EXAMINING THE LINK BETWEEN REGIME TYPE AND TERRORISM: AN EVALUATION OF RECENT TRENDS

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Georgetown University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Security Studies

By

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ABSTRACT

To test the proposition that regime type is linked to terrorism, and therefore that democracy may be an effective counterterrorism tool, this study employs a statistical analysis on incidents of terrorism from 143 countries over the period of 2004 to 2009. The overarching hypothesis put forth is that democracy is negatively related to the incidence of terrorism. Specifically, democratic states as victims of terrorism tend to experience fewer incidents of terrorism and suffer fewer fatalities as a result of terrorist acts than autocratic states. The results indicate statistically significant correlations between regime type and terrorism, and provide strong evidence to reject the null hypothesis. In particular, the data show that democracy, measured by both aggregate-level regime type and specific democratic characteristics such as a strong human rights record, is negatively associated with terrorism. These findings reveal that democracy has the potential to be used as an effective counterterrorism tool, particularly with regard to undermining the breeding causes of terrorism.
Special thanks to Rusan Chen for his statistical advice and generosity, to Justine Rosenthal for making me see complex issues through a different perspective, and to Jane Wubbels for giving me something great to look forward to.

Wesley Stanley
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Introduction

From John Adams’ “city upon a hill” to Woodrow Wilson’s assertive idealism and activism, debates over the use of democracy promotion as a strategic and/or ideological tool of U.S. foreign policy resonate throughout much of America’s history. In this vein, when confronted with the threat of Islamic terrorism after 9/11, the administration of George W. Bush aggressively touted democracy as the solution, casting the war on terrorism “as a global freedom agenda.” Indeed, the Bush administration made the argument that the Iraq model would serve as an inspiration for other Arab nations to embrace democracy, in a kind of democratic domino effect.

By the end of Bush’s second term, however, many informed observers felt that conflating democratic imperatives with the war in Iraq, regime change, and counterterrorism had tainted democracy promotion and severely tarnished America’s reputation. The widespread sentiment at the beginning of Barack

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1 Thomas Carothers lays out the initial policy dilemma facing the Bush administration in the aftermath of 9/11 as such: “The United States faces two contradictory imperatives: on the one hand, the fight against al Qaeda tempts Washington to put aside its democratic scruples and seek closer ties with autocracies throughout the Middle East and Asia. On the other hand, U.S. officials and policy experts have increasingly come to believe that it is precisely the lack of democracy in many of these countries that helps breed Islamic extremism.” See Thomas Carothers, “Promoting Democracy and Fighting Terror,” Foreign Affairs, Vol. 82, No. 1 (Jan-Feb., 2003).


4 For example, Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace share the sentiment that “by relentlessly associating it (democracy
Obama’s administration was that the model of aggressive democracy promotion, exemplified by the war in Iraq and applied to counterterrorism, must be rejected as being too costly, ineffective, and overly ambitious. Some prominent scholars even posited that the Obama administration ought to dramatically scale back democracy promotion more generally and return to a policy of realism, at least as far as the Middle East was concerned. While the Obama administration (at least rhetorically) has maintained that democracy promotion remains a part of U.S. foreign policy and is aligned with U.S. interests, it seems clear that democracy promotion as a foreign policy tool has been toned down.

Nonetheless, the question of using democracy as a counterterrorism tool, both in academic theory and in practice for U.S. policymakers, remains highly contentious. Conventional wisdom holds that there are three broad schools of thought on the relationship between regime type and terrorism, which logically arrive at different conclusions on the value of democracy as a counterterrorism tool. The first, which arguably is the prevailing view in the academic literature, is that democracies are more vulnerable to and experience more acts of terrorism as a

6 In his inaugural address, Obama expressed a commitment to advancing democracy by saying, “To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history, but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.” During Congressional testimony, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton aligned democracy promotion with U.S. strategic interests when she asserted, “We believe that no country benefits more than the United States when there is great security, democracy, and opportunity in the world.” As cited in Tamara Wittes and Andrew Masloksi, “Democracy Promotion Under Obama: Lessons From the Middle East Partnership Initiative,” The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, Middle East Policy Memo Number 13, May 2009.
victim than autocratic states. The opposing school of thought, which emphasizes different characteristics of democracy, turns this argument around and claims that democracies are actually less vulnerable to and experience fewer acts of terrorism as a victim than autocratic states. A third line of thinking posits that there is no clear relationship between regime type and terrorism, and consequentially that drawing conclusions regarding democracy as a counterterrorism tool is problematic.

Although each perspective marshals qualitative and quantitative evidence to support its position, the arguments often talk past each other and key distinctions within the positions are sometimes overlooked. Indeed, while viewing the relationship between regime type and terrorism through the lens of the three broad schools of thought can be helpful, it can also be an oversimplification. Thus a secondary objective of this paper is to highlight important distinctions within the broad positions, focusing in particular on distinguishing between the ability of democratic processes to undermine the roots of terrorism, and the ability of democratic processes to be wielded as a weapon to counter terrorist groups after they have formed. While this distinction is difficult to fully capture using the available data, the empirical findings taken in tandem with the theoretical arguments offered in this paper lend support to the contention that democracy’s greatest utility as a counterterrorism tool lies in its ability to undermine the breeding causes of terrorism.

After outlining the qualitative perspectives mentioned above, I will then move to the main analytical section of the paper. To test the proposition that regime type is linked to terrorism, and therefore that democracy may be an effective
counterterrorism tool, this study employs a statistical analysis on incidents of terrorism from 143 countries over the period of 2004 to 2009. The overarching hypothesis put forth is that democracy is negatively related to the incidence of terrorism. A related secondary hypothesis postulates that democracy is negatively related to the number of deaths caused by acts of terrorism. In an attempt to drill down on explanatory factors that are often highlighted as key distinctions between democracy and autocracy, a third hypothesis asserts that a strong record on human rights, which is defined in this metric as having minimal or no state repression and a robust rule of law, is negatively related to the incidence of terrorism. Lastly, going beyond democracy versus autocracy, this study evaluates the hypothesis that the strength of a state is negatively related to the incidence of terrorism. The results indicate statistically significant correlations between regime type and terrorism, and provide strong evidence to reject the null hypotheses. In particular, the data show that democratic processes, measured by both aggregate-level regime type and specific measures like human rights, are negatively associated with terrorism. These findings reveal that democracy has the potential to be used as an effective tool of counterterrorism.

The paper unfolds in five major sections. The first section lays out the methodology used in the study by indentifying the statistical methods and sources used to measure regime type, incidents of terrorism, deaths from terrorism, human rights, and state strength. The second section presents the competing schools of

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7 As will be explained in greater detail later, state fragility has been shown to be an accurate predictor of terrorism when regime type proved to be statistically insignificant. See Piazza, 2006.
thought, identifies gaps and ambiguities in the literature, and offers a more nuanced perspective that is designed to clarify how democratic processes interact with terrorism. The third section discusses the findings of the statistical tests, the fourth section analyses democracy’s role as a counterterrorism tool in light of the empirical findings, and the final section offers policy implications.

Methodology

To investigate the link between regime type and terrorism, I will draw on two primary sources, the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) Worldwide Incident Tracking System (WITS), and the Freedom House *Freedom in the World* annual reports. To test the third and forth hypothesis relating to human rights, and strength of state, I will draw on the *Political Terror Scale* (which is based on country reports from Amnesty International and the U.S. State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices), and the Center of Systemic Peace and Center for Global Policy’s *State Fragility Index*.

There are many databases used in academic and policy literature to measure terrorism, such as International Terrorism: Attributes of Terrorist Events (ITERATE), RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents (RDWTI), RAND-Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT), the Pinkerton Global Intelligence Service (PGIS) GIS Global Terrorism Database (GTD), the U.S. Department of State sponsored *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, and most recently, NCTC WITS. For the purposes of this paper, I am looking for the most comprehensive, inclusive, and accurate database to measure terrorism incidents.
and lethality ideally since the year 2001 (the beginning of the U.S. War on Terrorism). Although NCTC WITS only contains data dating back to 2004, it is arguably the most authoritative source on terrorism incidents available today.\(^8\) Other databases fall short because they do not include acts of domestic terrorism (ITERATE), because they are defunct (MIPT ended in 2005, PGIS GTD ended in 1997, U.S. State Department now relies on WITS data), or because they are currently unavailable (RAND RDWTI will not be available until early 2010 according to its website).

Other studies have tended to rely on ITERATE data, which only records international terrorism events and thus fails to capture the complete picture of terrorism. The WITS database overcomes this deficiency by incorporating both international and domestic terrorism events, although it does not clearly distinguish between the two.\(^9\) There is at least one empirical study\(^{10}\) that attempts to delineate between homegrown and foreign terrorist attacks, but the results proved to be statistically insignificant. Moreover, although one must consider that “motivations for international and domestic terrorism derive from vastly different sources,”\(^{11}\) the prominence of transnational terrorist groups and revolutionary communications

\(^8\) For more on this point, see Max Abrahms, “Why Democracies Make Superior Counterterrorists,” *Security Studies* 16:2, 2007.
\(^9\) I am only aware of one other study that has utilized the WITS database (Abrahms, 2007), and that study was limited to a single year’s worth of data.
\(^{11}\) Masters, pp. 9.
tools such as the Internet arguably make the distinction between domestic and international increasingly facile and artificial.¹²

Finally, while some scholars have criticized the use of short-range studies that encompass comparatively fewer incidents,¹³ I contend that although the timeframe for using WITS is not ideal (only available since 2004), the dataset is sufficient to provide a snapshot of the modern terrorism landscape. To illustrate, the WITS dataset contains 63,192 incidents spread across 143 countries, while the only other database to incorporate domestic and international incidents of terrorism, the PGIS GTD, contained about 70,000 incidents.¹⁴ Thus the sample size between the two is comparable, despite the vast difference in timeframe measured.

Annual data gathered from Freedom House’s *Freedom in the World* reports, which rank countries on political rights and civil liberties, will be used to measure democracy for this paper. Based on these measures, Freedom House separates countries into categories of Free, Not Free, and Partly Free. While Freedom House rankings are not intended to measure democracy per se, they do measure democratic processes and “real-world rights and social freedoms enjoyed by individuals.”¹⁵ Moreover, using Freedom House data to measure democracy is a standard choice among scholars who have previously examined regime type and

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¹² Abrahms (2007) also makes this point in his paper, citing Bruce Hoffman to illustrate that the “distinction between domestic and international terrorism has been evaporating since the late 1990s.” pp. 225.

¹³ Masters, pp. 18.

¹⁴ The PGIS GTD was active from 1970 to 1997. See the National Institute of Justice, “Terrorism Databases for Analysis,” U.S. Department of Justice. [http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/topics/crime/terrorism/databases.htm](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/topics/crime/terrorism/databases.htm)

terrorism.\textsuperscript{16} In instances where alternative democracy measures, such as the Polity IV data, have been used for robustness checks, the results did not vary.\textsuperscript{17} Due to the time series nature of the analysis here, however, I will average the Freedom House data from 2004-2009 for each country for comparison purposes.\textsuperscript{18} Averaging risks losing the impact of changes in political regimes over time, but in fact, the Freedom House data reveal very few changes in the countries examined over the time period of this study, and what variations do occur are still captured after averaging.\textsuperscript{19}

To test the third hypothesis, I will use rankings from the \textit{Political Terror Scale} (PTS).\textsuperscript{20} The PTS primarily measures the strength of the rule of law and the degree of state repression, and then assigns each country a PTS score, which for the sake of precision and ease of use I will refer to in this paper as the “human rights” metric. As the PTS website notes, “The ‘terror’ in the PTS refers to state-sanctioned killings, torture, disappearances, and political imprisonment.”\textsuperscript{21} Additionally, even though the PTS pulls from both Amnesty International and the U.S. State Department, for the statistical analysis in this study only the ratings from Amnesty International will

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{16} See, for example, Weinburg and Eubank, 1998; Li, 2005; and Abrahms, 2007.
\textsuperscript{17} Quan Li, “Does Democracy Promote or Reduce Transnational Terrorist Incidents?” \textit{Journal of Conflict Resolution} 49, no. 2 (April 2005).
\textsuperscript{18} One data issue that arose when averaging was that the Freedom House annual scale is not continuous (i.e., Free corresponds to a score of 1.0-2.5, Partly Free to 3.0-5.5, and Not Free to 5.5-7.0). Thus I extended the scale and rounded where necessary (e.g., a country with an average of 2.6 would be treated as Free, whereas a country with an average of 2.8 would be treated as Partly Free).
\textsuperscript{19} Averaging is also not unique to this study. See Masters, 2008 and Piazza, 2008.
\textsuperscript{20} The Political Terror Scale rates countries on a level of 1 to 5. Level 1 is described as: “Countries under a secure rule of law, people are not imprisoned for their views, and torture is rare or exceptional. Political murders are extremely rare.” Level 5 is described as: “Terror has expanded to the whole population. The leaders of these societies place no limits on the means or thoroughness with which they pursue personal or ideological goals.” For more information, please visit http://www.politicalterrorscale.org/about.php
\textsuperscript{21} See the FAQ section at http://www.politicalterrorscale.org/about.php
\end{quote}
be included to avoid rounding in instances when the scores differ, and also because the State Department does not rank the United States, which this study will include.

To test the fourth hypothesis measuring state strength and capacity, I will use the Center of Systemic Peace and Center for Global Policy’s *State Fragility Index*, which scores each country “on both Effectiveness and Legitimacy in four performance dimensions: Security, Political, Economic, and Social, at the end of the year 2008.” ²² I will use the latest rankings (from 2008) to provide an interesting snapshot of state capacity that could yield results deserving further inquiry.

Two primary statistical tests are used in this study, both using the SPSS statistical program. The Kruskal-Wallis test is used to assess correlation by examining the average number of terrorist incidents and deaths between the three regime types, and Spearman’s rho coefficient is used to measure how regime type and terrorism are correlated. These non-parametric statistical tests are chosen over more conventional parametric measures, such as the one-way ANOVA and Pearson’s rho coefficient, because the sample examined in this study is not a normal, Gaussian distribution. ²³ The non-parametric tests have also been used to assess correlation in

²² According to the Center for Systemic Peace website, “A country’s fragility is closely associated with its state capacity to manage conflict; make and implement public policy; and deliver essential services and its systemic resilience in maintaining system coherence, cohesion, and quality of life; responding effectively to challenges and crises, and continuing progressive development.” Based on the *Fragility Index*, countries fall into one of six categories: extreme, high, serious, moderate, low, and little or no. This is a more comprehensive index than the *Political Terror Scale*, although it pulls from that source as well. See [http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm](http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm)

²³ For the dataset, when regime type is plotted on the x-axis and terrorism incidents are plotted on the y-axis, the data points appear to be randomly distributed because they do not form a Gaussian distribution (i.e., a bell curve). This does not necessarily mean that there is no relationship between the two variables, only that a different statistical test is required to capture the variation.
previous studies on regime type and terrorism.\textsuperscript{24} To test the primary and secondary hypotheses, I will also examine the data and run the statistical tests with and without Iraq, a country (classified as Not Free) that may be considered an outlier because it accounts for an overwhelming 35 percent of the terrorism incidents and 50 percent of the deaths in the entire sample. By performing these tests, I expect to gain a clearer understanding of the complex relationship between regime type and terrorism.

**Linking Regime Type and Terrorism on a Theoretical Level**

In most cases, Occam’s razor holds true: all things being equal, the simplest answer to a problem is usually the correct one. In turn, assessing a straightforward, empirically testable hypothesis—such as democracies experience more terrorism than autocracies—should lend itself to a simple yes, no, or null. Indeed, many academic literature reviews on the relationship between regime type and terrorism tend to cluster around these three camps, and ultimately the qualitative and quantitative evidence derived from these studies is mobilized to lend support to a policy decision about whether or not (or to what extent) democracy should be part of America’s counterterrorism posture. Yet this line of inquiry tends to overlook the complexities of seemingly straightforward concepts like democracy and terrorism.\textsuperscript{25}

For example, democratic societies throughout the world have differences in culture,
organization, and political philosophy. Even the characteristics that the United Nations General Assembly endorses as “universal” building blocks of democracy—“respect for fundamental civil and political rights including the rights to association and expression, periodic multiparty elections that are free and fair, universal and equal suffrage, an elected parliament, an independent judiciary, a free press, civilian and democratic control of the armed forces, and the rule of law”—are complex to the extent of allowing significant room for variation within regime type classifications.

A similar process of disaggregation can be applied to terrorism. Particularly when considering the impact of regime type, the distinction between the root causes of terrorism and the ability to counter terrorism after groups have formed is often lost. Logically, democracies may be superior at mitigating the root (or breeding) causes of terrorism while having an inferior capability to counter mature terrorist organizations (either at home or abroad) when compared to an autocratic regime. Admittedly, articulating these nuances using empirical data is difficult, which has probably contributed to contradictory and inconclusive findings on the relationship between regime type and terrorism in previous studies. Nonetheless, these important nuances will be acknowledged in the qualitative, theoretical discussion below. As a result, the following literature review will consider: 1) how regime type affects the root causes of terrorism (i.e., “breeding” causes); 2) how regime type

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affects the capacity to counter terrorism; and 3) the proposition that regime type is not related to terrorism (i.e., the null hypothesis).

Regime Type and the Root Causes of Terrorism

Democracy’s greatest counterterrorism strength on a theoretical level probably lies in its ability to undercut the roots of terrorism.\textsuperscript{27} To this end, democracy itself may act as a bulwark against terrorism due to conflict-reducing mechanisms that are inherently hardwired into its framework.\textsuperscript{28} A recent RAND study examining democracy promotion and terrorism in the Middle East highlighted three characteristics of democracy that could be expected to undermine terrorism: “espousing norms of tolerance, creating functioning and inclusive institutional structures, and increasing the legitimacy of the political system.”\textsuperscript{29} In addition to providing a democratic regime with legitimacy, the predominant mechanism at work is the provision, sanctioning, and widespread societal acceptance of an alternative (i.e., peaceful) means of political expression. Thus in a democracy, as opposed to an autocratic state where political expression is discouraged and punished, those who might otherwise resort to political violence could instead peacefully make their voice heard through a legitimate political process. Along those same lines, those who advocate democracy promotion as an antidote to terrorism

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{27} It is not the purpose of this paper to flesh out what exactly constitute the “roots of terrorism,” but like similar studies, I acknowledge that the sources of terrorism are “complex and multifaceted, and no one antidote is likely to address entirely its root causes.” (see Kaye, et al., 2008).
\textsuperscript{28} Alex Schmid, “Terrorism and Democracy,” in Schmid, Alex and Crelinsten, Ronald (eds.). \textit{Western Responses to Terrorism} (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1993).
\end{footnotesize}
point to autocratic states as being incubators of terrorism that breed extremist thought and terrorist activity while repressing the public virtues of political moderation and compromise.\textsuperscript{30}

On the flip side, certain institutional characteristics of democracy may hinder efforts to undercut the sources of terrorism. In a pioneering work on regime type and terrorism, Eubank and Weinberg contend that “political and civil liberties are positively associated with political terrorism.”\textsuperscript{31} While it must be acknowledged that Eubank and Weinberg based this conclusion on the finding that terrorist groups were more prevalent in democracies, a contention that no longer holds true,\textsuperscript{32} the potentially more disturbing contention—that political and civil liberties might not be the powerful conflict-reducers that proponents of democracy allege—cannot be so easily dismissed. One might imagine a society that has robust political and civil liberties, and yet simultaneously oppresses a minority community to the point that members of that community rebel against the established system through acts of defiant violence. Indeed, this perceived sense of oppression is an important motivating force that jihadist ideologues tap into to encourage Muslims to engage in acts of violence against the West.

Moreover, it is unclear whether providing an alternative, peaceful means of political expression would have a significant effect on the most dangerous kinds of

\textsuperscript{32} Of the 45 terrorist organizations listed on the State Department Foreign Terrorist Organizations List, 21 organizations operate in a country categorized as “Not Free,” while only 8 operate in a country categorized as “Free.”
terrorists. For example, al Qaeda categorically rejects the notion of democracy and popular sovereignty as un-Islamic, and Osama Bin Laden refers to democracy as a “deviant and misleading practice” and the “faith of the ignorant.” Democracy’s powerful norms of legitimacy and representation ring hollow against these groups because they know a democratic election would not serve their interests, and thus recourse to violence becomes the de facto choice.

Regime Type and the Capacity to Counter Terrorism

The other key metric to consider when evaluating democracy as a counterterrorism tool is how regime type affects the capacity to counter terrorism. That is, looking beyond the initial roots of terror, how does regime type affect how a state deals with terrorism after terrorist organizations have formed? The notion that democracy can be used as weapon against terrorism has been popular in many Western policy circles. In 2005, the Club de Madrid held an international summit on democracy and terrorism that brought together “more than a thousand policymakers officials, and experts,” and produced a series of books and articles with the same underlying message: “only democracy will defeat terrorism.” The same idea constituted a key pillar of U.S. foreign policy during the George W. Bush administration. When discussing the War on Terror, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice asserted that “our theory of victory...must be to offer people a

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34 As quoted in F Gregory Gause III. “Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?” Foreign Affairs 84, no. 5 (Sept/Oct, 2005).
democratic path to advance their interests peacefully, to develop their talents, to redress injustices, and to live in freedom and dignity.”36

Some scholars in academia also argue for democracy as a counterterrorism tool. Max Abrahms contends that liberal values associated with an aversion to terrorism and a commitment to civil liberties allow democracies to strike an ideal balance between strong countermeasures and support against terrorism.37

Empirically, there is limited albeit notable evidence to support the claim that democracy reduces terrorism. Jan Engene found that countries with a high overall incidence of terrorism tend to score lower on the measure of political freedom,38 and Alex Schmid discovered a substantial correlation between countries ranking high on rule of law and ranking low on terrorism.39 An important policy implication that can be drawn from these studies is that strengthening the rule of law and increasing the level of political freedom in autocratic countries, which tend to score poorly on these measures, may help reduce the terrorist threat within these nations.

In contrast, certain characteristics of democracy appear to exacerbate terrorism and constrain the democratic state’s ability to counter terrorist groups compared to an autocratic state. For example, democracies are allegedly prone to making policy concessions,40 their borders are frequently permeable, and an open, liberal democratic state may offer aspiring terrorists more room to operate, recruit,

and plan attacks because security services in democracies are held in check by the rule of law and civil liberties. Indeed, with regard to the Middle East, a RAND study reported that while liberal reforms designed to reduce political violence have had mixed success, the strong, repressive security services of autocratic Arab regimes have “played a major role in either curtailing or preventing terrorism and violence.”41 Taken further, even if autocratic states breed more terrorists than democratic states, they may be able to quash them before the terrorists become a direct threat to the regime, whereas a democratic state’s preventive capability may be hampered by concerns over civil liberties.

Lastly, the strategic calculus of a terrorist group may also make democracies a more attractive target. Democracies are known for having a free and open media, which offers a terrorist organization a strategic incentive to influence (i.e., terrorize) a large audience through acts of theatrical violence. On the empirical front, the data is largely inconclusive, but there is at least one group of scholars who find that terrorist events are substantially more likely to occur in free and democratic countries.42

The Null Hypothesis and Going Beyond Regime Type

In several empirical analyses on relationship between regime type and terrorism, scholars have failed to find statistically significant correlations. The null hypothesis—that regime type is not related to terrorism—has been a common

41 The security services highlighted were those of Bahrain, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. See Kaye, et al. pp. xvii
finding, particularly in recent studies.\textsuperscript{43} Interestingly, although Joe Eyerman does not find a consistent correlation between regime type and terrorism, he does find that both well-established democracies and entrenched dictatorships appear to suffer the fewest acts of terrorism.\textsuperscript{44} Yet the reality may simply be that national-level regime type data cannot capture the granularity that is required to understand a multifaceted phenomenon like terrorism. As Jessica Stern phrased it in a recent article, “there is no particular political system that reliably promotes or deters terrorism...and democracy is not the cure-all it is often assumed to be.”\textsuperscript{45} Several scholars in this vein have instead stressed the need to dig deeper and examine variables other than regime type to understand terrorism. For example, James Piazza argues that factors such as social cleavages and failed states are better indicators of terrorism than regime type.\textsuperscript{46} One scholar also pointed to the “sorry condition of available data” as a factor contributing to conflicting and inconclusive studies.\textsuperscript{47}

\textit{Qualitative Summary and Empirical Tie-In}

On the whole, although they are arguably two sides of the same coin, parsing out the interactions between regime type and terrorism in terms of how they affect a) the roots of terrorism and b) the capacity to counter terrorists after groups have formed, yields some important observations. First, it is clear that the plethora of

\textsuperscript{43} For example, see Piazza, 2006 and 2007; Li, 2005; and Masters, 2008.
\textsuperscript{45} Jessica Stern. “5 myths about who becomes a terrorist,” \textit{The Washington Post}. 10 January 2010; B04.
\textsuperscript{47} Masters, 2008.
institutional processes that undergird a democratic society can cut both ways with regard to terrorism. That is, characteristics like civil liberties, free press, and an open, tolerant political process seem to be capable of both enabling and mitigating terrorism. This observation may help explain why so many recent empirical studies have tended to fall into the null hypothesis camp. Second, although it is difficult to determine in the aggregate which characteristic dominates in any given case, comparing multiple independent variables—for this study, democracy at the aggregate level, specific democratic processes represented by the human rights measure, and state capacity—might offer some insight into which characteristic yields the strongest correlation with terrorism. As will be shown, the empirical findings in this study do indeed offer compelling evidence to reject the null hypothesis. Indeed, the empirical findings taken in combination with the qualitative arguments outlined above, suggest that democracy’s potential as a counterterrorism tool may be particularly well suited to undermining the breeding causes of terrorism.

Findings

The Dataset

The dataset consists of terrorism incidents from 143 countries over a nearly six-year period from 01/01/2004 to 09/30/2009. Based on the average Freedom House score from 2004 to 2009, 52 countries are classified as Free (36% of the dataset), 51 are classified as Partly Free (36% of the dataset), and 40 are classified as Not Free (28% of the dataset). To illustrate some of the key countries in this
study, Tables 1 and 2 highlight the top fifteen countries by terrorism incidents and
deaths from terrorism.

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<td>Iraq</td>
<td>22,289</td>
<td>Not Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>5,356</td>
<td>Not Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>5,291</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>3,898</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>1,279</td>
<td>Partly Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>1,262</td>
<td>Not Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>733</td>
<td>Partly Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>Partly Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>Not Free</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*NCTC WITS dataset, 01/01/2004 to 09/30/2009*
Table 2: Top Fifteen Target Countries by Fatalities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Fatalities</th>
<th>Regime Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>45,907</td>
<td>Not Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>8,407</td>
<td>Not Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>6,327</td>
<td>Not Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>5,942</td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>3,269</td>
<td>Not Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>2,681</td>
<td>Partly Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Congo</td>
<td>2,650</td>
<td>Not Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>2,371</td>
<td>Partly Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>2,275</td>
<td>Not Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>1,785</td>
<td>Not Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>1,492</td>
<td>Partly Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>1,297</td>
<td>Partly Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>1,250</td>
<td>Partly Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>866</td>
<td>Not Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>744</td>
<td>Not Free</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*NCTC WITS dataset, 01/01/2004 to 09/30/2009

Regime Type and Terrorism

The primary hypothesis tested in this study is that democracy is negatively related to the incidence of terrorism. Secondarily, a related hypothesis posits that democracy is negatively related to the number of deaths from terrorism. First, the Kruskal-Wallis test is used to establish whether there is a correlation between regime type and terrorism, or conversely whether the incidents are simply distributed throughout the regime types by random chance. Dividing the sample into Free, Partly Free, and Not Free regimes, this test assesses correlation by examining the average number of terrorist incidents and deaths between the three regime types. The test finds a significant difference in both the number of terrorism incidents and the number of deaths from terrorism (P = 0.036 and P = <0.001,
respectively).\textsuperscript{48} This trend is apparent when the average number of incidents is compared to regime type as illustrated in Table 3. When Iraq is excluded from the analysis, the results still indicate a statistically significant difference in both incidents and deaths ($P = 0.042$ and $P = <0.001$, respectively).\textsuperscript{49} Even when both Iraq and Afghanistan are excluded from the analysis, the results remain statistically significant.\textsuperscript{50} With these results, the null hypothesis—that terrorism is dispersed randomly throughout the regime types, or that regime type and terrorism are not related—can be rejected.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regime Type</th>
<th>Number of Incidents</th>
<th>Average Number of Incidents Per Country</th>
<th>Number of Deaths</th>
<th>Average Number of Deaths Per Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free</td>
<td>9,862</td>
<td>189.7</td>
<td>6,690</td>
<td>128.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partly Free</td>
<td>14,437</td>
<td>283.1</td>
<td>12,354</td>
<td>242.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Free</td>
<td>38,893</td>
<td>972.3</td>
<td>73,410</td>
<td>1835.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Free (Iraq Excluded)</td>
<td>16,604</td>
<td>425.7</td>
<td>27,503</td>
<td>705.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Free (Iraq and Afghanistan excluded)</td>
<td>11,248</td>
<td>296.0</td>
<td>19,096</td>
<td>502.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*NCTC WITS dataset, 01/01/04 to 09/30/09

The next step in assessing the relationship between regime type and terrorism is to measure how the two variables are correlated. The results from

\textsuperscript{48} A $P$-value of less than 0.05 is widely accepted as a statistically significant finding in social science.

\textsuperscript{49} When Iraq is excluded from the analysis, terrorism incidents in Not Free countries are reduced to 16,604 (an average of 425.7 per country), and deaths are reduced to 27,503 (an average of 705.2).

\textsuperscript{50} For number of incidents, $P = 0.047$, and for number of deaths, $P = <0.001$. 

21
Spearman’s rho correlation coefficient support the main hypothesis of this paper, although the relationship is significantly weakened for number of incidents when Iraq and Afghanistan are excluded. In this test, the countries are not broken up into the three regime types, but rather they are assigned a score ranging from 1.0 to 7.0, with 1.0 representing the ideal democracy and 7.0 representing the most autocratic/least democratic polity according to Freedom House. Thus if the hypothesis is supported, one would expect Spearman’s coefficient to be positive and closer to 1 to indicate that terrorism incidents and deaths are rising as one moves up the Freedom House scale. The findings for number of incidents, $\rho = 0.164$ ($P = 0.051$), and number of deaths, $\rho = 0.365$ ($P < 0.001$), support this trend at a statistically significant level.\textsuperscript{51} When Iraq is excluded, Spearman’s coefficient remains positive, but it is not strong enough to be statistically significant ($\rho = 0.152$, $P = 0.071$).\textsuperscript{52} The correlation between regime type and lethality, however, remains robust when Iraq is excluded ($\rho = 0.356$, $P < 0.001$), and even when both Iraq and Afghanistan are excluded ($\rho = 0.351$, $P < 0.001$).

In sum, the findings thus far lend support to the primary and related secondary hypotheses offered in this paper. Although many recent studies found no significant correlations with terrorism when using aggregate-level regime type data, this study finds that democracy is negatively associated with both the incidence and the lethality of terrorism. In other words, democracies tend to experience less terrorism than autocratic states. Notably, even when Iraq and Afghanistan are

\textsuperscript{51} For number of incidents $P = 0.051$ is right at the 0.05 threshold, and is thus considered to be statistically significant.

\textsuperscript{52} When Iraq and Afghanistan are excluded, the correlation falls to $\rho = 0.144$, $P = 0.088$, which is statistically insignificant.
excluded from the analysis and the negative association between democracy and terrorism incidents is statistically insignificant, the negative association between democracy and the number of deaths caused by terrorist acts remains quite robust.

Delving into specific democratic processes, in the next section I will examine a measurement designed to rate countries on human rights to determine if specific democratic building blocks (a strong rule of law and low state repression) are negatively related to terrorism incidents. Finally, in the last test I will go beyond regime type to examine whether state fragility is related to terrorism.

**Democratic Processes**

Strong rule of law is a key indicator of a robust democratic state. The rule of law is intended to provide order among citizens within a country as well as between a government and its citizens. Conversely, states with a weak rule of law tend to be prone to arbitrary, repressive actions by the state against its citizens. Since a primary aim of terrorism is to provoke a harsh crackdown by the state (and thus make citizens more sympathetic to the terrorists’ cause or radicalize them to join the terrorist organization), one might logically speculate that states with a weaker rule of law and greater state repression experience more terrorism. To measure the rule of law and state repression, I will use a five-point “human rights” scoring system provided by the *Political Terror Scale* (PTS), which draws from Amnesty International country reports. As Table 4 illustrates, there appears to be a strong
relationship between states with a weak record of human rights (i.e., states with a weak rule of law and greater state repression) and higher incidents of terrorism.\footnote{There are 129 countries examined for this test. The breakdown is as follows: 19 countries scored a 1 on the PTS, 40 countries scored a 2, 38 countries scored a 3, 24 countries scored a 4, and 8 countries scored a 5.}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PTS Score</th>
<th>Number of Terrorism Incidents</th>
<th>Average Incidents Per Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>844</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6,393</td>
<td>168.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>18,965</td>
<td>790.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>35,200</td>
<td>4,400.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*NCTC WITS dataset, 01/01/04 to 09/30/09

Using Spearman’s rho correlation coefficient, I found that there is a statistically significant, positive association between the number of terrorist attacks and the PTS human rights scores of the countries examined, rho = 0.535 (P = <0.001). As such, the data support the third hypothesis, which proposed that a strong record of human rights is negatively associated with incidents of terrorism. Within this sample, the null hypothesis can be rejected.

State Strength

The previous hypotheses have been focused on democracy, both at the aggregate national level and at more specific democratic processes such as the rule of law. Yet an alternative look at regime type goes beyond political orientation, and instead focuses on the capacity of the state. Indeed, the notion of failed states as an accurate predictor of terrorism has recently garnered attention, both in the policy
world and in academic circles. As James Piazza notes, failed or failing states seem to be enablers of terrorism “because they produce conditions under which transnational terrorist groups can thrive.”\textsuperscript{54} Thus this study employs an alternative measure, State Fragility, to get a sense of what other kinds of factors might have an important effect on terrorism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of State Fragility</th>
<th>Number of Terrorism Incidents</th>
<th>Average Incidents Per Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little or No</td>
<td>1,343</td>
<td>40.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>3,869</td>
<td>168.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>8,629</td>
<td>345.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious</td>
<td>11,495</td>
<td>425.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>28,431</td>
<td>1,579.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extreme</td>
<td>7,794</td>
<td>866.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*NCTC WITS dataset, 01/01/04 to 09/30/09

The \textit{State Fragility Index}, which as previously acknowledged scores each country on both effectiveness and legitimacy across security, political, economic, and social dimensions, will be used to assess the fourth hypothesis.\textsuperscript{55} It should be noted that the legitimacy rankings are likely bolstered by democratic processes, but otherwise the \textit{Index} quantifies characteristics that go beyond political regime type. Applying Spearman’s rho correlation coefficient, I found that state fragility is significantly associated with terrorism \( \text{rho} = 0.327 \) \( (P < 0.001) \). Performing the test


\textsuperscript{55} 135 countries were included in this test. The breakdown is as follows: 33 countries were given a score of Little or No, 23 were given a score of Low, 25 were given a score of Moderate, 27 were given a score of Serious, 18 were given a score of High, and 9 were given a score of Extreme.
without Iraq still resulted in a statistically significant finding $\rho = 0.316$ ($P =<0.001$).\(^{56}\) The data thus support the hypothesis that the strength of a state is negatively related to the incidence of terrorism.

At the same time, however, the findings demonstrate the multiplicity of factors that could be associated with a phenomenon as complex as terrorism. For example, countries as geographically and culturally diverse as China, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Belarus, Qatar, and Vietnam all are considered Not Free countries with Freedom House scores above 5.9, yet they all also rank as “Little or No” or “Low” on the *Fragility Index* and experienced relatively few incidents of terrorism. Such crosscutting cleavages could offer insight into how democracy can be best employed as a counterterrorism tool.

**Evaluating Democracy’s Role as a Counterterrorism Tool**

The findings of this study reveal that the following three independent variables are accurate predictors at a statistically significant level of what types of countries tend to be victims of terrorist attacks: autocracies (as measured by aggregate-level regime type), states with poor human rights records, and states with a high degree of state fragility. However, a more in-depth look at the empirical and theoretical evidence is needed to begin to parse out democracy’s precise role in these instances. Democracy offers at least two interrelated but ultimately distinct roles in the realm of counterterrorism: it can be viewed as a set of institutional processes that once entrenched, will undermine the roots of terrorism, or it can be

\(^{56}\) Iraq falls in the “High” category in Table 5. If Iraq’s data is removed, terrorism incidents in the High category are reduced to 6,142 (an average of 361.3 per country).
viewed as a kind of weapon that can be deployed to combat terrorist groups already operating in autocratic countries.\textsuperscript{57} An examination of the empirical and qualitative tends to support the former of these two roles.

It is important to note that features of democracy likely influenced all of the independent variables measured in this study.\textsuperscript{58} That is, independent of incidents or deaths from terrorism, democratic countries as measured by Freedom House averages tend to more stable, capable states (i.e., score lower on the State Fragility Index), and tend to have stronger human rights records (i.e., score lower on the PTS scale) than autocratic states. This observation can help explain why once democracy at the aggregate level was correlated with terrorism, the other variables tended to follow suit. Even so, some correlations were more robust than others. For example, the strongest correlation was between human rights and terrorism.\textsuperscript{59} Since human rights measured the rule of law and state repression, two deeply ingrained institutional features democracy, the specific liberal, institutional aspects of democracy may be more important with regard to terrorism than democracy taken as a whole. In other words, democratizing states that have not yet matured with regard to the “liberal institutional” aspects of liberal democracies would tend to experience more terrorism, which is supported by the empirical evidence of the

\textsuperscript{57} The data indicate that autocratic countries tend to experience more acts of terrorism than democratic states, and thus these states are likely to be the prime candidates for a counterterrorism policy based on democracy promotion. Accordingly, from a U.S. policy perspective, the primary battlegrounds in the war on terror are autocratic countries in the Middle East and South Asia.

\textsuperscript{58} This is a drawback of not using a more sophisticated empirical analysis in which one could control for certain democratic characteristics.

\textsuperscript{59} Comparing the strength of the correlation coefficients with incidence of terrorism, human rights was rho=0.535, state fragility was rho=0.327, and democracy at the aggregate level was rho=0.164.
“Partly Free” countries in this study. In this view, the liberal institutional aspects serve as the “conflict-reducing” mechanisms of democracy, which undermine the roots of terror. Moreover, these characteristics cannot be easily deployed as a counterterrorism weapon against autocratic regimes because their presence essentially assumes the precondition of a democratic state.

Yet perhaps the distinction between democracy at the aggregate level and key liberal institutional aspects of democracy is the wrong distinction to make—after all, state fragility was a better predictor of terrorism than democracy as the aggregate level. In fact, several authoritarian states that score poorly on human rights but rank high on state capacity—states such as Belarus, China, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Syria—experience very few incidents of terrorism. Conversely, authoritarian states that score poorly on human rights and rank low on state capacity—states such as Afghanistan, Congo, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sudan, and Somalia—tend to experience quite a bit of terrorism. This pattern suggests that state capacity is important to combating terrorism, but it also highlights a possible connection between authoritarian states and the breeding causes of terrorism.

Keeping in mind that democracy in the aggregate tends to reduce susceptibility to terrorism, the importance of state capacity in autocratic states suggests that these states are relying precisely on that strong state capacity to counteract their vulnerability to the breeding causes of terror. Saudi Arabia

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60 Indeed, prominent democratic peace theory scholars claim that democratizing states are more volatile and war-prone than established democracies. The evidence gathered here suggests that their argument can help to explain patterns of terrorism as well. See Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, “Democratic Transitions, Institutional Strength, and War,” *International Organization*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (Spring 2002).
provides an illustrative case. The Kingdom is clearly a major breeder of terrorism, but it has suffered relatively few acts of terror due in large part to its highly capable internal state security apparatus. At least one other study concluded that entrenched dictatorships and liberal democracies are the least susceptible to terrorism, and the qualitative and empirical evidence marshaled here seems to support this claim.

Democracy’s greatest counterterrorism utility appears to lie in liberal institutional characteristics that undermine the root causes of terror. Yet because these liberal institutional characteristics take so long to develop and are not easily transplanted onto another state, a potentially viable short-term counterterrorism tool for autocratic states may be to increase state capabilities (e.g., bolster the security forces, enhance law enforcement capabilities, acquire better intelligence, etc.) to counteract their susceptibility to the breeding causes of terror. In the long-term, however, democracy appears to be an antidote or at least a strong mitigating factor with regard to the conditions that give rise to terrorist activity.

Policy Implications

Democracy promotion, particularly when applied to U.S. counterterrorism, has developed a stigma in the wake of the Bush administration. While some have


argued that the Bush administration in practice fell short of its lofty rhetoric,\textsuperscript{63} democracy promotion undoubtedly formed a key pillar of Bush’s national security policy. “Effective democracy” was highlighted as the long-term antidote to terrorism in the 2006 \textit{U.S. National Strategy to Combat Terrorism},\textsuperscript{64} and as a high-ranked Bush official noted, “I cannot think of any other country that has been as willing as the United States has to use both soft and hard power to promote democracy.”\textsuperscript{65}

Unfortunately, two of the most visible manifestations of democracy promotion, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, have overshadowed soft power efforts and conflated democracy promotion with forceful regime change. Moreover, while nation-building efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan were undertaken at least in part to mitigate terrorism within these states, the empirical evidence several years into these endeavors is cause for concern. As Tables 1 and 2 show, the two countries topped the lists of terrorism incidents and deaths from terrorism over the period measured. Iraq alone accounts for 35 percent of all terrorism incidents and 50 percent of the total deaths recorded. In light of these numbers, it is tempting to simply dismiss democracy promotion as a counterterrorism tool as being too costly and overly ambitious.

Yet before democracy promotion is dismissed as being ineffective or unrelated to terrorism, as some prominent analysts have seemed to suggest,\textsuperscript{66} the findings of this study should at least give one pause. Though the data is examined

\textsuperscript{63} Carothers, 2003.
\textsuperscript{65} As quoted in the response of Paula J. Dobrianski, who was the Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs, to Thomas Carothers’ criticism in Carothers, 2003.
\textsuperscript{66} Gause III, 2005.
over a relatively short time frame (six years), recent trends in terrorism support the hypothesis that democracy is negatively associated with terrorism at a statistically significant level. Unlike previous studies, the data indicate that aggregate-level democratic measures, as well as specific democratic processes, tend to mitigate terrorism incidence and lethality. Indeed, the human rights measure showed the most robust correlation with terrorism among the independent variables examined in this study. As noted, however, terrorism is a complex phenomenon, and despite the moderate correlations found in this study, democracy is by no means a silver bullet. The best way to frame democracy promotion for U.S. policy, then, is to view it “as part of a broader strategy” in which “democratization can help reshape the climates (where) terrorism thrives.”\(^{67}\) With this in mind, this paper offers three main policy implications:

- **Democracy has the potential to be a viable, long-term counterterrorism tool, particularly with regard to undermining the breeding causes of terrorism.**

In an influential article on democracy promotion, Gregory Gause III poses the question: “Is it true that the more democratic a country becomes, the less likely it is to produce terrorists and terrorist groups?” He answers in the negative and contends that terrorism “stems from factors much more specific than regime type.”\(^{68}\) However, the data in this study on recent terrorism trends indicate that the more democratic a country becomes, the less likely it is to experience terrorist attacks and suffer deaths from terrorism. Context and framing, nonetheless, remain

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\(^{68}\) Gause III, 2005.
important considerations when employing democracy as a counterterrorism tool. In
the context of U.S. policy toward autocratic countries, it is not clear that advocating
wholesale regime change is a more effective counterterrorism solution than simply
enhancing the state’s capabilities. Indeed, as the next recommendation spells out, a
more effective approach may be to emphasize specific liberal reforms designed to
target the breeding causes of terrorism.

➢ **Emphasize the liberal aspects of democracy.**

The strongest correlation found in this study was between human rights and
terrorism. That is, the states with strong human rights record built on a strong rule
of law and minimal state repression tended to experience fewer incidents of
terrorism. This finding suggests that there is empirical evidence to support one
prominent terrorism scholar’s contention that “the underlying principles of
democracy and the rule of law provide the best foundation for policy choices” in the
realm of counterterrorism.69

At the same time, certain democratic principles may be more important than
other with regard to terrorism. For example, free and fair elections are considered
essential characteristics of an effective democracy, but as the cases of Iraq and
Afghanistan illustrate,70 elections themselves do not necessarily reduce terrorism.
Admittedly, pushing for autocratic states to establish a strong rule of law and

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*Democratic Responses to Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 60.
70 Not to mention elections can sometimes bring anti-liberal, anti-American parties to
power. For example, the Muslim Brotherhood (running under a different name) performed
well in the Egyptian parliamentary elections in 2005, Hamas took over the West Bank after
dominating Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006, and Hezbollah has performed
surprisingly well in recent Lebanese elections.
minimize state repression may weaken state capacity, which is another key counterterrorism tool. Ideally, U.S. counterterrorism policy should promote both a robust state capability and a strong adherence to human rights. The decision on which policy to emphasize in a given situation will probably have to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Ultimately, however, building up state capability without building up the liberal characteristics of democracy will fail to address the root causes of terrorism. Indeed, the war on terrorism cannot be “won” in any sense of the word without addressing the breeding causes of terror.

- Democracy is not a panacea, and other casual factors remain important in formulating an effective counterterrorism policy.

While the data indicate several significant correlations between regime type and terrorism, other factors are also needed to understand the full scope of terrorism. In this study, the forth hypothesis considered whether state strength is correlated with terrorism, and concluded that there is a statistically significant negative association between strong states and incidence of terrorism. This finding adds complexity to the issue because several states that rank high on state strength also score high on the Freedom Index (i.e., more autocratic). Moreover, democracy at the aggregate national level is not close to being perfectly (negatively) associated with terrorism. For example, there are many countries examined in this study, such as India, Israel, and Spain that are classified as Free countries but have experienced a high number of terrorist incidents. Conversely, there are also several countries, such as China, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, and Iran that are classified as Not Free countries but have experienced few or no terrorist incidents. While some of the discrepancy in
autocratic countries may stem from the so-called reporting bias,\textsuperscript{71} the dataset also contains numerous small countries spanning all regime types (Not Free, Partly Free, and Free) that experienced few or no terrorist incidents. In essence, although regime type is important, other casual mechanisms clearly play a role in determining whether a country will experience terrorism.

**Conclusion**

Democracy and its institutions are often held in high regard in the West, both among policymakers and academics. After all, democracy has a solid historical record when confronted with security threats, particularly from the viewpoint of the United States: democracy defeated its ideological rival fascism on the battlefield of World War II, it outlasted communism during the Cold War, and today it is generally accepted as the best form of government on which to build a society.\textsuperscript{72} Yet in the case of terrorism, the security cause célèbre of the day, it remains contentious as to whether democracy can be an effective antidote. Few previous studies found significant correlations between democracy and terrorism, and those that did usually discovered that democracies tended to experience more terrorism than their autocratic counterparts. Examining recent terrorism data, however, this study found that democracy is negatively associated with terrorism. Furthermore, the findings

\textsuperscript{71} Several scholars assert that autocratic regimes are likely to undercount terrorist activity for domestic political reasons or restrictions on the press. The NCTC WITS dataset, like other terrorism databases, thus might undercount terrorist activity in autocratic, illiberal regimes because it relies extensively on open-source reporting. For more on the reporting bias, see Abrahms, 2007, pp. 234.

\textsuperscript{72} Notwithstanding the increasing attractiveness of the so-called China/Russia model, which is characterized by a strong, authoritarian government and a more or less capitalist economy.
showed that democracy is likely to be most effective at combating the roots of terrorism through the long-term development of liberal institutional characteristics such as a strong rule of law and minimal state repression. As such, the study serves as one of only a handful that lends empirical support to the contention that democracy can be used as an effective counterterrorism tool.

Despite its strong findings, this study leaves plenty of room for further research. The main quantitative analysis could not completely differentiate between democracy as a tool to combat the roots of terrorism and as a tool to combat terrorism once terrorist organizations have formed, although the theoretical discussion helped to fill in gaps. Moreover, even though this analysis examines a few institutional processes of democracy, it would be interesting to examine more variables and delve deeper into specific democratic processes. Such an in-depth analysis might help clarify which institutional processes matter in a given situation. Nonetheless, this study still captures key trends in the modern terrorism landscape. Democracy should be considered a worthwhile tool in the formulation of American counterterrorism policy.

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73 For example, employing the methods used by Li (2005) with newly available data like the NCTC WITS dataset.
Appendix: Selected Statistical Results

**Kruskal-Wallis Test: Number of Incidents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Statistics</th>
<th>NCTC Number of Incidents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square</td>
<td>6.655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig.</td>
<td>.036</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Kruskal Wallis Test  
b. Grouping Variable: Coded number: 1= free, 2= partly free, 3= not free

**Kruskal-Wallis Test: Number of Deaths**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Statistics</th>
<th>NCTC Number of Deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square</td>
<td>17.449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig.</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Kruskal Wallis Test  
b. Grouping Variable: Coded number: 1= free, 2= partly free, 3= not free

**Spearman’s rho correlation coefficient: number of incidents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Freedom House Average</th>
<th>NCTC Number of Incidents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spearman's rho</td>
<td>Freedom House Average</td>
<td>Correlation Coefficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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### Spearman’s rho correlation coefficient: number of deaths

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**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### Spearman’s rho correlation coefficient: Political Terror Scale (Rule of Law and State Repression)

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**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Spearman’s rho correlation coefficient: State Fragility

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**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
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