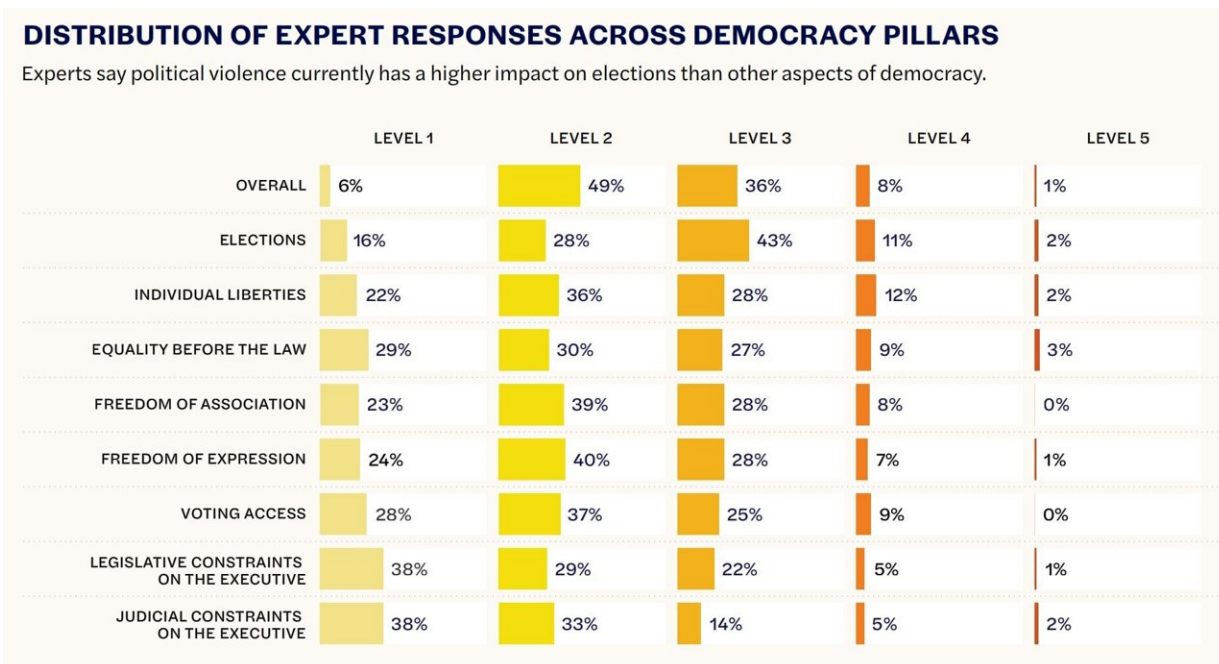


Report: Political violence threatens health of US democracy

November 7 2023



Note: Percentages do not always add up to 100% due to skipped and “Don’t know” responses. Chart: SNF Agora Institute and Protect Democracy. Credit: *Assessing the Effect of Political Violence on American Democracy* (2023).

Political violence is eroding the overall health of democracy in the United States, according to more than 100 global scholars surveyed for a [new report](#).

The report, released today by Johns Hopkins University's SNF Agora Institute and Protect Democracy, identifies how and to what extent experts believe violence is interfering with American [democracy](#). Those surveyed were most concerned about elections, with more than half suggesting that U.S. electoral processes have a high potential of breaking down in the future.

"Political violence is occurring, and it comes in waves," said co-author Lilliana Mason, an associate professor of political science at Johns Hopkins. "Hopefully, this report and future data collection can put it in context. Where do experts think we are right now? Where is the threat to American democracy currently? Without knowing the full landscape, it's difficult to know which concerns to prioritize."

The report is based on a July survey of more than 100 experts in political violence from around the world.

Respondents were asked to rate the impact of political violence on freedom of expression, freedom of association, voting access, election processes, equality before the law, protection of individual liberties, the independence of the judiciary to act without [political interference](#), and the ability of the legislature to provide oversight of the executive branch of the U.S. government. They were also asked to rate the overall threat to democracy and to identify the aspect of political violence that most threatens democratic stability.

In most categories, those surveyed reported [political violence](#) to be "moderately threatening," meaning they believed violence was interfering with how those areas functioned, but not so severely that the systems were completely ineffective. The threat to electoral processes was rated the highest, followed by the overall threat to democracy.

A healthy democracy is supported by voting access, equality before the

law, protection of individual liberties, and freedom of expression. When violence in the form of threats, intimidation, or [physical harm](#) is aimed at these rights and freedoms, it can undermine the ability of democracy to function properly. Escalating threats against poll workers, for example, undermine elections. When members of one party intimidate [election officials](#) into quitting, their actions raise the potential to create an imbalance of power.

"Once the parties take sides on this particular issue, if they are actually fighting each other in an organized way, every election becomes an opportunity to use violence to achieve what you need to get," said Mason, who studies American social polarization and partisan extremism.

Passing legislation to protect election workers could help maintain the democratic integrity of elections. The report also recommends that law enforcement coordinate more closely with [election](#) administrators to understand and protect against threats.

"The data emphasize the need to protect our [electoral process](#) in its entirety, from planning to administration to the transfer of power. Federal and state authorities, local law enforcement across the country, and [civil society](#) will need to expand and align their work to protect free and fair elections," said co-author Jennifer Dresden, a Protect Democracy policy advocate who previously studied democracy and armed conflict.

The team will survey experts quarterly. Ongoing findings will be available on the team's [Violence and Democracy Impact Tracker](#).

"The experts are telling us that we have violence affecting our politics and that aspects of democracy are at risk," Mason said. "With this project, we're trying to get a better picture of which parts of our

complex political system are bearing the brunt of its effects."

More information: Report: [snfagora.jhu.edu/wp-content/up ...
-Violence-Report.pdf](https://snfagora.jhu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Political-Violence-Report.pdf)

Provided by Johns Hopkins University

Citation: Report: Political violence threatens health of US democracy (2023, November 7)
retrieved 28 April 2024 from
<https://phys.org/news/2023-11-political-violence-threatens-health-democracy.html>

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