Political Polarization and Political Violence

James A. Piazza

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ABSTRACT

Is political violence and support for political violence more prevalent in democratic societies with high levels of affective polarization? This study argues that affective partisan political polarization fosters dehumanization of opposing partisans, lends a moralistic and zero-sum nature to political life, and facilitates group mobilization. These all produce an environment in which political violence is both more socially acceptable and more frequent. The study tests this assertion using two sets of empirical tests: an original survey of 1,899 US residents and a cross-national time-series analysis of eighty-three democracies. It finds that in the United States, Democrats who express aversion toward Republicans are 8% more likely to express support for the use of political violence, whereas Republicans who express aversion toward Democrats are 18% more likely to endorse political violence. Furthermore, in the cross-national analysis, democracies characterized by higher levels of affective partisan political polarization are 34% more likely to experience frequent political violence.

Is affective partisan political polarization (hereafter "polarization")[1]—defined as strong favoritism toward members of one's own political party and strong aversion toward members of opposing political parties[2]—in

James A. Piazza is Liberal Arts Professor of Political Science at The Pennsylvania State University.

[1] A variety of terms are used to identify this phenomenon, including affective polarization, social polarization, political tribalism, and political sectarianism. Throughout this article, I use the term "political polarization" to encompass these. See the following studies for a full discussion of the definition of and various terms applied to political polarization: Eli J. Finkel et al., "Political Sectarianism in America," *Science* 370, no. 6516 (30 October 2020): 533–36; Shanto Iyengar, Gaurav Sood, and Yphtach Lelkes, "Affect, Not Ideology: A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 405–31; Shanto Iyengar and Sean J. Westwood, "Fear and Loathing across Party Lines: New Evidence on Group Polarization," *American Journal of Political Science* 59, no. 3 (July 2015): 690–707.

[2] A key component of political polarization is that it is more rooted in an individual's partisan group identity rather than in public policy preferences. See Donald R. Kinder and Nathan P. Kalmoe, *Neither Liberal nor Conservative: Ideological Innocence in the American Public* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Ben M. Tappin and Ryan T. McKay, "Moral Polarization and Out-Party Hostility in the US Political Context," *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 7, no. 1 (2019): 213–45. Note also that there can be other forms of polarization that could affect political violence that have a public policy angle, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, and secessionism. See Rebekah Herrick and Sue Thomas, "Violence among State House Candidates during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (August 2022): 709–25; Sara B. Hobolt, Thomas J. Leeper, and James Tilley, "Divided by the Vote: Affective Polarization in the Wake of the Brexit Referendum," *British Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 4 (October 2021): 1476–93; Laia Balcells and Alexander Kuo, "Secessionist Conflict and Affective Polarization: Evidence from Catalonia," *Journal of Peace Research* (1 September 2022), https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433221088112.

democracies associated with an increased risk of political violence? This question is key given that the United States and several other democracies are currently experiencing high levels of political polarization.[3] In a recent poll, around 80% of partisan Americans reported feeling very unfavorably toward individuals associated with opposing political parties.[4] Over the past forty years, partisan polarization has increased in the United States, particularly as racial and religious identities have become more aligned with partisan identification.[5] Moreover, polarization seems to be increasing in other countries as well,[6] which cross-national empirical data on democracies confirms: according to indicators derived from the Varieties of Democracy (V-DEM) database, the intensity level of political polarization increased by 26.2% within democracies across the world from 2000 to 2018.[7]

At the same time, both expressed support for political violence—defined as the use of violence to achieve political goals—and actual occurrence of political violence have increased apace in democratic countries. A national poll conducted in December of 2021 in the United States found that around one-third of Americans believed that the use of violence to achieve political goals can be sometimes justified.[8] This is an increase from recent years. For example, similar polling indicates that support for political violence among Americans stood at around 23% in 2015 and around 16% in 2010.[9] Researchers have also documented an increase in violence and threats of violence in the United States motivated by partisan political animus.[10] A similar pattern is found in democracies worldwide.

[3]Thomas Carothers and Andrew O'Donohue, eds., *Democracies Divided: The Global Challenge of Political Polarization* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2019); Gordon Heltzel and Kristin Laurin, "Polarization in America: Two Possible Futures," *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences* 34 (August 2020): 179–84.

[4]"The Partisan Divide on Political Values Grows Even Wider," Pew Research Center, 5 October 2017, https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2017/10/05/the-partisan-divide-on-political-values-grows-even-wider/.

[5]Iyengar et al., "Affect, Not Ideology" estimates, using polling data, that political polarization doubled in the United States between 1978 and 2012. See also Lilliana Mason and Julie Wronski, "One Tribe to Bind Them All: How Our Social Group Attachments Strengthen Partisanship," *Political Psychology* 39, no. S1 (February 2018): 257–77.

[6]Levi Boxell, Matthew Gentzkow, and Jesse M. Shapiro, "Cross-Country Trends in Affective Polarization," *Review of Economics and Statistics* (2022): 1–60; Carothers and O'Donohue, *Democracies Divided*; Noam Gidron, James Adams, and Will Horne, *American Affective Polarization in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[7]Michael Coppedge et al., *V-Dem Codebook*, v10 (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, Varieties of Democracy Project, 2020). Calculated using the "v2cacamps_ord" ordinal measure of polarization severity from V-DEM for countries scoring 6 or higher on the Polity2 scale, indicating that they are full-fledged democracies. This measure of polarization is used in the cross-national analysis and is explained in full below.

[8]Meryl Kornfield and Mariana Alfaro, "1 in 3 Americans Say Violence against Government Can Be Justified, Citing Fears of Political Schism, Pandemic," *Washington Post*, 1 January 2022.

[9]Ivana Saric, "Poll: Americans Increasingly Justifying Political Violence," *Axios*, 2 January 2022.

[10]Ayal Feinberg, Regina Branton, and Valerie Martinez-Ebers, "The Trump Effect: How 2016 Campaign Rallies Explain Spikes in Hate," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 55, no. 2 (April 2022): 257–65; Rachel Kleinfeld, "The Rise of Political Violence in the United States," *Journal of Democracy* 32, no. 4 (October 2021):

According to recent data from the World Values Survey, around one-third (33.8%) of subjects in a sample of thirty-one democracies regard the use of violence to achieve political goals to be acceptable.[11] In several of the democracies surveyed, tolerance of the use of political violence exceeds 50%.[12] Moreover, levels of political violence have increased in democracies worldwide. V-DEM data reveal that the frequency and severity of nonstate political violence increased by 26% in democratic countries from 2000 to 2018.[13]

Scholarly research has linked partisan polarization to various adverse phenomena. For example, highly polarized partisans are more likely to exclude, discriminate against, and punish members of opposing political parties,[14] and are more likely to eschew cooperating with members of opposing political parties in collective efforts to address problems.[15] Gregory A. Huber and Neil Malhotra find that partisan individuals are less likely to be romantically attracted to members of opposing political parties.[16] Partisan polarization has been linked to increased appeal for populist and authoritarian political leaders.[17] At the macro level, highly polarized societies are found to be at a higher risk for democratic breakdown in some circumstances.[18] More recently, research suggests that partisan polarization might explain COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy, pandemic

160–76; Brigitte L. Nacos, Robert Y. Shapiro, and Yaeli Bloch-Elkon, "Donald Trump: Aggressive Rhetoric and Political Violence," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 14, no. 5 (October 2020): 2–25.

[11]"World Values Survey Wave 7 (2017–2022)." See the data and codebook at: https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV7.jsp. Percentages operationalized by coding as 1 all subjects who failed to completely reject and expressed some level of support for the statement that the use of "political violence is sometimes justified."

[12]Tolerance for the use of political violence is around 58% in Malaysia and Cyprus, 60% in South Korea, and 69% in Philippines. See "World Values Survey Wave 7."

[13]Coppedge et al., *V-Dem Codebook*, v10. Calculated using the "v2caviol_ord" ordinal measure of political violence frequency and intensity from V-DEM for countries scoring 6 or higher on the Polity2 scale, indicating that they are full-fledged democracies. Note: this measure of political violence is used in the cross-national analysis and is explained in full below.

[14]David E. Broockman, Joshua L. Kalla, and Sean J. Westwood, "Does Affective Polarization Undermine Democratic Norms or Accountability? Maybe Not," *American Journal of Political Science* (17 August 2022), https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12719; Ryan E. Carlin and Gregory J. Love, "The Politics of Interpersonal Trust and Reciprocity: An Experimental Approach," *Political Behavior* 35, no. 1 (March 2013): 43–63; Jonathan Haidt, Evan Rosenberg, and Holly Hom, "Differentiating Diversities: Moral Diversity Is Not Like Other Kinds," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 33, no. 1 (January 2003): 1–36; Iyengar and Westwood, "Fear and Loathing across Party Lines"; Michael N. Stagnaro, Yarrow Dunham, and David G. Rand, "Profit versus Prejudice: Harnessing Self-Interest to Reduce In-Group Bias," *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 9, no. 1 (January 2018): 50–58; Sean J. Westwood et al., "The Tie That Divides: Cross-National Evidence of the Primacy of Partyism," *European Journal of Political Research* 57, no. 2 (May 2018): 333–54.

[15]Yphtach Lelkes and Sean J. Westwood, "The Limits of Partisan Prejudice," *Journal of Politics* 79, no. 2 (April 2017): 485–501.

[16]Gregory A. Huber and Neil Malhotra, "Political Homophily in Social Relationships: Evidence from Online Dating Behavior," *Journal of Politics* 79, no. 1 (January 2017): 269–83.

[17]Charlie R. Crimston, Hema Preya Selvanathan, and Jolanda Jetten, "Moral Polarization Predicts Support for Authoritarian and Progressive Strong Leaders via the Perceived Breakdown of Society," *Political Psychology* 43, no. 4 (August 2022): 671–91.

[18]Adrienne LeBas, "Can Polarization Be Positive? Conflict and Institutional Development in Africa," *American Behavioral Scientist* 62, no. 1 (January 2018): 59–74.

risk perception, and different rates of COVID risk-mitigation behaviors between the United States and other advanced democracies.[19]

Is partisan polarization also associated with attitudes toward the use of political violence, and the chances that political violence will occur? Surprisingly, with a few exceptions noted below, the relationship between polarization, attitudes toward political violence, and political violence itself in the United States and in other democracies has received relatively little scholarly attention. This reflects a more general trend in research on partisan polarization. Most polarization research has focused on the social, economic, and political causes of polarization and on the effects of polarization on interpersonal attitudes, such as intolerance toward members of opposing parties, etc. As a result, scholars know very little about the relationship between partisan polarization and outcomes such as violence and support for violence.[20] Moreover, most empirical research on political polarization has been confined to the United States, and no previous work has tested the relationship between polarization and the actual occurrence of political violence, either in the United States or globally.

To fill this gap, this study investigates the relationship between political polarization, individual support for political violence, and the occurrence of political violence using a novel research design that combines public opinion evidence from the United States and cross-national, time-series evidence from a sample of eighty-three democracies worldwide. The study makes several findings. First, it determines that partisan polarization contributes to individual support for political violence in the United States. Specifically, it finds that US Democrats who express aversion toward Republicans are 8% more likely to support the use of political violence. Republicans who express aversion toward Democrats are 18% more likely to endorse political violence. Other factors such as subject age, gender, political ideology, degree of political engagement, and aggressive personality traits are also significant contributors to support for political violence among American subjects. Second, the study finds that political polarization has consequences for actual political violence in democracies globally. Democracies characterized by higher levels of partisan political polarization are 34% more likely to subsequently experience frequent nonstate political violence, holding constant regime age, type of electoral system, degree of ethnolinguistic and socioeconomic division, level of economic development, or history of political violence.

[19]Gordon Pennycook et al., "Beliefs about COVID-19 in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States: A Novel Test of Political Polarization and Motivated Reasoning," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 48, no. 5 (May 2022): 750–65.

[20]James N. Druckman et al., "How Affective Polarization Shapes Americans' Political Beliefs: A Study of Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Journal of Experimental Political Science* 8, no. 3 (Winter 2021): 223–34; Omer Yair, "A Note on the Affective Polarization Literature" (unpublished manuscript, December 2020), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3771264.

The article proceeds as follows: In the next section, I discuss the relevant literature and then present a three-pronged theoretical argument linking polarization to political violence. I argue that polarization may increase political violence by fostering demonization and dehumanization of opposing partisans, by lending a moralistic nature to individuals' assessments of opposing partisans, and by facilitating group mobilization, which is a necessary condition for political violence. I use three brief qualitative cases—Brazil, Turkey, and Bangladesh—to examine how demonization/dehumanization, moralization, and mobilization foster political violence. I then present my hypotheses and test them in the United States and cross-nationally. After discussing the results of these tests, I conclude with some brief remarks on the implications of the study.

Literature: Polarization and Political Violence

A limited body of research examines the relationship between partisan polarization and political violence. Relevant studies can be sorted into two categories: those that examine how polarization affects individuals' attitudes toward political violence and those that theorize that more polarized societies are prone to bouts of political violence.

Polarization and Violent Attitudes

The few empirical studies that examine polarization and individuals' support for political violence present a mixed picture. Some survey and experimental studies focused exclusively on the United States produce results consistent with the expectation that individuals who exhibit stronger degrees of partisanship and hostilities toward members of other parties are primed to tolerate political violence. For example, in a set of survey experiments Nathan P. Kalmoe and Lilliana Mason found that although only a very small number of strong US partisans endorse violence against partisans of rival parties, partisan schadenfreude—feelings of joy in the face of partisan rivals' harm or misfortune—is more common for strong partisans.[21] Perhaps more importantly, when the researchers increased subjects' expectations of victory in the next election, partisan subjects expressed greater confidence in endorsing political violence. In their recent book, Kalmoe and Mason determine that Americans with a stronger partisan social identity—feelings of social belonging to one of the major

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[21]Nathan P. Kalmoe and Lilliana Mason, "Lethal Mass Partisanship: Prevalence, Correlates, and Electoral Contingencies" (paper presented at the National Capital Area Political Science Association American Politics Meeting, 2019).

parties—were more likely to express support for political violence.[22] However, partisan social identity does not fully capture partisan polarization as a concept, as it leaves out antipathy toward members of rival political parties. Overall, in both studies, the effects of partisan identification were not as strong as subjects' trait aggression, which is the general propensity of an individual to be aggressive. In a recent unpublished survey experiment, Frank J. Gonzalez and Alexandra McCoy determine that US subjects found it more acceptable to physically harm individuals who adopted different ideological positions from themselves.[23] Research by Sean J. Westwood et al. does find that Americans exhibiting partisan polarization are more tolerant of the use of political violence.[24] However, they discover that polarization is a less robust predictor of political violence than individual aggressiveness as a trait. Finally, survey experiments David E. Broockman et al.[25] and Yphtach Lelkes and Westwood[26] conducted fail to find measures of strong partisan identification or partisan polarization to be statistically significant predictors of support for political violence in the United States. Overall, current research focuses on the United States and paints an inconclusive picture of the relationship between partisan polarization and individual support for political violence, suggesting further investigation is warranted.

Polarization and the Incidence of Political Violence

A more consistent picture can be found in the body of research demonstrating that politically polarized societies are more prone to political violence. Historical research provides evidence that extreme political polarization in Weimar Germany in the 1920s and in various Latin American countries in the 1960s and 1970s was a crucial driver of subsequent episodes of severe political violence between armed militias associated with political parties.[27] A large body of research posits that political polarization precipitated and fueled civil wars in a range of countries.[28] Empirical

[22]Nathan P. Kalmoe and Lilliana Mason, *Radical American Partisanship: Mapping Violent Hostility, Its Causes, and the Consequences for Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022).

[23]Frank J. Gonzalez and Alexandra McCoy, "Who Is It Okay to Punch? An Experimental Investigation of Support for Intolerance in the Form of Physical Violence" (unpublished manuscript, 2021), https://osf.io/uh6bt.

[24]Sean J. Westwood et al., "Current Research Overstates American Support for Political Violence," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 119, no. 12 (2022): e2116870119.

[25]Broockman et al., "Does Affective Polarization Undermine Democratic Norms or Accountability?"

[26]Lelkes and Westwood, "Limits of Partisan Prejudice."

[27]Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik: Eine Studie zum Problem des Machtverfalls in der Demokratie* [The dissolution of the Weimar Republic: A study of the collapse of power in democracy] (Stuttgart, West Germany: Ring Verlag, 1955); Juan J. Linz, "Crisis, Breakdown and Re-equilibration," in *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*, ed. Linz and Alfred Stepan (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

[28]Laia Balcells, "Rivalry and Revenge: Violence against Civilians in Conventional Civil Wars," *International Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (June 2010): 291–313; Ibrahim A. Elbadawi, "Civil Wars and Poverty: The Role

research on terrorism finds that violent terrorist campaigns are more common in countries with a legacy of higher levels of political polarization.[29] Finally, Sean P. O'Brien and Donald P. Haider-Markel determine that political polarization was a weakly significant predictor of far-right, violent militia activity in the United States.[30] This body of research, therefore, produces an expectation that political polarization is connected with the occurrence of political violence.

Theory: Polarization, Dehumanization, Morality, Group Conflict, and Political Violence

What might explain the association between partisan polarization, attitudes about political violence, and the occurrence of political violence? Three mutually reinforcing theoretical explanations can be offered. I describe each below and briefly discuss some exemplar country cases that help explain them.

Polarization and Dehumanization

First, polarization may facilitate the demonization and dehumanization of individuals associated with rival parties. This, in turn, may render the use of violence more acceptable in the minds of polarized individuals. A rather large body of literature associates partisanship and polarization with processes of demonization, dehumanization, and "othering" of political opponents. Indeed, antipathy toward rival partisans is argued to be a key component of polarization in that it serves to reinforce loyalty to one's partisan tribe. Scholars find that individuals with strong partisan group identification are more likely to negatively stereotype opposing partisans, and in particular are more likely to ascribe extreme, caricatured, immoral,

of External Interventions, Political Rights and Economic Growth" (paper presented at the World Bank Conference on Civil Conflicts, Crime and Violence, Washington, DC, 22–23 February 1999); Joshua R. Gubler and Joel Sawat Selway, "Horizontal Inequality, Crosscutting Cleavages, and Civil War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 2 (April 2012): 206–32; Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein, "Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War," *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 2 (April 2008): 436–55; Marc Scarcelli, "Social Cleavages and Civil War Onset," *Ethnopolitics* 13, no. 2 (2014): 181–202.

[29]Susanne Martin and Arie Perliger, "Turning to and from Terror: Deciphering the Conditions under which Political Groups Choose Violent and Nonviolent Tactics," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 6, no. 4/5 (October 2012): 21–45; James A. Piazza, "Fake News: The Effects of Social Media Disinformation on Domestic Terrorism," *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 15, no. 1 (2022): 55–77; James A. Piazza, "Politician Hate Speech and Domestic Terrorism," *International Interactions* 46, no. 3 (2020): 431–53; Andre Python, Jürgen Brandsch, and Aliya Tskhay, "Provoking Local Ethnic Violence: A Global Study on Ethnic Polarization and Terrorist Targeting," *Political Geography* 58 (May 2017): 77–89; Sabri Sayari, "Political Violence and Terrorism in Turkey, 1976–80: A Retrospective Analysis," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 2 (2010): 198–215; Leonard Weinberg, Ami Pedahzur, and Arie Perliger, *Political Parties and Terrorist Groups*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008).

[30]Sean P. O'Brien and Donald P. Haider-Markel, "Fueling the Fire: Social and Political Correlates of Citizen Militia Activity," *Social Science Quarterly* 79, no. 2 (June 1998): 456–65.

evil, and dangerous attributes to out-partisans.[31] Scholars link this tendency with an "othering" process whereby members of opposing political parties and individuals outside one's political tribe are regarded as fundamentally incompatible, alien, and without recognizable human attributes.[32] Research by James L. Martherus et al.[33] depicts the phenomenon of dehumanization of partisan opponents—facilitated by, among other things, partisan elite rhetoric[34]—as a key element of polarization and notes that it is observable both for Republicans and Democrats in contemporary American political life.

Demonization, dehumanization, and othering may amount to critical links between partisan polarization, violent attitudes, and the occurrence of violence. Scholars frequently argue that dehumanization precedes aggression and violence due to its role in fostering moral disengagement from members of opposing groups. Moral disengagement reinforces the viewpoint that out-group members are less than human and are therefore not entitled to the same level of consideration, trust, empathy, protection, and fair and humane treatment.[35] Consequently, dehumanized people are frequently mistrusted[36] and targeted for discriminatory practices and violence.[37]

Much dehumanization research has traditionally focused on explaining how individuals come to approve of and participate in episodes of extreme mass political violence, such as wars, civil conflicts, and genocides. However, recent work identifies dehumanization as an element linking

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[31]Douglas J. Ahler, "Self-Fulfilling Misperceptions of Public Polarization," *Journal of Politics* 76, no. 3 (July 2014): 607–20; Douglas J. Ahler and Gaurav Sood, "The Parties in Our Heads: Misperceptions about Party Composition and Their Consequences," *Journal of Politics* 80, no. 3 (July 2018): 964–81; Larry M. Bartels, "Beyond the Running Tally: Partisan Bias in Political Perceptions," *Political Behavior* 24, no. 2 (June 2002): 117–50; Iyengar and Westwood, "Fear and Loathing across Party Lines"; Kalmoe and Mason, *Radical American Partisanship*; Lilliana Mason, "'I Disrespectfully Agree': The Differential Effects of Partisan Sorting on Social and Issue Polarization," *American Journal of Political Science* 59, no. 1 (January 2015): 128–45.

[32]Kalmoe and Mason, *Radical American Partisanship*; Megan K. Schraedley and Debbie S. Dougherty, "Creating and Disrupting Othering during Policymaking in a Polarized Context," *Journal of Communication* 72, no. 1 (February 2022): 111–40.

[33]James L. Martherus et al., "Party Animals? Extreme Partisan Polarization and Dehumanization," *Political Behavior* 43, no. 2 (June 2021): 517–40.

[34]See Piazza, "Politician Hate Speech and Domestic Terrorism."

[35]Albert Bandura, "Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 3, no. 3 (August 1999): 193–209; Naomi Ellemers, Stefano Pagliaro, and Manuela Barreto, "Morality and Behavioural Regulation in Groups: A Social Identity Approach," *European Review of Social Psychology* 24, no. 1 (2013): 160–93; Nick Haslam et al., "Humanness, Dehumanization, and Moral Psychology," in *The Social Psychology of Morality: Exploring the Causes of Good and Evil*, ed. Mario Mikulincer and Phillip R. Shaver (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2012), 203–18; Shalom H. Schwartz, "Universalism Values and the Inclusiveness of Our Moral Universe," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 38, no. 6 (November 2007): 711–28.

[36]Loris Vezzali et al., "Increasing Outgroup Trust, Reducing Infrahumanization, and Enhancing Future Contact Intentions via Imagined Intergroup Contact," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 48, no. 1 (January 2012): 437–40.

[37]Herbert G. Kelman, "Violence without Moral Restraint: Reflections on the Dehumanization of Victims and Victimizers," *Journal of Social Issues* 29, no. 4 (Fall 1973): 25–61; Nour Kteily et al., "The Ascent of Man: Theoretical and Empirical Evidence for Blatant Dehumanization," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 109, no. 5 (November 2015): 901.

partisan polarization to political violence. Dehumanization of political opponents erodes tolerance of members of rival political parties,[38] providing an opening for transgression of social norms, including the use of violence. Most crucially, dehumanization and othering are frequently identified precursors to the endorsement and eventual use of violence. To harm or wish harm upon an opponent, it is first necessary to deny them their humanity.[39] Opponents more easily see dehumanized individuals as unworthy of human moral consideration and tolerance[40] and regard them as more dangerous and less worthy of protection, care, or humane treatment,[41] thereby rendering the use of violence against them as more socially acceptable. The process of dehumanization is necessary for violence because it removes instinctual sympathies toward other people and normative inhibitions against harming others, making it easier for affected individuals to act upon violent urges.[42] Using this framework, Martherus et al. argue that dehumanization reinforced by polarization is liable to normalize the use of violence, making it more acceptable to partisans.[43]

Demonization/Dehumanization Case Example: Brazil

Demonization and dehumanization among partisan rivals feature prominently within polarized democracies experiencing political violence. Brazil is an illustrative contemporary example. Between 2000 and 2018, Brazil saw its level of political polarization increase by 33% and its level of political violence double, according to data from V-DEM.[44] Polarization began to intensify during the 2016 impeachment of Brazil's center-left President Dilma Rousseff over allegations that her administration was corrupt and had abused its power.[45] The impeachment process was highly divisive and fueled large pro- and anti-impeachment protests that featured

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[38]Erin C. Cassese, "Partisan Dehumanization in American Politics," *Political Behavior* 43, no. 1 (March 2021): 29–50.

[39]Kelman, "Violence without Moral Restraint."

[40]Naomi Ellemers, *Morality and the Regulation of Social Behavior: Groups as Moral Anchors* (New York: Psychology Press, 2017).

[41]Albert Bandura, *Moral Disengagement: How People Do Harm and Live with Themselves* (New York: Worth, 2016); Haslem et al., "Humanness, Dehumanization, and Moral Psychology."

[42]Bandura, "Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities"; Sabina Čehajić, Rupert Brown, and Roberto González, "What Do I Care? Perceived Ingroup Responsibility and Dehumanization as Predictors of Empathy Felt for the Victim Group," *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations* 12, no. 6 (November 2009): 715–29; Kelman, "Violence without Moral Restraint"; Susan Opotow, "Moral Exclusion and Injustice: An Introduction," *Journal of Social Issues* 46, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 1–20; Adam Waytz, Nicholas Epley, and John T. Cacioppo, "Social Cognition Unbound: Insights into Anthropomorphism and Dehumanization," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 19, no. 1 (February 2010): 58–62.

[43]Martherus et al., "Party Animals?"

[44]Measured using "v2cacamps.ord" (ordinal level of polarization) and "v2caviol_ord" (ordinal level of political violence) from V-DEM. Note, as explained below, that both of these are ordinal measures ranging from 0 to 4, where 0 is an absence of polarization or violence, to 4, indicating that polarization or political violence are widespread and intense within the country.

[45]Peter R. Kingstone and Timothy J. Power, eds., *Democratic Brazil Divided* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017).

overt partisan vilification of the president along with demonization of her opponents as right-wing coup conspirators seeking to undermine Brazil's democracy.[46] Gisella Meneguelli and Carme Ferré-Pavia document the extensive use of hate messaging by partisans during the 2016 impeachment era in Brazil, arguing that it contributed to political polarization.[47]

Political polarization became even more acute under the administration of right-wing President Jair Bolsonaro from 2018 to 2022. During the Bolsonaro presidency, divisions grew between socially conservative supporters of the administration and center-left, secular Brazilians. Bolsonaro fueled these divisions by promoting online disinformation and conspiracy theories while making inflammatory public statements about sexual assault and women's rights and vilifying LGBTQ and Indigenous people—in part to appeal to Brazil's military, law enforcement, and burgeoning conservative Christian evangelical communities.[48] At the same time, interviews featuring right-wing partisans in 2020 indicated a sense of victimhood: feelings that they had been demonized for their political beliefs.[49]

The 2022 presidential election between Bolsonaro and center-left former president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva further intensified political polarization and witnessed the occurrence of political violence in Brazil. Disinformation campaigns and candidates' public statements demonizing, dehumanizing, and vilifying partisan opponents and their supporters marred the election. For example, the Bolsonaro campaign accused da Silva of being a secret communist and "satanist" who sought to banish religion from Brazilian society and to mandate unisex bathrooms in public schools.[50] Bolsonaro and his supporters also stoked homophobia and transphobia in accusing their political opponents of providing so-called gay kits to schoolteachers—curricular materials to foster inclusivity for LGBTQ people.[51] Da Silva's campaign deployed ads that depicted Bolsonaro as a cannibal and a leader bent on creating a fascist dictatorship in Brazil while left-wing partisans circulated on social media a falsified photograph of Bolsonaro visiting a Masonic lodge.[52] Throughout the election, Bolsonaro and his supporters continually made baseless allegations that the da Silva campaign

[46]Umberto Mignozzetti and Matias Spektor, "Brazil: When Political Oligarchies Limit Polarization but Fuel Populism," in Carothers and O'Donohue, *Democracies Divided*, 228–56.

[47]Gisella Meneguelli and Carme Ferré-Pavia, "Hate Speech and Social Polarization in Brazil: From Impeachment to Bolsonaro," in *Hate Speech and Polarization in Participatory Society*, ed. Marta Pérez-Escolar and José Manuel Noguera-Vivo (London: Routledge, 2022), 163–76.

[48]Mignozzetti and Spektor, "Brazil: When Political Oligarchies Limit Polarization but Fuel Populism," in Carothers and O'Donohue, *Democracies Divided*.

[49]Fanny Vrydagh and César Jiménez-Martínez, "Talking with the Right-Wing: Pernicious Polarization in Brazil and the Philosophy of Paulo Freire," *International Communication Gazette* 82, no. 5 (2020): 456–73.

[50]Anthony Faiola and Gabriela Sá Pessoa, "The Cannibal vs. the Satanist: Toxic Politics Is Poisoning Brazil," *Washington Post*, 28 October 2022.

[51]International Crisis Group, *Brazil's True Believers: Bolsonaro and the Risks of an Election Year*, Crisis Group Latin American Briefing no. 47 (Rio de Janeiro: International Crisis Group, 16 June 2022), https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/brazil/brazils-true-believers-bolsonaro-and-risks-election-year.

[52]Faiola and Pessoa, "Cannibal vs. the Satanist."

was engaging in election fraud, further polarizing the electorate. After losing the election, Bolsonaro broke with Brazilian political tradition by refusing to concede; meanwhile, truckers and other supporters protested the results, alleging that da Silva and his voters were fraudsters.[53] These baseless allegations, along with the charged polarized atmosphere, culminated in Bolsonaro supporters' violent assault on the Congress building in Brasilia on 8 January 2023.[54]

According to experts, this polarization-fueled environment of demonization and dehumanization contributed to marked increases in political violence within Brazil during the election period.[55] The Brazil-based nongovernmental organization Observatory of Political and Election Violence recorded 212 incidents of politically motivated violence during the election season, an increase of 110% from the previous quarter.[56]

Moral Polarization

Second, political polarization lends a moralized and zero-sum ethos to politics, which may render the use of political violence more acceptable and make cross-partisan cooperation to solve contentious, violent conflicts more difficult. Jonathan Haidt et al. explain that in contemporary America, members of both political parties are convinced of their own moral superiority compared to members of rival political parties.[57] Scholars have coined a term that helps capture this contemporary American political ethos in which polarization is charged with moral conviction: "moral polarization." Moral polarization allows partisans to negatively assess not the policy goals but rather the moral character of rival partisans, and it is associated with attitudes such as anger, blame, and disgust and amplified levels of behavioral hostility toward members of opposing parties.[58] Consequently, individuals exhibiting moral polarization express a desire for greater distance, socially and physically, from members of rival political parties and are more likely be intolerant of their rights and freedoms.[59]

[53]International Crisis Group, *Brazil's True Believers*; Valerie Wirtschafter, "After a Victory for Democracy, What Is Brazil's Road Ahead?" Brookings Institution, 9 November 2022, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2022/11/09/after-a-victory-for-democracy-what-is-brazils-road-ahead/.

[54]Diana Roy and Sabine Baumgartner, "Images Show the Extent of Brazil's Capitol Riots," Council on Foreign Relations, 12 January 2023, https://www.cfr.org/article/images-show-extent-brazils-capitol-riots.

[55]"Political Violence during Brazil's 2022 Presidential Runoff," ACLED Election Watch, 7 December 2022, https://acleddata.com/2022/12/07/political-violence-during-brazils-2022-presidential-runoff/; Wirtschafter, "After a Victory for Democracy, What Is Brazil's Road Ahead?"

[56]Faiola and Pessoa, "Cannibal vs. the Satanist."

[57]Haidt et al., "Differentiating Diversities."

[58]Kristin N. Garrett, "The Moralization of Politics: How a Moral Lens Shapes Perceptions of Party Leaders" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, IL, 2015); Tappin and McKay, "Moral Polarization and Out-Party Hostility in the US Political Context"; Timothy J. Ryan, "Reconsidering Moral Issues in Politics," *Journal of Politics* 76, no. 2 (April 2014): 380–97.

[59]Mark J. Brandt, "Predicting Ideological Prejudice," *Psychological Science* 28, no. 6 (June 2017): 713–22; Jarret T. Crawford et al., "Social and Economic Ideologies Differentially Predict Prejudice across the

Moral polarization may also reinforce the urge to use violence against social out-groups and perceived political enemies. Speaking more generally about morality and group behavior, scholars have identified beliefs of in-group moral superiority as a crucial contributor to militant extremist attitudes[60] and a precipitating factor for political and religious conflicts that feature the use of violence[61] and genocides.[62] Individuals who exhibit feelings of moral superiority to opponents and members of rival groups are more likely to tolerate the application of punitive actions toward out-groups, including acts of revenge and violence.[63] Linda J. Skitka and Elizabeth Mullen explain some of these processes' mechanics.[64] Members of groups convinced of their own moral superiority vis-à-vis other groups frequently adopt a Manichean view wherein they are locked into an existential battle between good, represented by their side, and evil, represented by out-groups. Under these conditions, extreme expressions of out-group hostility are exhibited, and even morally mandated. It is not difficult, then, to imagine that transgressive behaviors such as the use of violence against morally repugnant "others," including individuals associated with opposing parties, is more readily supported.

Moral Polarization Case Example: Turkey

Contemporary Turkey provides a case example of the impact of political polarization on moralization of partisan divisions in society leading to increased political violence. The roots of Turkey's social and political polarization rest in the origins of the Turkish Republic and the ongoing tension between the secular versus religious identity of the nation and

Political Spectrum, but Social Issues Are Most Divisive," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 112, no. 3 (March 2017): 383; Linda J. Skitka, Christopher W. Bauman, and Edward G. Sargis, "Moral Conviction: Another Contributor to Attitude Strength or Something More?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 88, no. 6 (June 2005): 895.

[60]Roger Giner-Sorolla, Bernhard Leidner, and Emanuele Castano, "Dehumanization, Demonization, and Morality Shifting: Paths to Moral Certainty in Extremist Violence," in *Extremism and the Psychology of Uncertainty*, ed. Michael A. Hogg and Danielle L. Blaylock (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 165–82; Eran Halperin, "Group-Based Hatred in Intractable Conflict in Israel," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52, no. 5 (October 2008): 713–36; Gerard Saucier et al., "Patterns of Thinking in Militant Extremism," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 4, no. 3 (May 2009): 256–71.

[61]Jeremy Ginges et al., "Psychology out of the Laboratory: The Challenge of Violent Extremism," *American Psychologist* 66, no. 6 (September 2011): 507.

[62]Stephen Reicher, S. Alexander Haslam, and Rakshi Rath, "Making a Virtue of Evil: A Five-Step Social Identity Model of the Development of Collective Hate," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 2, no. 3 (May 2008): 1313–44.

[63]Michal Reifen Tagar et al., "When Ideology Matters: Moral Conviction and the Association between Ideology and Policy Preferences in the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 44, no. 2 (March 2014): 117–25; Linda J. Skitka and David A. Houston, "When Due Process Is of No Consequence: Moral Mandates and Presumed Defendant Guilt or Innocence," *Social Justice Research* 14, no. 3 (September 2001): 305–26; Maarten P. Zaal et al., "By Any Means Necessary: The Effects of Regulatory Focus and Moral Conviction on Hostile and Benevolent Forms of Collective Action," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 50, no. 4 (December 2011): 670–89.

[64]Linda J. Skitka and Elizabeth Mullen, "The Dark Side of Moral Conviction," *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 2, no. 1 (December 2002): 35–41.

state.[65] The division between secular and religious citizens encompasses both contemporary party politics in Turkey—the main partisan cleavage is between the secular and center-left Republican People's Party (CHP) and its allied parties[66] and the right-religious Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its allies,[67] led by current president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan—as well as other prominent social conflicts.[68] Though the secular-religious political divide has deep historical roots in the country, AKP's electoral victory and political dominance under Erdoğan since 2002, along with his authoritarian tendencies, accelerated partisan political polarization between parties' secular and religious blocs and laid the foundation for the moral nature of political polarization between Turkish-speaking citizens.[69]

Turkey's current partisan environment shares many features with other highly polarized democracies: a zero-sum, Manichean nature of partisan politics; delegitimization of partisan opponents; disinformation campaigns; and demonizing and dehumanizing rhetoric.[70] What makes Turkey's political polarization distinctive is the degree of moral polarization exhibited by large numbers of Turkish citizens. Two waves of national public opinion surveys conducted in 2017 and 2020 by the German Marshall Fund of the United States and Istanbul Bilgi University illustrate this.[71] Across both surveys, Turkish citizens expressed feelings of moral superiority over citizens associated with rival political parties. Over 90% of surveyed subjects described members of their own party as "honorable," whereas between 77 and 85% described members of rival political parties with morally disparaging terms such as "arrogant," "hypocritical," "cruel," and "bigoted." In the surveys, around 75% of subjects stated that they would oppose their children marrying members of rival political parties, 67% would not want their children to play with children of families from rival political

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[65]Senem Aydın Düzgit, "The Islamist-Secularist Divide and Turkey's Descent into Severe Polarization," in Carothers and O'Donohue, *Democracies Divided*, 17–37; Emre Erdogan, "Turkey: Divided We Stand," report for the German Marshall Fund of the United States, no. 118 (2016), https://frontierenews.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Erdogan_DividedWeStand_Apr16.pdf; Murat Somer, "Turkey: The Slippery Slope from Reformist to Revolutionary Polarization and Democratic Breakdown," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 681, no. 1 (January 2019): 42–61.

[66]Referred to as the "Nation Alliance" led by the CHP and including as members the Good Party, the Felicity Party, and the Democrat Party.

[67]Referred to as the "People's Alliance" led by the AKP and including as members the Nationalist Movement Party and the Sunni Muslim Great Unity Party.

[68]Such as the Kurdish conflict and tensions between the Alevi minority community and conservative, hard-line Sunni Muslims.

[69]Senem Aydın Düzgit, "Islamist-Secularist Divide," in Carothers and O'Donohue, *Democracies Divided*.

[70]Ali İhsan Akbaş, "Artificial Agendas: Polarization and Partisanship in the Turkish Mainstream Media through Fake News" (master's thesis, Uppsala University, 2019), https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?dswid=1604&pid=diva2%3A1330923; Senem Aydın Düzgit, "Islamist-Secularist Divide," in Carothers and O'Donohue, *Democracies Divided*.

[71]"Dimensions of Polarization in Turkey in 2017," Turkuazlab, Strategies for Mitigating Polarization, 2017, https://www.turkuazlab.org/en/dimensions-of-polarization-in-turkey-2017/; "Dimensions of Polarization in Turkey in 2020," Turkuazlab, Strategies for Mitigating Polarization, 2020, https://www.turkuazlab.org/en/dimensions-of-polarization-in-turkey-2020/.

parties, and over 70% would not want a neighbor of a rival political party. Around 77% of respondents described rival partisans as "a threat to the country," while between 34% and 50% favored restricting rival partisans' political participation and placing them under police surveillance.

These survey results indicate a high level of moral polarization among Turkish citizens, and they are buttressed by V-DEM data. Between 2000 and 2018, political polarization in Turkey increased by 100%, moving from a moderate level of polarization to the highest level during the AKP's period of political dominance.[72] At the same time, the level of political violence increased by one-third, moving from a moderate to a high level.[73]

Polarization and Group Mobilization

Third, and finally, because partisan polarization reinforces in-group (co-partisan) affinity and out-group (out-partisan) antipathy, it also serves to facilitate collective mobilization that is necessary for organized political violence to occur while at the same time producing barriers to intergroup reconciliation and cooperation. An established body of research demonstrates that political elites make electorally strategic use of identity-based group conflict. Political leaders frequently stoke and exacerbate political and social group divisions—often enhancing in-group hostilities toward outgroups and sometimes encouraging violence—to mobilize supporters for collective action and to intimidate and demobilize members of opposing parties.[74]

This literature is primarily focused on explaining violent electoral politics—political riots, election violence, ethnic violence, etc.—in unstable or nonconsolidated democracies. However, investigating this may be also relevant for the contemporary US political climate and those of other highly polarized advanced democracies. As previously noted, partisan identification in the United States has become increasingly aligned with racial and religious identities[75] in addition to culturally relevant identities such as educational achievement, religiosity, and urban versus rural

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[72]Measured using "v2cacamps.ord" (ordinal level of polarization) from V-DEM. In 2000, the polarization measure stood at 2 (on a 0–4 point scale). By 2018 the polarization measure stood at 4 (on a 0–4 point scale).

[73]Measured using "v2caviol_ord" (ordinal level of political violence) from V-DEM. The political violence level in Turkey actually doubled—increasing from 2 to 4 (on a 0–4 points scale)—between 2000 and 2015 before lowering to 3 in 2017.

[74]Michael Bratton and Mwangi S. Kimenyi, "Voting in Kenya: Putting Ethnicity in Perspective," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 2, no. 2 (2008): 272–89; Paul Collier and Pedro C. Vicente, "Violence, Bribery, and Fraud: The Political Economy of Elections in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Public Choice* 153, no. 1/2 (October 2012): 117–47; Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, updated ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Steven I. Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[75]See Lilliana Mason, *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018); Lilliana Mason, "A Cross-Cutting Calm: How Social Sorting Drives Affective Polarization," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 80, no. S1 (2016): 351–77.

residence. This social identity–based sorting has important implications for electoral politics. Gone are the days in which interpartisan hostilities could be mitigated because partisan social identities were "cross-cutting" across social and partisan groups.[76] Instead, American politics resembles the more contentious ethnic politics of more unstable democracies in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, or South and Southeast Asia, complete with the increased possibility of violence. As in those countries, politics devolves into intractable identity-based group conflicts that reinforce polarization and hinder compromise and cooperative problem-solving.[77] This produces an environment where more extreme behaviors, including violence, may be more likely.

Mobilization Case Example: Bangladesh

Bangladesh provides an example of political elites' instrumental use of political polarization to mobilize supporters. According to data from V-DEM, since 2000 political polarization in Bangladesh has been at the highest measurable level.[78] Since democracy was restored in 1991, Bangladesh has featured a two-party system pitting the center-left, secular, Bengali nationalist Awami League (AL) against the more religious Bangladeshi National Party (BNP). Party divisions between the AL and BNP do not neatly fit along a left-right ideological framework. Rather, party identities are based upon disputes over the ideological identity of the nation, in which the AL promotes a secular Bengali language and cultural national identity, whereas the BNP supports an overtly Islamic national identity.[79] Partisan divides between the AL and BNP are bitter, but they are driven by party leadership rather than by the electorate's rank and file. Scholars argue that political polarization in Bangladesh is based upon the often-personal animosities among party elites, who have adopted a zero-sum approach to governance and party politics.[80]

Tahmina Rahman explains that this elite-based partisan polarization is exacerbated by Bangladesh's weak party system and the nature of its political and governing institutions.[81] The reputational identities and voter

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[76]Mason and Wronski, "One Tribe to Bind Them All."

[77]Tal Orian Harel, Ifat Maoz, and Eran Halperin, "A Conflict within a Conflict: Intragroup Ideological Polarization and Intergroup Intractable Conflict," *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences* 34 (August 2020): 52–57.

[78]Measured using "v2cacamps.ord" (ordinal level of polarization) from V-DEM. Political polarization was consistently at the 4 level (on a 0–4 point scale) between 2000 and 2018.

[79]Naomi Hossain, "Winner Takes All: Elite Power Struggles and Polarization in Bangladesh," in Carothers and O'Donohue, *Democracies Divided*, 177–200.

[80]Tahmina Rahman, "Party System Institutionalization and Pernicious Polarization in Bangladesh," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 681, no. 1 (January 2019): 173–92; Swati Parashar, "Political Polarisation in Bangladesh" (paper for the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, 9 May 2006), http://www.ipcs.org/comm_select.php?articleNo=2010.

[81]Rahman, "Party System Institutionalization and Pernicious Polarization in Bangladesh."

mobilization instruments of Bangladeshi parties are underdeveloped relative to parties in other democracies. At the same time, corruption and provision of government patronage are endemic. Because parties lack the ability to mobilize their supporters using robust get-out-the-vote machines commonly found in other democracies and because the stakes of winning elections, and thereby controlling government resources and patronage, are very high, party elites seek to intensify political polarization in Bangladeshi society to galvanize and mobilize supporters, prevail at the polls, form governments, distribute spoils to party members, and completely exclude the opposition.

Beyond this institutional explanation for political polarization in Bangladesh, scholars also identify the establishment of the 2010 International Crimes Tribunal as an important driver of polarization. The International Crimes Tribunal was founded to investigate and prosecute individuals who collaborated with West Pakistani armed forces during the brutal 1971 civil war. Such collaborators are argued to be traitors to the nation and potentially culpable for the human rights violations during the 1971 war. Both parties have weaponized the tribunal against each other. The AL and its supporters are accused of using the tribunal to depict the BNP and its supporters as traitors to the nation and religious extremists. The BNP and its supporters criticize the tribunal as an example of AL political overreach and an instrument for denigrating religious Bangladeshis. The BNP's propaganda often depicts AL members as "atheists" for supporting the tribunal. Both parties frequently deploy defamatory, misleading, and inflammatory social media.[82]

Bangladesh's elite-driven polarization has produced periods of intense political violence.[83] Naomi Hossain explains that party leaders' instrumentalization of political polarization has successfully created sociopolitical divides within the Bangladeshi electorate, producing an environment in which political violence is more likely to occur.[84] The zero-sum nature of politics, in which the losing political party is shut out from all influence and is not permitted to operate as a standard loyal opposition force, shrinks the legal space for political opposition, leaving violent activity as an alternative.[85] Moreover, the parties themselves frequently sponsor political strikes called "Hartals" that often become violent.[86] The result is heightened political violence. According to data from V-DEM, political

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[82]Hossain, "Winner Takes All," in Carothers and O'Donohue, *Democracies Divided*; Rahman, "Party System Institutionalization and Pernicious Polarization in Bangladesh."

[83]Naureen Chowdhury Fink, *Bombs and Ballots: Terrorism, Political Violence, and Governance in Bangladesh* (New York: International Peace Institute, 2010), https://www.ipinst.org/2010/02/bombs-and-ballots-terrorism-political-violence-and-governance-in-bangladesh.

[84]Hossain, "Winner Takes All," in Carothers and O'Donohue, *Democracies Divided*.

[85]Parashar, "Political Polarisation in Bangladesh."

[86]Hossain, "Winner Takes All," in Carothers and O'Donohue, *Democracies Divided*.

violence in Bangladesh in the most recent year measured (2019) stood at the highest level and had grown by one-third since 2000.[87]

Hypotheses

Given the expectation that by fostering out-partisan dehumanization, enhancing moral polarization, and facilitating in-partisan mobilization while hindering interpartisan compromise and cooperation, increased partisan polarization is linked with support for political violence and actual political violence, this study tests the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 (H1) Individuals in the United States who exhibit partisan polarization are also more likely to express support for political violence.

Hypothesis 2 (H2) Democracies characterized by greater levels of partisan polarization are also more likely to experience greater levels of political violence.

I find support for the hypotheses across two different sets of empirical analyses conducted at the individual and cross-national levels. The first analysis surveys Americans' attitudes regarding members of opposing political parties and examines how these attitudes predict support or tolerance for political violence. The second analysis tests whether political violence is higher in democracies characterized by greater levels of polarization. I detail these two analyses and their results in the next sections.

First Analysis: US Survey

The first analysis employs an original survey of 1,899 US residents[88] fielded 6–16 September 2021 on the Lucid Theorem online panel.[89] The median respondent completed the online survey in 14.1 minutes. The partisan

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[87]Measured using "v2caviol_ord" (ordinal level of political violence) from V-DEM. Political violence was measured at a 3 (on a 0–4 point scale) in 2000 but had increased to a 4 by 2018.

[88]Of original respondents, 141 who failed a simple attention check—requiring them to check a specific response box—and/or who either indicated that they were not US residents or used a VPN, were eliminated from the sample. Consent was obtained from all subjects, subjects were free to terminate the survey at any time, and all subjects were debriefed. Penn State IRB approval #00017882.

[89]More information about the Lucid Theorem panel can be found at: https://lucidtheorem.com/. For other examples of academic research using the Lucid panel, see: Erin C. Cassese, Christina E. Farhart, and Joanne M. Miller, "Gender Differences in COVID-19 Conspiracy Theory Beliefs," *Politics & Gender* 16, no. 4 (December 2020): 1009–18; Miles T. Armaly, David T. Buckley, and Adam M. Enders, "Christian Nationalism and Political Violence: Victimhood, Racial Identity, Conspiracy, and Support for the Capitol Attacks," *Political Behavior* 44, no. 2 (June 2022): 937–60; Matthew Motta, "Republicans, Not Democrats, Are More Likely to Endorse Anti-vaccine Misinformation," *American Politics Research* 49, no. 5 (September 2021): 428–38.

breakdown of the survey was 34.5% Republicans, 44.8% Democrats, and 20.6% independents.[90] The survey is broadly representative of the wider US population.[91] The dependent variable for the first analysis measures respondent support for the use of political violence. It is constructed from the question: "Do you believe it is sometimes necessary to use violence to achieve your political goals?" Respondents were given a five-point Likert response scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Support for political violence is low in the sample. Around 70.5% of all respondents strongly or somewhat disagreed that it is sometimes necessary to use violence to achieve political goals. Around 19.7% were ambivalent, stating that they neither agreed nor disagreed. Around 6.8% of respondents "somewhat agreed," and another 3.02% "strongly agreed." There are partisan differences for respondent support for political violence. Whereas around 11.7% of Democrats somewhat or strongly agreed that political violence is sometimes necessary, 8.4% of Republicans and 7.9% of independents exhibited somewhat or strong support for political violence.

The dependent variable in the US study measures general support for political violence without specifying the type of or motivation for political violence. I opt for a general measure of support of political violence because it corresponds with the general levels of political violence modeled in the cross-national analysis used in the second study. However, there is some scholarly controversy about the use of general questions to assess support for political violence in US survey research.[92] Westwood et al. argue that general questions about political violence overinflate support, namely because subjects often define political violence in different ways and inattentive subjects are more likely to express higher support for political violence.[93] This is not a problem in my study for several reasons. First, there is no reason to suspect that more politically polarized subjects are more likely to endorse political violence if it is presented through a general question. Second, as previously noted, I embedded multiple attention checks in the survey and removed inattentive subjects. Third, because Kalmoe and Mason show that subject aggressiveness is a predictor of subject attentiveness, I also control for subject aggression in my estimations.[94] Finally, I conducted a robustness test—described below—that uses a more comprehensive, multiquestion index of subject support for political violence that provides some specificity.

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[90]Respondents who identified as "strong," "weak," or "lean" Republican or Democrat or as "Independent" based upon the Lucid Theorem standard demographic data.

[91]Comparisons of basic demographic statistics of the survey sample and the US population in 2021 are presented in the online appendix.

[92]Kalmoe and Mason, *Radical American Partisanship*; Westwood et al., "Current Research Overstates American Support for Political Violence."

[93]Westwood et al., "Current Research Overstates American Support for Political Violence."

[94]Kalmoe and Mason, *Radical American Partisanship*.

Because the dependent variable in the first analysis is ordinal, an ordered logistical estimation technique is used.[95] However, as a further check and to simplify presentation of the substantive results, a supplemental analysis is also conducted using a dichotomous version of the dependent variable coded 1 for respondents who indicated they strongly or somewhat agreed that political violence is sometimes necessary. For this supplemental analysis, a logistical regression estimation technique is employed.[96]

The survey analysis uses two variables to measure partisan polarization. These are operationalized as measures of anti-Democrat and anti-Republican aversion among partisans. They are constructed using two questions asking whether the respondent regards members of the opposing party to be a threat to the nation's well-being and whether members of one's own party "love America more." The phrasing of these questions is modeled on language used in previous surveys employed by the Pew Research Center.[97] For each question, respondents are presented with an ordinal, Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Responses to the two questions are then added together to produce an aggregated measure ranging from 2, indicating no level of aversion toward members of the opposing party, to 10, indicating a very high level.[98] For Democrats in the sample, the median level of anti-Republican rancor was between 6 and 7. For Republicans asked about Democrats, it was between 5 and 6. However, a notably greater percentage of Democrats in the sample—38.7%—exhibited high levels[99] of aversion toward opposing party members than Republicans—10.2%.

A number of control variables are also included in the analysis. These include respondent age, gender, household income, employment status, education level, political ideology,[100] racial/ethnic background, religion,[101] religiosity,[102] level of political engagement,[103] news consumption

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[95]Models 1–3, Table 1.
[96]Model 4, Table 1.
[97]"Political Polarization in the American Public," Pew Research Center, 12 June 2014, https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/.
[98]α = .7382 for responses to the statements "Republicans are a threat to the nation's well-being" and "Democrats love America more." α = .7599 for responses to the statements "Democrats are a threat to the nation's well-being" and "Republicans love America more."
[99]Measured as a moralizing aversion score of 8 or higher, indicating the respondent "somewhat" or "strongly" agreed that members of the opposing party are a threat to the nation's well-being and that members of their own party love America more.
[100]Measured as degree of conservatism using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "extremely liberal" to "extremely conservative."
[101]Measured as a dichotomous indicator coded 1 for respondents who indicated they identified with any Christian religious denomination.
[102]Measured using three questions assessing respondents' self-declared religiosity, how frequently they reported praying, and how frequently they reported attending religious worship services. These were combined into a pseudo-additive scale ranging from 0, indicating that the respondent identified as not religious, to 12, indicating that the respondent is religious and regularly prays and attends services.
[103]Measured using a dichotomous indicator coded 1 for respondents who reported voting in the 2020 US presidential election and that they had contacted an elected official, urged another person to vote, or participated in a political meeting at least once in the past three years.

patterns,[104] and region of residence.[105] Also included as a control is a measure of subject propensity to have an aggressive personality ("trait aggressiveness"), a factor that may predict respondent attitudes toward political violence.[106] Descriptive statistics for the first study—the US survey—are included in the online appendix, along with a copy of the survey instrument itself.

Findings

The results of the first analysis provide support for the hypothesis that individuals exhibiting higher levels of partisan polarization are more approving of the use of political violence. Table 1 demonstrates this. In Models 1 and 2, subjects identifying as Republicans and Democrats who believe members of the opposing political party to be a threat to the nation's well-being and love America less are more likely to support the use of violence to achieve political goals. This is also the case in Model 3, where all subjects in the sample are included in the estimation. In Model 3, all subjects who express aversion toward members of opposing political parties are more likely to support political violence.[107] Finally, this same result is produced in Model 4, where the dependent variable is measured dichotomously. The findings in Table 1 are robust even though several of the controls are also significant. Male, politically engaged, and more aggressive subjects are more likely to support political violence, across all estimations.

Figure 1 graphs the marginal effects of the results of Model 4.[108] In the figure, the slope is positive and significant for both Republicans and Democrats. The effect of increased anti-Democrat aversion on support for political violence is more dramatic for Republican subjects, however. Republicans expressing greater tolerance for or affinity[109] with Democrats

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[104]Measured using several variables, including a Likert scale indicator for how frequently the respondent reported that they regularly follow political news and two dichotomous variables each coded 1 for respondents who reported obtaining their news mostly from cable television or from social media.

[105]Dichotomous indicators for residence by US region: Northeast, South, Midwest, West.

[106]Additive indicator ranging from 4 to 20 combining four questions used in Nathan P. Kalmoe, "Fueling the Fire: Violent Metaphors, Trait Aggression, and Support for Political Violence," *Political Communication* 31, no. 4 (2014): 545–63: "For the following questions, please tell me whether you think the statement is true or false for you. Please remember that your answers to any questions on the survey are completely confidential: 1) Given enough provocation I may hit another person; 2) Other people always seem to get the breaks; 3) I have trouble controlling my temper; 4) When people annoy me, I may tell them what I think of them." Responses: completely false for me; somewhat false for me; neither true nor false; somewhat true for me; completely true for me. α = .6072.

[107]Note that because Models 3 and 4 include all subjects, controls for partisan affiliation are also included with "independent" as the reference category.

[108]Note: graphs using dichotomous versions of the dependent variable with specifications that are identical to Models 1–3 also exhibit the same pattern. Results available from author.

[109]Here measured as respondents who disagree or strongly disagree (independent variable ordinal value of 2, 3, or 4) that members of the opposing political party are a threat to the nation's well-being or love America less.

Table 1. US survey results: Polarization and support for political violence.

	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Anti-Republican polarization		0.071*	0.084**	0.125**
		(0.041)	(0.027)	(0.048)
Anti-Democrat polarization	0.123*		0.071*	0.267***
	(0.069)		(0.040)	(0.068)
Democrat			−0.104	0.185
			(0.133)	(0.256)
Republican			−0.072	0.417
			(0.146)	(0.279)
Age	−0.006	−0.023***	−0.015***	−0.024***
	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.003)	(0.007)
Gender (Male = 1)	0.315*	0.278*	0.271**	0.460**
	(0.170)	(0.144)	(0.095)	(0.177)
Household income	−0.016	0.002	−0.004	0.027*
	(0.014)	(0.011)	(0.008)	(0.014)
Unemployed	−0.300	−0.152	−0.138	−0.254
	(0.310)	(0.219)	(0.146)	(0.279)
Education level	0.060	−0.021	0.012	0.017
	(0.049)	(0.042)	(0.027)	(0.050)
Conservative ideology	0.051	0.137**	0.126***	0.043
	(0.069)	(0.052)	(0.037)	(0.060)
White, non-Hispanic	−0.342	0.148	−0.615*	−0.490
	(0.702)	(0.512)	(0.311)	(0.574)
Black, non-Hispanic	−0.619	0.536	−0.448	0.078
	(0.921)	(0.532)	(0.338)	(0.605)
Asian, Pacific Islander	−0.475	0.407	−0.350	−0.396
	(0.753)	(0.536)	(0.340)	(0.624)
Native American	−0.710	0.290	−0.811	−0.680
	(1.138)	(0.712)	(0.503)	(0.893)
Hispanic, Latinx	−0.290	0.348	−0.405	−0.455
	(0.728)	(0.506)	(0.318)	(0.589)
Christian	−0.059	−0.140	−0.044	−0.275
	(0.234)	(0.179)	(0.123)	(0.210)
Religiosity	−0.010	−0.005	−0.006	0.044*
	(0.027)	(0.023)	(0.015)	(0.026)
Politically engaged	0.339*	0.253*	0.264*	0.382*
	(0.176)	(0.149)	(0.103)	(0.186)
Follows news	0.025	−0.045	−0.045	0.046
	(0.058)	(0.050)	(0.031)	(0.058)
Obtains news from cable	−0.060	−0.138	−0.040	0.297
	(0.242)	(0.241)	(0.156)	(0.277)
Obtains news from social media	−0.198	−0.093	−0.118	0.145
	(0.230)	(0.188)	(0.124)	(0.210)
Aggressive personality	0.147***	0.134***	0.130***	0.158***
	(0.027)	(0.023)	(0.016)	(0.026)
South	0.118	−0.428*	−0.055	0.252
	(0.233)	(0.188)	(0.126)	(0.242)
West	0.205	0.050	0.198	0.770**
	(0.308)	(0.207)	(0.150)	(0.264)
Midwest	0.311	−0.201	0.141	0.271
	(0.252)	(0.219)	(0.143)	(0.286)
Constant / Constant cut 1[a]	2.633**	1.314*	1.521**	−6.709***
	(1.018)	(0.697)	(0.520)	(0.945)
Model	Ordered Logit	Ordered Logit	Ordered Logit	Logit[b]
Sample	Democrats	Republicans	All	All
Obs	630	827	1,829	1,829
χ^2	61.94***	129.44***	214.12***	173.75***
Pseudo r^2	0.0412	0.0628	0.0473	0.1461

Notes:

***$p \leq .000$; **$p \leq .01$; *$p \leq .1$

[a]Only first constant cut is reported to conserve space in Models 1, 2, and 3.

[b]Dependent variable collapsed into dichotomous measure coded 1 for respondents who strongly or somewhat agree that it is sometimes necessary to use violence to achieve your political goals.
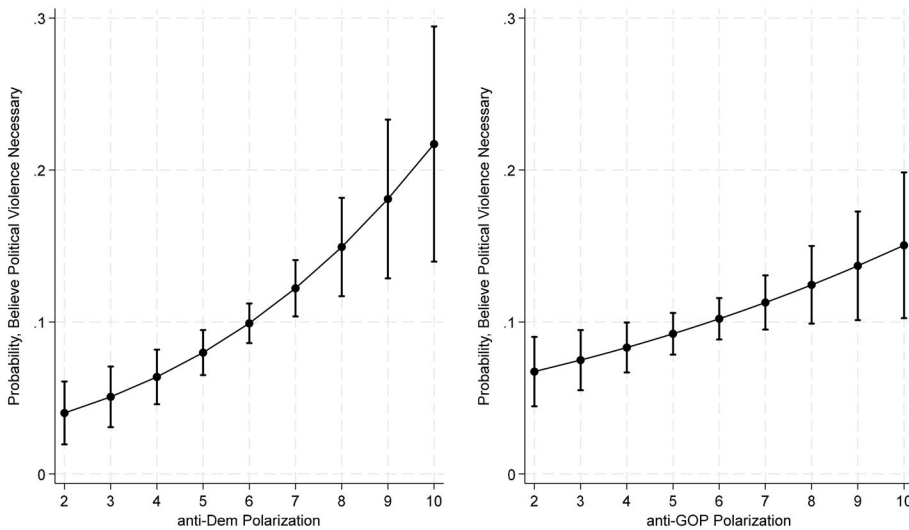
Figure 1. Polarization and support for political violence, US survey. Marginal effects plots; all controls included.

have a probability of between 4.0 and 6.4 of expressing support for political violence, whereas those expressing high levels of anti-Democrat aversion[110] have a probability of between 14.9 and 21.7 of supporting political violence. Democrats who express similarly low levels of aversion toward Republicans have a probability of between 6.7 and 8.3 of supporting political violence; Democrats exhibiting high levels of anti-Republican aversion have a probability of between 12.4 and 15 of supporting political violence.

I conducted several robustness checks of the US analysis. These include rerunning the estimation using a naive version of the model, a dichotomous measure of the dependent variable, an ordinary least squares modeling technique, a measure of polarization that is disaggregated by party, and a more comprehensive measure of supporting political violence alluded to previously that I built using several questions about political violence.[111] Moreover, though the US survey sample is broadly representative of the US population as previously noted,[112] I reran the analysis using a nationally weighted sample.[113] The results of these robustness tests reinforce the main findings and are presented and briefly discussed in the online appendix.

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[110]Measured as respondents who agree or strongly agree (independent variable ordinal value of 8, 9, or 10) that members of the opposing political party are a threat to the nation's well-being or love America less.

[111]I check the robustness of the analysis for the US survey both by using an aggregated measure of support for political violence and by rerunning the analysis on each individual question in the aggregated measure. These results are presented and discussed in the online appendix.

[112]See the online appendix for a table comparing survey and US population statistics.

[113]Survey weights built by the author using US census summary statistics. Sample weighted by respondent gender, race and ethnicity, region, education level, and age. Results presented in the online appendix.

Second Analysis: Cross-National Time-Series Observational Study of Democracies

The second analysis uses quasi-representative, cross-national, time-series, observational data on country-level partisan polarization and occurrence of political violence in eighty-three consolidated democracies—identified as countries for which the Polity2 score is 6 or higher—for the period 1950 (or 1970) through 2018.[114] It provides support for the second hypothesis. Polarized democracies are more likely to experience political violence. A list of democracies in this sample, along with descriptive statistics for key variables, is included in the online appendix.

For the second analysis, the dependent variable, political violence, is measured using an ordinal indicator of the level of political violence occurring annually within the country from 1970 to 2018. This variable is derived from the V-DEM database and is measured using its "v2caviol, Political Violence" indicator. This indicator measures severity of political violence by nonstate actors within a country on a five-point scale[115] ranging from 0, indicating the complete absence of political violence, to 4, indicating that nonstate political actors often used political violence.[116] In the sample, around 25% of all observations exhibited no political violence. In a plurality of observations, around 44%, political violence was "rare." In 18.9% of observations, political violence was occasional. In 9.2% and 3.4% of observations, political violence was "frequent or often." Ordered logistical regression estimation techniques are used to analyze the main political violence dependent variable. However, the analysis also uses a dichotomous version of the variable[117] and employs a logistical regression estimation technique to simplify substantive interpretation of the results.

The independent variable for the cross-national observational analysis is an ordinal indicator of the degree of polarization within countries. This measure is derived from the V-DEM database and is arranged on an ordinal scale ranging from 0, indicating an absence of polarization where supporters of opposing political parties interact with comity and mutual respect within wider society, to 4, indicating a very high level of polarization where supporters of opposing political sects interact with animosity

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[114]Monty G. Marshall, Ted Robert Gurr, and Keith Jaggers, *Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800–2018: Dataset Users' Manual* (Vienna, VA: Center for Systemic Peace, 2019, http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscr/p4manualv2018.pdf.

[115]Note that the "original scale (_osp)" or linearized original scale posterior prediction version of the V-DEM political violence measure ("v2caviol") is also used as a check. These produce the same findings. Results available from author.

[116]Specific coding for v2caviol: "How often have non-state actors used political violence against persons this year?" Responses: 0 = not at all; 1 = rare[ly]; 2 = occasionally; 3 = frequently; 4 = often. Note that the violence measured by this indicator is political in nature, not driven by criminal profit and excludes violence that is purely symbolic or involving only the destruction of property.

[117]Coded 1 for observations where political violence (V-DEM) is "frequent" or "often," the two highest ordinal categories.

and hostility.[118] Polarization is widely distributed among the democracies examined. In the sample, around 50% of country observations exhibit very low or no indicator of polarization.[119] In around 23.3% of observations, the level of polarization is moderate.[120] Finally, approximately 26% of observations exhibit high or very high levels of polarization.[121]

Several control variables are also included in the cross-national analysis. These include indicators of the degree of democracy and democratic consolidation of the country, measured using the Polity2 score of the country and the age[122] of the country's regime.[123] These are important to include, as there is diversity among full, established democracies in terms of level of consolidation. To account for the possible influence of countries' electoral systems, categorical variables for whether the country uses a proportional, plurality, or mixed system[124] are also included. These are derived from the Quality of Government database.[125] Countries with cultural or socioeconomic divisions may be more prone to political violence. Therefore, a measure of countries' levels of ethnolinguistic fractionalization[126] and Gini coefficient scores—income inequality—are also controlled for. Base-10 logged measures of country population and gross domestic product (GDP) per capita are also included as controls in all estimations.[127] Finally, in the models, past experience of civil war is also controlled for. This is accomplished by including a dichotomous variable coded 1 for all observations in countries experiencing a civil war in the past five years. This variable was derived using the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset, version 22.1.[128] All independent variables used in the cross-national study except for the past civil war indicator are lagged by one year.[129]

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[118]Coppedge et al., *V-Dem Codebook*, v10. Variable name "v2cacamps." Prompting question from the *V-DEM Codebook*: "Is society polarized into antagonistic, political camps?" Clarification: "Here we refer to the extent which political differences affect social relationships beyond political discussion. Societies are highly polarized if supporters of opposing political camps are reluctant to engage in friendly interactions, for example, in family functions, civil associations, their free time activities and workplaces." Responses: "0 = not at all; 1 = mainly not; 2 = somewhat; 3 = yes, to a noticeable extent; 4 = yes, to a large extent." Coppedge, *V-Dem Codebook*, v10, 224.

[119]v2cacamps = 0 or 1.

[120]v2cacamps = 2.

[121]v2cacamps = 3 or 4.

[122]"Durable" from Polity2.

[123]Marshall et al. *Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions*.

[124]In the analysis, mixed electoral system is the reference category.

[125]Jan Teorell et al., *The Quality of Government Standard Dataset*, version Jan23 (Gothenburg: Quality of Government Institute, University of Gothenburg, 2023), https://www.gu.se/en/quality-government.

[126]Derived from Alberto Alesina et al., "Fractionalization," *Journal of Economic Growth* 8 (June 2003): 155–94.

[127]World Bank, "World Development Indicators" (2023), https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators.

[128]Data and codebook available at: https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/.

[129]Descriptive statistics for all variables used in cross-national analysis are presented in the online appendix.

Table 2. Cross-national sample of democracies results: Polarization and political violence.

	[5]	[6]
	Level of Political Violence (V-DEM)	Level of Political Violence, Binary[a] (V-DEM)
Polarization$_{n-1}$	0.899***	1.239***
	(0.065)	(0.155)
Polity2 score$_{n-1}$	0.045	0.105
	(0.055)	(0.108)
Regime age (Polity durable score)$_{n-1}$	0.011***	0.010
	(0.002)	(0.006)
Proportional election system$_{n-1}$	−0.280*	−0.107
	(0.136)	(0.326)
Majoritarian election system$_{n-1}$	0.281	0.141
	(0.172)	(0.365)
Ethnolinguistic fractionalization$_{n-1}$	0.375	−0.307
	(0.274)	(0.533)
Gini$_{n-1}$	0.034***	0.035**
	(0.006)	(0.012)
Population (log)$_{n-1}$	0.373***	0.443***
	(0.039)	(0.079)
GDP per capita (log)$_{n-1}$	−0.743***	−0.945***
	(0.082)	(0.150)
Civil war, past 5 years	1.743***	1.260***
	(0.171)	(0.249)
Constant / Constant Cut 1	1.897*	−6.897**
	(1.138)	(2.106)
Obs.	1,439	1,439
Number of countries	83	83
Wald χ^2	905.02***	222.55***
Pseudo r^2	0.2632	0.3880
Model	Ordered Logit	Logit

Notes:
***$p \leq .000$ **$p \leq .01$ *$p \leq .1$
Standard errors clustered by country and year
Only the first constant cut reported to conserve space
[a]Dependent variable collapsed into dichotomous measure coded 1 for countries where nonstate actors used political violence "frequently" or "often" (Y > 2).

Findings

The results of the cross-national analysis provide support for the second hypothesis: that more polarized democracies are more likely to experience greater levels of political violence. These results are summarized in Table 2. In Model 5, more polarized democracies experience greater levels of political violence. This is also the case in Model 6, where a dichotomous version of the dependent variable is used. In Figure 2 the marginal effects of polarization on political violence are graphed, and they illustrate a clear positive slope in the relationship between political polarization and occurrence of political violence in democracies. Democracies that are "not at all" polarized (polarization level = 0) have a 1.5% probability of experiencing frequent political violence. Democracies that are "mainly not" polarized (polarization level = 1) have a 4.9% probability of experiencing frequent political violence. Probability of experiencing frequent political violence increases to 12% in democracies that are "somewhat" polarized
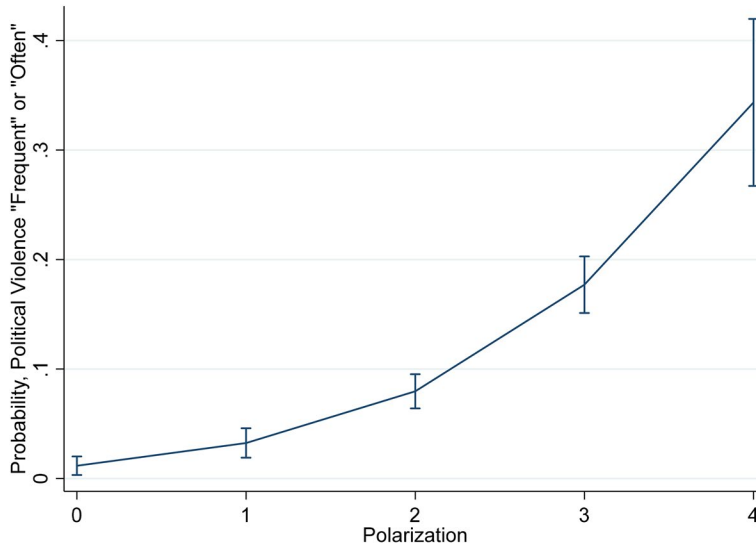
Figure 2. Polarization and level of political violence, cross-national sample of democracies, 1970–2018.

(polarization level = 2). This probability doubles in democracies that are "noticeably" polarized (polarization level = 3). Finally, the most polarized democracies—those that are polarized "to a large extent" (polarization level = 4)—have a 42.9% probability of experiencing frequent political violence.

In the cross-national analyses, several of the controls are also significant. Across both Models 5 and 6, Gini coefficient, national population, and legacy of civil war are positive predictors of political violence, whereas GDP per capita is a negative predictor. This suggests that democracies characterized by an unequal distribution of income (measured using Gini), a large population, and a legacy of past civil war are more likely to experience political violence. One control is only significant in one model in the cross-national analysis. In Model 5, which uses the ordinal version of the dependent variable, democracies with older regimes are more likely to experience political violence, whereas democracies with proportional election systems are less likely to experience political violence. This suggests that the nature of democratic political institutions and degree of cultural diversity matter for the likelihood of political violence in democracies. One of these controls bears an intuitive relationship with political violence: democracies with proportional systems typically disadvantage small, narrow, and more extreme political parties that could foster conflicts; but ethnically and linguistically diverse democracies are more likely to feature ethnic or language cleavages that could spark violence. The finding that democracies with older, and presumably more durable and

consolidated, political regimes are more likely to experience higher levels of political violence is not intuitive and needs further investigation.

I conducted several robustness checks of the findings in the second analysis. These include rerunning the main model using a temporally lagged version of the dependent variable on the right-hand side of the equation to address temporal autocorrelation, rerunning the main model using a multilevel mixed effects model in which country cases are nested, and controlling for other confounders such as extremist political parties and their rhetoric and the influence of past political violence. Finally, the effects of polarization are tested on alternate measures of political violence, specifically the occurrence of civil war, violent civil unrest, and domestic terrorism. For these alternate dependent variables, I use data from UCDP/ PRIO,[130] Major Episodes of Political Violence,[131] and the Global Terrorism Database,[132] respectively. The results of these checks all reproduce the main findings of the study and are presented and discussed in the online appendix.

Endogeneity

This study hypothesizes an association, rather than a directed causal relationship, between partisan polarization and the occurrence of political violence within democracies. Indeed, the empirical tests used in both the US survey and the cross-national analyses cannot definitively determine a causal relationship whereby polarization increases support for and occurrence of political violence. Logically, it is probable that an endogenous relationship exists between polarization and political violence in which they reinforce one another. Moreover, the coding of the independent variable might be affected by measurement biases arising from the fact that V-DEM expert coders might know the history of violence in a country. To provide some more clarity about the causal direction of the relationship, I conducted an endogeneity test. This test involves a generalized method of moments technique using Arrelano-Bond estimators.[133] The results of this test—presented in the online appendix—determine that a temporally lagged measure of political violence does significantly predict

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[130]Coded 1 for any country-year observation in which a civil war occurred. Data and codebook available from: https://www.prio.org/data/4.

[131]Monty G. Marshall, "Major Episodes of Political Violence (MEPV) and Conflict Regions, 1946–2018," Center for Systemic Peace, www.systemicpeace.org. Coded 1 for any country-year observation in which intrastate, societal, ethnic, or communal violence occurred. Data and codebook available from: https://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html.

[132]START (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism), "Global Terrorism Database (GTD), 1970–2020 [data file]," https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd. Measured as a count of casualties—people wounded, killed, or directly adversely affected—by domestic terrorist attacks. Data and codebook available from: https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/.

[133]Manuel Arellano and Stephen Bond, "Some Tests of Specification for Panel Data: Monte Carlo Evidence and an Application to Employment Equations," *Review of Economic Studies* 58, no. 2 (April 1991): 277–97.

level of political violence in the sample of democracies studied. Moreover, by including lagged versions of the dependent variable and various controls of past legacy of violence in several of the robustness checks, I also partially mitigate the problem of endogeneity produced by V-DEM coder biases. This, of course, does not rule out the possibility that political violence also bolsters future polarization. However, it does provide evidence that polarized democracies experience greater levels of political violence than nonpolarized democracies.

Polarization and Political Violence, Future Research Directions

The findings of both studies demonstrate that partisan polarization is not simply an unfortunate contemporary trend in advanced democracies that makes politics less civil, productive, and pleasant. Rather, polarization makes politics more dangerous. Indeed, partisan political polarization should be regarded as a significant generator of potential security threats. As such, it deserves attention from policymakers and the public.

Future research should investigate how polarization might be mitigated in order to reduce these security threats. Other scholarship suggests a couple of avenues worth pursuing. Kalmoe and Mason's recent work suggests that political elites could play a role in reducing polarization and its negative effects.[134] In their research, they found that when partisan subjects were exposed to partisan leader rhetoric rejecting the use of political violence as an unacceptable behavior while emphasizing cross-partisan tolerance, they were less likely to subsequently endorse the use of political violence. This underscores the positive role partisan leaders—political candidates, elected officials, and perhaps political media figures—have the opportunity to play in reducing partisan polarization and reducing the acceptability of violence. Future research should explore this in the US context and in other democracies.

Additionally, other research suggests that political leader rhetoric and political news and information, particularly that obtained from social media, exacerbates political violence. Research by James A. Piazza finds that countries where politicians frequently use inflammatory hate speech targeting rival social groups and where disinformation is widely propagated through social media experience greater levels of domestic terrorism.[135] In these two studies, the impact of hate speech and disinformation on domestic terrorism was significantly mediated by increased partisan polarization. It is possible that tempering the use of inflammatory public rhetoric demonizing out-partisans by political elites, along with better policing

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[134]Kalmoe and Mason, *Radical American Partisanship*.
[135]Piazza, "Fake News"; Piazza, "Politician Hate Speech and Domestic Terrorism."

online disinformation campaigns, could mitigate partisan political and thereby reduce support for and occurrence of political violence.

Data Availability Statement

The data and materials that support the findings of this study are available in the *Security Studies* Dataverse at https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/THPBRR.