"If Abortions Aren't Safe, Neither Are You":
Public Support for Violent Tactics in U.S. Abortion Politics

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ABSTRACT: What drives support for political violence: opportunity structures, moralized attitudes and strong identities, or general predispositions? We examine these questions in the context of abortion politics, which has been understudied by political violence scholars despite abortion constituting one of the most frequent targets of politically violent attacks in the United States. Using nationally representative survey data and an embedded survey experiment, we find that Americans view violent tactics as fundamentally distinct from conventional protest. Support for such tactics has little to do with the side respondents take on abortion, or the extremity or moralization of their abortion attitudes and identities. Rather, support for violent tactics is better predicted by general predispositions toward aggression and hostile sexism. Taken together, our findings suggest that an appetite for violence is concentrated not among the most ardent believers, but among a small subset who hold more aggressive and prejudiced attitudes across a range of issues.

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Introduction

In January 2023, two defendants, Caleb Freestone and Amber Smith-Stewart, were indicted by a federal court and charged with vandalizing three crisis pregnancy centers in Winter Haven, Florida.[5] The following year, in April 2024, Hridindu Sankar Roychowdhury was sentenced to seven and a half years in federal prison for firebombing the office of a pro-life lobbying group in Madison, Wisconsin in 2022, following the leak of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, the U.S. Supreme Court's decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* (U.S. Department of Justice, 2024).[6] Graffiti on the exterior of the Madison building was similar to messages scrawled on the Florida centers and read, "If abortions aren't safe then you aren't either." The defendants in both cases were accused of being part of "Jane's Revenge," a leaderless pro-choice movement claiming to carry out acts of vandalism and property destruction against pro-life targets and crisis pregnancy centers in the wake of the repeal of *Roe v. Wade*.[7]

Although much was made of the vandalism and property destruction by pro-choice activists in 2022-2023, violence by pro-life activists has historically been far more frequent and persistent. It has continued—and, by some accounts, even worsened—post-Dobbs, including the assassination of Minnesota State Representative Melissa Hortman in 2025.[8] Between 1970 and 2020, pro-life activists have been the perpetrators in more than 250 U.S. domestic terror attacks representing 96% of all abortion-related terror attacks worldwide (Wirken et al., 2023; Jacobson and Royer, 2011). Anti-abortion violence over the past five decades has included murders, arson attacks, and kidnappings, many of which have been attributed to

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[5]Crisis pregnancy centers are clinics that offer some reproductive services to women, but largely function to discourage pregnant women from obtaining an abortion (Stuart, 2023). Two additional defendants were added later to the indictment (U.S. Department of Justice, 2023).

[6]Throughout, we use "pro-life" and "pro-choice" to refer to activists and groups to be broadly consistent with the self-descriptions of these political actors and their policy preferences.

[7]These two cases were part of a wave of actions by left-wing pro-choice activists after the initial leak and the subsequent official announcement of the Dobbs decision. By January 2023, the FBI was reported to be investigating ten such incidents, and other sources estimate that the group may have been involved in nearly two dozen such actions across 15 U.S. states (Tiffany, 2022).

[8]For example, the suspect in the June 2025 assassination of Representative Hortman and her husband Mark reportedly had a list of over 70 targets (Kilgore, 2025).

the leaderless pro-life resistance group known as the "Army of God" (Jefferis, 2011; Builta, 1996).[9]

However, despite both the prevalence and salience of both contention and political violence surrounding abortion politics in the United States,[10] these dynamics have tended to go unstudied both by scholars of abortion in American politics, and by scholars of political violence more generally. Abortion politics scholars have tended to focus on Americans' attitudes about abortion—trends in opinion (Norrander and Wilcox, 2023; Jelen and Wilcox, 2003), correlates of support and nuances over time (Cassese, Ondercin and Randall, 2025; Osborne et al., 2022; Cook, Jelen and Wilcox, 1992; Alvarez and Brehm, 1995; Franklin and Kosaki, 1989; Wilcox, 1990), and social movements around abortion (Meyer and Staggenborg, 2008; Munson, 2010; Rohlinger, 2015)—rather than exploring attitudes about violence and contention in abortion politics.[11] Meanwhile, political violence scholars have largely sidestepped abortion altogether. Political violence scholars in International Relations (IR) have traditionally focused on the tactics, causes, and consequences of full-scale civil wars and global patterns of terrorism (Cunningham, 2011; Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Godefroidt, 2023; Phillips, 2023; Balcells and Stanton, 2021), rather than studying support for political violence within the United States. It is only recently that Americanists have filled this gap by paying greater attention to political violence as a topic in American politics, but much of the focus has been on the descriptive question of whether Americans endorse political violence in general (Westwood et al., 2022; Kalmoe and Mason, 2022), and the effects of political violence on the quality of American democracy (Kleinfeld, 2021; Hoffman and Ware, 2024; Wasow, 2020; Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2024), rather than the study of support for violence in particular issue areas, including abortion itself. This is the case even though, in the Global

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[9]According to one estimate, since the late 1970s, pro-life activists have been responsible for "11 murders, 42 bombings, 200 acts of arson, and 531 assaults" (Miller, 2024).

[10]For example, prominent right-wing media and pro-life activists heavily covered the various incidents by pro-choice activists and argued that they might be harbingers of increased violent activism by left-wing actors like Jane's Revenge, and an early sign of a broader burgeoning movement of "pro-abortion terrorists," following increased restrictions on abortion rights (Chasmar, 2022).

[11]Norris (2022) examines Jane's Revenge tactics immediately following the Dobbs decision, but leaves aside the question of the public's support for these tactics.

Terrorism Database (GTD)—arguably the most widely-used dataset in the study of political violence—anti-abortion activists constitute the single most common perpetrators of terrorist attacks in the United States. As Figure 1 shows, there have been nearly four times as many attacks by abortion-related groups as Islamist or Jihadi groups during this time period.

Figure 1: Terrorist attacks in the United States by perpetrator, 1970-2020
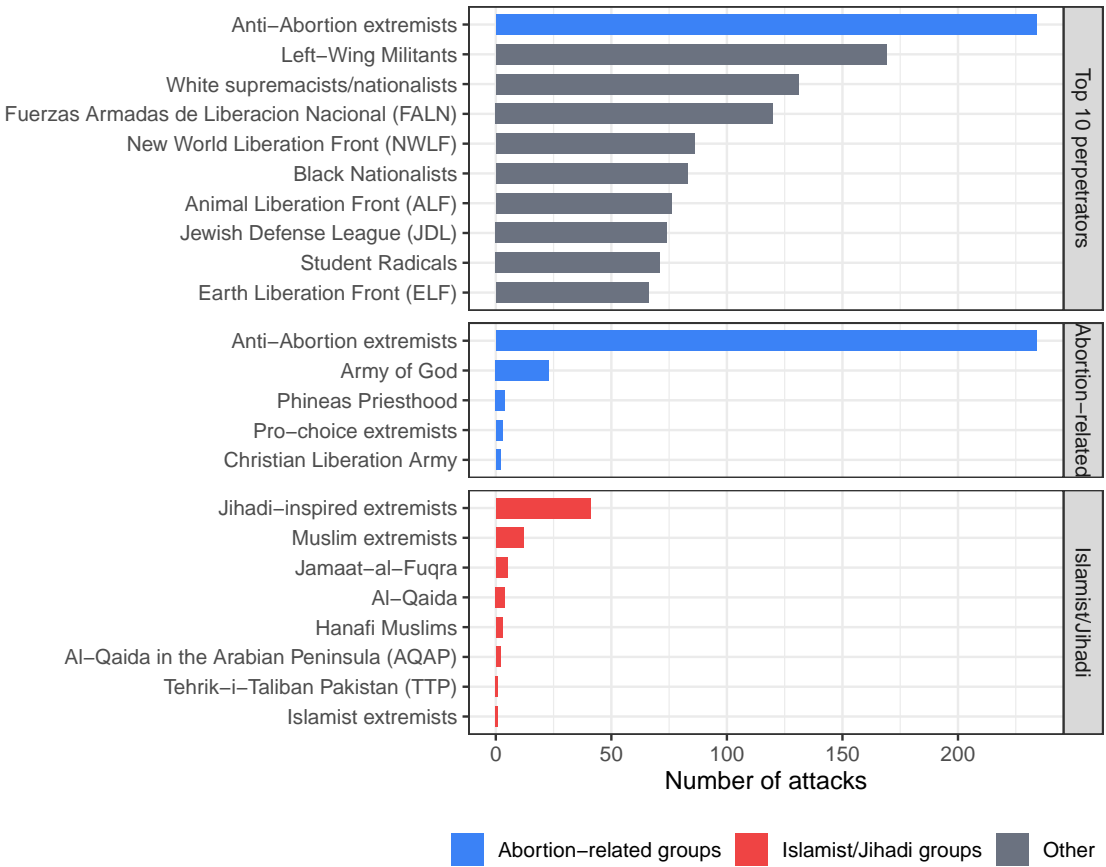
In this paper, we use contention around abortion politics as a vehicle for examining two key questions in the study of political violence. The first relates to the role of macropolitical logics in driving support for violence. Social movement scholars often argue that support for contentious tactics—including violent tactics—is a function of the ability of groups to achieve their goals through conventional means (Tarrow, 1996; Tilly and Tarrow, 2015). Changes in political opportunity structures should lead to changes in support for violence—

consistent with recent media coverage of violence by pro-choice activists following the *Dobbs* decision, in contrast to the violence by pro-life activists in the era of *Roe v. Wade*. To what extent is support for violent tactics by abortion activists a function of the side of the abortion debate on which Americans find themselves at a particular political moment? The second key question concerns the individual-level correlates of support for political violence. Political violence scholars have long been interested in two competing logics for why individuals fight, or are supportive of those who do: sacred values, and aggressive predispositions. The former imply that those who feel the most strongly about an issue, or for whom it becomes moralized—or even forms a part of their identity—will be most supportive of more extreme tactics (Martel et al., 2021; Atran and Ginges, 2012; Enders, 2021). The latter argue that some people are more aggressive in general and are predisposed to support violent actions regardless of their political beliefs; violence is endorsed not by true believers, but by individuals who may not in fact believe in anything (McDermott, 2014; Kalmoe, 2014; Mueller, 2000). Abortion, as the most quintessentially moralized issue in American politics, serves as an ideal test case for adjudicating these debates.

We use surveys and experiments to test these arguments, fielding a large, nationally representative survey of 3,000 respondents with an embedded survey experiment in July 2023 on Americans' attitudes toward abortion and contentious politics. We fielded our survey during a period of high salience, just after the one-year anniversary of the *Dobbs* decision, in the broader context of abortion becoming an increasingly central voting issue. Polling from this time period shows an increase in abortion's voting salience over the past five years, particularly among Democrats, women, young people, and in battleground states (Public Religion Research Institute, 2024).[12]

We first show that Americans' attitudes toward contentious politics on abortion have a three-dimensional structure, indicating that violent tactics are seen as distinct from other forms of protest or contentious tactics. Americans are systematically less supportive of

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[12]Our survey was also fielded in the midst of a wave of ballot initiatives about abortion access, with six states voting on constitutional amendments between 2022 and 2023 (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2024).

violent tactics—making the question of who actually supports them all the more important. We reconfirm these findings with a survey experiment, showing how support for contentious tactics decreases with tactical extremity. Consistent with other findings in the contentious politics literature (Huff and Kertzer, 2018; Edwards and Arnon, 2021; Manekin and Mitts, 2022), we show that Americans display double standards in their support for contentious tactics in general, based on whether the activist is aligned with the respondent's side or not. But crucially, when it comes to violent tactics, this in-group bias almost entirely disappears– again suggesting that violent tactics are understood differently than more conventional forms of contention. The experiment also suggests that support for violent tactics is not linked to which side of the abortion debate respondents are on, inconsistent with the macropolitics argument from the contentious politics literature.

We then turn to individual-level correlates of support for violent tactics. We find that support for violent tactics in abortion politics has little to do with the extremity of respondents' positions on abortion, or the strength of their pro-life or pro-choice identities. Instead, support for abortion-related political violence appears to be driven by two dispositions that are not directly related to abortion itself: political aggression and hostile sexism. Taken together, the results suggest that personality types and general predispositions are better predictors of support for political violence than attitude strength and identity.

Our findings have four important implications for the study of political violence, contentious politics, and abortion politics. First, public support for contentious tactics is distinct from public support for violence, suggesting that the public draws a bright line between conventional protests and civil disobedience, and actions that harass and harm others. Second, given the strong moralization of the abortion issue by both pro-life and pro-choice proponents, the lack of predictive power of both abortion-related identities and policy extremity suggests potential limits for sacred values-style explanations for support for violent tactics. In contrast, our findings provide evidence that support for political violence, and even political violence itself, may be driven more by those who hold more aggressive and anti-social

predispositions. Third, from a purely descriptive standpoint, despite some growing concern in the media and among the public (Montanaro, 2025), support for violent tactics in abortion politics remains low, consistent with other work in American politics about attitudes toward violence in more general forms (Westwood et al., 2022; Holliday et al., 2024). Finally, our findings highlight a disconnect between activist groups and the mass public. Even during a period when abortion is both highly salient and politically volatile, groups that choose extreme tactics are acting without broad public support.

Explaining Support for Violent Tactics

Groups seeking to enact policy change have an array of contentious tactics at their disposal (Gamson, 1975; Tarrow, 1996, 1998). Some of these tactics are violent, causing physical harm and destruction to people or property. Others, like protests and boycotts, are not (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011; Huff and Kruszewska, 2016). What causes some citizens to condone political violence, while others do not?

In what follows, we distill the vast literature on political violence into three families of explanations. Macropolitical accounts attribute support for violence to political opportunity structures: individuals aligning with a cause will be more supportive of violence on its behalf when conventional policy channels are blocked. Sacred value, moral conviction, and social identity accounts predict within-side variation: those who identify more strongly with a cause, or who hold more extreme or moralized views about it, are more willing to endorse extreme tactics. And finally, psychological predisposition accounts also predict within-side variation, but emphasize issue-general orientations that incline some individuals to endorse violence regardless of their views of the cause itself. We discuss each in turn. In each case, we first outline general theoretical mechanisms before translating them into the specific hypotheses in the context of abortion politics, which as we argue below, represents an important case for public opinion towards political violence in the United States.

Macropolitical Context

The first argument emphasizes the role of the macropolitical context, holding that when conventional policy channels are blocked for a group, they will display more support for non-conventional tactics than a group that enjoys more policy success. Scholars of social movements refer to political opportunity as the macro-level factors that make it highly advantageous or disadvantageous for social movements to form and contest (Meyer and Minkoff, 2004; Tarrow, 1996). We focus on a particular aspect of opportunity, related to the policy process. When supporters of one side find that conventional avenues to influence policy–whether lobbying, the courts, or voting–are not available to them, individuals will be more supportive of extreme tactics (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015). This logic is consistent with the idea of relative deprivation, in which individuals or groups may turn towards more contentious or even violent tactics to redress their grievances when their ambitions are thwarted (Gurr, 1970; Jahnke, Abad Borger and Beelmann, 2022; Nielsen, 2017).

In the case of abortion politics in the United States, the current macropolitical context implies asymmetric polarization between pro-choice and pro-life Americans, as the repeal of *Roe v. Wade* and the enactment of state-level laws restricting abortion access highlight the recent policy success of the pro-life movement. According to this argument, pro-choice Americans, who face increasing abortion restrictions and—in the MAGA era—fewer avenues to influence policy through conventional means, should be more supportive of pro-choice activists carrying out contentious tactics compared to pro-life Americans' support for pro-life activists carrying out those same tactics. This macropolitical logic is also often used to explain why so much of the violence in U.S. abortion politics during the *Roe v. Wade* era was perpetrated by pro-life proponents. Thus, we hypothesize that:

H1. Blocked Ambition. All else equal, pro-choice respondents will be more supportive of violent tactics given the recent lack of policy success compared to pro-life respondents.

Micro-level explanations

In contrast to the blocked ambition logic, which emphasizes the role of the political climate in differentially motivating individuals on either side of the abortion debate to be willing to support contentious tactics, an alternative set of perspectives suggests that support for contentious politics is less influenced by the macropolitical environment and more by a range of individual-level attitudes and dispositions. In other words, why are some Americans more supportive of violent tactics about abortion than others? Drawing on the literature in political psychology on bottom-up theories of public opinion (e.g., Kertzer and Zeitzoff, 2017), we can differentiate between two families of individual-level explanations in particular: those emphasizing abortion-specific attitudes and identities, and more general psychological orientations.

Abortion-specific attitudes and identities

The first family of individual-level explanations focuses on attitudes and identities relating to abortion itself.

Simply put, some attitudes are stronger than others (Krosnick and Petty, 1995), and stronger attitudes are both more resistant to change and more likely to motivate political behavior (Miller and Peterson, 2004). The more strongly an individual feels about an issue, the more likely they are to mobilize on its behalf. Similar conclusions emerge from the literatures on moralization and moral conviction (Ryan, 2017; Skitka et al., 2021). This work has shown that people are more likely to reject legitimate authority and resist norms related to obeying the rule of law in cases of moral conflict (Skitka and Morgan, 2014). When certain causes become moralized, individuals may be willing to face personal sacrifice or to justify violence in order to defend a sacred value (Atran and Ginges, 2012; Martel et al., 2021; Kruglanski et al., 2022). In the context of climate change, for example, greater concern about the climate is associated with greater support for contentious protest tactics (Bugden, 2020; Zeitzoff and Gold, 2024). Once a value becomes sacred, political violence

becomes a moral imperative to defend deeply held beliefs (Jefferis, 2011). These arguments are particularly relevant in the case of abortion, which is consistently seen as one of the most moralized issues in American politics. In a recent Pew Research Center survey, for example, 79 percent of Americans saw abortion as a moral issue (Mohamed and Hartig, 2022). Scholars of moral conviction have consistently studied abortion precisely because of its strong association with morality (Skitka and Morgan, 2014; Skitka, Bauman and Sargis, 2005).

A related set of explanations focuses on the role of social identity (Brewer and Brown, 1998). How strongly someone identifies with a cause is an important predictor of support for contentious tactics. For example, several recent studies suggest that more extreme partisan identity, and greater loathing of the outgroup, are associated with support for political violence (Armaly and Enders, 2024; Kalmoe and Mason, 2022; Webster, Glynn and Motta, 2024; Piazza, 2023; Martel et al., 2021). Copartisans are more likely to view the same protest tactics from in-group (out-group) members as less (more) violent or extreme, and are more (less) likely to support it (Manekin and Mitts, 2022; Hsiao and Radnitz, 2021). The logic of identity fusion similarly implies that individuals who identify strongly with a group are more likely to fight on its behalf (Swann Jr et al., 2012). Following these arguments, in the case of abortion, individuals who strongly identify as pro-life or pro-choice should be more supportive of violent tactics than individuals who only weakly associate with those identities.

In sum, those who have strong attitudes or strong identities around a cause are more likely to support more violent tactics, which we operationalize in two different ways:

H2a. Strength of Identification. Those who claim a strong self-identification with an abortion stance (whether pro-choice or pro-life) will be more likely to support violent tactics in abortion politics.

H2b. Attitude Extremity. Those who have more extreme attitudes about abortion

(whether pro-choice or pro-life) will be more likely to support violent tactics in abortion politics.

Political Aggression

Other research suggests that holding extreme beliefs is quite distinct from supporting or carrying out radical actions (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2017). Fundamental psychological predispositions, such as aggression (Kalmoe, 2014; Jahnke, Abad Borger and Beelmann, 2022), have been found to play an important role, with more aggressive personalities more likely to support and actually participate in political violence. Neurobiological research on aggression in politics has reached similar conclusions about aggressive personalities, using a very different set of evidence (e.g., McDermott, 2014; McDermott and Hatemi, 2017). Other recent studies echo these findings and emphasize the importance of antisocial, or dark personality traits, in studying support for political violence and anti-system politics (Gøtzsche-Astrup, 2021; Nai and Young, 2024; Arceneaux et al., 2021).

From a recruitment and socialization perspective, violence specialists (e.g., criminals and hooligans) have always found a comfortable home in groups or parties involved in political violence (Mueller, 2000; Tilly and Tarrow, 2015; Mudde, 2019). Other research finds that factors that predict criminal deviancy—such as being young, male, and a strong dispositional desire to enact revenge over perceived injustice—also overlap with participation in terrorism and political violence (Silke, 2003). These findings suggest that support or even participation in violent tactics may be more a function of certain personality types who believe more generally that violence is justified in politics, not only surrounding their particular issue of concern.

H3. Political Aggression. Those who support the use of violence to achieve political goals will be more likely to support violent tactics in abortion politics.

Gendered Prejudices

Core prejudices and values like sexism play an often-overlooked but central role in attitudes about both political violence and abortion politics—although these literatures have rarely been linked, a gap we seek to fill in the present analysis. Abortion is also arguably the most important gendered issue in contemporary politics. For example, abortion was the only gendered issue of the top three "most important" in the 2024 presidential election (Igielnik, 2024), and gender was considered by many to be the "defining issue" of the election (Lerer and Glueck, 2024). Understanding the role gendered attitudes play in determining support for violent tactics in abortion politics is thus particularly critical.

There is a rich literature on the role that sexism plays in support for violence (Armaly and Enders, 2024) and, in IR, on the general association between sexist attitudes and support for violent extremism around the world (Bjarnegård et al., 2023; Cohen and Karim, 2022). In American politics, there is an additional literature on sexism and support for anti-abortion policies (Cizmar and Kalkan, 2023; Petterson and Sutton, 2018; Huang and Osborne, 2016), a line of research made more relevant by Donald Trump's comments at a 2024 election rally that "whether the women like it or not, I'm going to protect them" (Hubbard, 2024). This comment reflects a core tenet of benevolent sexism, the belief that women ought to be protected by men, and has been found to be a correlate of support for restricting women's lifestyle choices during pregnancy (Sutton, Douglas and McClellan, 2011).

Hostile sexism, the belief that women are manipulative competitors to men and that men are superior to women, is also apparent in contemporary abortion politics. For example, following the 2024 presidential election, far-right activist Nick Fuentes, celebrating Donald Trump's reelection, posted on Twitter/X, "Your body, my choice," mocking a traditional pro-choice rallying cry. His post reflects clear hostile sexism, suggesting that women's bodily autonomy ought to be controlled by men. (Notably, and relevant to our analysis of contentious politics, Fuentes was subsequently doxxed—his private information was publicly reported, including his home address—by pro-choice activists, and some went to Fuentes'

home to confront him directly; see King, 2024). The link between hostile sexism and pro-life beliefs is a consistent finding in previous research (Cizmar and Kalkan, 2023; Petterson and Sutton, 2018; Huang and Osborne, 2016). Taken together—that sexist beliefs in general are correlated with support for violence and that hostile sexism in particular is correlated with support for pro-life beliefs—we derive the following hypotheses:

H4a. Benevolent Sexism. Those who espouse benevolent sexist beliefs will be more likely to support violent tactics.

H4b. Hostile Sexism. Those who espouse hostile sexist beliefs will be more likely to support violent tactics.

Methods

We fielded a survey and embedded survey experiment on a sample of 3,000 Americans in July 2023 recruited via YouGov, which utilizes a panel matching procedure to yield a nationally representative sample of the voting-age population.[13] As shown in Figure 2 below, the study has three modules, the order of which was randomized at the respondent-level.

One module consists of a battery of questions measuring respondents' abortion attitudes and identities, replicating standard question wording utilized to measure abortion attitudes by Pew, and others. We operationalize abortion identities and attitudes in three main ways: the extent to which respondents *identify* as pro-choice or pro-life, respondents' views about abortion's *legality*, and a revealed-preference measure capturing respondents' preferences for abortion's *scope*, which we describe in detail below. We use these measures to study both the substance of respondents' abortion attitudes and identities (e.g., whether they are pro-choice or pro-life), and the strength/extremity of these attitudes and identities (e.g., the strength of their abortion identity), when we test whether Americans with stronger attitudes and

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[13]In the analysis that follows, we report results using YouGov's survey weights, which are weighted to the American voting age population across presidential vote choice, geographic regions, home ownership, and gender, age, race, and education.

Figure 2: Study Design
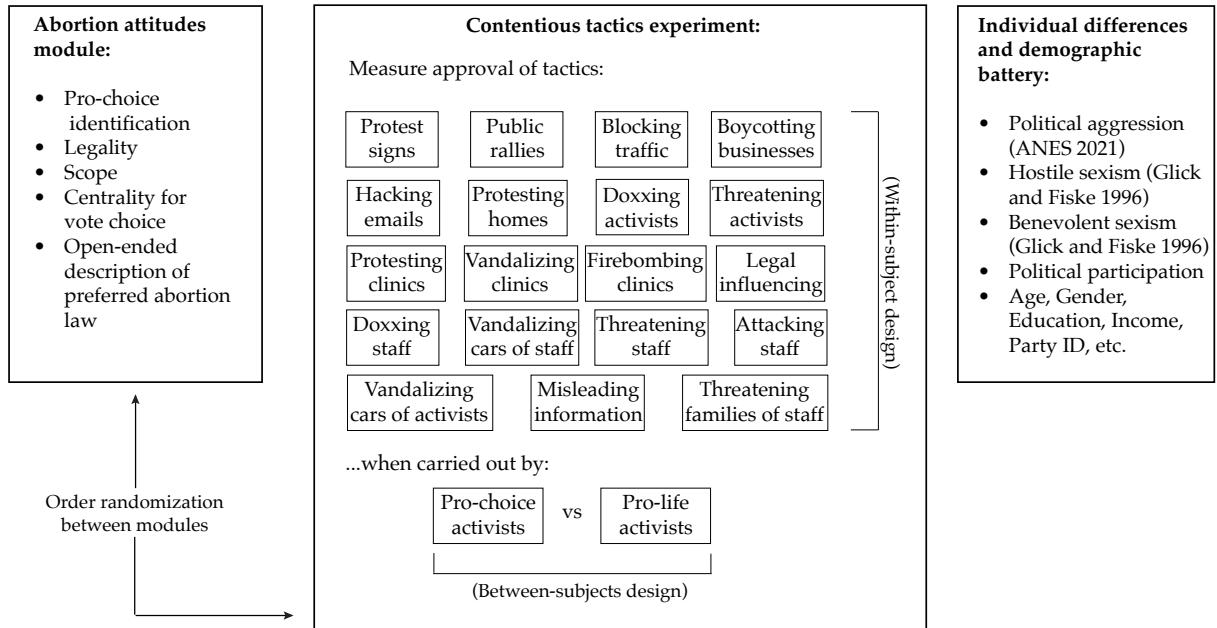
identities about abortion are more supportive of violence.

The study also contains an embedded survey experiment module, in which respondents indicated their approval towards a series of tactics carried out by activists (ranging in severity from holding protest signs, to hacking email addresses, to bombing buildings). The list was drawn from common tactics used by social movements, and was designed to include a range of tactics that were less aggressive (e.g., blocking traffic or protesting clinics) to those that were more extreme (e.g., firebombing), based on previous research (Zeitzoff, 2023). Importantly, the abortion movement in the U.S. has employed the full gamut of tactics studied here, which have garnered considerable media attention, including at the time of our study.[14]

The experiment contained two types of randomization: at the within-subject level, in which respondents were presented with the tactics in random order, and at the between-subject level, which randomized whether the activists engaging in the tactics were pro-choice

[14]For example, activists have targeted both public and private actors, and have engaged in everything from peaceful mass protest to targeted harassment and violence (Doan, 2009). They have also adapted to the digital age, pursuing newer disruptive tactics like hacking private communications and doxxing individuals. See, e.g. Sullivan (2019).

or pro-life. The experiment therefore both enables us to produce a measurement model of Americans' level of support for contentious tactics in abortion politics—testing whether Americans differentiate between violent and non-violent tactics—and allows us to determine whether there are asymmetric patterns of support between pro-choice and pro-life Americans in terms of differential willingness to tolerate violent tactics when carried out by their own side.

To avoid spillover effects, respondents were presented with these two modules in random order, such that half the respondents were asked about their abortion attitudes before the contentious tactics experiment, and half the respondents were asked about their abortion attitudes after the contentious tactics experiment. Finally, respondents were presented with a battery of individual differences—capturing the key dispositions of interest (political aggression, hostile sexism, and benevolent sexism)—and a set of demographic variables, presented in detail in Appendix §4.

Results

Our analysis below proceeds in three stages. First, we construct a measurement model, finding that Americans perceive contentious tactics as falling into three types: (1) disruptive or violent tactics, (2) targeted harassment, and (3) conventional protest tactics. This multi-dimensional structure suggests that there is something distinctive about support for violent tactics that sets it apart from support for more conventional forms of contention.

Second, we confirm this pattern with our experimental results, presenting a set of linear mixed effect models that show that support for contentious tactics decreases with their extremity. Americans display double standards in how they think about tactic acceptability, deeming the same tactics more acceptable when used by activists who share their perspective on abortion. Importantly, however, this in-group bias is *perfectly symmetric* in that both pro-choice and pro-life Americans display it to the same degree, inconsistent with the

blocked ambition macropolitical hypothesis. Further, it decreases in magnitude with tactical extremity, once again indicating that violent tactics are perceived differently than more conventional forms of contention.

Finally, we turn to the individual-level correlates of support for violent tactics. We find little evidence that respondents' support for violent tactics is a function of what side they fall on the abortion debate (H1), or the strength of their own abortion attitudes and identities (H2a and H2b). Rather, the strongest and most consistent correlates are two dispositions less directly related to abortion, and more closely linked to support for violent extremism: political aggression (H3) and hostile (but not benevolent) sexism (H4b).

Contentious tactics are multidimensional

We begin by analyzing attitudes towards the 19 contentious tactics listed in Figure 2, assessing the dimensionality of these items in order to construct a measurement model. Exploratory factor analysis with principal axis factoring and varimax rotation suggests there are essentially three types of contentious tactics, whose factor loadings are shown in Table 1 below.[15] The first factor consists of *disruptive or violent protest tactics*. These include threats against activists, clinic staff, and their families, physical attacks, vandalism, and blocking traffic. Hacking email and intentionally misleading public and elected officials also load on this factor, suggesting that these forms of activity are seen by the public as highly disruptive for their targets, beyond the realm of "normal" politics.

The second factor consists of *conventional protest tactics*. These tactics are generally less disruptive, and tend to target institutions rather than individuals: holding protest signs, attending public rallies, protesting clinics, boycotting businesses, or engaging in legal influence campaigns. Finally, the third factor consists of more *targeted forms of harassment*: doxxing

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[15]Model fit from a three factor solution (RMSEA = 0.057, TLI=0.958, RMSEA.LB=0.054) suggest the three dimensional solution produces a good fit; the fit improves with a four factor solution (RMSEA = 0.043, TLI=0.987, RMSEA.LB = 0.04), but no items load principally on the fourth factor, so we utilize the three factor solution for better interpretability.

clinic staff and activists, as well as protesting at the houses of targeted individuals.[16] The fact that the measurement model finds contentious tactics to be perceived as multidimensional is important: it confirms that respondents perceive violent tactics to be fundamentally distinct from conventional counterparts.

Table 1: Factor Loadings of Contentious Tactics

	Disruptive or violent tactics	Conventional protest tactics	Targeted harassment
Blocking traffic	**0.460**	0.317	0.197
Hacking email	**0.742**	0.124	0.281
Misleading information	**0.618**	0.046	0.164
Threaten activists	**0.740**	0.056	0.186
Vandalize activists' cars	**0.822**	0.049	0.175
Vandalize clinics	**0.807**	0.087	0.205
Firebomb clinics	**0.797**	0.008	0.133
Vandalize cars of clinic staff	**0.854**	0.059	0.174
Threaten clinic staff	**0.811**	0.046	0.181
Threaten families of clinic staff	**0.824**	0.007	0.135
Attack clinic staff	**0.810**	-0.001	0.129
Protest outside of clinics	0.030	**0.765**	0.170
Holding protest signs	-0.054	**0.879**	0.029
Holding public rallies	-0.027	**0.869**	0.052
Legal influence	0.280	**0.426**	0.306
Boycotting businesses	0.036	**0.717**	0.157
Protest outside of activists' houses	0.299	**0.400**	**0.412**
Doxx clinic staff	0.348	0.214	**0.724**
Doxx activists	0.321	0.227	**0.786**

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[16]As shown in Table 1, this item also cross-loads with conventional protest tactics).

Using the tactic characterizations generated by the factor loadings above, Figure 3 below shows three basic patterns regarding the acceptability of these tactics, on average. First, public approval of conventional protest tactics is very high, with an overwhelming majority of respondents expressing approval of protests and rallies. Second, public approval of disruptive or violent tactics is extremely low, with the lowest levels of acceptability around vandalizing personal property, firebombing buildings, and threatening families of those working in abortion clinics and pregnancy crisis centers. Third, public approval of targeted harassment against individuals—protesting at homes and doxxing—is higher than that of disruptive/violent tactics, but still relatively low. These aggregate findings are consistent with other recent research showing that public support for political violence in the United States is relatively low (Westwood et al., 2022), and suggests that most Americans respect and appreciate the right to engage in conventional forms of protest about policy while being far more wary of supporting more extreme forms, such as vandalism and personal forms of harassment (i.e., at the homes) of individuals.

Figure 3: Reported Acceptability of Types of Contentious Tactics
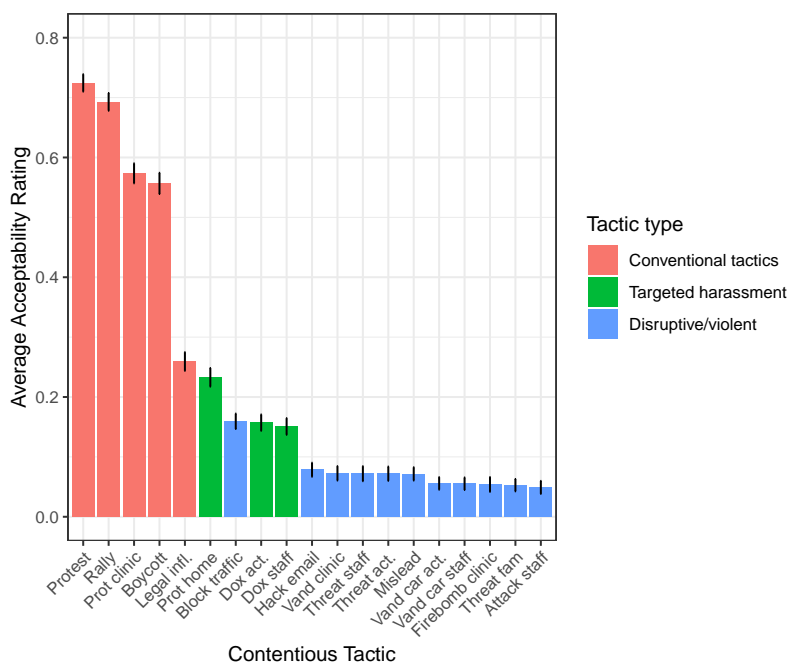
Note: Results include 95% confidence intervals and survey weights.

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# Tactical extremity decreases public support and double standards

To present our treatment effects, we estimate a series of linear mixed effects models in Table 2, where the outcome measure is approval of a given tactic. Because we collect responses from 3,000 respondents, each providing their level of approval towards 19 different tactics, we include random effects at both the respondent- and tactic-levels.

Because our data were collected from an experiment that manipulates two sets of factors (*tactics*, administered in random order at the within-subject level), and the *identity* of the protesters (either pro-choice, or pro-life, randomly assigned at the between-subject level), Model 1 estimates our average treatment effects using a set of three dichotomous variables. The first two are dummy variables that denote whether the tactic in question is classified as either targeted harassment or disruptive/violent, as defined in the previous section (with the baseline category being conventional tactics). Third, we include a dummy variable denoting whether respondents were assigned to the treatment condition where the protesters were pro-life (with the baseline category being pro-choice).

Consistent with the pattern shown in Figure 3, Model 1 shows substantively and statistically significant effects of tactic type on public approval. Approval is 39.4 percentage points lower for targeted harassment tactics than for conventional protest tactics, and 50.2 percentage points lower for disruptive/violent tactics than for conventional protest tactics. Model 1 also shows that the pro-life treatment has a small statistically significant effect: approval of the tactics drops by 1.5 percentage points when the protesters are pro-life than when the protesters are pro-choice.

One explanation for this pattern is presented in Models 2 and 3. Model 2 adds a dichotomous variable denoting respondents' self-reported identity as it pertains to abortion (that is, whether they self-identify as pro-choice or pro-life), as well as an interaction term between this abortion identity measure and the pro-life treatment. Model 3 instead includes a dummy variable denoting whether the tactic is being employed by respondents' ideological in-group or not (taking a value of 1 for pro-choice (pro-life) respondents exposed to the pro-choice

Figure 4: Pro-choice and pro-life respondents display a symmetric in-group bias when evaluating contentious tactics
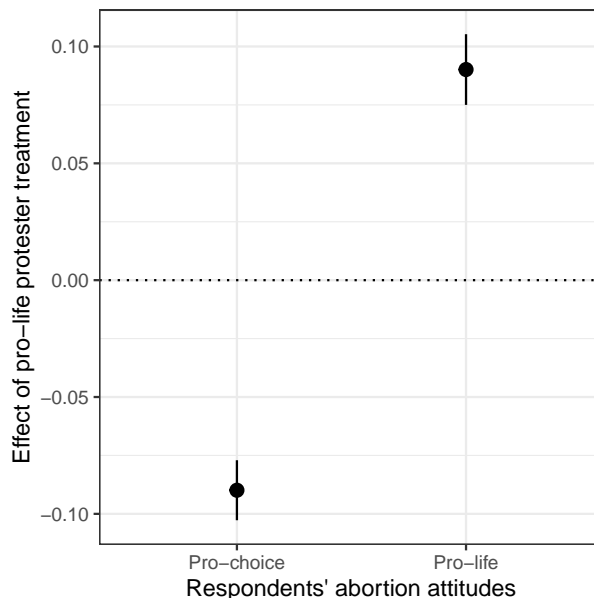

Note: Conditional effect of pro-life treatment on acceptability of tactics, given respondents' own abortion attitudes. Point estimates accompanied by 95% confidence intervals, derived from Model 2 in Table 2.

(pro-life) treatment, and 0 otherwise). In both cases, we document a highly symmetrical conditional effect reflecting in-group bias (illustrated in Figure 4): pro-choice respondents are 9 percentage points more approving of tactics when carried out by pro-choice activists than when those same tactics are carried out by pro-life activists, while pro-life respondents are 9 percentage points more approving of tactics when employed by pro-life activists than when those same tactics are employed by pro-choice activists.[17] This pattern is inconsistent with the blocked ambition argument which predicts that pro-choice Americans should be more supportive of contentious tactics in light of the newly restrictive legal environment. This result suggests that the conventional wisdom is at best incomplete; we do not find evidence that the national political environment predicts support for extremist tactics.

Finally, Model 4 estimates interactions between the ideological in-group dummy variable and the targeted harassment and disruptive/violent tactic dummies. The significant negative

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[17]In this sense, the significant negative average treatment effect reported for the pro-life treatment in Model 1 is an artifact of there being more pro-choice respondents (57.9%) than pro-life respondents (42.1%) in the survey sample.

Figure 5: Ingroup bias shrinks with tactical extremity
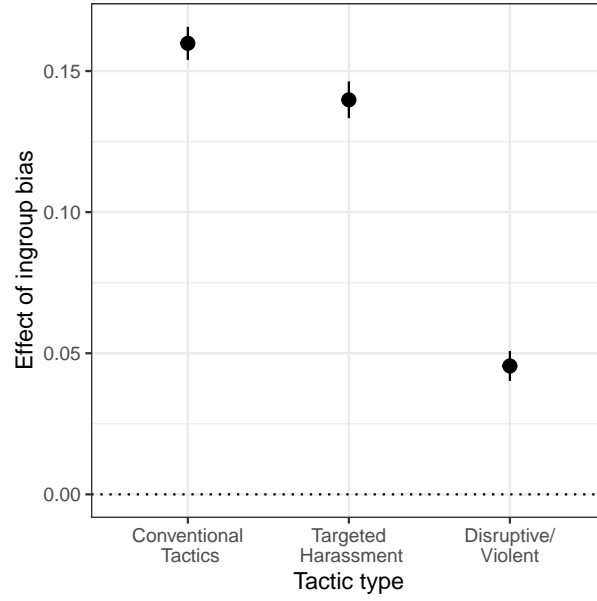
Note: Point estimates accompanied by 95% confidence intervals, and are derived from Model 4 in Table 2.

interaction terms, substantively interpreted in Figure 5, show that the magnitude of the in-group bias *decreases* with tactical extremity. While the in-group bias is statistically significant across all tactic types, it is most pronounced for conventional protest tactics (17 percentage points) and targeted harassment (14 percentage points) and least pronounced for the most violent/disruptive tactics (4 percentage points). These results are reassuring from the perspective of those concerned about the potential for increased support for violence by ideological extremists: Americans' distaste for the most radical tactics extends even to those with whom they share strong abortion beliefs.[18] It is also important theoretically, showing again that Americans perceive violent tactics fundamentally differently than other types of contention, where they are more likely to apply double standards when evaluating tactics.

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[18]This finding is somewhat tempered by the result that shows that targeted tactics, including doxxing and protesting at individuals' homes, are nearly as acceptable when perpetrated by the respondents' ideological in-group as are conventional protest tactics.

Table 2: Modeling Variation in Contentious Tactic Approval

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Targeted Harassment Tactics	−0.381***	−0.381***	−0.381***	−0.371***
	(0.070)	(0.070)	(0.070)	(0.071)
Disruptive/Violent Tactics	−0.489***	−0.489***	−0.489***	−0.433***
	(0.052)	(0.052)	(0.052)	(0.052)
Pro-choice Identifier		0.071***	−0.019***	
		(0.007)	(0.005)	
Pro-life Treatment	−0.015***	0.091***	0.0001	
	(0.005)	(0.008)	(0.005)	
Pro-choice x Pro-life Treatment		−0.181***		
		(0.010)		
Ingroup Use			0.090***	0.160***
			(0.005)	(0.006)
Targeted Harassment x Ingroup Use				−0.020***
				(0.006)
Disruptive/Violent x Ingroup Use				−0.114***
				(0.004)
Constant	0.557***	0.517***	0.517***	0.471***
	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.043)
N	57,000	57,000	57,000	57,000
Respondent REs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tactic REs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Survey Weights	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: $^*p < .1$; $^{**}p < .05$; $^{***}p < .01$. Results from linear mixed effect models.
Tactic reference category is *conventional* protest tactics.

Who supports violent tactics?

Our results thus far suggest public support for disruptive or violent contentious tactics is low, and does not seem to be well accounted for by which side of the abortion debate individuals find themselves on—inconsistent with macropolitical logics. Who, then, is more likely to deem violent tactics acceptable?

To analyze individual-level correlates of support for violent tactics, we estimate a series of regression models. Table 3 operationalizes support for violent tactics using factor score regression, based on the factor scores generated for each respondent based on their loadings on the disruptive/violent tactics factor from the measurement model presented in Table 1 above. Table A.3 in the Appendix operationalizes the dependent variable using an additive index instead, based on responses to specific tactics theoretically most relevant to the study of political violence (threats, vandalism, and physical attacks). However, as Figure 6 shows, the results are very similar regardless of the outcome measure used.

In both Table 3 and Table A.3, the analysis is presented in several stages, with all covariates normalized to range from 0-1 to ease interpretation, the substantive effects of which we also illustrate in Figure 6. All regression models include survey weights, and control for a battery of demographic control variables, including age, gender, race, education, income, partisanship, church attendance, and whether respondents indicated they had children.

The first three models regress support for violent tactics on a proxy for the macropolitical context (H1), operationalized in three different ways.[19] The first model utilizes respondents' self-placement on an ordinal *pro-choice* identification scale (scaled from strongly pro-life to strongly pro-choice). The second model focuses on the extent to which respondents believe abortion should be legal, reflecting the full spectrum from believing abortion should be illegal in all cases to believing abortion should be legal in all cases. The third studies the scope

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[19]We operationalize abortion identification and attitudes as a proxy for the macropolitical context based on the recent successes of the pro-life movement. Per H1, we expect pro-choice respondents to be more supportive of contentious tactics because their policy goals have been thwarted in the aftermath of the *Dobbs* decision.

Figure 6: Dispositions not directly related to abortion most strongly predict support for violent tactics
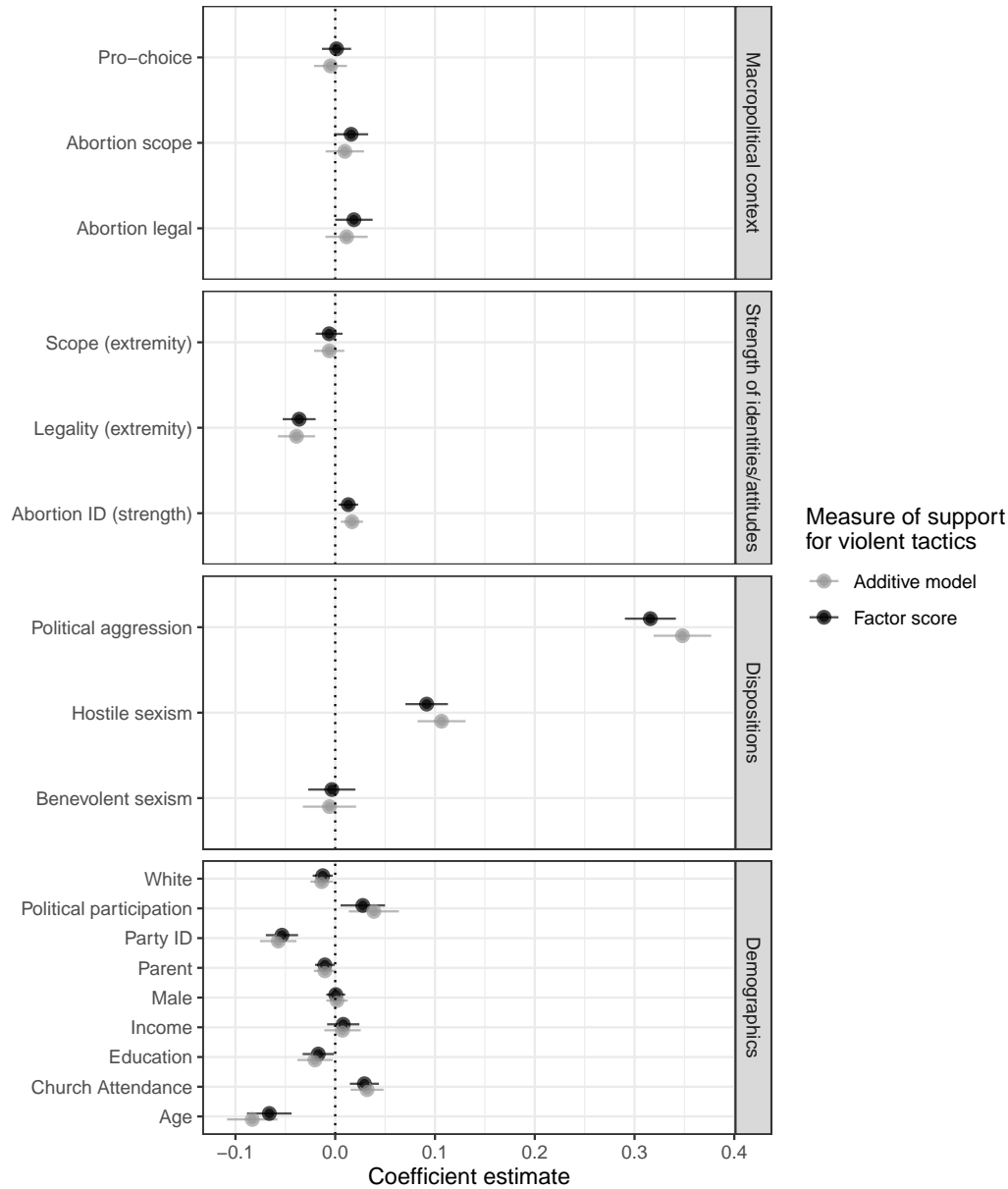
Coefficient estimates (and 95% confidence intervals) from models 1-6 of Table 3 and Table A.3 for the top two panels, and model 1 of Table 3 and Table A.3 for the bottom two panels.

of respondents' support for abortion, estimated by way of a revealed preference measure, calculating the proportion of scenarios presented to respondents in which someone might consider an abortion (e.g., when the pregnancy poses a serious health risk to the mother, in case of rape, when the parents already have children and don't want more, etc.) in which respondents provided a pro-choice answer.[20] In all three operationalizations, the macropolitical or blocked ambition hypothesis predicts that pro-choice respondents, respondents who believe abortion should be legal, or respondents who support abortion across a broad range of cases, should be more supportive of violent tactics than their pro-life counterparts.

Yet as the coefficient estimates in the top three rows of Table 3 and Table A.3 show, and the top panel of Figure 6 illustrates, we find little support for our macropolitical hypothesis (H1). Respondents who are more supportive of abortion, regardless of how this support is operationalized, are not significantly more supportive of violent tactics on abortion issues, and the effect sizes are very modest. If the findings of the previous section showed that support for violent tactics around abortion issues is very low, these results show it is also symmetrically so, and that support is not a function of what side of the debate respondents are on.

The next three models turn to our hypotheses of sacred or moralized values (H2a and H2b). Here, it is not what side of the abortion debate respondents find themselves that matters. Rather, the key factor is how strongly held their identities and how extreme their attitudes about abortion are, under the assumption that individuals who identify as strongly pro-choice/pro-life will be more supportive of extreme tactics than individuals who are only weak identifiers. Similarly, individuals who think abortion should always or never be legal, or who always or never support abortion in our revealed preference measure, should be more supportive than individuals whose views are somewhere in the middle.

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[20]As noted in Appendix 4, we present all respondents with 10 different scenarios, while randomizing which version of the scenarios they receive: one asking about scenarios in which abortion should be legal, one asking about scenarios in which abortion is morally acceptable, and one asking about scenarios in which respondents would support or oppose a close friend or family member's decision to get an abortion. We pool answers across all three versions of this measure, which were strongly intercorrelated.

Table 3: Who supports violent tactics? (Factor scoring)

|	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Pro-choice	0.001					
	(0.007)					
Abortion legal		0.019*				
		(0.010)				
Abortion scope			0.016*			
			(0.009)			
Abortion ID (strength)				0.013***		
				(0.005)		
Legality (extremity)					−0.036***	
					(0.008)	
Scope (extremity)						−0.006
						(0.007)
Political participation	0.028**	0.028**	0.028**	0.024**	0.030***	0.028**
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Political aggression	0.316***	0.315***	0.315***	0.316***	0.313***	0.316***
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Hostile sexism	0.092***	0.095***	0.095***	0.095***	0.088***	0.089***
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Benevolent sexism	−0.003	−0.001	−0.001	−0.003	−0.004	−0.005
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Age	−0.066***	−0.064***	−0.065***	−0.068***	−0.066***	−0.067***
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Male	0.001	0.001	0.0004	0.001	0.001	0.0004
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
White	−0.012**	−0.012**	−0.012**	−0.013**	−0.011**	−0.012**
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Education	−0.017**	−0.018**	−0.018**	−0.016**	−0.017**	−0.016**
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Income	0.008	0.008	0.008	0.008	0.008	0.008
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Party ID	−0.053***	−0.049***	−0.049***	−0.053***	−0.054***	−0.055***
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)
Church Attendance	0.029***	0.034***	0.034***	0.028***	0.028***	0.029***
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Parent	−0.010**	−0.010*	−0.010*	−0.010**	−0.011**	−0.011**
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Constant	0.137***	0.119***	0.122***	0.129***	0.173***	0.144***
	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.010)	(0.013)	(0.011)
N	2,866	2,866	2,865	2,866	2,866	2,865
Adjusted R^2	0.281	0.282	0.282	0.283	0.286	0.282

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01. Results include survey weights.

Once again, however, as the second panel of Figure 6 shows, the effects are relatively weak. Individuals with stronger levels of identification in the abortion debate are slightly more supportive of violent tactics, but the effect size is very modest. Individuals with more extreme views about whether abortion should be legal are actually significantly less supportive of violent tactics than individuals whose views are in the middle. Finally, individuals with more extreme views about the scope of abortion are not significantly more supportive of violent tactics. We therefore largely fail to find evidence for the view that support for violent tactics in abortion is driven by individuals who feel the strongest or who hold the most extreme abortion views (H2a and H2b).

Instead, as the third panel of Figure 6 shows, the most substantively and statistically significant predictors of support for violent tactics regarding abortion are psychological dispositions not directly related to abortion itself. Respondents' belief that it is justified for people to use violence to pursue their political goals (H3), which we operationalize with a widely used measure of political aggression from the ANES (2021), displays the strongest association across all model specifications. Although it may not seem surprising that individuals who support violence in general support it in particular circumstances (Armaly and Enders, 2024), these findings are important in that they show that there are certain people who are more aggressive, violent, and supportive of political violence regardless of the cause, or often for no particular reason at all (Jungkunz, Fahey and Hino, 2025; Kalmoe, 2014; Arceneaux et al., 2021; Westwood et al., 2022). It also stands diametrically opposed to the expectations of the sacred values and moralized attitudes literatures, which attribute support for violence to deeply held beliefs and attachment to the cause.

We further build on this point in Figure 7, which visualizes estimates from a set of seemingly unrelated regression (SUR) models, comparing the correlates of support for political violence on abortion tactics (plotted on the y-axis), versus the correlates of respondents reporting a willingness to base voting decisions on abortion—a more conventional expression of political behavior. Crucially, as Figure 7 shows, the strength of respondents' abortion

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Figure 7: Seemingly Unrelated Regression (SUR) models demonstrate limited effects of abortion attitudes and identities on support for political violence

(a) Strength of abortion ID

(b) Extremity of legality views

(c) Extremity of abortion support
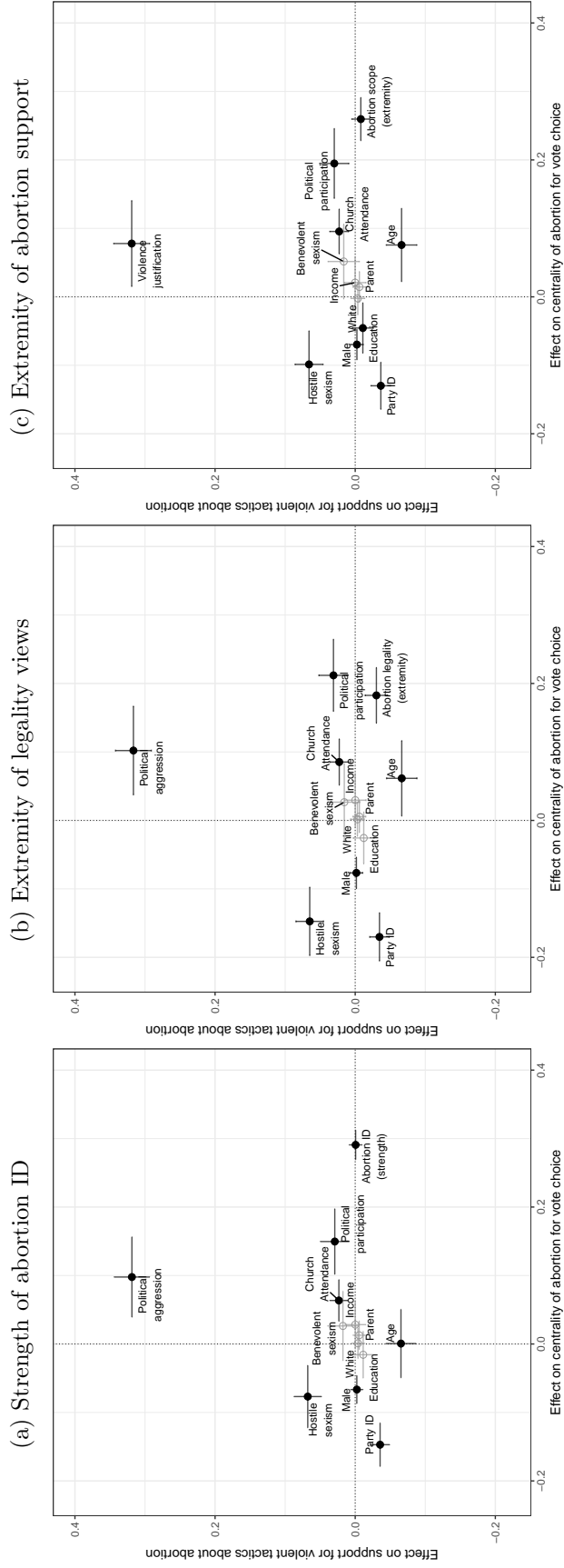
Plots present coefficient estimates (and 95% confidence intervals) from a set of seemingly unrelated regression (SUR) models, regressing a set of individual difference variables and demographic controls on self-reported centrality of abortion for vote choice (on the x-axis), and support for violent tactics (on the y-axis), respectively, operationalizing the strength or extremity of abortion attitudes differently in each of the three models, based on the strength of respondents' abortion identification, the extremity of their views about abortion's legality, and the extremity of the breadth of their support for abortion. The plots show clearly that the strength of respondents' abortion attitudes and identification is significantly and substantively associated with whether respondents report that abortion is central to their vote choice (i.e., a traditional expression of political behavior), but is unrelated to their support for violence on abortion issues.

attitudes and identities are statistically and substantively significant predictors of this more conventional form of political behavior, but dispositional characteristics less conceptually related to abortion are the major predictors of support for more extreme tactics regarding abortion issues. The dominant perspective in the study of abortion politics has been that although many Americans have ambivalent attitudes about abortion (Alvarez and Brehm, 1995), others have intense preferences (Cassese, Ondercin and Randall, 2025), and those with more extreme views are more likely to mobilize politically. We show that this applies to a more conventional form of political behavior, but does not extend to support for violent contention.

One limitation in the previous analysis is that the moralization literature often considers moralization to be related to questions of attitude strength, but also "something more" than it (e.g. Skitka, Bauman and Sargis, 2005), whereupon the measures above could be seen as somewhat indirect. They tell us that support for violent tactics is not a function of attitude strength or extremity, but may not capture the unique role that moralization itself plays. Table A.4 in the Appendix therefore replicates these analyses, but estimating the moralization of respondents' abortion attitudes by conducting content analyses of their open-ended responses. Our open-ended question asked respondents what they thought the abortion laws in our country should be. We operationalize moralization in two different ways: using a dictionary-based approach from Kraft (2018)'s moral foundations dictionary, and using Simonsen and Widmann (2023)'s political-moral-emotional-mDeBERTa, a transformer-based multilingual language model that classifies text based on whether it invokes moral rhetoric. In both models, we fail to find support for the claim that respondents for whom abortion is a moralized issue are more likely to endorse violent tactics. Importantly, this does not mean that people do not express their abortion views in moral terms. Responses that included moral judgments were common, such as equating abortion with murder or viewing abortion restrictions as violations of women's fundamental human rights. For example, one respondent said, "The right to life is GOD-GIVEN. Abortion is an ATROCITY committed

on mothers." Another responded, "Government has NO BUSINESS in abortion. Women are FULL HUMANS with BODILY AUTONOMY!" These excerpts illustrate the moral vehemence with which some Americans express their views on abortion. However, our analysis shows that, contrary to the expectations of the sacred values and moralization literatures, this is not associated with support for violent or disruptive contention on abortion.

The second largest association is hostile sexism (H4b). Respondents high in hostile sexism, who view women negatively based on their perceived transgression of gender norms and perceived attempts to compete with men for relational and societal power, are substantially more supportive of violent tactics than respondents who score low. In contrast, benevolent sexism (H4a), the view that women need men's protection, has no statistically significant effect. We thus concur with prior work that attitudes in abortion politics are shaped by Americans' gender attitudes and that gendered attitudes are associated with support for violence, in general (Piazza and O'Rourke, 2025; Bareket and Fiske, 2023); we complement this finding by showing that hostile sexism in particular is correlated with support for more extreme tactics in abortion politics.

Finally, as the bottom panel of Figure 6 shows, a number of the demographic covariates display statistically significant associations with support for violent tactics: younger Americans are more supportive, as are non-White respondents, respondents lower in education, Democrats, and churchgoers. However, all of these relationships are much weaker than those of the dispositional measures identified above.[21]

Conclusion

Our findings point to two important takeaways about abortion violence and contentious tactics in contemporary politics. First, current concerns about growing support for political violence among the American public are unfounded, even amidst high profile incidents of

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[21]See Table A.5 for results disaggregating by side of the abortion debate, and Tables A.6-A.7 showing our results are robust to the exclusion of potentially disengaged respondents.

violent contention. Those on both sides of the abortion issue show little support for violent or threatening tactics. Despite the growing attention to "left-wing violence" in American political discourse,[22] we find no such ideological asymmetry here, and there is little asymmetry in support for contentious tactics perpetrated by activists from their own side between pro-life and pro-choice Americans. Although there is an in-group bias in support for contentious tactics, with both pro-life and pro-choice supporters more supportive of any given tactic when it is carried out by activists on their own side, the magnitude of this bias shrinks dramatically for the most extreme tactics. Americans have a clear distaste for extreme forms of contention when it comes to abortion.

Second, and counter to long-standing conventional narratives about who becomes mobilized into violence in abortion politics, we show that support for violent tactics in abortion politics is not primarily driven by abortion attitudes or identity. Instead, certain general personality traits and dispositions—those who support political violence in general and those who hold hostile sexist beliefs—are stronger predictors of support for extreme forms of contention. This is a novel and important result that adds nuance to emerging debates about the potential for violent tactics in U.S. abortion politics. Our findings thread together disparate results from previous research on gender and violence, extending prior findings that gendered prejudices are correlated with both pro-life beliefs and support for political violence. We show for the first time that hostile sexism is an important predictor of support for extremism in the abortion debate, even controlling for the extremity of views on abortion. This finding is important given the growing literature on gender and political violence (e.g. Cohen and Karim, 2022; McDermott, 2020; Karim and Beardsley, 2017).

Several of our findings also raise important questions for future research. First, the dominance of abortion as a central issue in American politics is unlikely to diminish. Abortion access, long taken for granted by the public, continues to rapidly change, marked by increasingly restrictive laws and policies. Recent actions by the Trump administration have sought

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[22]See, for example, President Trump's recent comments following the killing of Charlie Kirk (e.g. Hutzler and Stoddart, 2025)

to restrict abortion access by blocking Planned Parenthood clinics, which provide abortions among other health services, from receiving Medicaid funds (Sherman, 2025). At the same time, abortion-related vandalism and violence persists, as seen by recent firebombings of pregnancy crisis centers and the assassinations of Melissa and Mark Hortman in Minnesota. There is an urgent need to better understand the drivers of violent extremism in the abortion debate and to track the public's reactions to it over time. Our survey was cross-sectional, but longitudinal data on abortion attitudes would help disentangle how shifts in abortion policies and high-profile instances of contention can predict shifts in support for contentious attitudes.

Second, research on violence perpetrated by the pro-life movement (Jefferis, 2011), and to a lesser extent the pro-choice movement (Norris, 2022), has highlighted the importance of socialization in small groups and the acceptance of violence as a moral imperative. Other research points to how radical social movements deliberately recruit more aggressive followers from subcultures with a violent bent, such as mixed martial arts (Miller-Idriss, 2020), soccer hooligans (Mudde, 2019), or punk rock (Simi, Smith and Reeser, 2008; Zeitzoff, 2026). Future research could analyze how different subcultures and the kinds of people they bring into a movement influence the subsequent acceptance of contentious tactics.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, right-wing and left-wing political extremism, climate change, and immigration all are salient issues. Why do some issues and movements attract and cultivate support for violent, and sometimes even lethal, tactics while others eschew it completely? Future scholars could seek to understand how and why political entrepreneurs and social movements seek to shift the boundary of acceptability of contentious tactics.

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"If Abortions Aren't Safe, Neither Are You": *Supplementary Appendix*

September 12, 2025

Contents

1 Sample Demographics

Our sample consists of approximately 3,000 respondents recruited via YouGov's online panel in July 2023. The respondents are recruited from YouGov's large panel to approximately match approximately American voting age population across presidential vote choice, geographic regions, home ownership, and gender, age, race, and education. YouGov also provided sample weights. Table A.2 shows the sample demographics, and Table A.1 shows summary statistics for our abortion attitude items.

Table A.1: Survey summary statistics: abortion items

	Survey response	Mean	SE
1	Strongly pro-life	0.278	0.010
2	Somewhat pro-life	0.143	0.008
3	Somewhat pro-choice	0.189	0.009
4	Strongly pro-choice	0.390	0.011
5	Abortion illegal all cases	0.092	0.007
6	Abortion illegal most cases	0.282	0.010
7	Abortion legal most cases	0.350	0.011
8	Abortion legal all cases	0.276	0.010
9	Support abortion - Career interference	0.395	0.011
10	Support abortion - Parents don't want more kids	0.456	0.011
11	Support abortion - Drug or alcohol addiction	0.642	0.011
12	Support abortion - Mother too young to raise child	0.584	0.011
13	Support abortion - Pregnancy is unwanted	0.535	0.011
14	Support abortion - Risk to mother's health	0.893	0.007
15	Support abortion - Pregnancy is result of incest	0.828	0.009
16	Support abortion - Pregnancy is result of rape	0.841	0.008
17	Support abortion - Major medical issue in baby	0.721	0.010
18	Support abortion - Parents unable to provide financially	0.502	0.011
19	Mean importance of abortion in candidate choice*	0.631	0.007

Notes: Importance is primary salience measure. Canvassing is alternative salience measure. Weighted proportions shown, except for salience measures where weighted mean is shown.
* denotes item is scaled from 0-1.

2 Abortion Policy Attitudes vs. Abortion Identity

In the survey, we included questions about both respondents' identities and attitudes related to abortion policy. The identity question asked respondents whether they considered themselves pro-choice or pro-life (with a follow-up question for intensity). The policy attitudes questions detailed 10 scenarios in which someone might consider an abortion. Half of the sample was asked whether abortion should be legal or illegal in each circumstance. One quarter of the sample was asked whether abortion was morally acceptable or morally unacceptable in each scenario. The remaining quarter was asked whether they would support or oppose a close friend or family member's decision to get an abortion in each circumstance. The responses

Table A.2: Survey Summary Statistics: demographics and individual differences

	Survey response	Mean	SE
1	Voted	0.647	0.012
2	Attended political meeting	0.112	0.007
3	Put up political sign	0.148	0.008
4	Worked for a campaign	0.043	0.005
5	Attended a protest	0.078	0.007
6	Contacted public official	0.249	0.009
7	Donated money to political group	0.203	0.008
8	Mean hostile sexism*	0.418	0.006
9	Mean benevolent sexism*	0.517	0.005
10	Mean age	48.409	0.432
11	Male	0.469	0.012
12	White	0.652	0.012
13	College grad	0.352	0.010
14	Household income <$80k	0.580	0.011
15	Strong Democrat	0.218	0.010
16	Not so strong Democrat	0.114	0.008
17	Lean Democrat	0.107	0.007
18	Independent	0.214	0.010
19	Lean Republican	0.092	0.006
20	Not so strong Republican	0.102	0.007
21	Strong Republican	0.152	0.007
22	Attends chruch	0.624	0.011
23	Parent	0.554	0.012

Notes: Weighted proportions shown, except for age and sexism questions, where weighted mean is shown. * denotes item is scaled from 0-1.

Figure A.1: Abortion policy attitudes by abortion identification
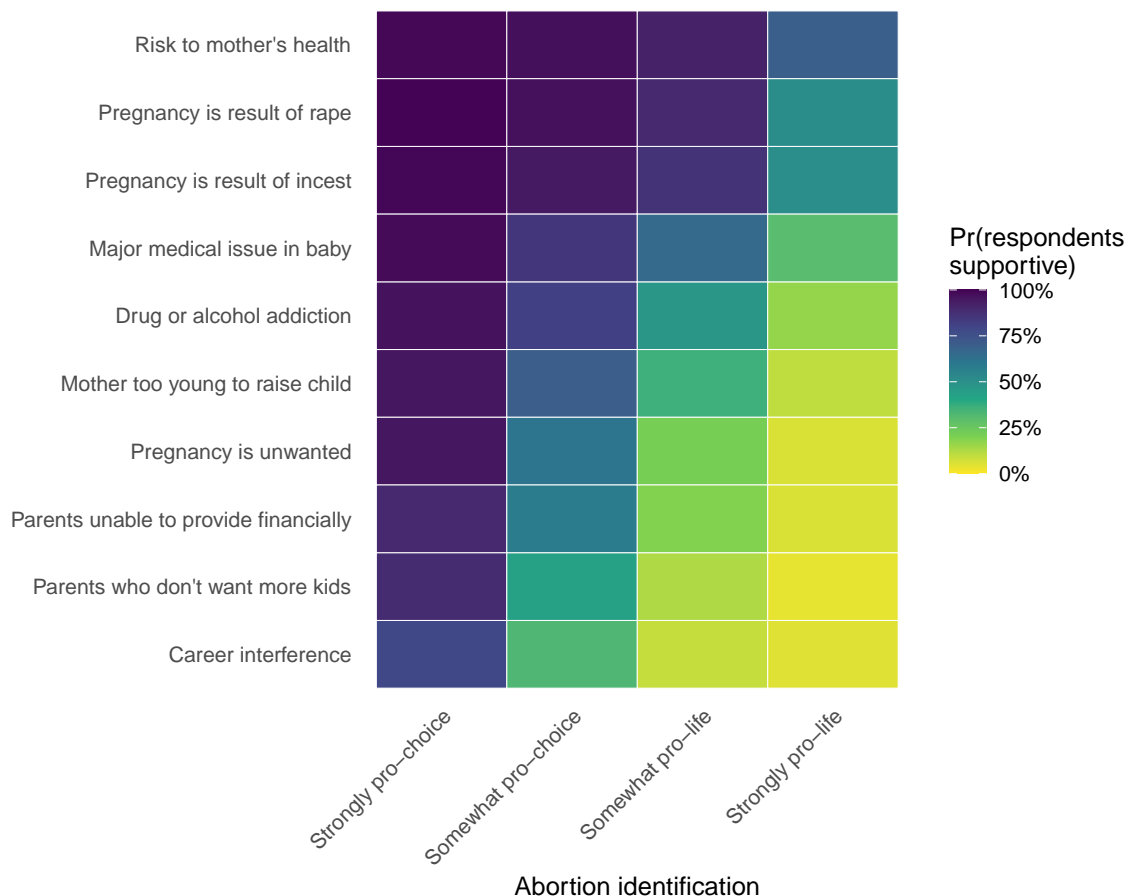
were broadly similar across the split samples, so results shown in Figure A.1 are pooled.[1]

Figure A.1 shows the crosstabulations between abortion identity and policy attitudes, illustrated as a heatmap. Overall, we find that respondents' pro-life or pro-choice identity is largely consistent with their attitudes. Those who identify as strongly pro-choice are widely supportive of abortion in every scenario. Those who identify as strongly pro-life widely oppose abortion across most scenarios. The only case in which strong pro-lifers are permissive of abortion is when there is a serious health risk to the mother. They are also split on cases of rape and incest.

Weak identifiers consistently fall between the extremes of strong identifiers. They consistently show high support for abortion in cases of trauma but less so in other scenarios. However, the weak pro-choice identifiers are still broadly supportive of abortion across most of the scenarios. Weak pro-lifers are highly supportive of abortion in cases of health risk, rape, and incest and show low to middling support in other cases. This is consistent with recent findings that there are four broad patterns in abortion attitudes that

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[1]We also asked whether abortion should be legal in all cases, legal in most cases, illegal in most cases, or illegal in all cases.

are structured by abortion scenarios that are seen as "elective" versus "traumatic" (Osborne et al., 2022).

3   Robustness tests and additional results

Table A.3 replicates the results in Table 3 in the main text, but using the additive scale version of the dependent variable rather than the factor score version used in the main results. The results hold. Table A.4 provides an alternative test for moralization. In the main text, we focus on the strength and extremity of respondents' abortion attitudes and identities. However, moral conviction is often thought of as something related to, but also "something more" than just attitude strength (e.g. Skitka, Bauman and Sargis, 2005. As noted in the main text, Table A.4 therefore replicates these analyses, but estimating the moralization of respondents' abortion attitudes by conducting content analyses of their open-ended responses. Our open-ended question asked respondents what they thought the abortion laws in our country should be. We operationalize moralization in two different ways: using a dictionary-based approach from Kraft (2018)'s moral foundations dictionary, and using Simonsen and Widmann (2023)'s political-moral-emotional-mDeBERTa, a transformer-based multilingual language model that classifies text based on whether it invokes moral rhetoric. Crucially, in both models we fail to find support for the claim that respondents for whom abortion is a moralized issue are more likely to endorse violent tactics (if anything, the mDeBERTa measure has a significant negative association, indicating that individuals with more moralized responses are *less* supportive of political violence). Finally, Table A.5 disaggregates our findings by abortion attitudes. It once again emphasizes the important role of hostile sexism and political aggression as correlates of support for violent tactics in abortion; in contrast, the abortion attitude measures have weak and inconsistent effects.

Table A.3: Who supports violent tactics? (Additive scale)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Pro-choice	−0.005					
	(0.008)					
Abortion legal		0.011				
		(0.011)				
Abortion scope			0.010			
			(0.010)			
Abortion ID (Strength)				0.017***		
				(0.006)		
Legality (extremity)					−0.039***	
					(0.010)	
Scope (extremity						−0.006
						(0.008)
Political participation	0.039***	0.039***	0.039***	0.035***	0.041***	0.039***
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Political aggression	0.348***	0.347***	0.347***	0.348***	0.345***	0.348***
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Hostile sexism	0.107***	0.111***	0.111***	0.113***	0.105***	0.106***
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Benevolent sexism	−0.006	−0.003	−0.003	−0.004	−0.005	−0.006
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Abortion legal	−0.083***	−0.082***	−0.082***	−0.085***	−0.082***	−0.083***
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Abortion scope	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Age	−0.013**	−0.013**	−0.014**	−0.014**	−0.012**	−0.013**
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Male	−0.020**	−0.021**	−0.021**	−0.020**	−0.021**	−0.020**
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
White	0.007	0.007	0.007	0.007	0.007	0.007
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Education	−0.057***	−0.052***	−0.052***	−0.054***	−0.055***	−0.056***
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.009)
Income	0.032***	0.036***	0.036***	0.032***	0.033***	0.033***
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Party ID	−0.010*	−0.010*	−0.010*	−0.010*	−0.010*	−0.010*
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Church Attendance	0.057***	0.039**	0.041***	0.039***	0.088***	0.057***
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.013)
N	2,866	2,866	2,865	2,866	2,866	2,865
Adjusted R^2	0.278	0.279	0.279	0.280	0.282	0.278

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01. Results include survey weights.

Table A.4: Who supports violent tactics? (Alternative moralization measures)

	(1)	(2)
Moralization (mDeBERTa)	−0.028***	
	(0.005)	
Moralization (MFT)		−0.001
		(0.002)
Political participation	0.030***	0.028**
	(0.011)	(0.011)
Political aggression	0.314***	0.316***
	(0.013)	(0.013)
Hostile sexism	0.087***	0.091***
	(0.011)	(0.011)
Benevolent sexism	−0.003	−0.004
	(0.012)	(0.012)
Age	−0.070***	−0.066***
	(0.011)	(0.011)
Male	−0.001	0.0005
	(0.005)	(0.005)
White	−0.012**	−0.012**
	(0.005)	(0.005)
Education	−0.016**	−0.017**
	(0.008)	(0.008)
Income	0.007	0.008
	(0.008)	(0.008)
Party ID	−0.054***	−0.054***
	(0.007)	(0.008)
Church Attendance	0.029***	0.029***
	(0.007)	(0.007)
Parent	−0.011**	−0.011**
	(0.005)	(0.005)
Constant	0.161***	0.139***
	(0.010)	(0.010)
N	2,866	2,866
Adjusted R^2	0.289	0.281

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01

Table A.5: Who supports violent tactics, by abortion attitudes

	Pro-Life			Pro-Choice		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Abortion extremity	0.013	0.015*	−0.013	0.027***	0.006	0.017**
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.007)
Political participation	0.032*	0.048***	0.028	0.023	0.028*	0.025*
	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Political aggression	0.349***	0.285***	0.397***	0.297***	0.327***	0.283***
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Hostile sexism	0.046***	0.037**	0.027	0.132***	0.138***	0.119***
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.014)
Benevolent sexism	0.009	0.006	−0.038*	−0.022	−0.015	−0.016
	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Age	−0.076***	−0.075***	−0.097***	−0.066***	−0.062***	−0.066***
	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Male	0.005	−0.012	0.002	−0.003	0.009	−0.007
	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
White	−0.013	−0.002	−0.026***	−0.010	−0.015**	−0.011
	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Education	−0.005	−0.018	−0.013	−0.021**	−0.015	−0.013
	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Income	0.036***	0.050***	0.010	−0.013	−0.018*	0.0003
	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Party ID	−0.057***	−0.051***	−0.027**	−0.055***	−0.060***	−0.046***
	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Church Attendance	−0.004	0.002	0.0001	0.059***	0.055***	0.059***
	(0.011)	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.011)
Parent	−0.009	0.006	0.012	−0.012*	−0.020***	−0.017***
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.007)
Constant	0.155***	0.148***	0.190***	0.116***	0.127***	0.123***
	(0.020)	(0.021)	(0.020)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.014)
N	1,201	1,068	966	1,665	1,798	1,682
Adjusted R^2	0.297	0.242	0.359	0.287	0.323	0.276
Abortion operationalization	Abortion ID	Legality	Scope	Abortion ID	Legality	Scope

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01

3.1 Removing speeders

Given research indicating that inattentive respondents can bias and inflate estimates of support for political violence (Westwood et al., 2022), as a precaution we conduct an additional robustness check on our results. We removed the n=300 fastest respondents and re-ran our main analyses (Tables 2-3 in the main text). This comprises ten percent of the sample. These results are presented below in Table A.6-A.7; there are no substantive differences.

Table A.6: Modeling variation in contentious tactic approval (weighted, excludes speeders)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Targeted Harassment Tactics	-0.388^{***}	-0.388^{***}	-0.388^{***}	-0.377^{***}
	(0.072)	(0.072)	(0.072)	(0.072)
Disruptive/Violent Tactics	-0.499^{***}	-0.499^{***}	-0.499^{***}	-0.440^{***}
	(0.053)	(0.053)	(0.053)	(0.053)
Pro-choice Identifier		0.068^{***}	-0.022^{***}	
		(0.007)	(0.005)	
Pro-life Treatment	-0.011^{**}	0.092^{***}	0.002	
	(0.005)	(0.008)	(0.005)	
Pro-choice x Pro-life Treatment		-0.180^{***}		
		(0.010)		
Ingroup Use			0.090^{***}	0.162^{***}
			(0.005)	(0.006)
Targeted Harassment x Ingroup Use				-0.021^{***}
				(0.006)
Disruptive/Violent x Ingroup Use				-0.119^{***}
				(0.004)
Constant	0.562^{***}	0.524^{***}	0.524^{***}	0.476^{***}
	(0.044)	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.044)
N	51,300	51,300	51,300	51,300
BIC	$-1,408.393$	$-1,672.725$	$-1,671.338$	$-2,554.231$

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01

Table A.7: Who supports violent tactics? (excludes speeders)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Pro-choice	−0.001					
	(0.007)					
Abortion legal		0.015				
		(0.010)				
Abortion scope			0.006			
			(0.009)			
Abortion ID (Strength)				0.007		
				(0.005)		
Abortion legal (extremity)					−0.037***	
					(0.008)	
Abortion scope (extremity)						−0.011
						(0.007)
Political participation	0.031***	0.031***	0.031***	0.029**	0.033***	0.032***
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Political aggression	0.297***	0.297***	0.297***	0.298***	0.292***	0.298***
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Hostile sexism	0.079***	0.083***	0.081***	0.082***	0.078***	0.077***
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Benevolent sexism	−0.006	−0.003	−0.004	−0.005	−0.007	−0.007
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Age	−0.057***	−0.055***	−0.056***	−0.058***	−0.056***	−0.058***
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Male	−0.0001	0.0003	−0.0001	0.0001	0.0002	−0.0002
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
White	−0.018***	−0.017***	−0.018***	−0.017***	−0.017***	−0.017***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Education	−0.019**	−0.020**	−0.020**	−0.019**	−0.020**	−0.018**
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Income	−0.009	−0.010	−0.009	−0.009	−0.009	−0.009
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Party ID	−0.048***	−0.044***	−0.046***	−0.048***	−0.048***	−0.049***
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)
Church Attendance	0.030***	0.034***	0.032***	0.030***	0.029***	0.030***
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Parent	−0.013***	−0.012**	−0.013**	−0.013***	−0.013***	−0.014***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Constant	0.140***	0.122***	0.132***	0.133***	0.174***	0.148***
	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.012)
N	2,587	2,587	2,586	2,587	2,587	2,586
Adjusted R^2	0.264	0.265	0.264	0.265	0.269	0.265

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01

4 Instrument

Abortion attitude module	Response options
Open-ended What do you think the abortion laws in our country should be?	Open-ended format
Pro-Choice Identification With respect to the abortion issue, would you consider yourself to be ...?	Strongly pro-choice, Somewhat pro-choice, Somewhat pro-life, Strongly pro-life
Legality Do you think abortion should be...?	Legal in all cases, Legal in most cases, Illegal in most cases, Illegal in all cases
Scope There are currently debates about the circumstances [in which abortion should be legal / in which abortion is morally acceptable or unacceptable / surrounding abortion]. For each circumstance below, indicate whether you [think abortion should be legal or illegal / think abortion is morally acceptable or morally unacceptable / would support or oppose a close friend or family member's decision to get an abortion in this circumstance] A) When the parents are concerned that a baby will interfere with their careers B) When the parents already have children and don't want more C) In cases of drug or alcohol addiction D) When the mother is too young to raise a child E) When the mother wants to have an abortion F) When the pregnancy poses a serious health risk to the mother G) When the pregnancy is a result of incest H) When the pregnancy is a result of rape I) When there are concerns about the baby's future quality of life due to major medical issues J) When the parents are unable to provide for a baby financially	[Legal, Illegal / Morally acceptable, Morally unacceptable / Would support, Would not support]
Centrality for vote choice When deciding whether or not you would vote for a candidate running for an elected office, how important is the candidate's stance on abortion?	Extremely important, Very important, Moderately important, Slightly important, Not at all important

Contentious tactics experiment: Pro-choice condition	Response options
Next you'll see a series of tactics pro-choice groups and individuals have used to protest in support of abortion. Please indicate how often you feel each tactic is acceptable. A) Holding protest signs B) Holding public rallies C) Blocking traffic D) Boycotting businesses that oppose abortion E) Hacking emails of activists who oppose abortion F) Protesting outside of the houses of activists who oppose abortion G) Publicizing names and addresses of activists who oppose abortion H) Sending threatening messages on social media to activists who oppose abortion I) Vandalizing cars of activists who oppose abortion J) Holding protest signs outside of crisis pregnancy centers, which try to stop pregnant women from getting abortions K) Vandalizing crisis pregnancy centers, which try to stop pregnant women from getting abortions L) Firebombing crisis pregnancy centers, which try to stop pregnant women from getting abortions M) Publicizing names and addresses of people who work at crisis pregnancy centers, which try to stop pregnant women from getting abortions N) Vandalizing cars of people who work at crisis pregnancy centers, which try to stop pregnant women from getting abortions O) Threatening people who work at crisis pregnancy centers, which try to stop pregnant women from getting abortions P) Threatening the families of people who work at crisis pregnancy centers, which try to stop pregnant women from getting abortions Q) Physically harming people who work at crisis pregnancy centers, which try to stop pregnant women from getting abortions R) Creating influence operations to befriend judges or lawmakers who make decisions about the legality of abortion S) Providing misleading information to lawmakers and the public	Always acceptable, Often acceptable, Sometimes acceptable, Rarely acceptable, Never acceptable

Contentious tactic experiment: Pro-life condition	Response options
Next you'll see a series of tactics pro-life groups and individuals have used to protest against abortion. Please indicate how often you feel each tactic is acceptable. A) Holding protest signs B) Holding public rallies C) Blocking traffic D) Boycotting businesses that support abortion E) Hacking emails of activists who support abortion F) Protesting outside of the houses of activists who support abortion G) Publicizing names and addresses of activists who support abortion H) Sending threatening messages on social media to activists who support abortion I) Vandalizing cars of activists who support abortion J) Holding protest signs outside of abortion clinics K) Vandalizing abortion clinics L) Firebombing abortion clinics M) Publicizing names and addresses of people who work at abortion clinics N) Vandalizing cars of people who work at abortion clinics O) Threatening people who work at abortion clinics P) Threatening the families of people who work at abortion clinics Q) Physically harming people who work at abortion clinics R) Creating influence operations to befriend judges or lawmakers who make decisions about the legality of abortion S) Providing misleading information to lawmakers and the public	Always acceptable, Often acceptable, Sometimes acceptable, Rarely acceptable, Never acceptable

Individual differences battery	Response options
Benevolent sexism (Glick and Fiske, 1996) Next is a list of statements concerning men and women and their relationship in contemporary society. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement. A) Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores B) Men are incomplete without women C) Women should be cherished and protected by men D) Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess E) Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility F) Men should be willing to sacrifice their own well being in order to provide financially for the women in their lives *Hostile sexism* (Glick and Fiske, 1996) A) When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against B) Once a woman gets a man to commit to her, she usually tries to put him on a tight leash C) Women exaggerate problems they have at work D) Women seek to gain power by getting control over men E) Feminists are making unreasonable demands of men F) Many women get a kick out of teasing men by seeming sexually available and then refusing male advances	Agree strongly, Agree somewhat, Agree a little, Disagree a little, Disagree somewhat, Disagree a lot
Political aggression (ANES, 2021) How much do you feel it is justified for people to use violence to pursue their political goals in this country?	A great deal, A lot, A moderate amount, A little, Not at all
Parental status Are you a parent or guardian? Select all that apply	Yes, of at least one child younger than 18 years old; Yes, of at least one child 18 years old or older; No, am neither a parent or guardian
Political participation During the past two years did you...? A) Vote in an election B) Attend local political meetings (such as school board or city council) C) Put up a political sign (such as a lawn sign or bumper sticker) D) Work for a candidate or campaign E) Attend a political protest, march or demonstration F) Contact a public official G) Donate money to a candidate, campaign, or political organization official H) Donate blood I) None of these	Check all that apply.

Individual differences battery	Response options
In what year were you born?	Open-ended
Are you...?	Male, Female, Non-binary, Other
What racial or ethnic group best describes you?	White, Black or African-American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian or Asian-American, Native American, Middle Eastern
What is the highest level of education you have completed?	Did not graduate from high school; High school graduate; Some college, but no degree (yet); 2-year college degree; 4-year college degree; Postgraduate degree (MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, etc.)
Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a...?	Strong Democrat, not very strong Democrat, lean Democrat, Independent, lean Republican, not very strong Republican, strong Republican
What is your family income?	Less than $10,000; $10,000-$19,999; $20,000-$29,999; $30,000 - $39,999; $40,000-$49,999; $50,000 - $59,999; $60,000-$69,999; $70,000 - $79,999; $80,000 - $99,999; $100,000 - $119,999; $120,000 - $149,999; $150,000 - $199,999; $200,000-$249,999; $250,000 - $349,999; $350,000 - $499,999; $500,000 or more; prefer not to say
How often do you attend religious services?	More than once a week; once a week; once or twice a month; a few times a year; seldom; never; don't know

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