

Trump supporters have a secret weapon against bad news about him: report



(REUTERS)

[Matthew Rozsa](#)

April 12, 2026 | 11:26AM ET

President Donald [Trump](#) supporters have stood by him despite his documented abuses of power, rhetorically violent attempt to overturn the 2020 election and numerous alleged instances of sexual misconduct. To those outside the so-called Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement, this is mystifying — yet a recent study reveals the surprising reason why.

Three studies conducted between 2019 and 2022 examined hundreds of Trump supporters to establish how they reconcile negative information about him with their positive impressions, [according to a recent analysis published in the Journal of Social and Political Psychology](#). The first found that a majority of 128 Trump supporters refused to believe sexual misconduct accusations against him and praised his handling of the economy, supposed competence, abnormal communication style and perceived outsider status; roughly a third said that they were so happy with his policies that they could disregard his personal behavior, while another third implied they were indifferent as to his potential guilt because they are cynical about elites like Trump.

The other two studies reinforced the trends in the original. One included 173 participants and the other included 187 participants, and both were taken after Trump-related legal hearings: His first

impeachment, over an attempt to coerce Ukraine into discrediting then-Vice President Joe Biden, and his arraignment after the January 6th coup attempt. On the first occasion, Trump supporters again refused to accept evidence that the president attempted to force Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to obtain anti-Biden dirt in return for military aid; they similarly praised Trump's handling of economic issues, although 15 percent admitted they did not care even if Trump had coerced Ukraine. On the second occasion, a majority (60 percent) simply refused to accept that Trump had tried to overturn the 2020 election on January 6th, although researchers noted participants did this with great emotion and while indicating distress at the accusations, suggesting they were motivated by a psychological reaction to unpleasant information rather than a calm dismissal of facts.

All of the studies found that Trump supporters use disbelief, compartmentalization and false equivalence — to resolve the mental tension between their positive views and negative reports about Trump. They also turn to their economic self-interest as a rationalization for ignoring conduct they might otherwise publicly deplore.

“I was motivated by real-life experiences. I’ve been puzzled and confused by the continuing support and admiration that Donald Trump’s supporters hold for him, despite the many accusations that he has engaged in sexual assault, corruption, and other immoral and illegal activities. I wanted to give those supporters a chance to explain in their own words why they support him,” study author Cindy Harmon-Jones, a senior lecturer in the School of Psychology at Western Sydney University, [told PsyPost’s Eric W. Dolan in an interview about her study](#).

“I also wanted to take a cognitive dissonance perspective to understanding their answers. The theory of cognitive dissonance proposes that when people hold beliefs that are in conflict, meaning that both ideas cannot be true at once, they feel uncomfortable. This discomfort motivates them to do cognitive work to bring their beliefs closer in alignment. I was interested in how people justify their support for Trump when reminded of the accusations against him.”

She also noted that (a) the studies reinforce the notion that Trump supporters engage in cognitive dissonance and (b) it is unclear whether this trend applies only to Trump or to other popular presidents.

“Some people might think that these findings aren’t due to dissonance and that the participants simply did not believe the information,” Harmon-Jones told Dolan. “However, in Study 3 we asked people whether the information about the accusations of Trump’s misconduct conflicted with their beliefs and if so, how bothered were they by the information. The more bothered they said they were, the more likely they were to say they didn’t believe the accusations. We interpreted this to mean that those participants were experiencing dissonance and not just coolly disbelieving the information.”

Harmon-Jones also told Dolan that “our findings only apply to supporters of Donald Trump. However, we don’t know whether this is the case. Would supporters of Barack Obama or Bill Clinton react similarly if they learned of similar accusations against them? That remains to be tested.”

Scientific research also finds another motive for Trump supporters to back him: Because when he is perceived as “winning,” they feel good. Earlier this month a [study](#) by researchers Deborah J. Wu, Kyle F. Law, Stylianos Syropoulos, and Sylvia P. Perry in the journal *Advances in Psychology* found that mental wellness corresponds closely to believing the government shares your values.

"Across all five weekly waves (Feb–Mar 2025), Republicans reported higher life satisfaction and happiness than Democrats," the authors explained. Specifically they noted that "Republicans increased in well-being over time, whereas Democrats showed both linear and quadratic change, as initial decreases in well-being were followed by increases in well-being."

This means that ultimately "alignment with government actions may provide short-term psychological comfort, while opposition—though vital for democratic resilience—may carry psychological costs." Hence after Trump's second inauguration "at all timepoints, Republicans reported greater life satisfaction over the past week, in comparison to Democrats."