

ONLINE VIOLENT RHETORIC AND THE US ELECTIONS

OVERVIEW

The anonymity of online platforms allows for the mass sharing of divisive content, often supported by mis- and disinformation, potentially inciting political violence.

KEY POINTS

- Former President Donald Trump and his allies have been accused of inciting violence and making threats through rhetoric that includes voicing false claims about the 2020 election being “stolen” and offensive remarks about immigrants, the LGBTQ+ community, and anyone perceived to be a political enemy.
- Research shows that political leaders' inflammatory rhetoric can increase the likelihood of violence and create fear in vulnerable communities.
- Leaders with large social media followings will see their remarks widely shared, shaping traditional news coverage.
- Rhetoric from national leaders influences local figures and ordinary people, who then spread the message through social media and traditional outlets.

PRE- AND POST-ELECTION WARNING SIGNS

ONLINE TO OFFLINE

- Regardless of the 2024 election outcome, disparaging remarks and false narratives from either side of the political spectrum could drive post-election calls to action, with groups coordinating offline activity.
- The FBI and DHS are concerned “election-related grievances” could motivate domestic extremists to engage in violence, with accessible locations as possible targets. **Though most threats turn out to be false, violent extremists with access to weapons could intimidate, coerce, or threaten members of the public.**

32% of Americans believe the 2020 election was stolen

33% of Republicans believe “true American patriots may have to resort to violence in order to save our country”

42% of owners of assault-type rifles said political violence could be justified

56% of assault-type rifle owners who always carry loaded guns in public say political violence could be justified

75% of Americans believe that democracy is at risk in the 2024 election

EXPECTATIONS 2024 US ELECTIONS

KEY INDICATORS

- Heightened political tensions are likely post-election, but prosecutions following the 2021 insurrection, heightened security measures, and increased vigilance could deter widespread unrest.
- The Global Network on Extremism & Technology (GNET) noted groups such as Blood Tribe and Proud Boys are ramping up online activity with more posts, propaganda, and active recruitment efforts.
- A GNET report* noted efforts are underway to reformulate and re-energize the American militia movement, with the American Patriots Three Percent (AP3)—a subgroup that identifies itself as part of the III% movement—posing a risk of mobilizing election-related violence.
 - AP3 has chapters across the country, including in WA and AZ, and active members in 48 states.

* Newhouse, A. (2024). Pre-November 2024 US election violence report. In <https://gnet-research.org/>. The Global Network on Extremism and Technology.

STOKING VIOLENCE THROUGH RHETORIC



SEPTEMBER 2024

Trump held Biden and Harris of responsible for two assassination attempts on his life, claiming both used rhetoric to suggest Trump is a “threat to democracy.”



SEPTEMBER 2024

Trump and Vance falsely claimed during the presidential debate and on social media that **Springfield, OH**'s Haitian community is criminally killing and eating neighbors' pets. These claims resulted in over **33 bomb threats** and the **evacuation** of public institutions.



DECEMBER 2023

Violent rhetoric increased online as Trump supporters reacted to news that he is ineligible to appear on Colorado's primary ballot. Personal information of the Colorado Supreme Court justices who ruled against Trump circulated on **far-right platforms**. The most incendiary posts were found on **Gab**, **Truth Social**, and **Patriots.win**.



MAY 2020

A report found 54 cases involving **assaults** and **threats** linked to individuals who invoked Trump and his rhetoric during their actions.

VOTER INTIMIDATION

OVERVIEW

- In 2020, the nonpartisan Election Protection hotline received 246,000 calls, most commonly reporting incidents of voter intimidation.
- The Princeton University Bridging Divides Project observed an increase in the potential for election-related violence and voter intimidation over the past four years. This has been in part due to claims fueling grievances about past election losses.
- Federal and state laws prohibit intimidation or coercion of voters and election workers by any state official or private citizen.
- Since 2020, former President Donald Trump has urged supporters to join his campaign’s “army” of poll watchers. In 2022, it was reported armed Trump supporters monitoring drop boxes and intimidating voters.
- Trump often says the 2020 election was stolen and he may challenge the 2024 results if he does not win.
- Voter intimidation is a major concern, particularly among voters in swing states or areas with a history of disputed election results. States like AZ, FL, GA, MI, NV, NH, NC, PA, TX, and WI, potentially face a high risk of disruption based on past elections.

HARASSMENT & THREATS

ELECTION DAY, NOVEMBER 5

- In response to election worker and voter concerns, some counties are upgrading security at election venues, including installing bulletproof glass and security cameras.
- Misinformation and disinformation campaigns on social media are likely to intensify. Trump and his allies have been accused of encouraging violence and threats through their rhetoric, including making false claims about the 2020 election, possibly laying the foundation for post-election outcome disputes.



VOTER INTIMIDATION TACTICS

US voters, especially in swing states, are at high risk of exposure to voter suppression techniques. In 2020, law enforcement closed down streets to prepare for counter-demonstrations, authorities recorded individuals carrying weapons near tabulation centers, and bomb threats prompted the closure of government offices.

VOTER INTIMIDATION

ROBOCALLS

In 2020, two right-wing conspiracy theorists created a robocall scheme to discourage voters from voting by mail, mainly in IL, OH, MI, NY and PA.

IN-PERSON TACTICS

Leading up to the 2020 election, Trump called on supporters to “go into the polls and watch very carefully.” At least 14 states reported intimidation at polling sites.

THREATENING EMAILS

Voters in AL, PA, AZ, and FL reported receiving emails that read, “You will vote for Trump on Election Day or we will come after you.”

DOOR-TO-DOOR CAMPAIGN

A group knocked on 10K doors in CO questioning residents’ voting habits and photographed homes. *Organizers encouraged canvassers to carry guns.*

VOTER FRAUD VIGILANTES

Trump supporters staked out drop boxes in Maricopa County, AZ, filming voters, and photographing license plates soon after early midterm voting began on October 12, 2022. People also spotted two armed individuals.

Potential for Violence and Voter Intimidation Before and After US Elections

Armed individuals harboring election-related grievances could use voter suppression tactics, including patrolling election venues, to intimidate election workers and voters.

Open Carry Allowed Without a Permit

Open Carry Allowed With a Permit

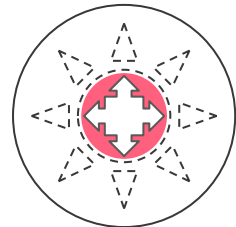
Open Carry Not Allowed

Concealed Carry Without a Permit

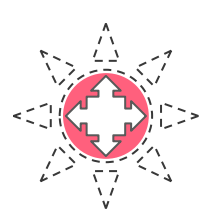
Notable Incidents of Voter Intimidation in 2020

Swing State

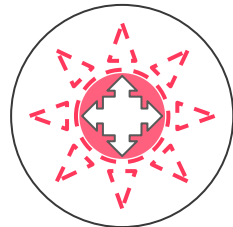
State



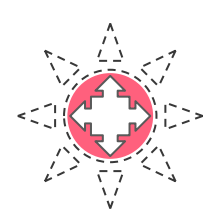
Alabama



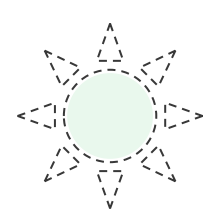
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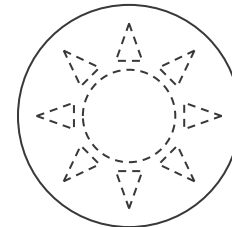
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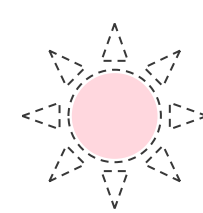
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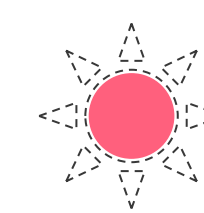
California



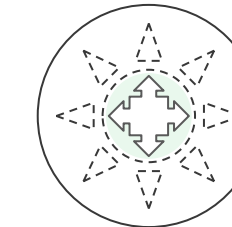
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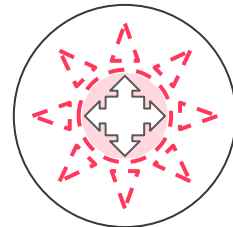
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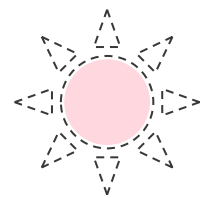
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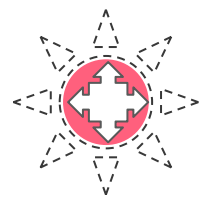
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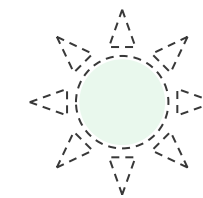
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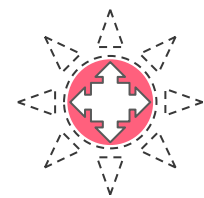
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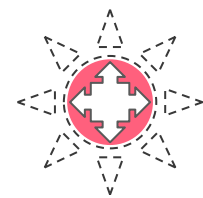
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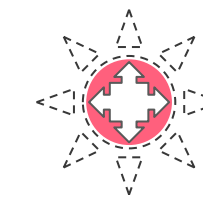
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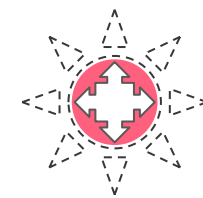
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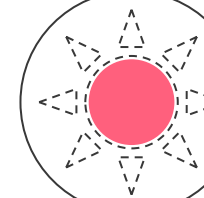
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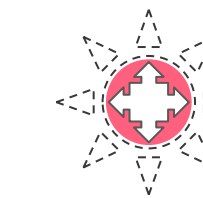
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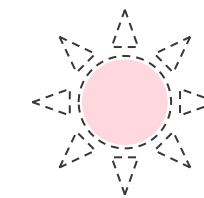
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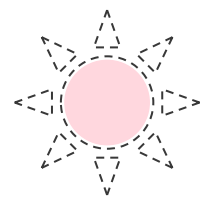
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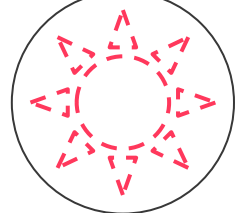
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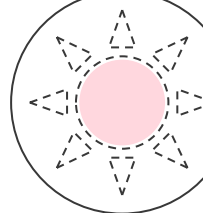
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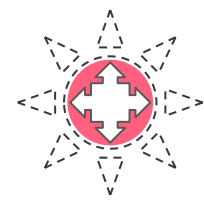
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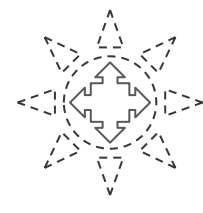
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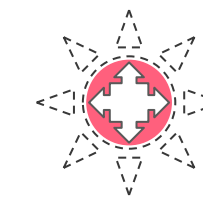
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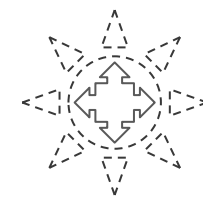
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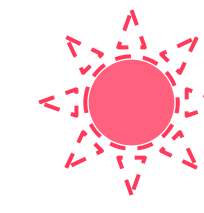
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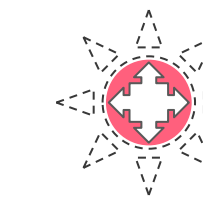
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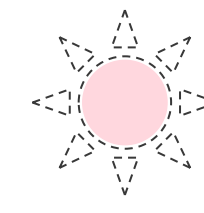
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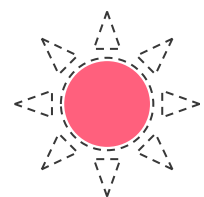
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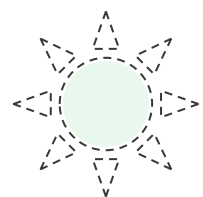
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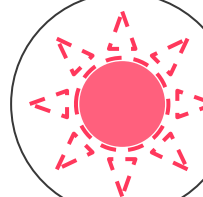
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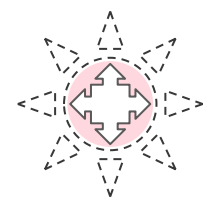
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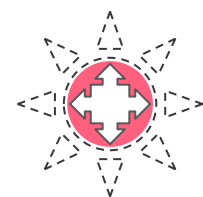
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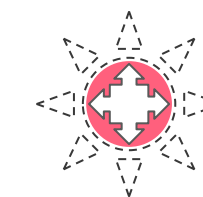
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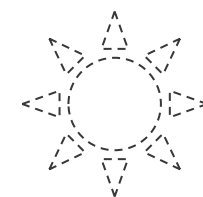
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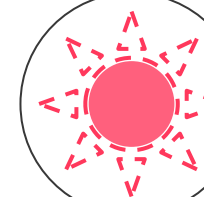
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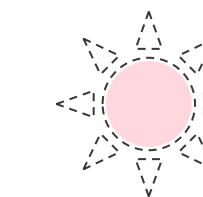
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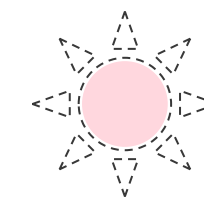
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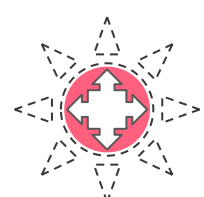
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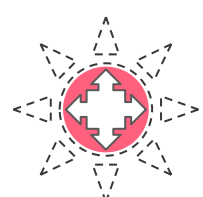
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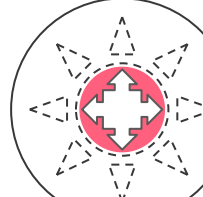
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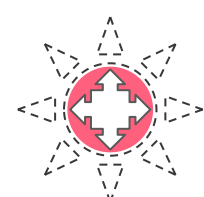
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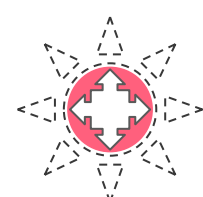
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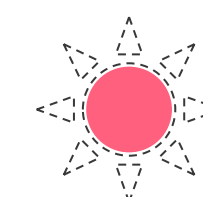
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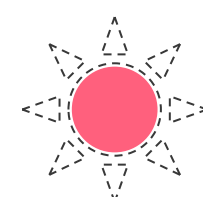
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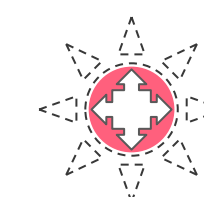
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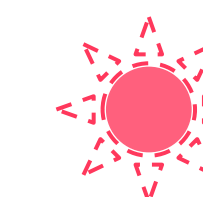
Virginia



Washington



West Virginia



Wisconsin



Wyoming

* State with exception to carry permits | Source: [USCCA](#); [Every Town Research](#); [The Trace](#)