Political extremism, conflict identities and the search for ontological security in contemporary established democracies
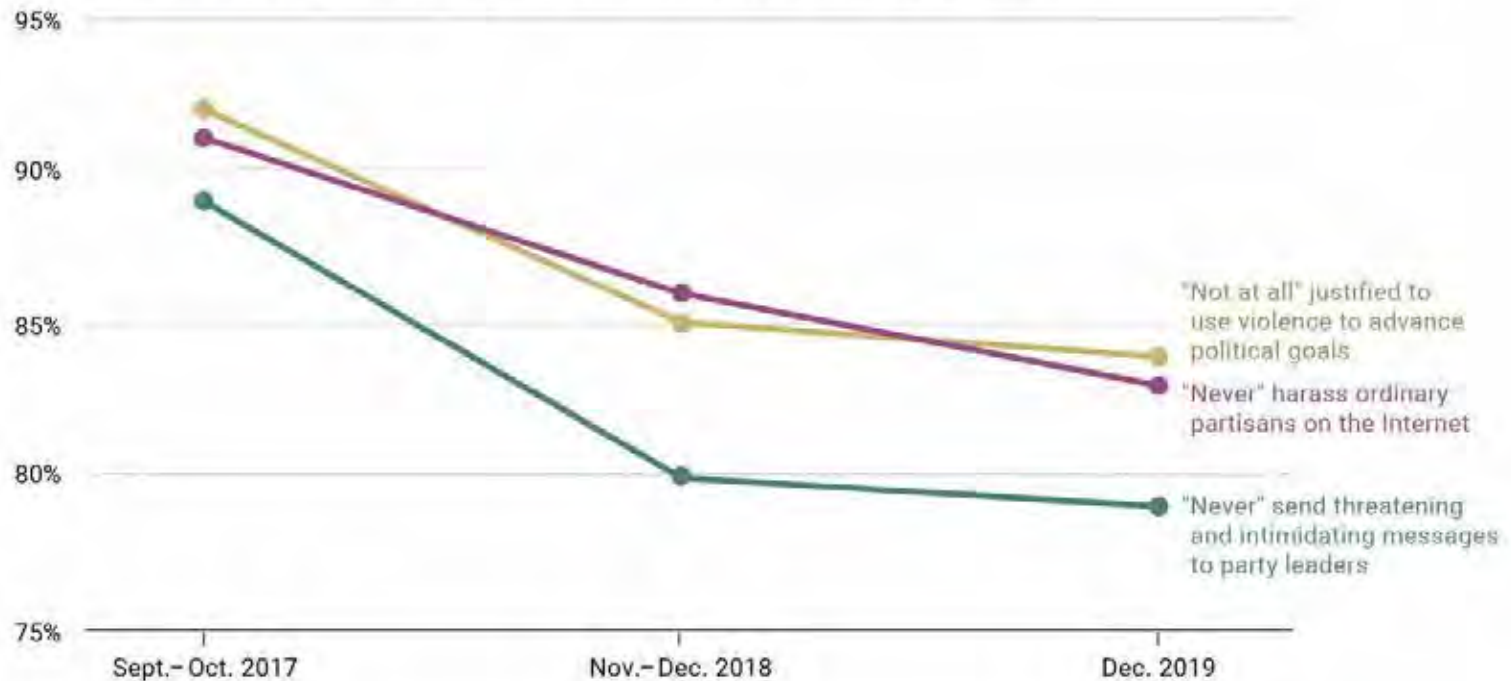
The current milieu within established democracies

◈ A time of social unrest, discord and malaise within 'mature' democracies.

◈ Growing sense of uncertainty at many levels – cultural, gender, political, social, economic.

◈ A lot of previously 'fixed' meanings in question.

◈ Collapse of time/space via social media, 24 hour conflict reporting, networking etc make these issues seem more omnipresent and inescapable.

◈ Growth of reactionary forces.

◈ Perception of the failure of liberal utopianism and the promises of cosmopolitan globalisation.

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Americans Less Likely to Reject Violence Than in 2017

"Not at all" justified to use violence to advance political goals

"Never" harass ordinary partisans on the Internet

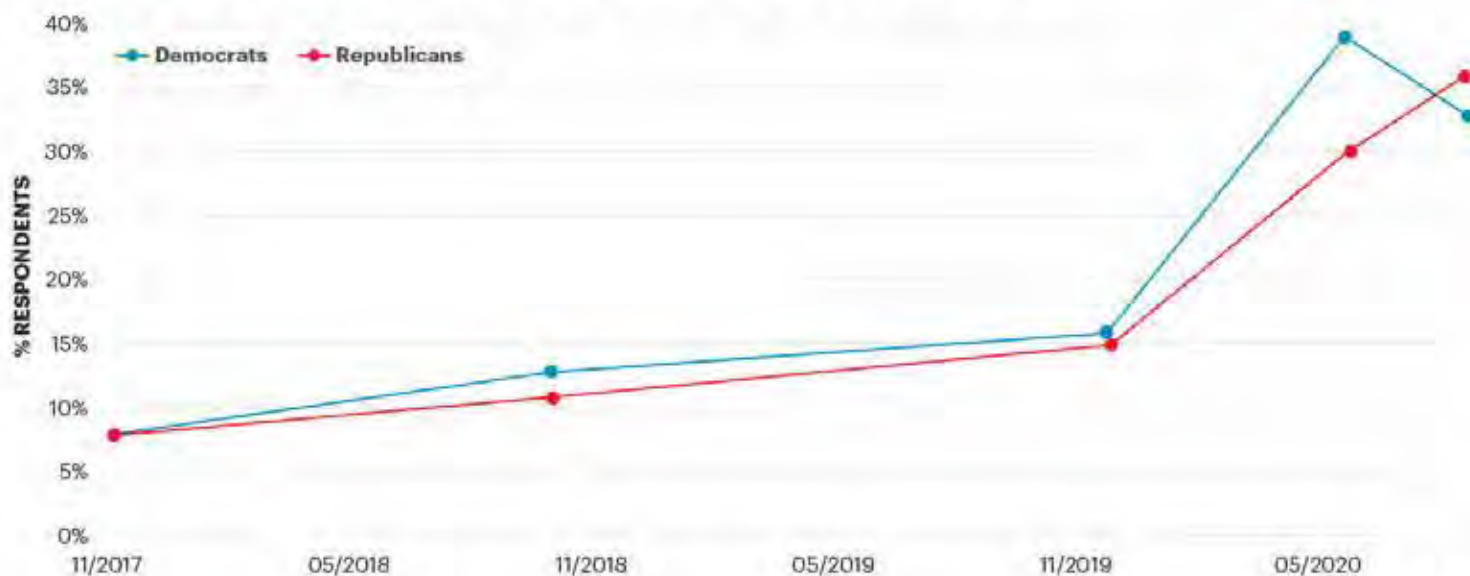"Never" send threatening and intimidating messages to party leaders

Democracy Fund Voter Study Group

Source: 2017 and 2018 Cooperative Congressional Election Study, Team Modules of Louisiana State University.

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People who feel that violence is justified in advancing political goals, United States, 2017–2020

Violence as a response?

◈ Increasing salience and conspicuousness of extremist and militant groups, ideologies and ideas within left and right and beyond.

◈ Violent concepts such as accelerationism, boogaloo, fuck around and fight out, great replacement etc becoming more main stream

Alt-right protest fighter 'Based Spartan'

Boogaloo boi

◈ All sides claim position as defensive/resistance.

◈ Often times adherents or sympathisers are middle class or otherwise well off / comfortable – not Fanon's wretched of the earth!

◈ Growth of Salad bar ideology

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Explaining drivers

◈ Individual case studies dissecting ideologies, properties, strategies etc of each group discretely drawing on psych, anthro, socio etc.

◈ Class-based (classical Marxist) analysing economic factors, labour conditions, precarity, GNI etc.

◈ Power-based analysis looking at shifting distribution of social/economic/political/cultural power/influence/clout/resources across various demographics and how said groups respond to this.

◈ Identarian (left/right) traditional vs progressive, culture wars (everyone I disagree with is a snowflake), spiritual + moral decay vs injustice + bigotry.

◈ Security / terrorism studies (utilitarian) approaching from threat mitigation / policing perspectives.

Important to note: I'm not actually seeking to challenge, validate, or disprove any of these!

Symptoms of a deeper wound?

But! Existing approaches tend to divide their units of analysis – us vs them, class vs class, identity vs identity, etc – reluctant to draw parallels.

Question: is there an overarching, unifying phenomenon that explains the growing political extremism in mature democracies?

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Ontological security theory

Confidence or trust that the natural and social worlds are as they appear to be, including, the basic existential parameters of self and social identity…a sense of continuity and order in events, including those not directly within the perceptual environment of the individual. (Giddens, 1984/1990)

◈ A security of the self / of knowing.

◈ Multiple definitions across multiple disciplines, but essential precepts:

  • Individuals pursue ontological security.
  • This security is derived from routines that provide identity.
  • The legitimacy of such routines and their attached identities are generally   derived from and defined by a larger community.
  • Change and unpredictability are corrosive to ontological security and   produce existential angst / unease / anxiety.

◈ Think of all the insecurity and anxiety <u>experienced within COVID-19</u>.

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Ontological security theory

◈ Kinnvall (2004) argues that religious / nationalist movements are particularly powerful sources of OntSec as they provide:

Powerful stories and beliefs because of their ability to convey a picture of security, stability, and simple answers. They do this by being portrayed as resting on solid ground, as being true, thus creating a sense that the world really is what it appears to be.

◈ Periods of historical change see corresponding growth of 'hardened' identities – fundamentalist, ultranationalist, etc

◈ Creates a legible, ordered sense of reality and a method by which to respond.

◈ Subsequent research has showed how the establishment and defence of these identities can become intimately tied to violence. (Rich, 2017)

◈ Violence as a means of asserting identity and supressing/eliminating sources of ontological insecurity / unknowing.

Within the current moment?

◈ Contemporary period seems to be one of significant ontological insecurity and alienation.

◈ Longstanding social norms increasingly unmoored or challenged:

- ◇ Dominant national narratives of the self and belonging.

- ◇ The parameters of gender identity, roles, sexuality, femininity and masculinity.

- ◇ Careers, vocations and labour security.

- ◇ Contestations of faith.

- ◇ Shifting racial and cultural demographics.

- ◇ Breakdown of traditional community.

- ◇ The role of technology.

- ◇ General chaos and frenetic nature of modern living.
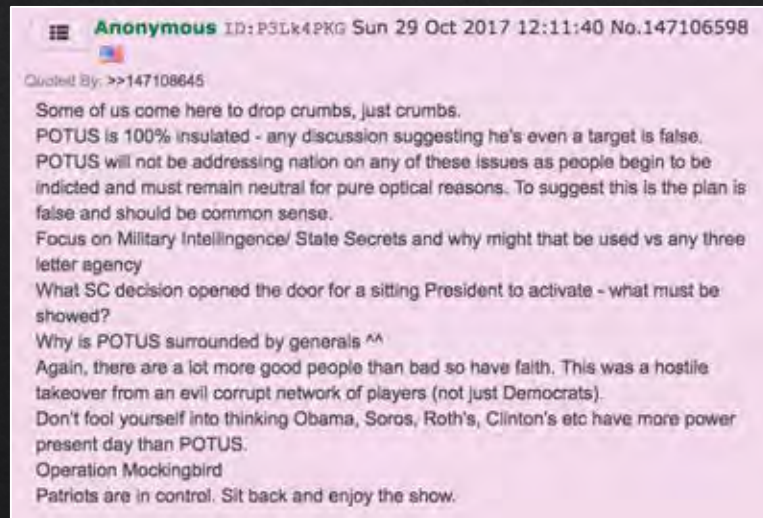
- ◇ Plus much, much more.

Qanon

Sources of insecurity:
Loss of American greatness resulting from corrupt, traitorous elites and corresponding social, moral, cultural decay in society. Need for MAGA.

Qanon rioter at the US Capitol

Anonymous ID:P3Lk4PKG Sun 29 Oct 2017 12:11:40 No.147106598
Quoted By: >>147108645

Some of us come here to drop crumbs, just crumbs.
POTUS is 100% insulated - any discussion suggesting he's even a target is false.
POTUS will not be addressing nation on any of these issues as people begin to be indicted and must remain neutral for pure optical reasons. To suggest this is the plan is false and should be common sense.
Focus on Military Intellingence/ State Secrets and why might that be used vs any three letter agency
What SC decision opened the door for a sitting President to activate - what must be showed?
Why is POTUS surrounded by generals ^^
Again, there are a lot more good people than bad so have faith. This was a hostile takeover from an evil corrupt network of players (not just Democrats).
Don't fool yourself into thinking Obama, Soros, Roth's, Clinton's etc have more power present day than POTUS.
Operation Mockingbird
Patriots are in control. Sit back and enjoy the show.

A 'Q drop' anonymous post

Movement provides:

➤ Compelling, evolving, involving narrative responding in real time to real-world events.

➤ Emphasis on conservative articles of faith – religion, military, POTUS, symbology.

➤ Literal demonisation of perceived sources of ontological insecurity and social malaise.

➤ Community of support.

➤ Emphasis on righteous violence.

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ANTIFA-adjacent groups

ANTIFA street brawlers

Sources of insecurity:
Failure of state to provide protections in face of capitalist exploitation and fascist growth to achieve egalitarian 'good life'.

Movement provides:

➢ Coherent analysis utilising identified material conditions to explain feelings of ontological security.

➢ Actions by which to redress this.

➢ Community of support for actions that provides sense of purpose.

➢ Legitimation for the use of violence.

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The Involuntary Celibate movement

Sources of insecurity:
Loss of male status and privileges resultant from feminism and corresponding 'breakdown' of social/political/economic norms.

Eliot Rodger – the first 'blackpilled' Incel terrorist?

Movement provides:

➢ Coherent, 'scientific' accounting of reality in hypergamy model, chad/virgin dichotomy

➢ Community of…..support?

➢ Routines and actions to respond to the insecurity, depending on your 'pill'.

➢ Some subgroups legitimise violence.

Conflict identities?

North Korean strategic culture as derived from conflict identity? (Mitzen, 2006)

◈ Conflict itself comes to provide ontological security > a conflict FOR ontological security.

◈ Fighting comes to impart routines, actions, senses of camaraderie, and clarity. (Vlahos, 2008)

◈ Common purpose and meaning in the struggle.

◈ More likely to emerge the longer conditions of ontological insecurity percolate and mature – groups radicalize.

◈ Peace/resolution as undesirable return to pre-existing insecurity.

◈ Greater chance of political violence / terrorism etc.

Proud boy street brawlers

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Solutions?

◈ NOT greater atomisation and isolationism.

◈ New forms of civic nationalism – teach civics in schools – create a sense of stake in the greater whole.

◈ National service mixing people of different backgrounds, growing valuable social and ethical cohesion, media literacy, mutual respect, towards a sense of common participatory citizenship.

◈ Compensated pathways for positive contribution and meaning building.

◈ A reckoning with social media and technology as substitutes for genuine interaction and connections.

◈ Social science and historical literacy:

Indignation blinds understanding and understanding tends to dissipate indignation

Mansfield - 1998

◈ Taking offers if anyone wants to fund further research!

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