

The domestic democratic peace: How democracy constrains political violence

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Abstract

This article offers a systematic, longitudinal and cross-national assessment of the constraint democratic institutions place on domestic political violence. It formulates two structural equation models which allows for the examination of the relative contribution of formal institutions and political culture as sources of constraint on political violence. Institutionalized opportunities for democratic participation significantly reduce political violence; however, these institutions only realize their full potential when embedded within a deliberative political culture. This article suggests that when oppositional groups view democratic participation as meaningful, and state elites engage with their claims, these groups are inclined to behave as radical democrats rather than violent extremists.

Keywords

Political violence, deliberative culture, political opportunities, grievance, oppositional groups, structural equation modelling

Introduction

That political conflicts should be resolved peacefully is basic to the ideal of democratic rule. Ideals are seldom realized in politics, but that democratic states rarely wage war against each other – that they enjoy a ‘democratic peace’ – suggests that this ideal is not entirely misplaced, and that democratic rule can and does constrain certain kinds of violent action (Babst, 1964). To be sure, the workings of democratic constraint remain a matter of protracted disagreement in political science, despite this being among the more intensively studied questions in the discipline’s history. Much

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less studied are the effects that democratic institutions have on domestic political violence. As at the interstate level, the internal politics of democratic states are less violent than those of other political systems. Established democratic states are less likely to coerce and attack their political opponents, just as oppositional groups within such democracies are less likely to attack each other or the state. But the internal pacification of democracies is often overstated (Keane, 2004). Political violence is widely prevalent across democratic states and concerns are growing about its spread (Kleinfeld, 2021). Explaining why rates of political violence vary across democratic states is the primary aim of this paper. More specifically, we seek to understand the degree to which democratic institutions constrain political violence and which components of these institutions exert the strongest pacifying effects.

The arguments we develop here draw from longstanding ideas concerning the source of war-making constraint among democratic states. Our first line of argument concerns the effect of *democratic institutions* on the political dynamics that lead to violent action. Representative institutions are thought to reduce interstate warfare by threatening electoral costs on the instigators of unpopular wars (Clark and Nordstrom, 2005). With respect to domestic political violence, we suggest that it is not representative institutions as such that constrain violence (since these are broadly common to all democracies) but rather institutionalized opportunities for political participation. We posit that meaningful political participation enables oppositional groups to express their grievances and so transform them into tractable political claims.

The second line of investigation pursued here is cultural. It has been widely observed that democratic politics are guided by norms of non-violent conflict resolution. As such, democratic leaders expect to resolve disputes with their foreign counterparts via negotiation and bargaining. When dealing with non-democratic states, however, they do not harbour this expectation. State elites and ordinary citizens in democracies see state coercion as less problematic when it is deployed against coercive states. In the context of domestic political violence, however, such a generic norm of non-violent dispute resolution cannot account for variation in political violence since this norm is (again) a more or less constant feature of democratic societies. We propose that more specific moral and behavioural norms concerning deliberation and mutual justification (what democratic theorists term ‘deliberative cultures’) (Sass and Dryzek, 2014) are more significant constraints on violence to the extent that they motivate parties in conflict to recognize one another and engage their respective grievances and claims.

While institutional and cultural explanations of interstate peace have typically been viewed as competing, our key finding is that these explanatory factors are complementary in the domestic context. Democratic institutions induce non-violent forms of political action where they offer channels for citizens to meaningfully participate in the political process. However, institutions are most effective where citizens view them as effective and legitimate. As such, citizens need to maintain favourable attitudes towards their institutions, and, further, state elites need to maintain a discursive stance towards oppositional groups. In short, oppositional groups and state elites must be motivated to engage one another peacefully if democratic institutions are to function as intended.

This paper is organized as follows: in the first section, we elaborate upon motive-based and opportunity-based theories of political violence and existing accounts of the constraining effect of democratic structures on political violence; we then develop a multidimensional framework that configures our hypothesized explanatory factors within two competing models. Finally, using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modelling (SEM), we test our core hypotheses concerning the enabling role of deliberative culture within institutionalized participation with respect to the constraint of political violence.

Democracy and violence: theoretical background

Political violence can be defined minimally as the use (or threat) of physical coercion to achieve political ends (Schwarzmantel, 2010: 218). Democratic and non-democratic states use political violence extensively; oppositional groups also use political violence to challenge the status quo. In what immediately follows, we discuss general explanations of non-state political violence, contrasting approaches that focus on the *motives* driving political action with those concentrating on the *opportunities* that exist for oppositional groups to pursue their aims. We then consider the (somewhat limited) scholarship that seeks to explain how democratic structures reduce the prevalence and intensity of political violence undertaken by oppositional groups.

Motive-based factors of political violence. This first class of explanations direct analytic priority to the kinds of motives that compel actors to engage in political action. Of these motives, grievances are the most pertinent to violence, where grievances are understood as shared reasons for complaint that are typically related to perceptions of unfairness or injustice. Scholars argue that grievances generate support for violence, engender collective mobilization, and have spill-over effects on other political actors, not least in supporting a movement's recruitment efforts (e.g. Østby, 2013).

From a motives-centred position, explaining political violence begins with identifying the primary sources of grievance. Grievances are often associated with horizontal inequalities (Gurr, 2015), where particular groups are relatively disadvantaged or absolutely marginalized, whether due to political affiliation, ethnicity or socio-economic status (Hansen et al., 2020; Stewart, 2000). According to the horizontal inequality approach, the risk of violent group mobilization is further heightened where government actions are seen as directly responsible for this group's state of relative deprivation (Stewart, 2000). Horizontal inequalities tend to produce grievances that are felt collectively, and can thereby foster violent collective action, which stands in contrast to violence undertaken, for example, by lone-wolf actors or terrorist cells, whose grievances are not widely felt (Østby, 2013). According to Hansen et al. (2020), political, social and economic exclusion pushes marginalized groups to employ violence where it is seen as the only means to advance their authority, economic status or political claims. Conversely, the feeling of marginalization is reduced where these groups enjoy equal access to rights guaranteed by law. Where they can exercise their political rights, oppositional groups view the political system as being more effective and legitimate, and this moderates their feelings of grievance, rendering violent action less justifiable (Elman and Warner, 2008).

Political opportunity factors. A competing body of scholarship known as 'political process theory' views grievances as a permanent and relatively stable feature of the political landscape in most countries and thus irrelevant to explaining the occurrence and varying extent of political violence (Tilly, 2004). Political process theories emphasize structural characteristics within the political system that create opportunities for oppositional groups to deploy political violence (Tarrow, 2011). A key assumption in this scholarship is that these structures change and with them the political payoffs associated with different forms of action. More specifically, the structural characteristics of a polity may evolve such that political violence can be exercised with (relatively) less risk, lower costs and higher financial and/or political rewards. Structures of this kind preceded the 1991 civil war in Sierra Leone, for example, where the Revolutionary United Front exploited the lack of state capabilities and prevailing corruption to secure control of the diamond trade, not least by recruiting poor, unemployed and thus vulnerable young men to fight their battles (Keen, 2005). By contrast, political structures may provide opportunities for civil participation that induces radical

oppositional groups to advance their interests in a non-violent fashion. This was seen in Switzerland during the turbulent 1970s, where revolutionary leftists channelled most of their extra-parliamentary demands through the direct democratic system of referenda (Villiger, 2013).

A growing stream of political violence scholarship has sought to combine these two theoretical approaches, examining the dynamic interaction between grievances and political structures (e.g. Dyrstad and Hillesund, 2020; White et al., 2015). Given popular discontent, a political system's structural characteristics define the framework within which political actors can express their grievances, whether in a violent or non-violent manner (Gleditsch SK and Ruggeri, 2010). Yet the behaviour of state elites will also influence the likelihood of violent mobilization. In non-authoritarian settings, in particular, states that resort to repression can enflame popular resentment and thereby provoke wider mobilization (Opp and Roehl, 1990). If state elites respond to popular mobilization with repression, oppositional violence will also grow as political moderates see violence as morally justified and politically necessary (Dyrstad and Hillesund, 2020).

Democratic structures and political violence. There are a number of reasons why established democratic states provoke less violence than other regime types. Obvious among these is that democratic states are themselves less violent than other regimes, not least as their actions are constrained by law (Eck and Hultman, 2007: 533; Gleditsch NP, 2020). Because democratic states engage in less repression, and because the repression they deploy to defend the state is legally circumscribed, they generate fewer grievances. Democratic states may also reduce grievance formation by virtue of their tendency to redistribute resources and wealth more equally than other regime types, thereby producing relatively less marginalization (Collier and Rohner, 2008).

Beyond these general patterns, there are more specific processes by which democratic structures can moderate the incidence of political violence, processes which act both on grievance formation and on the structure of political opportunities. Where democratic states institute formal opportunities for political participation, diverse and otherwise marginalized perspectives are more likely to be included within decision-making processes (Gleditsch NP, 2020). Institutionalized participation does not only provide channels for the *expression* of grievances; ideally, it allows for their reformulation as tractable political claims that can be the objects of negotiation, bargaining and credible commitments (Fearon, 2004). In this respect, democratic structures set the parameters within which political participation and mobilization occur and define the rules and channels in terms of which oppositional groups form their strategies and express their claims (e.g. Cinalli and Giugni, 2011). Democratic polities can thus be assessed in terms of the level of formal recognition that they afford oppositional groups, the level of plurality among the non-state groups who participate in these processes, and the degree of involvement these processes secure among such groups as well as ordinary citizens. Where these processes are maximally inclusive, oppositional actors who feel threatened or marginalized are more likely to seek recognition and protection by exercising their political rights instead of resorting to violence (Schwarzmantel, 2011). In this respect, political elites can best constrain violence not by cowering oppositional groups but rather by recognizing their legitimate role in the political process and thereby inducing their constructive engagement (Collier and Rohner, 2008: 533).

In addition to conditioning the behaviour of oppositional groups, institutionalized political opportunities also condition the behaviour of state elites. They exert this effect by reinforcing the political norms that guide government and non-state actors; in particular, norms concerning the public justification of political action, and not least the use of force. Political actors whose justifications are weak can see their reputations tarnished, with wide-ranging electoral and non-electoral consequences (Hegre et al., 2020). This mechanism was first noted to explain why democratic states do not wage war against each other; however, it might also apply to violence within

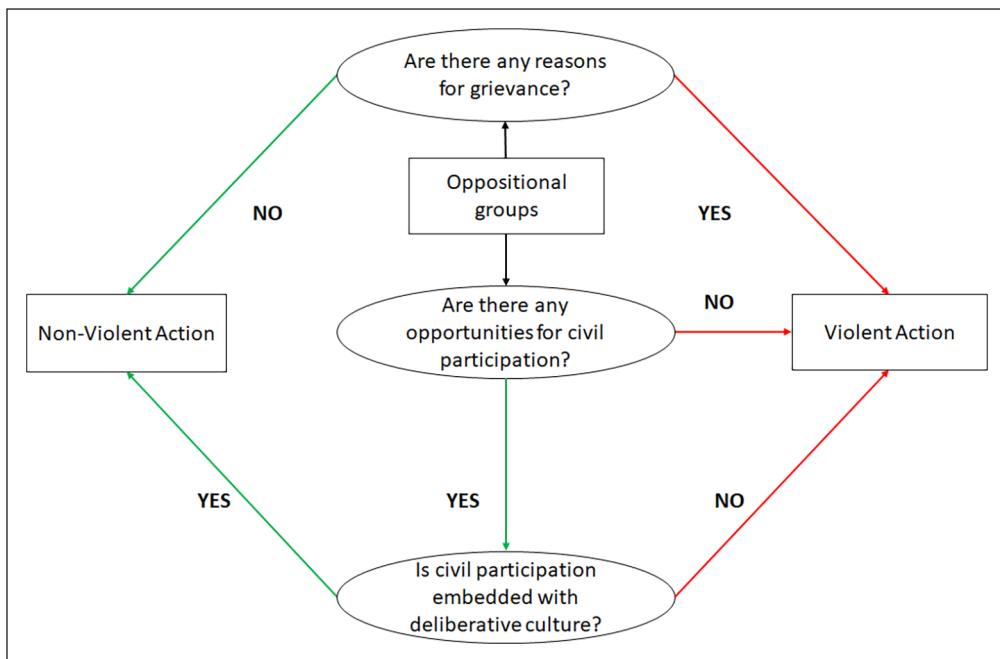
democratic states, where the political actors who fail to adequately justify the use of force see their own credibility degraded.

Thus far we have largely assumed that the mere existence of formal opportunities for political participation will lead directly to their use by oppositional groups. In fact, there are good reasons to doubt whether this connection will be reliably made. Where they have previously been marginalized or excluded by formal institutions and state elites, oppositional groups may view such participation with suspicion. Note that marginalization need not be the product of malice or prejudice – it also results where group forms a ‘permanent minority’ and is thereby routinely outvoted (or ‘out influenced’) by larger constituencies. In such circumstances, desperation may push certain groups to engage in violent action, despite the apparent opportunity to advance their interests by non-violent means (Schwarzmantel, 2010: 227).

In addition to their structural origins, negative beliefs about participation may also result from contingent political dynamics. The violent uprising in the French banlieues during the autumn of 2005 is illustrative. Despite the relative openness of the French political opportunity structure, which ought to foster non-violent forms of collective action, marginalized groups in the banlieues still turned to disruption and violence. A detailed analysis of this case emphasized the complex interaction of events and motives that escalated hostilities between protesters and state authorities (Donzelot, 2006). While perceived socio-economic marginalization in the banlieues saw ethnic minorities frustrated with the political system, they turned to violence because of the reticent and often dismissive attitude of political elites towards their claims. The frustration among group members was further compounded by the obstructive approach of state elites in grappling with social and economic inequalities, and, finally, by their fated decision to violently suppress the movement (Donzelot, 2006).

The French case indicates that the mere existence of formal opportunities for political participation may not suffice to reduce political violence; much depends on how these institutions are perceived by oppositional groups and state elites (Schwarzmantel, 2010: 226). This observation is longstanding in the democratization literature; that is, that the efficacy of democratic institutions depends on social and cultural factors, not least the commitment to democracy among citizens. While this lesson applies to ordinary citizens, it applies with equal or greater force to political elites, who must not only tolerate but engage with claims made by groups that they would sooner dismiss or delegitimize (Caldeira and Holston, 1999). Where state elites are incapable of engagement, they may win power at the cost of the legitimacy of the democratic state. Indeed, just as citizens in democracies are more willing to go to war against autocrats, they may also be more willing to go to war against their own governments when officials behave as autocrats.

While these insights appear in the literature (see Schwarzmantel, 2010), they have not been adequately theorized nor empirically tested at scale.¹ Drawing on contemporary democratic theory, we propose that a willingness to recognize the claims of political opponents and to engage in mutual justification indicates the existence of a ‘deliberative culture’ (Sass and Dryzek, 2014). According to Sass and Dryzek, a deliberative culture comprises the publicly accessible meanings, symbols and norms that motivate and give practical form to political deliberation. A deliberative culture need not suffuse an entire society; indeed, it is more likely to inhere within particular groups or institutional settings, whether state elites or popular movements. Where the deliberative cultures of competing groups align, we posit the existence of a meta-consensus, not on the substantive matters of politics but on what constitute desirable processes for negotiating political difference (Niemeyer and Dryzek, 2007). To be sure, inclusive deliberative cultures do not guarantee anything about political outcomes; the only promise is to increase the likelihood that contending groups will recognize and engage each other discursively, even in the presence of deep disagreements.

Figure 1. Political violence, grievance, opportunities and deliberative culture.

Concretely, a deliberative culture entails a normative commitment to public engagement, and, by extension, an attitudinal predisposition to consider diverse and opposing views within decision-making processes. An institutionally entrenched deliberative culture motivates inclusive participation and bolsters the perception of its political efficacy and legitimacy among oppositional groups. Although oppositional groups will continue to feel aggrieved for the injustices that they have suffered, inclusive participation appears to moderate their belief that the political system as a whole is unjust. While Sass and Dryzek (2014) develop the concept of deliberative culture via case-based and interpretive analysis, we test this concept in a systematic, longitudinal and cross-national comparison. More specifically, we examine the relationship between deliberative cultures and formal participation in constraining political violence.

Hypotheses. Institutionalized participatory opportunities promise to channel oppositional groups in non-violent directions – this is our first hypothesis; we further hypothesize that this effect will be pronounced where participatory institutions are infused with a strong deliberative culture. We test these joint hypotheses using a complex framework that includes a number of grievance-related factors (Figure 1). Grievance is central to our approach given its widely recognized role as a precursor to political violence; we suspect that institutionalized participation can diffuse the intensity of grievances, and sometimes transform them into tractable political claims.

From a causal perspective, deliberative cultures are enabling factors that mediate between oppositional groups and their decision to adopt (or reject) violent tactics. Were oppositional groups placed in relation to a hypothetical polity with a weak deliberative culture, these groups would resort to violence more often than in the alternative counterfactual; that is, where they were placed into a polity with an entrenched deliberative culture. As mediating variables, deliberative cultures

and institutionalized participation elucidate the *process* that conditions oppositional group decisions about how to advance their political claims.

H1: Deliberative culture together with institutionalized participatory opportunities negatively mediate the relationship between oppositional groups and political violence.

A deliberative culture is needed to activate the violence-constraining potential of institutionalized participatory opportunities. An institutionally entrenched deliberative culture enables oppositional groups to experience some level of recognition from the state, which should motivate them to articulate their grievances. As such, oppositional groups engage in non-violent political expression, the contents of which formal institutions transmit to elite decision makers. In the absence of an entrenched deliberative culture, where institutionalized participatory opportunities appear without the normative and motivational reinforcement this culture provides, the mediation effects of these institutions on political violence will be partial.

H2: Institutionalized participatory opportunities partially mediate the relationship between oppositional groups and political violence.

The second hypothesis aims to double check the necessary role of culture within the model using a *reductio ad absurdum* strategy. If a deliberative culture is necessary to the proper functioning of institutionalized political opportunities, a model lacking deliberative culture variables would leave a significant amount of unexplained effect in the relationship between oppositional groups and political violence. In short, the model fit would be relatively unsatisfactory, indicating that H1 is likely to be true.

Data source and method

Data for this study is largely drawn from the Varieties of Democracy dataset (V-Dem) (Coppedge et al., 2020). The data comprises a total of 1484 observations from 2007 (an average of 114 countries per year) including 310 observations from ‘fully democratic’ countries (an average of 24 countries per year), 696 observations from ‘flawed democracies’ (an average of 54 countries per year) and 478 observations from ‘hybrid regimes’ (an average of 37 countries per year). This period was selected for analysis given the focus on contemporary trends and the temporal scope of the V-Dem dataset. While there may be value in exploring our hypotheses over longer historical periods, we suggest that the period selected represents a sufficient span for detecting causal relationships and is not marked by world events that would skew our data.² Further (and as we discuss in more depth in Supplemental Appendix I), there is a stationary trend for the dependent variable *oppositional group political violence*, the independent variable *oppositional groups*, and the key variables linked to participatory opportunities and deliberative cultures from the period beginning with the fall of the Berlin Wall. These trends suggest that the longitudinal causal relationship we identify is constant beyond the timeframe we analyse here.

We test these hypotheses for non-authoritarian countries, including semi-, flawed- and fully democratic countries. We identified non-authoritarian countries via the Economist Intelligence Unit’s (EIU) Democracy Index. As discussed in Supplemental Appendix II, the EIU index is preferable to other democratic indexes because it includes a thick conceptualization of civil liberties and political culture (Kekic, 2007). In our model, these features have a functional role for the latent construct of institutionalized participatory opportunity embedded within a deliberative culture.

We exclude authoritarian regimes from the analysis because our aim is to test the relationship between democratic participatory opportunities, deliberative cultures and political violence. As emphasized in the literature on political violence (see, for example, Taydas et al., 2011), regime types can influence how political opportunity structures interact with other explanatory variables, thereby inverting the relationship between democratic institutions and political violence (i.e. semi- and flawed-democratic regimes host more political violence than fully-democratic regimes, but authoritarian regimes host less political violence than semi- and flawed-democratic regimes (e.g. Gleditsch and Ruggeri, 2010)). Consequently, and as we explain in Supplemental Appendices II–VI, the model proposed in this article only fits non-authoritarian regimes from both a normative and an empirical perspective.

Our analysis relies upon CFA and SEM. CFA allows us to identify complex unobserved constructs and therefore build latent variables reflecting these constructs (e.g. institutional and cultural structures). Using CFA, we test the validity of a latent construct that merges both formal and cultural elements of democratic institutions. We use SEM to construct complex models comprising multidimensional mediating mechanisms and exogenous controlling variables. This allows us to test the mediating effects of institutional and cultural structures by controlling for both the mediating and direct effects of motive-based and political opportunity-based variables that are widely analysed in the literature.

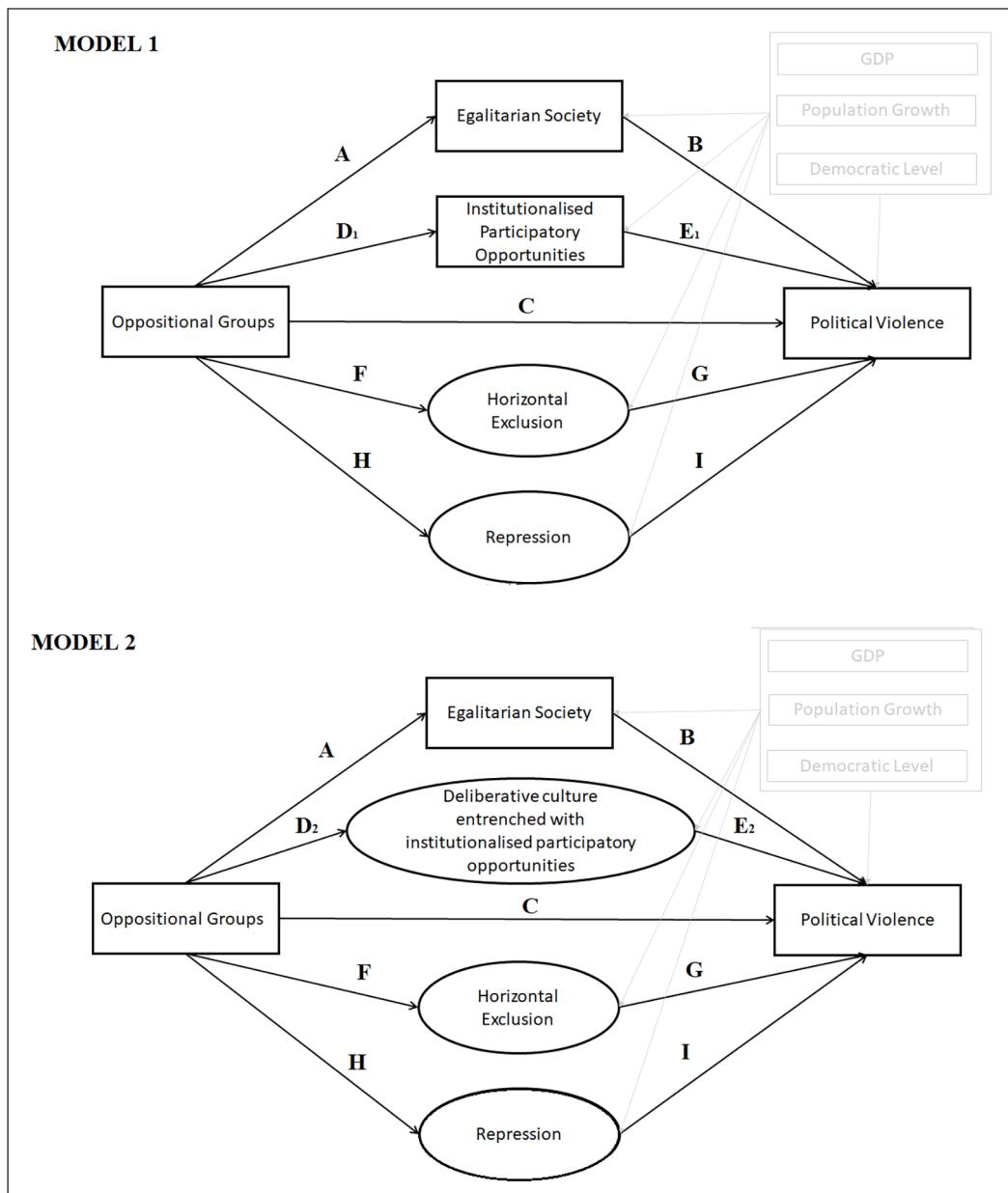
To check for the specific enabling role of deliberative culture over institutionalized participatory structures, we construct and compare two complex models. The first comprises the institutional elements of democratic participation alone; the second includes a deliberative culture that pervades these institutions. We check both models in light of their final goodness-of-fit measures and R^2 difference. This approach allows us to check the contribution of deliberative culture to institutionalized opportunities and to compare how they mediate the relationship between anti-systemic oppositional groups and political violence.

Models and variables

In this paper, we seek to explain variation in the incidence of oppositional group political violence within democratic states, taking a broad cross-national and longitudinal approach. As noted above, key drivers of political violence are now well understood in the literature. In addition to violence caused by the repressive behaviour of states are certain characteristics of the citizenry and their political movements. Democracies with more radicalized groups – groups that are fundamentally ‘anti-systemic’ in their orientation – experience more violence. Likewise, in societies where citizens have strong grievances, where particular groups are socially, economically or politically excluded, political violence is likewise more widespread.

H1 and H2 were tested here by comparing two models (Figure 2). The models were built using indicators developed from the V-Dem dataset that expressed the concept of motive-based factors of *horizontal exclusion* and *egalitarian society*, the opportunity-based variables of *deliberative culture entrenched within institutionalized participatory opportunities* and *repression*, the exogenous variable of *oppositional groups*, and the dependent variable of *oppositional groups’ political violence*. Grievance and political opportunities variables were considered to be mediating factors linking oppositional groups and political violence, meaning that the relationship linking oppositional groups and political violence is explained by the presence of these variables. As such, these variables are enabling factors that explain levels of oppositional group political violence.

Following Hayduk and Littvay (2012), a parsimonious analytical approach in latent variable building was taken to avoid additional error accumulation. For this reason, we employed a direct measure of our key concepts wherever possible. Where it was not possible to directly measure the

Figure 2. Models tested.

relevant concept, we developed latent constructs with parsimonious dimensions (i.e. no more than two to three indicators per latent construct).

Exogenous variable:

- *Oppositional groups*' variable is operationalized through the V-Dem indicator that considers the prevalence of anti-system oppositional group activity within the polity (v2csantimv)

(Coppedge et al., 2020). Oppositional groups comprise in-country anti-government movements that aim to change the polity in a fundamental way (Coppedge et al., 2020). The *oppositional groups*' variable also includes 'enraged radical actors'; that is, groups and movements whose psychological motivations express deep dissatisfaction with the status quo. In this respect, the indicator we employ implies that oppositional groups are likely to adopt radical forms of political action (Bernhard et al., 2020) and advance maximalist claims (White et al., 2015). The oppositional groups concept enables us to produce robust claims over the hypotheses because it trains our analysis on those political actors most likely to adopt violent behaviour.

Dependent variable:

- The dependent variable *political violence* (v2caviol) (Pemstein et al., 2018) expresses violence performed by oppositional groups. The variable refers explicitly to the use of political violence (in particular, the use of physical force to achieve political objectives) and it describes how frequently oppositional groups employ such tactics to advance their ends. As detailed in Supplemental Appendix IV, the dependent variable's validity was checked using the time series Granger causality test along with oppositional groups. As reported in Supplemental Appendix III, it is crucial to recognize variation in the distribution of political violence across different regime types. In this respect, non-authoritarian countries experience less political violence, with lower levels of variability in the incidence of violence than authoritarian regimes, which experience higher levels of political violence and higher variability across countries.

Mediating variables:

- *Horizontal exclusion* is a latent construct that is intended to capture the underlying idea of grievance. As Østby (2013) notes, exclusion is closely linked to a broad understanding of horizontal inequalities, including social, political and economic inequalities that hinder citizens and residents from normal participation. Socio-economic exclusion is captured by the *exclusion by social group index* (v2xpe_exlsocgr) that estimates the exclusion of individuals from access to services or participation in decision-making processes due to their identity or group membership. *Exclusion by political group index* measure the omission of individual to participate in the polity by considering their political affiliation (v2xpe_exlpol). *Exclusion by the socio-economic group* indicates the exclusion of persons from economic activity based on identity or belonging to a specific social group (v2xpe_exlecon) (Coppedge et al., 2020). While the three indexes express political, economic and social status inequality with respect to civil liberties, access to public services, jobs and business opportunities (Coppedge et al., 2020), they are also crucial components of horizontal inequality (Østby, 2013).
- *The egalitarian society* variable comprises the *egalitarian component index* (v2x_egal). This compound index includes each group's de jure capability to participate in the polity, the equal protection of participation and the equal distribution of resources (Coppedge et al., 2020). Egalitarian society is understood in terms of combination of legal protections and resources, such that the state guarantees de jure protection of basic rights for all citizens.
- *Repression* is a latent construct that combines the *electoral intimidation index* (v2elintim) and the *physical violence index* (v2x_clphy). The former describes a government's action to intimidate or eliminate oppositional groups and exclude them from the political arena (Pemstein et al., 2018). This construct includes diverse forms of state repression including

the murder or torture of political opponents during and outside electoral periods (Coppedge et al., 2020). As noted, state repression is generally understood as a precipitant of radicalization among oppositional groups and as being highly predictive of political violence.

- *Institutionalized participatory opportunities* (Model 1 – Figure 2) is a latent construct comprising the *civil society participation index* (v2x_cspart) (Coppedge et al., 2020), which captures civil society's de facto participation within the polity. This index includes electoral and non-electoral (such as directly democratic) participatory venues that oppositional groups can engage (Coppedge et al., 2020). This index describes how oppositional group political action is institutionally channelled within a polity.
- *Deliberative culture entrenched with institutionalized participatory opportunities* (Model 2 – Figure 2) is a latent construct combining institutionalized participatory opportunities with a normative understanding of deliberative culture. This construct comprises the *civil society participation index* explained above along with two variables drawn from the V-Dem deliberative component index, namely, *Engage* (v2dlengage) and *Counterargument* (v2dlconuntr), which together approximate the normative idea of deliberative cultures. While most of the indicators of V-Dem Deliberative Component Index (DCI) capture the quality of deliberation from an elite perspective, the component of *Engage* captures deliberative engagement from the perspective of civil society (Fleuß and Helbig, 2021). In addition, *Engage* is the only indicator that accounts for the transmission of non-elite debate within the media or grassroots movements to official decision-making bodies (Coppedge et al., 2020). Similarly, *Counterargument* is the sole existing proxy of the DCI that captures accountability mechanisms among the state elite as it describes elite attitudes towards the acknowledging and valuing oppositional group counterarguments. Together, *engage* and *counterargument* express the level of deliberative engagement within oppositional groups and highlight the state elite's inclination to consult political opponents in their decision-making process.

As already mentioned, the validity of the causal relationship between *oppositional group* and *political violence* was checked employing time series Granger causality test (reported in Supplemental Appendix IV). This confirms the validity of the relationship between anti-systemic oppositional groups and the incidence of political violence.

As noted above, the internal validity of the constructs was checked using CFA, which enabled us to build and test the validity of each latent construct defined above, and, further, to assess their longitudinal validity.

Control variables

The model was controlled with a number of non-mediating variables widely considered to predict political violence. We also controlled for opportunity indicators such as economic, political and demographic factors, since these shape the context of political action; that is, they amplify (or dampen) grievances and so the motivation to resort to violence. Economic factors were controlled for with gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (i.e. natural log of GDP per capita in US dollars), which represents a proxy variable for economic prosperity. Previous research has demonstrated the inverse relationship between GDP and oppositional group political violence (Abadie, 2006).

Demographic factors were controlled for with the population growth rate, the importance of which relates to the resource scarcity theories of political violence. On this view, demographic change may stimulate violent conflict via demand-induced scarcities (Homer-Dixon and Blitt, 1998). Finally, regime stability was controlled for with the EIU, as discussed above (Kekic, 2007). This variable is widely employed in the literature to express concepts of political stability and

Table 1. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) Model 1 and Model 2 (deliberative model).

	χ^2	df	RMSEA	CFI	GFI	SRMR
Model 1	197.369	148	0.054	0.985	0.996	0.076
Model 2	483.378	473	0.014	0.989	0.995	0.071

df: degrees of freedom; RMSEA: root mean square error of approximation; CFI: comparative fit index; GFI: goodness of fit index; SRMR: standardized root mean square residual.

Table 2. Standardized loading CFA across years model 1.

Model 1	Phys_viol	Intimid	Exc_pol	Exc_soc	Exc_eco
	Repression	Exclusion			
2007	0.937	0.926	0.966	0.833	0.932
2008	0.804	0.874	0.859	0.819	0.921
2009	0.836	0.860	0.964	0.815	0.918
2010	0.887	0.933	0.959	0.789	0.913
2011	0.860	0.896	0.959	0.812	0.927
2012	0.722	0.824	0.964	0.823	0.925
2013	0.803	0.907	0.965	0.828	0.922
2014	0.801	0.790	0.962	0.824	0.931
2015	0.845	0.869	0.959	0.824	0.930
2016	0.836	0.871	0.961	0.830	0.937
2017	0.820	0.842	0.953	0.864	0.922
2018	0.769	0.799	0.970	0.854	0.913
2019	0.881	0.844	0.969	0.863	0.925

Phys_viol: Physical Violence Index; Intimid: Election Government Intimidation Index; Exc_pol: Exclusion by Political Group Index; Exc_soc: Exclusion by Social Group Index; Exc_eco: Exclusion by Socio-Economic Group Index.

political opportunity (e.g. Buterbaugh et al., 2017). In this respect, political stability is usually considered as an input measure of the perception of political opportunity structures as it favours processes of including oppositional group claims and the perception, among such groups, of the effectiveness of institutionalized political opportunities (Kitschelt, 1986).

Measurement models: latent construct validity

The latent constructs were tested using CFA, which allowed checking their validity in light of each indicator's loading. Given the dataset's longitudinal dimension, levels of longitudinal measurement invariance were checked. Further discussion on the longitudinal invariance of the measurement model for non-authoritarian regimes and the subgroup of democratic regimes appears in Supplemental Appendix V.

The analysis indicates a good fit for both models (Table 1).

As outlined in Table 1, the comparative fit index (CFI) and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) scores are respectively above the 0.95 and below the 0.08 cut-offs suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999). The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) shows very good fit considering the maximum cut-off values of 0.054, and the goodness of fit index (GFI) statistics created as an alternative to the χ^2 ²³ is above the conservative cut-off of 0.95. CFA also allows for the assessment of each indicator's loading within the construct for each year included in the analysis (Tables 2 and 3).

Table 3. Standardized loading confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) across years Model 2.

Model 2	Civil_part	Engage	Counter	Phys_viol	Intimid	Exc_pol	Exc_soc	Exc_eco
	Deliberative participatory opportunity			Repression		Exclusion		
2007	0.815	0.885	0.812	0.864	0.874	0.844	0.929	0.966
2008	0.805	0.878	0.802	0.856	0.866	0.833	0.924	0.963
2009	0.787	0.865	0.783	0.851	0.861	0.832	0.923	0.963
2010	0.751	0.839	0.747	0.844	0.855	0.812	0.912	0.957
2011	0.746	0.834	0.741	0.827	0.838	0.828	0.921	0.962
2012	0.745	0.834	0.741	0.825	0.836	0.831	0.923	0.963
2013	0.764	0.848	0.760	0.831	0.842	0.832	0.923	0.963
2014	0.788	0.866	0.784	0.812	0.823	0.832	0.923	0.963
2015	0.789	0.866	0.785	0.833	0.844	0.832	0.923	0.963
2016	0.811	0.882	0.807	0.858	0.867	0.839	0.927	0.965
2017	0.786	0.864	0.782	0.850	0.860	0.834	0.924	0.963
2018	0.790	0.868	0.787	0.837	0.848	0.832	0.923	0.963
2019	0.800	0.875	0.797	0.842	0.853	0.825	0.919	0.961

Civil_part: Civil Society Participation Index, Engage: Engage Society; Counter: Respect Counterarguments, Phys_viol: Physical Violence Index; Intimid: Election Government Intimidation Index; Ex_pol: Exclusion by Political Group Index; Exc_soc: Exclusion by Social Group Index; Exc_eco: Exclusion by Socio-Economic Gorup Index.

The standardized loading of each indicator is above the conservative cut-off of 0.7, as suggested by the literature. The loading patterns are also similar across time, suggesting the robustness of these constructs with respect to the longitudinal dimension of the dataset. It can therefore be confirmed with high confidence that the data fit both theoretical constructs very well. These results also statistically validate our normative intuition that deliberative culture and participatory opportunities configure on the same dimension.

Covariance-based structural equation modelling

As depicted in Figure 2, two models were compared using SEM. Model 1 considers the relationship between *Oppositional groups* and *political violence* to be mediated by the grievance suppressor variable *egalitarian society*, the political opportunity-based variable *institutionalized participatory opportunities*, the grievance enhancer latent variable that embodies the concept of *horizontal exclusion*, and the political opportunities latent variable of *repression*. Model 2 is identical to Model 1 in every aspect except for the latent construct *Deliberative culture entrenched with institutionalized participatory opportunities*. This difference allows for the comparison of mediation mechanisms in models with and without deliberation and ultimately addresses H1 and H2. As noted, the endogenous control variables are: *GDP*; *population growth*; and *democratic level* variables.

To corroborate the hypotheses, a significant negative coefficient is expected for the Model 2 path ‘*Oppositional groups*→ *deliberative culture entrenched with institutionalized participatory opportunities*→*political violence*’ (D₂→E₂) while path C is expected to be non-significant. In contrast, the parallel relationship in Model 1 path C is expected to be significant.

Results and discussion

Estimates for the structural equation regression are reported in Table 4.

Table 4. Structural equation modelling (SEM) results.

Paths	Model 1	Model 2
(A–B) <i>Oppositional groups</i> → <i>Egalitarian society</i> → <i>Political violence</i>	-0.067***	-0.083***
(F–G) <i>Oppositional groups</i> → <i>Horizontal exclusion</i> → <i>Political violence</i>	0.037***	0.056***
(H–I) <i>Oppositional groups</i> → <i>Repression</i> → <i>Political violence</i>	0.415***	0.533***
(D ₁ –E ₁) <i>Oppositional groups</i> → <i>Institutionalized participatory opportunities</i> → <i>Political violence</i>	-0.013*	N/A
(D ₂ –E ₂) <i>Oppositional groups</i> → <i>Deliberative opportunity</i> → <i>Political violence</i>	N/A	-0.038**
(C) <i>Oppositional groups</i> → <i>Political violence</i>	0.256***	0.161
R ² total	0.744	0.822
CFI	0.950	0.945
GFI	0.996	0.995
RMSEA	0.094	0.078
SRMR	0.058	0.060

* $p < 0.1$. ** $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.01$.

CFI: comparative fit index; GFI: goodness of fit index; RMSEA: root mean square error of approximation; SRMR: standardized root mean squared.

A comparative analysis across Model 1 and Model 2 highlights partial mediation without the components of deliberative culture (Model 1) and a full mediation effect for the model where the components of deliberative culture are included (Model 2). As such, a model that includes deliberative culture entrenched with participatory opportunities fully channels the causal relationship between oppositional groups and political violence. In contrast, this causal relationship is not fully explained when the intermediary variable between oppositional groups and violence lacks deliberative culture. The mediation effect's significance can be observed in the direct effect between *oppositional groups* and *political violence*, which is significantly positive for Model 1 (0.256, $p < 0.01$) and considering directional expectation, non-significant in Model 2 (0.161, $p > 0.1$). *This relationship indicates that the mediating variables within Model 2 entirely explains the direct effect of oppositional groups on political violence while it remains partially unexplained in Model 1.* This also confirms H1 and H2, such that deliberative cultures enhance institutionalized civil participation by increasing its effect size and by reducing oppositional group political violence. This can be demonstrated via *reductio ad absurdum* when we analyse the effect size of Model 1, where institutionalized participatory opportunities do not fully explain the relationship between radical oppositional groups and political violence. In other words, in a hypothetical world where institutionalized participatory opportunities can be isolated from deliberative culture, oppositional groups would less frequently take advantage of the available institutionalized participatory opportunities to peacefully advance their claims (i.e. Model 1). In contrast, deliberative culture is proven to be a necessary condition for realizing the potential of participatory opportunities as it pushes (or induces) oppositional groups to take advantage of existing institutionalized participatory opportunities; that is, to express their discontent and advance their claims peacefully (i.e. Model 2).

These results are further corroborated by the model goodness-of-fit parameters and the total R^2 value: in fact, Model 2 is far superior to Model 1 in predicting political violence.⁴ Normatively, deliberative cultures may enhance the perceived efficacy of existing participatory channels, providing a mechanism for oppositional groups to de-radicalize and learn democratic values and practices (Fung, 2003). In sum, where state elites are committed to listening and responding to the

claims of oppositional groups, these groups and movements will view institutionalized participation as relatively more efficacious and pursue their claims through these channels, rather than turn to violence.

The findings reported here have some potentially wide-ranging implications for the way democratic states handle oppositional groups and the spectre of political extremism. Indeed, the growth of political extremism in established democracies is currently testing the bounds of liberal tolerance. Normative political theory indicates that liberal tolerance should find its limits at the intolerant, such that it is morally unnecessary (as well as politically dangerous) to engage with oppositional movements that would seek to overthrow the liberal-democratic order. The findings reported here challenge that view. Our analysis indicates the importance of not only tolerating aggrieved anti-system groups, but of actively engaging them in discourse. At an aggregate level, it is clear that institutionalized and culturally sanctioned political discourse constrains political violence and does so in a way that reaffirms democratic values. Understanding the sociological and psychological pathways that explain this effect will require further research, and there exists ample opportunity for fine-grained process-oriented studies of particular cases, individually and in comparative perspective. But even without this additional research, some general observations are warranted. The first of these concerns the risk of peremptory assumptions about which groups in a society are 'intolerably intolerant'. What political groups stand for, and what they may be capable of, should be understood non-trivially as a function of how they are received by state elites and political institutions. On these terms, political violence is not a simple product of the grievances and political orientations of oppositional groups; rather, it occurs where group characteristics meet the structure of political opportunities that a polity affords; such opportunities appear to shape the character and strength of political grievances, and can channel them along democratic or violent pathways. Affording participatory opportunities to oppositional groups can make democrats of them, but these opportunities need take a particular form – they must be entrenched within a deliberative culture such that the normative principles on which these institutions are founded are honoured by state elites, who anticipate, engage with and respond to groups who appear to oppose the political system. Political elites in democratic societies justify state violence to defend the democratic state; in fact, their first line of defence should involve the courageous pursuit of democratic engagement.

There is a noteworthy symmetry concerning the findings reported here and widely discussed observations about war and peace among states. Democratic states are reluctant to make war against other democratic states but feel less compunction about warring with non-democratic regimes. Within democracies, oppositional groups seem to be guided by a similar ethic; their political use of violence increases reliably in response to state-sanctioned violence. However, the actions of such groups are far more restrained when confronted with state elites committed to democratic engagement. While the group dynamics responsible for these outcomes warrant further analysis, the aggregate findings reported here are democratically affirming and consistent with analogous dynamics pertaining to interstate relations.

The foregoing analysis should not be interpreted as an unqualified call for democratic states to lay down their arms when confronted with violent groups. The commitment to violent action among certain groups is likely implacable. But most oppositional groups are neither absolute nor unified in their tactical or ideological commitments and as such they are amenable to expressing their grievances, and pursuing their interests, via diverse institutional pathways. In fact, democratic engagement may be used to discern just how absolute and cohesive are the anti-democratic commitments within a group and precisely where these commitments are to be found. Deliberation promises to reveal sources of citizen grievances in previously unacknowledged forms of neglect

and abuse, and thereby foster knowledge that might guide elites to fashion more adequate political and policy responses; where grievances are not connected to basic interests, questions concerning how and why these grievances are sustained within a group deserve their own analysis.

Conclusion

In democratic societies, *state repression* is a key driver of violence among oppositional groups – this is widely known. The institutional corollary is that *state-driven participation* can be a powerful constraint on such violence. To put this another way, the most effective way for democracies to constrain political violence is with more democracy. This is the central and original claim made in this article, an empirical finding that holds more than a decade for more than 110 of non-authoritarian societies. But a crucial qualification is in order. Formal institutions alone do not produce the full constraining effect on political violence. To realize their full potential, these institutions must be embedded within a deliberative culture – that is to say, democratic institutions must be governed by committed democrats, by state elites who are culturally motivated to engage with the grievances and political claims made by oppositional movements, and especially those who are profoundly opposed to the political system. We thereby conclude that the democratic peace is not limited to interstate relations – under certain conditions, its effects are felt in the domestic affairs of democratic societies.

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Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. Previous studies on these themes have mostly taken the form of in-depth case studies (e.g. Pantucci, 2010, Briggs, 2010; for an overview, see Schwarzmantel, 2010); we study this discursive engagement from a broader cross-national perspective.
2. Our analysis purposely exclude the 2020 and 2021 as marked by the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. χ^2 is reported here for informative purposes. The χ^2 results are biased and unreliable in a large sample size (such as this sample). Due to the restrictiveness of χ^2 values, GFI, CFI, SRMR and RMSEA were used.
4. While CFI, GFI and SRMR are comparable and present good fit in both models, the RMSEA values indicate marginal fit for Model 1 (RMSEA > 0.08) and good fit for Model 2 (RMSEA < 0.08).

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