

JUNE 2024

Violence and Democracy Impact Tracker: June 2024 Update

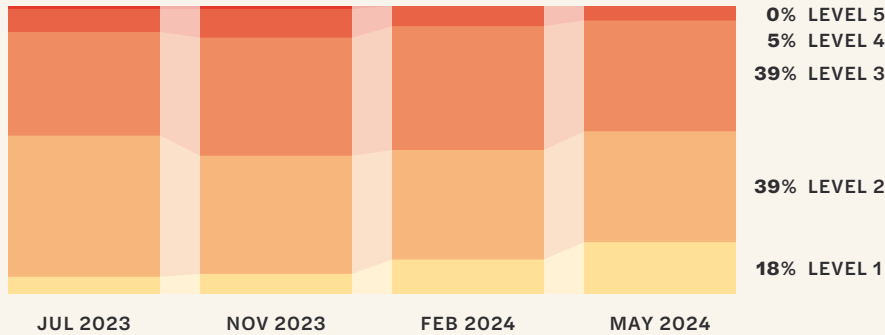
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June 2024 Update at a Glance

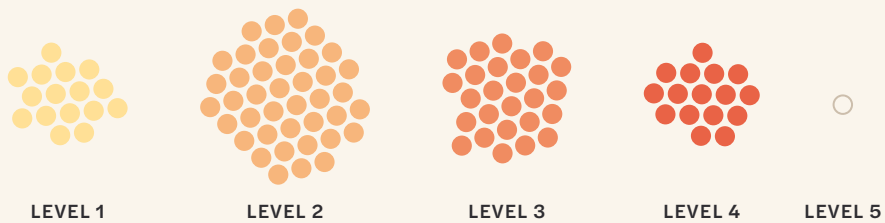
- IMPACT LEVELS**
- 1 Well-functioning democracy
 - 2 Atypical effects, but no imminent threat of breakdown
 - 3 Significant erosion of democratic quality, risk of future breakdown
 - 4 Critical effects, risk of imminent breakdown
 - 5 System is non-democratic

Impact on Democracy Distribution of expert ratings of the overall impact of violence



44% of experts rated the current overall impact of violence on **U.S. democracy** at a level 3 or higher, reflecting “significant erosion.”

Impact on Elections



41% of experts place the impact of violence on **elections** at a level 3 or higher, at risk of future breakdown.

Top Expert Concerns

- Extremist Violence Including Militias and the Far Right
- Threats to the Electoral Process/Voter Intimidation
- Threats to Freedom of Expression/Right to Protest
- Donald Trump and Supporters of his Authoritarian Approach
- Threats to Political Opposition/Peaceful Transfer of Power

71% of experts indicated that they were thinking about intimidation or indirect threats “a lot” or “a great deal.”

The Violence and Democracy Impact Tracker (VDIT) is a quarterly expert survey that evaluates the impact that political violence is having on eight distinct pillars of democracy in the United States: **freedoms of (1) expression and (2) association; (3) access to the vote; (4) election administration; (5) equality before the law; (6) individual liberties; and the independence of the (7) judiciary and (8) legislature.** Impact is gauged across 5 levels – with 1 being the lowest level of impact and 5 being the highest. VDIT also gathers insights from experts on the most concerning trends.

Main Takeaways

- Concern about the overall impact of political violence on U.S. democracy was consistent with prior waves, dropping slightly between January and April from 2.46 to 2.31.
- Among the eight pillars of democratic health tracked by VDIT, election processes remain the area of highest concern to experts. However, for the first time since VDIT began collecting data, fewer than half of experts expressed the view that political violence is causing erosion high enough to indicate a high risk of democratic breakdown in the future. The pillar that saw the greatest change was individual liberties, whose average impact score dropped from 2.36 to 2.06 between January and April. Only freedom of association saw an increase in average score, from 2.05 to 2.18.
- In evaluating the impact of political violence, respondents were thinking most about the effects of intimidation, with seven out of ten again reporting that they were thinking about it “a lot” or “a great deal” in making their impact assessments.
- Respondents identified Extremist Violence, Threats to the Electoral Process, Threats to Political Opposition, Threats to Civil Rights, and Donald Trump and Supporters of his Authoritarian Approach as their top concerns.

Overall Impact

In its fourth edition, VDIT indicates that the impact of political violence on American democracy has mostly remained consistent or slightly decreased in severity.¹ The average assessment of overall impact was 2.31, with 57% of respondents assessing the impact as falling at a Level 2 or below and the rest of the respondents rating the impact as a

Level 3 or 4. Once again, very few experts rated the impact as falling into the most severe categories. Only 5% of respondents rated the impact at a Level 4 and none assessed the overall impact as reaching a Level 5. This indicates that while many experts expressed concern about the possibility of democratic breakdown due to political violence, very few viewed it as imminent.

Respondents also continued to think more about intimidation than other aspects of political violence. In evaluating the impact of political violence on the pillars of democracy, 71% of respondents indicated that they were thinking about intimidation or indirect threats “a lot” or “a great deal” compared to 58% thinking about direct threats and 51% about physical harm.

Eight Pillars of Democracy

- Freedom of Expression
- Freedom of Association
- Voting Access
- Election Processes
- Equality Before the Law
- Protection of Individual Liberties
- Judicial Constraints on the Executive
- Legislative Constraints on the Executive

Impact Across Democratic Pillars

Among the eight pillars of democratic practice that VDIT tracks, election processes again remained the area of highest concern to experts, though the level of this concern was lower than any prior wave of VDIT data. The mean impact score for election processes was 2.42 (down from 2.55 in January), and the median rating dropped to Level 2. The

¹ Wave 4 of the survey was sent to 887 individual experts between April 15th and May 14th, 2024, including 58 who were newly qualified into the panel based on new publications between October 2023 and December 2023. Of these, 596 opened the e-mail and 85 completed the survey, for an overall response rate of 9.6% and a response rate of 14.3% among those who opened the invitation email.

distribution of expert responses shifted slightly downwards from prior waves, with just 41% of respondents rating the impact of violence at a Level 3 or higher for elections.

There was an even larger decline in the impact score for individual liberties, which dropped from 2.36 in January to 2.06 in April. Changes in most other pillars of the VDIT tracker were more modest. The mean impact score for legal equality before the law declined by 0.15 to 2.12, while concerns about political violence's impact on voting access declined by 0.14 to 2.04. Concerns about freedom of association rose slightly, from a mean of 2.05 in January to 2.18.²

Top 5 Areas of Concern

As with prior editions of VDIT, respondents were asked to identify the aspect of political violence in the United States that concerns them the most. The responses to this wave of the survey were similar to prior waves in expressing a mix of concerns. Some respondents noted the impact of broad forces such as polarization and the breakdown of social norms, while others expressed more specific concerns about responses to campus protests or the impact of the war in Gaza. Further concerns were centered around the impact of violence on certain pillars of democratic practice.

Experts most frequently expressed concerns about threats that could be categorized as extremist violence, including militias and far right violence. They once again identified threats related to our electoral processes as being among the top concerns. Threats to political opposition (including the transfer of power) took an additional spot on the “Top 5” concerns list.

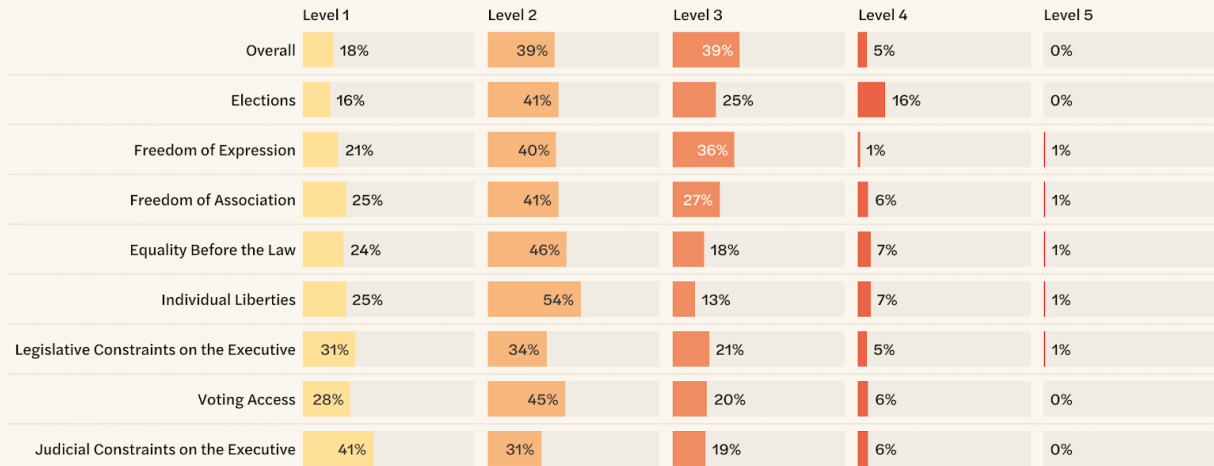
Top 5 Concerns

- Extremist violence, including from militias and the far right
- Threats to the electoral process, including voter intimidation
- Threats to political opposition in the US, including the peaceful transfer of power
- Threats to civil rights, including freedom of expression and the right of protest
- Donald Trump and supporters of his authoritarian approach

Respondents again identified concerns about threats to freedom of speech and protest as among the highest categories of concern. Consistent with the last edition of VDIT, respondents also included Donald Trump and supporters of his authoritarian approach as a concern.

² This reflected a return to the comparable mean score of 2.16 in the previous VDIT edition from October 2023.

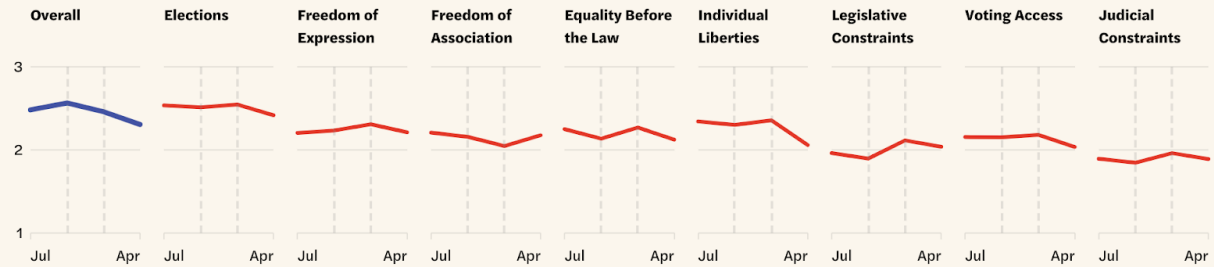
DISTRIBUTION OF EXPERT RESPONSES ACROSS DEMOCRACY PILLARS



Note: Percentages do not always add up to 100% due to skipped and "Don't know" responses.
 Source: Violence and Democracy Impact Tracker, April 2024



MEAN EXPERT SCORE FROM JULY 2023 TO APRIL 2024

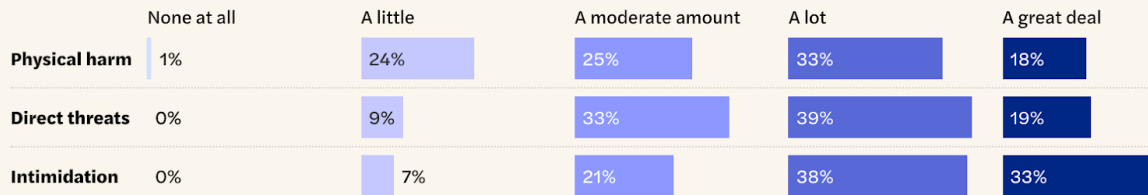


Source: Violence and Democracy Impact Tracker, July 2023 - April 2024



CONSIDERING ASPECTS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE

"In answering the questions above, how much were you thinking about each of the following aspects of political violence?"



Note: The number of responses to each question ranged from n = 84 to n = 85.
 Source: Violence and Democracy Impact Tracker, April 2024

