Democratic Breakdown and Terrorism

Abstract: *Democracy is one of the most consistent predictors of terrorism. Yet, we know little about why there is an apparent relationship between terrorism and democracy. In this article, we argue that previous* democratic breakdowns *are a significant predictor of terrorist activity. While democratic civil liberties increase the opportunity to carry out terrorist attacks, they do not explain why groups are motivated to use terrorism rather than legal means for implementing change. However, a history of democratic breakdown creates grievances that motivate terrorism by excluding groups from the political process that once had full rights of participation. Cross-national statistical evidence from 1970 to 2007 reveals strong support for this hypothesis. It further demonstrates that only democracies that have experienced democratic breakdown experience more terrorism than autocracies. Moreover, an extreme bounds analysis indicates that previous democratic breakdown is one of the most robust predictors of terrorism and the most robust among variables conceptually related to democracy.*

Keywords: Terrorism: Terrorism; Democracy; Democratic Breakdown; Sensitivity Analysis

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No relationship in the terrorism literature is more thoroughly examined than the association between terrorism and democracy. A recent review article affirms the robustness of this relationship and points to several mechanisms previously identified as possible explanations (Chenoweth 2013). To single out but a few of the most prominent, democracies may experience higher levels of terrorism due to democratic competition (Chenoweth 2010), their vulnerability to coercion when civilians are targeted (Pape 2003), or civil liberties such as freedom of association that lower the barriers to carrying out terrorist attacks (Eubank and Weinberg 2001). Despite a thriving research program on terrorism and democracy, we still lack integrative theory and robust empirical analysis that allows researchers to make sense of competing explanations and to adjudicate among potential mechanisms.

In this article, we maintain that a history of democratic breakdown is one of the most consistent predictors of terrorism, including among democracies. Democracies, as scholars have argued for decades, are more likely to provide civil liberties that increase the opportunity to engage in terrorism (Eubank and Weinberg 1994, 2001). We maintain that this argument is theoretically sound but note that increased opportunity does little to explain the motivations behind terrorism. Even with greater opportunity to engage in terrorism, why would dissatisfied actors not pursue legal avenues for enacting policy change? Following a large body of research on the motivations for terrorism, we argue that grievances give rise to emotions such as anger and frustration that can motivate individuals and groups to adopt illicit tactics even when legitimate mechanisms to redress grievances exist (Crenshaw 1981; Walsh and Piazza 2010; Piazza 2017). Democratic breakdown is one important factor that promotes such grievances, because it necessarily excludes from the political process groups that were once able to participate. Moreover, we argue that these grievances are persistent and thrive even after re-democratization: although democratic breakdown immediately creates the motivation for terrorism, its effects are most visible when these grievances are coupled with the civil liberties that increase the opportunity for terrorism.

We test our hypothesis that democratic breakdown leads to increased terrorism using a time-series cross-sectional dataset of all domestic terrorist attacks carried out between 1970 and 2007. In addition to finding support for this argument, the analysis demonstrates that the relationship between terrorism and democracy is driven by democracies with a history of democratic breakdown; democracies that have not experienced a democratic breakdown do not suffer from more terrorism than autocracies. One concern is that theories that posit the overriding importance of new variables to well-researched subjects are always suspect. How can we know whether democratic breakdown influences terrorism across large numbers of reasonably specified models, rather than merely a few with researcher discretion in choosing covariates (Lenz and Sahn 2017)? Democratic breakdown is also related to a number of democracy-related variables, many of which have been posited as mechanisms connecting democracy and terrorism. To address these possibilities, we conduct an extreme bounds analysis to test the sensitivity of the relationship between democratic breakdown and terrorism across a large number of model specifications. We find that democratic breakdown is the most robust predictors of terrorism conceptually related to democracy and one of the most robust overall. While some democracy-related variables highlighted in the literature consistently predict terrorism, others receive limited support.

Democracy and Terrorism

Research into the relationship between terrorism and democracy is now decades old, and a recent review article surveys this literature in greater depth than could be accomplished in shorter space (Chenoweth 2013). We therefore concentrate on a few subsets of the literature relevant to our theory.[1]

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[1] Some recent studies find that the relationship between terrorism and democracy is curvilinear rather than linear (Gaibulloev, Piazza, and Sandler 2017; Chenoweth 2013, 359). Our theory is consistent with an inverted u-shaped relationship between terrorism and democracy, since it maintains that a history of democratic breakdown accounts for any apparent relationship between democracy (whether highly consolidated or not) and terrorism. Empirically, the analysis accounts for the possibility that the results are driven by intermediate regimes.

Our point of departure is the civil liberties and organizational approaches to explaining why terrorism occurs more frequently in democracies (Chenoweth 2013, 360–368). According to the former, democratic rights such as the freedom of association, movement, and expression provide opportunities for groups to engage in violent collective action (Schmid 1992; Eubank and Weinberg 2001). Other civil liberties, such as freedom of the press, can increase publicity for terrorism, thereby strengthening the incentive to carry out terrorist attacks (Hoffman 2006). According to the latter approach, democracies are susceptible to mobilization that allows people to "magnify their voices in a seemingly uneven playing field of powerful competitors" (Chenoweth 2012, 90). In other words, democratic competition provides an incentive for groups to outbid their competitors, and terrorism is one innovation that allows groups to gain an edge over their competitors (on outbidding and terrorism, see: Bloom 2004; Kydd and Walter 2006; Nemeth 2014).

Note that these explanatory frameworks are easily reconciled: democratic freedoms create opportunities for mobilization, which includes violent mobilization and terrorist activity. In line with this reasoning, many social movement theorists consider political opportunity an impetus for mobilization in general (Tarrow 1994). Research that examines terrorism from a sociological perspective sometimes situates terrorism within the broader world of collective action and argues that political opportunity is also a cause of terrorism (Oberschall 2004). We concur that democratic freedoms increase the opportunity for mobilization, which creates an environment in which terrorism is more likely due to relaxed barriers to committing terrorist attacks. Nevertheless, these approaches suffer from notable limitations. The civil liberties approach, for example, does not account for why terrorist groups "use violence" rather than "legal channels to pursue their interests," and the organizational approach overlooks that mobilization and terrorism could be caused by shared unobserved factors (Chenoweth 2013, 362, 368). In other words, the political opportunity that civil liberties afford terrorists cannot fully account for terrorism because it fails to address the motivation

and willingness to use violence rather than alternatives. Similarly, while civil liberties constitute a set of background opportunity factors that influence both mobilization and terrorism, the literature identifies few background factors that can explain the motivation for mobilization and terrorism.

Of course, several studies that do not treat democracy as their primary concern address the motivational factors that inspire terrorism. One area, which draws theoretical support from the relative deprivation school of political violence (Gurr 1970), argues that grievances increase terrorism (Lai 2007, 303). For instance, states that commit physical integrity rights violations, a subset of human rights violations that involve inflicting arbitrary physical harm on individuals, see higher levels of terrorism in part due to their alienating effects on the population and domestic political movements (Walsh and Piazza 2010, 556). Another study finds that states with high minority economic discrimination suffer from more terrorism (Piazza 2011). Grievance-heightening factors such as these certainly explain the motivation to commit terrorism, and they can influence both violent and non-violent mobilization (Johnston et al. 1994). Yet, there is reason to question whether these particular grievance related factors account for the relationship between terrorism and democracy.[2] Democracies tend to violate physical integrity rights less than other regimes (Young 2009). Moreover, physical integrity rights and terrorism are endogenous: some research indicates that terrorism increases physical integrity rights violations (Dreher, Gassebner, and Siemers 2010). Lastly, horizontal inequalities may help explain one subset of terrorism, ethnic or separatist terrorism, but they are unlikely to account for revolutionary terrorism.[3] While understanding ethnic terrorism is undoubtedly important, revolutionary or centrist terrorism is also a primary concern of the field (Crenshaw 1981).

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[2] The primary objective of these studies is to demonstrate the incremental validity of grievance-related concepts over democracy-related variables, rather than to account for the relationship between terrorism and democracy.
[3] On horizontal inequalities and ethnic conflict, see Cederman, Weidmann, and Gleditsch (2011).

Democratic Breakdown and Terrorism

Why use terrorism rather than legitimate means for pursuing policy change? This presents a puzzle for understanding terrorism in democracies, since the ability to shape policy through nonviolent mechanisms is a hallmark of democracy. Li (2005, 280-281), in a study that successfully isolates constituent components of democracy to determine which facilitate and which inhibit terrorism, demonstrates that democratic participation reduces terrorism, which is attributed to the increased ability for citizens to redress their grievances.[4] If democracy alleviates grievances, and if the grievance-inducing factors identified in the literature are less common in democracies, then what explains the motivation for terrorism in democracies? We advance the argument that a state's *historical experience* with democracy can increase grievances that persist even after the state democratizes again. Our core contention is that previous democratic breakdowns are an important factor that inflames group grievances, thereby raising the likelihood that terrorism is used even when alternative strategies are available.

How does democratic breakdown generate grievances? To answer this question, we must turn to the period preceding democratic breakdown. Democratic competition, as scholars of democratization and war point out (Mansfield and Snyder 1995, 2002), promotes nationalism and mass mobilization as elites compete amongst themselves to gain an electoral advantage. Once a democratic breakdown occurs, either when the military stages a coup or the executive suspends democracy (Maeda 2010), the national identities, political allegiances, and potential for mobilization cultivated under democracy do not dissipate. Democracy is, after all, a stock variable whose history exerts continued influence on contemporary events, rather than having only contemporaneous effects

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[4] Li's (2005) analysis is restricted to transnational terrorism, but his hypotheses are derived from a long literature that broadly subsumes domestic and transnational terrorism. In line with these expectations, some research shows that autocracies with peaceful avenues to enter politics (e.g. legislatures) experience less terrorism than those without (Aksoy, Carter, and Wright 2012). Li (2005) also finds that institutional constraints on the government increase transnational terrorism.

(Gerring et al. 2005). National identities are among the most stable and can persist across generations (Smith 1991), although there is evidence that political and other group identities are also strong and are often transmitted generationally (Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers 2009). Many individuals will cleave to these identities even once the democratic conditions that produced them are overturned. In fact, the subordinate status that newly excluded groups obtain may strengthen ingroup identities (see Huddy 2001, 130; Coser 1956).

Democratic breakdown necessarily excludes groups that previously competed under and participated in democracy. In the minimalist, Schumpeterian conception of democracy, leaders are selected into office through competitive elections for the public's votes (Schumpeter 1942; Przeworski et al. 2000; Boix, Miller, and Rosato 2012). If regimes are conceptualized as a complex of formal and informal rules that determine how leaders are selected and replaced, then autocracies are simply regimes in which leaders are not replaced through competitive state-wide elections (Debs and Goemans 2010; Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2014, 317). Rather, in autocracies leaders are selected by much smaller groups. In Selectorate theory, for instance, autocratic regimes have smaller Selectorates (individuals who participate in selecting the leader) and Winning Coalitions (the part of the Selectorate from which leaders can come) than democracies (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2005). Recent typologies of autocratic regimes similarly focus on the leadership groups that the leader relies upon to retain power; depending on the type of autocracy, these groups can include the military, a single political party, or the leader's family and confidants (Slater 2003; Weeks 2012; Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2014).

One distinction between democracy and autocracy is thus clear: autocratic regimes, no matter how inclusive relative to other autocracies, exclude large segments of the population from influencing leader selection. Accordingly, autocratic leaders have little incentive to implement policy that favors excluded groups because they are unable to affect leader tenure. Outside the groups that select the

leader, the only option excluded groups have to remove the leader is costly collective action, such as rebellion and revolution (Popper 1963, 124). Autocrats recognize this dilemma and are thus likelier to carry out preventive repression against excluded groups to deter potential mobilization (Dragu and Przeworski 2019). Of course, universal repression is uncommon even among autocracies. All regimes rely upon some combination of cooptation and coercion to deal with potential threats; autocracies, however, tilt more toward coercion than democracies (Wilson and Piazza 2013). Some research also indicates that radical policy preference—meaning policy preferences that reside on the extreme left or right of the political spectrum—among key social and political actors predicts democratic breakdown more than economic variables (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2013). Even when a popular uprising is a distant possibility, it is unlikely that radical leaders will treat their ideological outgroups charitably after suspending democracy.[5]

Following the relative deprivation school of political violence, these features of democratic breakdown are expected to generate grievances. According to relative deprivation theory, which informs contemporary research on grievances and political violence (Cederman, Weidmann, and Gleditsch 2011; Thomson 2016), grievances arise when there is a perceived discrepancy between the conditions an individual or group feels entitled to and the conditions they feel capable of reaching; importantly, the standards by which individuals determine what they are entitled to often derive from past conditions (Gurr 1970, 24-25). After a democratic breakdown, groups that were once included in the political process find themselves excluded and, quite frequently, new targets for state repression. We anticipate that these groups develop more pronounced grievances than otherwise similarly excluded groups that never had, and perhaps never expected, inclusion or representation in national politics.

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[5] See Tajfel and Turner (1979) on social identity theory.

Grievances, as argued in an extensive literature on the psychology of violence, increase emotions such as anger and frustration that lower the psychological barriers to political violence (Gurr 1970; Petersen 2002; Cederman, Weidmann, and Gleditsch 2011; McDoom 2012). This is one direct mechanism through which relative deprivation created by democratic breakdown can increase terrorism. Moreover, group grievances create an environment in which extremists can use terrorism to achieve their goals without alienating their constituents (Piazza 2017, 106). We depart from existing research on grievances and terrorism in focusing not on poor conditions, such as minority discrimination and human rights abuses, themselves but rather exclusion from a previously more equitable standard. Objective measures of inequalities are expected to matter less than perceptions—and this might partly explain why there is little evidence of a relationship between poverty and terrorism (see Sandler 2014, 263)—and these perceptions often follow from historical benchmarks.

Grievance, Opportunity, and Terrorism across Regime Type

Grievances have long been considered a root cause of terrorism (Crenshaw 1981, 383). However, quantitative research on grievances and terrorism highlights grievance-inducing factors such as physical integrity rights violations and minority discrimination that we know are less common in democracies (Walsh and Piazza 2010; Piazza 2011; Young 2009). Along with research showing that democratic civil liberties increase the opportunity for terrorism, the existing literature thus implies that grievances are secondary to opportunities in explaining why democracies experience more terrorism. We nonetheless argue that grievance and opportunity jointly explain variation in terrorism across regimes. Accordingly, we conjecture that the highest levels of terrorism will be seen in democratic states with a history of democratic breakdown; these states have both the grievances and opportunities that facilitate terrorism.

If democratic breakdown increases grievances that motivate terrorism by excluding groups that could once participate in politics, then it follows that autocracies established through democratic breakdown will experience more terrorism on average than other autocracies. After democratic breakdown, groups that once could participate are excluded and this discrepancy between expectation and reality heightens grievances that increase the likelihood these groups turn to political violence. Other research finds that autocracies with legislatures have less terrorism, presumably due to institutional channels that allow for nonviolent policy change (Aksoy, Carter, and Wright 2012). Interestingly, the logic may be reversed in democracies: when there are many veto players (i.e., actors whose agreement is necessary for a policy decision), the costs of participation are low and thus the likelihood of changing policy is also low and the incidence of terrorism high (Young and Dugan 2011, 21-22). Existing evidence therefore suggests, irrespective of the mechanism involved, that foreclosing legitimate opportunities for legitimate policy change increases terrorism. We add that removing these opportunities where they once existed further increases terrorism through the grievances these changes produce.

But why should democracies with a history of democratic breakdown suffer more terrorism than other democracies? While democracy reduces grievances by opening legitimate avenues for participation (Li 2005), re-democratization is unlikely to quickly alleviate grievances formed due to exclusion after democratic breakdown. Groups that were previously excluded under autocracy are still predisposed to perceive themselves as disadvantaged relative to the status they would have retained had democracy never collapsed; the gap between expectation and reality created after democratic breakdown persists, in part because the disparities resulting from exclusion take long to remedy. Evidence that democracy reduces economic inequality, for instance, is at best limited (Timmons 2010), and the disparities that serve as constant reminders of the status denied after democratic breakdown are similarly bound to persist after democratization. What matters for the grievances that can induce

violence is not a reduction in absolute conditions, which democracy improves by allowing participation, but rather the perception that the group's actual conditions do not align with the conditions to which the group feels entitled.

Moreover, the length of time passing between democratic breakdown and return to democracy should matter minimally. Grievances are not expected to naturally alleviate under prolonged autocratic rule following a democratic breakdown, since many individuals "carry the burden of profound grievances throughout their lives and pass them onto their children;" relative deprivation can thus "endure for a community almost indefinitely after its onset" (Gurr 1970, 59, 83). When significant time passes before re-democratization, it is likelier that the second generation of excluded group members take up terrorism for the simple reason that older individuals are less likely to engage in violent collective action. Second-generation group members are not only sensitive to the same disparities that began under the first generation, they are also more inclined toward frustration at foreclosed opportunity than the older generation whose life outcomes are established and unlikely to radically change (Moller 1968, esp. 241-44). Moreover, terrorism almost always arises from a long process of radicalization that begins with less extreme forms of contention. Terrorism scholars have long noted that it is "usually a second generation of radicals" that becomes the most excessive, for it is only after a process that involves experimenting with nonviolent tactics that groups turn to terrorism (Sprinzak 1991, 56). Second generation members are therefore likelier to turn to terrorism when the more limited tactics of previous efforts fails to close their perceived gap between expectation and reality.

We therefore hypothesize that only democracies with a history of democratic breakdown will experience more terrorism than autocracies. In these democracies, grievances that arose from democratic breakdown combine with the increased opportunities to engage in terrorism observed in a long literature on democracy and terrorism. While autocracies formed through democratic

breakdown should experience more terrorism than other autocracies, in both cases the coercion typical in autocracies should suppress terrorism below the levels experienced by democracies with a history of democratic breakdown. Democratization is unlikely to alleviate grievances formed as a result of democratic collapse: the intergroup disparities suspending the democratic process creates take time to remedy, and the perceptions that the group's relative status is lower than its deserved status is likely to endure.

Anecdotal evidence from several important cases help illustrate these pathways to terrorism. Take, for instance, the Red Army Faction (RAF) and assorted leftist terrorists in 1970s West Germany. When Hitler suspended democracy in 1933, left-wing parties and organizations were clearly excluded from politics and often faced severe repression under the Nazi regime (Fritzsche 1998, chap. 3). Post-war democratization did not undo these disparities. The political left remained weak into the 1950s—the Communist Party was banned in 1956—and in the 1960s several leftist organizations were formed that "operated outside of party politics and the electoral process" (Varon 2004, 31). This tendency toward extralegal action culminated in the formation of the RAF and other left-wing terrorist groups in the late '60s and early '70s. According to our theory, one reason that part of the West German left embraced terrorism is frustration at political disparities that started under Nazi exclusion and were not fully remedied after democratization. Indeed, many officials from Nazi Germany continued to hold prominent government positions during the democratic era (Arendt 1977). Frustrated with discrepancy between their actual and expected political influence, some leftist activists and most notably the second-generation upset with the slow pace of reform turned to terrorism.

Spain's history with terrorism tells a similar story. ETA, the notorious Basque separatist group, was formed in 1959 by university students dissatisfied with the relatively moderate Basque Nationalist Party, which suffered significant repression after Franco took power in a civil war that dissolved the Second Spanish Republic. Although the ETA committed some terrorist attacks in the 1960s, it was

the later and younger generation of the ETA that consistently pursued violence even after Spain democratized; older ETA militants came to "despair of the endless cycle of violence" while a "new generation of young and unsophisticated activists would replace them and put their hopes in violence" (Preston 1986, 24, 93). This narrative is consistent with the horizontal inequalities school of relative deprivation and violence, which maintains that inequalities among groups affects political violence through grievances (Østby 2008; Cederman, Weidmann, and Gleditsch 2011). While research on horizontal inequalities brackets the question of the origins of inequalities, noting that "ethnic groups find themselves in radically different situations for various historical reasons" (Cederman, Weidmann, and Gleditsch 2011, 480), we argue that the ways in which inequalities are established matter. Our argument is that in cases of ethnic terrorism, such as the ETA, it is not the horizontal inequalities per se that matter, but that inequalities established through democratic breakdown exclude groups that were once included. Moreover, as the RAF case suggests, our theory is not relevant only to ethnic conflict: democratic breakdown can lead to revolutionary terrorism by political groups excluded from politics.

To summarize, there are two primary testable implications of this theory. First, it is anticipated that a history of democratic breakdown leads to more terrorism. Since democratic breakdown foments grievances that provide motivation for terrorism, it is expected to uniformly increase terrorism irrespective of regime type. Second, it is expected that only democracies with a history of democratic breakdown will experience higher levels of terrorism than autocracies. Other democracies provide opportunity for terrorism but lack what this article maintains is a key factor in generating the grievances that motivate individuals to use illegitimate violence.

Hypothesis 1. *A history of democratic breakdown leads to an increase in terrorism.*

Hypothesis 2. *Democracies with a history of democratic breakdown experience more terrorism than autocracies, but democracies without a history of democratic breakdown do not.*

Statistical Analysis

Our statistical analysis is performed with a time-series cross-sectional dataset covering 1970 to 2007;[6] the unit of analysis is the country-year. The dependent variable, taken from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), is the number of domestic terrorist attacks committed in a country-year.[7] We restrict to domestic attack since our grievance theory should apply specifically to terrorism committed by domestic groups that were excluded following democratic breakdown. Moreover, domestic and transnational terrorism have different underlying causes (Sanchez-Cuenca and de la Calle 2009; Young and Findley 2011).

The key independent variable is Boix, Miller, and Rosato's (2013) count of the number of democratic breakdowns a country has experienced in its history. The authors consider a country democratic when it "has competitive elections and has enfranchised a majority of the male population," and a reversion from this standard is marked as a democratic breakdown (Boix, Miller, Rosato 2013, 1529). This variable is desirable because it captures qualitative transition in democracy, which proxies such as change in Polity score may not. It also provides a difficult test for our hypothesis, since most groups in states transitioning away from a low threshold of democracy presumably have lower levels of inclusion than social groups in consolidated democracies. At the same time, the qualitative distinction between competitive democratic elections and its alternatives (e.g. military or personalist rule) is unmistakable. Stripping citizens of their electoral rights, even when the 'level' of democracy is

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[6] These are the years for which there is full coverage on the dependent and key independent variables.
[7] As is well known in the terrorism literature, the GTD is missing data for the year 1993.
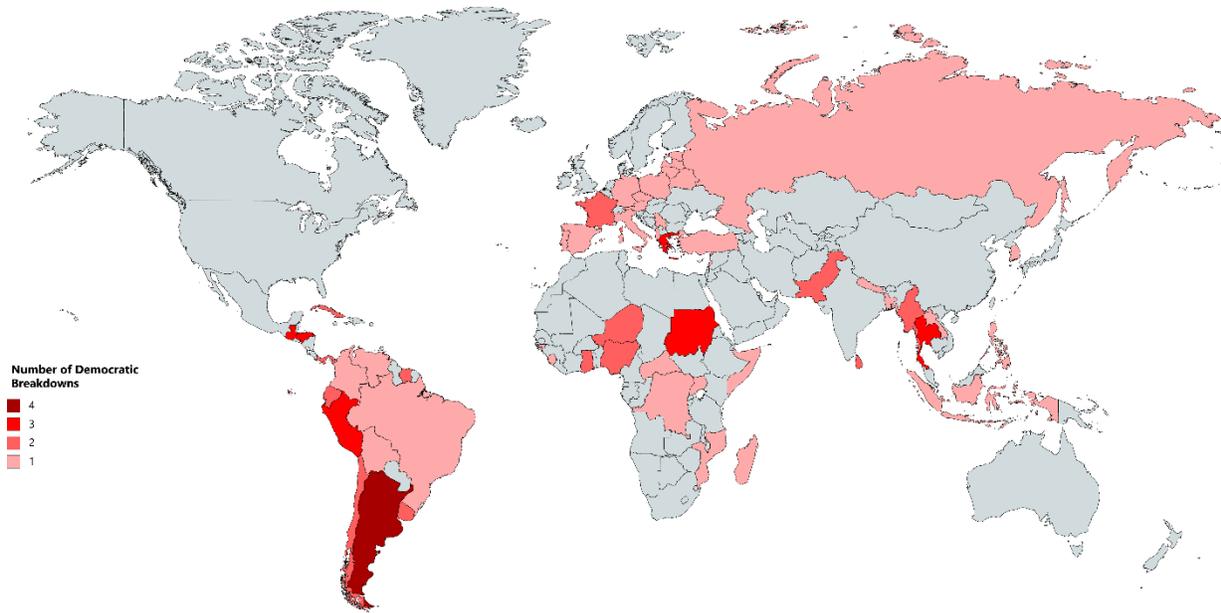
Figure 1. Number of Democratic Breakdowns by Country

low, is bound to spark grievances since for the groups that do not directly impact leader selection this removes the only means through which they can influence policy.

Empirically, the democratic breakdown variable ranges between zero and four democratic breakdowns within a single country history. Using the original count measure, rather than collapsing it into a binary variable, is appropriate for testing hypothesis 1: multiple democratic breakdowns should increase terrorism-fueling grievances, either by excluding new groups or repeatedly excluding the same groups.[8] Figure 1 depicts the global distribution of democratic breakdowns. Two key trends from this figure are worth noting. First, democratic breakdowns have occurred multiple times in every continent with the exception of North America. Thus, there is little concern that results from the statistical analysis are driven exclusively by one or two regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa, that could experience both frequent democratic breakdowns and terrorism. Second, there are several countries,

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[8] Results are robust to instead using a dichotomous indicator.

particularly Iraq and Afghanistan, that experience high levels of terrorism but have not suffered from democratic breakdowns. This relationship is due to the fact that democratic breakdown and civil war are alternative mechanisms that lead to the same outcome (excessive terrorism). Democracy and civil war are perhaps the variables most frequently cited as causes of terrorism (see Findley and Young 2012; Chenoweth 2013). Our argument is that democratic breakdown is the most important predictor of terrorism conceptually related to democracy; civil wars tend to dramatically increase terrorist attacks for alternative reasons, and civil wars occur infrequently in democracies (Hegre et al. 2001).

A series of control variables that could possibly confound the relationship between democratic breakdowns and terrorism—civil war, Polity score, Polity squared, logged GDP per capita, logged population, and regime duration—is included in our statistical model. We deliberately restrict the covariates to the most theoretically relevant subset that most likely confound the relationship of interest (Achen 2005). Civil war is a binary indicator for whether the country is undergoing an intrastate conflict resulting it at least 25 battle deaths in a given year, taken from the UCDP. We also include the ordinal Polity score along with its squared value. The squared term is necessary to ensure that the results are not an artifact of the greater likelihood for intermediate regimes to both experience greater terrorism and democratic breakdowns (Gailbulloev, Piazza, and Sandler 2017; Chenoweth 2013, 359).[9] GDP per capita and population, from which we calculate the natural log, are both taken from Haber and Menaldo (2011). Some models also include an ordinal measure of physical integrity rights violations (Cingranelli and Richards 2010), since this could confound the relationship between democratic breakdown and terrorism (Walsh and Piazza 2010). This variable extends back only till 1981, and thus it is not included in every model.[10] Lastly, we include Boix, Miller, and Rosato's (2013)

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[9] Although one limitation with Polity is that conflict is built into the measure (Vreeland 2008), we account for this by controlling for civil war at even the lowest threshold.

[10] CIRI's physical integrity rights violations variable is ordinal and ranges from 0 for extensive violations to 8 for no violations. We reverse this coding so that higher values indicate more physical integrity rights violations.

count variable for regime duration, since the recentness of democratic breakdown or transition back to democracy could confound the primary relationship of interest.

Since the dependent variable is an event count with a high proportion of zeros, negative binomial regression is an appropriate estimation strategy (Hilbe 2007). We therefore fit the following model:

$$\Pr(Y_{it} = \mathcal{Y}_{it}|X_{it}, \delta_i) = \frac{\Gamma(\lambda_{it} + \mathcal{Y}_{it})}{\Gamma(\lambda_{it})\Gamma(\mathcal{Y}_{it} + 1)}\left(\frac{1}{1 + \delta_i}\right)^{\lambda_{it}}\left(\frac{\delta_i}{1 + \delta_i}\right)^{\mathcal{Y}_{it}}$$

where $\mathcal{Y}_{it}$ denotes the count for country i at time t, $\lambda_{it} = \exp(X_{it}\beta + \text{offset}_{it})$, and δ_i is the dispersion parameter. We estimate the models with standard errors clustered at the country level to account for the statistical interdependence of observations within the same state. Moreover, we also estimate the results from a conditional fixed-effects model where the joint probability of the country counts are conditioned on the sum of the counts for the country (i.e., $\sum_{t=1}^{n_i} y_{it}$). Lastly, models are estimated with year fixed effects to account for temporal heterogeneity.[11]

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the results from several negative binomial regression models. Model 1 is the base model specification and model 2 adds the ordinal measure of physical integrity rights violations. Models 3 and 4 replicate models 1 and 2 using conditional fixed effects to account for unit heterogeneity. Democratic breakdown is statistically significant across models. Although the tables report statistical significance to the 1 percent error level (p-value < 0.01), democratic breakdown is statistically significant at above the 0.1 percent error level (p-value < 0.001) in every model. This

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[11] Results are robust to instead estimating an autoregressive model with a lagged dependent variable.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Democratic Breakdowns	0.716***	0.219***	0.605***	0.166***
	(0.164)	(0.0371)	(0.146)	(0.0411)
Polity 2	0.0743***	0.0488***	0.107***	0.0677***
	(0.0142)	(0.00521)	(0.0151)	(0.00627)
Polity Squared	-0.00860***	0.000399	0.000384	0.00452***
	(0.00318)	(0.000997)	(0.00301)	(0.00122)
Civil War	2.130***	1.013***	1.607***	0.849***
	(0.264)	(0.0623)	(0.268)	(0.0770)
Physical Integrity Rights			0.370***	0.148***
			(0.0486)	(0.0178)
Population (ln)	0.518***	0.0572**	0.260***	0.0375
	(0.0817)	(0.0279)	(0.0731)	(0.0328)
GDP per capita (ln)	0.0427*	0.0162**	0.0675**	0.0186*
	(0.0258)	(0.00755)	(0.0278)	(0.0100)
Regime Duration	0.00384	0.00279***	0.00306	0.00297***
	(0.00242)	(0.000733)	(0.00236)	(0.000865)
Constant	-3.422***	-3.909***	-3.041***	-2.626***
	(0.751)	(0.336)	(0.688)	(0.274)
Observations	4,911	4,753	3,265	3,122
Fixed Effects		✓		✓

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 1. Democratic Breakdown and Terrorism

finding is relevant given recent recommendations to redefine statistical significance to p-values lower than 0.005 (Benjamin et al. 2018). Moreover, the significant results in the fixed effects models suggests that democratic breakdown has a within-unit causal effect on terrorism. In line with existing research, states that with higher Polity scores, intermediate levels of democracy, high physical integrity rights violations, and civil wars experience more terrorist attacks on average.

The Historical Legacy of Democratic Breakdowns on Terrorism and Democracy

According to the theory, democratic breakdown should largely account for the relationship between terrorism and democracy. To test this argument, we create two binary indicators: one for democracies that have experienced at least one democratic breakdown in their history and one for democracies that have never experienced a democratic breakdown.[12] Dichotomizing democratic breakdown is acceptable because our theory stipulates that the most significant distinction is between states that have experienced democratic breakdown and those that have not. Since these two dichotomous variables are indicators for whether the state is a democracy, the Polity score variables are omitted due to collinearity. Fixed effects are also not used in these models because the relevant comparisons are across states rather than within them.

Results are conveyed in table 1. As model 5 shows, the variable for democracy/ democratic breakdown is statistically significant, whereas democracies that have not had at least one democratic breakdown are not more likely to suffer from more terrorism than autocracies (autocracy is the baseline category). One possibility is that states with past democratic breakdowns experience more terrorism irrespective of regime type. Model 6 addresses this by adding another binary indicator for whether the regime is an autocracy and has experienced a previous democratic breakdown, which means the baseline category is authoritarian regimes with no history of democratic breakdown. All three regime types—democracies with and without a history of democratic breakdown, and autocracies with a history of democratic breakdown—have positive and statistically significant coefficients, indicating higher rates of terrorism relative to autocracies with no history of democratic breakdown. This fits with the theoretical expectations: these baseline autocracies have neither the

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[12] We use Boix, Miller, and Rosato's (2012) coding for democracy. A quick glance at figure 1 demonstrates that many states fall in each category. For example, Canada, the United States, South Africa, Mexico, Hungary, and Great Britain never experienced a democratic breakdown, whereas Germany, France, Colombia, Niger, Argentina, and the Philippines each had at least one breakdown. Results are robust to instead using Polity to measure democracy, where state-years with a Polity score of 6 or higher are coded as democracies.

	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Democracy, Previous Breakdowns	0.911*** (0.277)	1.640*** (0.281)	1.306*** (0.296)	1.822*** (0.305)
Democracy, No Previous Breakdowns	0.0760 (0.256)	0.608*** (0.220)	0.649*** (0.231)	0.967*** (0.240)
Autocracy, Previous Breakdowns		1.393*** (0.402)		1.182*** (0.449)
Civil War	2.268*** (0.306)	2.470*** (0.291)	1.688*** (0.341)	1.899*** (0.279)
Physical Integrity Rights			0.303*** (0.0607)	0.275*** (0.0537)
Population (ln)	0.618*** (0.0895)	0.540*** (0.0878)	0.388*** (0.0756)	0.330*** (0.0789)
GDP per capita (ln)	0.0495** (0.0234)	0.0434 (0.0270)	0.0630* (0.0335)	0.0621* (0.0366)
Regime Duration	0.000297 (0.00256)	0.00416 (0.00268)	0.000487 (0.00248)	0.00343 (0.00259)
Constant	-3.811*** (0.640)	-4.323*** (0.739)	-2.767*** (0.752)	-3.081*** (0.843)
Observations	4,919	4,919	3,270	3,270

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 2. Democracy, Democratic Breakdown, and Terrorism

pportunity nor systematic grievances that increase terrorism. Although both democracy variables are statistically significant, a Wald test reveals a statistically significant difference in these coefficient estimates ($\chi^2 = 14.6$, p-value = 0.0001). Models 7 and 8 include the variable for physical integrity rights violations, which produces similar results.

Robustness Checks

Robustness checks are placed in appendix §1 for space considerations. It is theoretically possible that the causal relationship is actually reversed: terrorism could cause democratic breakdowns, and

continued terrorist activity could create the erroneous impression that democratic breakdowns cause terrorism. Two additional tests are conducted to address this endogeneity problem. First, the model is estimated using only Western countries, which we operationalize to include Europe, Australia, Canada, and the United States. None of the democratic breakdowns in Western countries are recent: all but one precede 1970, when the data start, and many are traced back to the period leading up to WWII. It is therefore impossible for these democratic breakdowns to have been influenced by terrorism since 1970. If our argument about the persistent effects of democratic breakdown is sound, then we should expect the relationship to hold even in these cases. An additional benefit of estimating the model on this subset of the data is that observations are restricted to democracies, which helps ensure that results are not driven by autocratic states that experienced democratic breakdowns. Second, we include an instrumental variable analysis. While these approaches have limitations, as discussed in the appendix, they improve our confidence that a causal relationship exists between democratic breakdown and terrorism. Despite protecting against endogeneity, one might wonder whether important omitted factors are still confounding the relationship. Instead of presenting a few additional models with different covariates here, however, the paper carries out an extreme bounds analysis to examine the robustness of the relationship between democratic breakdown and terrorism across thousands of model specifications.

SENSITIVITY ANALYSIS

Several limitations arise when positing the importance of a new variable to a well-studied area, especially when that variable is conceptually similar to those already acknowledged as relevant. Is an association between democratic breakdown and terrorism an artifact of including discretionary covariates in the model (Lenz and Sahn 2017)? Or, are important confounding variables excluded from the model? Is democratic breakdown a consistent predictor of terrorism across most reasonably

specified models? We address these limitations using extreme bounds analysis, a method previously used to examine nuclear proliferation (Bell 2016) and civil war onset (Hegre and Sambanis 2006). Extreme bounds analysis operates by estimating a model for every possible combination of covariates, rather than a small set of the total possible models with researcher discretion in choosing which to include. More specifically, extreme bounds analysis estimates a series of models with the following form:

$$Y_{it} = \alpha_j + \beta_j f_{it} + \gamma_j R_{it} + \delta_j D_{jit} + \varepsilon$$

where j indexes regression models, f is any focus variable for the analysis, R is a vector of required variables included in every model, D_j is a vector of k variables taken from the set of X doubtful variables, and ε is the normally and identically distributed error term. This equation is estimated on each of the M possible combinations of $D_j \subset X$. Using this framework, two primary standards for determining whether a variable is robust are used. Leamer's (1985) extreme bounds analysis takes any focus variable f and defines its extreme bounds as the minimum and maximum values of $\hat{\beta}_j \pm \tau \hat{\sigma}_j$ for the M estimated regression models, where τ is the critical value for the desired confidence level (i.e., approximately 1.96 for a 95 percent confidence interval). Variable f is declared robust if the upper and lower bounds share the same sign.

Admittedly, Leamer's (1985) criterion is a stringent standard, since the estimates from a single regression model are sufficient for labeling a relationship fragile. In other words, coefficient β_j is considered fragile when its sign changes or it becomes statistically insignificant in even a single model. Sala-i-Martin (1997) therefore presents an alternative approach that examines the full distribution of coefficient estimates rather than solely the minimum and maximum estimates, which allows

researchers to move beyond a binary application of the labels "robust" or "fragile" to variables. This approach examines the fraction of the cumulative distribution function (CDF) of estimator β_j lying on each side of zero. The general version of the approach is to estimate CDF(0), $\phi_j(0|\hat{\beta}_j, \hat{\sigma}_j)$ or the CDF at zero, for each individual model in M and combine them into the weighted average:

$$\Phi(0) = \sum_{j=1}^{M} w_j \, \phi_j(0|\hat{\beta}_j, \hat{\sigma}_j^2)$$

where w_j are weights allowing researchers to give greater weight to models likelier to be closer to the unobserved "true" model. Although Sala-i-Martin (1997) applies weights that are proportional to the integrated likelihood, other goodness of fit statistics such as R^2 or the adjusted R^2 are viable alternatives.

Extreme Bounds Analysis Results

We use recently developed tools for conducting extreme bounds analyses to examine the sensitivity of different coefficient estimates to alternative model specifications (Hlavac 2016). We transform the dependent variable into a continuous measure by adding one and taking the natural log for each observation. Although negative binomial regression would seem more appropriate, this approach is adopted to address another problem. Many variables in the models are conceptually related to democracy and therefore suffer from multicollinearity, which makes determining what measures are actually driving the relationships difficult and can yield unstable coefficient estimates. We therefore restrict to models in which the variance inflation factor for a given coefficient does not exceed 7, where $VIF_{ji} = \frac{1}{1-R_{ji}^2}$ for an equation regressing each independent variable i on the other covariates from each model j. It is only possible to implement this procedure in an extreme bounds analysis using

ordinary least squares regression.[13] We apply weights to each model using the adjusted R^2 statistic to more heavily weigh models with superior goodness of fit while insuring against overfitting. Standard errors are derived using standard heteroskedasticity and autocorrelation consistent covariance estimation strategies (White 1980; Zeileis 2004).[14]

Additionally, since we have an exploratory interest in uncovering the factors most consistently related to terrorism, we treat all doubtful variables D_j as focus variables f. Our vector of required variables, R, includes two variables, GDP per capita and population, since these are standard covariates in the conflict literature and their exclusion almost certainly means a model is mis-specified. In addition to the variables from the preceding statistical analysis, our vector of doubtful variables includes several factors that have been posited as explanations for the relationship between terrorism and democracy, such as executive constraints (Li 2005), judicial constraints on the executive (Findley and Young 2011), political competition (Chenoweth 2010), media freedom (Hoffman 2006), policies that discriminate against social groups (Piazza and Walsh 2010), physical integrity rights (Piazza 2011), and various civil liberties (Schmid 1992). The full set of variables is described in greater detail in appendix §2.

Figure 4 presents the results from the extreme bounds analysis graphically to ease interpretation. Each histogram depicts the distribution of coefficient estimates for each variable included in the analysis. In total, this includes the results from over 40,000 regression models, although it is important to recall that since every variable is not included in every model (with the exception of the two required variables) that each variable features in just over 4,500 models. The red vertical lines in each histogram represent the parameter value under the null hypothesis, which in this case is zero, and the blue lines surrounding each distribution are kernel density functions, which convey a non-

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[13] We replicate the extreme bounds analysis using negative binomial regression without applying the VIF in appendix §4.
[14] Results are indistinguishable when using more complex covariance estimation strategies, thus we opt for the less computationally intensive and more parsimonious approach.

parametric estimate of the probability density function for each coefficient. These plots allow us to visually identify which estimates concentrate around points far from the null. Table 1 presents a more detailed picture of the extreme bounds analysis: it includes the lower bounds, upper bounds, percent of models in which the variable reaches statistical significance, and whether the variable is robust according to Leamer's (1985) criterion. This last feature is important since Leamer's extreme bounds analysis very unlikely to yield false positives (Plumper and Traunmuller 2018), whereas Sala-i-Martin's (1997) approach does tend to yield false positives (Hoover and Perez 2004).

As shown, the estimates on democratic breakdown are concentrated far away from the null, and indeed this variable is statistically significant at the five percent error level or above across every model. Other variables that are statistically significant in every model are population, civil war, anti-system civil society movements, opposition parties, physical integrity rights violations, and Polity score. Most of these additional results are unsurprising. Civil war (and anti-system civil society organizations, which are conceptually related to civil war) is well-established as a predictor of terrorism and the two overlap considerably in time and space (Findley and Young 2012). Several other variables related to democracy—such as weak democracy, political competition, and executive constraints—are statistically significant in at least 95 percent of the models in which they are included. In other words, these variables are fairly robust predictors of terrorism. Similarly, terrorism has long been associated with "urban warfare" and here is related to terrorism across most models (Laqueur 1999, 8), although this result should be approached with caution given the urban bias in reporting political violence (Kalyvas 2006, 38-48).

Appendix §3 includes several other extreme bounds analyses. First, we replicate the analysis after excluding the measure for integrity rights violations since, as discussed in reference to the main analysis, these models are temporally truncated because this variable is available only from 1981 onwards. Since the results hold, all subsequent extreme bounds analyses are estimated without this

variable. Second, the extreme bounds analysis is replicated when including democratic breakdown as one of the required variables (along with population and GDP). As shown, democratic breakdown retains its statistical significance when specified as a required variable across all of the approximately 40,000 models in which it is included. Third, the extreme bounds analysis is replicated using negative binomial regression on the untransformed count dependent variable rather than OLS. This strategy does not allow model restriction based on the VIF, meaning that multicollinearity is likely a problem in many models. However, the results are nearly indistinguishable from those presented above. And, fourth, we carry out the extreme bounds analysis after excluding country-years in which there is an ongoing civil war that reaches at least 1,000 battle-deaths. This ensures that outliers that experience high terrorism counts due to civil war—such as Iraq, Pakistan, and Afghanistan—are not driving the results. Results are the same here as well.

Based on these results, it is reasonable to conclude that democratic breakdown is among the strongest predictors of terrorism that is conceptually related to democracy. Other potential mechanisms, such as judicial constraints on the executive, are highly model dependent and thus their effects on terrorism should be treated with skepticism. Note that these results do not indicate unsound methodological practices on the part of scholarship positing these variables as important predictors of terrorism. Most research is dedicated to estimating a small number of models that are carefully specified according to theory. Rather than discarding "fragile" variables, a sensible way forward is to refine theory and carefully examine the conditions under which these variables might affect terrorism. On the one hand, extreme bounds analysis allows us to discover which variables consistently predict an outcome and relationships that hold under most conditions. On the other hand, variables that are inconsistent predictors can be approached as puzzles to stimulate further research. Instead of concluding that fragile variables are irrelevant, it is more theoretically interesting to ask why a variable apparently induces an outcome in certain conditions rather than others.
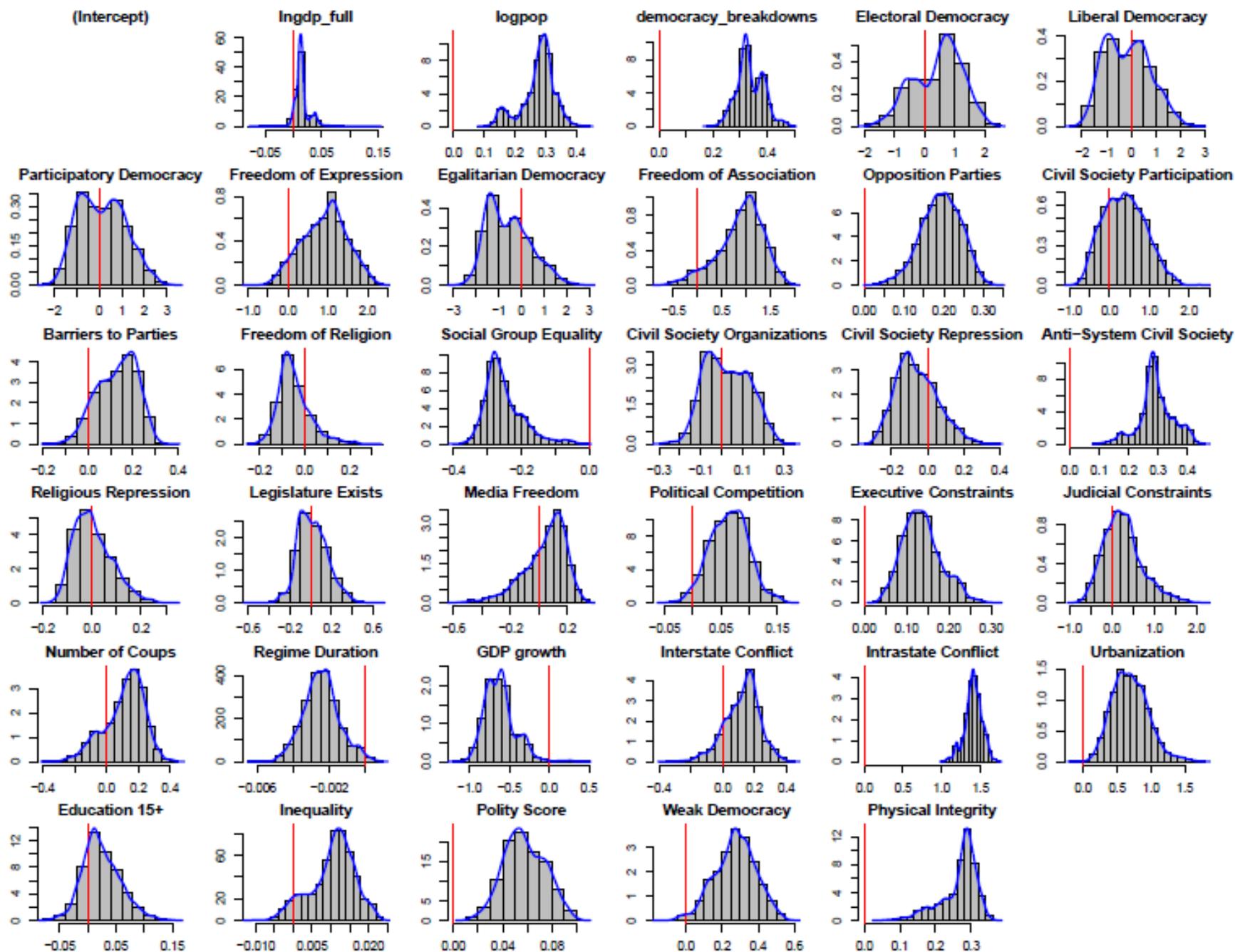
Figure 2. Results from the Extreme Bounds Analysis

Table 3. Detailed Results from Extreme Bounds Analysis

Variable	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	% Significant	Robust
GDP per capita	0.00	0.00	74.0	fragile
Population	**0.00**	**0.00**	**100**	**robust**
Democratic Breakdown	**0.35**	**0.81**	**100**	**robust**
Electoral Democracy	-2.45	3.27	86.2	fragile
Liberal Democracy	-3.57	2.98	87.8	fragile
Participatory Democracy	-3.66	4.00	83.8	fragile
Freedom of Expression	-1.07	4.03	92.1	fragile
Egalitarian Democracy	-4.71	3.38	88.9	fragile
Freedom of Association	-1.75	3.28	94.6	fragile
Opposition Parties	*-0.02*	*0.36*	*99.9*	*fragile*
Civil Society Participation	-1.43	2.99	78.1	fragile
Barriers to Parties	-0.19	0.57	94.8	fragile
Freedom of Religion	-0.49	2.99	89.1	fragile
Social Group Equality	*-0.59*	*0.11*	*99.1*	*fragile*
Civil Society Orgs	-0.52	0.44	77.2	fragile
Civil Society Repression	-0.58	0.43	83.6	fragile
Anti-System CSO	**0.15**	**0.69**	**100**	**robust**
Religious Repression	-0.46	0.33	75.5	fragile
Legislature Exists	-0.61	1.04	49.2	fragile
Media Freedom	-0.65	0.55	81.1	fragile
Political Competition	*-0.60*	*0.27*	*97.1*	*fragile*
Executive Constraints	*-0.02*	*0.38*	*99.6*	*fragile*
Judicial Constraints	-1.39	2.22	70.3	fragile
Number of Coups	-0.84	0.92	26.7	fragile
Regime Duration	-0.01	0.00	91.3	fragile
GDP growth	-1.86	0.68	55.0	fragile
Interstate Conflict	-0.50	1.07	86.2	fragile
Intrastate Conflict	**1.23**	**2.47**	**100**	**robust**
Urbanization	*-0.30*	*2.02*	*99.8*	*fragile*
Education 15+	-0.05	0.03	91.2	fragile
Inequality	-0.02	0.03	74.3	fragile
Polity Score	**0.00**	**0.15**	**100**	**robust**
Weak Democracy	*-0.30*	*0.97*	*98.8*	*fragile*
Physical Integrity Rights	**0.02**	**0.40**	**100**	**robust**

*Bolded lines are variables that are statistically significant across all models, while italicized lines are variables that are statistically significant in at least 95 percent of the models.

CONCLUSION

Research explaining the cross-national variation in terrorism constitutes a thriving literature. Not only is there evidence that democracies experience more terrorism, recent studies aim to account for the substantial variation in terrorism across autocratic regimes (Aksoy, Carter, and Wright 2012; Wilson and Piazza 2013). Despite significant progress, one limitation mars research on the effects that regime type has on terrorism: they almost exclusively theorize how different regimes create opportunities to engage in terrorism. What is missing from many discussions is the motivation to use terrorism. The civil liberties approach to explaining the association between terrorism and democracy, for instance, can account for the opportunities to use terrorism, but they poorly explain why groups use terrorism rather than legal means to pursue their interests (Chenoweth 2013, 362).

This study argues that one factor associated with regime history, democratic breakdowns, affects the motivation to engage in terrorism. Democratic breakdown generates profound grievances by excluding groups that were once able to participate in the political process. Counterintuitively, it is when the regime recovers from democratic breakdown that terrorism is most likely, since the discrepancy between reality and expectation that provides the motivation for terrorism is coupled with the opportunity afforded by democratic freedoms. Our research, which finds that much of the relationship between democracy and terrorism is explained by democracies with a history of democratic breakdown, provides support for these claims. This finding is especially relevant given the rise of populist movements in democracies, which are at risk of democratic backsliding (see De la Torre and Lemos 2016). Although this study pertains only to complete democratic breakdown, our theory suggests that these countries are at increased risk of terrorism should they move to exclude certain groups from politics. And while we do not test what specific facets of democratic liberties

increase opportunity the most (as the theory does not prioritize any specific feature), future research could explore the intersection between opportunity and motivation in greater depth. An extreme bounds analysis further reveals that democratic breakdown is positive and statistically significant across each one of over 40,000 model specifications, indicating that the relationship is highly robust. Indeed, it is one of the few variables that is statistically significant across all model specifications and the most robust predictor of terrorism conceptually related to democracy.

Lastly, this study aspires to reorient and refocus research on terrorism and democracy. Not only do we find that democratic breakdown is the most consistent predictor of terrorism, the extreme bounds analysis indicates a way forward for future research. Several variables already highlighted in the literature, such as executive constraints and political competition (Li 2005; Chenoweth 2010), are also highly robust. Moreover, consistent with the theory that democratic breakdown affects terrorism through the grievances it generates, the most robust relationships posited in previous studies include those related to grievances, including physical integrity rights violations and social group equality (Piazza and Walsh 2010; Piazza 2011). However, many of the variables related to civil liberties are surprisingly fragile. Our models suggest one reason for these results is that the opportunities that civil liberties provide for terrorists are insufficient for explaining political violence absent motivating factors. We have only scratched the surface of the potential complex relationships between important characteristics of democracy and terrorism, and additional research is needed to examine the conditions under which democracy makes terrorism more likely. Having a fuller picture of the variables that consistently predict terrorism and those that we theoretically anticipate to increase terrorism but do not should serve as a useful starting point for exploring precisely when and where terrorism will arise.

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