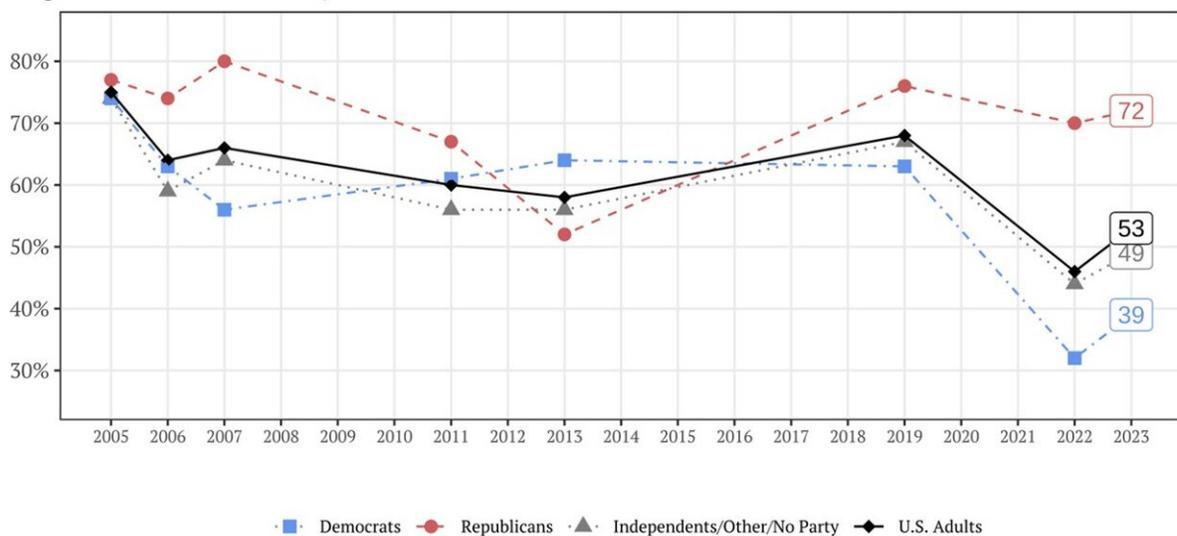


# Report finds 'withering of public confidence in the courts'

July 29 2024

## Trust in the U.S. Supreme Court

How much do you trust the Supreme Court to operate in the best interests of the American people?  
(% A great deal or fair amount)



Source: APCC Constitution Day Survey 2005-2023  
©2023 Annenberg Public Policy Center

Trust in the U.S. Supreme Court 2005-23, from the Annenberg Public Policy Center Constitution Day Survey. Credit: Annenberg Public Policy Center, as published in *Judicature*, Vol. 108 No. 1 (2024).

A new report on public confidence in American courts finds that trust in the federal judiciary has waned in recent years. "The withering of public

confidence in the courts," [published today](#) in the journal *Judicature* by researchers at the Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) of the University of Pennsylvania, also delves into likely contributing factors to this decline in trust, why the decline poses a problem, and what might be done about it.

The judiciary has historically enjoyed more [public trust](#) than the legislative and executive branches of the federal government, as Americans have long believed that unlike politicians, judges make their decisions based on legal reasoning rather than politics. Drawing on 20 years of data from Annenberg surveys, APPC research analyst Shawn Patterson Jr., director of APPC's Institutions of Democracy division Matthew Levendusky, APPC managing director of survey research Ken Winneg, and APPC director Kathleen Hall Jamieson report that:

- The percentage of Americans who express either "a great deal" or "a fair amount" of trust and confidence in the judicial branch has fallen from 75% in 2000 to under 50% in 2022.
- Trust in the Supreme Court has declined even more than trust in the courts in general.
- The judicial branch remains more trusted than the other two branches of the federal government, but its advantage in this regard has declined in recent years.
- A majority of Americans believe that the courts favor the wealthy and judges don't set aside their personal political beliefs when making rulings.

The research team also found that the longstanding association between knowledge about the judiciary and trust in the judiciary has begun to erode.

"It had long been the case that 'to know courts is to love them,'" says Patterson, the lead author. "But the relationship between civics

knowledge and trust in the Supreme Court has changed. Those most knowledgeable about the Court are now the least trusting of its ability to serve the people's interest."

The authors write that "the culprit behind these trends is a familiar one": polarization.

"Where Republicans are as trusting and confident in the Court as ever before, Democratic voters (and to a lesser extent voters unaffiliated with either major party) now hold considerably less favorable views of the Court," they state.

The potential risk of these developments is that politicians and the public become more willing to allow constraints on the independence and authority of the courts. The authors suggest that "robust civics education" that goes beyond mechanics and fosters an appreciation for democratic norms and civil discourse may help to rebuild [public confidence](#) in the judiciary, but acknowledge that this alone may not be enough to reverse the troubling trends.

The Judicature report follows [an earlier one](#) by APPC scholars in the journal *Science Advances* finding that the Supreme Court's dramatic shift to the right, capped by its decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health*, had polarized the public's view of the [court](#) for the first time in decades.

**More information:** The withering of public confidence in the courts, [judicature.duke.edu/articles/t ... dence-in-the-courts/](https://judicature.duke.edu/articles/t...-dence-in-the-courts/)

Provided by Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania

Citation: Report finds 'withering of public confidence in the courts' (2024, July 29) retrieved 29 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-07-withering-confidence-courts.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.