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A view from the jury box is shown inside a federal courtroom similar to the room where the trial of Sean “Diddy” Combs’ is being held in Federal District court in Manhattan on Friday, June 6, 2025 in New York. (Jefferson Siegel /The New York Times via AP, Pool)

Throughout American history, the innumerable societal benefits and indeed sacred constitutional status of jury trials were unquestioned. After all, in 1774, [John Adams](#) said, “Representative government and trial by jury are the heart and lungs of liberty.”

If Adams’s sentiments were shared by the Founders generally, as they surely were, liberty today may be facing a serious health crisis.

Recently, the United Kingdom — birthplace of the modern jury trial — [moved to eliminate jury trials in England and Wales](#) for defendants facing sentences of less than three years. The proposal, advanced to address a court backlog, touts benefits such as speed and cost savings. So drastic a move by our mother country should prompt serious reflection on the health of jury trials in America as we approach the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

The jury trial is not simply a procedural election; it is a cornerstone of democratic governance and one of the most important protections against lawfare and the unchecked exercise of arbitrary and capricious government power.

In the American legal system, juries serve a vital role by placing ordinary citizens at the center of the administration of justice. It is not despite their expertise but because of it that juries are essential to safeguarding our liberties. Juries embody the distilled conscience of the community. So when jurors decide cases, the law is administered not by government officials alone, but with the

participation and consent of the governed.

This sharing of power between the government and the governed creates accountability, ensures transparency and promotes public trust — values that cannot be fully replicated when decisions are concentrated in the hands of judges and administrative bodies alone.

Even when motivated by efficiency or cost savings, removing juries weakens a fundamental check on the sovereign's authority. [Alexis de Tocqueville](#), an early observer of the American experiment in self-government, warned: "All sovereigns who have wanted to draw the source of their power from themselves ... have destroyed the institution of the jury. ... The Tudors sent jurors who did not want to condemn to prison, and Napoleon had them chosen by his agents."

History teaches that centralized power, once expanded, rarely contracts on its own. This understanding of the dangers of centralizing power is exactly why the [right to a jury trial has been enshrined in our Constitution](#). That guarantee reflects a deliberate choice by the nation's Founders, informed by centuries of experience with government overreach dating back to antiquity. The jury trial stands as a stark reminder that justice in a free society depends as much on citizen participation as it does on institutional expertise.

This right of the people did not come easily. As [Thomas Jefferson](#) eloquently declared in 1801, "The wisdom of our sages and the blood of our heroes has been devoted to the attainment of trial by jury. It should be the creed of our political faith." Cost savings and speed should be accomplished by properly resourcing the federal and state justice systems that protect our rights, not by stripping power from the people and bestowing it upon centralized government.

This check on government power is indeed crucial in today's polarized environment where rogue prosecutors increasingly spurn equal justice under law in favor of selectively prosecuting those they politically disfavor.

Although most Americans continue to support the concept of trial by jury, cultural warning signs abound. Plea deals are the norm in criminal court — [resolving more than 98 percent of cases](#) — elevating efficiency, certainty and cost savings over the benefits associated with the traditional jury trial. Juries are even more of a relic in civil court, where [less than 1 percent of cases are resolved by jurors](#). In such an environment — where juries are rarely empaneled in our halls of justice — institutional expertise and the attorney experience needed to administer and nurture jury trials wanes. We can do better.

America may at times stand alone in preserving jury trials, but it does so for salutary reasons. We must never forget that the reaction against King George was due in no small part to his revised justice system for the colonies — one that diminished trial by jury. Indeed, the road to tyranny necessarily includes a plank curtailing or eliminating jury trials.

The institution of trial by jury affirms the timeless principle that liberty is safeguarded when the people themselves play a direct role in administering justice. Preserving our jury system is essential to ensuring justice in our courts, limiting government overreach, and protecting our rights as Americans.

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