

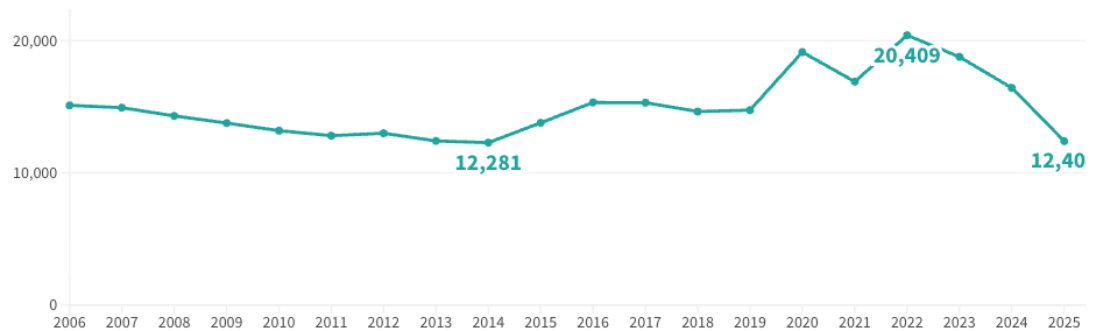
# Political Violence in the U.S.

## What is Political Violence?

- Physical violence, threats, or intimidation that are: Intended to destabilize public institutions or democratic functions;
- Directed by or targeted at elected officials, candidates, or pre-candidates; or
- Aimed at marginalizing a person or group or restricting their full political, economic, or social participation.<sup>1</sup>

## Nonpolitical homicides have been dropping for several years.

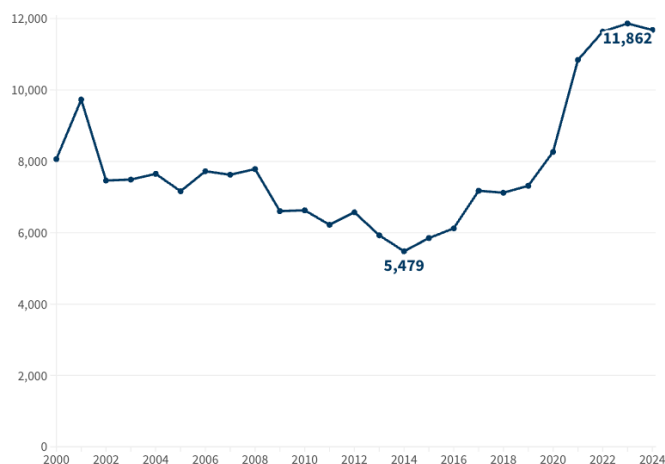
Homicides, 2006–2025



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Program, "Expanded Homicides Reported in the United States," FBI Crime Data Explorer, updated February 15, 2026, <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/explorer/crime/shr>.

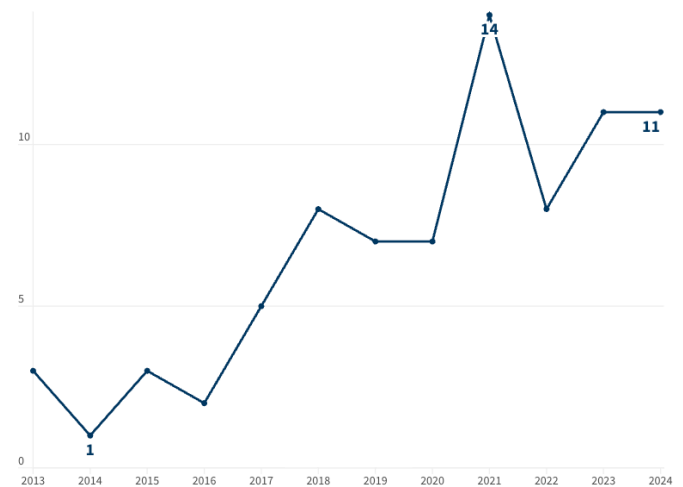
## But threats and acts of political violence remain high.<sup>2</sup>

Hate Crime Incidents Reported to the FBI, 2000–2024



Source: "Comparison of FBI Hate Crime Statistics (2020–2000)," Anti-Defamation League, accessed February 8, 2024, <https://adl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2022-05/FBI%20Hate%20Crime%20Statistics%20Comparison%202000-2020.pdf>; "2022 FBI Hate Crimes Statistics," U.S. Department of Justice Community Relations Service, U.S. Department of Justice, updated October 30, 2023, <https://www.justice.gov/archives/crs/highlights/2022-hate-crime-statistics>; "FBI Releases 2024 Hate Crime Statistics," U.S. Department of Justice, updated September 24, 2025, <https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/hate-crime-statistics>.

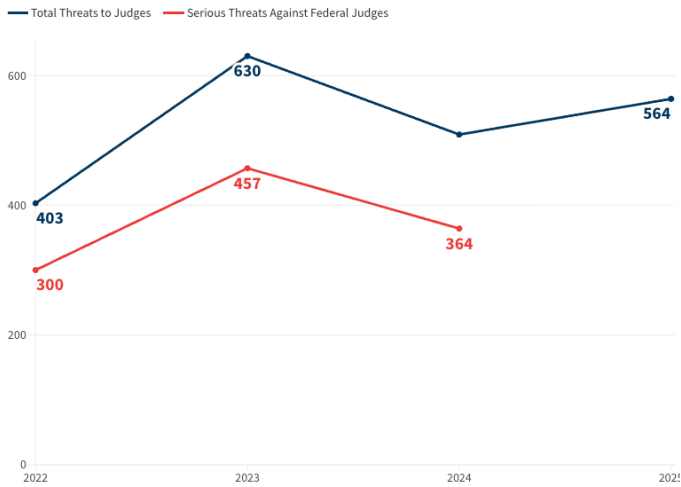
Vehicle Ramming Attacks, 2013–2024



Source: Brian Michael Jenkins and Bruce R. Butterworth, "Update on Vehicle Ramming: Attackers, Frequency, Lethality, and Mitigation Measures," Mineta Transportation Institute, San José State University, September 2025, <https://transweb.sjsu.edu/sites/default/files/2557-Vehicle-Ramming.pdf>.

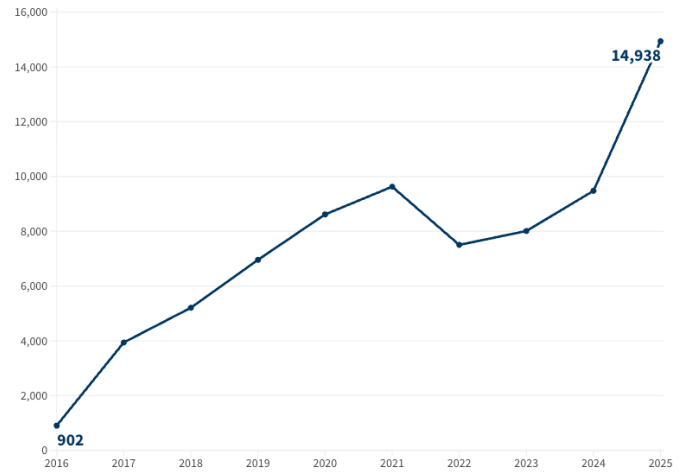
# Threats and violent acts are having major consequences. Hate is inundating targeted communities. Public servants are leaving roles after decades of helping our communities run smoothly.<sup>3</sup>

Threats Against Federal Judges, FY2000–2025



Source: “Protective Investigations – Threat Statistics,” U.S. Marshals Service, February 19, 2026, <https://www.usmarshals.gov/what-we-do/judicial-security/protective-investigations-threat-statistics>; Rachel Schilke, “Serious Threats Against Federal Judges Spiked Over 50% Since Last Year,” *Washington Examiner*, February 13, 2024, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/justice/2854848/marshals-service-serious-threats-federal-judges-2023/>; Jen Armstrong, “Emerging Threats and How to Stay Safe,” Judicial Security Division, US Marshals Service, [https://www.nawj.org/uploads/files/annual\\_conference/2024-annual-conference/judicialsecurity-671f9d17af5b7.pdf](https://www.nawj.org/uploads/files/annual_conference/2024-annual-conference/judicialsecurity-671f9d17af5b7.pdf).

Threats Against Congress, 2016–2025

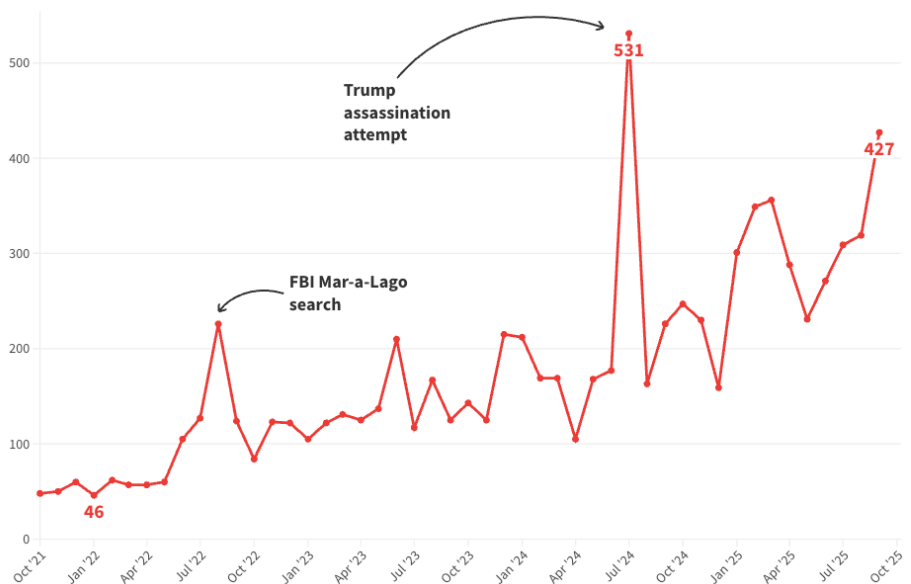


Source: Paul D. Irving, “Letter to Federal Election Commission Chairman Steven T. Walther,” Office of the Sergeant at Arms, U.S. House of Representatives, June 21, 2017, <https://www.fec.gov/files/legal/aos/83377.pdf>; “USCP Threat Assessment Cases for 2024,” United States Capitol Police, February 3, 2025, <https://www.uscp.gov/media-center/press-releases/uscp-threat-assessment-cases-2024>; Incident numbers include concerning statements and direct threats against members of Congress, their family, and their staff, investigated by the USCP’s Threat Assessment Section; Andrew Solender, “Threats Against Members of Congress Skyrocketed in 2025,” *Axios*, <https://www.axios.com/2026/01/28/threats-congress-capitol-police-omar-frost>.

## The National Association of Attorneys General found doxxing and swatting rose from 2024 to 2025.<sup>4</sup>

Source: Nathan Doctor et al., “‘Tick Tock Traitor’: The Rise of Violent Rhetoric Targeting US Public Officials,” Institute for Strategic Dialogue, February 3, 2026, <https://www.isdglobal.org/digital-dispatch/tick-tock-traitor-the-rise-of-violent-rhetoric-targeting-us-public-officials>.

Violent Threats Against Leading U.S. Officials, October 2021–September 2025



While threats remain high across all groups (including white men), women, minorities, and younger officials report receiving higher rates of threats and less willingness to take part in civil service or continue in elected office as a result.<sup>5</sup>

## Which side is committing more violence is the wrong question.

The left and right have both been responsible for periods of political violence. In the 1950s, U.S. political violence largely targeted civil rights workers and mostly came from the right. By the 1960s-1970s, the left was responsible for most political violence. Political violence lessened, but moved more to the right in the 1980s, then the left in the late '90s and then jihadists in the early 2000s. After 2015, political violence from the right skyrocketed. Following the 2024 election, political violence from the right fell, but started to rise from the left, from a very low point.<sup>6</sup>

## That said, ideology is not a good way to understand political violence today.

First, a disproportionate number of the people who commit political violence face mental health distress (although the overwhelming majority of individuals with mental health issues are victims, not perpetrators, of violence).<sup>7</sup>

Second, many of today's perpetrators draw from a mix of ideological beliefs.<sup>8</sup> Violence is growing for policy reasons, such as fear of AI, that are not clearly left or right. Nihilistic violence, from people who reject the political process altogether, is a growing concern.<sup>9</sup> Both left and right are nearly equally targeted—at times by their own side.

Third, young people are more likely than older people to support violence.<sup>10</sup> Frustration at a government that isn't answering problems has combined with social "scripts" that offer aggrieved young people a violent template for response.

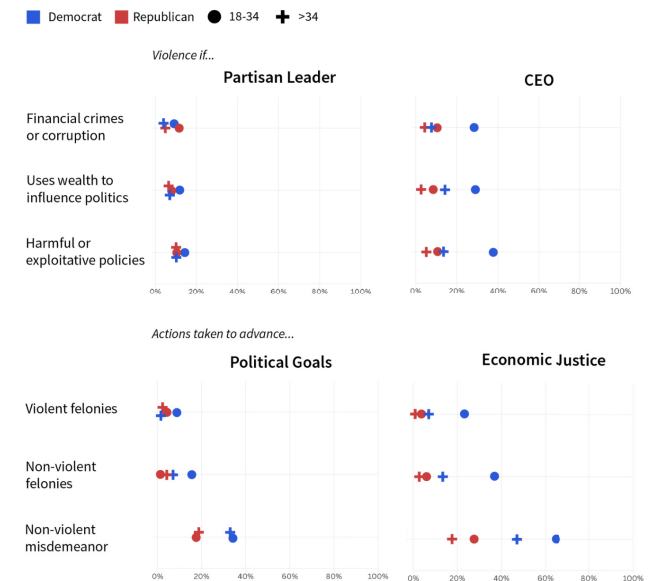
Finally, political violence from the government grew in 2025, especially from ICE. This may be replacing previous right-leaning vigilantism.<sup>11</sup> In 2025, 32 people died in ICE custody.<sup>12</sup> In 2026, as of March 19, ICE has killed two protesting Americans and at least 13 people died in ICE custody.<sup>13</sup> Since January 2025, immigration agents have shot at people in at least 24 incidents.<sup>14</sup> In 2025, law enforcement used less-lethal munitions in 22% of protests with police engagement, almost four times the rate in 2024.<sup>15</sup>

## Extremist Murders by Perpetrator Ideology, 2015–2025



Source: "ADL H.E.A.T. Map," Anti-Defamation League, 2026, <https://www.adl.org/resources/tools-to-track-hate/heat-map>.

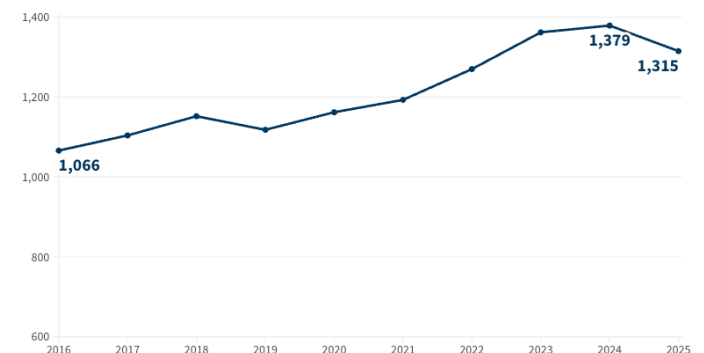
## Public Support for Aggressive Actions by Party and Age



Note: All options includes Never, Occasionally, Frequently, and Always. Points are percent of attentive respondents who did not select "Never."

Source: "Accelerated Transgressions in the Second Trump Presidency: Bright Line Watch February 2025 Survey."

## People Killed by Police, 2016–2025



Source: Campaign Zero, "Mapping Police Violence," Mapping Police Violence, February 18, 2026, <https://mappingpoliceviolence.org>.

**Threats and harassment are causing crucial talent to leave government and are affecting the quality of our representation, according to Bridging Divides Initiative/ Civic Pulse data. In 2025, local public servants reported that as a result, they were:**

**47%**

were less willing to work on controversial topics

**46%**

were less willing to run for higher office

**43%**

were less willing to run for re-election or go to public events

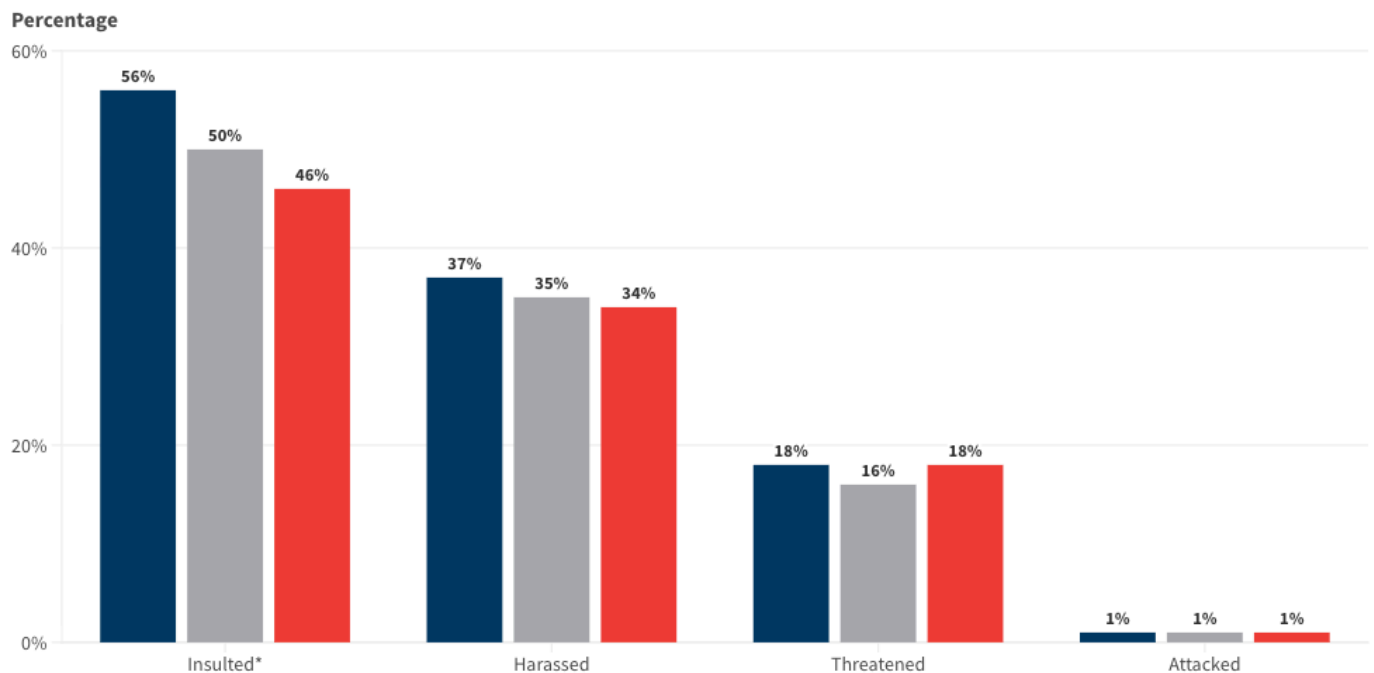
**37%**

were less willing to be in public spaces<sup>16</sup>

**Percentage of Local Elected Officials Reporting Hostility, by Party**

2022 Q3 - 2025 Q3, n = 4,464

Democrat Independent Republican



Source: "Threats and Harassment Dashboard."

“I get two or three really severe rashes of death threats every single year where we end up having to have police stationed outside. And it was one thing when I was single, and you know, the threat was just [to] myself, but it seems untenable that my family could also be harmed now, especially after what happened in Minnesota . . . so that’s kind of been playing into my decision about whether or not I’m going to run again next year.”<sup>17</sup>

—Laurie Pohutsky, Michigan State Representative

“I was on the hit list. . . . There’s always been a level of risk in my job, but I had never considered that somebody could come to my home and shoot me and my wife, and . . . would my daughter be screaming in her crib? People can carry guns in the Capitol. And the chamber is a circle and the viewing gallery’s above it. We take votes in a fishbowl where people can stand over us with not signs, but guns. And I find that terrifying.”<sup>18</sup>

—Erin Maye Quade, Minnesota State Senator following the assassinations of Minnesota lawmakers

## What we know works.

- Targeted rhetoric that creates a sense of fear and blame can direct violence toward particular groups.<sup>20</sup> Political leaders should **speak out to condemn political violence**. Doing so is even more effective when leaders speak against violence committed by their own side.<sup>21</sup> To ensure violence does not become normalized, everyone should speak against it—particularly young people and other groups that are more supportive of political violence.
- Journalists should **increase complexity** within groups when reporting, to show that not all group members think similarly. Reducing problems to “Us vs. Them” and posing one side as an existential threat deepens divisions and increases justification for violence. Americans significantly overestimate the other side’s support for violence—which is condemned by large majorities in all parties—and correcting these misperceptions may itself reduce hostility.<sup>22</sup> When reporting on incidents of political violence, journalists should **include information on people and groups taking positive actions to reduce harm**, so that violence is centered as the problem and not normalized as the solution.
- Younger Americans, especially those who are more politically engaged, are among the most accepting of political violence. While this age gap is not new, youth acceptance of violence has increased in recent years, in part because they feel “the system” is so broken, and see no way to alter it that is not drastic.<sup>23</sup> Giving them a sense that there is a **positive future they can work toward incrementally**, and sharing tangible opportunities to build something better, is important. Helping young people develop skills to identify manipulative content intended to justify political violence can also reduce their susceptibility to radicalizing narratives.<sup>24</sup>
- The number and severity of threats, particularly against officials’ children, is concerning. Elected officials are in need of heightened protections, including funding for hard security measures, **doxing protections, and other policy changes**. Community security measures—such as creating a community of help with friends who can pick kids up from school in a threat moment, neighbors reporting suspicious persons near a home, and allies across ideological divides that speak out—are effective, low-cost security improvements that may also ease the psycho-social isolation created by threats and violence for public officials.<sup>25</sup>

**Almost 90% of state legislators experienced threats or attacks from 2021 to 2024, and more than half of locally elected officials (such as school board members) experienced threats or attacks from mid-2023 to 2024.<sup>26</sup> Public servants have stressful jobs keeping everyday life running smoothly. Serious threats against them, including, often, death threats against their young children, are not okay. Everyone should be safe to do their jobs. We all have the power to choose to do better, to speak out against threats, and see others as human beings even if we disagree.<sup>27</sup>**

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## Notes

- 1 Definition adapted from Brazilian think tank Terra de Direitos and Justiça Global.
- 2 “Threats and Harassment Dashboard,” CivicPulse and Bridging Divides Initiative, 2025, <https://www.civimpulse.org/threats-harassment>; William Braniff, “Written Testimony,” before the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on the Constitution, hearing on “Politically Violent Attacks: A Threat to Our Constitutional Order,” October 28, 2025, [https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/4a3850cc-9186-4271-fe98-9caebcd5b632/2025-10-28-PM\\_Testimony\\_Braniff.pdf](https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/4a3850cc-9186-4271-fe98-9caebcd5b632/2025-10-28-PM_Testimony_Braniff.pdf), START data showed a 34.5% increase in terrorism and targeted violence events in the first eight months of 2025 compared to the first eight months in 2024.
- 3 “The Exit Interview,” Future Caucus, 2026, <https://futurecaucus.org/the-exit-interview>; “Survey of Local Elected Officials on Threats and Harassment: Q3 2025,” Bridging Divides Initiative, December 11, 2025, <https://bridgingdivides.princeton.edu/updates/2025/survey-local-elected-officials-threats-and-harassment-q3-2025>.
- 4 Shuhan Wang, “The Escalating Threats of Doxing and Swatting: An Analysis of Recent Developments and Legal Responses,” The National Association of Attorneys General, August 12, 2025, <https://www.naag.org/attorney-general-journal/the-escalating-threats-of-doxing-and-swatting-an-analysis-of-recent-developments-and-legal-responses>.

“You got family in [redacted]. I’m taking a trip there because I’m gonna get next to one of your family members and have you feel some [explicit] pain the way you make us feel pain.”<sup>19</sup>

—excerpt from a voicemail left for a congressional office

- 5 “Survey of Local Elected Officials on Threats and Harassment: Q2 2025,” Bridging Divides Initiative, September 1, 2025, <https://bridgingdivides.princeton.edu/updates/2025/survey-local-elected-officials-threats-and-harassment-q2-2025>; “Survey of Local Elected Officials...Q3 2025.”
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- 7 Alisa B. Miller et al., “The Roles of Trauma and Mental Health in Preventing Domestic Radicalization and Violent Extremism,” *NIJ Journal* 285, June 2024, <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/roles-trauma-and-mental-health-preventing-domestic-radicalization-and-violent>.
- 8 Jensen and Cooter, “Correctly Assessing Left-Wing Terrorism and Political Violence in the United States.”
- 9 Katherine Keneally and Cody Zoschak, “The 2025 Annual Review of Plots and Attacks Across the US,” Institute for Strategic Dialogue, March 10, 2026, <https://www.isdglobal.org/publication/2025-annual-review-plots-attacks-across-us>.
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- 11 Maanvi Singh et al., “2025 was ICE’s deadliest year in two decades. Here are the 32 people who died in custody,” *The Guardian*, January 4, 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2026/jan/04/ice-2025-deaths-timeline>.
- 12 Singh et al., “2025 was ICE’s deadliest year in two decades. Here are the 32 people who died in custody.”
- 13 Ted Hesson, “Eleven people died in US immigration custody this year, ICE says,” Reuters, March 9, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/eleven-people-died-us-immigration-custody-this-year-ice-says-2026-03-09>.
- 14 Jennifer Mascia, “How Many People Have Been Shot in ICE Raids?” *The Trace*, updated February 23, 2026, <https://www.thetrace.org/2025/12/immigration-ice-shootings-guns-tracker>.
- 15 Kieran Doyle, “Confrontations between ICE and protesters: How does Minnesota compare to other states?” *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data*, January 22, 2026, <https://acleddata.com/report/confrontations-between-ice-and-protesters-how-does-minnesota-compare-other-states>; “Key Political Violence and Resilience Trends From 2025,” Bridging Divides Initiative, February 11, 2026, <https://bridgingdivides.princeton.edu/key-political-violence-and-resilience-trends-2025>.
- 16 “Survey of Local Elected Officials...Q3 2025.”
- 17 “The Exit Interview.”
- 18 “The Exit Interview.”
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- 22 “Accelerated Transgressions in the Second Trump Presidency,” David Montgomery, “What Americans Really Think About Political Violence,” YouGov, September 12, 2025, <https://yougov.com/en-us/articles/52960-charlie-kirk-americans-political-violence-poll>; Samantha L. Moore-Berg et al., “Exaggerated meta-perceptions predict intergroup hostility between American political partisans,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, U.S.A. 117 (26) 14864-14872, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2001263117> (2020).
- 23 Ellyn Maese and Zacc Ritter, “Youth, Loneliness and Political Violence in the U.S.,” Gallup, December 3, 2025, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/697745/youth-loneliness-political-violence.aspx>.
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Created by Rachel Kleinfeld and Dalya Berkowitz based on data from the previously cited organizations, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 2026.