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An apolitical risk assessment of the 2024 US elections: The threat of widespread riots and significant business disruption

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ABSTRACT

Civil disorder has always plagued humanity, with violence being triggered by real or perceived grievances, rumours and speculation, and internal or external agitators. The risk to people, communities, businesses and the rule of law is not isolated to a particular country or society. The propensity for violence and how it is incited is, however, an evolving threat with the advent of the 'modern riot'. The causes of violence centre on economic and social injustice, sports- and event-related riots, a reaction to police or security forces and political unrest. As the US nears the contentious 2024 elections, the failing trust in the three branches of government combined with external global tensions and conflict, threats from domestic extremist groups, a rising acceptance of violence as a means of settling political disagreements, hostile nation actors and international terror groups that exploit societal instability create fertile conditions for widespread violence. Exacerbating these factors are the risks from artificial intelligence (AI) deepfake, rapid mass communications, the citizen journalist, prominent influencers amplifying grievances and inflammatory media reporting. This convergence of exacerbators and accelerants for political discord offers the potential for serious security risks and significant business disruption.

Keywords: 2024 elections; deepfake, AI, riots, civil disorder, flashpoints, social unrest

INTRODUCTION

Political violence is not new. It has posed a risk to society and commerce since people started to organise themselves into large communities. In the US, civil disorder has always been a threat, with Rosenthal, a research associate at CRESS, stating in 1969:

Hostile outbursts have occurred throughout the country, even in communities that are noted for progressive policies and modern governmental institutions ... [as a result of] criminal subcultures; militant youth; Hobbesian man; subversive manipulation and agitation; frustration and aggression; relative deprivation and heightened aspirations; limited communication channels; racial polarization; conspiracy; external war; the world Socialist struggle; and the progress of social movements.¹

The question examined in this paper is whether the US faces the same historic threats associated with political violence, or whether the 2024 US elections present a new danger that threatens the rule of law and the ability of businesses to operate profitably. This apolitical study explores the potential threat of significant civil disorder and business disruption associated with the 2024 US elections and the potential risks to people, facilities, assets, supply chains, critical vendors and suppliers, operations, information, profitability and business reputation. It looks at the evolution of civil disorder in the US and the ever-increasing complexity of causal connections which create the

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opportunity for widespread politically motivated violence.

The US has seen periods of increased civil disorder since the 1960s. Between 1964 and 1968, 329 riots in 257 cities killed more than 220 people.² Parker and Eisler³ stated that political violence declined between the 1980s and 2016, with a resurgence of violence starting in 2016, with 213 incidents of political violence and 39 deaths resulting from the ‘perception that members of the opposing political party are an evil force bent on destroying America’s social and cultural fabric’.

Large-scale political gatherings, rallies, protests and outbreaks of political violence are not isolated to the US, and lessons can be learned from the underlying causes and the implications of riots in other countries. Examples include:

- London’s Brixton⁴ riots in 1981 which resulted in 13 deaths, 299 injured police officers, 150 cases of property damage and over £7.5m in damages;
- The 2002 Indian Gujarat⁵ riots which led to almost 2,000 deaths and widespread looting, rapes, and property damages;
- The 2011 Arab Spring⁶ uprisings which toppled long-standing authoritarian regimes and caused national instability and significant business disruption;
- France’s Nahel⁷ riots in 2013 which saw 200 businesses looted, 300 bank branches and 250 tobacco stores destroyed, at an estimated cost in excess of €1bn;
- The Myanmar 2021 anti-coup⁸ riots where security forces killed over 300 people;
- The 2022 murder of Mahsa Amini⁹ in Iran which sparked nationwide protests where security forces killed more than 550 people and arrested almost 20,000;

- Pakistan’s Imran Khan 2023 riots¹⁰ where at least eight people were killed, 140 police officers were injured, and over 1,400 people arrested.

These examples give organisations the opportunity to effectively understand the key drivers, triggers and scope for potential violence, providing an informed premise to shape and enhance organisational resilience strategies.

The *modern urban riot*¹¹ helps frame an understanding of the evolution of civil disorder, while contextualising the factors that can exacerbate societal tensions. The U.S. Criminal Code¹² defines a riot as:

a public disturbance involving (1) an act or acts of violence by one or more persons part of an assemblage of three or more persons, which act or acts shall constitute a clear and present danger of, or shall result in, damage or injury to the property of any other person or to the person of any other individual or (2) a threat or threats of the commission of an act or acts of violence by one or more persons part of an assemblage of three or more persons having, individually or collectively, the ability of immediate execution of such threat or threats, where the performance of the threatened act or acts of violence would constitute a clear and present danger of, or would result in, damage or injury to the property of any other person or to the person of any other individual.

Whether or not an incident is classified as a riot depends on whether the gathering and any associated violence are considered justifiable.¹³ This study examines large gatherings that include acts of violence. It does not explore peaceful or legal assemblies which might be termed as ‘illegal’ due to differing political ideologies.

Understanding the cause and risks associated with riots helps risk leaders better shape their resilience strategy. De Jong¹⁴ offers that civil disorder, and ultimately riots, originate from an incident or community event that is perceived as negative by a segment of the community, with violent groups taking advantage of a situation for seemingly random acts of violence. He also states that riots can include widespread acts of civil disruption with assaults, looting, arson and sniper attacks, or a domino effect as other segments of the community join the violence. Routley¹⁵ adds that politically motivated violence is most commonly associated with economic and social injustice, sports- and event-related riots, politically motivated civil unrest, or a reaction to police actions.

The threat of violence before, during, or after the 2024 US elections is rooted in perceived social injustice and politically motivated unrest. At the same time, it includes perceived economic injustice and the risk of a negative reaction by both rioters and the general public to police actions during large public gatherings. The polarisation of US society over the validity of the 2020 elections and the integrity of the 2024 elections, combined with anti-abortion rulings, contention over LGBTQIA rights and a corrosion of trust in the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, presents an environment where businesses are faced with a period of elevated, complex and national security risks and resultant business challenges. These risks are complicated by multiple hostile state actors and terror groups, artificial intelligence (AI) deepfakes, conspiracy theories becoming mainstream, inflammatory and biased media reporting, and a deeply concerning acceptance among Americans that violence is a valid means of settling political disputes.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research methodology consisted of a nonpartisan literature review of political discord and rioting in the US, while drawing on international case studies to contextualise the causes, triggers and implications of rioting; an online survey of senior resilience, risk, security and crisis leaders to gather quantitative data as well as anonymous qualitative observations during a 20-day survey period; and a focus group of six senior resilience leaders who offered technical contributions to the paper.

Of the 67 online survey participants, 27 per cent are chief security officers (CSOs) or lead their organisation's security function, 43 per cent hold a security director-level position, 15 per cent are resilience, business continuity or crisis management leaders and 15 per cent are executives or C-suite leaders. All participants had at least eight years in a senior role, with 31 per cent with 5–10 years' experience, 20 per cent with 11–15 years' experience, 18 per cent with 16–20 years' experience, 19 per cent with 21–30 years' experience and 12 per cent with more than 31 years' experience. All participation and observations offered through the online survey were treated as anonymous.

UNDERSTANDING CIVIL DISORDER AND THE IMPACTS

It is important for organisational risk leaders to understand the aetiology of *why* and *how* riots occur, as well as the consequences to their business. Leaders must also understand how riots have evolved to contextualise the threat and risks associated with civil disorder which both accelerate and exacerbate the potential for violence. The ability of state or local policing agencies — and *in extremis* the National Guard and federal troops — to prevent, react to, control and recover from a riot is an important resilience and

crisis management factor for businesses that operate in areas prone to outbreaks of violence. The composition of a crowd is also a determinant of the likelihood for violence, presenting what can be a combination of peaceful demonstrators, onlookers, militants, exploiters, instigators and opportunistic criminals. Beyond the threat of physical and sexual violence¹⁶ are the risks of looting and property damage where a loss of law and order presents an opportunity for individuals and groups to exploit the situation.

Understanding the phases of a riot and crowd classifications

Risk leaders can better structure their resilience strategy and identify warning signs when they can break down a complex threat into its component parts, including the phases of how civil disorder moves from an idea to a point of physical violence. Rosenthal's¹⁷ identification of the four phases for civil disorder helps define the chronology of a riot in terms of the phases of:

- Pre-mobilisation;
- Mobilisation;
- Hostile outburst;
- Post-hostile outburst.

Within these phases are different crowd classifications, including the casual or physical crowd formed as a temporary collection of people with no unity or organisation; the conventional or cohesive crowd which assembles at a designated site for a pre-planned occasion; and the expressive or revelous crowd engaging in expressive behaviours, whether passive or aggressive in nature.

This structured framework enables both businesses and law enforcement to design their resilience strategies; define and prepare their crisis management structures; establish risk, business continuity

and crisis management plans; develop and implement structured or just-in-time (JIT) training and exercising programmes; map and deploy support and resource needs; and implement proactive or reactive incident or crisis response measures. By developing an understanding of the phases of civil disorder, the types of crowds that are likely to convene, how violence can be triggered and the speed of transition from a peaceful to a violent gathering, risk leaders can formulate more effective resilience and crisis response strategies.

Rumours, consiracy theories and deepfake

Conspiracy theories, agitational media reporting and the lack of trust in the government and federal law enforcement agencies (including false statements that the Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI] was authorised to shoot and kill former President Trump¹⁸ during a Mar-a-Lago search) play a key role in modern riots. Lopex¹⁹ stated that beliefs in conspiracy theories among Americans has risen from 14 per cent to 23 per cent between 2021 and 2023, and ideas which were once confined to fringe groups now appear in the mainstream media where they can influence more people.

AI deepfake²⁰ disorts reality and makes fact checking difficult to impossible for most people. Even within entertainment outlets there is now a risk, with a study on multiplayer videogame users finding that 23 per cent of respondents had been exposed to white supremacist ideology, and that 10 per cent had been exposed to Holocaust denial in the videogames.²¹ This allows agitators to distort or invent facts and then easily — and covertly — disseminate them to large numbers of people.

Rosenthal²² has claimed that 'some militants may attempt to maintain the emotional pitch of the rioters at a high level through verbal encouragement or

through committing acts of violence including arson and even sniping'. These factors complicate the risks that arise before, during and after the elections, and create an opening for rapidly deployed incidents of premeditated or opportunistically structured violence. One of the online survey participants observed:

The geopolitical landscape, including the ongoing war in Ukraine, devastation in Gaza, the spread of NATO toward Russia and the nuclear leanings of Putin, China's mounting focus on Taiwan, and Russia's ongoing involvement in U.S. elections has created a social hub of misunderstanding and mistrust. No one can believe what they are reading, hearing, or seeing in the media to be true if media outlets are politically biased or funded.

Identifying probable targets and affected areas

Identifying the targets of potential violence, whether by aggrieved members of the public, extremists, hostile nation actors or terrorist groups, allows risk leaders to focus their resilience strategies, effort and finite resources against the people, operations and assets most at risk. Effective risk management starts with assessing the risks to people, assets, facilities, supply chains and critical vendors. The modern riot complicates the process of pinpointing likely targets of violence, with one online survey participant offering that the targets are ambiguous and shifting, and that this makes designing effective resilience measures challenging:

The likely targets for violent protestors, domestic extremists, international terrorists, or hostile nation agitators during the upcoming U.S. elections include law enforcement and government buildings, retail, commercial, and

recreational areas, business, transport, and industrial facilities, as well as highly populated residential areas. All these locations present opportunities for agitators to cause significant disruption, attract media attention, and instill fear. Therefore, it is crucial for organizations to consider a broad range of potential targets when planning their security measures and response strategies.

One online survey participant highlighted how internal employee pressures might encourage, or indeed force, executives to take a political stand which could make the company and its staff a target:

Our executive team must think very carefully when taking moral decisions that could result in a physical threat. For example, if our products or internal or external messaging favored – or was even perceived to favor – a particular political group then this could cause us to become a target. And, it could cause us to lose customers.

As shown in Figure 1, 43 per cent of the online survey participants expected riots to present risks to law enforcement or government buildings; retail, commercial and recreational areas; business, transport and industrial facilities; and densely populated residential areas. Of the remaining participants, over 43 per cent thought that law enforcement and government buildings would be the prime targets for rioters, 3 per cent felt that business, transport and industrial areas would be at risk, 9 per cent were concerned about the impact on retail and recreational areas, and fewer than 2 per cent expected densely populated residential areas to be affected. This data can help risk leaders to identify the most probable targets for violence — whether a direct threat based on the nature of the business,

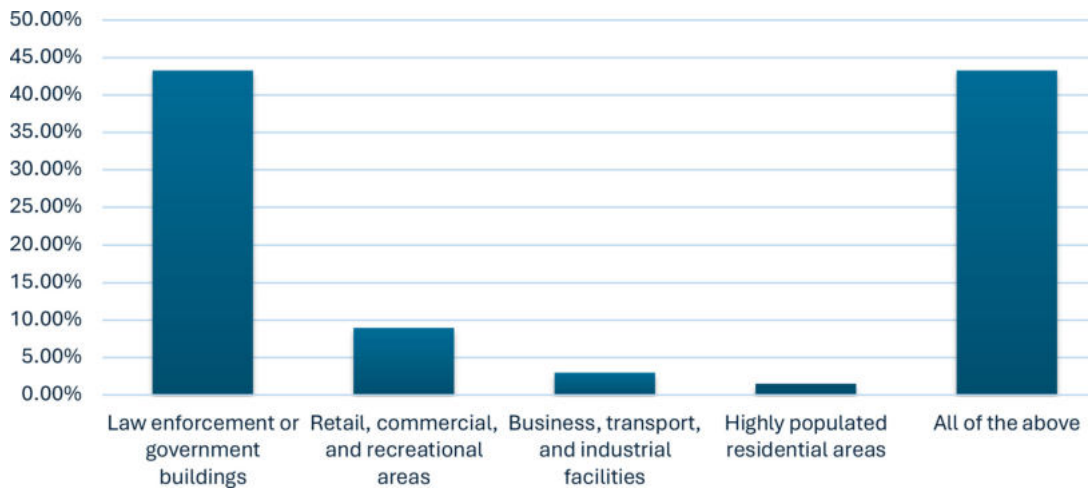


Figure 1 What are the likely targets for violent protestors or domestic extremist, international terrorist or hostile nation agitators?

or a proximity threat where businesses are physically close to a likely target of violence.

Mapping the potential hot spots for violence and tracking the shifting temperature of national to localised tensions will allow risk leaders to channel the right resources to the right areas. One online survey participant offered a bleak perspective:

No place in the U.S. will be exempt [from the threat of violence] due to the approximate 50/50 support between the two candidates and the extreme views held by groups on both sides.

This widespread geographic risk is exaggerated where domestic or foreign agitators seek to create the conditions for — or trigger — violence. According to another online survey participant:

I would believe that these [agitator] groups would seek to impact as large a group as possible and therefore will likely look at both major and mid-sized areas across the U.S.

As shown in Figure 2, only 7 per cent of survey participants thought that violence would be limited to Washington, DC, while over 40 per cent expected violence to erupt in several major cities, 33 per cent to a limited number of cities and 20 per cent thought that mid-sized to major cities and mid-sized urban areas would be affected.

These results suggest that unlike the Capitol Hill 6th January, 2021 riot, the outcome of the 2024 presidential election is likely to see violence across multiple cities and mid-sized urban areas. This presents a significantly enhanced risk to businesses which have infrastructure, operations or critical vendor reliance centred in medium to large cities and urban areas.

The probability of electoral civil disorder

Risk leaders commonly establish their resilience strategies based on both the *probability* and *impact* of risks against their people and business interests. In 1991, the FBI identified a rise in worldwide civil disturbances²³ and one year later the US saw widespread rioting following the

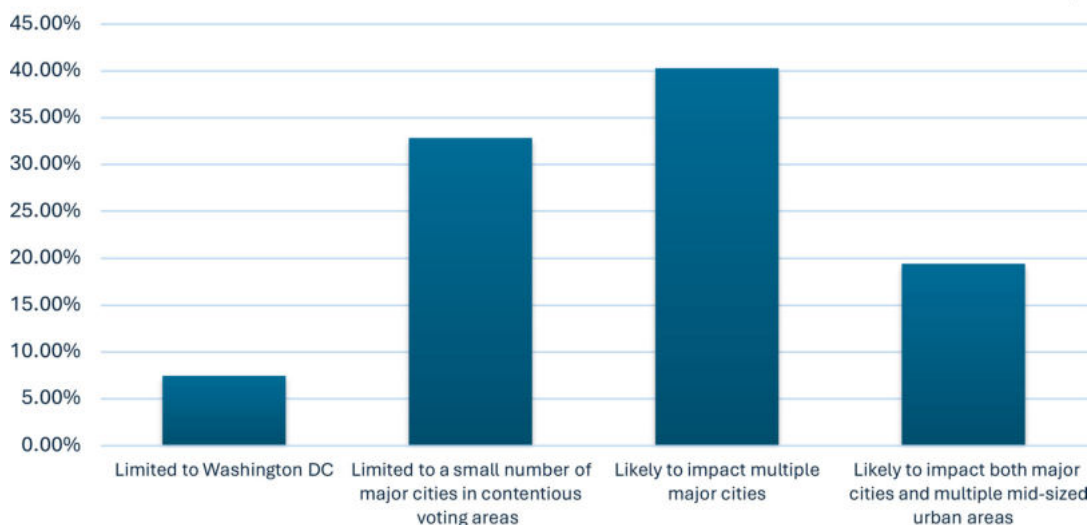


Figure 2 What is the likely geographic extent or focus of any physical violence and business disruption which might occur?

Rodney King²⁴ verdict. Studies suggest that the differences in violent escalation between the Rodney King incident and the riots that occurred in the 1960s reflect the propensity for a more rapid escalation for acts of physical violence and murder compared to the previous focus of rioters on property damage. The rise in violence directed toward individuals is concerning, notably with a 2023 Reuters/Ipsos²⁵ poll of approximately 4,500 voters indicating that roughly 20 per cent of both US Democratic and Republican respondents felt that violence is acceptable if it was committed to ‘achieve my idea of a better society’. This is reinforced by one online survey participant noting:

Increasingly divided rhetoric in political debates and in social media, influenced by intentional disinformation, advocates more and more for *taking action*.

Reuters attributed political violence to political polarisation, with violence being increasingly directed at people instead of property. In addition, spontaneous or

organised political violence is no longer based on a specific racial or radical group, but rather involves more mainstream participation from the US populace.²⁶ As extremist groups use mainstream causes to recruit and expand their membership, the pool of potentially violent individuals focused on partisan purposes increases. Lopez²⁷ concurs, citing research suggesting that a quarter of Americans surveyed believed that patriots may have to resort to violence to save the country, and that 75 per cent of Americans surveyed thought that the future of US democracy is at risk in the 2024 presidential election. Kleinfeld²⁸ supports this statement, noting that the acceptance of political violence has risen sharply over the past five years. This trend parallels the Northern Irish Catholic and Protestant acceptance of violence as a justifiable way of settling political disagreements in 1973, the most violent period of the Northern Ireland Troubles. One survey participant commented:

As we approach the 2024 U.S. elections, the potential for violence is a

notable concern due to heightened political polarization, the precedent set by the January 6th Capitol riot, and the ongoing spread of misinformation. This volatile environment is exacerbated by deep societal divisions and economic stressors. While it is difficult to predict specific incidents, the risk of election-related violence is significant enough to warrant proactive measures.

The integrity of the electoral process is undermined where poll workers are unable (or unwilling) to perform their role. A 2021 Brennan Center for Justice²⁹ poll found that a third of poll workers stated they felt unsafe, and that 79 per cent wanted government-provided security. This rise in both perceived risk and actual threats has driven many seasoned election administrators from the field, further eroding the perception of polling and political legitimacy. A 2023 Capitol Police report concluded that the number of threats against Congress had doubled between 2022 and 2023,³⁰ while on the US border Mexico has seen 36 political candidates murdered in the run-up to the June 2024 elections.³¹

While attacks against US politicians are not a new threat, an escalation in the targeting of members of a political party could quickly trigger protests and potentially aggressive responses. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED)³² report on the potential for a repeat of the violence following the disputed 2020 election in 2024 suggests that increasing political polarisation may lead to the mobilisation of militias and militant social movements. One online survey participant echoed these studies, stating:

The elements of insurgency are present and are paired with a backdrop of widening political views, media spreading disinformation, the erosion of rights (women's predominantly), xenophobic

foreign policies, the fervent fist bagging around foreign aid, and a political figure the likes of which we last saw in the 1930s. This has already proven they can incite violence and national unrest ... and who is also advertising incarceration for resisters to their policies, and parole for incarcerated supporters.

Figure 3 shows that 9 per cent of survey participants did not believe that violence was likely while the remaining 91 per cent did. This suggests that organisations must take the threat of 2024 election security challenges seriously.

One online survey participant identified the risk of internal workplace violence and active shooter threats if political tensions in the workplace escalate, stating:

We are not just looking at the risk [of violence associated with the 2024 elections] as external. Tensions in the workplace among highly polarized staff with very robust political views present a serious risk from bullying, physical aggression, and potentially even an active shooter threat.

Violence accelerants and exacerbators

Where risk leaders understand the triggers for violence and the conditions that accelerate or exacerbate the speed, scope and intensity of rioting, then more informed and timely resilience planning and crisis decision making can occur. Accelerants and exacerbators to civil disorder include the after-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of social instability, business disruption and political polarisation;³³ the Black Lives Matter (BLM) social movement and associated societal tensions and protests; the war between Russia and Ukraine from both an internal political and external hostile nation actor perspective; the Israel– Hamas war and the

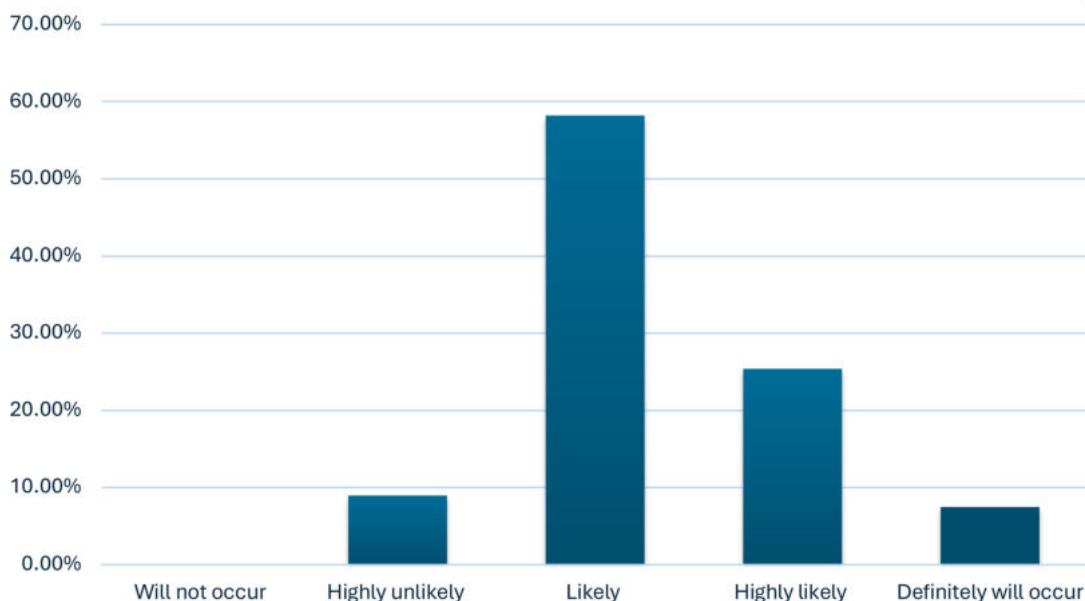


Figure 3 What do you believe the potential is for physical violence associated with the 2024 US elections?

resulting domestic and global tensions of the humanitarian crisis and the risk of the conflict spreading in the Middle East; and tension between China and Taiwan.

These risks are exacerbated by heated debates over reproductive and transgender rights; escalating cyber, AI deepfake and ‘false flag’ threats; biased if not inflammatory media reporting; prominent politicians and social influencers broadcasting provocative messages and misinformation; and a lack of trust in the government and election integrity.

A 2024 Bloomberg³⁴ report explores the peripheral risks of demonstrations on college campuses over the Israel– Hamas war, electoral interference by Russia and China, AI deepfake and bogus media reporting, and the increasingly hostile attacks on presidential candidates as precursors to the increasing risk of political violence. This confluence of risk factors was reinforced by an online survey participant who suggested:

The likelihood of agitators promoting, inciting, or participating in physical violence during the upcoming U.S. elections is significant. Domestic extremist groups such as militias and white supremacists pose a high risk due to their history of violent actions and exploitation of political polarization. International terror groups and hostile foreign governments also present moderate risks. While they are less likely to engage directly in physical violence, their efforts to sow chaos and amplify divisive narratives can incite unrest.

Cumulatively, these drivers set conditions to destabilise the rule of law and could offer multiple flashpoints for widespread violence. According to another online survey respondent:

Conflicts and the associated global consequences (like Israel/ Hamas and Russia/ Ukraine) and the related U.S.

posture and/or participation, environmental demonstration group agendas, immigration concerns, and mostly the condition of the U.S. economy in the three months prior to will surely influence the threat landscape immediately before and after the election.

Figure 4 highlights the internal and external exacerbators of potential violence, in addition to the accelerants affecting its probability, speed, scope and severity.

These accumulated tensions exponentially increase the potential for violence and the resulting political and societal instability which may cause otherwise rational people to *feel*, *think* and *act* in a manner not typical of their personality.³⁵ This threat is compounded where there is a risk of law enforcement or security forces overreacting to a violent public gathering and presenting a risk to attendees or bystanders. A police or military overreaction could incite additional and escalating violence, as seen in the Bloody Sunday³⁶ shootings of 1972, when British soldiers killed 26 civilians in Northern Ireland. In the US, a lone

shooter — or a coordinated group of shooters — firing at law enforcement or military forces from a crowd could similarly provoke a lethal response. Such a response could present the same optics as when the Chechnyan leader Ramzan Kadyrov authorised police³⁷ to shoot and kill demonstrators and rioters following anti-Semitic protests in 2023.

The threat of violence being deliberately and intentionally staged increases the likelihood of riots. Figure 5 presents a significant concern of such violence being planned or triggered by domestic extremists, international terror groups or hostile government actors. Nearly half (43 per cent) of participants stated that deliberate violence was likely, 33 per cent considered it highly likely and 17 per cent assessed the risk as definite. Only 7 per cent thought that intentional or planned violence was highly unlikely.

One online survey participant reinforced the concern of violence being potentially premeditated by external actors, stating:

With the war in Ukraine ongoing, there is significant potential for third-party

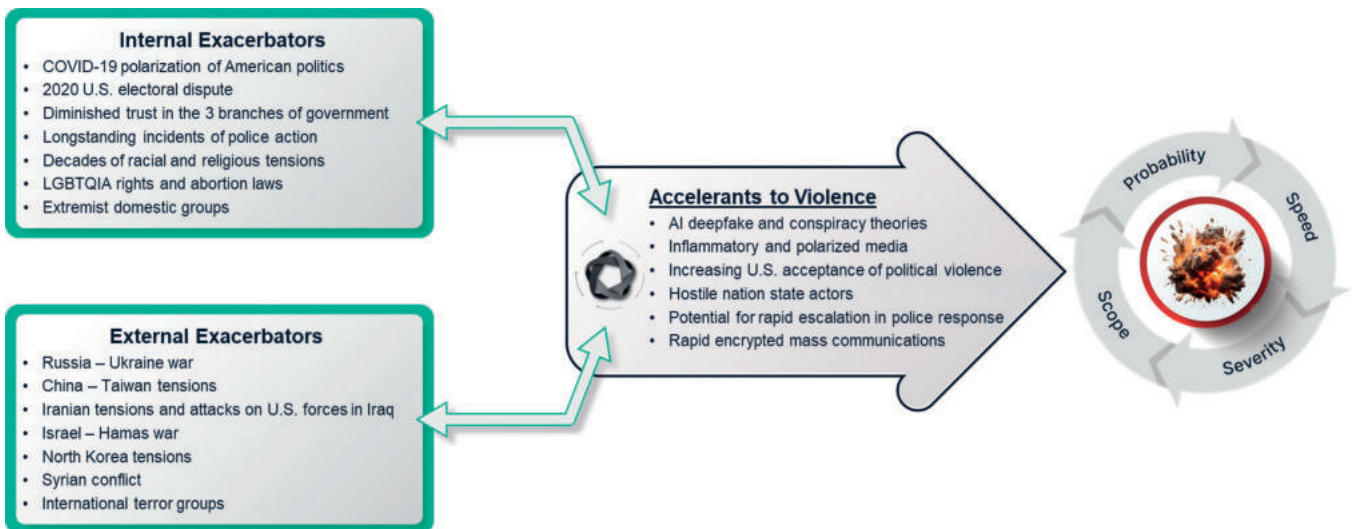


Figure 4 Exacerbators and accelerants to political unrest and rioting

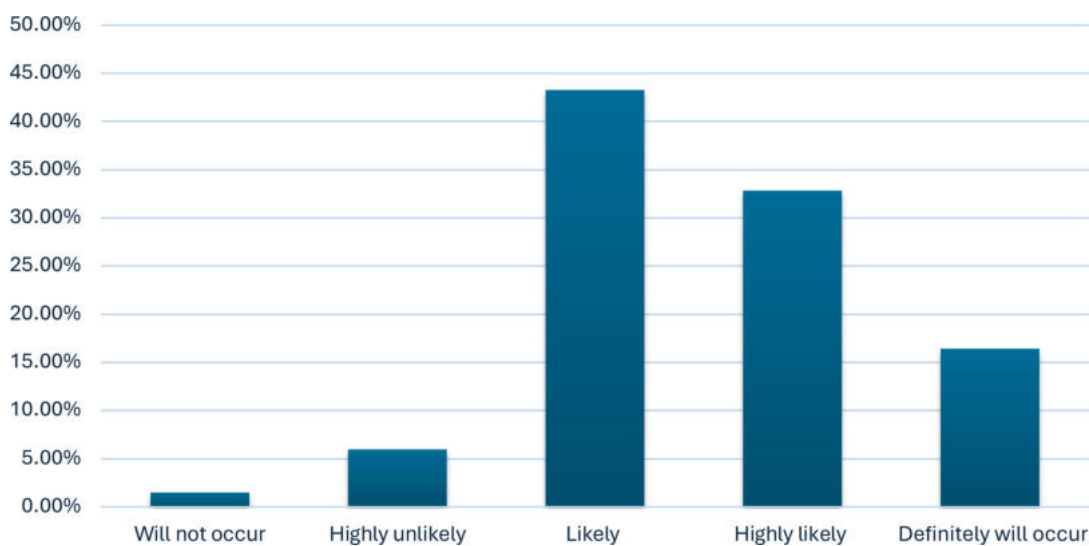


Figure 5 What is the likelihood of agitators including domestic extremists, international terror groups or hostile government actors promoting, inciting or being part of physical violence?

[international] agitators to incite violence or civil disturbances.

The risk of an overreaction in the US is arguably more pronounced than in many other Western countries given the availability of lethal weapons and the historic use of firearms used to perpetrate acts of mass violence. One of the deadliest was the 2017 Las Vegas³⁸ shooting that killed 60 and injured 500, illustrating the risk from the use of firearms against the public, and potentially against law enforcement or military forces. The risks from conventional weapons combined with the ease with which vehicles can be used as weapons,³⁹ the use of home-built improvised explosive devices, as well as the weaponisation of flammable or explosive infrastructure (ie gas stations, fuel lorries, fuel depots and chemical industrial facilities) not only presents a physical risk to those attending or in the vicinity of a gathering, it also offers the potential to incite a lethal reaction from law enforcement agencies and the military. Another online survey participant expressed this concern:

The most likely threats posed by violent protestors, domestic extremists, international terrorists, or hostile nation agitators during the upcoming U.S. elections include the use of vehicles and/or firearms, as well as improvised explosive weapons such as bombs, Molotov cocktails, and improvised explosive devices. While non-violent but disruptive demonstrations, rallies, and protests will likely occur, the potential for escalation to more dangerous weapons remain significant. Additionally, cyber and critical infrastructure attacks and disruptions are a credible threat, particularly from hostile nation actors.

Hostile actors may take advantage of social and political instability to raise tensions or incite violence to further destabilise the rule of law. Where significant friction exists between the US and other countries such as Russia, North Korea, Syria and China, then hostile nation actors may also seek to exploit the political instability to their advantage. An online survey participant identified this concern:

I think the most likely course of action we will see is where large-scale political protests lead to conflict and violence [triggered by hostile actors] and result in an aggressive police response.

Figure 6 shows the mechanisms by which violence might be perpetrated. Among survey participants, 73 per cent worried that agitators or rioters would use weapons, vehicles, explosives and cyberattacks. The remaining 27 per cent of the participants believed that public gatherings would be disruptive, but not violent. What truly sets the US elections apart from other riots is the concern of cyberattacks, with 8 per cent of participants citing this non-traditional threat as a concern.

The potential for the average American to act as a *citizen journalist*, posting tech-enabled real-time footage from their potentially distorted or biased perspective of public gatherings, crowd violence and aggressive police responses, contributes to the rapid sharing of information and the escalation of protests. Often, the first report — regardless of its accuracy — is

the one that is absorbed and believed as *true* and it is difficult to correct through subsequent more factual reporting. This, coupled with biased and inflammatory media reporting, AI deepfake and conspiracy theories, can amplify and expedite the effects of violence, with one online survey participant noting:

The threat landscape is varied and we are likely to see many forms of disruption: direct confrontation, peaceful protest, media, and cyber-attacks ... with a second army of lawyers and journalists monitoring and reporting on every action and statement.

The new and rapidly evolving challenge of AI deepfake and cyber threats is also now part of the modern riot, with one online survey participant commenting:

My sense is that this election is open to manipulation and escalation by foreign actors, certainly in the AI and cyber elements. The capacity and integration of disruptive cyber threats or influencing

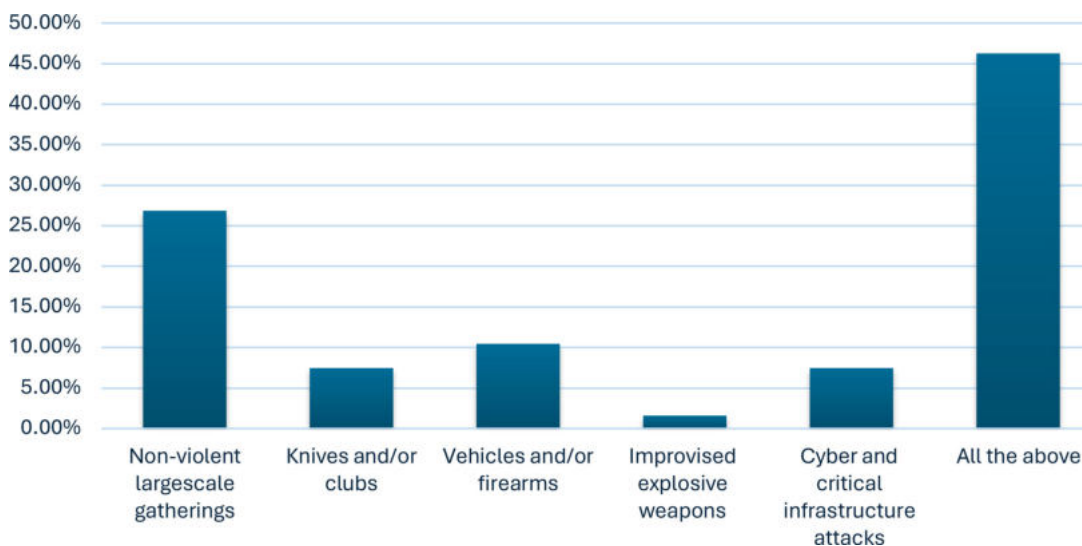


Figure 6 What types of weapons might be used by violent protestors or domestic extremist, international terrorist or hostile nation agitators?

social media has substantially increased. Given the known disruption that we saw last time I am sure this will be a prominent feature for this election: though this may be through proxy violence.

The potential cost to business

Every public gathering has an economic cost. Where a gathering becomes violent, the economic impacts can be accompanied by injuries and deaths, property and asset damage, insurance claims and compensation, and business interruptions and lost opportunities.⁴⁰ According to Beazley's 'Geopolitical Risk Snapshot' for 2024,⁴¹ approximately 70 per cent of business leaders expressed concerns about the 2024 US elections, with 25 per cent stating they are unprepared for political risk and violence. Although the costs are difficult to quantify, riots are expensive and can have far-reaching impacts on people, communities and businesses. The 1992 Los Angeles riots resulted in over 700 businesses burnt, which cost over US\$1bn.⁴² In the UK, the nationwide riots following the 2011 police shooting of Mark Duggan resulted in over £133m in policing and compensation costs. And, in the US, the January 2020 attack on the US Capitol was estimated to have cost more than US\$2.7bn.

Aside from business disruption, damaged property, policing and compensation costs, looting is often associated with rioting,⁴³ and businesses with facilities, inventory and activities in high-risk areas are most vulnerable. Employees might also live in or commute through riot-affected areas and critical vendors and supply routes may be cut off, causing a chain reaction of operational or production disruption. One online survey participant offered that businesses face different risks, some immediate and measurable, others less so:

Those businesses in the heart of a riot face immediate and front of face risks

which are easy to measure. Whereas others may be physically removed from the violence and the business disruption impacts may be more ambiguous and difficult to put a price tag on.

The extent of potential disruption to business has both tangible and intangible effects on profitability, with a survey participant offering:

It is not calculable ... unless looking at a cost resulting from an incident directly related to an election incident. There are however contingency costs in terms of preparing for incidents, response costs, recovery costs, personal injury, secondary disruptions, etc.

As shown in Figure 7, 20 per cent of online survey participants predicted that the US elections will see considerable to significant business disruption, 46 per cent expect some level of disruption, and 34 per cent assessed the potential impact to be limited to negligible. When the amount of disruption is linked to potential business losses — combined with the anticipated duration of disruption (Figure 8) — then a more accurate business impact analysis can be conducted.

The nature and scale of the business and its geographic location(s) contribute to the likelihood of business disruption and the associated costs. As one online survey participant observed:

The impact on businesses depends upon the nature and location of the business and how employees reach these destinations. If they are in areas that routinely experience demonstrations, then employers may opt to have them work from home where possible. However, businesses such as manufacturing will not have that option for all employees.

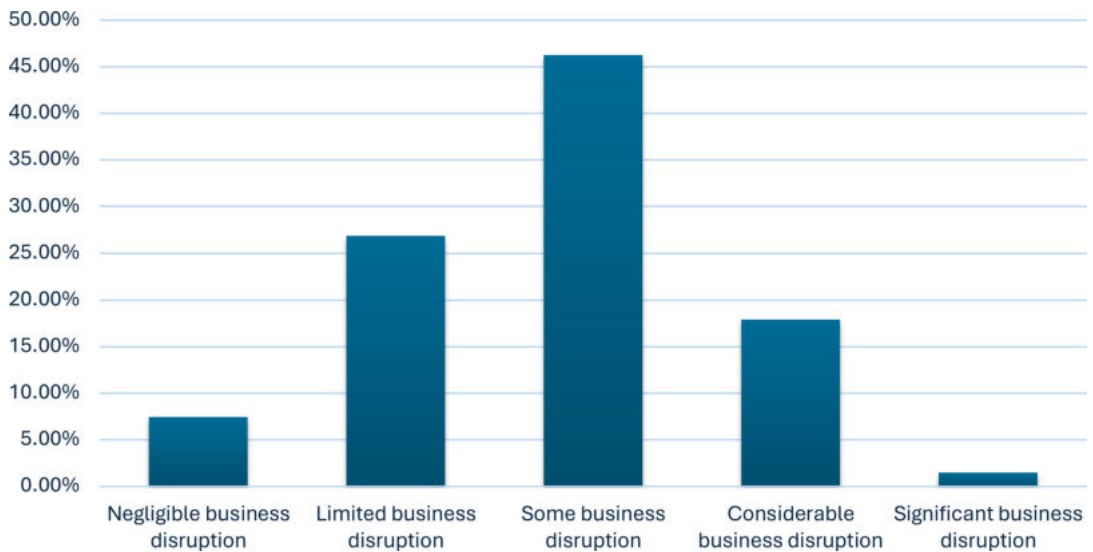


Figure 7 What level of business disruption is anticipated to affect companies?

Another online survey participant used an example from the services industry to estimate potential business costs, suggesting:

If a company operates 100 restaurants that are affected by widespread rioting then my guestimate is up to \$5m in potential losses each day at a minimum.

This observation provides a general sense of the potential cost to a specific business type and was reinforced by another online survey participant:

The overall impact of even a single day of lost production typically reaches well above a million [dollars]. I believe that the 2024 eclipse was estimated to cost in the millions of dollars of lost productivity, and this was only a few hours.

The risk to retail and food outlets is arguably more pronounced than most businesses if civil disorder affects urban areas, with revenue losses of a shop or restaurant closure costing potentially hundreds of thousands of dollars each day. Part

of the equation for evaluating the implications of business disruption is predicting the duration of violence, with Figure 8 showing that 13 per cent of the survey participants expected either very temporary or no period of disruption, 39 per cent expected disruption to last several days, 40 per cent thought that it would last from days to weeks and 9 per cent predicted that it would last weeks to months. By understanding the likely period of disruption risk leaders can better define workarounds or the transfer of critical functions for operations or sites most at risk during likely periods of disruption.

The survey participants offered a variety of perspectives on the likely period of disruption which might directly affect businesses, with one suggesting:

The anticipated period of disruption is likely to span days to weeks, encompassing the time before, during, and after the election. The political tensions and potential for violence from various agitators suggest that disruptions could begin in the lead-up to

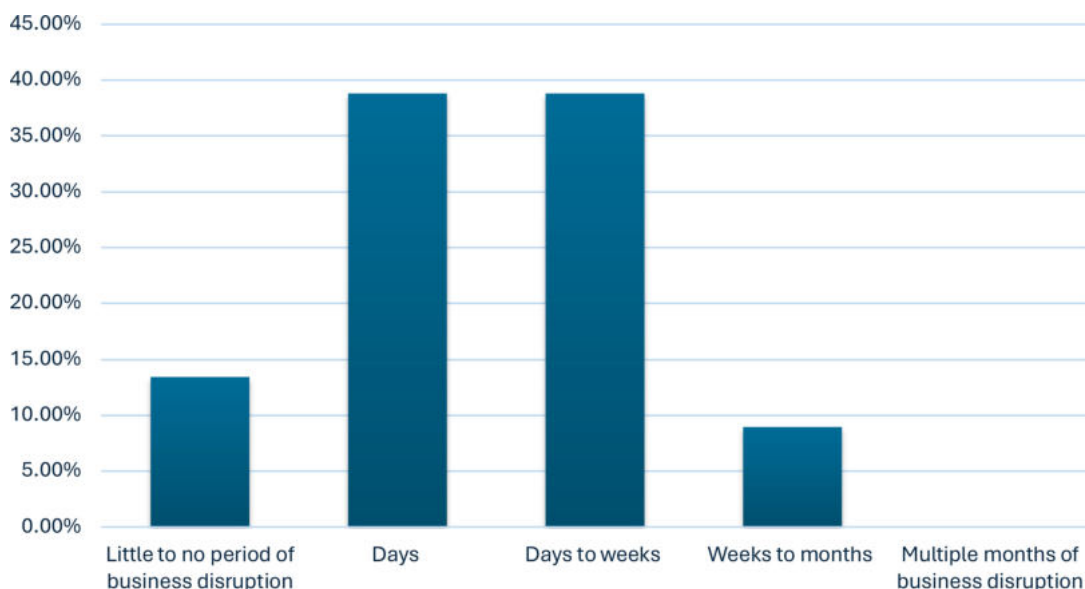


Figure 8 What is the anticipated period of business disruption associated with the November 2024 elections?

the election as campaigns intensify and continue through the immediate post-election period as results are contested and power transition occurs.

Other participants countered this perspective:

Business disruptions are likely to be limited only to the days immediately before and after the election result.

Where businesses have a dependency on external stakeholders, the risk of critical vendor and supplier disruption to business success is more pronounced. Vendors and suppliers — like any business — may also be affected by violence, causing cascading impacts on business operations and productivity. Figure 9 shows that 60 per cent of participants assessed the risks on critical vendors and suppliers as limited to negligible, 33 per cent expected some disruption, while 7 per cent thought that the disruptions could be serious.

One online survey participant called out the risk to vendors and suppliers, remarking:

The anticipated risk of critical vendors, suppliers, and stakeholders being disrupted is likely in the category of *serious disruption risk*. While there may not be a catastrophic level of disruption, there is a significant potential for disruptions to critical supply chains and partnerships due to the volatile environment surrounding the elections.

The vulnerability of suppliers and supply chains can have a significant impact on a business, with one online survey participant stating:

I believe that based on the scale of disruptions it has the potential to impact all business sectors, including even the largest businesses. Supply chains will be at risk at all levels, and like we saw with the pandemic it doesn't take an

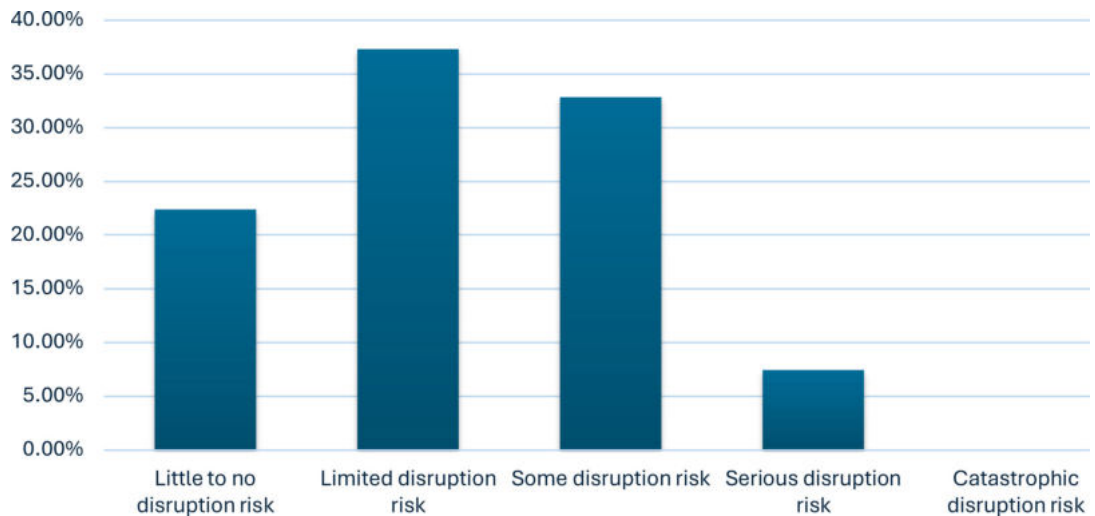


Figure 9 What is the anticipated risk of critical vendors, suppliers and stakeholders being disrupted? How much disruption is needed to have a negative impact on your company?

extraordinary effort to break down or disrupt that critical system.

The Business Impact Analysis process defines the likely severity of financial losses associated with riots. Figure 10 shows that 18 per cent of survey participants did not believe that violence would have a financial impact on their organisation, 54 per cent thought the financial damage would be less than US\$1m, and 28 per cent believed that the cost to their business might exceed US\$1m.

The warning signs and points of escalation

Effective resilience relies on activating people, plans and resources in a timely manner. Rosenthal⁴⁴ explains how a community belief system and dissident groups, coupled with the posture of law enforcement and security forces, influence the way in which civil disorder breaks out. Social cleavages appear in the premobilisation phase as belief systems shift and grow based on recent or long-standing points of frustration related to a perceived or actual crisis. In this early stage, militant

leaders emerge to inflame tensions and lay the groundwork for future discord, while a deterioration in the rule of law and the emergence of a quasi-political ideology creates the opportunity for violence. Associational groups can also deepen cleavages in the community by reinforcing a hostile system of attitudes and beliefs, giving dissidents ‘a great sense of exhilaration’ as they learn that people agree with them, that institutional mechanisms cannot resolve the crisis, and that violence will be rewarded. Finally, Rosenthal adds that there must be facilitators of violence, including a weakening of the social controls within institutional mechanisms.

The triggers of violence surrounding the 2024 US elections involve not only the outcome of the presidential election but also the Supreme Court’s ruling on the issue of presidential immunity. The plethora of court rulings in 2024 alone against the presumptive Republican nominee for president (Donald Trump), including the US\$454m civil fraud⁴⁵ ruling, the US\$83m in damages for defaming E. Jean Carroll,⁴⁶ and being found guilty of 34 counts of falsifying business records in

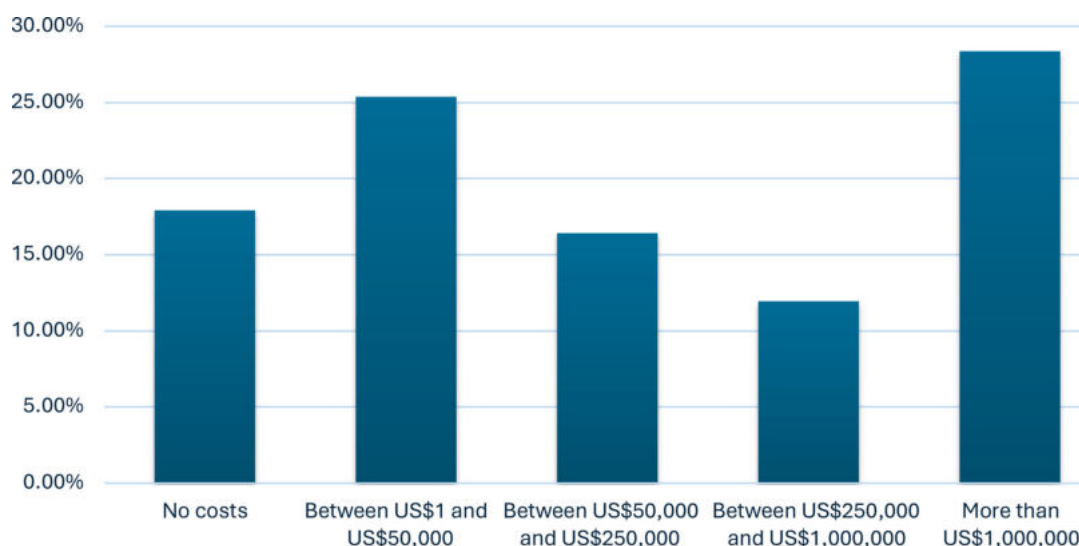


Figure 10 What are the anticipated business costs or losses of violence caused by political instability?

the ‘Hush Money’ election interference case,⁴⁷ presents opportunities for significant political agitation. Legislative threats to the LGBTQIA community, accusations of election fraud, impeachments in the House of Representatives and the Israel– Hamas war and humanitarian crisis have added volatility to the election season.

Rosenthal describes crowds as needing communication to foment tensions and organise unrest, and claims that violence is rarely spontaneous and is always preceded by some form of *warning indicator*. Rumours, now amplified through social media, AI deepfake, conspiracy theories, inflammatory news outlets⁴⁸ and incendiary political and social influencers, heighten tensions and can be catalysts for structured or impulsive — and highly contagious — violence.

Organisational resilience strategies

The alignment of anticipated risks to how organisations establish management structures, communication strategies, codified standards and practices, support and resources allocations and training and

exercising programmes defines the maturity and effectiveness of the resilience strategy. De Jong⁴⁹ stated that policing authorities managing civil disorder risks require goals, specialised tactics, a plan of action and training, suggesting:

Preparation is the single most important step law enforcement agencies can take to ensure that small disturbances do not grow into major incidents. Effective preparation is, in fact, the best form of prevention.

Similarly, businesses must evaluate the risks to their staff, locations, operations, and critical vendors and supply chains, and should codify their strategies within a formal civil disorder business continuity plan and supporting crisis management plan, before operationalising these standards and practices through structured or JIT training and exercising programmes. Rosenthal⁵⁰ stated that the pre-mobilisation period offers the opportunity for government authorities to recognise the need for civil disorder planning, and it is in this

phase where businesses are most effective in defining and addressing risks, as well as creating appropriate resilience and crisis strategies to better react to, manage and recover from possible crises. One survey participant reinforced this viewpoint:

Businesses in areas that may be affected by protests and violence should prepare for considerable business disruption in their planning. They should prepare for all scenarios and not wait to react.

Resilience preparedness and effective leadership

The maturity of an organisation's resilience strategy, its centralised or decentralised management structures, the systems and processes used and the organic or external resources available to it form the bedrock from which effective risk management, business continuity and crisis management strategies are applied before, during or after outbreaks of violence. Where a business adopts a decentralised management approach, there is a risk that individual business units or locations may lack the right strategic risk perspective. Conversely, where a centralised management approach is used, the business may not be nimble enough to make time-sensitive and locally nuanced decisions. A prepared organisation will weather a riot better than an organisation that must scramble to design, codify and implement resilience strategies, structures, plans, resources and training while also contending with a crisis. One online survey participant commented that while the risks are known, some organisations will not take advantage of the time available to implement appropriate resilience planning:

Businesses tend to be slow to prepare and miss opportunities to avoid becoming a victim of election unrest or violence. Many [businesses] are hoping

this will not occur, but even if it's anticipated, the resources available may not be adequate.

Another online survey participant emphasised the importance of wisely using the time available to develop and test a robust resilience approach:

The organization's awareness, preparedness, and resourcing to understand and address the potential election security and business disruption risks vary widely. Unfortunately, there may be organizations with little to no awareness, preparedness, and resourcing and this leaves them particularly vulnerable. It is essential for all organizations to prioritize risk assessments, contingency planning, and the investment in security measures to effectively navigate the uncertainties surrounding the upcoming election and safeguard their operations.

Figure 11 shows that 15 per cent of the online survey participants assessed their organisation as being highly resilient, 46 per cent felt that their organisation was reasonably resilient, while 39 per cent felt that their organisation lacked a sufficient level of resilience commensurate with the potential 2024 election risks.

Where companies are more liberal in their brand, orientation and messaging, this also presents a market share risk as they run the risk of alienating their consumers.

Informed risk assessments

Companies should conduct a risk assessment of the potential for violence and the implications to their people, facilities, assets, operations, critical vendors and supply chains and business interests. Employees, contractors and clients may also be part of the problem, whether participating in violent political demonstrations,

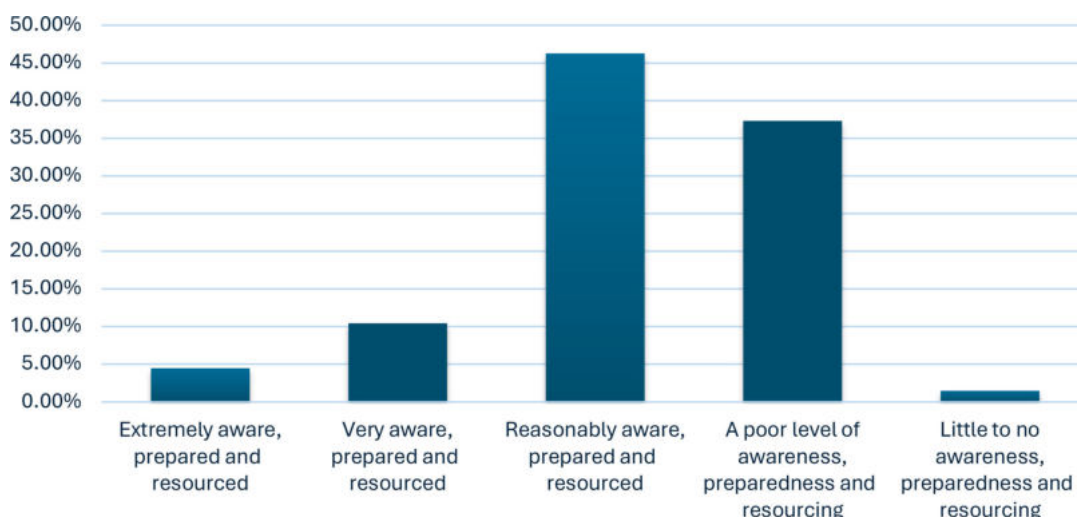


Figure 11 How aware, prepared, and resourced are organisations to understand and address the potential physical security and business disruption risks associated with the 2024 US election?

creating discord and disruption in the workplace, or presenting a physical threat to people and assets. Organisations must not only look outwards in terms of potential threats, but also inwards to define insider threats and who is responsible for addressing potential business disruption and physical security risks.

This process is not static and must track the evolving situation as a dynamic process of identifying, evaluating and acting upon predicted or emergent threats. Risk assessments are also challenging where a complex blend of domestic and international staff, locations and operational diversity complicates the process. The process can both identify whether facilities and operations are in violence-prone 'hot spots', as well as determine projected periods of likely disruption to establish if they will interfere with critical business activities, and when workarounds or operational redirections may be required. The process gives risk leaders the intelligence needed to assess business costs and an opportunity to avoid, mitigate or prepare for disruption. The findings may also help to identify staff, sites and operations that require specific

resilience strategies and resourcing, and should map, evaluate and address recovery time objectives, maximum acceptable periods of disruption, minimum business continuity objectives and recovery point objectives.

Codified standards and practices

The codification of standards and practices into document systems at the strategic, operational and tactical levels allows organisations to capture the knowledge and experience of internal and external resilience, security and crisis management experts for application before, during, or after a riot. The document systems should (ideally) be aligned with International Organization for Standardization (ISO), British Standards Institution (BSI) or Continuity Of Operations Plan (COOP) standards related to risk assessments, business continuity, security risk management and incident and crisis management.

While document systems are useful, they should not be prescriptive and must provide leaders with the flexibility needed to deal with nuanced or complex crises. Subject matter experts are then required to

activate and implement components of the system, advising leaders on how to navigate high-impact and fast-burn incidents.

Businesses with a history of operating in volatile and high-risk environments might be better prepared for violence, leveraging pre-existing systems and reorientating these to the US context. One online survey participant commented, however, that even companies with a sophisticated resilience strategy might find their systems are insufficient to withstand the 2024 risks:

As a global player that has already been hugely impacted by the war in Ukraine, one might assume we are more prepared. However, that might be the case internationally due to lessons learnt, but less so from a national perspective as something akin to a civil war hasn't happened since the 1700s. It will be interesting to see how we adapt the closer we get to the election.

Figure 12 shows that 70 per cent of survey participants were confident that

their organisational resilience, business continuity, security, emergency and crisis management policies, plans and protocols were mature and effective enough to respond to potential threats, but 30 per cent were not confident. Business leaders should use the time before the elections to rectify shortfalls in resilience document systems and to close the gaps in standards and practices.

The importance and application of timely intelligence

Sound intelligence and the timely tracking and reporting of threats allows adequate time for risk owners to prepare for, and react to, crises; however, government agencies and businesses are often caught off guard, despite forewarning of potential risks.⁵¹ Even where sound and trusted intelligence exists, the interpretation and use of information requires focused knowledge and experience coupled with effective leadership, otherwise obvious warning signs will be missed. According to one online survey participant:

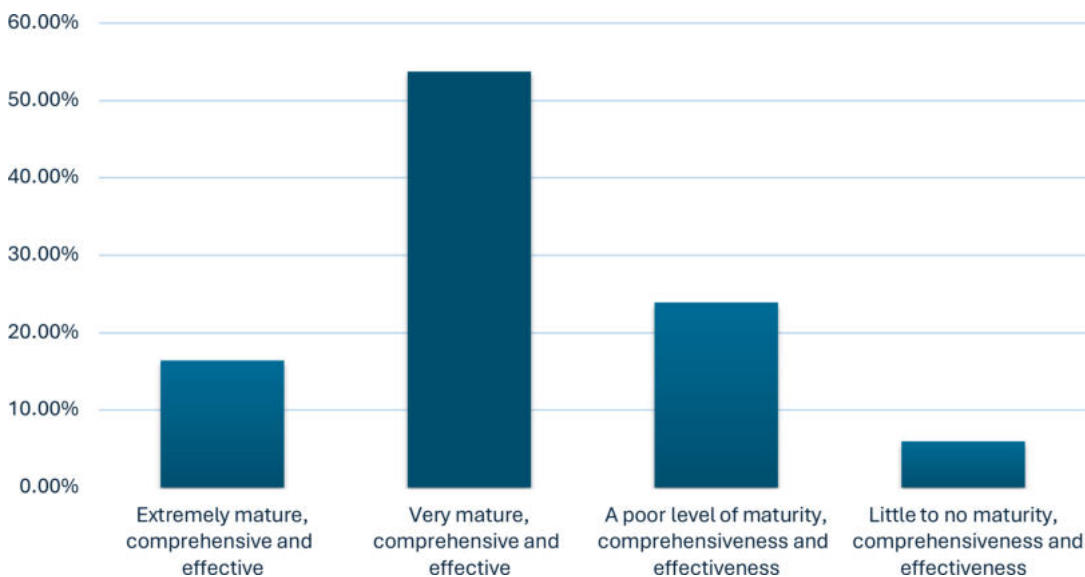


Figure 12 How mature and effective are your organisation's resilience, business continuity, security risk management, crisis and emergency response policies, plans and protocols?

Virtually nothing in this regard happens in a vacuum. If intelligence and law enforcement entities watch the money trail and travel patterns the events may be less difficult to predict.

The ability to gather accurate and real-time intelligence is impaired where encrypted communications and protected planning is available to domestic extremist and international terrorist groups. Several studies⁵² have identified videogames as a secure mechanism available to even the least sophisticated agitator to effectively plan and synchronise an attack. This can reduce the ability of intelligence services and civilian risk leaders to track and act upon threats. Risk leaders must then be able to source and utilise reliable and timely intelligence to shape their resilience and crisis response decision making.

Internal and external resilience resources

Commercial organisations must rely on police and security forces to contend with the direct risks resulting from rioting; however, government authorities can be quickly overwhelmed by widespread violence, so businesses need to rely on themselves or their specialist contractors. Where resilience, security or crisis responsibilities are outsourced, risk leaders must understand the scope of the contracted services, the experience, skills and resources contractors can (or cannot) bring to bear, and where leadership responsibilities remain within the organisation. Risk owners should determine whether their sites or operations are in hot, warm or cold risk zones⁵³ to most effectively assign leadership and security resources. Part of the resilience strategy should also reflect that once a riot attains a certain momentum,⁵⁴ law enforcement agencies can do little to contain it. As one online survey participant noted:

Once the demonstrations start, the agitators will quickly expand to other geographic areas.

This places a temporary onus of responsibility onto the business until law and order has been restored. As such, companies must rely on themselves as policing and security forces mobilise to control rampant violence. When a business relies on external vendors and suppliers, the resilience of these stakeholders becomes important. Figure 13 shows how survey participants assessed 13 per cent of their critical vendors as resilient, 69 per cent as reasonably resilient and 18 per cent as insufficiently resilient.

The importance of training and exercising

The production of knowledge and experience operationalises and stress-tests resilience, security and crisis management strategies, standards and practices. According to De Jong:⁵⁵

Administrators should keep in mind that no matter how well developed the written plan may be, nothing teaches it as well as practical experience ... [and that] ideally, training should be made as realistic as possible ... to place both mental and physical stress on participants to condition their reactions.

Groups of organisational learners span from executive to employee levels, and laterally across locational and specialist groupings. Learning may be pre-planned and structured to reflect known areas of risk or vulnerability, or it may be more reactive and deployed as a JIT solution to emergent or recurring violence. Getting knowledge and experience into the hands of learner groups can be logistically problematic and financially costly, especially during a riot. Companies should develop a competency framework against the anticipated risks,

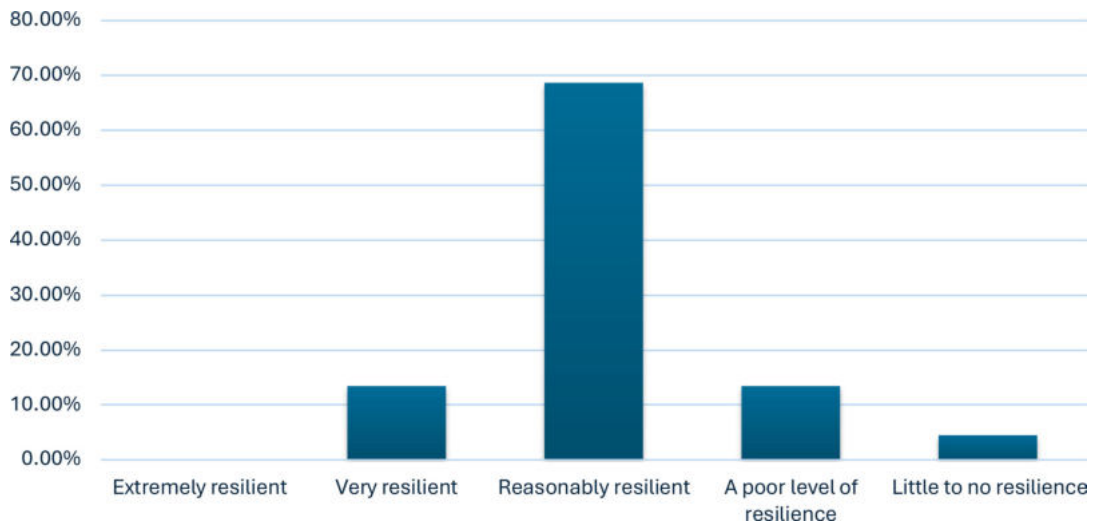


Figure 13 How resilient do you believe your critical vendors and suppliers would be if physical violence occurred at, or near, their operating location(s)?

drawing on pre-identified e-learning, videogame, instructor-led and tabletop simulation solutions.

Leadership knowledge and experience

Leaders are ultimately responsible for how resilience and crisis management strategies are defined, resourced, trained against and implemented; they are also responsible for managing localised incidents or more strategic-level crises. Structured, knowledge-led, exercised and experienced-based leadership will be more resilient to crisis-induced duress. Conversely, ill-prepared, untested and poorly equipped leaders will more likely struggle and fail during a high-stress, fast-burning crisis. Even where resilience strategies are robust, a failure to exercise and test the system can undermine the leadership team's ability to respond to a crisis. As one online survey participant observed:

I will say our resilience system is mature, however, it has not been adequately *riot-tested* to ensure true effectiveness.

Even large and well-established companies often lack a formal and resourced

leadership training programme that might define how leaders view risks, design and implement their resilience system or respond to a crisis. According to one online survey participant:

We don't have an enterprise-wide approach to risk management yet even though we are a company that has been around for over 140 years. Although individual regions have strategies for crisis management, they are largely not integrated, nor consistent.

Figure 14 shows that 36 per cent of the online survey participants described their organisational approach to developing leadership knowledge and experience was mature and sophisticated, 47 per cent believed that it was appropriate for the need, and 17 per cent thought that the mechanisms to develop experience in leaders were absent or lacking.

Staff awareness and competency

While developing leadership knowledge helps businesses to craft a more effective organisational resilience strategy, and

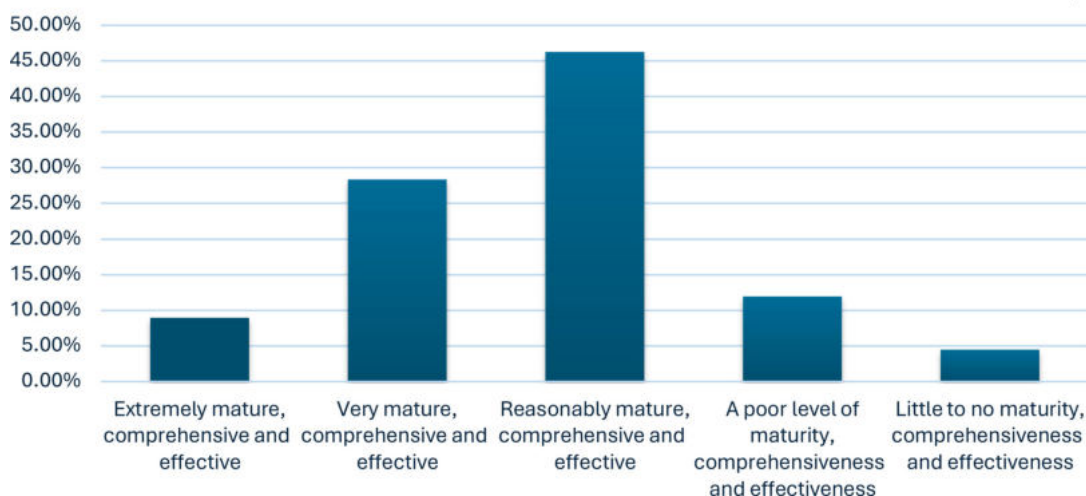


Figure 14 How mature and effective is your organisation's approach to educating and exercising leadership teams to create resilience strategies and respond effectively to crisis management needs?

then respond better at the strategic and operational levels to a crisis or localised incident, the foundation of business success depends on the knowledge and skills of each employee. This is especially true of staff working, travelling through or living in a riot-affected area, who must make on-the-spot decisions about their personal safety and security. The effects on people affect business, and building adequate risk awareness of attending rallies or being caught in a riot improves overall business resilience. It also is an integral part of a business's duty of care responsibility. Staff preparedness varies across organisations, as stated by one online survey participant:

I have been preparing training for my team on civil unrest due to concerns around protests and physical violence. Local law enforcement has also indicated that they are anticipating unrest associated with the 2024 U.S. elections.

Other participants complained that their teams had not invested enough in raising

awareness and competencies within their teams, with one claiming:

No real effort is taken to protect employees outside of work other than advisory notices.

Another participant asserted that training programmes were available, but were insufficient to meet the need:

Staff are aware with localized training programs, but it is not comprehensive.

Where businesses have international operations, notably in higher-risk environments, then they are more likely to have security awareness training and exercising programmes already in place. In addition, these businesses should better understand the importance of security and safety awareness training. As one online survey respondent stated:

This [level of security awareness training] is achieved by our culture of security and risk awareness by the nature of

work we do internationally. Security and risk are part of our everyday lives. In addition, our staff are required to take security related training, such as hostile environment awareness training (HEAT) courses, to prepare for all types of risk scenarios.

Figure 15 shows that 39 per cent of survey participants described their approach to developing civil disorder and associated risk knowledge and skills for staff as mature and appropriate, 38 per cent considered it appropriately reflective of the risks, and 23 per cent thought that the training strategy was lacking or absent.

Resilience and response planning time

Violence can erupt quickly and without warning and organisations must establish risk trip-wires to establish when aspects of the resilience strategy are activated. When a trip-wire is triggered, risk leaders must then be able to react to an emergent or occurring threat in a structured

and focused manner. In 2020, the police shooting of a teenager in France caused the mobilisation of 40,000 police officers and the arrest of 1,300 people.⁵⁶ Similarly, violent protests can be set off when a point of societal sensitivity sparks public gatherings, as seen with the global protests following the murder of George Floyd by police in 2020.⁵⁷

Most social scientists believe that although it takes planning and communication to summon a crowd, the subsequent violence is (often) spontaneous;⁵⁸ however, structured violence can occur when militants have purposely created a volatile situation.⁵⁹ The complexity of organisational resilience planning and crisis response times where crowds gather and where agitators incite or trigger structured violence was identified as a challenge by one online survey participant:

Organizational leaders will have varying lead times to identify specific locations and periods of security or business disruption risk, depending on the threat.

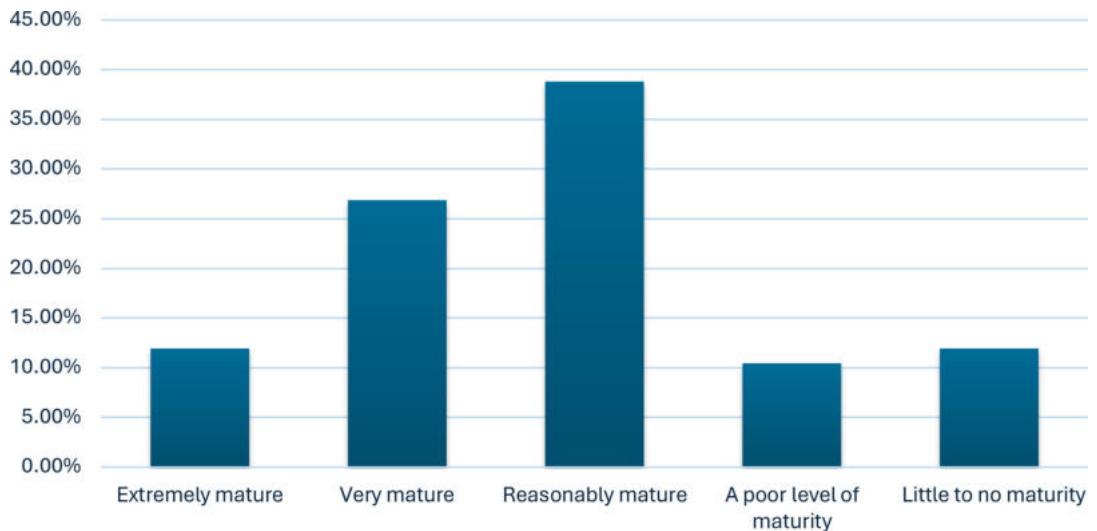


Figure 15 How mature and effective is your organisation’s approach to educating staff on the risks associated with physical violence and how to implement appropriate self-help measures if caught within a riot or an attack?

While some risks such as general threats from domestic extremist groups or planned demonstrations may be identified months or weeks in advance, more specific and imminent threats such as spontaneous violent actions or cyberattacks might only become apparent days or even hours beforehand. In some cases, particularly with rapidly evolving situations, there may be minutes or no time for advance notice.

De Jong⁶⁰ explores the issue of time being the enemy of containing a riot as policing agencies gather and direct limited resources to the point of unrest. Resourcing limitations are central in determining whether riots can be immediately contained or dispersed, especially when there was no warning and where law enforcement responses have not been timely. Policing studies suggest that commanders should assume that only 60–70 per cent of resources will be available to respond to a riot and businesses should also not overestimate the availability of organic or supportive resources, especially when the

conditions for violence have been orchestrated and may escalate quickly in terms of time, severity and impact. One online survey participant observed:

Riots are likely to be spontaneous and are unannounced by design.

Where there are spikes in violence, and where riots are ongoing, both policing and commercial resources will quickly become strained. Donohue⁶¹ also explores how emergency service resources drawn into violence can be quickly overwhelmed. The same principles of planning time and resource challenges hold true for commercial organisations and must be part of the contingency planning strategy as companies head into the 2024 elections.

Figure 16 illustrates the anticipated *flash-to-bang* time between an emergent threat being identified and violence occurring. Of the survey participants, 36 per cent felt that warning indicators provide weeks to months of warning time before a riot, 37 per cent suggested only days of pre-warning time would be available, and 27

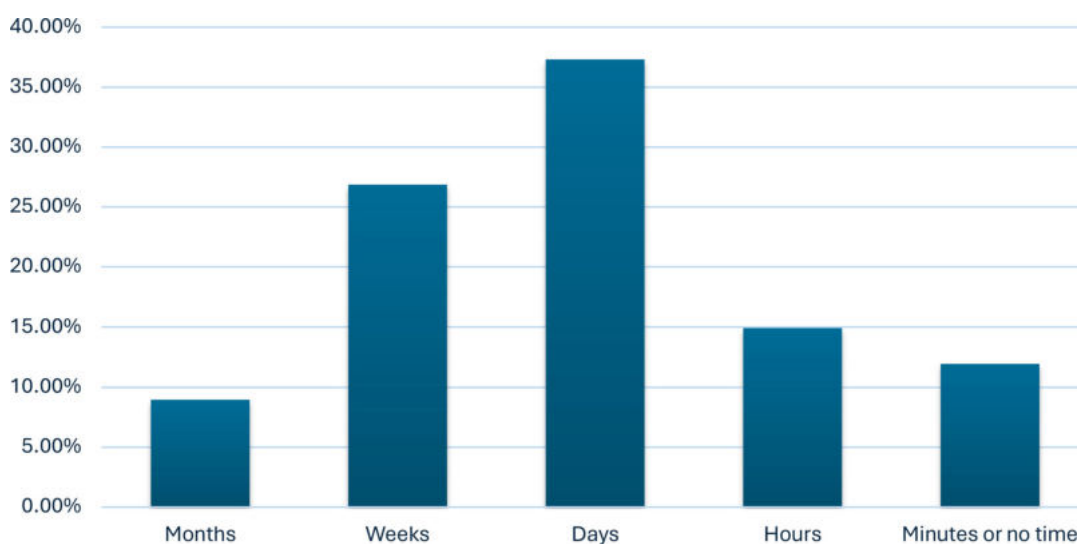


Figure 16 How much lead time will organisations and leaders have to identify specific locations and defined periods of physical security or business disruption risk?

per cent believed that only minutes to hours will be available. If 64 per cent of the respondents are correct that less than a day of warning will be available ahead of a riot, this underpins the need for organisations to be prepared to activate mature, articulated, resourced and trained resilience strategies well in advance of anticipated violence.

CONCLUSION

What is the difference between how riots have occurred historically and the threat of social instability and business disruption before, during and after the 2024 US elections? Research suggests that the upcoming elections have all the ingredients for national-level riots and the potential for significant injuries, deaths and business disruption. The threats seen today are markedly different from those experienced in the past. The modern riot does not resemble the violence seen in the 1960s, 1970s or even 1990s; the demographics of rioters⁶² and the motivations of participants have changed dramatically. This, coupled with a rapidly evolving interplay of accelerants and exacerbators, lays the foundation for widespread and complex violence.

Within the modern agitator portfolio are politicians, public figures, social media influencers, citizen journalists, domestic extremists, subversive nation states and international terrorist groups — with the potential for lethal weapon use and aggressive police responses. Where employee rioters or agitators post social media opinions which might be viewed as a communique from the business, untangling the corporate opinion from those of its staff also becomes a challenge. The geographic scope of the risk is wide, as noted by an online survey participant:

All [locations] are prime targets and can be attacked simultaneously in an

effort to exasperate security forces, and protestors can also take advantage of overstretched emergency services and an exacerbated security situation to carry out looting against commercial establishments.

The mechanisms available to heighten tensions and cause violence are more sophisticated and far-reaching than ever. ACLED⁶³ identified nearly 60,000 demonstrations in more than 4,500 US locations between 2020 and 2023. Rosenthal⁶⁴ posits that the conditions for a riot exist if a precipitating event and the circulation of rumours that reduce inhibitions and intensify aggression are combined with the formation of crowds. In this phase, conspiratorial groups can infiltrate activist organisations and initiate violence, leading to a hostile outburst phase where individuals and groups engage in isolated or widespread violence. Complicating the risk is the ability for police or military forces to distinguish lawbreakers from bystanders. After the violence has subsided, the post-hostile phase begins with its own potential for the re-emergence of violence through rumours, incendiary reporting, physical attacks or intentional agitation.

Smelser⁶⁵ suggests that a precipitating factor channels specific fears, antagonisms and hopes, thereby exaggerating generalised aggression. Allport⁶⁶ suggests that rioters believe that the majority supports them and that they are acting for the greater collective good. Turner and Killian⁶⁷ concur, stating that disturbances can allow rioters to circumvent established institutional patterns of behaviour. The confluence of destabilising factors exponentially increases the risks of rioting before, during and after the elections. Complicating the security challenge is the legalised participation of armed protestors and the risk of a law enforcement

overreaction as the number of armed paramilitary groups attending political rallies rises,⁶⁸ creating a commensurate increase — by an estimated factor of x6.5 — in the probability of armed demonstrators causing violence, compared to an unarmed demonstrator gathering.

As seen in Figure 17, the online survey results suggest that government, social and retail locations will likely be targeted; mid-sized urban areas to larger cities will see riots; violence will almost certainly occur with domestic extremist, hostile state actor and international terrorist group involvement; lethal weapons will be used; and business disruption is unavoidable and will likely occur over a period of weeks to months. The survey also found that not all organisations are confident that their resilience strategies are robust enough, and that the period between identifying a threat and violence occurring is likely to offer only minutes to days of warning time.

The level of understanding and the resilience strategies used to address interconnected riot risks defines how well or badly organisations can prepare for and prevent, respond to and manage, and then recover from widespread violence. Risk leaders must also contend with the potential for resilience and security measures to be perceived as having a political bias by employees and on-site contractors given the extreme sensitivities over the 2024 election, and internal perceptions and the resulting friction may complicate the effectiveness of the resilience strategy.

Figure 18 illustrates how understanding the cause of civil disorder and the factors that compound, amplify or intentionally exacerbate it allows leaders to better predict areas and periods of elevated risk. Timely and accurate intelligence can identify and track flashpoints and the triggers of violence. It can help to determine the implications of AI deepfake, hostile actors and incendiary media reporting,

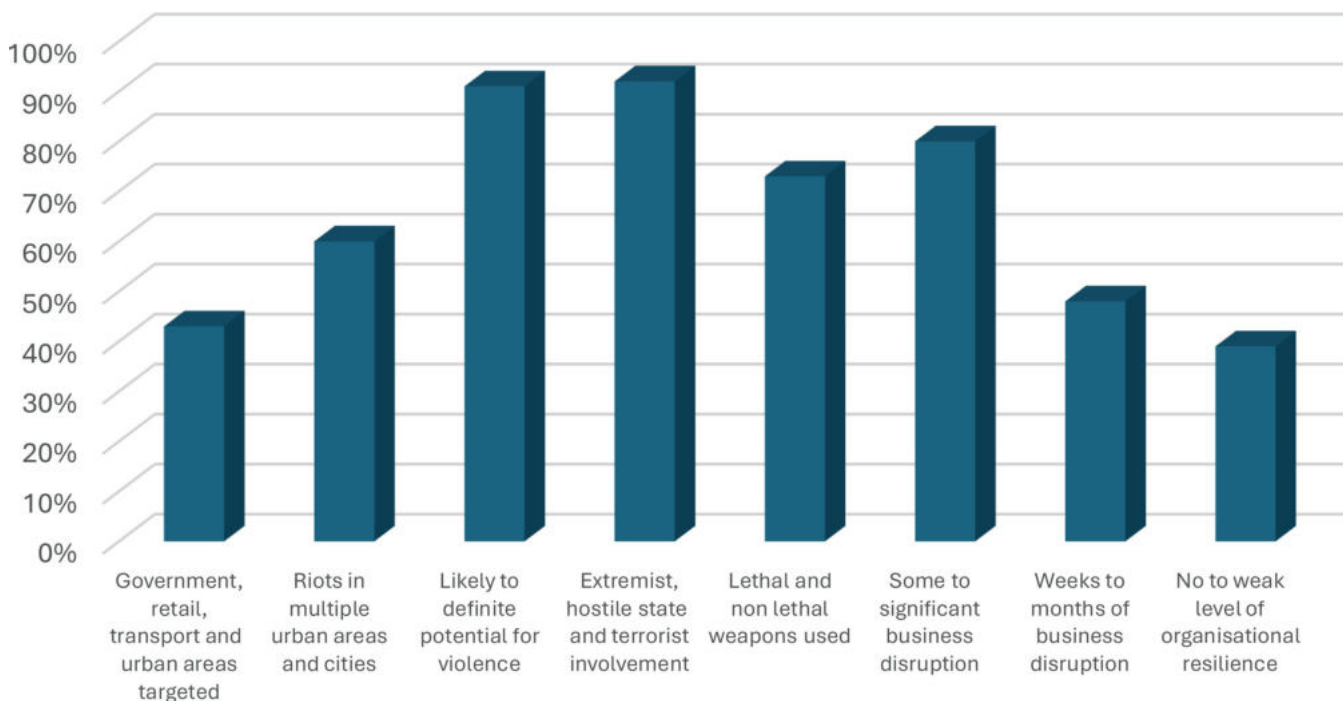


Figure 17 A summary of online survey findings

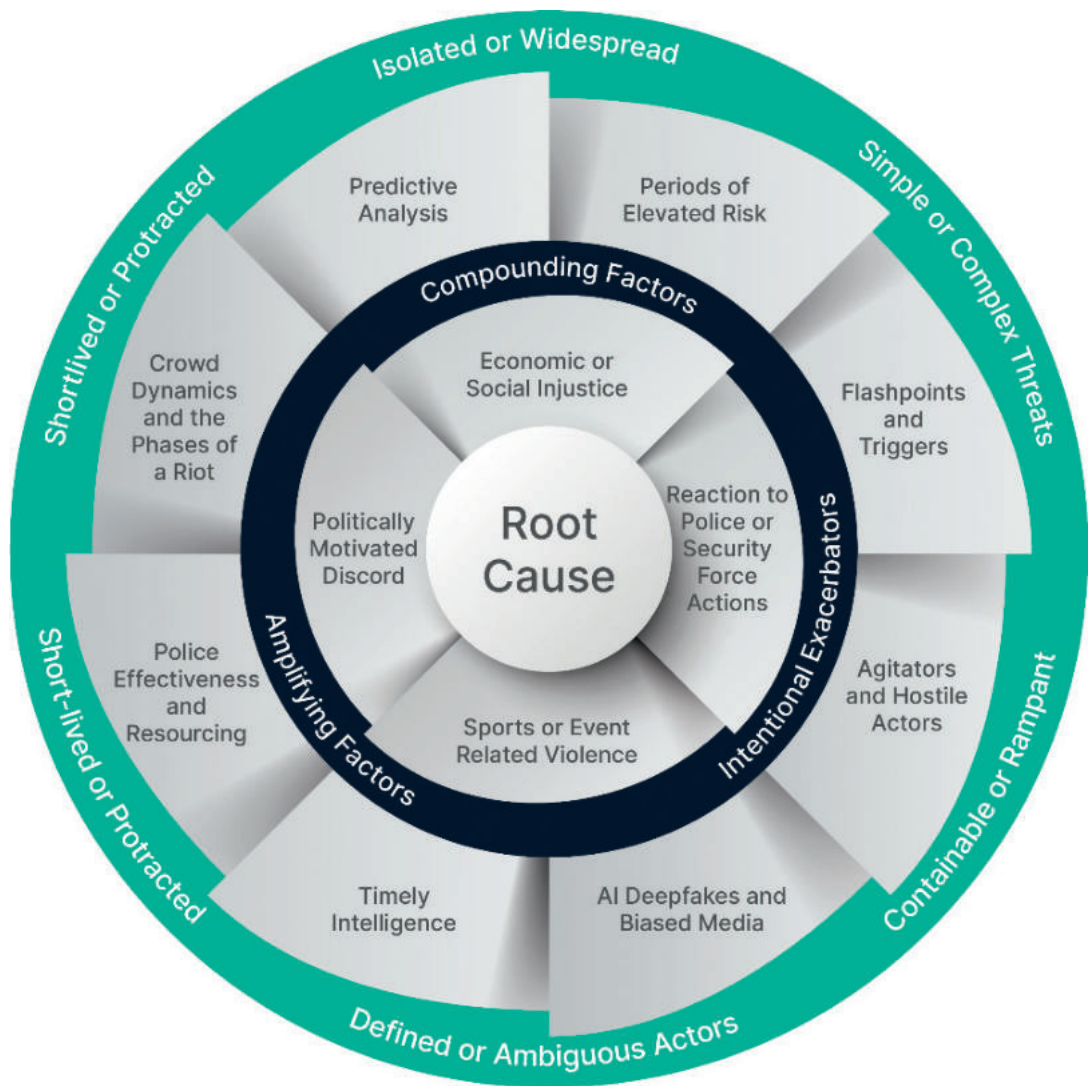


Figure 18 The components that form, trigger and exacerbate riots

and then establish how crowd dynamics and law enforcement responses might harm or help business interests. Inward-facing intelligence can also help analyse the risk temperature within an employee base where frustrations and potential violence may be present within specific locations or demographics. Robust management structures, codified standards and practices, trained leaders, specialists and staff, appropriate support and resourcing, evaluated critical dependencies and timely

and effective communications all affect the identification and mitigation of risks, and consequently the effectiveness of how businesses will protect their interests during the 2024 US elections.

Organisational risk leaders have access to a wealth of information on how political violence can quickly engulf society and overwhelm law enforcement and security forces. The multiple domestic friction points surrounding the upcoming 2024 elections, compounded by international

crises and looming tensions, all present obvious warning signs to businesses. Organisations have ample time ahead of the elections to evaluate the threat, determine the risks, assess the potential for business disruption, and develop and resource appropriate resilience strategies. To best protect the business risk, leaders must work closely with their business and financial counterparts to establish the known or anticipated cost to business should operational or production disruption, property and asset damage, critical supplier and vendor disruption or employee injuries and deaths occur.

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