Judging the Supreme Court
2024 Survey Report
Version 1.0

Michael J. Nelson*

July 29, 2024

Contents

The report can be downloaded here: http://www.mjnelson.org/2024SurveyReport.pdf
The report's website is here: http://www.mjnelson.org/jsc.html

About the Survey

YouGov interviewed 1554 respondents between July 9 - 17, 2024 who were then matched down to a sample of 1500 to produce the final dataset. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race, and education. The sampling frame is a politically representative "modeled frame" of US adults, based upon the American Community Survey (ACS) public use microdata file, public voter file records, the 2020 Current Population Survey (CPS) Voting and Registration supplements, the 2020 National Election Pool (NEP) exit poll, and the 2020 CES surveys, including demographics and 2020 presidential vote.

The matched cases were weighted to the sampling frame using propensity scores. The matched cases and the frame were combined and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion in the frame. The propensity score function included age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of education, and region. The propensity scores were grouped into deciles of the estimated propensity score in the frame and post-stratified according to these deciles.

The weights were then post-stratified on 2020 presidential vote choice as well as a four-way stratification of gender, age (4-categories), race (4-categories), and education (4-categories), to produce the final weight.

1 Job Performance Evaluations

Respondents were asked to rate the performance of several individuals and institutions on a four-point scale ranging from "Great Job" to "Poor Job." Overall, 52% of Americans approve of the Supreme Court's job performance. The Court's approval is greater than that of the president (42%) and Congress (34%). There is a large partisan split in approval of the U.S. Supreme Court: 35% of Democrats and 77% of Republicans provided positive evaluations of the Court's job performance.
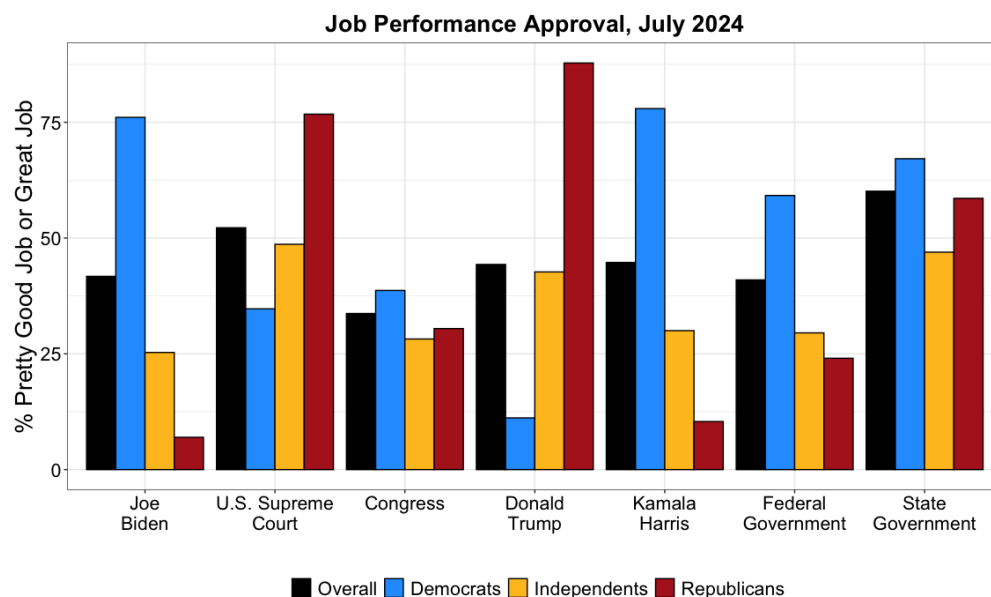

Figure 1: Job Performance Evaluations, July 2024. The bars indicate the percentage of respondents who reported that the individual or institution was doing a "Great Job" or "Pretty Good Job." Partisan groupings count leaners as partisans. Data come from a nationally representative YouGov survey of 1,500 U.S. adults fielded from July 9-17, 2024.

	Overall	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Joe Biden	42	76	25	7
U.S. Supreme Court	52	35	49	77
Congress	34	39	28	30
Donald Trump	44	11	43	88
Kamala Harris	45	78	30	10
Federal Government	41	59	30	24
State Government	60	67	47	59

Table 1: Job Performance Evaluations, July 2024. The cell entries provide the percentage of respondents who reported that the individual or institution was doing a "Great Job" or "Pretty Good Job." The first column provides the percentage of all Americans who provided a positive job performance assessment; the remaining three columns provide the percentage of each partisan grouping (counting leaners as partisans) who provided a positive job performance assessment. For example, 76% of Democrats approve of Joe Biden's performance in office.

2 Basis of Decisions

Respondents were asked "In general, what most often motivates Supreme Court justices decisions?" Overall, 61% of Americans responded that the Court's decisions are based on "mainly law" while 39% said that the Court's decisions are "mainly politics."

	Mainly Politics	Mainly Law
Overall	39	61
Democrat	52	48
Independent	38	62
Republican	23	77

Table 2: Basis of Supreme Court Decisions, July 2024. The cell entries provide the percentage of respondents who answered that the Court's decisions were based on "mainly law" or "mainly politics." The first row provides the percentage for all Americans; the remaining three rows provide the percentage by partisan grouping (counting leaners as partisans). For example, 52% of Democrats said that the Court's decisions are based on "mainly politics." Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

3 Ideological Direction of Decisions

Respondents were asked "In general, would you say that the U.S. Supreme Court is too liberal, too conservative, or about right in its decisions?" Overall, 15% of Americans say that the Court is too liberal, 41% say that the Court is too conservative, and 44% say that the Court's decisions are "about right" ideologically. Notably, 67% of Republicans, 47% of Independents, and 26% of Independents say that the Court's decisions are "about right" ideologically.

Respondents were also asked "Over the past five years, do you think the Supreme Court has become more liberal, more conservative or stayed about the same?" 16% of Americans say that the Court has trended in a liberal direction, 52% say the Court has gotten more conservative, and 32% say that the Court's decisions have stayed the same over the past five years. 66% of Democrats say that the Court has become more conservative while only 41% of Independents and Republicans responded similarly.

	Too Liberal	Too Conservative	About Right
Overall	15	41	44
Democrat	8	66	26
Independent	14	39	47
Republican	24	10	67

Table 3: Judgment of the Ideological Direction of the Court's Decisions, July 2024. The cell entries provide the percentage of respondents who answered that the Court's decisions were "too liberal," "too conservative," or "'about right." The first row provides the percentage for all Americans; the remaining three rows provide the percentage by partisan grouping (counting leaners as partisans). For example, 8% of Democrats said that the Court's decisions are too liberal. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

	More Liberal	More Conservative	Stayed the Same
Overall	16	52	32
Democrat	10	66	23
Independent	14	41	44
Republican	23	41	36

Table 4: Judgment of the 5-Year Trend in Supreme Court Decisions, July 2024. The cell entries provide the percentage of respondents who answered that the Court's decisions have become "more liberal," "more conservative," or "stayed the same" over the past half-decade. The first row provides the percentage for all Americans; the remaining three rows provide the percentage by partisan grouping (counting leaners as partisans). For example, 66% of Democrats said that the Court has become more conservative over the past 5 years. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

4 Support for Court Reform

Respondents were asked "There are currently many proposals for changes to the U.S. Supreme Court. How strongly would you support or oppose the following changes?" Responents answered on a 5-point scale ranging from "Strongly Support" to "Strongly Oppose." The full text of the proposals follows:

- Reducing the ability of the Supreme Court to decide cases dealing with controversial issues, like abortion, school prayer, and LGBT rights
- Allowing the president to nominate four new justices while increasing the size of the Supreme Court from 9 to 13
- Eliminating the ability of the Supreme Court to declare laws passed by Congress unconstitutional
- Requiring Supreme Court justices to retire when they turn 70
- Having judges serve a fixed term on the Supreme Court like six or eight years rather than serving life terms
- Allowing the people to elect U.S. Supreme Court judges directly rather than having them appointed by politicians

Notably, the term limits item differs from Biden's proposal which calls for a longer term length than was provided in this survey item.

Overall, Americans responded favorably toward mandatory retirement, term limits, and judicial elections, with a majority supporting each reform. A majority of Democrats also supported court packing, while no proposal receives a majority of support from Republicans. A majority of Independents supported the mandatory retirement and term limits proposals.

Notably, the 5-option response set means respondents were provided an explicit opportunity to say they were "uncertain" about their level of support for reform. Many Americans–at least one-in-five for each proposal–are uncertain of their level of support for each proposal.
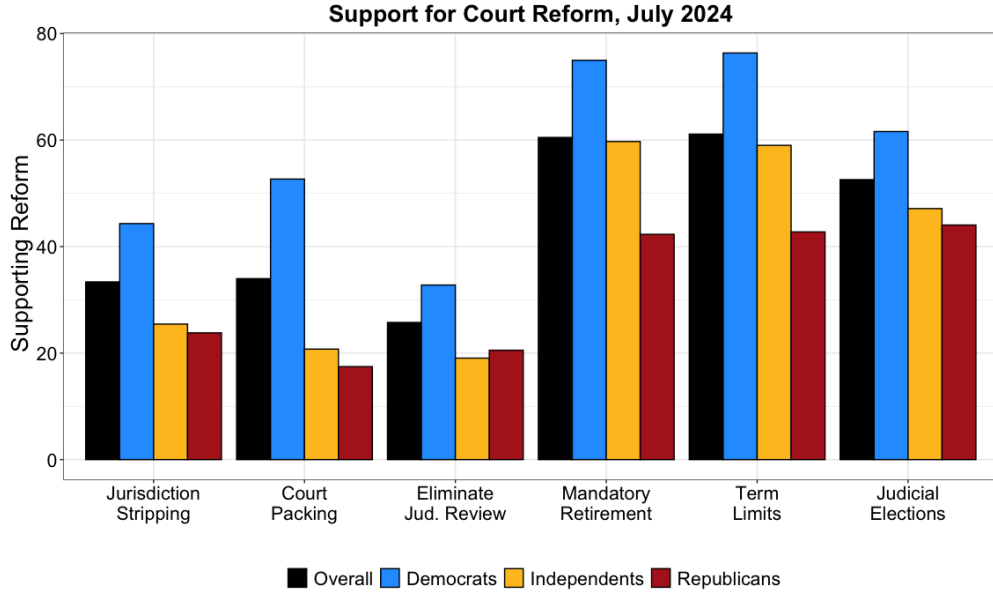
Support for Court Reform, July 2024

Figure 2: Support for Court Reform, July 2024. The bars indicate the percentage of respondents who support each reform (rather than indicating that they oppose it or are uncertain of their level of support for it). Partisan groupings count leaners as partisans. Data come from a nationally representative YouGov survey of 1,500 U.S. adults fielded from July 9-17, 2024.

	Support	Uncertain	Oppose
Jurisdiction Stripping	33	28	39
Court Packing	34	31	35
Eliminate Judicial Review	26	33	41
Mandatory Retirement	60	22	18
Term Limits	61	21	18
Judicial Elections	53	25	23

Table 5: Support for Court Reform, July 2024. The cell entries provide the percentage of respondents who supported, were uncertain about, or opposed each reform. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Jurisdiction Stripping	44	25	24
Court Packing	53	21	17
Eliminate Judicial Review	33	19	21
Mandatory Retirement	75	60	42
Term Limits	76	59	43
Judicial Elections	62	47	44

Table 6: Support for Court Reform (by Partisanship), July 2024. The cell entries provide the percentage of respondents, by partisanship (counting leaners as partisans) who support each reform. For example, 53% of Democrats support court packing.

5   Judgments of Ethical Practices

Respondents were asked "How would you rate the ethical and moral practices of the following parts of government?" Response options were "Excellent," "Good," "Fair," or "Poor." A minority of Americans responded positively about the Court's ethical practices (46%), though the public is more positive toward the Court's ethical practices than Congress's. Two-thirds of Republicans have a positive judgment of the Court's ethical practices while only one-third of Democrats responded similarly.
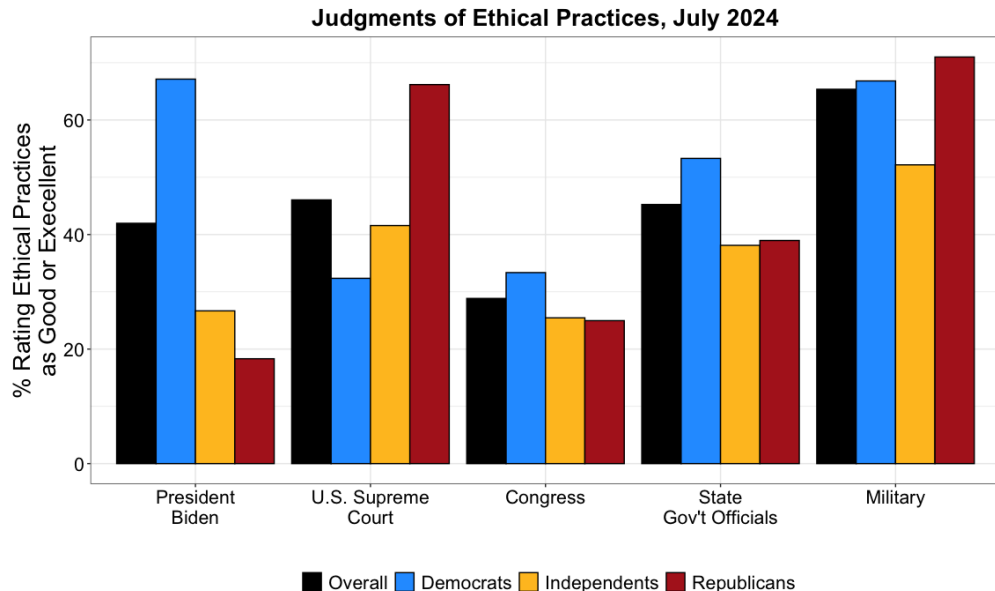

Figure 3: Judgments of Ethical Practices, July 2024. The bars indicate the percentage of respondents who reported that the institution's ethical and moral practices were "Excellent" or "Good." Partisan groupings count leaners as partisans. Data come from a nationally representative YouGov survey of 1,500 U.S. adults fielded from July 9-17, 2024.

	Overall	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
President Biden	42	67	27	18
U.S. Supreme Court	46	32	42	66
Congress	29	33	25	25
State Government Officials	45	53	38	39
Military	65	67	52	71

Table 7: Judgments of Ethical Practices, July 2024. The cell entries provide the percentage of respondents who reported that the institution's ethical and moral practices were "Excellent" or "Good." The first column provides the percentage of all Americans who provided a positive job performance assessment; the remaining three columns provide the percentage of each partisan grouping (counting leaners as partisans) who provided a judgment of ethical practices. For example, 67% of Democrats said that Joe Biden's ethical practices were "Excellent" or "Good."