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Kinder, Gentler, Safer? A Re-Examination of the Relationship between Consensus Democracy and Domestic Terrorism

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ABSTRACT

Can inclusive institutions tame the threat of domestic terrorism? In a series of recent publications, the political scientists Arend Lijphart and Matt Qvortrup claim that consensus democracies are not only kinder and gentler, but also safer: consensus democracies are less likely to experience deadly domestic terrorism and when they do, they suffer fewer fatalities than majoritarian democracies. This article reexamines the logic and the evidence. It argues that the underlying grievance theory of terrorism contains important gaps and that the statistical results are based on a problematic coding of cases and lack robustness. Lijphart and Qvortrup have opened up an important new line of inquiry, but their results do not withstand scrutiny.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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In recent years, the literature has shown an increased interest in domestic terrorism. So far, research on political institutions and terrorism has focused on either the general (regime type) or particular (individual institutions). The first strand of research has queried whether democracies are less or more vulnerable to terrorism than non-democracies. The second strand has focused on select political institutions, with a special interest in the electoral system. Other political institutions that have been linked to terrorism are the number of interest groups, the number of veto players, the party system, and regional autonomy.

The work of Lijphart sits between these two extremes, as it looks at particular configurations of institutional features. Consensus democracy is a package of ten political institutions clustered in two dimensions: the executives-parties dimension and the federal-unitary dimension. Most research on the impact of consensus democracy has concentrated on the first, executives-parties dimension. The second, federal-unitary dimension, has received much less attention, probably because this dimension tends to be weakly related at best to outcomes of interest. The first dimension comprises composition of government, balance of power between government and parliament, electoral system, party system, and system of interest intermediation. The second dimension captures federalism, centralization, bicameralism, constitutional rigidity, judicial review, and...
central bank independence. On each criterion, countries can be more consensual or more majoritarian, depending on whether power is shared/divided or concentrated. Lijphart then calculates an overall score for each dimension and maps countries on his two-dimensional map of democracy. Switzerland and Belgium are typical consensus democracies. Barbados and the United Kingdom, before the reforms of the Labor Government in the 1990s, are typical majoritarian democracies.

The study of contemporary democracy has been influenced heavily by Lijphart’s typology of consensus versus majoritarian democracy. Scholars have applied it to more than 100 countries and sought to demonstrate its impact on over seventy dependent variables. One of these is terrorism. Lijphart finds a negative relationship between degree of consensus democracy and the number of fatalities caused by domestic terrorism. Qvortrup and Lijphart find a negative relationship between degree of consensus democracy and the presence of fatal domestic terrorism. If true, then consensus democracies are not only kinder and gentler—as demonstrated by more spending on social welfare and foreign aid, more women in parliament, less people in prison, environmentally friendly policies, and so on—but also safer. Other scholars have started to quote these findings.

This article presents a reexamination of the relationship between type of democracy and domestic terrorism, casting doubt on both the underlying argument and the empirical evidence. It starts with a summary of the grievance theory of terrorism, which is situated in the classic literature on the causes of terrorism. The next section questions the findings, focusing on coding decisions. This is followed by a series of robustness tests. The conclusion suggests that future research on the relationship between type of democracy and terrorism should look at the full causal chain from grievances to political inclusion, preferably at the group level.

The argument

For Qvortrup and Lijphart, terrorism is about grievances. They assume that individuals “will calculate the expected utilities of engaging in domestic terrorism or in electoral politics.” Terrorism “is the last resort for people who cannot be represented through the legal political system.” Grievance theories of terrorism have a long tradition in terrorism studies. Figure 1 visualizes the causal relations posited by Qvortrup and Lijphart in the context of Crenshaw’s influential work on the causes of terrorism. Crenshaw distinguishes between preconditions and precipitants, “specific events that immediately precede the occurrence of terrorism.” Preconditions are divided into enabling or permissive factors, which provide opportunities for terrorism, and instigating circumstances or reasons for terrorism.

As can be seen in Figure 1, Qvortrup and Lijphart’s model leaves out Crenshaw’s permissive factors. One reason could be that their universe of cases consists of established democracies, thereby keeping one background variable constant: a commitment to the rule of law and an excellent record in maintaining political rights and civil liberties, all of which reduce the government’s ability to crack down on terrorism in the way that dictatorships can. Their thirty-six democracies differ, though, on other factors that have been identified as enabling factors for terrorism, including degree of modernization, urbanization, and traditions that sanction the use of violence against the government.
Arguably, some of that variance is captured by the control variables in their statistical models.\(^{19}\)

Precipitants are catalysts or triggers that help to explain the timing of terrorism. Their omission from the causal model does not affect Qvortrup and Lijphart’s empirical analysis or results, as they are interested in whether terrorism occurred, not when. Their dependent variables are aggregates for a time period of twenty-five years. Therefore, the fact that Qvortrup and Lijphart left out some of the steps in Crenshaw’s causal chain leading to terror does not directly affect their findings.

More consequential is Qvortrup and Lijphart’s reconceptualization of the relationship between grievances and the opportunity for political participation. For Crenshaw, these are two separate conditions that represent distinct scenarios. In the first scenario, groups experiencing concrete grievances, for example discriminated ethnic minorities, organize into social movements. Terrorism is then “the resort of an extremist faction of this broader movement.”\(^{20}\) In the second scenario, grievances are political, not social or economic. They directly derive from the lack of opportunity for political participation. Here, terrorism is “essentially the result of elite disaffection.”\(^{21}\) Crenshaw cites revolutionary terrorism in, among others, nineteenth-century Russia and postwar Germany and Italy as examples. For Qvortrup and Lijphart, instead, it is the combination of grievances and lack of political representation that leads to terrorism. Although they do not say so explicitly, for them grievances are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for terrorism. Only when grievances are prevented from being voiced through regular political channels will they result in terrorism. In this model, political institutions make the crucial difference: inclusive institutions will allow grievances to be represented and, ultimately, accommodated, whereas exclusive institutions will result in “disenfranchised minorities” that resort to terrorism as the political system is effectively closed to them.\(^{22}\)

In reality, though, terrorist decision making seems to be more complicated than a choice between ballot and bullet. Many parties have links to terrorist groups, support terrorist groups, or engage in terror themselves.\(^{23}\) Some terrorists are bad losers, turning to bullets after they have failed to attract a sufficient number of ballots.\(^{24}\) Nor is the political opportunity structure necessarily the decisive factor in terrorist decision making. Some groups refuse to enter the “democratic political arena because they reject its validity from the outset.”\(^{25}\) Not all terrorist groups are susceptible to political incorporation. Aksoy and Carter distinguish between anti-system and within-system groups.\(^{26}\) They find that permissive electoral institutions reduce the likelihood of the latter.

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**Figure 1.** A causal theory of terrorism. Source: See text.
emerging but not the former.\(^{27}\) Engene also finds a relationship between anti-system parties and terrorism.\(^{28}\) Moreover, the appeal of inclusion only attracts terrorist groups behaving like rational actors, “those who employ terrorism on behalf of an external goal.” It will not affect decision making by those for whom terrorism performs an expressive function, “whose goal is to carry out acts of terror.”\(^{29}\) McGormick mentions the Portuguese Popular Forces of 25 April, the Japanese Red Army, and the German Baader-Meinhof Gang as examples of expressive terrorists.

The aim of this section has been to elucidate the causal chain in research on the relationship between type of democracy and terrorism. Qvortrup and Lijphart’s model can be seen as a simplified version of Crenshaw’s classic study of the causes of terrorism. It makes strong assumptions about terrorist decision making, assumptions that are difficult to satisfy empirically. The conclusion will return to these questions, following the reexamination of the evidence that consensus democracies are less prone to terrorism than majoritarian democracies in the next sections.

**The evidence**

In the second edition of *Patterns of Democracy*, Lijphart for the first time examines the relationship between consensus democracy and the number of deaths from domestic terrorism. As can be seen in table 1, the numbers that Lijphart reports for several countries (especially India, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States) seem too low. However, for the re-examination presented here, only those numbers have been reconsidered that change a country’s classification as having experienced fatal domestic terrorism: yes/no. The universe of cases consists of all thirty-six “countries (with populations of at least a quarter of a million) that were democratic in the middle of 2010 and that had been continuously democratic since 1989 or earlier.”\(^{30}\) For Lijphart, democratic means a rating of free by Freedom House. Using the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) for the period 1985–2010, he finds a negative relationship, statistically significant at the five-percent level using a one-tailed test.\(^{31}\) Logged population size, the Human Development Index, and the extent of pluralism, all measured around 2010, are used as control variables. The analysis is based on thirty-three established democracies, excluding three “extreme outliers”: India, Israel, and the United Kingdom.\(^{32}\)

Qvortrup and Lijphart find a statistically significant negative relationship between the degree of consensus democracy and domestic terrorism. Their dependent variable takes the value of 1 if there was at least one fatal domestic terror attack by a terrorist group between 1985 and 2010 and 0 otherwise. They include all thirty-six democracies from *Patterns of Democracy* and control for human development, population size, urbanization, and youth population.\(^{33}\) They find that a fatal terrorist attack is six times more likely in a majoritarian democracy than a consensus democracy.

Qvortrup’s latest publication appears to rerun the analysis in Qvortrup and Lijphart, with four additional control variables: Muslim population, immigrant population, Iraq war participation-dummy, and peace deal dummy.\(^{34}\) These control variables correspond to alternative hypotheses about domestic terrorism being positively associated with a large percentage of Muslims, a large immigrant population, and support for the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and negatively associated with comprehensive peace deals. No support
is found for these hypotheses and degree of consensus democracy is the only consistent predictor of the presence of domestic terrorism across all models.

Thus, despite a slight difference in the number of cases, operationalization of the dependent variable, and control variables, these three studies have substantively similar findings.

Before proceeding to a reexamination of the evidence, there are several conceptual issues that need to be clarified. First, what is terrorism? Second, what is domestic terrorism? Third, what is a terrorist group? Schmid lists over 250 definitions of terrorism. Qvortrup and Lijphart follow the U.S. Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act of 2007, but for practical purposes, what matters is the operationalization of terrorism in the GTD, the source of their data on terrorism. For the GTD, to count as terrorism, an attack needs to satisfy at least two of three criteria: (1) the action must be purposeful, aimed at achieving a goal beyond profit; (2) the action must be directed at an audience beyond the immediate victims; (3) the action must be outside of legitimate warfare.

So far, three attempts have been made to distinguish domestic and transnational terrorism using the GTD. For Enders, Sandler, and Gaibulloev, GTD incidents count as domestic terrorism if they are neither transnational nor uncertain. For them, an incident is transnational if the nationality of the victims does not match the location, in case of attacks on diplomatic targets, if the targets are U.S. or international entities, if the victims are U.S. citizens abroad, or if kidnappings and hijackings involve at least two countries. Incidents are classified as “uncertain” when information about the nationality of the victims, the target type, or the target entity are missing. The resulting datasets can be downloaded from the journal’s webpage.

LaFree, Dugan, and Miller distinguish between types of terrorism on the basis of three variables: the location of the attack, the nationality of the perpetrators, and the nationality of the victims. If the perpetrators stage their attack in a foreign country, then this constitutes what they term “logistical international terrorism.” If the perpetrators and the victims have a different nationality, then we are dealing with “ideologically international terrorism.” If the victims are attacked in a country other than their own, this is labeled “indeterminately international terrorism,” indeterminate because no information on the perpetrators is taken into account. In each case, domestic terrorism is the residual category.

For Berkebile, domestic terrorism requires that the nationality of the perpetrators, victims, and attack location match. He immediately runs into the problem that for a majority of events listed in the GTD, no information on the perpetrator is available. One reason is that the responsibility for many attacks is never claimed. To complicate matters further, the GTD does not provide information on perpetrator nationalities. Berkebile’s solution is to code the state of origin for each perpetrator group or individual acting alone “based on supplemental research.” He also makes use of short-cuts, assigning country codes to GTD generic descriptors such as “left-wing militants” or “dissidents.”

Unfortunately, it is not clear how Qvortrup and Lijphart distinguish cases of domestic terrorism. The example of Botswana shows the attendant risk of misclassification. Qvortrup and Lijphart explicitly mention what they call the “Sikwame Village attacks in Botswana (two deaths)” in 1990 as a terrorist attack. The GTD lists six deaths.
victims were Sam Chand and his family. Sam Chand was an exiled member of the Pan African Congress, an anti-apartheid organization that had been outlawed for decades in South Africa. Although the GTD lists the perpetrators as unknown, they were in fact South African security forces. This incident must be seen in the context of the struggle against South Africa’s apartheid regime. Therefore, it is not a case of domestic terrorism, but what LaFree et al. call “logistical international terrorism.” The GTD records two more terrorist incidents with fatalities in Botswana. A car bomb in 1987 has been linked to South African security forces. A bomb attack on a house in the capital in 1988 left one dead but there is no information in the GTD about the victim or the perpetrator(s). The case of Botswana shows that it is problematic to presume that actors are domestic when the perpetrators are unknown.

Qvortrup and Lijphart are only interested in terrorist groups, arguing that lone wolf terrorism is better explained by “individual psychopathological factors.” This interpretation, however, is disputed, with recent research pointing to the social, political, ideational, and cultural embeddedness of lone wolf terrorists. A second complication is the emergence of “leaderless resistance” and terrorist networks. Third, the fact that right-wing terrorism is predominantly the work of gangs and other loose collaborations means that a focus on organized groups misses out on most of this type of violence. In any case, in the absence of information on perpetrators for most GTD incidents, and in the absence of an operational definition of what constitutes a terrorist group, it is difficult to verify Qvortrup and Lijphart’s coding.

As can be seen in Table 1, out of thirty-six established democracies analyzed by Lijphart, seventeen experienced at least one fatal domestic terrorist incident in the quarter century up to 2010. Only two of these are consensus democracies in the sense that their political systems are located closer to the consensual pole than the majoritarian pole. India and Japan are the outliers. Qvortrup and Lijphart try to explain the deviant case of India by suggesting that terrorist attacks were “predominantly perpetrated by foreigners” and can be explained by “international relations.” They do not provide evidence for the first claim and while the conflict with Pakistan might account for terrorism in Kashmir and the 2008 Mumbai attack, it has little to do with, for example, left-wing violence in the center of the country or with ethnic terrorism in India’s north-east.

As one can see in Table 1, Lijphart’s coding of cases of domestic terrorism differs substantially from that in Qvortrup and Lijphart. Lijphart records seven more countries that experienced domestic terrorism: Bahamas, Barbados, Canada, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Korea, and Malta. With the exception of Korea, all these cases are described in the text of Qvortrup and Lijphart as having experienced fatal domestic terrorism. Therefore, the discrepancy between cases of terrorism in Lijphart compared with Qvortrup and Lijphart overlaps almost perfectly with the discrepancy between text and appendix in Qvortrup and Lijphart, suggesting that the appendix should be corrected.

Still, it is difficult to corroborate the coding for these seven cases with the GTD. In the Bahamas and Barbados, no information is available on the perpetrator(s), but according to media, the death of housing minister Charles Virgil in 1997 in the Bahamas was part of a kidnapping and robbery, not a political assassination. In Costa Rica, Qvortrup and Lijphart describe an incident in September 1995 in San Jose leaving one person dead, but
Table 1. Consensus democracy and terrorism.

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Source. Own compilation based on Lijphart (2012), Qvortrup and Lijphart (2013), and the Global Terrorism Database. The index of majoritarian democracy has higher values for majoritarian democracies and lower values for consensus democracies. In bold = recalculation and recoding of cases of domestic group terrorism with fatalities, based on the Global Terrorism Database.
the GTD records no terrorist incident of any kind for 1995 in Costa Rica. Likewise, the GTD has no record of an attack on a Toronto shopping center in 2006. The fatal incident in Beaconsfield, Canada, in 1995 seems to be related to a biker gang. The attack on the Maltese Labor Party in March 1992 that left two dead according to Qvortrup and Lijphart cannot be found as such in the GTD, which records an assassination that month of an unknown victim of unknown perpetrators. Undisputed is only terrorism in Jamaica. Finally, there is no explanation for the disagreement between Lijphart and Qvortrup and Lijphart about Korea, which the former lists as having suffered from fatal domestic terrorism and the latter not. The GTD records a total of two fatalities in two separate incidents, not the total of five victims reported by Lijphart. One concerns a group of university students beating a suspected police informer to death; the other a deadly attack on an American soldier. This information supports Qvortrup and Lijphart’s coding more than Lijphart’s.

Summing up, the table in Qvortrup and Lijphart’s article underestimates the number of countries suffering from terrorism. According to their text, six countries should be added. According to the information in Lijphart’s book, even seven countries. However, a closer look revealed that out of these seven, only one corresponds to the authors’ own coding rules. Botswana (transnational terrorism) and Trinidad and Tobago should also be taken off the list. Whether the storming and occupation of the parliament by a Muslim group in Trinidad and Tobago constitutes a coup or an insurrection can be debated, but the GTD does not view it as terrorism.

In addition to false positives there are false negatives. Surprisingly, no fatal domestic terrorist incidents are recorded for Israel. The explanation can be found in the text, which states that “the fatal attacks in this consensus democracy have been perpetrated solely by Palestinians who are not Israeli citizens.” This claim is contradicted by the Israeli chief of staff, who said in parliament that 45 percent of recent terror attacks were committed by Israeli Arabs. The murder of Prime Minister Rabin by a Jewish extremist is considered a lone-wolf operation, but the GTD lists an organization as being suspected. The case of Kach is even more clear-cut. Weinberg et al. discuss the transformation of Kach from a political movement to a terrorist group and political party. Kach was barred from running in elections in 1988 and outlawed after a former member killed twenty-nine Muslims in Hebron in 1994. The GTD lists Kach as involved in two fatal incidents in Israel, one in 1992 and the other in 2005.

Absent information on Qvortrup and Lijphart’s detailed coding decisions, it is impossible to say why they did not capture domestic terrorism in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, and Portugal. Even though much is still unclear about the terrorism that shocked Belgium in the mid-1980s, there is no doubt these incidents should have been coded. The same is true for the series of murders by the National Socialist Underground in Germany. While terrorism in Italy and Portugal peaked before 1985, there were still some deadly attacks afterwards.

Following Qvortrup and Lijphart’s logic about terrorists as political actors, only those incidents should be taken into account where the GTD contains the name of a group. In other words, a general reference to “left-wing militants” or a “neo-Nazi group” is not enough. Therefore, Table 1 does not record neo-Nazi deaths in Austria but does register the attack by the “Bootboys,” a Norwegian neo-Nazi group mentioned by name in the
GTD. The GTD attributes the murder of Theo van Gogh to the Hofstad group, therefore the Netherlands are also listed here as a positive case. It should be noted that there is no scholarly consensus on this classification. Whereas Vidino discusses the Hofstad group as a new type of terrorist group, which he calls a “jihadist network,” Schuurman et al. emphasize the lack of organization.  

According to Lijphart, domestic terrorism is almost exclusively a problem of majoritarian democracies. Out of seventeen majoritarian democracies, no less than fifteen experienced at least one fatal domestic attack by a terrorist group in the period 1985–2010. Of the nineteen consensus democracies, only two suffered this fate. The contrast could hardly be stronger. After the recoding of cases of terrorism, following Qvortrup and Lijphart’s own coding rules and time frame, the results look very different. Now, nine consensus democracies (47 percent) and seven majoritarian democracies (41 percent) experienced terrorism of the kind that Qvortrup and Lijphart causally connect to type of democracy. In other words, domestic terrorism is more likely to hit consensus democracies than majoritarian democracies, although the percentages are very close. As a consequence, it will be no surprise that a rerun of the regression analyses in Lijphart and Qvortrup and Lijphart with the recoded data yields results that are statistically not significant (see Table 2). What led the authors to overreport terrorism in majoritarian democracies and underreport terrorism in consensus democracies is not clear, but the implications are obvious.  

Comparisons over time are difficult because type of democracy tends to remain stable. In Lijphart’s study, the only countries to have substantially reformed their political system are France, which changed from a parliamentary to a semi-presidential form of government in 1958 and New Zealand, which replaced plurality elections in single-member districts with a mixed-member proportional electoral system in the mid-1990s. These two countries thus allow for a before-and-after check. We cannot verify whether France suffered an increase in terrorism after it turned more majoritarian because the GTD only goes back to 1970. New Zealand was safe before and after electoral reform.  

All the results discussed so far come from quantitative analysis. Case-based research on the relationship between type of democracy and terrorism does not exist. A partial exception is Qvortrup’s study of the impact of the introduction of a proportional electoral system, a cornerstone of consensus democracy, on terrorism in Algeria and Northern Ireland. In both cases, much more changed than the electoral system alone. In Northern Ireland the adoption of a specific form of proportional representation, the Single Transferable Vote, was part of a peace process and an elaborate set of power-sharing institutions. The consociational package of the Good Friday Agreement, which also includes a proportional cabinet and group veto rights, goes far beyond consensus democracy. In Algeria, terrorism was part of a civil war that broke out after the military regime annulled elections following an impending victory for an Islamist party. When the regime organized legislative elections in 1997, it was under a new electoral law meant to divide the opposition. Despite multiparty elections, Algeria is merely a competitive authoritarian regime, rated “not free” by Freedom House. Moreover, before, during, and after the 1997 elections, terrorism was at an all-time high and it remained high in the following years.
Robustness tests

How robust is the relationship between consensus democracy and terrorism against alternative measures of the dependent variable and an extension of the time period? Qvortrup and Lijphart limit their analysis to the period 1985–2010. The end point coincides with the last year for which data are available in Lijphart’s book, but it is not clear why 1985 is chosen as the starting point. Lijphart calculates the degree of consensus democracy for each of his thirty-six established democracies for the entire period since the end of World War II or the transition to democracy. Because the GTD currently has data for the period 1970 to 2015, it makes sense to make full use of this coverage and to replicate the analysis in Qvortrup and Lijphart for the period 1970–2015. This results in five more democracies with fatal terrorism conducted by domestic groups: Germany (Red Army Faction), Canada (Quebec Liberation Front), Italy (Red Brigades), Portugal (Popular Forces of April 25), and the Netherlands (South Moluccan terrorism). As can be seen in Table 2, with these five cases recoded, the statistically significant relationship between degree of consensus democracy and domestic terrorism disappears. In other words, if Qvortrup and Lijphart had made full use of the GTD, extending the analysis from 25 to 45 years, their conclusions would have had to be different.

As mentioned above, Enders et al. provide a dataset containing all domestic terrorist incidents in the GTD between 1970 and 2007. Their coding rules are not unproblematic. Enders et al. only use information about target/victims and location, not taking into account perpetrator nationality. This leads them to classify 11 September 2001 as a domestic terrorist attack. Nonetheless, their data allow for a robustness test of the findings in Lijphart and Qvortrup and Lijphart. For both, the results are negative: when the data from Enders et al. on domestic terrorism are used to measure the dependent variable, the results are statistically insignificant. As can be seen in Table 2, the same is true when Berkebile’s data on domestic terrorism, available for the period 1970–2010, are used.

For Western Europe, two alternative datasets on domestic terrorism are available: the Domestic Terrorism Victims (DTV) dataset and the Terrorism in Western Europe: Event Data (TWEED). According to the DTV, which has data on domestic terrorism in Western European countries from 1965 to 2005, fifteen out of eighteen countries covered experienced fatal domestic terrorist attacks. The only countries to escape this fate are Iceland, Luxembourg, and Finland. This does not leave much variation to work with. When DTV data are used as a robustness test of Lijphart’s analysis of the number of fatalities, the result is not statistically significant.

The TWEED dataset records intrastate terrorism between 1950 and 2004. Like the DTV, TWEED records fatal domestic terrorist incidents in the majority of Western European countries. To the three exceptions listed by the DTV it adds Denmark. Again, this leaves little variation. When TWEED data are used as a robustness test of Lijphart’s analysis of the number of fatalities, the result is statistically significant at the 10 percent level. However, the relationship disappears without Spain, which should be excluded following Lijphart’s policy about extreme outliers.

In sum, all robustness tests point in the same direction: the findings of Lijphart and Qvortrup and Lijphart do not hold. They do not hold when GTD data are used for the full period and they do not hold when DTV, TWEED, Enders et al., or Berkebile’s data
Table 2. Statistical relationship between type of democracy and domestic terrorism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Linear</td>
<td>Linear</td>
<td>Linear</td>
<td>Logistic</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2.357</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>-190</td>
<td>-174.9</td>
<td>384.1</td>
<td>2219</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>-0.446</td>
<td>0.242</td>
<td>0.416</td>
<td>0.912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard error</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>195.6</td>
<td>113.4</td>
<td>221.6</td>
<td>104.4</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>0.634</td>
<td>0.549</td>
<td>0.499</td>
<td>0.582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>5% (one-tailed)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>10%*</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes * = Loses statistical significance without Spain. n.a. = not available from original source.
Sources. See text. Results for the first column (Lijphart 2012) and the seventh column (Qvortrup and Lijphart 2013, text) are from the original source. All other calculations are by the author.
are used to measure the dependent variables. Most of the alternative sources were available to Qvortrup and Lijphart. This lack of robustness comes on top of and is separate from the problems with the coding of cases discussed above.

**Conclusion**

In a series of recent publications, the political scientists Lijphart and Qvortrup have sought to demonstrate the impact of type of democracy on the presence of deadly domestic terrorism and the number of fatalities. This article has reexamined the empirical evidence. It has shown how the conclusions are based on problematic coding decisions. Prior statistical results did not survive recoding and did not prove robust to the use of alternative data sets and time periods. In light of these findings, it is premature to conclude that “the more opportunities for political influence, the lower level of fatal terror acts perpetrated by domestic terror groups,”76 that “terrorism in democracies occurs when the citizens have inadequate opportunities to make themselves heard and when they fail to be represented in any meaningful way,”77 that “the more consensus-oriented the political system, the lower the level of domestic terrorism,”78 that “majoritarian government breeds terrorism,” or that “the risk of terrorism can be reduced through institutional reform.”79 These bold conclusions and policy recommendations are not supported by the evidence that Lijphart and Qvortrup have presented so far. Consensus democracies may be kinder and gentler, but their citizens are not safer from fatal domestic terrorism than those who live in majoritarian democracies.

Lijphart and Qvortrup have opened up an important new line of inquiry. How can the underlying theory be developed and the observable implications tested? As Figure 1 shows, grievances play an important role in Qvortrup and Lijphart’s causal theory. However, in their empirical analysis the scholars focus on the right-hand side of the causal chain. Grievances are assumed, not measured, even though there are various ways of doing so. Scholars have included measures of ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity80; ethnic tensions81; and minority discrimination.82 A variable that is missing in both the causal model and the empirical analysis, surprisingly, is political representation itself. Actual political representation would seem a crucial intervening variable between type of democracy and terrorism. The literature on civil war has demonstrated the importance of political inclusion.83 Recent studies extend this logic to terrorism. Most rely on the Ethnic Power Relations dataset, which combines information on politically salient ethnicity and the representation of ethnic groups in government. Choi and Piazza use the “percentage share of the excluded population in the total population that is ethnopolitically relevant.”84 Applying the same measure, Ghatak et al. conclude that “the discrimination of minority groups is one of the major reasons for domestic terrorism.”85 Gleditsch and Polo analyze the number of terrorist attacks per ethnic-group-country-year.86 In other words, they directly link the political inclusion of politically mobilized ethnic groups to terrorist attacks conducted on behalf of those groups.87 They find that a more inclusive political system reduces terrorism by moderate groups, although splinter groups might remain active. Using their own data set, Satana et al. find that political exclusion of religious minorities increases terrorism by group members.88 These last studies especially make two important contributions. First, they measure actual political inclusion. Second, they establish a direct link between
aggrieved groups and terrorist activity. Still, they suffer from three limitations. First, they prioritize political grievances. Political inclusion is both cause and remedy. Being left out of the government constitutes discrimination in and of itself. The reverse is also true, as inclusion in the government ends discrimination. Second, the analysis is limited to ethnic and religious minorities, although the same logic applies to ideological minorities. Third, there is no systematic attempt to examine the political institutions that facilitate or hinder inclusion. A more complete causal model should include at least four variables: grievances, political institutions, political representation, and terrorism.

Ideally, these causal connections should be studied at the group level. This would allow for a proper test of Qvortrup and Lijphart’s claim that the “perceived exclusion” of Sinn Fein, Herri Batasuna, and the Italian Communist Party “led to increased terror.”89 Or Qvortrup’s claim that Denmark has been spared Muslim terrorism because Muslims are represented in the national parliament.90 An analysis at the group level could also reveal whether consensus democracies are perhaps more inclusive with respect to some groups rather than others and through what particular mechanisms grievances are accommodated.91 More generally, Qvortrup and Lijphart assume that groups organize grievances and seek political redress. Are terrorist groups indeed more likely to participate in elections in consensus democracies? Recent research has started to look at the electoral participation of what are called “militant groups.”92 Acosta finds that more permissive electoral systems do not entice militant groups to transition to political parties.93 Focusing on terrorist groups, Brathwaite finds no evidence that the electoral system makes a difference for electoral participation.94 This is a reminder that not all terrorist groups are amenable to political inclusion and that some simply prefer bullets over ballots. In addition to large \( N \) studies, therefore, case studies and small \( N \) comparisons are needed that examine how type of democracy affects the decision making of (would-be) terrorists.95

Acknowledgment

The idea for this article comes from Arend Lijphart. In November 2014 I interviewed Lijphart at his home in San Francisco for an article that was published as “Making a Difference: An Interview with Arend Lijphart” in the Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft 9, No. 1–2 (2015): 83–96. When I confronted him with my reservations about the claimed relationship between consensus democracy and terrorism, he replied: “If you have that kind of critique, you should write a response, actually re-do the analysis” (p. 89). This article does just that. Previous versions were presented in the CEU Research Group on Conflict and Security, Budapest, December 2016, and at the NCCR conference on Challenges to Democracy in the 21st Century, University of Zürich, June 2017. The author would like to thank the participants for their helpful suggestions.

Notes


11. Qvortrup and Lijphart, “Domestic Terrorism and Democratic Regime Type,” 472.


15. Ibid., 472.

16. For a recent contribution focusing on two particular grievances, poverty and exclusion, see the exchange between Dipak Gupta versus Rowell Huesmann and Graham Huesmann, in *Contemporary Debates on Terrorism*, ed. Richard Jackson and Samuel Justin Sinclair (London: Routledge, 2012), 107–120.


22. Qvortrup and Lijphart, “Domestic Terrorism and Democratic Regime Type,” 474.
26. Della Porta’s research shows that these categories are not static. Over time, some groups radicalized, also because of the way authorities reacted. This observation suggests that radicalization may be endogenous (i.e., that type of democracy affects the objectives of terrorist groups). Donatella della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
33. Oddly, when human development is omitted from the model, statistical significance drops to 0.10. Qvortrup and Lijphart, “Domestic Terrorism and Democratic Regime Type,” 480.
34. Surprisingly, this latest article makes no mention of the previous study co-authored with Lijphart. Matt Qvortrup, “The Logic of Constitutional Engineering.”
41. Qvortrup and Lijphart, “Domestic Terrorism and Democratic Regime Type,” 481.

45. Qvortrup and Lijphart, “Domestic Terrorism and Democratic Regime Type,” 477.


49. Qvortrup and Lijphart, “Domestic Terrorism and Democratic Regime Type,” 481.


52. Many of the examples are repeated in Qvortrup, “The Logic of Institutional Engineering,” 3.

53. Other evidence: A replication of the statistical analysis only yields results similar to those reported by Qvortrup and Lijphart when the information from the text is used, not the appendix.


57. Qvortrup and Lijphart, “Domestic Terrorism and Democratic Regime Type,” 481.


59. Qvortrup and Lijphart, “Domestic Terrorism and Democratic Regime Type,” 481.

60. Weinberg et al., Political Parties and Terrorist Groups, 121–125.


65. The author has been trying since December 2016 to get information from Qvortrup about his coding decisions, but without success. In June 2017, Lijphart and Qvortrup received an earlier version of this article with the request for information about their coding. Lijphart asked Qvortrup to reply, which he did not.

66. As Young shows, most of the quantitative literature on terrorism uses country-years. Qvortrup and Lijphart’s reliance on binary coding or totals for long periods of time leaves out information on the timing of terrorism and on trends over time. Incorporation of such information would allow for the test of more dynamic hypotheses. Joseph Young, “Measuring Terrorism,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*. doi:10.1080/09546553.2016.1228630

67. Qvortrup, “T-Test for Terrorism.”


70. Qvortrup performs a t-test comparing the number of incidents before and after the legislative elections in 1997. Without information on the exact time period, it is not possible to verify the results. If, however, one compares the year prior to the elections with the twelve following months, one sees that the number of terrorist incidents reported in the GTD actually doubles.

71. To mention only the best-known terrorist groups for each country.

72. The author thanks Richard Berkebile for kindly sharing his data, which cover all thirty-six countries included in Table 1, except Iceland, Malta, and Mauritius.


76. Qvortrup and Lijphart, “Domestic Terrorism and Democratic Regime Type,” 482 (italics and missing definite article in original).

77. Qvortrup, “T-Test for Terrorism,” 301.

78. Qvortrup, “Terrorism and Political Science,” 514.


89. Qvortrup and Lijphart, “Domestic Terrorism and Democratic Regime Type,” 480.
90. Qvortrup, “The Logic of Constitutional Engineering,” 105. Moreover, in 2015 and 2016 the GTD reports terrorist incidents where Danish citizens with a migrant family background caused fatalities. In both cases, the GTD lists them as “Jihadi-inspired extremists.”
91. I thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this point.
95. Neumann’s case study of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) provides a good example. His study is designed as an explicit test of some aspects of grievance theory. Neumann shows that representation was less important for the IRA’s decision to seize its operations than access to power. Peter Neumann, “The Bullet and the Ballot Box: The Case of the IRA,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 6 (2005): 941–975.