Revisiting the Link between Democracy and Terrorism

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Abstract

This essay revisits the link between democracy and terrorism. Several related divided conclusions proposed in the past are re-examined with new data. An OLS regression with fixed effects and a 2SLS regression are adopted in this essay. The results confirms the common belief that democracy has a positive curvilinear relationship with terrorism. Countries respecting physical integrity would experience less terrorism. High levels of mobilization would inspire terrorism, and new systematic changes in the dynamic between democracy and terrorism remain to be further explored.

Keywords— Democracy, Terrorism, Civil Liberty, Physical Integrity

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1 Introduction

1.1 Research Question

Terrorism is generally defined by scholars as "an intentional use of violence or force against noncombatant civilians by a non-state actor to achieve a political objective or convey a political message that goes beyond its specific victims" (Gunaratna, 2008). The typical primary targets of these attacks are noncombatant civilians, who are not directly involved in conflict or military operations, which could be regarded as a hallmark of terrorism and is intended to impose the maximum amount of psychological impact of the broader population, instilling fear and uncertainty (Polo, 2019). Also, these terrorists acts refer to actions carried out by non-state actors, including extremist groups, insurgents, or other entities that are not officially recognized as sovereign power, which distinguish terrorism from state-sponsored violence or general warfare (Cantey, 2023). Terrorism's primary objective beyond the immediate harm inflicted on its victims, is to send out broader political messages to society, government authorities or specific communities and use symbolic acts of violence to draw attention to the perpetrator's grievances and force a response from those in power (Gunaratna, 2008).

Some scholars also view terrorism as a method for expressing grievances, particularly when groups feel that they have no other viable avenues for voicing their concerns or effecting change (Chenoweth, 2013). In this context, terrorism could be viewed as a desperate tactic employed by those who perceive themselves as powerless or oppressed, using violence "as a last resort to draw attention to their political causes and demand redress" (Homolar & A. Rodríguez-Merino, 2019). Therefore, there should naturally be less terrorist activities in democracies since the cost-benefit analysis often does not support these costly extreme actions when other ways of political participation and expression are not blocked.

Following this logic, many policy makers, especially those from countries engaged in Western Countries Global War on Terror have often claimed that terrorism emerged from authoritarian regimes or failed states, and therefore strong actions of intervention including regime changes and military occupation could be justified as necessary precautionary against this outflow of destabilizing threat to democracy in the liberal world. This stance has been relatively consistent, which represents part of liberal world's general attitude

towards terrorism. After 9/11, president Bush claimed that "it was an attack on the heart and soul of the civilized world, and the world has come together to fight… a war against all those who seek to export terror… against those governments that support or shelter them" (Bush, 2001). The British Prime Minister, Tony Blair wrote privately to Bush after the incident, justifying the necessity of a military intervention in order to promote democracy, that "our fundamental goals is to spread our goals of freedom, democracy, tolerance and the rule of law…That's why though Iraq's WMD is the immediate justification for action, ridding Iraq of Saddam is the real prize" (Blair, 2003). In his later speech at the United Nations General Assembly in 2005, he again suggested "a new UN-backed political process to give democracy to Iraqis", but "the obstacle is terrorism" (Blair, 2005). David Cameron still supported the idea that British democratic values counters extremism and terrorism. In his speech to address extremism in 2015, he claimed that "our freedom comes from out Parliamentary democracy", and all British citizens should believe in the idea of democracy and freedom, so that extremism and terrorism (often with its origin from the Middle East), could be contained and eradicated in the United Kingdom (Cameron, 2015). This agenda of promoting democracy was continued by president Obama as a successful security measure for the free world, as he claimed that he would "need to support democratic transitions in the Arab World" as a strategy of counter-terrorism (Obama, 2013). In short, terrorism is a poison emerging from under-developed authoritarian regimes that poses severe threats to democracies and significantly erodes the liberal world order, and the promotion of democracy, often through military interventions all around the globe, is the cure. As democratic practices and governance spread worldwide, global terrorism will naturally come to an end.

However, as the record of democracy building has not been even remotely ideal in many of the former authoritarian or autocratic countries including Iraq, Afghanistan, and many other Middle Eastern countries (Gerges, 2024), this explicit iconic western policy of democracy-promotion in order to constrain terrorism has been more or less abandoned by Western leaders and policy makers. For instance, in his speech to the Arab Islamic American Summit in 2017, president Trump claimed that America is not to "lecture and tell other people how to live, what to do, who to be, or how to worship.", instead, America is here to "offer partnership based on shared interests and values -to pursue a better future for all" (Trump, 2017), indicating that America is changing to take a new nuanced stance

in the effectiveness of massive democracy-building via military intervention and long term occupation. Also, multiple quantitative academic researches have confirmed a positive linear link between the level of democracy and terrorist attacks. Contrary to many of Western policy makers' longstanding counter-terrorism narrative, democracies tends to be the more popular target of terrorist attacks than authoritarian regimes, that is, the more democratic a country is, the more terrorist attacks it would have suffered (Chenoweth, 2013; Eubank & Weinberg, 1994; Young & Findley, 2011). For instance, Eubank & Weinberg (1994) first explored the linkage of democratic forms of government with the presence of terrorist groups using multiple indicators of democratic practices, and found out that "terrorist groups are more likely to be found in democratic settings than non-democratic ones" (Eubank & Weinberg, 1994).

Some other studies have argued that a curvi-linear effect exists between democracy and terrorism, and specifically, that countries undergoing transition to democracy tend to experience the most terrorism (Abadie, 2004; Chenoweth, 2013; Eyerman, 1998; Kurrild-Klitgaard et al., 2006; Piazza, 2013). Eyerman (1998) used the ITERATE panel data to estimate a negative binomial regression event count model, and concluded that "newly formed democracies are more likely to experience terrorism than established democracies" (Eyerman, 1998). Abadie (2004) stressed the previous experience in Iraq, Spain and Russia in raising his conclusion that transitions from an authoritarian regime to a democracy might be accompanied by increases in terrorism (Abadie, 2004). Kurrild-Klitgaard et al. (2006) focused on the empirical analysis of the correlation between political and civil freedom and transnational terrorist attacks and found out that they are negatively correlated in "a non-linear manner" (Kurrild-Klitgaard et al., 2006). Piazza (2013) revisited the relationship between regime type and terrorism with updated time series and analytic techniques and confirmed the observation that the established relationship that "young democracies experience more terrorism than older democracies" is still valid (Piazza, 2013).

Scholars also sometimes receive inconclusive or contradicting results regarding the correlation between democracy and terrorism (Hand & Saiya, 2022; Piazza, 2007). Piazza (2007) employed statistical analyses on incidents of terrorist activities in 153 countries from 1986 to 2003 and found that variables measuring democracy are not significant predictors of terrorism (Piazza, 2007). While Hand & Saiya (2022) found that attacks from 'strategic'

terrorist groups are positively correlated with levels of democracy in a country, while attacks from 'universalist' terrorist groups who have abstract ambitions and non-negotiable goals tends to decrease as the country becomes more democratic (Hand & Saiya, 2022).

In absence of recent comprehensive literature examining the inconclusive relation between democracy and terrorism, this essay intends to revisit some of the key conclusion made by scholars in the past, re-explore the linkage using new data including numerous novel indicators of democratic governance as well as terrorist activities with quantitative research methods, and reconcile the previous divergent findings where possible. For instance, recent developments in the measurement of democracy, such as the V-Dem data set (Maerz et al., 2024), offer more nuanced and comprehensive indicators of democratic practices and institutions. These novel indicators allow for a deeper understanding of how different aspects of democracy—such as the rule of law, electoral integrity, and civil liberties interact with the presence of terrorism. Also, it would be hard to establish a valid causal relationship between democracy and terrorism based on the results of past studies due to potential endogeneity issues including reverse causality, omitted variable bias and measurement errors, for which this essay plan to revisit the old empirical results with a 2SLS instrument variable regression, so that the more robust causal interpretations between indicators of democracy and terrorism could be made.

1.2 Hypotheses

1.2.1 A Positive Cruvi-linear Relation?

The first conclusion to be revisited is the claim from many past studies that the occurrence of terrorist activities is positively correlated with the level of democracy of a country, which means the more democratic a country is, the more terrorism it would experience. This hypothesis would be re-tested with a new data the Global Terrorism Database (START, 2022) along with several control variables from the V-dem Database (Maerz et al., 2024).

Hypothesis 1: Terrorism is positively correlated with the level of democracy of a country.

The second conclusion to be re-examined is whether the nature of correlation between democracy and terrorism is linear or curvi-linear. This requires a testing of the claim that democracies in transition often experience more terrorism comparing to developed

democracies and stable authoritarian regimes or autocracies. During the selected data range of 1970 to 2018, there has been generally two major waves of democratization. The first one is what scholars refer to as the 'third wave of democratization' (Huntington, 1991), which began with the 1974 Carnation Revolution in Portugal, followed by large scales of democratic transitions in Latin America and Asia-Pacific countries in the 80s (Huntington, 1991). The rapid democratization of the former Eastern Bloc after the collapse of the soviet union is also included in this 'third wave' by scholars (Haggard & Kaufman, 2016). The second major wave is the large scale of democratization process in the middle east, starting from 2011, commonly known as the 'Arab Spring', also brings new observations for transitional democracies in the new century. By including these two major waves of democratization in the data set, it is now more complete and up to date, so that the hypothesis could be further better validated.

Hypothesis 2: Transitional/partial democracies are more exposed to terrorism than stable authoritarian and democratic regimes.

1.2.2 Different Approaches

Building on the conclusion that terrorism is correlated with democracy, scholars have identified multiple different plausible road maps or transferring mechanisms behind this link, which remains to be examined and tested with the newly constructed data set.

Many studies believed that democracies could not afford to respect civil liberty and physical integrity when dealing with terrorism (Eubank & Weinberg, 1994; Piazza & Walsh, 2010), which is why American policy makers often regard the limiting of physical integrity rights as "a key counter-terrorism weapon", and meanwhile "an unfortunate cost of preventing terrorism" (Piazza & Walsh, 2010). Policies including "indefinite detention, use of physically abusive interrogation techniques and massive indiscriminate surveillance programs" were all permitted as a result (Piazza & Walsh, 2010; Walsh & Piazza, 2010). But Piazza & Walsh (2010) have questioned this conclusion by utilizing the physical integrity index to show the opposite, that is, the more a country respect civil liberty and physical integrity by having less political imprisonment and tortures, the less number of terrorist attacks it would experience (Piazza & Walsh, 2010). Rubin & Morgan (2020) further

disaggregated civil liberty into specific sub-categories including physical integrity, political liberties, and private liberties, and concluded that "physical integrity rights decrease terrorism, while political liberties increase terrorism" (Rubin & Morgan, 2020). This is because when physical integrity are respected, grievances against government could be decreased and trust could be enhanced, so that people would resort to terrorism less than in those countries where physical integrity is not well respected (Rubin & Morgan, 2020). And political liberties, on the other hand, would "incentivize violence among extremist groups and protect their ability to organize" (Rubin & Morgan, 2020) at the same time.

Given the divided results in existing literature on the relationship between physical integrity, civil liberty and terrorism, this essay seeks to evaluate whether the critiques made by Piazza & Walsh (2010) and Rubin & Morgan (2020) against the traditional belief, that those countries respecting civil liberty and physical integrity are more susceptible to terrorism, still hold with new data.

Hypothesis 3: Countries respecting civil liberty and physical integrity will have less terrorism.

A small number of studies have emerged around an suspected measurement error regarding the terrorism data, suggesting that the widely observed correlation between democracy and terrorism may actually be spurious, arguing that the positive correlation could be artificially inflated due to the tendency of authoritarian regimes to deliberately under-report terrorist incidents (Chenoweth, 2013; Drakos & Gofas, 2006, 2007; Sandler, 1995). Although some data from open sources are likely to be subject to under-reporting problems due to low levels of press freedom (Drakos & Gofas, 2007), data from the Global Terrorism Database could be "a partial exception" because its data combined both private and public sources, giving us a lot more information than public news reports, or the previously popular ITERATE database, which is based more on open sources (Chenoweth, 2013; START, 2022). Also, nobody has yet "identified any systematic proof that occurrences of terrorist attacks have been overlooked by databases" (Chenoweth, 2013). Generally speaking, although the argument by Drakos & Gofas (2006) has some empirical support (Drakos & Gofas, 2006, 2007), it is still not conclusive (Chenoweth, 2013).Besides, counterarguments have been raised by Chenoweth (2013) that it "became generally more profitable for authoritarian regimes to report more terrorist attacks so that they could expect more military aid from the United States and its allies" (Chenoweth, 2013).

This essay aims to test the hypothesis that the under-reporting bias in authoritarian states is a significant factor behind the observed correlation between democracy and terrorism. Additional regressions will be conducted alongside the baseline model, who specifically focusing on data that excludes authoritarian states to see whether the correlation between democracy and terrorism remains significant when the potential under-reporting bias is removed. This approach will help clarify whether the positive correlation often observed is reflective of true correlation or if it is primarily driven by reporting discrepancies in authoritarian regimes.

Hypothesis 4: The under-reporting of terrorism by authoritarian states lead to the positive relation between terrorism and democracy.

Mass mobilizations are often viewed by scholars as a destabilizing condition, that might weaken democratic practices and therefore induces more terrorist attacks . Robertson & Teitelbaum (2011) suggested in his study that democracies are vulnerable to strikes and demonstrations (Robertson & Teitelbaum, 2011). Brooks (2009), Chenoweth (2010), and Chenoweth (2013) found that terrorist violence occurs on the margins of various forms of contentious mass mobilization, which may imply that groups would resort to terrorism as a way to "draw attention to their political causes in a playing field with strong competitors", which is therefore "perceived uneven" (Brooks, 2009; Chenoweth, 2010, 2013). This organizational approach is more concerned with the "density and intensity of the environment, rather than the opportunities", as the perceived benefits of terrorist activities when the overall level of mobilization is high in society may drive them to take such dramatic actions in the 'ripe' moment (Chenoweth, 2013), which is plausible as it could help to explain some of the variation in intensity of terrorism activities among developed democracies including the systematic difference in terrorism between, for example, France, a common target of terrorism, and Norway, a country where terrorism rarely happens (Sánchez-Cuenca & Aguilar, 2009).

This essay plans to use the compiled protest data, which is made up of the total number of strikes, demonstrations, and riots for each country-year observation to examine whether it is a significant predictor of terrorism, or whether mobilization could inspire terrorism or not.

Hypothesis 5: Mobilizations inspire terrorism.

1.2.3 Effects of Shifts in Global Anti-Terrorism Agenda

The previous theoretical approaches are all static in nature, meaning that they are not sensitive to the global changing trends of democratization and terrorism (Chenoweth, 2013), as well as significant geopolitical changes including the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the initiation of the Global War on Terror after 9/11 in the new century, after which the attacks on democracies might have been diverted towards countries under military occupation including Iraq and Afghanistan (Chenoweth, 2012). Besides, new data recording terrorism may be suffering from measurement errors since under the Global War on Terror campaign, sources could start to count what should be warfare as "terrorist attacks", casting new questions to its internal and external validity (Chenoweth, 2013). Nevertheless, it is hard to mitigate this downfall since reliable alternative data sources are still rare in documenting terrorist activities around the globe (Chenoweth, 2013).

In order to test this hypothesis, this essay plans to perform several additional regressions with different subsets of the original data set, representing data from different time periods. The estimations are then compared in their respective substantive and statistical significance to see if there is any dramatic differences between the estimates from different time periods.

Hypothesis 6: Democracies are no longer the main target of terrorism after 9/11.

2 Empirical Strategy

2.1 Data

The summative statistic of the variables are described in Table 1. The data set including observations in 175 countries from the year of 1970 and 2018 is compiled and constructed from Krieger & Meierrieks (2010) 's study (Krieger & Meierrieks, 2010), the V-DEM database, the Global Terrorism Database and other open sources. The terrorist attack statistics are inverse hyperbolic sine transformed since firstly, the influence of outliers should be accommodated, and secondly, the inverse hyperbolic sine transformation is defined for observations with zeros, which makes it preferable than a simple log transformation (Meierriek & Auer, 2024).

Table 1: Summary Statistics

	N	Mean	SD	Min	Q1	Median	Q3	Max	Variable
nattack	7789	1.36	1.84	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.31	8.97	Number of Attacks
ihs_nvictim	7789	1.58	2.40	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.89	11.03	Number of Victims
ihs_attack_gov	7762	0.92	1.52	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.44	8.17	Attacks on Government
ihs_attack_nongov	7762	1.09	1.66	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.82	8.57	Attacks not on Government
ihs_dom_nattack	7424	0.92	1.57	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.44	8.73	Domestic Attacks
ihs_dom_nvictim	7424	1.08	2.07	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.88	10.79	Domestic Attack Victims
ihs_trans_nattack	7424	0.57	1.06	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.88	6.10	Transnational Attacks
ihs_trans_nvictim	7424	0.56	1.32	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	9.90	Transnational Attack Victims
kg_democracy	7701	0.53	0.41	0.00	0.04	0.66	0.96	1.00	Democracy Index
v2x_clphy	7789	0.59	0.31	0.01	0.32	0.66	0.89	0.99	Physical Integrity Index
v2clrspct	7789	0.22	1.51	−3.68	−0.87	−0.06	1.26	4.46	Impartial Public Administration
v2clrelig	7789	0.82	1.44	−3.86	−0.14	1.23	1.94	3.06	Freedom of Religion
protest	5970	0.45	0.84	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.88	4.59	Number of Protests
statefailure	7789	0.57	1.65	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	20.00	State Failure Index
v2svstterr	7701	91.43	10.37	33.75	87.09	95.00	99.00	100.00	Territorial Control
sh_dyn_mort	7594	70.05	70.66	1.70	14.80	42.35	106.97	372.40	Infant Mortality
sp_pop_totl	7782	2.79	1.55	0.06	1.73	2.73	3.81	7.93	Population

2.1.1 Measuring Terrorism

This essay uses the Global Terrorism Database as a reputable source of data on terrorist activities across the globe (START, 2022). This database is selected as the data source for the dependent variables in this research since it provides the most country-year observations on different statistics related to terrorism. Besides, the Global Terrorism Database is also considered one of the most reliable data sources by scholar since it combines both public and private sources (Chenoweth, 2013),and for a terrorist activity to be recorded, it must be intentional, violent, and committed by non-state actors (Meierriek & Auer, 2024). And unlike other sources including the *ITERATE* or *TWEED* data often used by scholars in previous studies(Aksoy, 2014; Li, 2005), the Global Terrorism Database also provides a detailed record on the originality, type, and target of the attack, for example, whether the attack is domestic, transnational, government-targeting or not government-targeting, which allows the deeper examination on the different variations of terrorist attacks.

Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3 displayed the number of terrorist attacks around the globe in 2015,2008,and 1985 from the Global Terrorism Database. Overall, the variable has a mean of 1.36, a minimum of 0, a maximum of 8.97 and a standard deviation of 1.84. It also has a first quarter quantile of 0 attacks and a third quarter quantile of 2.31. Notice that all numbers here are inverse hyperbolic sine transformed. Generally speaking, these statistics infer high volatility as well as variations in the number of attacks data and point to the somewhat stochastic and also clustered nature regarding the occurrences of

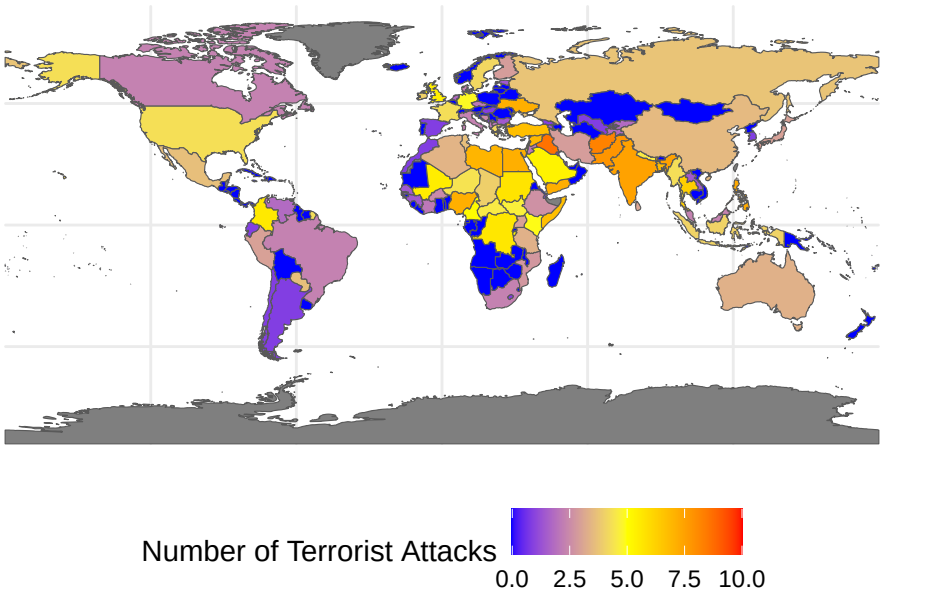

Figure 1: Number of Terrorist Attacks in 2015 (IHS Transformed)

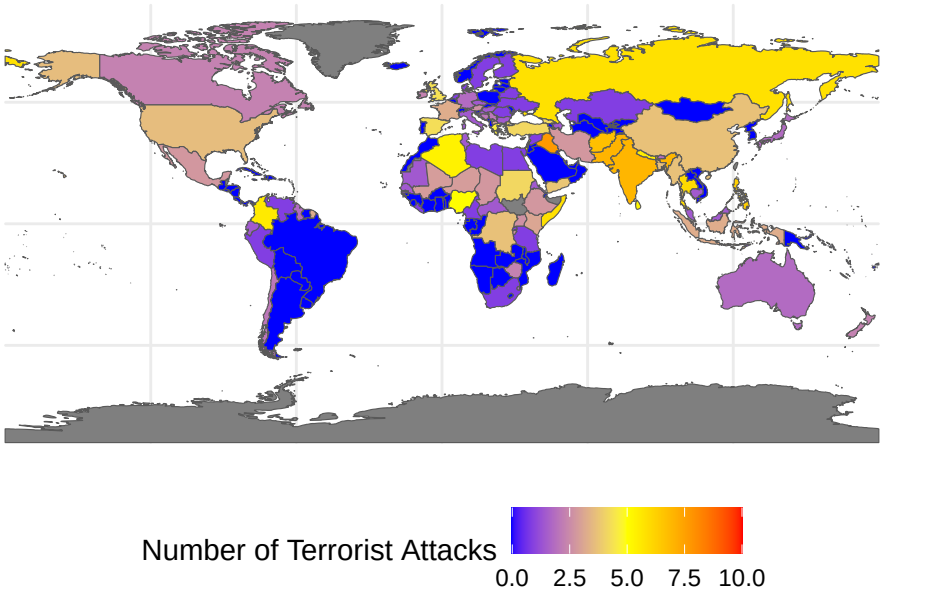

Figure 2: Global Democracy Index in 2008 (IHS Transformed)

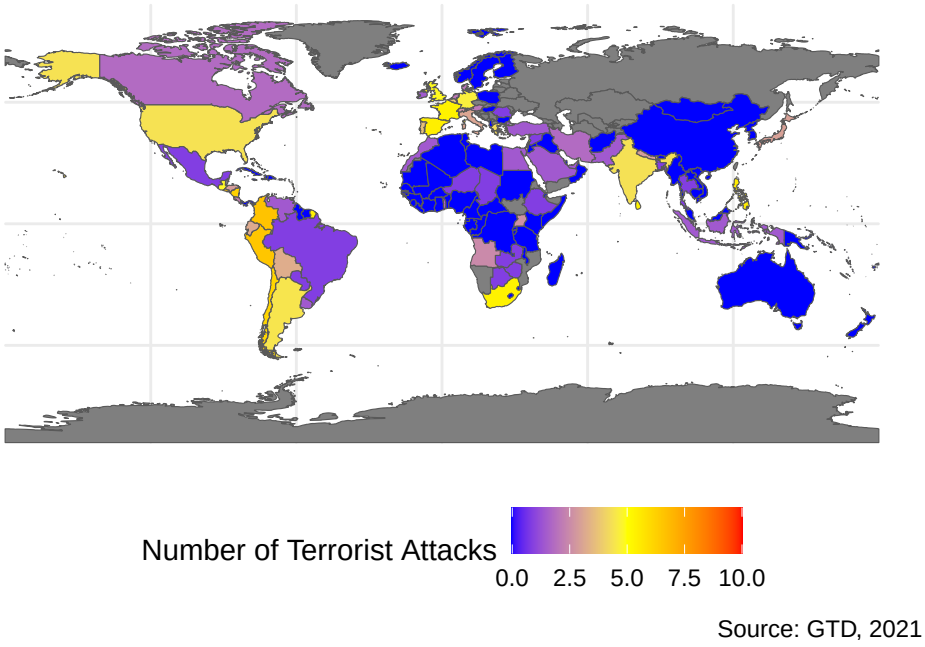

Figure 3: Global Democracy Index in 1985 (IHS Transformed)

terrorist attacks around the globe (Meierriek & Auer, 2024).

Also, some spillover effects of terrorist attacks could be observed in Africa and Western Europe. It could also be concluded that the number of attacks happening in South East Asia and Africa both increased from its 1985 level, changing along with significant geopolitical events including the collapse of Soviet Union, 9/11 and the initiation of the Global War on Terror campaign. To dig deeper into the global shifting trends regarding the occurrence of terrorist attacks, Chenoweth (2013) dis-aggregated regime type beyond the traditional democracy-autocracy dichotomy, expanding the classification method proposed by Goldstone et al. (2009) into eight categories: democracy, partial democracy, factionalized democracy, partial autocracy, autocracy, failed state, under occupation, and transitioning countries (Chenoweth, 2013). By aggregating country-year observations using this classification method, Chenoweth (2013) found that "partial democracies with factionalism are among the most exposed to terrorism, who suffered the most during two spikes of attacks in 1983 to 1998 and 2007 to 2010" (Chenoweth, 2013). While advanced democracies and autocracies both experienced very low attacks throughout the series (Chenoweth, 2013). His findings also pointed to the phenomenon that a global trend regarding the frequency of terrorist activities seem to be clustered on time and type of regime.

2.1.2 Measuring Democracy

Constructing an index to measure the level of democracy in a country usually involve three steps. First, a series of attributes related to level of democracy in a country should be identified and vertically organized by level of abstraction in order to conceptualize democracy for the index makeup. Secondly, measurement levels and indicators should be selected with data reliability and replicability taken into consideration at the same time. Finally, the level and rule of aggregation with appropriate level of robustness should be determined for the final computation of the index (Munck & Verkuilen, 2002). Since democracy by nature still does not have a commonly accepted comprehensive definition on hand, the flexibility for interpretation and variations in indicator selection are high (Gründler & Krieger, 2016). A minimalist inclusion of indicators would lead to considerable deviations in the underlying instruments (Boix et al., 2012; Gründler & Krieger, 2016; Vanhanen, 2000), while exhaustive approaches have more details, they often suffers from constraints in data due to limited availability in country-year observations.

Taking the cost-benefit tradeoff into consideration, many scholars used established large time series incorporating a wide range of indicators of political freedom, civil liberty and rule of law as reliable measurements of a country's level of democracy. Among which the most popular ones are the Polity score (Marshall, 2018) and the Freedom House rating of democracy and liberty(FreedomHouse, 2023). The Polity data set uses a 21-point scale ranging from -10 (autocracy) to 10 (full democracy) to measure the level of democracy of a country (Chenoweth, 2013; Marshall, 2018), which is a discrete classification of democracy lacking a certain amount of details for values in-between. A score of 6 to 9 represents democracy, 1 to 5 represents open anocracy, -5 to 0 represents closed anocracy and -10 to -6 represents autocracy (Marshall, 2018). Freedom House's annual rating on people's political rights and civil liberties are based on a two-tiered system made up of scores and status, in which a country is awarded 0 to 4 points for each of the 10 political rights indicators and 15 civil liberties indicators (FreedomHouse, 2023). This approach also have a similar issue with discrete rankings.

The V-Dem Indices is another popular and comprehensive source of democracy index. It's baseline democracy index, the *Electoral Democracy Index*, aggregates the rating of a country's election freedom, voter participation, freedom of speech, political competition, and

the effective power of officials, which incorporated the fundamentals of democracy: the electoral process that enables citizens to express their demands. V-dem also constructed four other high-level democracy indices, namely the *Liberal Democracy Index*, the *Participatory Democracy Index*, the *Deliberative Democracy Index*, and the *Egalitarian Democracy Index* to represent different aspects of democratic governance that fits the different definitions of democracy(V-Dem-Codebook, 2021). These indices, along with many other control variables in V-dem, constructed a milti-dimensional and comprehensive framework in the evaluation of a country's current and past level of democracy.

The Economist Intelligence Unit has also published its annual democracy index of the world since 2006, which also took a similar methodology by aggregating questions in five major categories: electoral pluralism, civil liberties, governance, political participation, and political culture (EIU, 2024), while the lack of data availability before 2006 had made a comprehensive panel data analysis using this measurement technically difficult. Also, these existing mainstream indicators of democracy all suffer from substantial methodological weaknesses, making them not sufficiently sensitive towards political events, regime changes and geopolitical trend shifts (Gründler & Krieger, 2016). Meanwhile, the lack of justification for the arbitrariness and simplicity for the rules of aggregation of these indexes are often regarded as a major deficiency and inadequacy of these series by scholars (Cheibub et al., 2009; Gründler & Krieger, 2016; Munck & Verkuilen, 2002; Treier & Jackman, 2008).

Generally speaking, the drawbacks and criticisms of the popular democracy indices include the lack of detail, subjectivity in conceptualization, arbitrariness in instrument selection, and the low level of sophistication of the aggregation process (see Gründler & Krieger, 2016 for detailed explanation). Therefore, this essay uses the democracy index constructed by Gründler & Krieger (2016), addressing the concerns around traditional indices. This estimated index is continuous from 0 (the most authoritarian) to 1 (the most democratic), which enhances the level of detail entailed in these estimations. The SVMDI index covering all 175 countries from 1970 to 2018 in our data set was constructed using Support Vector Machines, who "give computers the ability of learning without being explicitly programmed by adopting machine learning algorithms for pattern recognition", so that the problem of arbitrary specification of aggregation in other democracy indices could be mitigated (Gründler & Krieger, 2016). The estimation process is built on the "*a priori*

labeled, unambiguous *fully autocratic* and *fully democratic* observations, and a set of characteristics such as the core elements of political participation, political competition, civil liberty, and independence of non-government institutions" are all accounted for, following the idea that "democracy requires more than just a free general election process" (Gründler & Krieger, 2016; Larry Diamond, 1995; Rawls, 1971).

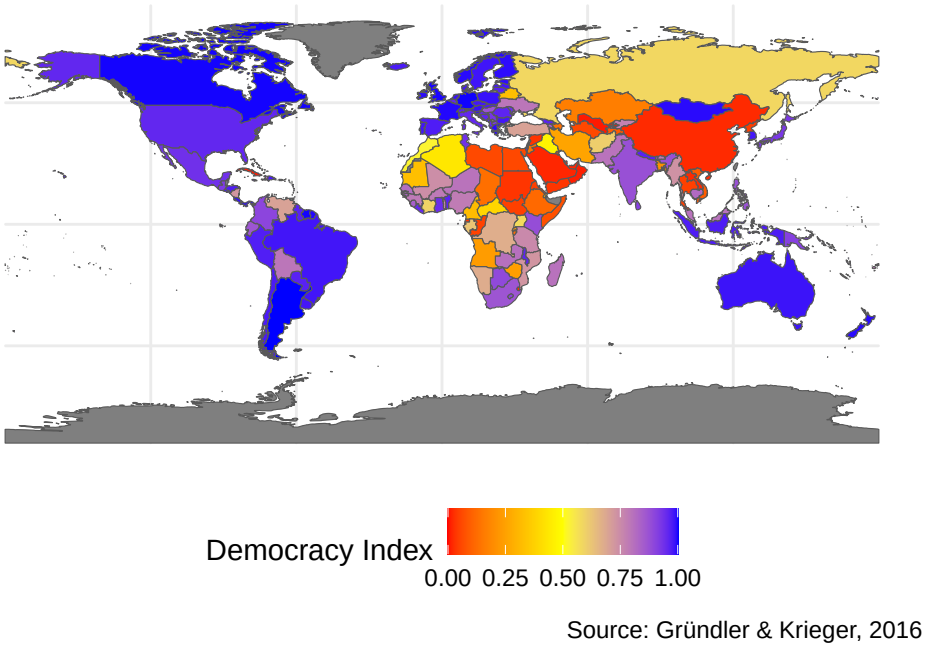

Figure 4: Global Democracy Index in 2015 (SVMDI)

The variable *kg_democracy* has a minimum of 0, a maximum of 1, a mean of 0.53, and a standard deviation of 0.41, indicating a relatively high level of variations within the data. Figure 4 displayed the level of democracy in 2015 around the globe, which showed a clear pattern of regional contraction. Generally speaking, countries in Europe, North America, Oceania, and most of South America have relatively high democracy scores, This pattern suggests a geographical clustering of democratic regimes, where neighboring countries often share similar levels of democratic development. This clustering effect could be attributed to various factors such as regional integration, shared historical experiences, and cultural similarities (Gründler & Krieger, 2016).

Figure 5 displayed the level of democracy in 1985 around the globe. Comparing Figure 4 and Figure 5, we could see that the wave of democratization washed through Latin America, Asia Pacific, Eastern Europe and parts of the Africa continent. These waves are identified by scholars as "The Third Wave of Democratization" (Gründler & Krieger,

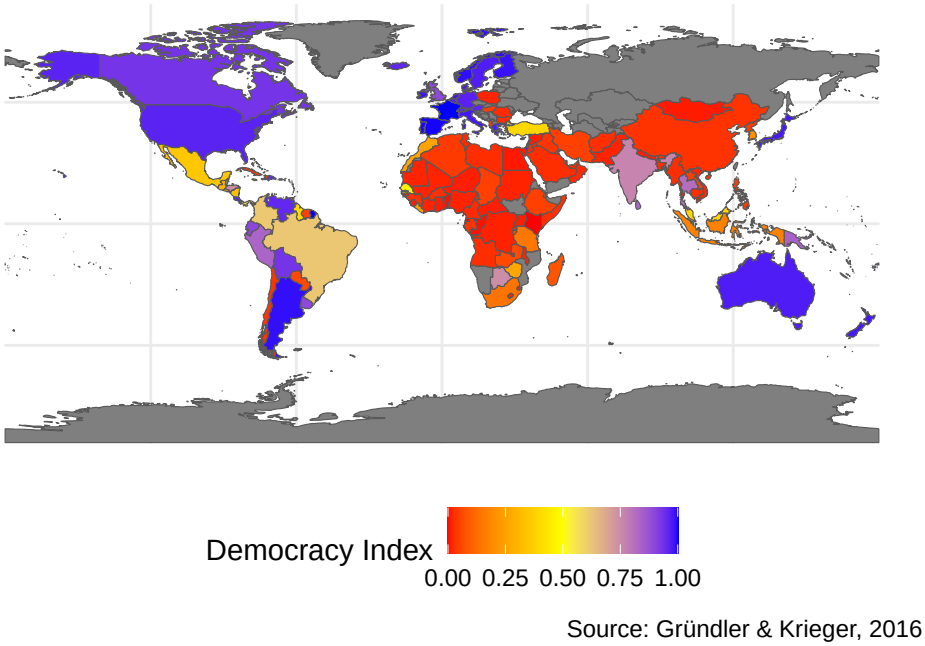

Figure 5: Global Democracy Index in 1985 (SVMDI)

2016; Huntington, 1991). This wave of democratization reflects a period of intense political transformation, where many countries transitioned from authoritarian regimes to varying forms of democratic governance, which were often marked by significant efforts to establish democratic institutions, enhance civil society, and improve legitimacy. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 played a pivotal role in accelerating these changes, particularly in Eastern Europe and parts of the former Soviet Union.

Outside these transitional regions, the world was characterized by a clear division between fully established democracies and highly authoritarian regimes. Countries in Europe, North America, and Oceania maintained relatively stable democratic systems, while nations like China, North Korea, and many Middle Eastern countries continued to exhibit strong authoritarian characteristics.

2.1.3 Control Variables

Control variables include the baseline controls of a country's population and infant mortality rates, which serves as an indicator of its size and level of economic and social development.

The population size of a country is an important factor to control since larger populations may lead to a higher absolute number of terrorist incidents, simply because there are more people who could potentially be involved in or affected by such events. By controlling for population size, the analysis accounts for this potential upward bias, allowing for a more accurate comparison across countries. A country with a larger population might experience more terrorism in absolute terms, but by adjusting for population size, the focus can be shifted to understanding the relative incidence of terrorism and its relationship with other factors.The variable had a minimum of 0.06, a maximum of 7.93, a mean of 2.79 and a standard deviation of 1.55, representing a modestly high level of variation in observations worldwide.

Infant mortality rates is a well-established indicator in socio-economic studies, reflecting the overall health, economic conditions, and development level of a country (Nishiyama, 2011; Sartorius & Sartorius, 2014). The variable had a minimum of 1.7, a maximum of 372.4, a mean of 70.05 and a standard deviation of 70.66, meaning that most country-year observation had a moderate rate of infant mortality, with some extreme high values representing the most under-developed countries. Higher infant mortality rates often indicate poor healthcare systems, lower economic development, and greater social instability. By including infant mortality rates as a control variable, the analysis can better account for the underlying economic and social conditions that might influence other variables of interest.Infant mortality rates could be an important variable to control in this context since socio-economic conditions play a crucial role in shaping the environment in which terrorism might arise.

Other control variables include the *Physical Integrity Index*, *Impartial Public Administration Index*, *Freedom of Religion Index*, *Protests*, *State Failure Index*, and *Territorial Control Index*.

The *Physical Integrity Index* from the *V-Dem* database identifies the extent to which physical integrity is respected, which is the freedom from political killings and torture by the government, and is based on indicators that shows violence committed by government agent which are not referring to elections (V-Dem-Codebook, 2021). The variable had a minimum of 0.01, a maximum of 0.99, a mean of 0.59 and a standard deviation of 0.31, which means many of the observations had a moderate level of respect for physical integrity, which is changing rapidly around the globe, going through waves of democratization. As

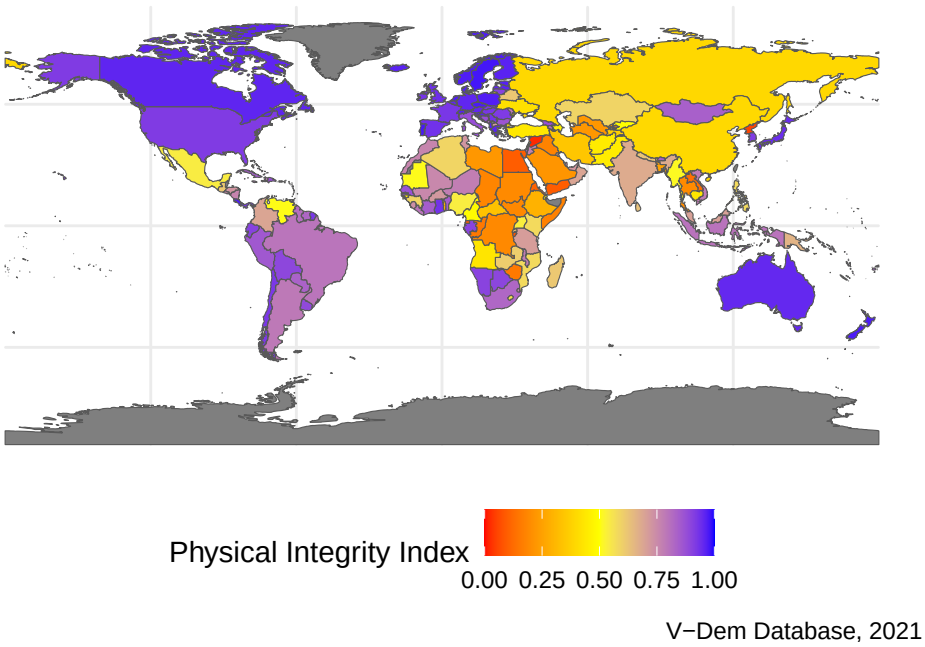

Figure 6: Physical Integrity in 2015

is depicted in Figure 6, this index highly coincidences with the level of democracy in each country, which is somewhat intuitive. Democratic regimes, with their institutional checks and balances, tend to respect the physical integrity of individuals and refrain from using political violence as means of control. These governments "are generally held accountable by free media, independent judiciary systems, and civil societies, making it politically costly to engage in acts of political torturing and extrajudicial killings" (Davenport & Armstrong, 2004; Veri & Sass, 2022).

In contrast, authoritarian regimes often rely on coercive methods, including physical violence, to maintain social stability and suppress dissent. These regimes typically lack the same level of accountability of democracy and are more inclined to use violence to intimidate challengers. Driven by the need to secure the power of ruling, these acts are often performed "in the absence of legitimate electoral support or legal frameworks that protect human rights" (Schlumberger, 2017).

The correlation also reflects the well-accepted theory that "the institutionalization of democratic norms, such as the rule of law and respect for civil liberty, naturally leads to lower levels of state-sponsored political violence" (Veri & Sass, 2022). Conversely, the absence of these norms in authoritarian settings often results in higher levels of repression (Schlum-

berger, 2017).

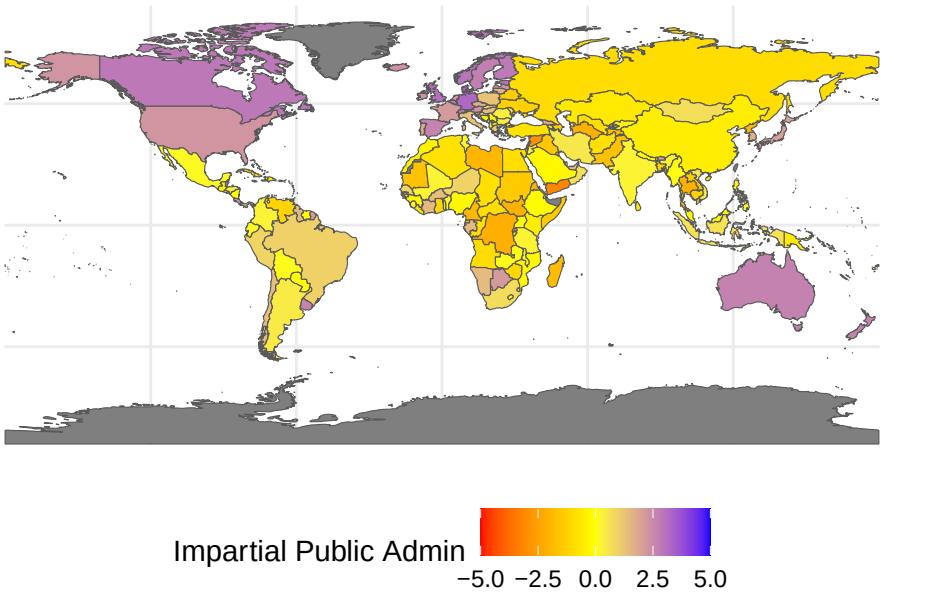

Figure 7: Impartial Public Administration in 2015

The *Impartial Public Administration Index* from the *V-Dem* database documented the level of rigorousness and impartiality when public officials perform their duties (V-Dem-Codebook, 2021). The scale ranges from -5 (Law not respected by officials, arbitrariness and biases are very common) to 5 (Law fully respected by officials, arbitrariness and biases are very limited) (V-Dem-Codebook, 2021).This Index indicates the level of bias (from nepotism, cronyism, or discrimination) an ordinary citizen face when dealing with government officials and public administration. The variable has a minimum of -3.68, a maximum of 4.46, a mean of 0.22 and a standard deviation of 1.51, indicating a high level of variation within the data set. It can be concluded from Figure 7 that as of 2015, countries in North America, Europe and Oceania, namely those advanced democracies have relatively high levels of rigorously and impartiality when doing public administration, while most countries in Latin America and Africa, although might be classified as a democracy, still have high arbitrariness and biases within their public administration. Authoritarian states including China and some Middle Eastern countries typically have a modest level of rigorousness and impartiality, which implies a certain level of flexibility for government in interpreting the law and a moderate to high level of nepotism, cronyism and discrimination in society.

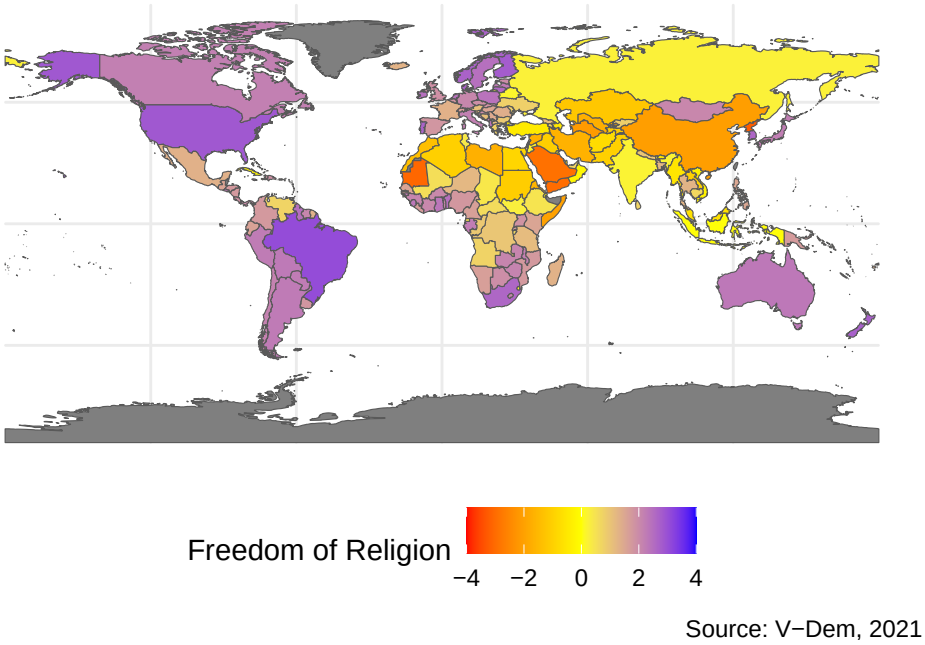

Figure 8: Freedom of Religion in 2015

The *Freedom of Religion Index* from *V-Dem* database displayed the extent to which citizens have the right to choose, change, and practice a religion in private or in public without being subject to restrictions and oppression from government authorities (V-Dem-Codebook, 2021). The scale of the index ranges from -4 (No freedom of religion exists) to 4 (Complete freedom of religion unhindered by authorities). Similarly to the *Impartial Public Administration Index*, the variable has a minimum of -3.86, a maximum of 3.06, a mean of 0.82 and a standard deviation of 1.44, pointing to the high level of variation across country-year observations in the data set. As is depicted in Figure 8, in 2015 democracies generally have a higher freedom of religion, particularly those in Europe, North America, and Latin America, which are consistent with the democratic principles of individual rights and freedoms, including the protection of religious liberties (Audi, 2020). In contrast, authoritarian states tend to score lower on the index, with many countries in the Middle East and China displaying negative scores, reflecting the restrictive and often oppressive policies imposed by authoritarian regimes on religious practices. State authorities frequently intervene in religious matters, imposing constraints that limit individuals' ability to practice their faith freely, or choose to endorse one single religion as part of the official ideology (Schleutker, 2020).

The variable *Protest* captures the intensity of social unrest within a country by summing

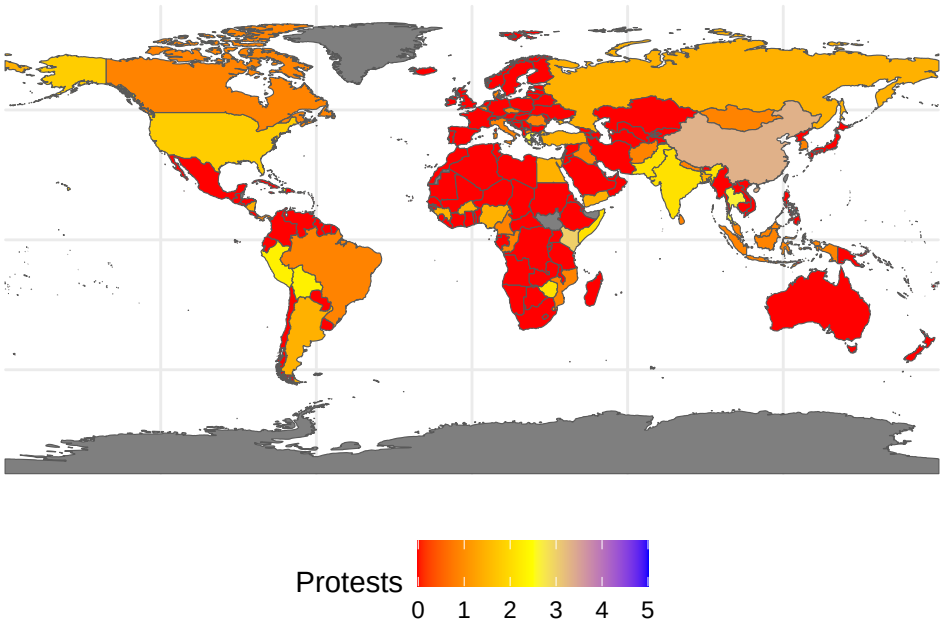

Figure 9: Protests in 2008

up the total occurrences of strikes, riots and demonstrations within one year. It is inverse hyperbolic sine transformed so that the inclusion of zero values is allowed (which are common in protest data), and the impact of extreme values or outliers could be reduced. The transformed *Protest* variable exhibits a range from 0 to 4.59, indicating varying levels of protest intensity across countries and years. The standard deviation of 0.84, as shown in Table 1, highlights the volatility and variability of protest activities across different contexts, underscoring the complex and dynamic nature of social unrest, which can be influenced by political, economic, and social factors. The variable also has a median of 0, with a mean of 0.45 and a standard deviation of 0.84, meaning that there is very few protests for most of the country-year observations in the data set, and occurrences of strikes, demonstrations, and riots might be highly concentrated in a relatively short period of time. Figure 9 depicted varying levels of protest activity across different regions in the year of 2008, most countries in Europe, Africa and Oceania experienced a relatively low intensity of protests, while American countries had a higher count of protests overall.

The *State Failure Index* constructed by Political Instability Task Force combines indicators measuring multiple aspects of state performance, including governance, political stability, economic performance and overall social well-being. It generally accounts for the government effectiveness and legitimacy, the levels of political violence and civil wars, economic

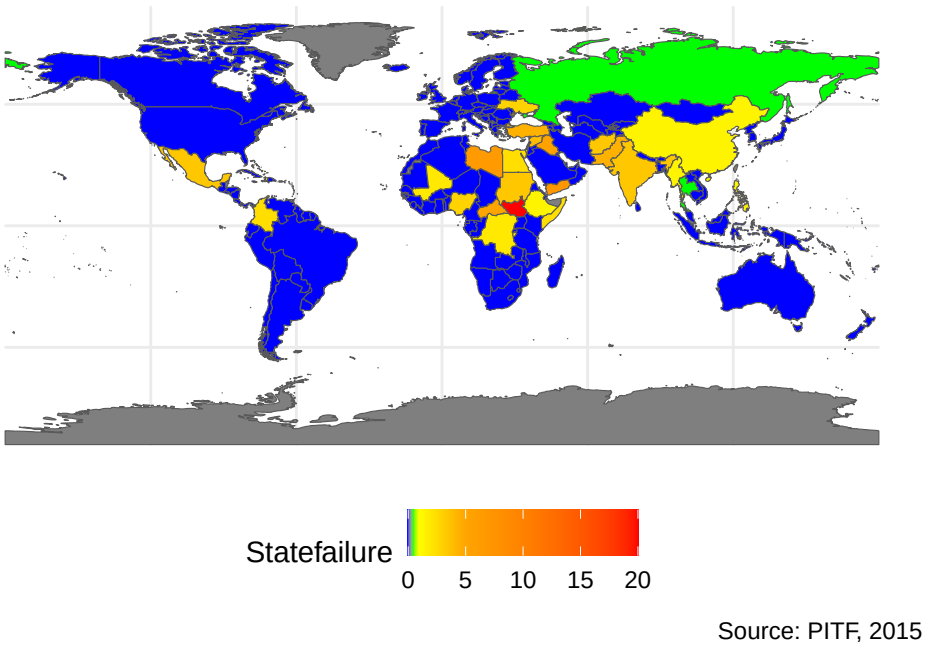

Figure 10: State Failure Index in 2015

stability and equality, social unrest and human rights violations, and environment sustainability. This Index is often used by scholars and policy-makers to measure the stability of states and the probability of an imminent social crisis.The variable had a mean of 0.57, a standard deviation of 1.65, with a range from 0 to 20. It has also got a third quarter quantile of 0, indicating that most of the country-year observations in the data set had a 0 score for state failure. Very few countries on the other hand, had relatively high scores. As is depicted in Figure 10, most democracies had a score of state failure of 0 in 2015, indicating a low risk of state failure and relatively stable governance, which aligns with the expectation that democracies, with their established institutions and processes, tend to have lower levels of state failure. Large authoritarian regimes like China and Russia also had relatively low levels of state failure. Despite their differing political systems, these countries managed to maintain a high level of stability and control, indicating that their ability to manage internal challenges still works effectively, although through different mechanisms compared to democracies. Countries experiencing high-intensity civil wars, such as Burma (Myanmar) and South Sudan, displayed high scores on the state failure index in 2015. These high scores highlight the severe instability and dysfunction in states facing ongoing conflicts, social unrest, and significant governance challenges, reflecting the profound impact of violent conflict and instability on overall state performance, which

could have significant implication for the occurrence of terrorist activity. Therefore, this *Statefailure* variable is included in the model to account for those environmental differences.

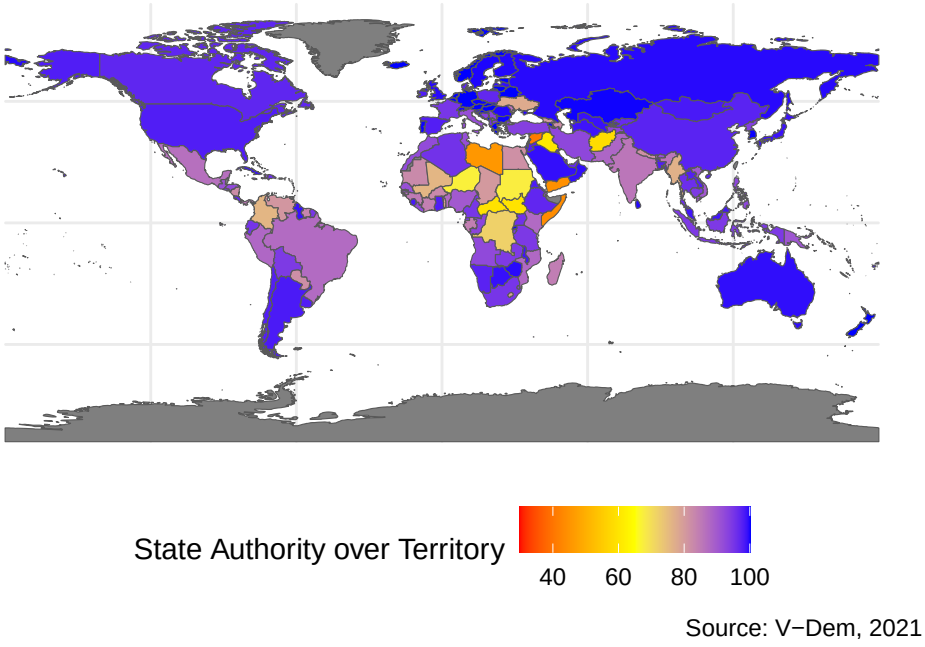

Figure 11: State Authority over Territory in 2015

The *State Authority over Territory Index* from *V-Dem* database measures the extent of effective state control over its internationally recognized territory,as opposed to being controlled by non-state actors or facing significant governance challenges. (V-Dem-Codebook, 2021).The variable had a minimum of 33.75, a maximum of 100, a mean of 91.43 and a standard deviation of 10.37, which means that most countries had effective control over all of its internationally recognized territories (with a median of 95 percent). Only a very small proportion of country-year observations had low effective control, who might be caught up in civil wars at the time.

As is depict in Figure 11, most countries in North America, Europe and Oceania generally exhibit high levels of effective control over their territories in 2015, which reflects the strong institutional frameworks and governance structures in place, ensuring that state authority is exercised uniformly across their internationally recognized borders. Also, the presence of stable governments and effective law enforcement contributes to the comprehensive control observed in these regions. In contrast, some countries in Latin America face challenges in maintaining effective state authority across their territories. The presence

of powerful criminal organizations, such as drug cartels, has led to significant areas where state control is limited or contested. These criminal organizations often operate in "regions with weakened state presence, impacting the overall ability of the government to enforce laws and maintain order effectively" (Correa-Cabrera et al., 2015). Several countries in Africa also experience difficulties with state authority over their territory. Ongoing civil wars and internal conflicts often result in fragmented control, where different regions may be governed by various factions or face severe instability. The impact of these conflicts can significantly "reduce the extent of effective state control, as central authorities struggle to assert their influence in conflict-affected areas" (Sobek, 2010).

2.2 Main Regression Model

2.2.1 Model Specification

The baseline regression model is estimated to examine the effect of democracy on terrorism as follows:

$$terrorism_{it} = \beta \cdot \text{democracy}_{it} + \delta X_{it} + \alpha_i + \tau_t + \gamma_i + \epsilon_{it} \tag{1}$$

where the inverse hyperbolic sine transformed number of terrorist attacks in country i and year t is a function of the level of democracy (SVMDI democracy index) in country i and year t, a set of control variables X and country, year as well as area fixed effects (α, τ, and γ respectively) to account for time-invariant factors, including the culture, history and norms that affect terrorism and the level of democracy in different countries and different regions.The main purpose of including these fixed effects is to control for unobserved factors that vary across countries and regions but constant over time, which might lead to biased outcomes if these unobserved confounding factors are correlated with the independent variables and the dependent variable.

2.2.2 OLS Regression

Table 2 displayed the main regression results of the baseline model using number of terrorist attacks (inverse hyperbolic sine transformed) as the dependent variable. The results

Table 2: OLS Regression Results (with Fixed Effects)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Democracy Index	0.189	1.142***	0.571*	0.514*	0.207	0.325+	0.286	0.859***
	(0.204)	(0.259)	(0.244)	(0.232)	(0.186)	(0.189)	(0.190)	(0.235)
Physical Integrity		−2.088***						−1.305**
		(0.442)						(0.428)
Admin Impartiality			−0.284**					0.030
			(0.087)					(0.082)
Freedom of Religion				−0.244*				0.039
				(0.103)				(0.083)
Protests					0.248***			0.214***
					(0.038)			(0.032)
State Failure Index						0.294***		0.176***
						(0.042)		(0.046)
Terroritorial Control							−0.074***	−0.031**
							(0.009)	(0.011)
Infant Mortality	−0.004	−0.005+	−0.004	−0.004+	−0.005+	−0.005*	−0.005*	−0.005**
	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Population	1.140**	1.074**	1.038**	1.016*	0.783*	1.191**	1.136**	0.819*
	(0.416)	(0.405)	(0.377)	(0.393)	(0.365)	(0.407)	(0.384)	(0.355)
Observations	7536	7536	7536	7536	5823	7536	7532	5819
R^2 Adj.	0.595	0.609	0.601	0.599	0.623	0.632	0.637	0.661
R^2 Within Adj.	0.036	0.069	0.052	0.046	0.053	0.125	0.135	0.150
Year FE	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Country FE	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Region FE	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Note: Standard errors are clustered at the Country level.

Note2: FE: Fixed Effects.

show that it is statistically significant that, with this scope and specification of data, level of democracy appears to be positively correlated with terrorist activities, that is, the more democratic a country is, the more attacks it would experience, which confirms *Hypothesis 1* in Section 1.2.1. By adding controls one by one, the results show that the more a country respect physical integrity of its people, that is, the less government use political violence to suppress objections, the less terrorism it would suffer, which denies the claim in *Hypothesis 3* in Section 1.2.2 that countries respecting physical integrity would in fact experience less terrorism. The more rigorousness and impartiality in public administration and freedom of religion would generally lead to fewer attacks. And the more protests there is in a country, the more terrorist activities it would experience. This conclusion is somewhat in line with *Hypothesis 5* in Section 1.2.2 that the right to mobilize would destabilize democracy by having more strikes, demonstrations, riots and therefore, terrorist attacks, but more researches are needed to confirm the causal mechanism between these contentious activities. The more failed a state is, the more likely that there would be more terrorism. This result is intuitive since failed states are often suffering from chronic conflicts including civil wars and ethnic wars, and usually have low legitimacy and poor governance, therefore would experience more terrorism. Finally, the more effective territorial control a country have, the less terrorism it would have. This result supports the idea in *Hypothesis 2* in Section 1.2.1 that stable or established democracies and authoritarian regimes would have less terrorist activities since they would normally control their territories more completely and effectively, and therefore could take precautionary actions to curb terrorism in preparation.

2.3 Sensitivity Analyses

2.3.1 Regression with Different Scopes of Data

In order to dig deeper into the causal mechanisms between democracy and terrorism, and to accommodate for global waves of democratization as well as the difference between regimes in transition and established democratic or authoritarian regimes, regressions with different subset of the original data was performed and displayed in Table 3. If taking the subset of attacks occurring after the year of 2001, which is after the establishment of the U.S.-led *Global War on Terror* campaign,the link between democracy and terrorism

Table 3: Subset Regression Results

	Baseline Model	Attacks after 2001	Attacks before 2001	Transitional Democracy	Stable Countries	Without Authoritarian
Democracy Index	0.859***	0.554+	0.781**	1.340***	−1.624	0.640*
	(0.235)	(0.328)	(0.278)	(0.363)	(3.542)	(0.286)
Physical Integrity	−1.305**	−0.895	−0.970*	−2.546***	1.934	−1.611**
	(0.428)	(0.898)	(0.441)	(0.641)	(1.631)	(0.547)
Admin Impartiality	0.030	0.052	0.045	0.317+	−0.479**	0.055
	(0.082)	(0.208)	(0.088)	(0.158)	(0.149)	(0.128)
Freedom of Religion	0.039	0.501*	0.079	0.129	0.056	−0.067
	(0.083)	(0.230)	(0.090)	(0.090)	(0.131)	(0.168)
Protests	0.214***	0.172***	0.181***	0.210***	0.138**	0.163***
	(0.032)	(0.044)	(0.032)	(0.054)	(0.047)	(0.036)
State Failure Index	0.176***	0.177+	0.180***	0.206	0.242**	0.210***
	(0.046)	(0.094)	(0.044)	(0.161)	(0.080)	(0.057)
Terroritorial Control	−0.031**	−0.037	−0.029*	−0.063**	−0.002	−0.039*
	(0.011)	(0.024)	(0.012)	(0.019)	(0.010)	(0.019)
Infant Mortality	−0.005**	0.002	−0.004+	−0.003	−0.003	−0.008*
	(0.002)	(0.007)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Population	0.819*	1.203	0.899*	1.112+	0.271	0.947+
	(0.355)	(0.923)	(0.412)	(0.609)	(0.388)	(0.531)
Observations	5819	1357	4462	1516	1423	4112
R^2 Adj.	0.661	0.810	0.696	0.672	0.724	0.701
R^2 Within Adj.	0.150	0.086	0.129	0.235	0.086	0.157
Year FE	√	√	√	√	√	√
Country FE	√	√	√	√	√	√
Region FE	√	√	√	√	√	√

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001
Note: Standard errors are clustered at the Country level.
Note2: FE: Fixed Effects.

is not significant at 5% confidence level (the estimated result is significant at 10% level), making the correlation not as statistically strong as the baseline model(which include the entire data), and the subset of attacks happening before 2001. This results points to certain changes in the link between terrorism and democracy after 9/11, from which the focus of global terrorist activities might be diverted to U.S.-occupied Iraq or Afghanistan (Chenoweth, 2013; Windsor, 2003).

Regarding the validity of *Hypothesis 2* in Section 1.2.1, a subset of countries whose *change in democracy index*, which is the difference between the maximum and the minimum of its *kg_democracy* value is larger than the 75th quantile of the entire population is selected for a regression with the same setup. A total of 1945 observations were selected. Another 1931 observations whose *change in democracy index* is below the 25th quantile of the entire population are selected for another regression with the same model specification. The regression results are in line with *Hypothesis 2* that for *Transitional Democracies*, the positive correlation between their level of democracy and terrorism is statistically significant and substantively larger than the baseline scenario, while for the remaining *Stable Countries*, which are made up of developed democracies and stable authoritarian regimes, the correlation between their level of democracy and terrorism is not statistically significant. The results are in line with previous literature suggesting that democracies

in transition suffer more from terrorism when going through institutional reforms and legitimacy building in the process of democratization (Piccone, 2017).

Taking the autocratic and authoritarian states (whose *kg_democracy* is below the 25th quantile of the entire population) out of the original data, a similar regression is performed. The results denies the claim made in *Hypothesis 4* in Section 1.2.2 that the under-reporting of terrorist activities in authoritarian states is the major reason behind the positive correlation between democracy and terrorism, since the estimates are still statistically significant without data from authoritarian regimes. It is also worth noticing that *Protest* is still significantly and positively correlated with terrorism after taking out the data from authoritarian regimes, which supports the claim made in *Hypothesis 5* in Section 1.2.2 that large scales of mass mobilization could be correlated with more terrorist attacks in democracies.

2.3.2 Regression with Different Measures of Terrorism

Table 4 displayed the regression results with different specifications of the dependent variable *Terrorism*, in which (1) is the baseline (ihs transformed number of attacks), (2) is the ihs transformed number of victims, (3) is the ihs transformed number of attacks on government, (4) is the ihs transformed number of attacks not on government, (5) is the ihs transformed number of domestic attacks, (6) is the ihs transformed number of domestic attacks victims, (7) is the ihs transformed number of transnational attacks, (8) is the ihs transformed number of transnational attacks victims. The regression results indicate that the correlation between level of democracy and terrorism is still significantly positive with different measurements of *Terrorism*, which further confirms the validity of the original results.

2.4 Instrumental Variable Approach

2.4.1 Model Specification

Although the time-invariant unobserved heterogeneity is believed to be controlled with the fixed-effects OLS model, there might still be unobserved time-varying confounders that lead to biased estimates. The original model Equation 1 may also have endogeneity

Table 4: Regression Results with Different Measures of Terrorism

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Democracy Index	0.859***	0.751*	0.735***	0.716**	0.727***	0.584*	0.436**	0.398*
	(0.235)	(0.312)	(0.196)	(0.221)	(0.215)	(0.280)	(0.147)	(0.185)
Physical Integrity	−1.305**	−1.552**	−0.942*	−1.225**	−1.185**	−1.279**	−0.518+	−0.538+
	(0.428)	(0.525)	(0.363)	(0.413)	(0.405)	(0.486)	(0.275)	(0.287)
Admin Impartiality	0.030	0.059	0.021	0.049	0.055	0.081	0.035	0.046
	(0.082)	(0.108)	(0.070)	(0.073)	(0.068)	(0.089)	(0.048)	(0.058)
Freedom of Religion	0.039	0.055	−0.002	0.019	0.023	0.037	−0.008	0.001
	(0.083)	(0.119)	(0.066)	(0.075)	(0.074)	(0.114)	(0.044)	(0.053)
Protests	0.214***	0.219***	0.177***	0.170***	0.162***	0.179***	0.125***	0.061+
	(0.032)	(0.045)	(0.030)	(0.030)	(0.033)	(0.043)	(0.021)	(0.033)
State Failure Index	0.176***	0.292***	0.158***	0.158***	0.139**	0.241***	0.103***	0.122**
	(0.046)	(0.063)	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.043)	(0.060)	(0.030)	(0.041)
Terroritorial Control	−0.031**	−0.046**	−0.025*	−0.026*	−0.021*	−0.029*	−0.017**	−0.016+
	(0.011)	(0.016)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.014)	(0.006)	(0.009)
Infant Mortality	−0.005**	−0.008**	−0.005**	−0.004*	−0.004*	−0.007**	−0.002*	−0.003
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.002)
Population	0.819*	1.627**	0.638*	0.697*	0.455	0.984*	0.509*	1.000**
	(0.355)	(0.560)	(0.276)	(0.328)	(0.287)	(0.432)	(0.199)	(0.338)
Observations	5819	5819	5813	5813	5815	5815	5815	5815
R^2 Adj.	0.661	0.581	0.622	0.633	0.600	0.541	0.552	0.342
R^2 Within Adj.	0.150	0.149	0.145	0.127	0.101	0.109	0.095	0.056
Year FE	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Country FE	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Region FE	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Note: Standard errors are clustered at the Country level.

Note2: FE: Fixed Effects.

bias due to measurement error in democracy index or reverse causation. To address these concerns, a two-stage least squares instrumental variable regression model is estimated in the following form:

$$democracy_{it} = \beta_1 \cdot democracy_{i,t-1} + \delta_1 X_{it} + \alpha_{1i} + \tau_{1t} + \gamma_{1i} + \epsilon_{1,it} \tag{2}$$

$$terrorism_{it} = \beta_2 \cdot \widehat{democracy}_{it} + \delta_2 X_{it} + \alpha_{2i} + \tau_{2t} + \gamma_{2i} + \epsilon_{2,it} \tag{3}$$

where the first-stage regression in Equation 2 predicting the level of democracy in year t using the instrumental variable $democracy_{i,t-1}$. The predicted country-specific democracy levels are then used in the second stage regression in Equation 3 to explain terrorism. The country and regional fixed effects could absorb certain time-invariant factors that correlate with the instrument and increase terrorism through ways other than increasing national corruption, while year fixed effects could account for changes over time that are spuriously correlated with both the instrument and the dependent variable (Meierriek & Auer, 2024).

Endogeneity concerns from the ordinary least square regression can be effectively addressed using this two-stage-least-square approach. Firstly, the issue of reverse causality, where the dependent variable ($terrorism_{it}$) could influence the independent variable ($democracy_{it}$) rather than the other way around. For example, high levels of terrorism might lead to stricter government restrictions or changes in democratic practices. By using lagged democracy levels as an instrument, this issue could be mitigated by assuming that while past democracy levels may predict current democracy levels, they are less likely to be directly influenced by the current levels of terrorism, providing a clearer pathway from democracy to terrorism.

Secondly, omitted variables that affect both democracy and terrorism could lead to biased estimates if not properly accounted for. An appropriate instrumental variable can help isolate the effect of democracy on terrorism by accounting for these unobserved factors, assuming the exogeneity of the instrument, which is enhanced with the incorporation of fixed effects.

Table 5: IV Regression Results

	Baseline Model	Attacks after 2001	Attacks before 2001	Transitional Democracy	Stable Countries	Without Authoritarian
$\widehat{Democracy}$	1.333**	0.634	1.063**	1.605**	26.951	0.954*
	(0.412)	(0.607)	(0.389)	(0.502)	(27.900)	(0.425)
Physical Integrity	−1.458**	−1.010	−1.206*	−2.675***	2.729	−1.838**
	(0.517)	(0.915)	(0.482)	(0.652)	(1.835)	(0.569)
Admin Impartiality	−0.006	0.060	0.043	0.293+	−0.590**	0.056
	(0.103)	(0.207)	(0.090)	(0.172)	(0.205)	(0.129)
Freedom of Religion	−0.107	0.485*	0.058	0.100	0.006	−0.090
	(0.113)	(0.229)	(0.094)	(0.098)	(0.158)	(0.171)
Protests	0.133***	0.169***	0.178***	0.210***	0.130*	0.159***
	(0.034)	(0.044)	(0.032)	(0.055)	(0.054)	(0.036)
State Failure Index	0.344***	0.176+	0.180***	0.204	0.262**	0.211***
	(0.065)	(0.091)	(0.045)	(0.161)	(0.081)	(0.058)
Terroritorial Control	−0.031	−0.036	−0.029*	−0.063**	−0.003	−0.037+
	(0.025)	(0.024)	(0.012)	(0.019)	(0.010)	(0.019)
Infant Mortality	−0.006*	0.002	−0.004+	−0.003	−0.004	−0.007*
	(0.003)	(0.007)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Population	0.679	1.161	0.870*	1.011	0.565	0.946+
	(0.526)	(0.914)	(0.411)	(0.625)	(0.567)	(0.535)
Observations	3336	1356	4458	1515	1423	4109
R^2 Adj.	0.719	0.808	0.696	0.671	0.689	0.701
R^2 Within Adj.	0.179	0.083	0.128	0.234	−0.027	0.155
Wald	299.41	114.82	254.77	109.89	3.02	202.12
F-Statistics	2653.54	570.65	2462.56	752.03	10.94	2156.39
Year FE	√	√	√	√	√	√
Country FE	√	√	√	√	√	√
Region FE	√	√	√	√	√	√

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001
Note: Standard errors are clustered at the Country level.
Note2: FE: Fixed Effects.

2.4.2 Regression Results

The results of the instrumental variable regression in Table 5 are similar to the results presented in the OLS regression in Table 3, that further confirms the validity of the previous findings. Results also suggests that:

1. The level of democracy in a country is positively linked to the amount of terrorism it might experience.
2. This positive link between democracy and terrorism is more predominant before the year of 2001.
3. The phenomenon is the most substantively significant for regimes in transitions, which means that transitional democracies are more exposed to terrorism in the transitory process.
4. For stable democracies and authoritarian regimes, whose level of democracy remains relatively stable, the link between their democratic level and terrorism is not significant.

5. Taking data from authoritarian states out of the regression, the positive correlation between democracy and terrorism is still statistically significant, suggesting that the claimed under-reporting of terrorist activities are not the major explanation why there is a positive relation between democracy and terrorism.

2.4.3 Instrument Relevance and Exclusion Restriction

For the two stage least square instrumental variable regression to be valid, Instrument Relevance must be satisfied. The instrument ($democracy_{i,t-1}$) must be significantly correlated with the endogenous regressor ($democracy_{it}$) and are able to explain a great portion of variations in it.

This requirement could be justified by turning to the F-Statistics in the first stage of the regression, which are all larger than 10 in Table 5, a common threshold indicating strong relevance. Therefore, the Instrument Relevance assumption is believed to be satisfied.

Another important requirement to be satisfied is Exclusion Restriction, which demands that the instrument must affect the dependent variable ($terrorism_{it}$) only via its effect on the endogenous regressor. This means that the instrument ($democracy_{i,t-1}$) should not have any direct effect on $terrorism_{it}$ apart from its impact through $democracy_{it}$.

This could be argued from a theoretical perspective that past democracy levels only influence current terrorism through their impact on current democratic practices and institutions. Democracy is not an instantaneous phenomenon but a process that evolves over time, so are democratic norms, institutions, practices, governance and legitimacy, which are expected to influence the functioning of democracy in later periods. For example, past establishments of free elections, respect of civil liberty, and rule of law lays the groundwork for these institutions to be more robust and influential in the current period. Also, many scholars have found that democracy influences terrorism via its institutions and structure. Li (2005) argued that "democratic institutions influence terrorism through the political process" (Li, 2005); Piazza (2019) also supported the idea that "political institutions would influence terrorism" (Piazza, 2019); Krieger & Meierrieks (2010) suggested that "democracy impacts terrorism primarily through its governance structures" (Krieger & Meierrieks, 2010); Stephan & Chenoweth (2008) and Goldstone (2011) supported that

Table 6: Placebo IV Regression Results

	Baseline Model	Attacks after 2001	Attacks before 2001	Transitional Democracy	Stable Countries	Without Authoritarian
$\widehat{Democracy}$	−12.638	9.794	−16.429	5.524	−107.917	−19.860
	(35.795)	(10.007)	(49.306)	(5.008)	(495.913)	(140.007)
Physical Integrity	9.460	−6.922	12.329	−4.491+	−1.176	11.917
	(28.508)	(6.794)	(38.159)	(2.349)	(14.022)	(92.160)
Admin Impartiality	0.075	0.043	0.387	−0.083	−0.062	0.213
	(0.314)	(0.514)	(1.125)	(0.538)	(1.934)	(1.274)
Freedom of Religion	1.028	0.338	1.428	−0.348	0.248	1.464
	(2.646)	(0.564)	(3.851)	(0.617)	(0.924)	(10.511)
Protests	0.254+	0.163**	0.240	0.201**	0.156	0.256
	(0.136)	(0.062)	(0.201)	(0.070)	(0.120)	(0.671)
State Failure Index	0.230	0.306	0.255	0.174	0.159	0.197
	(0.185)	(0.185)	(0.263)	(0.159)	(0.376)	(0.224)
Terroritorial Control	−0.052	−0.047	−0.045	−0.069***	−0.002	−0.118
	(0.061)	(0.031)	(0.064)	(0.018)	(0.031)	(0.542)
Infant Mortality	−0.016	0.003	−0.016	−0.005	−0.002	−0.038
	(0.029)	(0.011)	(0.034)	(0.004)	(0.009)	(0.209)
Population	1.525	−1.710	2.263	−0.348	−0.864	1.466
	(2.160)	(3.454)	(4.337)	(1.956)	(5.136)	(3.805)
Observations	5749	1347	4402	1499	1406	4057
R^2 Adj.	−0.617	0.444	−1.158	0.527	0.247	−1.389
R^2 Within Adj.	−3.061	−1.681	−5.202	−0.101	−1.497	−5.732
Wald	0.15	1.3	0.14	2.06	0.08	0.02
F-Statistics	0.13	1.6	0.12	1.75	0.08	0.02
Year FE	√	√	√	√	√	√
Country FE	√	√	√	√	√	√
Region FE	√	√	√	√	√	√

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001
Note: Standard errors are clustered at the Country level.
Note2: FE: Fixed Effects.

democracy levels affect terrorism through their institutional legacy and continuity (Goldstone, 2011; Stephan & Chenoweth, 2008). These studies coupled with the controlling of variables such as economic conditions, political stability, and other social factors support the assumption that past democracy only affects terrorism through current democratic practices and governance, so that Exclusion Restriction assumption is likely to be met.

2.4.4 Placebo Test

One way to further examine the robustness of the instrumental variable regression is to "perform a placebo test with instrument randomly assigned to other countries" (Meierriek & Auer, 2024).

The results displayed in Table 6 yields results of zero after randomly assigning the instrumental variable to other countries, suggesting that the statistically significant results observed in the original 2SLS regression are indeed attributable to the true relationship between the instrument and the endogenous variable, which further strengthens the validity of the original instrumental variable.

3 Conclusion

3.1 Results

Both the OLS regression Table 2 and the 2SLS regression Table 5 confirms the positive correlation between democracy and terrorism are still valid with the data and model specification used in this essay, which is specified in *Hypothesis 1* in Section 1.2.1. Generally speaking, the positive relation that the more democratic a country is, the more terrorism it would experience still holds.

For *Hypothesis 2* in Section 1.2.1, as is displayed in both subset regression results (Table 3 and Table 5), the positive correlation between democracy and terrorism is statistically significant for democracies in transition, but not statistically significant for stable countries, which are made up of developed democracies and stable authoritarian regimes. This result supports the suggestion made by many scholars that the countries undergoing significant transitions to democracy would experience the most terrorism, that a curvilinear effect is the more accurate representation of the relation between democracy and terrorism (Abadie, 2004; Chenoweth, 2013; Eyerman, 1998; Goldstone et al., 2009).

For *Hypothesis 3* in Section 1.2.2, both regressions (Table 3 and Table 5) showed that the level of respect of physical integrity of a country is negatively correlated with the terrorism it would experience, supporting the critiques made by Piazza & Walsh (2010). However, in absence of a proper variable representing the disaggregated conceptualization of political liberty specified by Rubin & Morgan (2020), the isolated effect of political liberty on terrorism is not directly examined in the regression models. But we could infer form the fact the the variable *Protest* is significantly and positively correlated with *Terrorism* in all models, that for countries with a higher political freedom (including the rights to strike, gather,associate, and go on demonstrations) and a high level of mobilization, the claim that terrorist activities would emerge within by Rubin & Morgan (2020) could be an reasonable explanation for the presence of this strong positive correlation. Also, as most estimates are not statistically significant for the correlation between freedom of religion and impartial public administration and terrorism (Table 3 and Table 5), the relationship between terrorism and civil liberty remains indecisive in a general way, concluding from the study. This result also point to the difficulty for studies in finding a universal and

rigorous definition of civil liberty.

After taking out the data from authoritarian states, the estimated coefficients of *Democracy* is reduced from 0.859 to 0.640 and 1.333 to 0.954 (see Table 3 and Table 5), but remains statistically different from zero, which rejects the notion specified in *Hypothesis 4* in Section 1.2.2 that the under-reporting from the authoritarian states is the major reason a positive correlation between democracy and terrorism exists, which is also in line with the suggestion by Chenoweth (2013) that the Global Terrorism Database employed in this study is partly exempted from this bias (Chenoweth, 2013).

As for the destabilizing effects of mobilization specified in *Hypothesis 5* in Section 1.2.2, a statistically significant positive correlation could be identified between the total number of protests and terrorism. This result confirm what most scholars says about mobilization, that democracies are indeed vulnerable to a variation of mobilization (Brooks, 2009; Chenoweth, 2010, 2013), so as other types of regimes (also see Table 3 and Table 5).The significant results also point to the tendency that these high levels of mobilization would lead to more terrorist attacks.

For *Hypothesis 6* in Section 1.2.3, the fact that model using the subset of attacks happening after 2001 yielded estimates of zero (see Table 3 and Table 5) indeed pointed to some systematic changes in the relation between democracy and terrorism after the initiation of the Global War on Terror campaign, which remains to be further investigated with more detailed data and theory on the changing in the broader dynamic of global terrorism.

3.2 Policy Implications

Based on the findings mentioned in the last section, several policy implications could be identified:

1. Targeted Support for Emerging Democracies: As transitional democracies are among the most vulnerable to the threat of terrorism, targeted supports could be provided to help build institutions, improve governance as well as legitimacy, strengthen rule of law so that the threat of terrorism could be effectively contained without resorting to the vicious cycle of applying political violence.

2. Taking A Balanced Approach to Civil Liberties: The positive link between protests and terrorism highlights the potential risks associated with high levels of political freedom and mobilization, even in established democracy. While political freedom is essential in democracies, continuous high-intensity mobilization had often ended up in violence in numerous cases in both the U.S. and the U.K., especially when public are divided with polarized ideas. Therefore, finding the right balance between civil liberty and safety for all is essential. Democracies should deescalate the situation when the tensions are too high on the street, before they further deteriorate, and take active measures to strengthen social cohesion.

3. Reassessing the Impact of the Global War on Terror: given the fact that the massive plan to promote electoral democracy in former authoritarian regimes have failed, the West should take a nuanced view of democracy when making foreign policy, as the more practical aspects of democracy including effective governance, rule of law, and impartial public administration could be more useful in containing the threat of terrorism than building a simple electoral system without localizing concerns. Also, physical integrity should be better respected since it would help reduce the risk of terrorism.

4. Enhancing Counter-Terrorism Measures in Democratic Settings: At home, democracies should form policies that address the root causes of terrorism, including political exclusion, poverty, and social grievances, which involves integrating counter-terrorism efforts with broader social and economic policies to create a more holistic approach to security. As is displayed in Table 3 and Table 5, strengthening democratic institutions can make them more resilient to terrorism, which includes ensuring the rigorousness in public administration, protecting physical integrity, and enhancing effective control over territory.

3.3 Research Limits

There are many underlying limits within this study. Firstly, the nature of the concepts involved in the study make them harder to define and quantify. For instance, as democracy itself is not well defined, it's naturally hard to quantify as different indices often select different attributes and adopt different aggregation methods, which is often subject to the

arbitrariness of the process. Therefore, a more comprehensive theory on how to quantify democracy in a universal way is needed. Measurements for terrorism is also challenging, as the boundary of terrorism and its difference with, for example, low-intensity acts of war are still ongoing debates among scholars (Lentini, 2008). The naturally vague definition of civil liberty is another problem, as it often involves multiple aspects including freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and the freedom of demonstration. The selection of indicators and the subsequent aggregation methods are therefore inevitably subjective to different interpretations. Therefore, it might be better for scholars to further disaggreagte the concept so that clearer implications could be found by not incorporating too many information in a single variable.

Secondly, the limited availability of data on political freedom, civil liberty, and terrorism often require scholars to rely on one single database as the only source of data, which decreases the validity of researches since data could be subject to measurement error or methodological changes. Many sub-categorical studies could not be conducted due to the lack of available data. For instance, it would be ideal to further group terrorist attacks into smaller subcategories based on their specific causes, and originality, so that we could further identify the mechanism behind, for example, the different patterns of terrorism in the U.K. and Northern Europe. Yet these data sets still remain to be developed as of now.

Thirdly, it might be hard for studies on terrorism and democracy to capture the dynamic changes in macro environment and the nature of terrorism. For instance, external factors including global economic cycles, geopolitical tensions, and regional conflicts could have a significant impact on both terrorism and democratic process. Both a theoretical and empirical approach is needed in the future to better quantify these macro changes. Also, the methods, motivations, and the targeting tactics of terrorism also evolved over time, which requires continuous updates in theoretical framework and empirical methods.

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