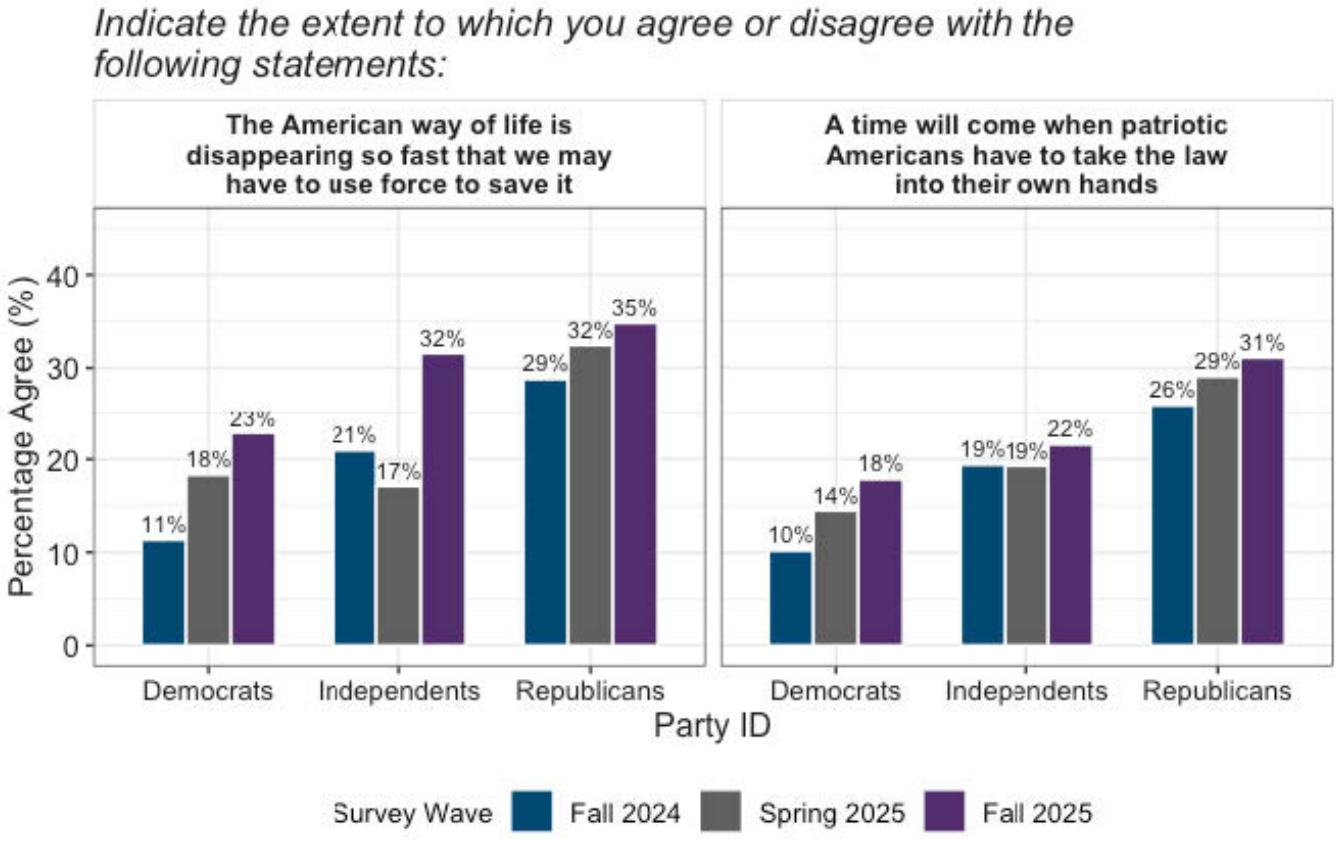
The Growth of Support for Political Violence

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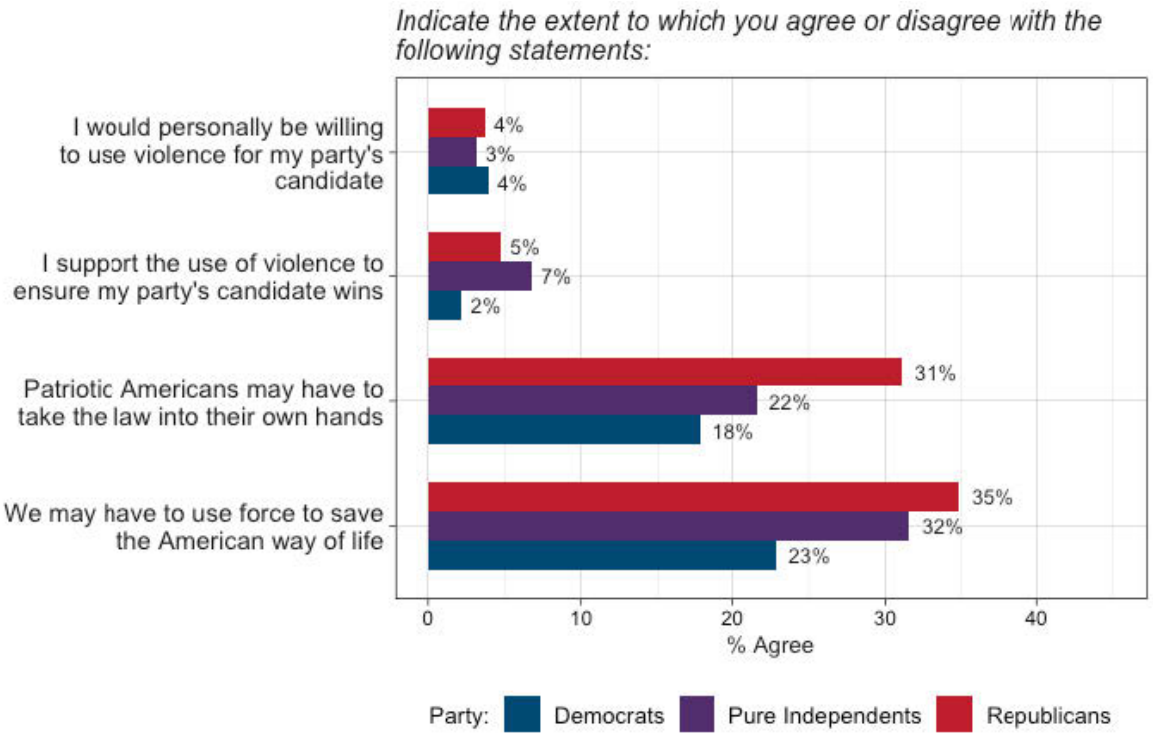
Do Americans believe that political violence can be justified? According to three waves of the Notre Dame Health of Democracy Survey (Fall 2024, Spring 2025, and Fall 2025), a growing number of Americans say yes. Agreement with statements endorsing the use of force to preserve the American way of life and vigilante action by "patriotic Americans" has increased steadily over the past year. Among Democrats, agreement that "the American way of life is disappearing so fast that we may have to use force to save it" more than doubled from 11% in Fall 2024 to 23% by Fall 2025. Among Republicans, agreement rose from 29% to 35%. Independents increased from 21% to 32%, nearly matching Republicans by the final wave.

A similar survey item in the Health of Democracy Survey tells a parallel story. Republican agreement with the statement that "a time will come when patriotic Americans have to take the law into their own hands" increased from 26% to 31% across the three waves. Democratic agreement rose from 10% to 18%. Independents held relatively steady around 19–22%. The consistency of the upward trend across both items and across partisan groups is what makes these findings notable. This is not a story about one party radicalizing while others hold steady; it is a story about a broad-based shift in attitudes across the political spectrum.



Note: Data from the Fall 2024, Spring 2025, and Fall 2025 waves of the Notre Dame Health of Democracy Survey.

The Fall 2025 data allow us to examine a broader set of political violence items, including two that are more personal and explicit and offer a bit of reassurance on Americans' attitudes towards political violence. Respondents were asked whether they "support the use of violence to ensure my party's candidate wins" and whether they "would personally be willing to use violence for my party's candidate," in addition to the questions discussed above. These items represent a harder test of Americans' support for violence by asking about support for direct, partisan-motivated violence instead of about the potential necessity of violence in the future. As shown below, agreement is much lower. Among Independents, 7% endorse violence to ensure their preferred candidate wins, and 3% say they would personally engage in it. Among Republicans, the figures are 5% and 4%, respectively. And among Democrats, 2% support partisan violence and 4% say they would personally participate.



Note: Data from the Fall 2025 wave of the Notre Dame Health of Democracy Survey.

The difference between the more abstract items and the more concrete ones is informative. Roughly a third of Republicans and Independents agree that force may be necessary to save the American way of life, but only about 3-4% say they would personally commit violence for partisan ends. The gap between these two types of survey items suggests that much of the support for political violence could be rhetorical or expressive rather than a direct statement of intent. Yet the fact that any measurable share of the public says they are willing to use partisan violence should not be dismissed.

The Notre Dame Health of Democracy Survey will continue to monitor these attitudes in future waves. The trajectory documented here represents a warning sign for democratic stability. Political violence is not normal in a healthy democracy. What the data make clear is that the slow growth of support for political violence is real, bipartisan, and demands attention.

AI transparency statement: Anthropic's Claude Opus 4.6 was used in initial data analysis and identification of trends. Results reported were manually and independently verified by the author without use of generative AI. Written report is entirely the author's work, but Opus 4.6 provided copy edits and stylistic suggestions—only some of which were implemented at the discretion of the author.