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REPLY



Coding, Concessions, Conclusions: A Reply to Matt Qvortrup

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The idea for my re-examination of the relationship between consensus democracy and domestic terrorism comes from Arend Lijphart. In November 2014 I interviewed Lijphart at his home in San Francisco. Confronted with my reservations about the claimed relationship between type of democracy and terrorism in his recent publications, one co-authored with Matt Qvortrup, he said: “If you have that kind of critique, you should write a response, actually re-do the analysis.”¹ My article in this journal did just that.²

In his reply, Qvortrup makes three points. First, he defends the choice for a parsimonious model of the grievance theory of terrorism. Second, he opens a discussion about the scope conditions of the theory, suggesting it might be limited to only the highest quality democracies, economically developed democracies, or Western Europe. Third, he concludes that my critique cannot falsify the grievance theory of terrorism because it does not provide an alternative. In this rejoinder, I will respond to all three points in turn.

First, though, a clarification is in order. Different from what Qvortrup writes, my “main problem” is not with the grievance theory of terrorism. Instead, my main problem is with the empirical evidence presented in a series of publications on consensus democracy and deadly domestic terrorism by Lijphart and Qvortrup. At the heart of my article is a detailed critique of the coding decisions that led to their results. They consistently underreport deadly domestic terrorism in consensus democracies and overreport it in majoritarian democracies. If these controversial coding decisions are corrected, the relationship between degree of consensus democracy and the number of fatalities or the presence of deadly domestic terrorism, the two dependent variables, disappears. Moreover, all robustness tests come up empty as well.³

It is unfortunate that Qvortrup has not used this opportunity to shed light on his coding decisions. He merely offers the reassurance that “the greatest care was given to include cases.” Readers are therefore still left to wonder why the appendix in Qvortrup and Lijphart lists less cases of terrorism than the text. As anybody working with the Global Terrorism Database knows, coding decisions are often not straightforward. Qvortrup and Lijphart write that they are only interested in deadly terrorist attacks by domestic groups. This is a clear coding rule, but its application raises important questions and many of the coding decisions fly in the face of their own criteria.

While Qvortrup could have set the record straight in his response, he only admits to the misclassification of Israel, a single case. I demonstrate that in fact fifteen out of thirty-six countries need recoding, which drastically changes the overall picture as well as the results.

Now, coming to the three main points in Qvortrup's reply. First, the grievance theory of terrorism holds that political violence occurs when societal grievances do not find political expression and accommodation. There are at least four variables in this causal chain: grievances, political institutions, political representation, and terrorism. Most research only looks at two of these factors at a time, including Lijphart and Qvortrup's. I recommend looking at the complete causal model, preferably at the group level. I cite Neumann's case study of Northern Ireland because it effectively shows how the Irish Republican Army was motivated by access to power, not representation.⁴ This finding has important implications for policymakers seeking to persuade terrorist groups to give up bullets for ballots and suggests a fifth variable in the causal model: sharing executive power.

Second, to test whether Qvortrup's proposals to limit the scope of the theory can save the results, I have rerun all eleven regressions in my Table 2 for three subsets among the thirty-six countries in Lijphart's universe of democracies: the nineteen countries rated as full democracies in 2017 by the Economist Intelligence Unit; the nineteen West European countries; and the twenty-five-member states of the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD). The results for OECD countries closely mirror those reported in Table 2 in my article. Also, in line with what I discovered, the results for Western Europe and for full democracies are insignificant when the presence/absence of deadly domestic terrorism is the dependent variable, as in Qvortrup's recent work.⁵ However, if the number of fatalities is taken as the dependent variable, following Lijphart, most results are statistically significant.⁶

This result could be celebrated as a vindication of the theory, but such an interpretation has at least four problems. First, the results are driven by the cases of Spain and the United Kingdom. Without the two West European countries that suffered most from separatist violence, all results turn statistically insignificant. Second, there is no theoretical reason why the moderating force of inclusive institutions should be limited to one world region or democracies of the highest quality. Third, prior to the publication of my critique, Qvortrup still proposed the opposite, encouraging researchers to *extend* the analysis to the new democracies that emerged after the fall of the Berlin Wall.⁷ Fourth, the limited validity of the relationship between consensus democracy and domestic terrorism would caution strongly against the kind of bold conclusions ("majoritarian government breeds terrorism") and recommendations ("the risk of terrorism can be reduced through institutional reform") one finds in Qvortrup's work.⁸

Finally, there is no need to get Popper involved. Consensus democracy has been linked to more than seventy performance indicators, most of them positive. So far, few studies have gone from correlation to causation, with the result that we do not know precisely *why* consensus democracy is kinder and gentler and outperforms majoritarian democracy in many respects.⁹ The grievance theory of terrorism, which goes back at least to Crenshaw's influential work on the causes of terrorism from the 1980s, provides

an elegant explanation.¹⁰ However, as my re-analysis shows, it is an explanation for an empirical relationship that does not exist.

The failure of Lijphart and Qvortrup to demonstrate an empirical relationship between consensus democracy and terrorism among the world's thirty-six established democracies does not mean that research on this topic should now be abandoned. There are good reasons to focus on configurations of democratic institutions.¹¹ Neither should scholars and advocates of consensus democracy (these categories often overlap) be content that their expectations are borne out by one of the dependent variables for half of the cases. Instead, the next step should be to intensify the study of type of democracy and terrorism, to clarify the causal mechanisms, and to examine the causal chain through case-based research.

Notes

1. Matthijs Bogaards, "Making a Difference: An Interview with Arend Lijphart," *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft* 9, no. 1–2 (2015): 83–96, at 89.
2. Matthijs Bogaards, "Kinder, Gentler, Safer? A Re-Examination of the Relationship between Consensus Democracy and Domestic Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, doi:10.1080/1057610X.2018.1507312
3. The one exception is the relationship between consensus democracy and the number of deadly victims of domestic terrorism in the TWEED data set. This result, however, is driven by one country: Spain.
4. Peter Neumann, "The Bullet and the Ballot Box: The Case of the IRA," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 6 (2005): 941–975.
5. Matt Qvortrup and Arend Lijphart, "Domestic Terrorism and Democratic Regime Type," *Civil Wars* 15, no. 4 (2013): 471–485; Matt Qvortrup, "The Logic of Constitutional Engineering: Institutional Design and Counterterrorism from Aristotle to Arend Lijphart," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 41, no. 2 (2018): 96–108.
6. Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Democracies*, second edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 270–272.
7. Qvortrup, "The Logic of Constitutional Engineering," 102.
8. *Ibid.*, 101 and 104.
9. Matthijs Bogaards, "Comparative Political Regimes: Consensus and Majoritarian Democracy," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, ed. William Thompson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
10. Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," *Comparative Politics* 13, no. 4 (1981): 379–399.
11. My article does not discuss Qvortrup's earlier work on terrorism because it uses selected individual political institutions as "proxies" for consensus democracy, not degree of consensus democracy itself. Matt Qvortrup, "Terrorism and Political Science," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 14, no. 4 (2012): 503–517.