

PARTISAN LINES AND PRESIDENTIAL CONTROL

The Transformation of Juror Trust in the FDA, EPA, and Federal Oversight

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Trust in federal regulatory agencies has undergone a profound transformation in the wake of Trump-era policies, marked by heightened skepticism and deepening polarization across the American public. During his administration, President Trump has issued sweeping executive orders designed to bring independent agencies, which have historically been insulated from direct presidential control, under tighter White House supervision. For example, a February 2025 order mandates that regulatory agencies align their policies with presidential priorities, submit new regulations for White House review, and establish liaison offices within the executive branch. Such moves have sparked widespread debate about the erosion of agency independence and the potential for regulatory instability, as agencies once tasked with nonpartisan oversight now face

increased political influence. Public trust, already on the decline due to perceptions of inefficiency and partisanship, has been further shaken by promises of radical workforce reductions and mass rescission of regulations as championed by Trump's allies and high-profile appointees.

Shifting public perceptions of federal regulatory agencies have the potential to seep into deliberation rooms and influence how jurors evaluate cases involving agency approval or oversight. When trust in federal institutions like the FDA, EPA, or OSHA declines, jurors may be more skeptical of evidence or arguments that rely on agency findings, approvals, or assurances of safety and effectiveness. Conversely, higher trust can lend credibility to such defenses. With these hypotheses in mind, Immersion Legal's jury consultants set out to poll jury-eligible participants from a variety of

jurisdictions across the country to better understand their attitudes toward federal regulatory agencies in the wake of recent Trump-era policies.¹ Unsurprisingly, jurors' political affiliation shaped the lens through which jury-eligible participants viewed the shifting landscape.

The FDA, a cornerstone of the nation's public health infrastructure, has been especially impacted. When asked about their view of the FDA during the second Trump administration, 39.6% of respondents said their opinion had become more negative, compared to just 6.6% who reported a more positive outlook. This aligns with broader polling data indicating declining trust in key health agencies, with the share of Americans trusting the FDA to make the right health recommendations falling from 65% to 53% in the past 18 months.²

Political affiliation was significantly

associated with changing perceptions of the FDA. Specifically, 20.6% of polled Republicans noted their view of FDA had become more positive, compared to just 1.4% of Democrats. Conversely, 53.1% of Democrats noted that their view of the FDA had become more negative compared to 19.1% of Republicans. Approximately 45.5% of Democrats reported their view of the FDA had not changed compared to 60.3% of Republicans who indicated the same. Taken together, the results suggest that views on the FDA have changed, with this being especially true among Democrats.

Skepticism over the FDA's independence and scientific rigor is also pronounced along party lines. When asked how much they trust the FDA to make decisions based on science rather than politics under the Trump administration, 60.6% of Democrats expressed low to no trust, compared to 38.2% of Republicans reporting the same. In contrast, 17.7% of Republicans compared to 11.7% of Democrats reported high or complete trust. Moderate trust was reported by 44.1% of Republicans and 27.6% of Democrats, highlighting a notable gap in the middle ground.

This polarization extends to confidence in the FDA's current leadership. While conservative respondents were somewhat divided over the extent to which the FDA's decisions are influenced by politics, they nonetheless expressed substantial confidence in the agency's leadership under the second Trump administration. Specifically, almost three-quarters of the Republicans surveyed felt very or somewhat confident (25% and 45.6%, respectively) in the FDA's leadership. This underscores a prevailing sense of institutional trust among conservative respondents. By contrast, 61.4% of Democrats reported feeling not confident about the FDA's leadership, reflecting deep skepticism and concern about the agency's direction.

Concerns have been further heightened by recent workforce reductions at the FDA, which some view as an impediment to the agency's ability to fulfill its core mission. On April 1, 2025, The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) terminated 3,500 employees at the FDA. While HHS officials assert that the reduction in force would not impact medical product and food reviewers or inspectors, Democrats were significantly more concerned than their Republican counterparts that the layoffs will affect the FDA's ability to ensure the safety and effectiveness of

food, drugs, and medical devices. A striking 71% of Democrats reported being somewhat to very concerned about these layoffs. As confidence in federal agencies continues to erode, especially among Democrats, the FDA's ability to protect public health and maintain its credibility faces unprecedented challenges.

Views of the EPA have polarized sharply along party lines during the second Trump administration as well. Among Republicans, 22.1% reported their view of the EPA has become more positive, compared to just 2.1% of Democrats. Conversely, nearly half of the Democrats polled (48.3%) reported a more negative view of the agency, while only 14.7% of Republicans shared the same sentiment. Approximately a fifth of polled Republicans (20.2%), compared to a third of Democrats (33.8%) reported no change in their perspective. These differences reflect the broader impact of Trump-era environmental policies (e.g., emphasized deregulation, reduced enforcement actions, and shifts in agency priorities), all of which were generally welcomed by conservatives and met with deep skepticism from liberals.

This partisan divide is also evident in the level of trust placed in the EPA to protect environmental health. While 64.8% of Democrats reported low or no trust at all in the EPA's abilities under the Trump administration, only 14.7% of Republicans expressed similar skepticism. On the other hand, most Republicans (64.7%) indicated moderate trust and 20.6% reported high or complete trust, compared to just 7.6% of Democrats. The starkly contrasting levels of trust highlight how political affiliation significantly shapes public confidence in the EPA's effectiveness during the Trump administration, potentially reinforcing confidence among conservatives while deepening doubts among liberals.

Confidence in the EPA's leadership further illustrates this divide. Only 13.1% of Democrats reported they are somewhat to very confident in the agency's leadership, compared to 64.7% of Republicans. In contrast, 64.8% of Democrats reported no confidence, while just 11.8% of Republicans share that view. Significant portions of both groups remain unsure, reflecting that many jury-eligible participants maintain ongoing uncertainty about the agency's direction and priorities.

In May 2025, the Trump administration announced plans for a significant reorganization of the EPA, signaling a reduction in staff to Reagan-era levels. For compari-

son, the agency was comprised of 11,000 to 14,000 employees in the 1980s and 15,000 in 2024. The proposed layoffs would particularly affect the agency's scientific research arm. As anticipated, concerns about workforce reductions at the EPA and their potential impact on the agency's effectiveness emerged as highly partisan amongst the jury-eligible participants surveyed. Two-thirds of Democrats (66.9%) were somewhat to very concerned about layoffs, and 69.7% believed these reductions will harm the EPA's ability to protect environmental health. By contrast, only 14.7% of Republicans expressed concern, and a majority - 48.5% - did not believe layoffs will have a negative impact. These divergent views underscore the extent to which political affiliation is shaping perceptions of federal regulatory agencies and their capacity to fulfill their missions in a polarized era.

The Trump administration's approach to federal regulatory agencies - marked by workforce reductions, leadership changes, and policy shifts - has triggered a crisis of confidence among the liberal American public. As agencies like the FDA and EPA struggle to maintain their core functions amid diminished resources and heightened political scrutiny, the stakes for public health, scientific integrity, and regulatory independence have rarely been higher. As a result, arguments that once relied on the authority of agencies like the FDA or EPA now face greater scrutiny, with some jurors even viewing agency endorsements as compromised at best, or meaningless at worst. Ultimately, this erosion of trust is making it harder for litigants to persuade juries with agency-backed evidence, fundamentally altering the dynamics of trials involving regulatory oversight.



With nearly a decade of dedicated trial consulting experience, [Juliana Manrique](#) refines trial strategies through mock jury research, nuanced data analysis, and guidance in jury selection.



Director of Jury Research, [Jessica Kansky, Ph.D.](#), leverages over 15 years of expertise in psychology and statistics to analyze jurors' reactions to case themes and predict juror behavior at trial. She provides mock trial facilitation and jury selection assistance with an emphasis on developing juror profiles to effectively guide counsel through jury selection.

¹ Two hundred thirteen mock jurors were polled from Kaufman County (TX), Schenectady County (NY), Fresno County (CA), Los Angeles County (CA), Cook County (IL), San Francisco County (CA), and the District of Delaware.

² <https://www.kff.org/health-information-and-trust/poll-finding/kff-tracking-poll-on-health-information-and-trust-january-2025/>