THE DEMOCRACY DILEMMA

AN EXAMINATION OF SOFT DOMESTIC TERRORISM IN DEMOCRATIC SYSTEMS

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Introduction

> *"Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy."*[1] – Martin Luther King

Democracies, often held as bastions of peace and stability, exhibit vulnerabilities to 'soft' domestic terrorism, as recent events around the globe have shown. Soft domestic terrorism, as I define it, refers to the dissemination of hate speech, incivility, fake news, cyber troops, and violence related to elections by political actors against citizens or voters in an effort to win elections or obstruct a smooth handover of power after elections. The January 2021 Capitol riot (and the online planning that happened before it) in the United States are an example of soft domestic terrorism that hampered peaceful post-election transitions. This research concentrates on four democratic countries, seeking to identify any similarities or distinctions between "full" and "flawed" democracies within the context of soft domestic terrorism. With the help of the Democracy Index created by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) assessing global democracy through numerical rankings and categorization of countries, I examine Chile and Japan, classified as "full democracies," and the United States and India, categorized as "flawed democracies." There are two questions this research aims to answer while adding to literature on soft domestic terrorism in democratic systems:

- *Research Question 1:* What does the manifestation and intensification of soft domestic terrorism during the election period look like, particularly in the brief period leading up to, during, and following elections?

- *Research Question 2*: What parallels and differences can then be identified between full versus flawed democracies concerning soft domestic terrorism during election periods with the help of the four chosen case studies for the research?

Key events for this analysis include the polarized 2017 Presidential Elections in Chile; the exacerbation of violence leading up to elections in India's West Bengal and Kashmir in the past decade along with the infamous 2002 Gujarat election; the harrowing January 2021 Capitol riots in the United States; and finally, the murder attempts on important political leaders of Japan along with the unsettling incidents of hate speech directed exacerbated campaigns.[2]

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[1] Korea, U.S. Mission. "Martin Luther King, Jr. : I Have a Dream Speech (1963)." U.S. Embassy & Consulate in the Republic of Korea, March 7, 2023. https://kr.usembassy.gov/martin-luther-king-jr-dream-speech-1963/.

[2] Sardarizadeh and Lussenhop 2021; Rachel Kleinfeld, "The Rise of Political Violence in the United States," Journal of Democracy, vol. 32, no. 4 (2021); https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2056305120969891; Suman Nath and Subhasish Ray, "Political campaigning in West Bengal: violence, professionalisation, and communalisation," South Asian History and Culture, vol. 13 (2022): 305-320; https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0022343319889670; Eldridge, Robert D. "The Assassination Attempt of Nobusuke Kishi." The Japan Times, July 13, 2020.

In a paradigm-shifting result, this study aims to undermine the popular wisdom that democracies have fewer occurrences of election violence in the country because they allow for institutionalized, peaceful expression from the opposition.[3] This research also challenges the existing norms on democratic functioning especially during election periods by asserting that soft domestic terrorism is not only commonplace within democratic contexts but is actually inevitable and can be also predicted. Moreover, I analyze violence and hate speech in the context of full and flawed democracies to compare the prevalence or degree of violence occurring within the two democratic systems included in this evaluation. These compelling findings, together, offer a reevaluation of democratic paradigms and underscore the importance of proactive measures in addressing and mitigating the impact of soft domestic terrorism within democratic societies. This conclusion has far-reaching consequences for academics, politicians, and the international community at large. In light of the impending elections in over 40 countries set for 2024, this research is incredibly timely since it may help improve protocols and techniques that protect votes and citizens.[4]

Justification for Research Significance

As elections become increasingly prevalent across the globe, there has been a corresponding surge in discourse regarding the role of violence in the process of democratization and its utilization as a means to influence political outcomes.[5] Numerous scholars have posited that electoral processes have the propensity to intensify political polarization and potentially exacerbate human rights violations in countries lacking a robust adherence to the principles of democratic legal governance with an enforcement mechanism in place.[6] Additionally, it has been argued that within democratic systems, there is a shifting paradigm where politicians may find strong motivation to resort to violent electoral strategies.[7] This departure from conventional expectations underscores a changing landscape where the use of violence, even within democratic frameworks, is considered a viable and influential strategy for political actors. In order for the populace of a democratic nation to be more prepared for the upcoming election season, it is imperative that they understand the standards of the government.

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https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2020/07/13/commentary/japan-commentary/assassination-attempt-nobusuke-kishi/.

[3] Gleditsch, N. P., & Hegre, Hå. (1997). Peace and Democracy: Three Levels of Analysis. Journal of Conflict Resolution, 41(2), 283-310. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002797041002004

[4] https://www.bloomberg.com/news/newsletters/2023-11-01/2024-is-election-year-in-40-countries-and-podcast-elon-inc-launches-next-week

[5] Hafner-Burton, Emilie M., Susan D. Hyde, and Ryan S. Jablonski. "When Do Governments Resort to Election Violence?" British Journal of Political Science 44, no. 1 (2013): 149–79. https://doi.org/10.1017/s00071234120006701.

[6] Hafner-Burton, Emilie M., Susan D. Hyde, and Ryan S. Jablonski. "When Do Governments Resort to Election Violence?" British Journal of Political Science 44, no. 1 (2013): 149–79. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0007123412000671.

[7] Collier 2009; Collier and Vicente 2012; Robinson and Torvik 2009; Zakaria 1997.

To defend the premise of democracy—that it is *of, for*, and *by* the people—citizens must be informed that they may be subjected to hate speech, propaganda, fake news, and even violence if a candidate chooses to use these tactics to win elections. Navigating this complex issue requires acknowledging that democracy fundamentally relies on mass participation, ensuring that diverse voices contribute to the decision-making process. However, in certain countries, including the United States, a historical pattern of effective disenfranchisement, through systemic barriers, has left many communities feeling disheartened. These communities perceive significant disincentives to participate, given the belief that their voices hold little weight in the political landscape. Nonetheless, despite these challenges, it remains crucial for individuals to overcome these obstacles and exercise their right to vote. The significance of large voter turnout is undeniable, as it plays a pivotal role in shaping the democratic process. Furthermore, safeguarding the "people" from soft domestic terrorism becomes imperative, especially in contexts where historical disenfranchisement has created a perception of futility in participating in the democratic process. Recognizing and addressing these practical realities is essential to foster a more inclusive and resilient democracy. While it holds true that political parties and their leaders in a democracy must be able to compete with one another, this rivalry must not be at the cost of the lives or dignity of the voters.

Social Media & Hate Speech – The Weapon & Tool of Soft Domestic Terrorism

In the 21st century, mass media's traditional status and authority has declined while the significance of social media platforms and associated regulatory frameworks has increased.[8] In contemporary times, the transmission of political information occurs through multimedia settings that integrate conventional media outlets and online social platforms, creating a multifaceted communication environment. The emergence of this novel public sphere, in conjunction with the interactions occurring within it, enables the dissemination of political concepts and policies that have repercussions on diverse political mechanisms.[9] The ability to send customized messages, or "microtargeting," to a broad audience via social media platforms raises voters' perceptions of their closeness to power, and social media platforms are viewed by political campaigns as a useful tool for engaging with prospective voters. There is an increasing body of international evidence indicating that political entities utilize computer-driven propaganda techniques, such as

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[8] Persily N. Can democracy survive the Internet? Journal of Democracy. 2017;28(2):63–76. doi: https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0025.

[9] Philip N. Howard, Samuel Woolley & Ryan Calo (2018) Algorithms, bots, and political communication in the US 2016 election: The challenge of automated political communication for election law and administration, Journal of Information Technology & Politics, 15:2, 81-93, DOI: https://doi.org.10.1080/19331681.2018.1448735.

the production of fabricated news, algorithms, and the automation of bots, to manipulate public sentiment, discourage adversaries, and generate spurious backing for particular stances.[10]

Social networks have nonetheless been found to have a positive influence on civic engagement, effectively reducing gaps associated with age, gender, and other individual characteristics. Moreover, those who participate in political activities on these platforms demonstrate a greater inclination to engage in protests on the ground in comparison to those who choose not to participate in political activities on social media.[11] The democratization of campaign resources and political information through the widespread and accessible use of digital tools has ushered in a creative revolution. This transformation has significantly lowered the barriers to entry, making it easier for campaigns to navigate the expansive digital landscape. This newfound accessibility has not only simplified but also broadened and purified the channels through which political messages are disseminated. As a consequence, the conventional technical and operational costs tied to elements like campaign advertising, the establishment of communication channels, and the strategic targeting of audiences have witnessed a remarkable reduction. This shift is particularly evident in the streamlined process of maintaining a vibrant online presence across various platforms. At the same time, the internet and online social networks, initially designed to democratize information, face significant challenges threatening democracy, including hate speech and fake news that both limit and skew the participation of some groups.[12]

Hate speech is defined as an offensive or demeaning message that targets a specific social group and places that group at risk of exclusion from society. It can manifest in various forms, such as accusing a group of illegal acts, dehumanizing the group, using offensive characterizations or slurs, or imposing social specific prohibitions based on group features.[13] In politics, these issues manifest explosively and rapidly on social networks, often orchestrated by bots and accounts created for specific purposes to target the desired audience, particularly during times of social crises and electoral campaigns. Coordinated hate speech and disinformation campaigns are commonly associated with astroturfing, aimed at introducing ideas that appear spontaneous and connected to the social environment.[14] Astroturfing tactics extend to traditional media and online platforms, particularly those like Twitter that facilitate rapid viralization of

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[10] Monica Kaminska, John D. Gallacher, Bence Kollanyi, Taha Yasseri, and Philip N. Howard. "Social Media and News Sources during the 2017 UK General Election" Data Memo 2017.6. Oxford, UK: Project on Computational Propaganda. Demtech.oii.ox.ac.uk;

[11] Valenzuela, Sebastián & Somma, Nicolás & Scherman, Andrés & Arriagada, Arturo. (2016). Social media in Latin America: Deepening or bridging gaps in protest participation?. Online Information Review. 40. 595-609. https://doi.org/10.1108/OIR-11-2015-0347.

[12] Sergio Andrés Castaño-Pulgarín, Natalia Suárez-Betancur, Luz Magnolia Tilano Vega, Harvey Mauricio Herrera López, Internet, social media and online hate speech. Systematic review, Aggression and Violent Behavior, Volume 58, 2021, 101608, ISSN 1359-1789, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2021.101608.

[13] Beltrán, Jarnishs, Paula Walker, and René Jara. 2023. "Hate and Incivilities in Hashtags against Women Candidates in Chile (2021–2022)" Social Sciences 12, no. 3: 180. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12030180

[14] Santana, Luis E., and Gonzalo Huerta Cánepa. "¿Son Bots? Automatización En Redes Sociales Durante Las Elecciones Presidenciales de Chile 2017." Cuadernos.info, no. 44 (2019): 61–77. https://doi.org/10.7764/cdi.44.1629.

content. These communication strategies often involve simplification, disinformation, and polarization of discourse.[15]

Similarly, cyber-troops mostly consist of governmental, military, or political party entities whose primary objective is to engage in the manipulation of public opinion through the utilization of social networks. Cyber-troops predominantly engage in their activities by utilizing counterfeit accounts, which may be automated in the form of bots or controlled by operators to simulate human behavior.[16] Nonetheless, the integrity of the expected discourse may be compromised when the conversation or interaction is overseen or disrupted by computer algorithms that fabricate agreement or launch assaults against adversaries.[17] Algorithms also contribute to misinformation's propagation, as some platforms, for example, employ visual algorithms to prioritize popular content on users' displays, with the aim of increasing traffic to certain pages/sites and generating income through advertising.[18] As a result, these algorithms amplify content that exhibits quick dissemination and attracts a wider audience, hence even further enhancing its impact. This phenomenon is particularly noteworthy in platforms such as Facebook and Twitter that are specifically designed to regulate the user experience and discourage users from discontinuing their engagement.

Based on the principles of Bayesian information and decision theories, some researchers argue that the reason for a boom in new information during elections is that human attention is inherently inclined towards novelty due to its role in facilitating efficient decision-making during the process of updating one's knowledge and perception of the environment.[19] As a result, individuals frequently disseminate new information with the intention of providing advantages to their immediate social circle. Additionally, such sharing is socially significant since it shows that one is "in the know" or has access to exclusive "inside" information and therefore elevates their social position.[20] This phenomenon is documented within the realm of false information, where its novelty contributes to heightened dissemination and reach on social media platforms. Propaganda intended to shape others' perspectives on a certain topic or candidate can originate

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[15] Franziska B. Keller, David Schoch, Sebastian Stier & JungHwan Yang (2020) Political Astroturfing on Twitter: How to Coordinate a Disinformation Campaign, Political Communication, 37:2, 256-280, http://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2019.1661888; Tucker, Joshua Aaron and Guess, Andrew and Barbera, Pablo and Vaccari, Cristian and Siegel, Alexandra and Siegel, Alexandra and Sanovich, Sergey and Stukal, Denis and Nyhan, Brendan, Social Media, Political Polarization, and Political Disinformation: A Review of the Scientific Literature (2018). http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3144139.

[16] Syauket, Amalia, Ida Budhiati, and Bambang Karsono. "Jurisdiction Overview of Cyber Troops in Digital Campaigns." In International Conference on Social and Politics (ICSP 2023), pp. 54-62. Atlantis Press, 2024.

[17] Howard, P. N., Woolley, S., & Calo, R. (2018). Algorithms, bots, and political communication in the US 2016 election: The challenge of automated political communication for election law and administration. Journal of Information Technology & Politics, 15(2), 81-93. https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2018.1448735

[18] Noble, Safiya Umoja. Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism. NYU Press, 2018. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1pwt9w5.

[19] Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. Science (New York, N.Y.), 359(6380), 1146–1151. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aap9559

[20] J. Berger, K. L. Milkman, What makes online content viral? J. Mark. Res. 49, 192–205 (2012).

from election campaigns, individual proponents, media outlets, foreign players, and even the candidates themselves.[21]

Research supporting the existence of soft domestic terrorism and attacks on the population during election time has been observed through the dissemination of false information by certain far-right parties and organizations in an effort to mobilize their followers against centrist parties and established media outlets.[22] A growing body of evidence supports the claim that different actors in democracies use tactics that undermine the integrity of the system, including the widespread use of social media to disseminate false information, cast doubt on opponents, influence consensus, influence public opinion, impede democratic processes, meddle in elections, and undermine faith in democratic institutions.[23] The prevalence of false information can damage the credibility of media organizations. This is concerning as a free and responsible media is essential for providing accurate and reliable information to the public. All of these are just tools that exacerbate soft domestic terrorism online during elections and contribute to undermining the democratic process, erosion of trust in institutions, creation of divisions within the society, thereby influencing voter behavior.

Online Opinion Influencers

The aforementioned measures are interrelated in their contribution to the proliferation of misinformation, reinforcement of bias, targeting of disinformation operations, and impact on the social media ecosystem, particularly when employed by political leaders or parties in electoral contexts. Prior to elections, engaging in open and constructive dialogue regarding political perspectives is not only permissible but also recommended for citizens of most democracies. This practice serves to enhance their knowledge and facilitate informed decision-making when electing their representatives.

Digital opinion leaders, facilitated by advancements in technology, have the ability to exert influence that extends beyond conventional political realms. These individuals possess the power to swiftly and emotionally shape the broader public agenda[24]. In a similar vein, campaigns may take one of two clear turns according to Zúñiga et al..: "scientific" or "subversive," depending on how such components are chosen and managed by parties or candidates. While

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[21] Persily N. Can democracy survive the Internet? Journal of Democracy. 2017;28(2):63–76. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0025.

[22] Hafner-Burton, Emilie M., Susan D. Hyde, and Ryan S. Jablonski. "When Do Governments Resort to Election Violence?" British Journal of Political Science 44, no. 1 (2013): 149–79. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0007123412000671.

[23] Bradshaw, Samantha, and Philip N. Howard. "THE GLOBAL ORGANIZATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGNS." Journal of International Affairs 71, no. 1.5 (2018): 23–32. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26508115 ; Bennett, W. L., & Livingston, S. (2018). The disinformation order: Disruptive communication and the decline of democratic institutions. European Journal of Communication, 33(2), 122-139. https://doi.org/10.1177/026732311876031 7.

[24] Gil de Zúñiga, H., Koc Michalska, K., & Römmele, A. (2020). Populism in the era of Twitter: How social media contextualized new insights into an old phenomenon. New Media & Society, 22(4), 585-594. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819893978.

both campaign types are data-driven, employ virtual networks, and have a high degree of personalization, they differ in terms of procedures, goals, and content. *Scientific* campaigning is generally far more in line with a conventional political campaigning format. Conversely, *subversive* campaigning aims to acknowledge the recent triumphs of populist groups in Western democracies.[25] The powerful leader, frequently an outsider in mainstream politics, whose decisions are guided by facts and "the views of the people," is the focal point of the subversive approach. However, it can also develop an unpredictable, domineering, and seemingly impulsive personality and behavior. From a communication standpoint, subversive campaigning uses impromptu messaging that is frequently meant to confuse and polarize voters, inciting them against the opponent or purposefully demoralizing them. As direct and network-based communication tools, social media is calibrated as a machine that opposes traditional media reporting and the establishment, thus contributing significantly to exacerbation of soft domestic terrorism.

This development holds considerable importance within the arsenal of the global far-right. Moreover, populist movements and radical political beliefs resonate and amplify on social media. Twitter, for example, does not substantially transform the top-down strategy of populist presidential communication, but rather functions as a means of perpetuating it.[26] This is due to Twitter's failure in facilitating meaningful exchanges between presidents and the public, as well as its inability to alter traditional methods of presidential communication. Instead, Twitter has primarily been utilized as a means to directly engage with the public and media, bypassing any filters or inquiries.[27] Through the various cases analyzed for this research, the paper underscores various examples where such strategies were used to garner support from voters in large numbers.

Case of Chile

Chile is an interesting case study since it is a fairly young democracy with widespread social media and internet use. In 1990, the country under 17 years of Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship underwent a democratic transition. All types of unfiltered speech gained momentum as internet forums took off because political dialogue had previously only occurred in person. While Chile had been seen as stable and a model for liberal reforms since the revolution, it attracted international attention in 2019 and 2020 as a result of widespread protests and political unrest regarding socioeconomic inequality and subpar public services. The societal upheaval in October

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[25] Gil de Zúñiga, H., Koc Michalska, K., & Römmele, A. (2020). Populism in the era of Twitter: How social media contextualized new insights into an old phenomenon. New Media & Society, 22(4), 585-594. https://doi.org/10.1177/146144481989397 8.

[26] Silvio Waisbord & Adriana Amado (2017) Populist communication by digital means: presidential Twitter in Latin America, Information, Communication & Society, 20:9, 1330-1346, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1328521.

[27] Silvio Waisbord & Adriana Amado (2017) Populist communication by digital means: presidential Twitter in Latin America, Information, Communication & Society, 20:9, 1330-1346, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1328521

2019, resulted in a constitutional revision and a plebiscite, granting Chilean citizens the opportunity to endorse the making of a new constitution. The country's dictatorship-era constitution was replaced as a result of these events by a constituent assembly. The citizens saw this constituent assembly as a model for handling civil unrest and channeling public discontent, despite the uncertainty it has brought. The post-2019 period in Chile brought a glimpse of hope and optimism in a region dealing with the pandemic, rising inequality, political instability, and democratic concerns, even while it disclosed more serious social issues than previously thought by outside observers. Piñera continues to face scrutiny for the severe suppression of demonstrations against inequality in 2019 and 2020. During the peak of the protests in December 2019, Andrés Chadwick, who previously held the position of interior minister, was impeached by congress. Shortly after, President Piñera narrowly escaped impeachment in a similar vote.

General Elections in November 2021

In November 2021, around 15 million Chileans participated in the electoral process to select a new president. There was a notable emergence of far-right candidate Jose Antonio Kast, a staunch supporter of the deceased dictator Augusto Pinochet. Kast's popularity was on par with that of socialist candidate Gabriel Boric, until Kast experienced a little decline in support. However, the election period was marred by insecurity and violence leading to the anti-government protests on October 18, 2021 just a few days before the elections. It resulted in two fatalities, 56 injuries, and the arrest of 450 individuals. These events significantly bolstered Kast's position, since he ranked fourth in recent polls, up by 21 per cent. Therefore, the impact of violence can be tremendous even though President Gabriel Boric ended up winning the elections. Inaccurate and incorrect information about human rights, crime, migration, the economy, and politics flooded social media in Chile since 2019. This was particularly true in 2021, when more than six elections were held in a super-election cycle and the internet was inundated with false material. One noteworthy characteristic of the 2021 elections was the implementation of an unusual parity rule, which mandated that fifty percent of the legislators be women. This regulation, in conjunction with the allocation of designated seats for Indigenous populations, had a substantial impact on the composition of the Constitutional Convention because it resulted in gender parity.

A study by Beltrán, Walker, and Jara (2023) employed hashtags as a methodological tool to examine online communication and its efficacy in transmitting messages pertaining to female candidates. Hashtags serve as deliberate means of conveying a message and are employed for the examination of many online phenomena, encompassing social movements and public sentiment. The purpose of this research was to identify any differences in the hashtags used by various electoral lists and years in the Chilean constitutional elections by analyzing the networks of hashtags associated with them. Their study examined "incivilities" in the form of offensive or vulgar language that is not as overt as hate speech but still contributes to the creation of a hostile online environment, with #rechazo, #rechazotransversal, #rechazoelmamarrachocomunista, being the most commonly used hashtags on Twitter across different parties. One could argue that

violent messages do not originate solely from those who commit acts of violence and occasionally utilize social media for this goal. A common tactic in Chile involving hashtags was to connect the 2021 presidential election and the 2022 constitutional plebiscite, two big electoral processes, to the women's performance and the convention. There was a direct correlation between the violence the women candidates faced and these two events, which shaped the constitutional debate.

It appears that female candidates may have been more vulnerable to violence during the 2021 presidential election's second round, when José Kast and Gabriel Boric faced off. Secondly, looking at the timeline of all the women's candidate lists reveals that the majority choice to reject the new constitutional text was imposed across all of their hashtag networks. The extent to which the discourse of rejection of the constitutional text can be extended and the prevalence of violence against women on social networks can be confirmed is an open question. In the context of Chile, the dynamics surrounding elections differ from those in the United States, yet a common concern emerges – the exacerbation of soft domestic terrorism during electoral periods. Soft domestic terrorism in this context may encompass tactics such as online harassment, smear campaigns, and other non-physical methods aimed at intimidating and destabilizing the campaigns of women seeking public office. In Chile, this phenomenon takes on a distinctive dimension, particularly with regard to its impact on female candidates. These actions can be detrimental to the democratic process by suppressing the voices of female candidates and dissuading them from participating actively in electoral politics.

Anti-Venezuelans Protests

An approximate 5,000 Chileans participated in marches, primarily taking place on 25th September 2021, with placards that stated "No more migrants." They also engaged in destructive acts by setting fire to the possessions of Venezuelan migrants. This included throwing clothes and mattresses into bonfires on the streets after police cleared a migrant camp. Protesters urged authorities to implement measures to halt the influx of migrants through Chile's northern border. The presence of settlement camps in city squares and beaches in Iquique, northern Chile have become the focal point of angry protests by locals and caused unrest among Venezuelan migrants.

Juana Rodriguez, a resident of Iquique, Chile, expressed that many locals harbor resentment towards immigrants, attributing it to concerns about job opportunities and an alleged perception that migrants are seeking unwarranted assistance. The UN mission in Chile, through a tweet, called upon both authorities and the general population to act in accordance with human rights and international humanitarian principles. Eduardo Stein, the representative for Venezuelan migrants from both the UN Refugee Agency and UN Migration Agency, conveyed his deep sadness and concern, characterizing the incidents as manifestations of "hate, intolerance, and xenophobia." Chile's Interior Minister, Rodrigo Delgado, condemned the protest while affirming the continuation of evictions from public spaces and the enforcement of expulsion

plans for undocumented migrants. Additionally, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) denounced the violent and xenophobic actions and highlighted the escalating popularity of Kast, especially following the anti-migrant protests on September 24, which were labeled as xenophobic by the United Nations.

State of Emergency

President Sebastián Piñera issued a declaration of a state of emergency on October 12, 2021, including 72 settlements in two southern regions of Chile. This action was prompted by disruptions and acts of aggression, frequently associated with Indigenous Mapuche factions calling for the restitution of their ancestral territories. This statement includes 40 municipalities in the Biobío region and 32 in La Araucanía. The region of La Araucanía has been plagued by long-standing violence and disputes, which have included attacks on forestry equipment and trucks. This instability has endured for several decades. Arsonists in the Biobío region, which is next to La Araucanía, deliberately set fire to two churches—one belonging to the Roman Catholic denomination and the other to the Evangelical denomination.

The region has experienced significant unrest since the 2018 homicide of an unarmed Mapuche individual by law enforcement, resulting in extensive protests prompted by the subsequent concealment of the crime. At a congressional hearing on Catrillanca's killing, former Interior Minister Chadwick presented concerning data, revealing that there have been 920 incidents of arson, 924 armed confrontations, and 509 attacks on police in the region since 2013. These findings underscore the profound challenges faced by a democracy when it appears to jeopardize community safety, highlighting the stringent measures the government may adopt to mitigate high levels of conflict.

2017 Presidential Elections

On December 17, 2017, two candidates, each running on a very different platform, contested for the presidency of Chile. Former TV and radio journalist and editor Alejandro Guillier, who supported left- and center-wing parties despite being politically independent, was on one side. On the other side was Sebastián Piera, a right-wing politician and successful businessman who presided over Chile from 2010 to 2014. The term 'Chilezuela', which juxtaposes the names of Chile and Venezuela, was widely used in news comments and on social media before the election. Similar to many other countries in the region, right-wing conglomerates control the majority of Chile's media, which frequently demonstrates bias against left-wing politicians and their policies as well as against female political figures.

An analysis of 84 stories and 4670 comments made during Chile's 2017 presidential election revealed how often news commentators used impolite language when addressing political figures. It also revealed how closely incivility and media bias were associated with comments made during the election. The research showed that Chilean news sites' comment sections had more incidents of incivility than those in the Global North (countries in colonial

power dynamics that are not the Global South), especially when female politicians—most notably former president Michelle Bachelet—were addressed. Incivility was recorded in 29% of comments– 25% contained insulting language while 4% classified as profanity— and individual evaluation of each attribute shows that foul language was the main sign of incivility in the discourse. This phenomenon is concerning for democracy as it hampers the free exchange of ideas and impedes constructive political discussions. When individuals resort to foul language and insults, it diminishes the possibility of engaging in meaningful debates and understanding diverse perspectives. Moreover, the disproportionate targeting of female politicians in these uncivil comments raises questions about gender equality and the inclusivity of political discourse. It suggests that certain individuals may face additional challenges and hostility based on their gender, potentially discouraging women from participating in politics or expressing their opinions openly. Efforts to address and reduce such incidents are essential for fostering a more constructive and democratic online environment.

Case of Japan

Mr Sakurai: Pro-Hitler and Anti-Korea

In 2007, Sakurai Makoto, officially founded Zaitokukai, which gained prominence by orchestrating a series of widely publicized street protests in Tokyo's Koreatown in 2012, with the aim of removing social welfare benefits given to Zainichi Koreans. Driven by their newfound fame, they escalated the magnitude of their demonstrations, orchestrating a grand total of 1,152 hate rallies across Japan from April 2013 to September 2015, as reported by the Ministry of Justice. Additionally, in response to a complaint lodged by Korea University students concerning a sequence of anti-Korean demonstrations held in front of their institution between 2008 and 2011, the Ministry of Justice formally gave Sakurai Makoto a warning in 2015.

As a result of their activism coming to a standstill, Sakurai entered the 2016 Tokyo governor's race. Despite receiving only 1.7 percent of the vote in 2016, Sakaurai made an effort to increase his political clout in local and national legislatures by founding the Japan First Party. Sakurai rose to the fifth position in the most recent Tokyo gubernatorial election, which increased his vote share to over 170,000, or almost 3 percent. In various regions of the nation, a few former Far Right members and those who support them have also entered to run for local council elections; nonetheless, the Japan First Party presently only has one seat in the legislature.They have also failed in their attempts to push party members into national politics; most recently, in the 2020 lower house election, none of the five candidates the party supported won a seat. However, the Japan First Party may serve as a simple facade for the Zaitokukai.

Election-related posters and public speeches laced with anti-Korean rhetoric are just two of the ways that Zainichi activists claim the Zaitokukai strategically used elections, which are exempt from hate speech laws, to spread xenophobic propaganda. As a legally recognised political party, the Japan First Party is not subject to any restrictions of this kind during election

season, even though the new laws have prevented them from obtaining permits to hold hate protests against the Koreans. Additionally, their controversial history received a lot of attention from the media during local elections, which paradoxically helped them gain new followers, taking the place of their now-banned hate rallies. This new venue has, rather ironically, facilitated the Zaitokukai's expansion to a more extensive audience. They have spread their anti-Korean ideology to non-netizens and residents of rural and suburban areas through their involvement in local politics.

In August, the Fukuoka Legal Affairs Bureau ruled that comments Sakurai, founder of the Japan First Party, made in March 2019, prior to the Japanese House of Councillors elections in front of a school in Kyushu for ethnic Korean children constituted hate speech. Additionally, during the 2020 Tokyo gubernatorial election, Sakurai repeated his call for the immediate end to public welfare assistance to foreigners.

Murder Attempts and Successes on Japanese Ministers

Fumio Kishida, the incumbent Japanese Prime Minister, was the victim of a terrifying attack with a homemade explosive device on April 15, 2023. This heinous occurrence transpired during a campaign event in Wakayama, just before PM Fumio was supposed to give a speech for April 2023 Japanese Unified Local Elections at a fishing port in the country's southern regions. Fortunately, the prime minister survived the ordeal with about two hundred people in attendance, and just one police officer got injured. This latest development brought back bitter memories of the death of former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo. Abe was shot and killed during an election rally on July 8th 2022, just two days preceding elections, by a person who carried grudges against him for his affiliation with a controversial religious group. Abe was calling on voters to re-elect his Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) colleague Kei Sato in the upper house elections when he was shot. The National Police Agency (NPA) and regional law enforcement organizations have completely redesigned police collaboration in the wake of Abe's murder.

In the wake of Abe's murder, the NPA also increased its efforts to stop the spread of information about making explosives and weapons online, even though it was difficult to remove dangerous content from overseas websites. Despite these precautions, the threat of unexpected assaults on dignitaries in public spaces remains. In Japan, political contenders place a high value on meeting with voters in their communities and giving speeches in open areas without security checks. Both the attack on Prime Minister Kishida and the assassination of Abe occurred during campaigning when they were addressing the public prior to elections. This latest incident is the third time that an attack has been launched on a Japanese Prime Minister while they are in office since the end of World War II. Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke suffered six knife wounds to his thigh in 1960, leaving him with serious injuries. That was followed by another attack in 1975 when Prime Minister Miki Takeo was punched in the face when he was at a former Prime Minister's national funeral. Interestingly, it was determined that these attackers were both right-wing radicals.

Case of India

India frequently experiences various sorts of election violence. Such confrontations, which are most common in Bihar, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal, involve party members or sympathizers. Particularly in Gujarat, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, there is a high rate of communal violence between Muslims and Hindus. The emergence of the Hindu-nationalist movement during the 1980s prompted recurrent confrontations within the major urban centers of India that continue through present day. With more competitive, less incumbent-friendly, and well-apportioned or slightly underrepresented districts, India's electoral landscape is less likely to be biased in favor of incumbents, which encourages opposition parties and district-level incumbents to resort to violence because they have a lower chance of winning in person. There has been a decrease in more severe violence, especially fatal violence, throughout previous elections, especially those that took place in 2004 and 2009.[28] This paper explores the Gujarat 2002 elections, the 2018 West Bengal elections along with the local body (Panchayati Raj) elections, and the 2018 Kashmir elections.

Gujarat, often recognized as being among the most economically wealthy states in India, experienced an outbreak of violence before parliamentary elections. In late February 2002, there was an incident near the Godhra railway station that involved the burning of a train carriage, which was transporting Hindu-nationalist activists. It is believed that the incident was triggered by a confrontation between Hindu-nationalist activists and Muslim tea vendors. Local officials affiliated with the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) delivered provocative speeches, further instigating extensive assaults on Muslim communities.[29] Researchers investigating communal violence in India concluded that violence was more probable in regions where it results in the most significant electoral advantages and that areas with intense political competition were more prone to violence.[30] Higher levels of violence were also discovered in regions where the ruling parties could win election majorities without relying on minority votes.[31] Several notable scholars on democracy have noted that political competition is essential to the functioning of a democracy.[32] As a result of pressure from an Indian lawmaker, the

[28]Daxecker, Ursula. "Unequal Votes, Unequal Violence: Malapportionment and Election Violence in India." Journal of Peace Research 57, no. 1 (2019): 156–70. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343319884985.

[29]Daxecker, Ursula. "Unequal Votes, Unequal Violence: Malapportionment and Election Violence in India." Journal of Peace Research 57, no. 1 (2019): 156–70. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343319884985.

[30] Wilkinson, Steven I & Christopher J Haid (2009) Ethnic violence as campaign expenditure: Riots, competition, and vote swings in India. Working paper;

Dhattiwala, Raheel & Michael Biggs (2012) The political logic of ethnic violence: The anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat, 2002. Theory & Society 40(4): 483–516.

[31] Wilkinson, Steven I (2004) Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press;

Brass, Paul (2003) The Production of Hindu–Muslim Violence in Contemporary India. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

[32] Strom, Kaare. 1992. "Democracy as Political Competition" The American Behavioral Scientist (1986-1994) 35 (4) (Mar): 375. https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/democracy-as-political-competition/docview/194861482/se-2

government of Gujarat finally released the official death toll from the violence that followed Godhra in 2005. A total of 1,044 people, including 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus, were officially killed (not including the 59 victims of the train fire).[33]

The 2019 and 2021 West Bengal Case

West Bengal's political culture, historically, was deeply influenced by continuous Left rule of the Communist Party of India Marxist (CPIM)-led Left Front (LF) government from 1977 to 2011, which, institutionally and organizationally, eschewed overt identity-based politics. However, the emergence of the BJP, as the main opposition party in the state marked a significant political transformation. This shift, from a political discourse that was relatively devoid of identity-based appeals to a sudden surge in identity politics, positions West Bengal as an interesting case study. Two critical shifts in political campaigning can be identified since the 2016 West Bengal Assembly Elections. First, at the operational level, the BJP adeptly harnessed identity-based mobilization by synchronizing organizational development, the dissemination of misinformation, and the effective portrayal of micro-narratives related to corruption and anti-incumbency. For instance, the party animosity that had begun to emerge during the final years of LF control persisted unabatedly, in spite of the TMC's emphasis on politics centered on service delivery. To refer to people who had defected from the TMC to the BJP, Mamata Banerjee herself coined the insulting and offensive term *Gaddar*, which means "treacher." Another slogan, *Khela Hobe*, which translates to "the game is on" or "let's play the game," gained popularity as a double meaning term that linked elections to a game that was hated and had consequences.[34] According to The New Indian Express, West Bengal had reported 47 political homicides by November 2020, months before the Assembly election, with the majority of the victims being members of the TMC and BJP. [35]

Second, at the ideological level, the 2019 Parliamentary Elections campaign, subtly employing identity politics, contributed to the communalization of the state's public discourse. This campaign succeeded in rekindling age-old sentiments that were seen before partition during the infamous Bengal riots in 1947, sentiments that were previously marginalized during the LF's 34-year rule, cutting across the political spectrum. This trend continued and intensified during the 2021 State Assembly Elections, where campaigns increasingly involved the dissemination of disturbing images and hate speech by saying phrases like "*marbo ekhane, laash porbe shoshaney*" (which translates to "Will hit you here, body will fall at a crematorium"), and other threats by the TMC that included pulling out tongues of people spreading rumors, destroying

[33]"We Have No Orders to Save You". Human Rights Watch.
https://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/india/India0402.htm

[34] Suman Nath & Subhasish Ray (2022) Political campaigning in West Bengal:
violence, professionalisation, and communalisation, South Asian History and Culture, 13:3,
305-320, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/19472498.2022.2075208

[35] Mondal, Pronab. 2020. "Decoding Political Killings in West Bengal." The New Indian Express.
https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2020/Nov/16/decoding-political-killings-2223960.html

homes of BJP workers using bulldozers, and shooting dead the protesters who destroyed police vehicles.[36]

These different dimensions in the use of hate speech before 2016 promoted political polarization. The rise of WhatsApp- and Facebook-mediated communication brought significant changes to political campaigning in West Bengal since 2016 leading to a surge in communal riots, with few incidents pre-dating the widespread availability of internet access. Such incidents have not always been reported in mainstream media but have been widely circulated through social media networks.[37] The state government's response to these riots included temporary internet bans in affected areas.

Furthermore, West Bengal demonstrates how political campaigns are deeply intertwined with people's everyday lives. The fact that substantial sections of the state's population embraced identity-based organizations, even after three decades of LF rule, underscores the deep-seated communal perceptions at play. It sheds light on how the rise of the BJP, the professionalization of campaigns, and the communalization of political discourse have shaped the state's political landscape. The authors provide valuable insights into the role of technology and social media in this transformation and the implications for communal relations and political polarization. False information about hyper-nationalism and identity politics spread rapidly over social media. In 2021, West Bengal accounted for around 25% of all instances nationwide involving fake news, making it the state with the highest number of cases against it.[38]

Against the backdrop of the May 2019 Parliamentary Elections, an incident occurred in West Bengal. The dispute began when the veteran leader Arjun Singh was denied a ticket by the TMC and subsequently defected to the BJP. Bombings and other acts of violence broke out between the Muslim population of the area and the communities of North Indian jute industry workers. Local political dynamics were strongly influenced by the BJP's and the TMC's respective identities as the defenders of Hindus and Muslims, respectively.

The state of West Bengal is notorious for violence emerging even prior to small panchayat level elections. There are reports of shootings, bombings, arson, stone-throwing, and other gruesome activities between 2013 and 2018 during elections. Official data indicates that 13

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[36] Suman Nath and Subhasish Ray, "Political campaigning in West Bengal: violence, professionalisation, and communalisation," South Asian History and Culture, vol. 13 (2022): 305-320;
Shamsi, Mohammed Safi. "The Two-Sided Sword of 'free Speech' That Is Hurting Bengal Politics." Deccan Herald, September 2022.
https://www.deccanherald.com/india/the-two-sided-sword-of-free-speech-that-is-hurting-bengal-politics-1145795.html.
[37] Ray, S., M. J. Dutta, T. A. Neyazi, and A. Kumar. "Voting for Autocracy in Post-Civil War Elections: Evidence from an Indian State." In APSA Political Psychology Pre-Conference, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Harvard University, 2018
[38] Majumder, Soumyajit. "Bengal Tops in Fake News Cases on Social Media in 2021." Fake News | In an election year, West Bengal topped in fake news cases on social media - Telegraph India, September 2, 2022.
https://www.telegraphindia.com/west-bengal/in-an-election-year-west-bengal-topped-in-fake-news-cases-on-social-media/cid/1884094.

people lost their lives as a result of the 2018 Panchayat elections. In addition, thirty people lost their lives during the most turbulent period in decades leading up to the elections.[39] West Bengal reported 47 political homicides in November 2020 a month before the Assembly Elections, with the majority of the victims being members of the BJP and the TMC. The election itself was violent, and irresponsible comments from prominent politicians encouraged more violence, despite the deployment of Central Forces and the division of voting into eight phases to distribute the total number of voters as a means to avoid the start or spread of violence. For instance, five people were killed during polling in Shitalkuchi, Cooch Behar district as the Central Forces which was stationed in that specific booth opened fire in self defense.[40] Even weeks after the Assembly Election results in May 2021, were announced, political violence persisted. Inter-party fighting immediately following the election claimed the lives of party officials, most of whom were BJP members.[41]

The 2018 Kashmir Case

The Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) region has been a hotbed of strife since 1947. Being the only Muslim-majority state in India, tensions have always been heightened by India's governance of J&K, both inside the country and with Pakistan. This tension is sometimes manifested in the form of intermittent incidents of cross-border violence between Indian and Pakistani forces and in the activities of militant groups that are against the Indian government, including Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), and Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM). Furthermore, a sizable portion of the local populace opposes the central government of India, as seen by the frequency of demonstrations and instances of stone-throwing at security personnel.

The 2018 Local Body elections were held in early October with the results being announced on October 20th. The table (3) added below highlights the incidents of violent activities that took place during the local body elections in Kashmir.

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[39] Sanchala, V. 2023, "Why panchayat polls in West Bengal see so much violence" Firstpost, July 8. https://www.firstpost.com/explainers/why-panchayat-polls-in-west-bengal-see-so-much-violence-1284158 2.html

[40] "Bengal Polls: 4 Killed as Central Forces Open Fire after Coming under Attack." The Economic Times, April 2021. https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/elections/assembly-elections/west-bengal/bengal-polls-4-kille d-as-central-forces-open-fire-after-coming-under-attack/articleshow/82001533.cms.

[41] Mondal, P. 2020. "Decoding Political Killings in West Bengal." The New Indian Express, November 16.

Table 3: Examining Violence in Kashmir's Local Body Poll			
	12th October	17th October	21st October
Protest	7	6	2
Riot	12	1	2
Violence Against Civilians	1	-	-
Battle	1	3	-
Fatalities	2	6	16

The surge in protests, riots, and violence against civilians during elections indicates a potential erosion of civil order and the emergence of societal unrest. Soft domestic terrorism often exploits social and political tensions, and the observed incidents may be indicative of extremist activities or attempts to disrupt the electoral process through violent means. In the broader context of soft domestic terrorism, these findings underscore the vulnerability of democratic institutions to external pressures and internal strife. Acts of violence, protests, and riots can be employed as tactics to sow discord, undermine trust in democratic processes, and create an environment conducive to extremist ideologies. The potential loss of life and disruption of public order not only pose immediate threats to individuals but also jeopardize the foundational principles of democracy.

Addressing and understanding these patterns of violence is crucial for safeguarding the democratic fabric of a society. It highlights the need for enhanced security measures during electoral periods, effective conflict resolution mechanisms, and efforts to address the root causes of social and political tensions. Fostering a resilient and secure democratic environment requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond electoral procedures to address the underlying issues contributing to soft domestic terrorism.

Case of the United States

The 2016 and 2016 United States elections, which culminated in the triumph of Donald Trump and Joseph Biden, respectively, brought to the forefront notable transformations in the traditional dynamics of political campaigns inside US democracy. The distinctions that were once clear, such as the delineation of specific individuals participating in campaigns, the separation between media coverage and advertising, and the ability to distinguish news from entertainment, are gradually fading away. Social media played a pivotal role in highlighting these shifts, bringing to the forefront elements that were previously less prominent. Notably, extremists who were once relatively quiet in mainstream political discourse are not only gaining visibility but are also being

integrated into advisory and managerial roles within campaigns.[42] In addition, Donald Trump strategically utilized tweets to exert influence over the traditional media agenda. This involved an increased frequency of tweeting during periods of low media coverage, and a corresponding adjustment in tweet frequency when garnering greater attention from the media. Trump's tweets were so outlandish and intended to attract attention that the corporate Twitter handle began fact-checking his statements.[43] In the wake of Colorado's decision to exclude Donald Trump from the Republican primary ballot in the state, an armed individual broke into the Denver building that housed the Supreme Court in January 2024, thereby introducing soft domestic terrorism into American society just in time for the 2024 presidential elections.[44]

Social Media Analysis

In the context of the 2020 Presidential elections, I analyzed numerous Tweets employed in the dehumanization of immigrants or the Chinese amidst the COVID pandemic as an indicator of xenophobia. I performed an extensive survey of Tweets, including, 'bad hombres', '14 and 88', 'build a wall,' Shithole Countries' and 'New York values', but this paper selectively focused on those exhibiting the most alarming implications, notably including terms like 'Communist Chinese,' 'Kung Flu,' 'Caravans,' 'Barack Hussein Obama,' and 'Shithole Countries.' The results were alarming while also consistent with the hypothesis that hate speech is used more frequently as a tool during election period.[45] For all the three hashtags listed below in Table 1, the search hits increased dramatically during the 2020 elections that took place in November that year. These expressions were prevalent among Twitter users, particularly in the lead-up to and the immediate aftermath of the elections. The use of such language perpetuates stereotypes and promotes discrimination against specific ethnic or national groups by creating an environment where immigrants may feel marginalized, targeted, and unwelcome, undermining the principles of inclusivity and diversity in a democratic society.

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[42] Persily N. Can democracy survive the Internet? Journal of Democracy. 2017;28(2):63–76. doi: https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0025.

[43] _DanMangan. "Twitter Fact-Checks Trump, Slaps Warning Labels on His Tweets about Mail-in Ballots." CNBC, May 27, 2020. https://www.cnbc.com/2020/05/26/twitter-fact-checks-trump-slaps-warning-labels-on-his-tweets-about-mail-in-ballots.html

[44]"Armed Man Breaks into Denver Building Housing Colorado Supreme Court." NBCNews.com, January 2, 2024. https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/armed-man-breaks-denver-building-housing-colorado-supreme-court-rcna131896.

[45] The timeframes selected for each term were constrained by platform Terms of Service and other logistical challenges.

Table 1: Analysis of Tweets During 2020 Presidential Elections			
Tweet	Search Hits	Search Hits	Search Hits
Communist Chinese	54 in July 2020	100 during 2020 Elections	73 in March/April 2021
Kung Flu	0 in January 2020	38 in June 2020	0 Post Elections
Barack Hussein Obama	75 in Jan 2020	100 during 2020 Elections	0 Post Elections
Caravans	25 in May 2020	100 in August 2020	25 in December 2020

The 2016 election campaign in the United States leading to Donald Trump's victory, made visible certain changes; limits that were once clear were now difficult to determine (e.g., knowing who is part of the campaign and who is not, or the distinction between legitimate media coverage and advertising for a candidate, or the difference between news and entertainment). It was also possible to demonstrate the strategic use of tweets to shape the traditional media's agenda. When Trump had little traditional media coverage, he tweeted in greater quantity than when he received more coverage.[46]

January 6th Assault on Democracy

Supporters of former President Trump, including right-wing groups, U.S. domestic militias, Oath Keepers, Three Percenters, and other "patriots" gathered in Washington, D.C. on January 6, 2021, with the intention of expressing their dissent towards the US Congress' official validation of Joseph R. Biden as the 46th US President.[47] The demonstration constituted one of several 'Stop the Steal' actions that took place nationwide subsequent to the November 4, 2020, elections. The January event, orchestrated by groups aligned with right-wing populism, aimed to undermine the legitimacy of President Biden's election by asserting the existence of extensive voter fraud.[48] Certain groups including the white Christian evangelical Republicans and their ties to conspiracy theories like Q-Anon, are more likely to engage in political violence as was the case with the riots in January, when the insurgents displayed banners bearing the messages "Jesus Saves," "In

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[46] Persily N. Can democracy survive the Internet? Journal of Democracy. 2017;28(2):63–76. doi: https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0025.

[47] Cooter, Amy. "Militia Expert Warns Trump's Capitol Insurrectionists Could Try Again." Scientific American, June 14, 2022. https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/militia-expert-warns-trumps-capitol-insurrectionists-could-try-again/.

[48] Sardarizadeh S, Lussenhop J (2021) "The 65 days that led to chaos at the Capitol". BBC News

God We Trust," "Jesus 2020," and "Jesus Is My Saviour, Trump Is My President."[49] One individual strode purposefully through the corridors of Congress, brandishing a Christian flag, while another held a Bible. These groups perceive themselves as defenders of a threatened way of life and view the Republican Party, particularly Donald Trump, as their protectors.[50] This occurrence posed a significant threat to the longstanding history of peaceful transfer of political authority inside the nation's executive branch.

Democracy seeks to eliminate violence and ideally should make violence obsolete, as all organizations and individuals should be able to express their opinions and interests through a process of logical discussion.[51] The risk is that this kind of violent behavior could get out of democratic control and jeopardize fundamental rights that are meant to be protected. Armed protests, which are legal in many places in the U.S., are not necessarily synonymous with violent protest, but have notably been found to have a significantly higher likelihood, around 6.5 times, of resulting in violent incidents compared to demonstrations when firearms are not present.[52] Preceding the 2020 Presidential elections, a multitude of armed demonstrations transpired across the nation, encompassing a range of movements, including Second Amendment rallies, militias offering opposition to the BLM movement, and sporadic occurrences of armed Black paramilitary groups.

[49]Adriana. "Washington State University." CAS in the Media The Capitol Riot Revealed the Darkest Nightmares of White Evangelical America Comments, January 17, 2021. https://cas.wsu.edu/news/2021/01/17/the-capitol-riot-revealed-the-darkest-nightmares-of-white-evangelical-america/; ;Jenkins, Jack. "For Insurrectionists, a Violent Faith Brewed from Nationalism, Conspiracies and Jesus." Religion News Service, January 13, 2021. https://religionnews.com/2021/01/12/the-faith-of-the-insurrectionists/; Dias, Elizabeth, and Ruth Graham. "How White Evangelical Christians Fused with Trump Extremism." The New York Times, January 12, 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/11/us/how-white-evangelical-christians-fused-with-trump-extremism.html; Rachel Kleinfeld, "The Rise of Political Violence in the United States," Journal of Democracy, vol. 32, no. 4 (2021)
[50]Daniel A. Cox, "Support for Political Violence Among Americans Is on the Rise. It's a Grim Warning About America's Political Future," American Enterprise Institute, 26 March 2021, www.aei.org/op-eds/support-for-political-violence-among-americans-is-on-the-rise-its-a-grim-warning-about-americas-political-future; Bartels, "Ethnic Antagonism Erodes Republicans' Commitment to Democracy"; Sonia Roccas and Marilynn B. Brewer, "Social Identity Complexity," Personality and Social Psychology Review 6 (May 2002): 86–102.
[51] Schwarzmantel, John. "Democracy and Violence: A Theoretical Overview." Democratization 17, no. 2 (2010): 217–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510341003588641.
[52]Jones, Sam. "Fact Sheet: Updated Armed Demonstration Data Released a Year after the 6 January Insurrection Show New Trends." ACLED, September 30, 2022. https://acleddata.com/2022/01/05/updated-armed-demonstration-data-released-a-year-after-the-6-january-insurrection-show-new-trends/.

Table 2.1: No. of Demonstrations (Weekly Avg.)[53]		
March 2020- Nov 2020*	Pre-Election Period (Aug 2020- Nov 2020)	Post-Election Period (Nov 2020- Jan 2021)
517	460	250 approx
*Includes a significant number of Black Lives Matter (BLM) and social justice demonstrations in May and June.		

Table 2.2: A 54% Decline in No. of Contentious Demonstrations (Weekly Avg.) Post Elections**[54]	
Post-Election Period (Nov 2020- Jan 2021)	Pre-Election Period (Aug 2020- Nov 2020)
167	360
**Aligns with a general decline in overall demonstrations	

Table 2.3: Proportion of Demonstrations with Contention [55]	
Post-Election Period (Nov 2020- Jan 2021)	Pre-Election Period (Aug 2020- Nov 2020)
6% (167 out of 2,790)	7 % (360 out of 5,075)

Table 2.4: Proportion of pro-Trump demonstrations involving presence of firearms[56]	
2020	6.2%
2021	8.8%

[53]"Report: Election 2020 Political Violence Data and Trends." Bridging Divides initiative. https://bridgingdivides.princeton.edu/sites/g/files/toruqf246/files/2021-02/Report-Election2020PoliticalViolenceDataandTrends%20%281%29.pdf.
[54]Ibid
[55] "Report: Election 2020 Political Violence Data and Trends." Bridging Divides initiative. https://bridgingdivides.princeton.edu/sites/g/files/toruqf246/files/2021-02/Report-Election2020PoliticalViolenceDataandTrends%20%281%29.pdf.
[56]Jones, Sam. "Fact Sheet: Updated Armed Demonstration Data Released a Year after the 6 January Insurrection Show New Trends." ACLED, September 30, 2022. https://acleddata.com/2022/01/05/updated-armed-demonstration-data-released-a-year-after-the-6-january-insurrection-show-new-trends /.

Table 2.5: Notable disparity observed in the distribution of armed pro-Trump protests on legislative grounds, in contrast to other armed demonstrations[57]	
Pro-Trump	**47.3%**
Others	12.2%

During the 11-week period spanning from the election to Inauguration Day, there was also a notable increase in the presence of armed individuals at protests, with a growth rate of 47%.[58] Furthermore, organized paramilitary groups saw a substantial surge, exhibiting a growth rate of 96% during the same timeframe.[59] The 'Stop the Steal' demonstrations exhibited a significantly higher prevalence–by a factor of four–of armed individuals or unlawful paramilitary groups in comparison to other demonstrations. Armed individuals or unlawful paramilitary groups were present in over 20% of the 'Stop the Steal' rallies held across the country.[60] The observed rates of armed protestors have exhibited a notable upward trend, surpassing those observed in anti-Trump protests. Demonstrations characterized by their political inclination in favor of the Trump administration were notably more prone to take place in the vicinity of legislative buildings with senior government officials and bureaucrats as primary targets. Therefore, data clearly indicates the existence of soft domestic terrorism within American democracy.

Furthermore, these protests demonstrated an increased propensity for escalating into violent incidents. As an illustration, on January 6th, alongside the occurrences in Washington D.C., a total of 12 states encountered the need to interrupt their operations, evacuate their capitol buildings, and/or confront gatherings that posed threats or breached the security of state capitol buildings.[61] Subsequent to the election, it is noteworthy that every instance of armed protest aligned with election-related events that were previously regarded as merely procedural in nature. These events encompassed activities such as election tabulation, announcement of electoral college results, and the ceremonial inauguration of the elected candidate. Hence, the manifestation of violence exhibited a resemblance to the patterns observed in other nations, wherein politicians harness public anger and employ it to advance their political objectives.

[57]Ibid

[58]The rise in political violence in the United States and Damage to Our Democracy, https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/03/31/rise-in-political-violence-in-united-states-and-damage-to-our-democracy-pub-87584.

[59] Ibid

[60]"Report: Election 2020 Political Violence Data and Trends." Bridging Divides initiative. https://bridgingdivides.princeton.edu/sites/g/files/toruqf246/files/2021-02/Report-Election2020PoliticalViolenceDataandTrends%20%281%29.pdf.

[61] "Report: Election 2020 Political Violence Data and Trends." Bridging Divides initiative. Accessed January 15, 2024. https://bridgingdivides.princeton.edu/sites/g/files/toruqf246/files/2021-02/Report-Election2020PoliticalViolenceDataandTrends%20%281%29.pdf.

Regrettably, the candidacy of Donald Trump in the upcoming 2024 Presidential elections raises concerns about the recurrence of instances of soft domestic terrorism. It is imperative to proactively prevent such occurrences to safeguard both the integrity of the electoral process and the well-being of voters, thereby ensuring the conduct of genuinely democratic elections.

Confronting Violence and White Supremacist Machinations

Another method of assessing the increasing tolerance for violence is through the observation of escalating occurrences, which exemplify the integration of threats, coercion, and physical aggression into the fabric of American political culture.

Table 2.6: +10 Fold Increase in Frequency of Threats Directed Towards members of Congress[62]	
2016	902
2021	8,613

Table 2.7: +12 Fold Increase in Frequency of Public and Openly White Supremacist Activity[63]	
2017	421
2020	5,125

In 2021, there was a notable rise in white supremacists' visibility, as seen by at least 183 occurrences when they displayed banners on prominent areas such as highway overpasses. This represents a significant 40 percent increase compared to the previous year. Organizing was also openly conducted, when in 2021, white supremacists organized 108 public events, which is more than twice the number from the previous year and the highest documented in the past five years. More than half of the experts (56%) rank the effect of political violence on elections as Level 3 or higher, which means that there has been a serious decline in democratic standards and the possibility that future electoral processes may fail.[64] The effect of violence on elections was also the primary concern of experts, according to the VDIT survey. Tragically, elections continue to

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[62]Polarization, democracy, and political violence in the United States... Accessed January 12, 2024. https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/09/05/polarization-democracy-and-political-violence-in-united-states-what-research-says-pub-90457.

[63] White Supremacist Propaganda Remained at Historic Levels in 2021." Anti-Defamation League. March 3, 2022. https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/adl-white-supremacist-propaganda-remained-at-historic-levels-in-2021

[64] Mason, Lilliana, and Jennifer Dresden. Assessing the Effect of Political Violence on American Democracy: A Report on the Violence and Democracy Impact Tracker, n.d. https://protectdemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/23.11.06-Political-Violence-Report.pdf.

be the most visible source of political violence in the US, and this is true both on Election Day and over the entirety of the election administration process.

Conclusion

In comparing the cases of Chile, Japan, India, and the United States, a nuanced understanding of the challenges posed by soft domestic terrorism during elections emerges. Each case reflects unique dynamics and intricacies, showcasing the diverse ways in which political violence intersects with democratic processes. This research highlights the perils embedded in the very core of democracy– the electoral process. The analyses of various case studies examining four democracies during different election periods reveals a disconcerting reality – democracies inherently escalate violence and hate speech rhetoric during electoral epochs, albeit manifesting distinct intensities and modalities. Due to the constrained time frame of this research, the Twitter analysis was not thoroughly explored, with only the United States undergoing such scrutiny. Additionally, the other three cases lacked a Twitter analysis. Furthermore, while this paper illuminates the presence of soft domestic terrorism within democracies, it falls short in presenting a comprehensive set of policy recommendations to address this issue. Given more time, a more in-depth exploration of additional case studies, encompassing both successes and shortcomings, could have been pursued. There is also a missed opportunity to incorporate elements from majoritarian democracies to bolster the strength of the argument.

Primarily, elections exist as prominent flashpoints for political violence in the United States, extending beyond the confines of Election Day to include the entirety of the election administration process. In the case of India, pervasive cases of violence prevail in certain states not only during the grandiose national elections but also permeate local body elections, laying bare the tenacious grip of soft domestic terrorism in the nation. The delineation between flawed and full democracies assumes a pivotal role as a lens through which to derive conclusions concerning the heterogeneous frequencies and magnitudes of soft domestic terrorism. Instances from India and the United States substantiate a palpable correlation between elections and escalated violence, with incidents surging during these pivotal junctures. While Japan registers relatively fewer instances of violence in numerical terms, it remains susceptible to the disconcerting trend, especially as influential political figures like Prime Ministers become targets. Chile's experience underscores a distinctive concern, wherein attacks increasingly target women candidates.

All four cases reveal the impact of online communication and hate speech on the democratic fabric. Whether through hashtags in Chile, hate rallies and election-related rhetoric in Japan, communal tensions in India, or the surge in xenophobic language on social media in the United States, digital platforms have become arenas where divisive narratives thrive. Japan and India experienced attempts on the lives of political leaders, highlighting the vulnerability of candidates during campaigns. This commonality emphasizes the need for enhanced security measures and the recognition of potential risks to democratic stability. Additionally, the rise of

identity-based appeals and hate speech, evident in West Bengal's case and Japan's Zaitokukai movement, underscores the challenge of balancing free speech with preventing discrimination. The exploitation of identity politics for electoral gains poses threats to inclusive democratic ideals. Chile's anti-Venezuelan protests, Japan's anti-Korean rhetoric, and the surge in xenophobic language in the United States share common threads of societal resentment towards immigrants. Addressing xenophobia emerges as a shared imperative for preserving democratic values. India's history of communal violence, particularly in Gujarat, and West Bengal's shift towards identity politics showcase the enduring challenge of managing communal tensions during elections. Both cases underscore the importance of fostering inclusive political discourse. The United States exemplifies the transformative impact of social media on political campaigns through the integration of extremists into advisory roles and the use of Twitter to influence public opinion highlight the global implications of online platforms for democratic processes.

While each case presents distinct challenges, a common thread runs through them—the need for a holistic approach to safeguarding democracy. As the global landscape evolves, the lessons learned from these cases underscore the importance of adapting democratic institutions to the realities of the digital age, fostering inclusivity, and confronting the divisive forces that threaten the foundational principles of democracy. This investigation prompts a critical examination of the robustness of the democratic framework in these societies. It serves as a wake-up call for democracies worldwide to fortify their democratic foundations, particularly during the pivotal phases of elections. In a democratic milieu, citizens possess the inherent right to cast their votes in an ambiance characterized by peace and security. When the act of voting becomes tainted by threats or violence, the very essence of democracy stands imperiled. As Ursula Daxecker aptly suggests, the recurrent utilization of violence during elections implies an unconsolidated democracy.[65] The aspiration is that by comprehending these nuanced distinctions, valuable insights may be gleaned into the intricate dynamics influencing the prevalence of such threats. This understanding, in turn, holds the potential to contribute to judicious strategies aimed at addressing and mitigating soft domestic terrorism in democratic societies, especially pertinent as we stand a few months away from National elections in India and the United States scheduled for April and November, respectively.

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[65] Ursula Daxecker, 2020. "Unequal votes, unequal violence: Malapportionment and election violence in India," Journal of Peace Research, Peace Research Institute Oslo, vol. 57(1), pages 156-170.