



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

Acknowledgements

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

Ana María Montoya and Carlos Toruño led the production of this report with assistance from Erin Campbell, Isabella Coddington, Artha Pillai, and Natalia Rodríguez Cajamarca. We thank Christine Detz and Santiago Pardo for their comments on the early drafts of this report.

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.

Cover design by Raquel Medina with images from iStock.

© Copyright 2024 by the World Justice Project.

Requests to reproduce this document should be sent to:

Alejandro Ponce
World Justice Project
1025 Vermont Avenue NW, Suite 1200
Washington, DC 20005, USA
Email: aponce@worldjusticeproject.org

WASHINGTON, DC

1025 Vermont Avenue
NW, Suite 1200
Washington, DC 20005
USA
 +1 (202) 407-9330

MEXICO CITY

Gobernador José
Guadalupe Covarrubias
57-20, San Miguel
Chapultepec, 11850,
Miguel Hidalgo, Mexico
City
worldjusticeproject.mx

 worldjusticeproject.org

 facebook.com/thewjp/

 twitter.com/TheWJP

 [@the-world-justice-project](https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-world-justice-project)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

About this Report

- 5 About this Report
- 6 Executive Findings

Section I: Rule of Law and Trust

- 9 Perceptions on the Rule of Law
- 10 Government Accountability
- 11 Authoritarianism
- 14 Trust
- 16 Perceptions on the Judiciary

Section II: Perceptions on the 2024 Presidential Elections

- 19 Integrity of the Electoral Process
- 20 Hypothetical Situations

Project Design

- 24 Methodology

Appendix

- 27 Methodological Materials
- 28 About the World Justice Project
- 29 Other Publications

About this Report

- 5 About this Report
- 6 Executive Findings

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.

The Rule of Law in the United States: Key Findings from the WJP General Population Poll 2024 presents question-level data drawn from the General Population Poll (GPP), an original data source designed and collected by the World Justice Project. 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.

This report represents the voices of people in the United States and their experiences with the rule of law in their country.

This report presents data derived from the General Population Poll in thematic briefs, 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, corruption, and trust in institutions. In this edition of *The Rule of Law in the United States: Key Findings from the WJP General Population Poll 2024*, we also introduce new insights related to the 2024 Presidential elections. The survey now captures detailed perceptions on 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 it 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 citizens perceive and experience the rule of law in the United States and their perceptions about the institutions governing the 2024 elections. The results from the World Justice Project (WJP) General Population Poll 2024 show a decrease in the perception of the rule of law in the country compared to previous years.

SECTION 1

Rule of Law and Trust

The current state of the rule of law in the United States is viewed negatively by a majority of Americans, 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 within 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 values mask deeper concerns about the erosion of accountability and institutional trust.

Since 2013, public perception of accountability, particularly concerning high-ranking officials, has significantly declined, with a 30 percentage-point drop in those who believe these individuals would be held accountable for breaking the law. Although this perception has slightly improved between 2021 and 2024, accountability remains a critical issue, and the public's views are increasingly divided along partisan lines. Democrats have shown an increasing belief in accountability for high-ranking officials, while Republicans have become more skeptical. Additionally, the erosion of 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 2014, although there has been a slight recovery 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 further complicate these trends. Historically Republicans have had greater trust than Democrats have had 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 of these checks on executive authority exceeded Republicans'.

Overall trust in many key institutions has eroded since 2018, with a particularly significant decline in confidence in judges and the media. Trust in local government officials has increased slightly, but national officials still hold more trust overall. Partisan differences persist, with 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.

SECTION 2

Perceptions on the 2024 Presidential Elections

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, where Republicans are more likely to believe that voting is equally accessible and convenient for all citizens.

The legitimacy of the 2024 presidential election results is also in question, with approximately one-third of the electorate indicating they would not accept the results as legitimate 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 than do Democrats. This divergence in trust reflects broader partisan divisions in perceptions of institutional integrity and fairness.

The findings of the 2024 WJP US General Population Poll 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 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 on the Rule of Law
- 10 Government Accountability
- 11 Authoritarianism
- 14 Trust
- 16 Perceptions on the Judiciary

Perceptions on 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

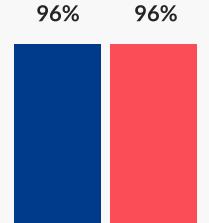
Chart 2

Both Democrats and Republicans Consider Rule of Law to Be Crucial

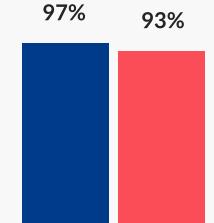
Regardless of political affiliation, the percentage of respondents who agree that rule of law is essential or important to the future of the country, U.S. democracy, and their own lives consistently exceeds 90%.

● Democrats ● Republicans

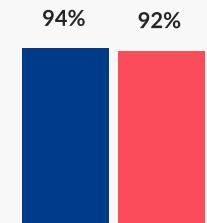
| The future of the United States



| U.S. democracy



| Your own life



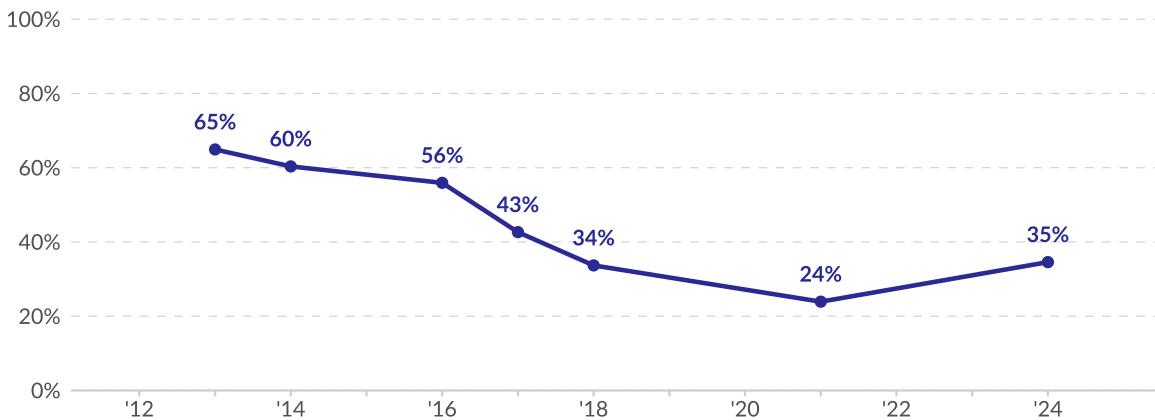
Source: WJP General Population Poll 2024

Government Accountability

Chart 3.1

Perceptions of Accountability Remain Low

Since WJP's 2013 General Population Poll, 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.

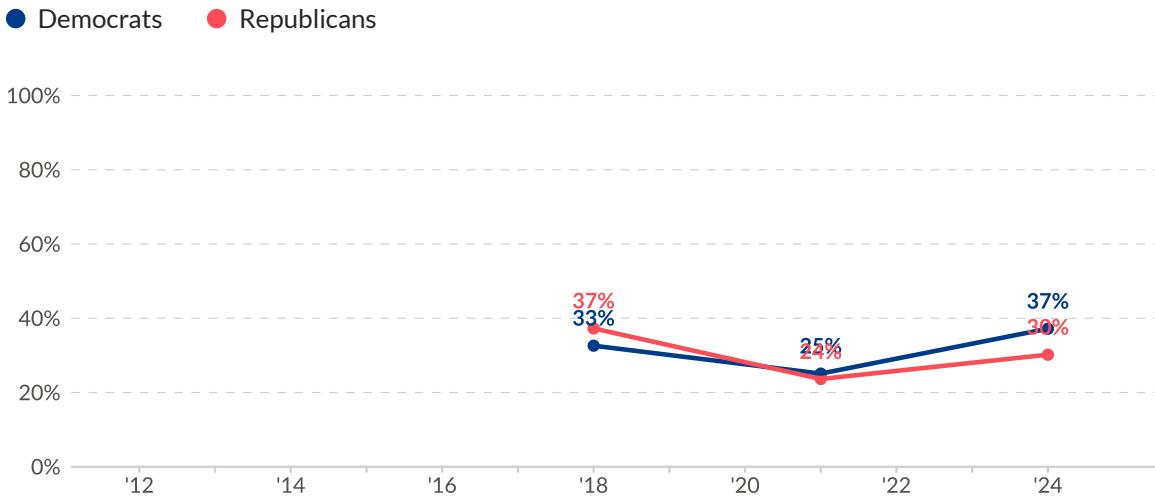


Source: WJP General Population Poll 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2021, and 2024

Chart 3.2

Perceptions of Accountability are Conditional on Party Affiliation

Since 2018, the percentage of people who agree or strongly agree that high-ranking government officials would be held accountable for breaking the law has increased for Democrats, but decreased for Republicans.



Source: WJP General Population Poll 2018, 2021 and 2024

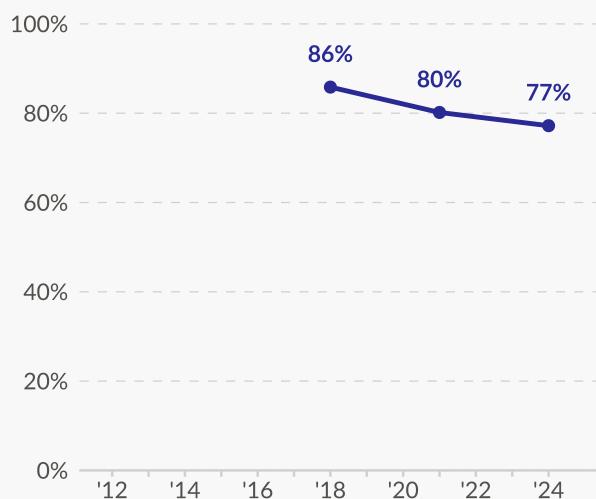
Authoritarianism

Chart 4

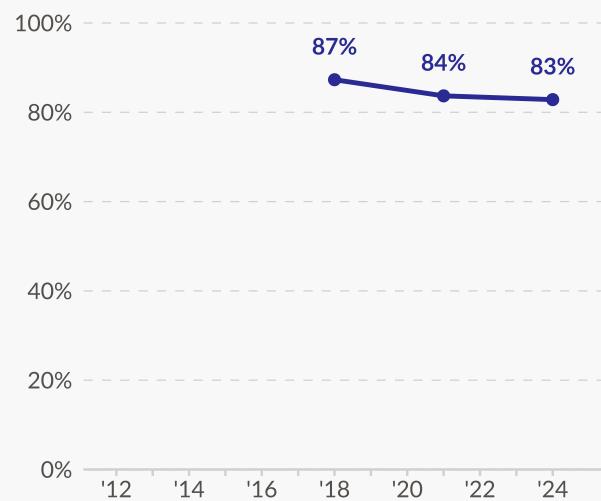
Most Americans Express Rule of Law Values, But Majorities Are Eroding

Since 2018, the percentage of respondents who favor citizen participation over government efficiency has decreased by almost 10 percentage points. Likewise, the percentage 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, the number of people who now say it is not necessary to obey the laws of a government you did not vote for has increased. This is possible because the number of people who did not agree with either statement has declined.

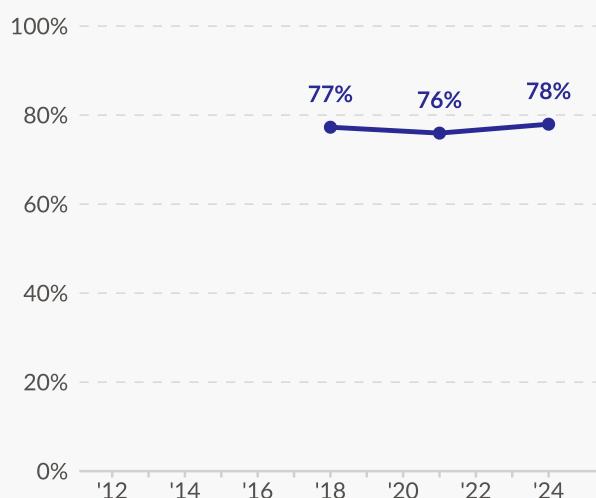
| It is important that citizens have a say in government matters, even at the expense of efficiency.



| 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

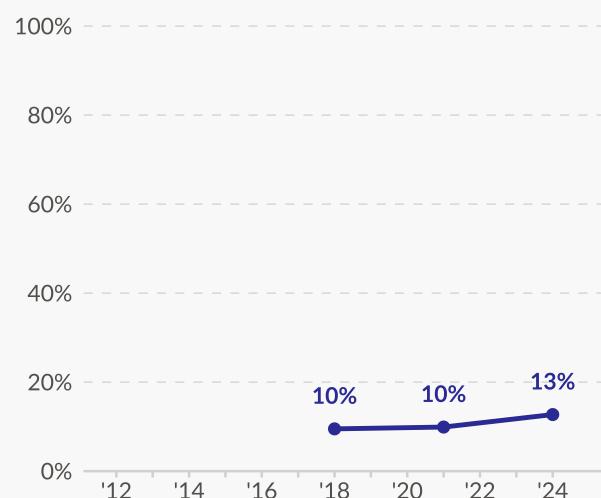
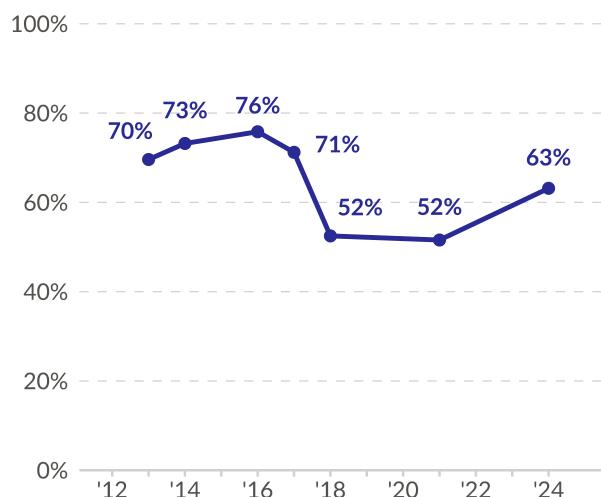


Chart 5

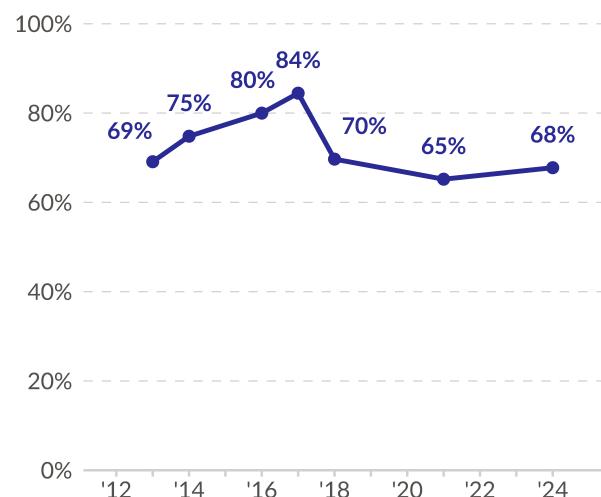
Confidence in Institutions to Check Executive Power has Decreased, but Confidence in Citizens to Do So Has Increased

The percentages of respondents in the United States who agree that Congress, the courts, and citizens could hypothetically stop a president's illegal actions follow a similar pattern since 2014—peaking in the 2016 and 2017 polls before dropping off in 2021 and increasing between 2021 and 2024. Between 2014 and 2024, however, the only group that saw a net increase in the percentage of Americans who believed it could stop a president's illegal actions was citizens.

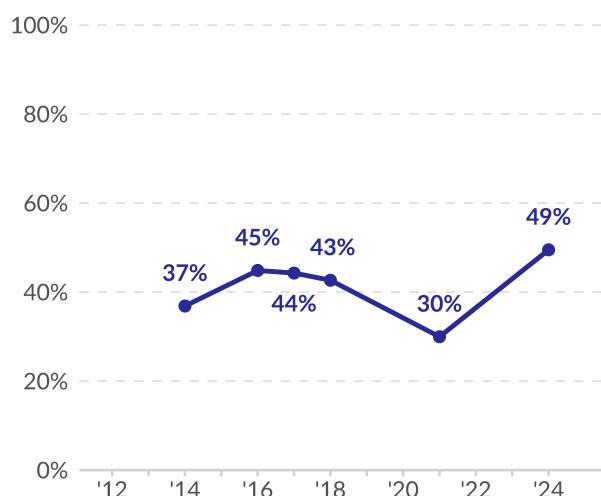
| Congress



| Courts



| Citizens



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

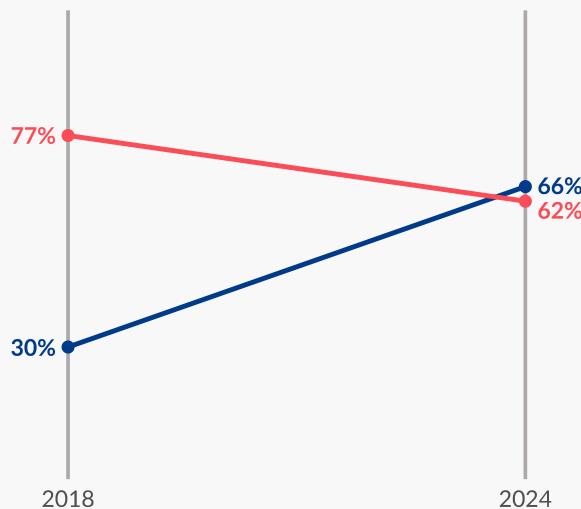
Chart 6

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

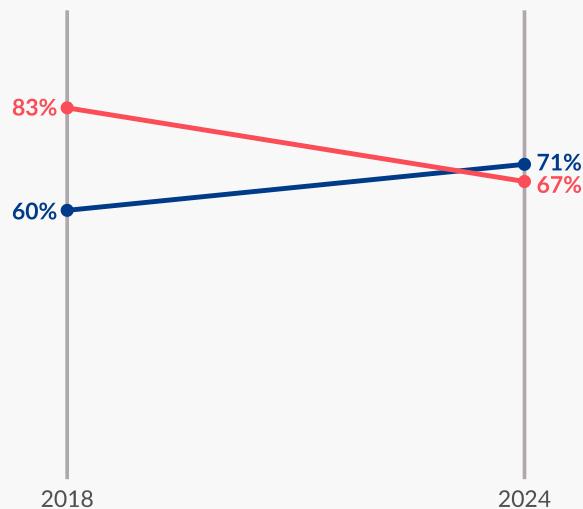
Between 2018 and 2024, the percentage of Democrats who believe that courts and Congress could hypothetically stop a president's illegal actions has increased significantly, while the percentage of Republicans that hold the same belief has decreased significantly. A similar but less striking pattern is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

● Democrats ● Republicans

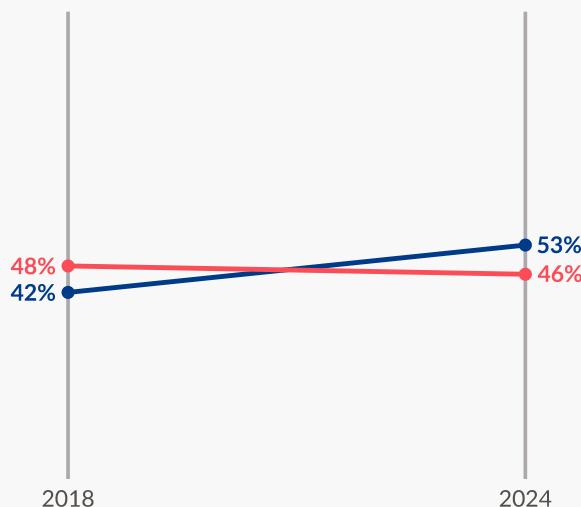
■ Congress



■ Courts



■ Citizens



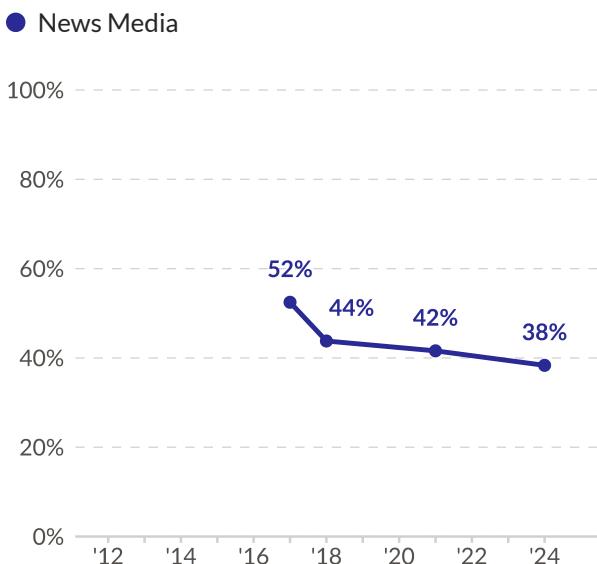
Trust

Chart 7

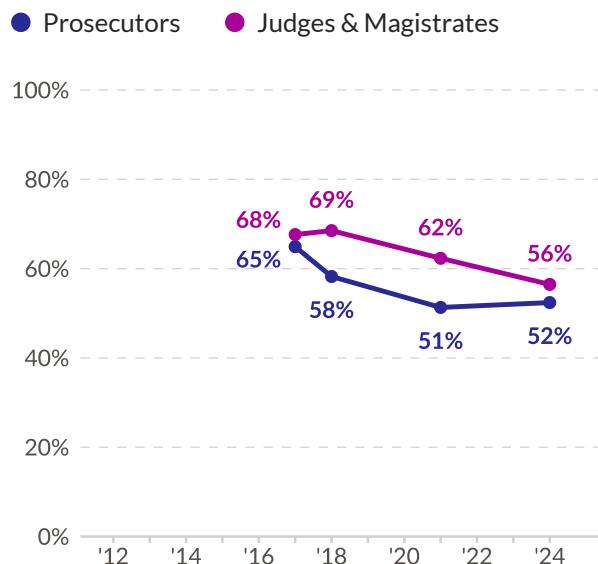
Trust in Many Institutions Has Eroded Since 2018

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, but more Americans still trust officials working at the national level more.

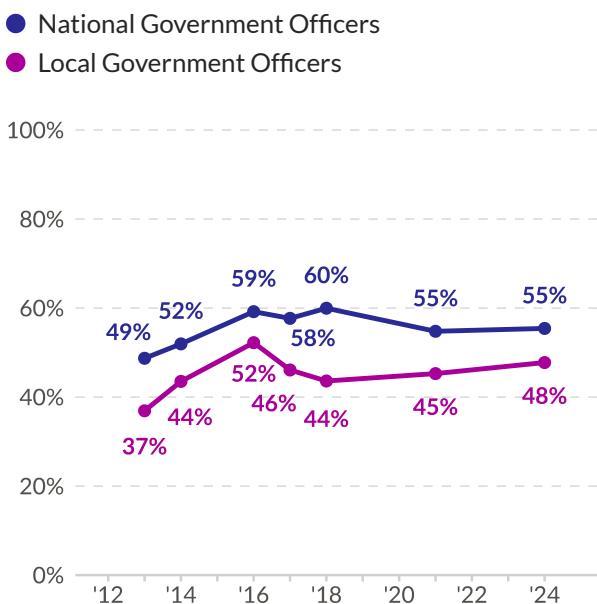
The News Media



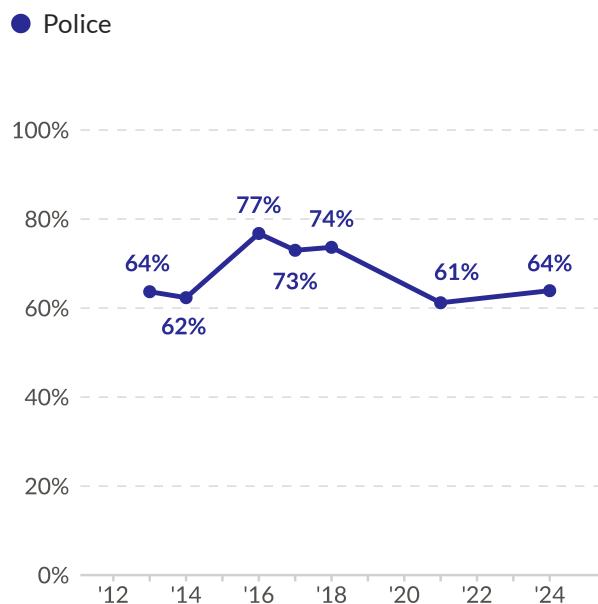
Justice System



Executive Branch



The Police



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

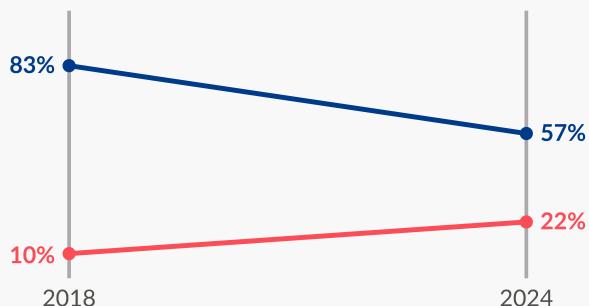
Chart 8

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

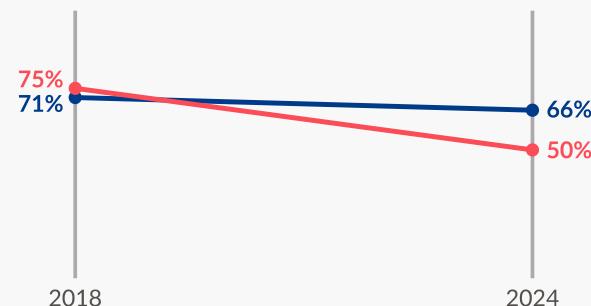
The percentage of Democrats who express a lot or some trust in the media, executive officials, and judicial officials is consistently greater than the percentage of Republicans who do. However, Republicans consistently trust the police more. Since 2021, Democrats have gained trust in executive officials and law enforcement, but lost trust in judges and the media. Republicans have lost trust in most institutions since 2021.

● Democrats ● Republicans

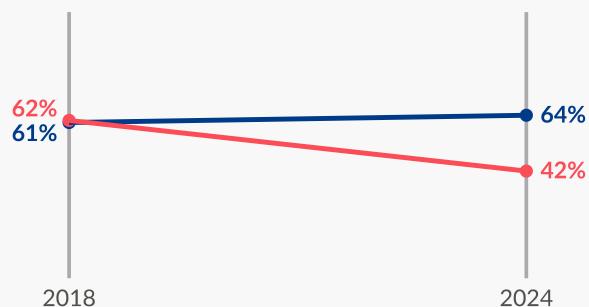
News Media



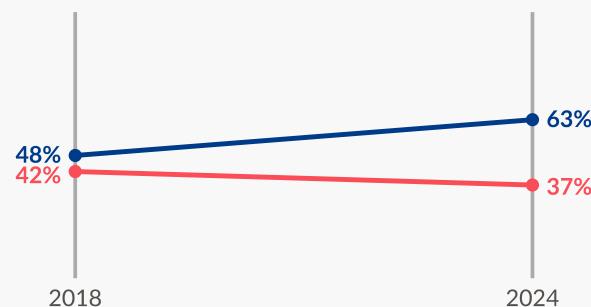
Judges and Magistrates



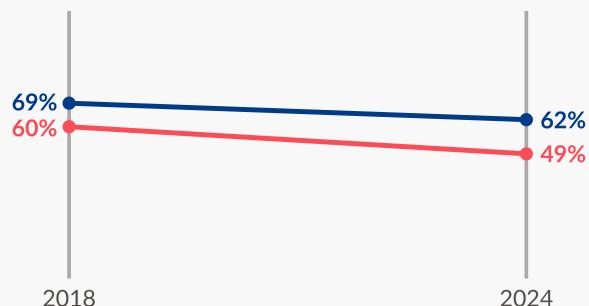
Prosecutors



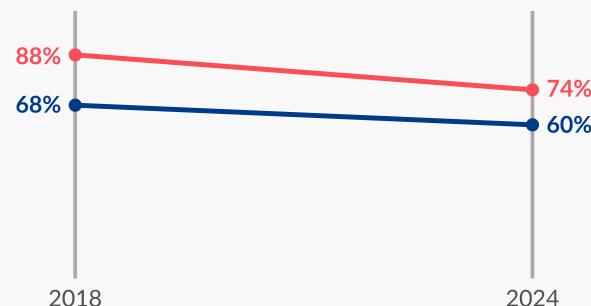
National Government Officers



Local Government Officers



The Police



Perceptions on the Judiciary

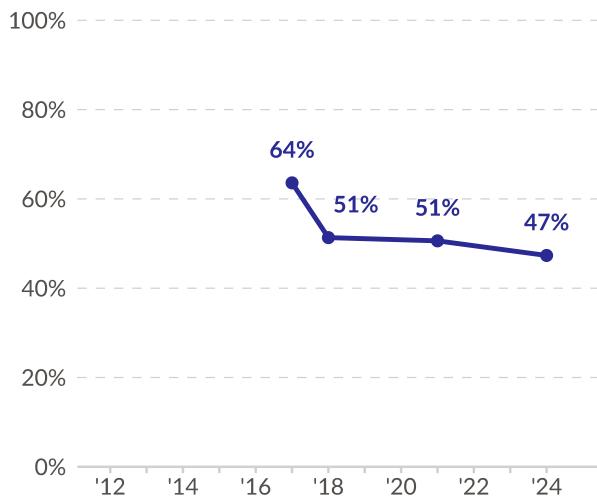
Chart 9

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

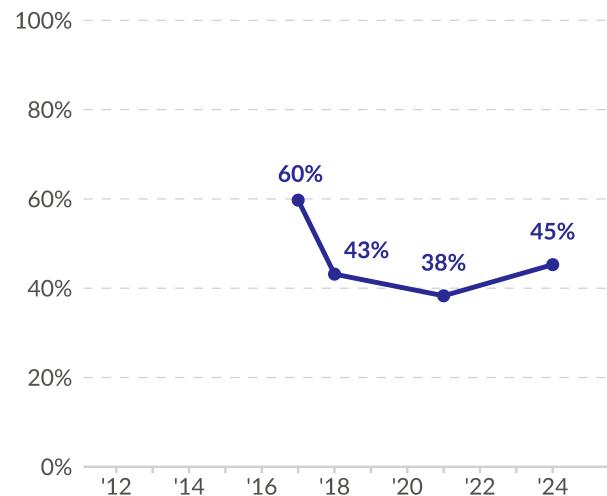
The percentage of respondents that perceives the justice system as fair and independent has decreased significantly since 2018.

However, the perception on the independence of prosecutors showed a significant increased between 2021 and 2024.

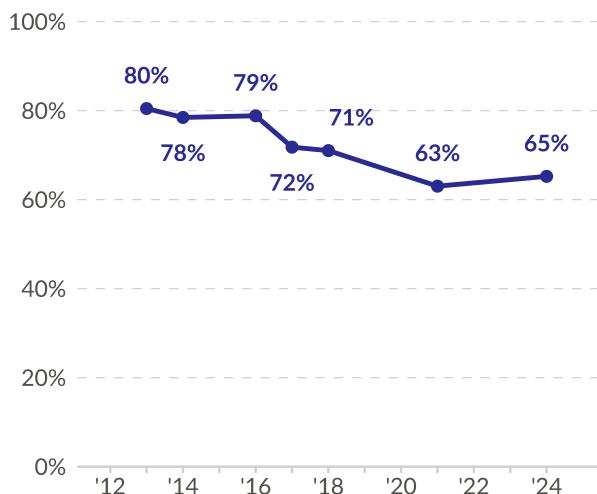
Judges decide cases in an independent manner



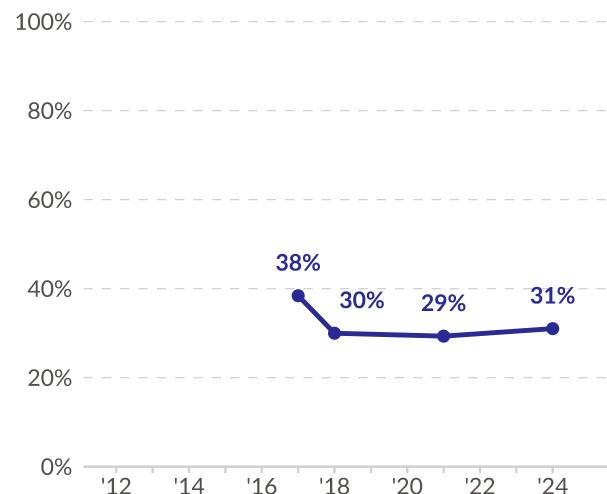
Prosecutors prosecute crimes in an independent manner



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

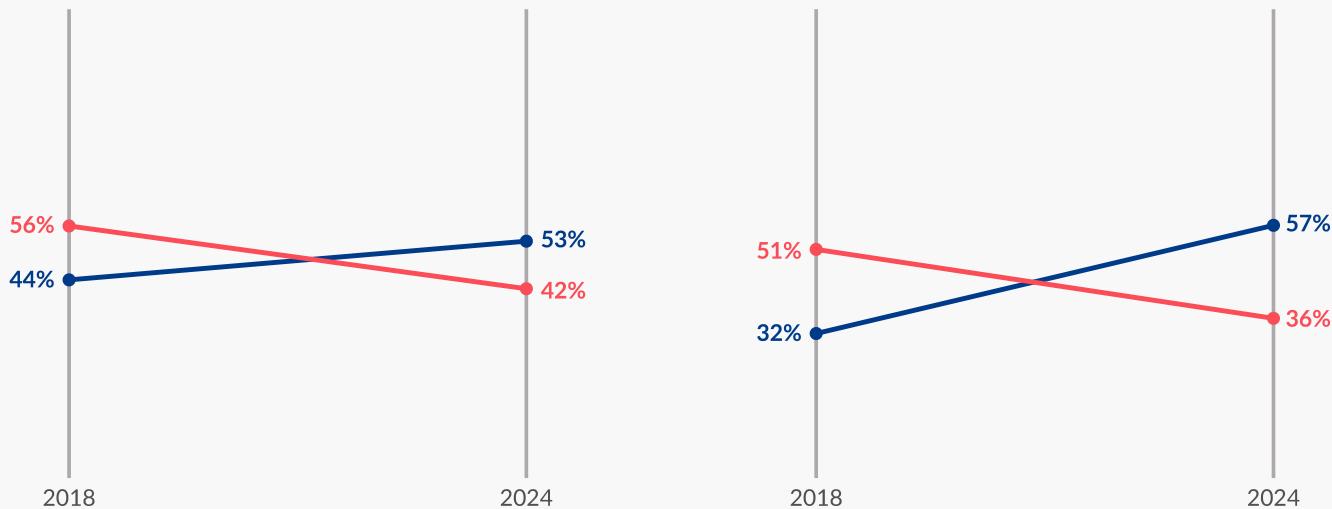
Perceptions on Independence and Fairness of the Justice System Show Different Trends Depending on Political Affiliation

In 2018, Republicans had a more positive perception 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 dimensions of justice system performance evaluated. As a result, Democrats now show a more positive perception than Republicans when asked about their perception on the fairness of courts and the independence of judges and prosecutors.

● Democrats ● Republicans

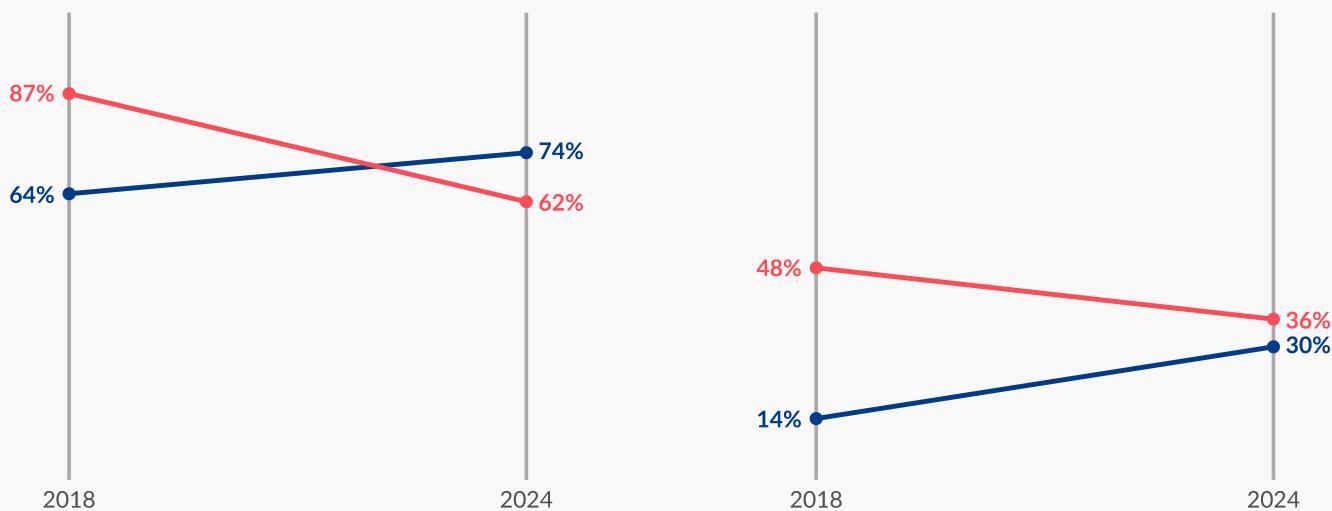
Judges decide cases in an independent manner

Prosecutors prosecute crimes in an independent manner



Courts guarantee everyone a fair trial

Courts are not biased towards money or influence



Section II: Perceptions on the 2024 Presidential Elections

19 Integrity of the Electoral
Process

20 Hypothetical Situations

Integrity of the Electoral Process

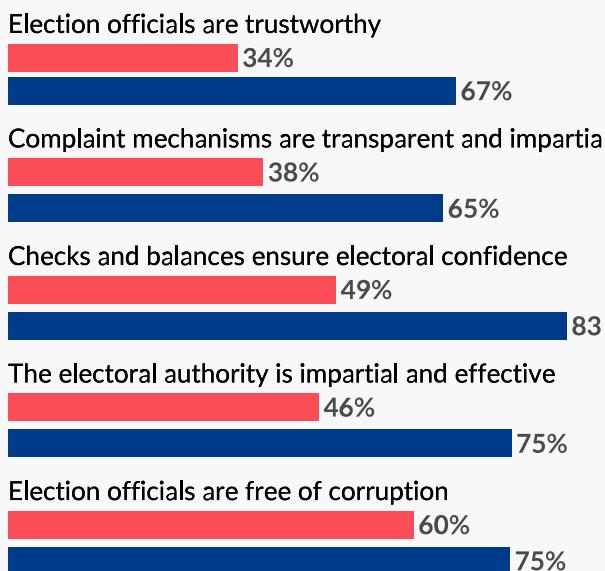
Chart 11

Confidence in Elections is Dependent on Political Affiliation

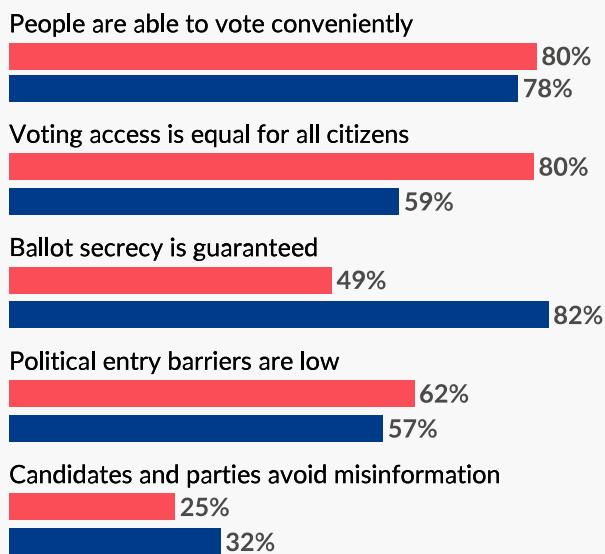
In most cases, the percentage of Democrats who agree or strongly agree with the following positive statements about the electoral process significantly exceeds the percentage of Republicans who do so. The only deviations from this trend concern voting rights, where Democrats are less likely than Republicans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

● Democrats ● Republicans

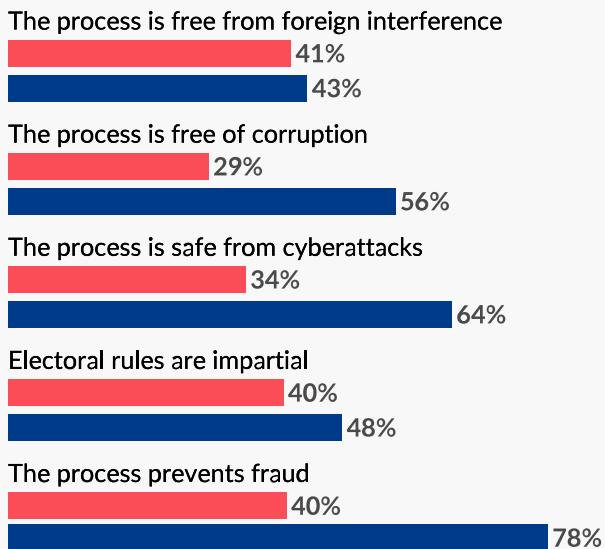
Electoral Authorities



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

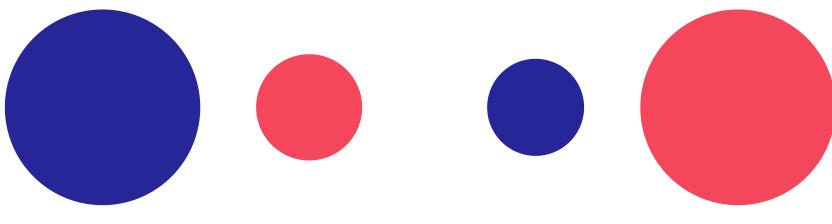
Overall, around one-third of respondents said they would not accept 2024 presidential election results as legitimate if their favored candidate did not win. This infographic shows how Democrats and Republicans said they would respond to election results based on who won. A total of 46% of Republicans 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

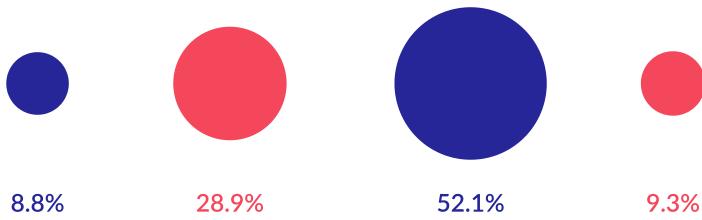
IF THE DEMOCRAT CANDIDATE WINS

Accept the results as legitimate...

...and support their presidency

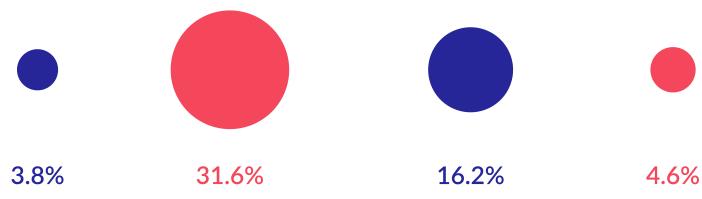


...and oppose their presidency



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

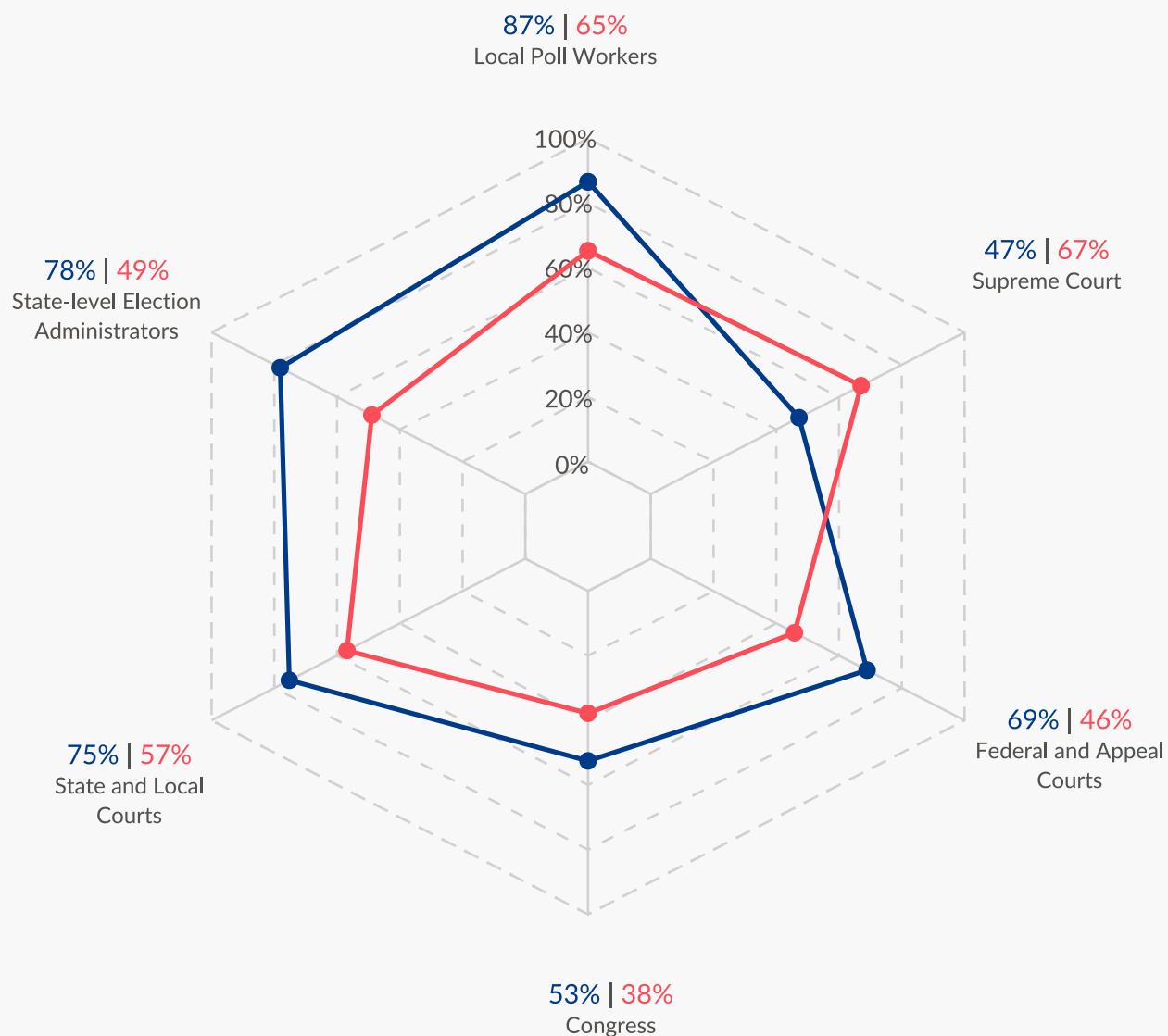
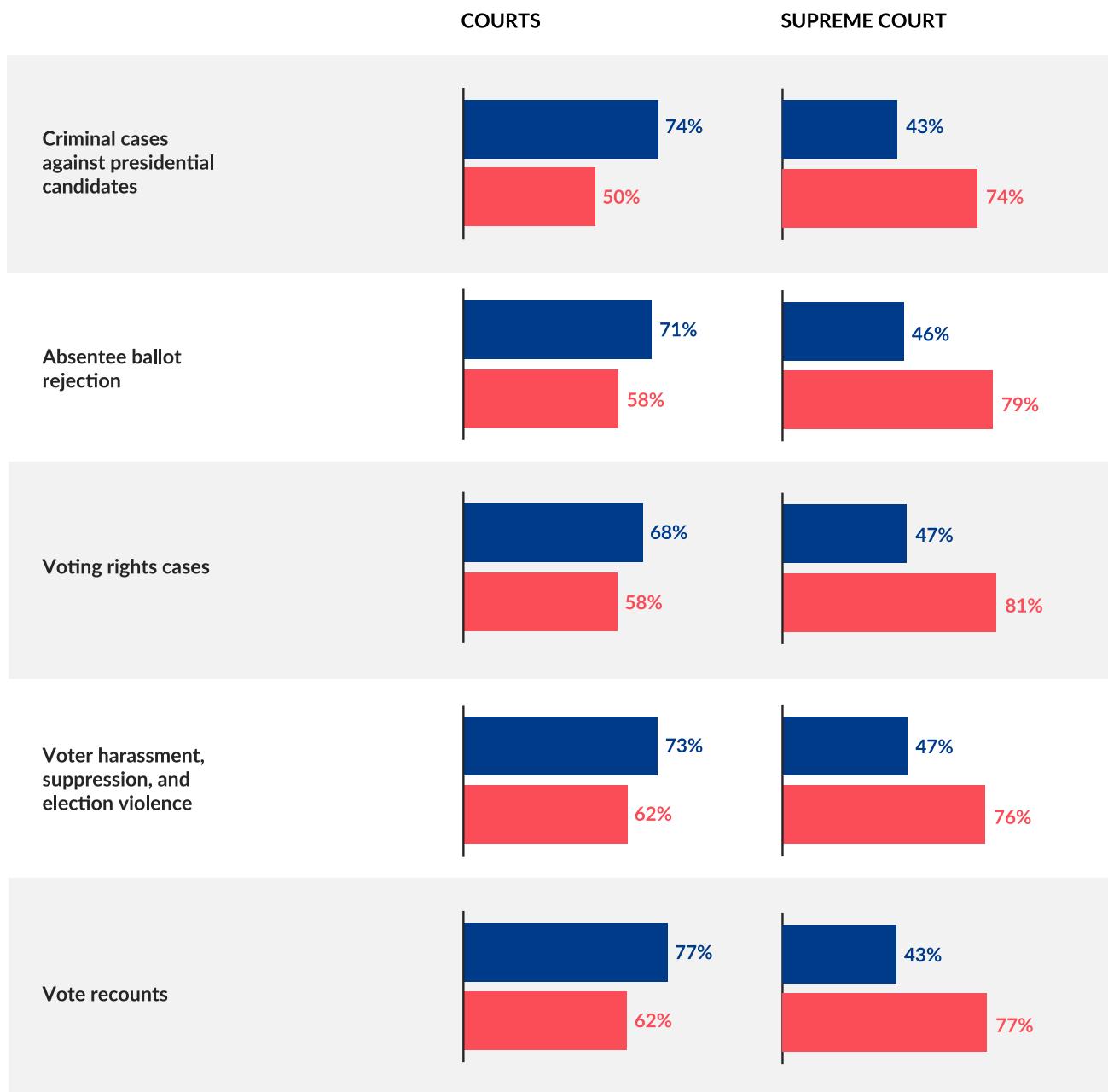


Chart 14

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.

● 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. Additionally, 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 *The Rule of Law in the United States: Key Findings from the General Population Poll 2024* 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 panelist 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 send a unique link to the survey, which is only valid for one single submission. The sampling system algorythm 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 24% in the West region, 20% in the Southern zone, 11% 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-America, Mixed, 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 or graduate degree, followed by 28% declaring to hold up to a high school diploma, and a 15% reporting to have 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 and compare it with the objective rule of law situation in-country. 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 typically administered every two to three 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 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2021.

APPENDIX

26 Appendix

27 About the WJP

28 Other Publications

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 elections.

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

nan



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.

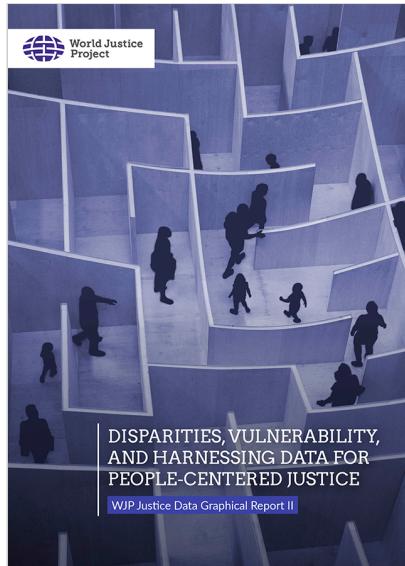
Learn more at: worldjusticeproject.org.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

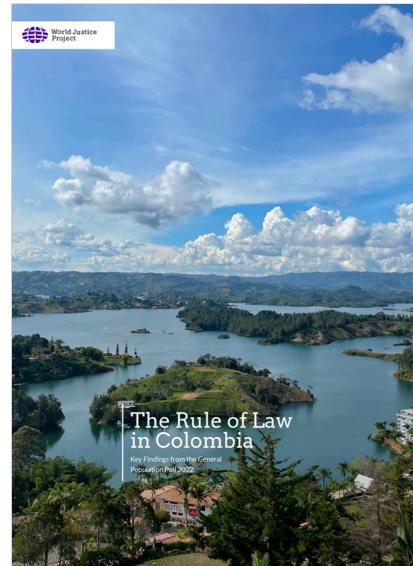
For more information click on the publication.



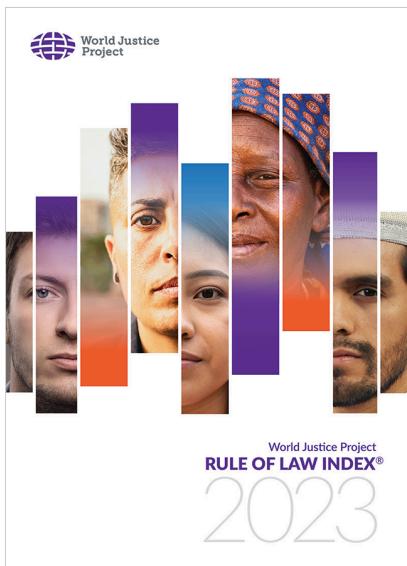
**The Rule of Law in the United States
2021**



**Dissecting the Justice Gap in 104
Countries**



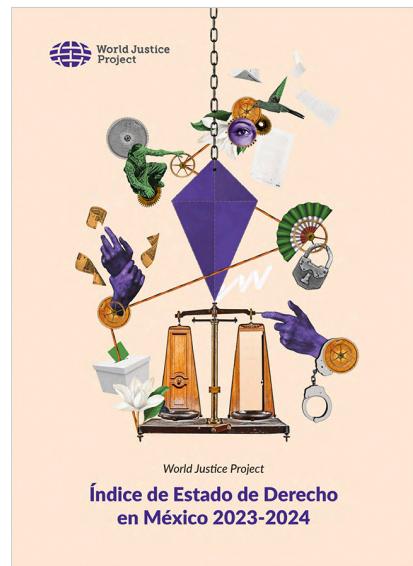
WJP Country Reports



WJP Rule of Law Index 2023



WJP Rule of Law Index 2023 Insights



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

