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Americans' trust in nation's court system hits record low, survey finds

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FILE - People stand on the steps of the Supreme Court at sunset in Washington, Feb. 13, 2016. (AP Photo/Jon Elswick, File)

WASHINGTON (AP) — At a time of heightened political division, Americans' confidence in their country's judicial system and courts dropped to a record low of 35% this year, according to a new Gallup poll.

The United States saw a sharp drop of 24 percentage points over the last four years, setting the country apart from other wealthy nations where most people on average still express trust in their systems.

The results come after a tumultuous period that included the overturning of the nationwide right to abortion, the indictment of former President Donald Trump and the subsequent withdrawal of federal charges, and his attacks on the integrity of the judicial system.

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The drop wasn't limited to one end of the political spectrum. Confidence dropped among people who disapproved of the country's leadership during Joe Biden's presidency and among those who approved, according to Gallup. The respondents weren't asked about their party affiliations.

It's become normal for people who disapprove of the country's leadership to also lose at least some confidence in the court system. Still, the 17-point drop

recorded among that group under Biden was precipitous, and the cases filed against Trump were likely factors, Gallup said.

Among those who did approve of the country's leadership, there was an 18-point decline between 2023 and 2024, possibly reflecting dissatisfaction with court rulings favoring Trump, Gallup found. Confidence in the judicial system had been above 60% among that group during the first three years of Biden's presidency but nosedived this year.

Trump had faced four criminal indictments this year, but only a hush-money case in New York ended with a trial and conviction before he won the presidential race.

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Since then, special counsel Jack Smith has ended his two federal cases, which pertained to Trump's efforts to overturn his 2020 election loss and allegations that he hoarded classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida. A separate state election interference case in Fulton County, Georgia, is largely on hold. Trump denies wrongdoing in all.

Other Gallup findings have shown that Democrats' confidence in the Supreme Court dropped by 25 points between 2021 and 2022, the year the justices overturned constitutional protections for abortion. Their trust climbed a bit, to 34%, in 2023, but dropped again to 24% in 2024. The change comes after a Supreme Court opinion that Trump and other former presidents have broad immunity from criminal prosecution.

Trust in the court among Republicans, by contrast, reached 71% in 2024.

The judicial system more broadly also lost public confidence more quickly than many other U.S. institutions over the last four years. Confidence in the federal government, for example, also declined to 26%. That was a 20-point drop — not as steep as the decline in confidence in the courts.

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The trust drop is also steep compared with other countries around the world. Only a handful of other countries have seen larger drops during a four-year period. They include a 46-point drop in Myanmar during the period that overlapped the return of military rule in 2021, a 35-point drop in Venezuela amid deep economic and political turmoil from 2012 to 2016 and a 28-point drop in Syria in the runup and early years of its civil war.

The survey was based on telephone interviews with a random sample of 1,000 U.S. adults between June 28 and August 1.

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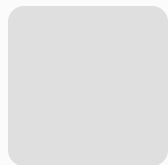
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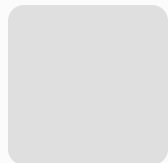
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