

Views of Democracy and Society and Support for Political Violence in the USA: Findings from a Nationally-Representative Survey

Small but concerning proportions of Americans are willing to engage in violence for political aims.

Read the full study: Wintemute GJ et al. *Injury Epidemiology* 2023.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40621-023-00456-3>

What is Political Violence?

Political violence is “violence aimed at political ends — controlling or changing who benefits from, and participates fully in, US political, economic and socio-cultural life.”¹ In this survey, we ask US adults about their support for and willingness to engage in “force or violence to advance an important political objective that [they] support,” both in general and when considering specific objectives, types of violence, and potential targets.

Key Findings

Justification of political violence

A large majority of respondents reject political violence altogether, however:

3.0%

Consider political violence usually or always justified “in general.”

12.1%

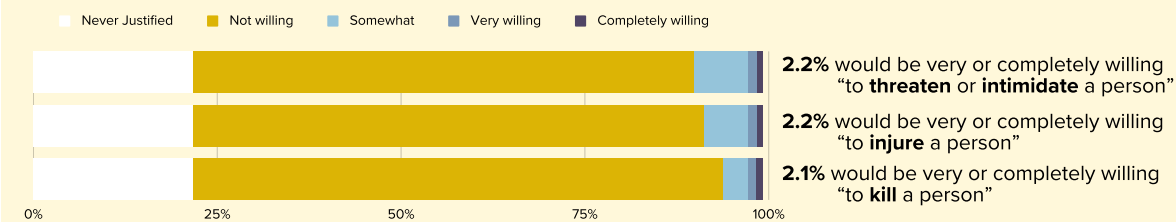
Consider violence usually or always justified “to preserve an American way of life [they] believe in,” with support for the other 16 specific political objectives ranging from 2.5-9.8%.

32.8%

Consider violence usually or always justified to advance at least one of 17 specific political objectives.

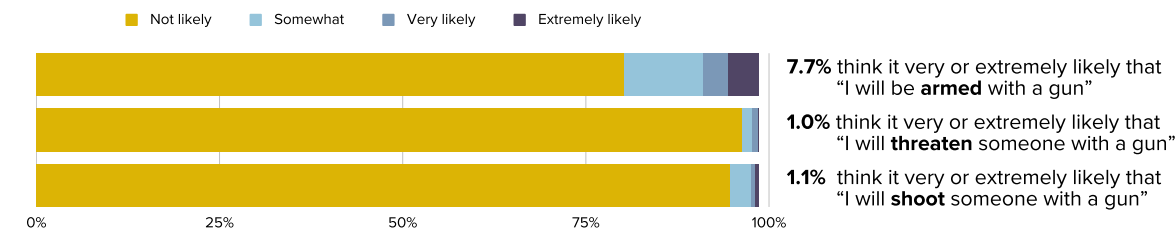
Personal willingness to engage in political violence, by type of violence

“How willing would you personally be to use force or violence in each of these ways?”



Anticipated use of a firearm in situations where political violence is perceived as justified

“How likely is it that you will use a gun in any of the following ways in the next few years — in a situation where you think force or violence is justified to advance an important political objective?”

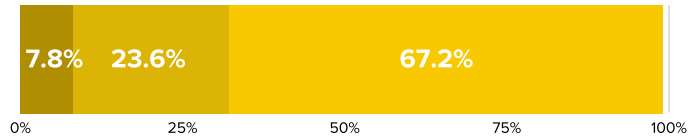


Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding and non-responses.

Views on democracy and potential for violence

“When thinking about democracy in the United States these days, do you believe...?”

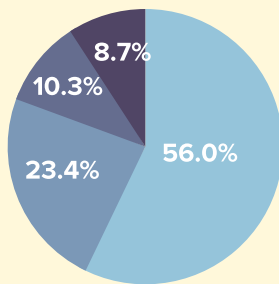
- There is no threat to our democracy
- There may be a threat to our democracy, but it is not serious
- There is a serious threat to our democracy



Two-thirds of respondents believe there is a **serious threat to our democracy.**

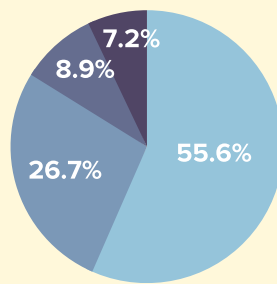
Nearly 1 in 5 (18.9%) agree strongly or very strongly that

“Having a **strong leader** for America is **more important than having a democracy.**”



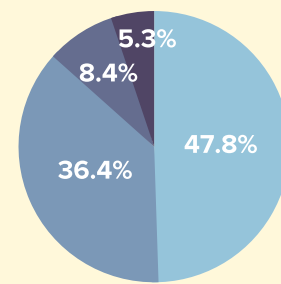
1 in 6 (16.1%) agree strongly or very strongly that

“Our **American way of life is disappearing** so fast that we may have to **use force to save it.**”



About 1 in 7 (13.7%) agree strongly or very strongly that

“In the next few years, **there will be civil war** in the United States.”



■ Do not agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Strongly agree ■ Very strongly agree

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding and non-responses.

How This Study Expands our Understanding of Political Violence

This report finds concordance with prior research² and is the first of its kind to explore personal willingness to engage in violence to advance specific political objectives, including questions about:

- Motivations or reasons that may be used to justify the use of force or violence
- Types of violence, from damaging property to threatening, injuring, or killing someone, including firearm use
- Potential targets of violence, including community members, civil servants, and leaders

Methodology

Data are from the 2022 Life in America Survey administered online in English and Spanish from May 13 to June 2, 2022 by the survey research firm Ipsos.³ The main sample included 8,620 respondents, all adult members of the probability-based Ipsos KnowledgePanel. When weighted, the sample is representative of the general adult population of the US.

Sources

1. Ben Itzhak, N.A., Brown, R., & Hurlburt, H. Summary: Building U.S. Resilience to Political Violence. Over Zero. 2019. <https://overzero.ghost.io/building-u-s-resilience-topolitical-violence-summary/>.
2. Wintemute, G.J. Guns, violence, politics: the gyre widens. *Inj. Epidemiol.* 8, 64 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40621-021-00357-3>.
3. Ipsos. KnowledgePanel®: a methodological overview. <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ipsosknowledgepanelmethodology.pdf>.

An earlier version of this analysis appeared as a preprint in medRxiv.

The UC Davis Violence Prevention Research Program (VPRP) is a multi-disciplinary program of research and policy development focused on causes, consequences, and prevention of violence. Research areas include firearm violence, social conditions that underlie violence, and connections between violence, substance abuse, and mental illness. Learn more at health.ucdavis.edu/vprp/ or contact hs-vprp@ucdavis.edu.

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