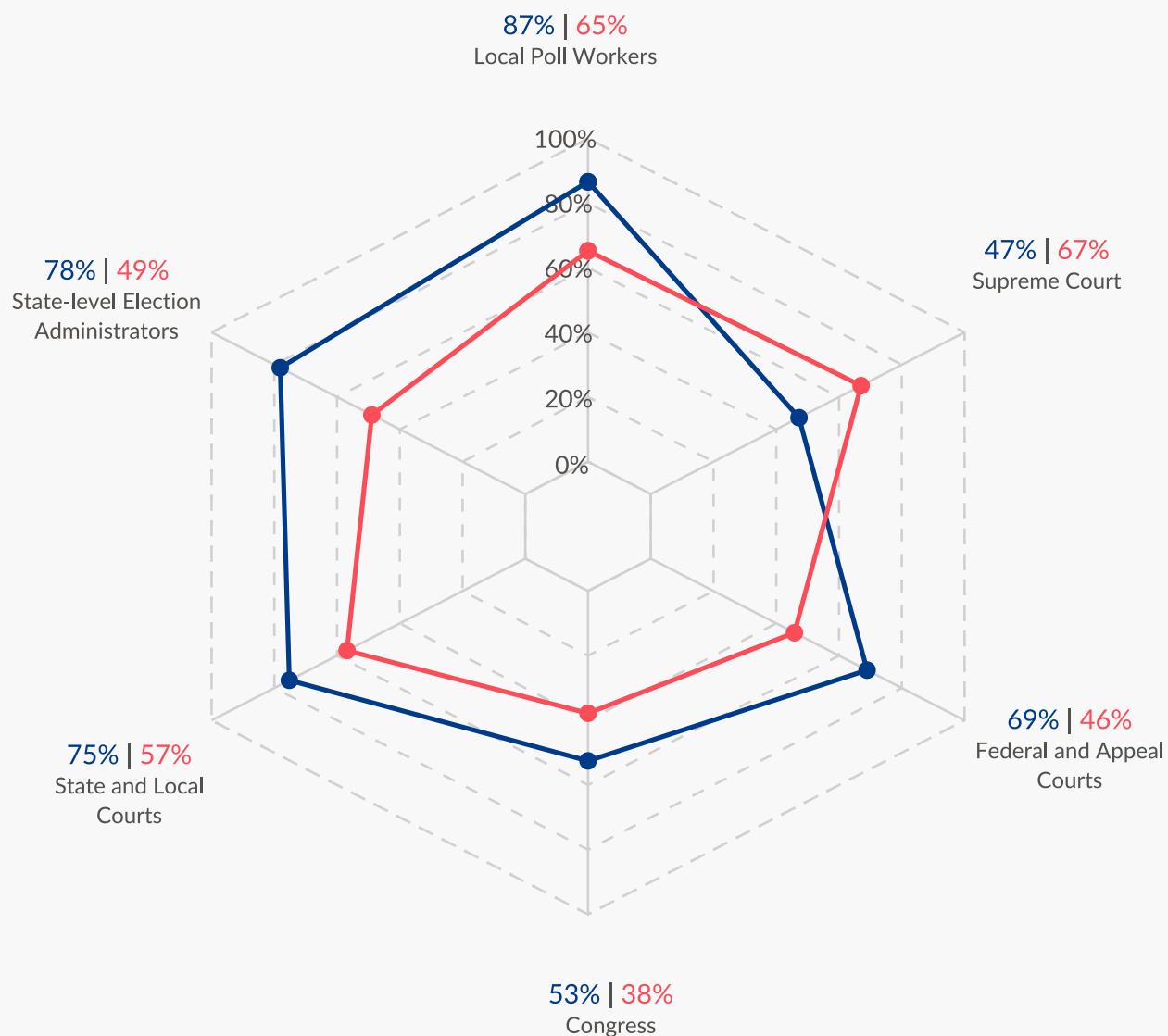
Note: The 2024 U.S. General Population Poll was conducted in June before the Democratic candidate changed from Joe Biden to Kamala Harris.  
Source: WJP General Population Poll 2024

### Chart 13

## Democrats Have More Trust in Institutions to Ensure A Fair Election Outcome—Except the Supreme Court

If the 2024 presidential election results are contested, the proportion of Democrats who express a lot or some trust in local and state election workers, local and federal courts, and Congress to fairly determine the winner is significantly higher than the respective share of Republicans who do so. However, Republicans have more trust in the Supreme Court to fairly determine a winner.

● Democrats ● Republicans

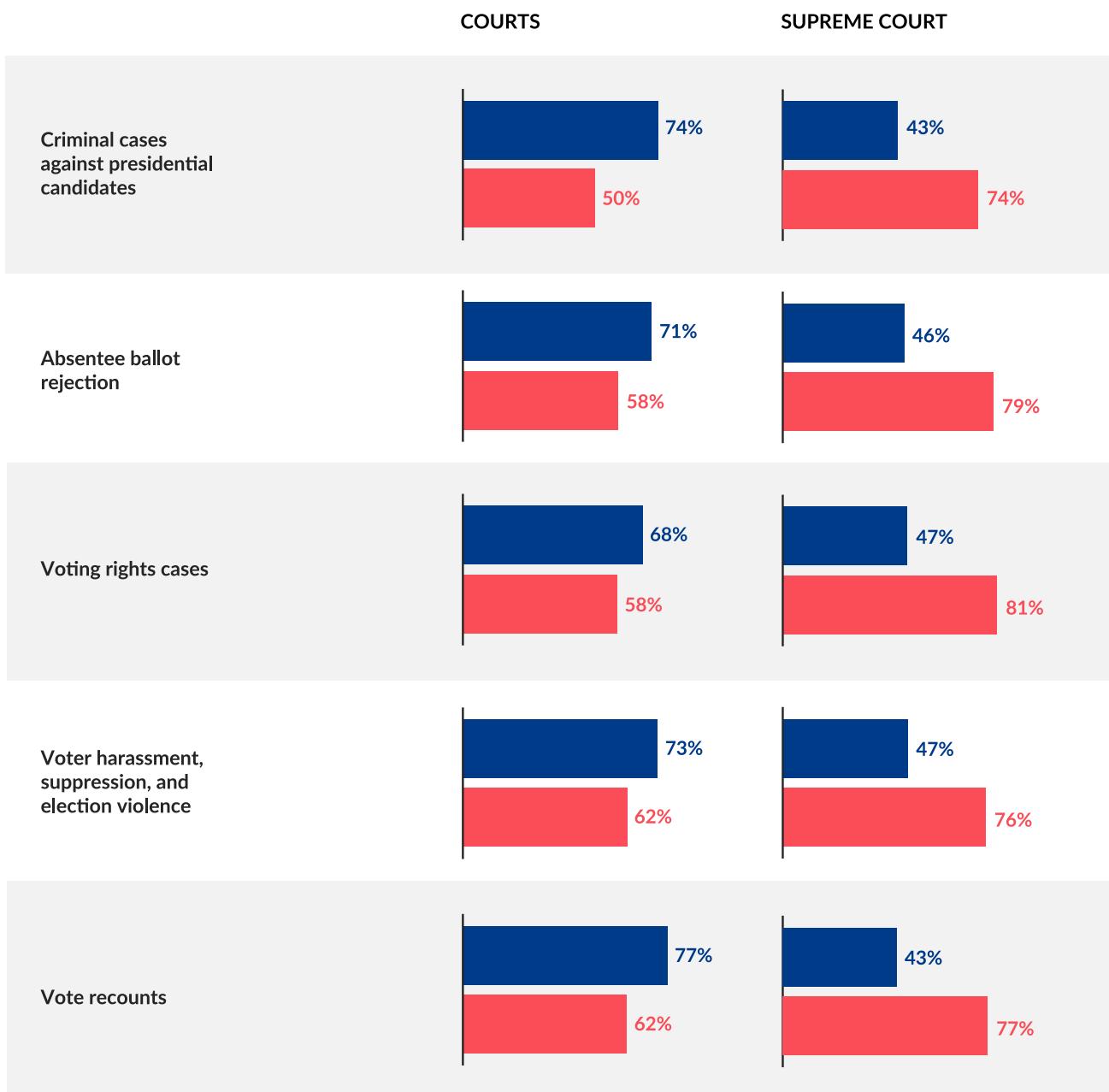


### Chart 14

## When Asked About “The Courts,” Democrats Have More Trust; When Asked About “The Supreme Court,” Republicans Do

More than two-thirds of Democrats trust “the courts” to act impartially on criminal cases against presidential candidates and a variety of election-related disputes, while smaller majorities of Republicans agreed. However, when asked about “the Supreme Court” regarding those same issues, less than half of Democrats believe the Supreme Court would act in a non-partisan manner, while 74%-81% of Republicans do. This infographic shows the percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree that the justice system will act fairly in the following issues...

● Democrats ● Republicans



Source: WJP General Population Poll 2024

## PROJECT DESIGN

23 Methodology

# METHODOLOGY

To present an image that accurately portrays the rule of law as experienced by ordinary people, data in this report is drawn from the General Population Poll (GPP), an original data source designed and collected by the World Justice Project (WJP). The GPP captures the experiences and perceptions of ordinary citizens concerning the performance of the state and its agents and the actual operation of the legal framework in their country. The General Population Poll used to collect data in the United States in 2024 features several new questions that highlight perceptions on issues salient to the region, including corruption, authoritarian behaviors, police performance, criminal justice, and security. In total, the General Population Poll questionnaire includes 123 perception-based questions, along with sociodemographic information on all respondents. The GPP in the United States was administered to a sample of 1,046 respondents.

## DATA COLLECTION

The GPP in the United States was conducted for the WJP's *U.S. Rule of Law Trends and the 2024 Election* report with sampling, fieldwork, and data processing by YouGov, Nordic, based in Copenhagen, Denmark. YouGov, Nordic administered the surveys during the month of June 2024, conducting Computer-Assisted Web Interviews (CAWI) using a stratified random sampling design on their online panel. The target population group for this survey included residents aged 18 years or older residing across the following macro-regions: Northeast, Midwest, West, and South.

## SAMPLE SIZE AND SAMPLE FRAME

The General Population Poll in the United States represents an achieved total sample size of 1,046 interviews distributed proportionally across four regions. YouGov, Nordic based the sampling frame on 2022 census figures from the United States Census Bureau, acquiring a proportionally stratified sample by region, age, gender, socioeconomic status, and level of urbanization. In order to address all relevant topics while controlling the questionnaire length, the World Justice Project split three of the survey modules into two versions (Option A and Option B) and randomly assigned one option to each respondent for each module. These modules included: Civic Participation, Institutional Performance, and Elections. Aside from these modules, the questionnaires are identical. A link to the complete survey instrument in English can be found in the Appendix of this report.

## SAMPLING

Regions were selected as the primary sampling unit to achieve a nationally representative sample of the country. Registered online panelists were randomly selected according to quotas for age, gender, geographic distribution, socioeconomic level, and level of urbanization. The sampling plan was approved by WJP before the start of fieldwork.

## INTERVIEWING AND QUALITY CONTROL

Once a respondent is selected for interview, YouGov sends a unique link to the survey, which is only valid for one single submission. The sampling system algorithm directs panel members to the active survey where their particular profile (gender, age, region) is needed the most. A "speed limit" of 7 minutes was set and used to screen unusual completion times. A total of 61 completed surveys were rejected due to speeding. Interviews averaged 21 minutes in length.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

**COVERAGE:** Online surveys were distributed across regions to create a nationally representative sample. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of the interviews took place in the South region, followed by 23% in the West region, 21% in the Midwest region, and the remaining 18% in the Northeast region.

**GEOGRAPHY:** Eighty percent (80%) of respondents resided in metro areas or cities, while 20% of respondents resided in rural zones.

**RACIAL AND ETHNIC BACKGROUND:** Most respondents (72%) identified themselves as White, followed by Black or African American (13%) and Hispanic or Latino (6%). The remaining 9% identified themselves as Asian, Native American, Multiracial, or Other.

**GENDER:** Fifty-one percent (51%) of respondents were female and 49% were male.

**EDUCATION:** Most respondents (54%) reported that they had received a Bachelor's degree or higher. Twenty-eight percent (28%) held up to a high school diploma and 15% had a vocational degree.

## RESPONSE RATES

|             |     |
|-------------|-----|
| Rejected    | 61  |
| Break-off   | 126 |
| Non-contact | 0   |

## DATA REVIEW AND JUSTIFICATION

As part of the data analysis process, the team consulted several third-party sources in order to contextualize and validate perception-based data captured by the General Population Poll. Peer data sources consulted include select indicators measured by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP)'s *AmericasBarometer*, Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), Transparency International's *Corruption Perceptions Index*, the Bertelsmann Stiftung's *Transformation Index (BTI)*, and Freedom House's *Freedom in the World*. While certain trends captured by the 2024 General Population Poll in the United States are comparable to trends in perceptions data measured by other indices, the perceptions presented in this report may not always coincide with the reality of the United States's rule of law performance as measured by other sources.

## HISTORICAL DATA

Historical data in this report derives from the WJP Rule of Law Index®'s General Population Poll that is administered every few years using a nationally representative probability sample ranging from 500 to 1,000 respondents. These household surveys were administered in the three largest cities of most countries until 2018, when the World Justice Project transitioned to nationally representative coverage as the preferred methodology for polling. The historical polling data used in this year's report covers data collected in 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2021.

## APPENDIX

26 Appendix

27 About the WJP

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# APPENDIX

## Methodological Materials

### GENERAL POPULATION POLL (GPP)

The General Population Poll in the United States was designed to capture high-quality data on the realities and concerns of ordinary people on a variety of themes related to the rule of law, including authoritarianism, government accountability, bribery, corruption, police performance, crime and security, and the 2024 presidential election.

[World Justice Project General Population Poll 2024 – United States Survey Instrument](#)



## ABOUT THE WORLD JUSTICE PROJECT

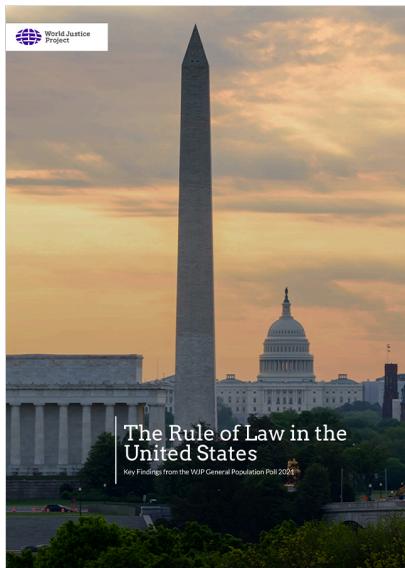
The World Justice Project (WJP) is an independent, multidisciplinary organization working to create knowledge, build awareness, and stimulate action to advance the rule of law worldwide. Effective rule of law is the foundation for communities of justice, opportunity, and peace—underpinning development, accountable government, and respect for fundamental rights.

The WJP builds and supports a global, multidisciplinary movement for the rule of law through three lines of work: collecting, organizing, and analyzing original, independent rule of law data, including the *World Justice Project Rule of Law Index®*; supporting research, scholarship, and teaching about the importance of the rule of law, its relationship to development, and effective strategies to strengthen it; and connecting and building an engaged global network of policymakers and advocates to advance the rule of law through strategic partnerships, convenings, coordinated advocacy, and support for locally led initiatives.

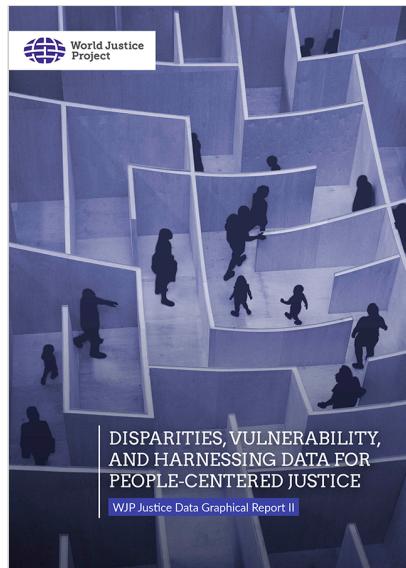
Learn more at: [worldjusticeproject.org](http://worldjusticeproject.org).

# OTHER PUBLICATIONS

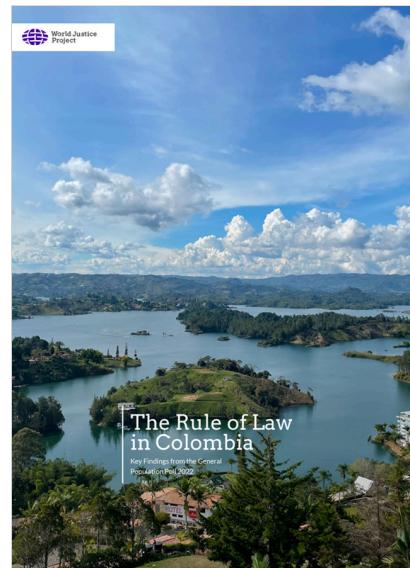
For more information click on the publication.



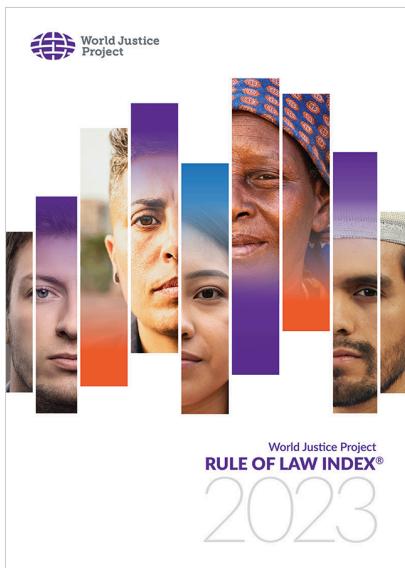
**The Rule of Law in the United States  
2021**



**Disparities, Vulnerability, and  
Harnessing Data for People-Centered  
Justice**



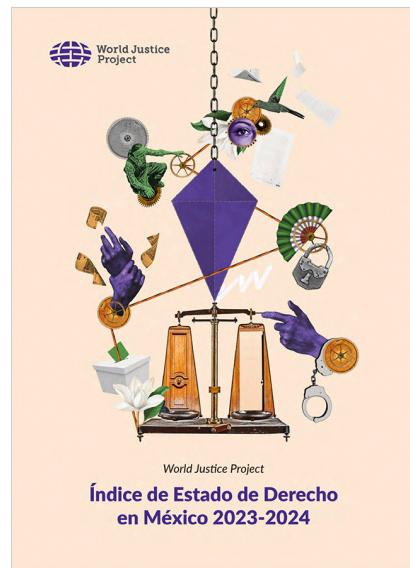
**WJP Country Reports**



**WJP Rule of Law Index 2023**



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**Índice de Estado de Derecho en  
México 2023-2024**

