Theses and Dissertations
1. Thesis and Dissertation Collection, all items

2022-12

THE NEXUS OF SOCIETAL FRAGILITY AND EXTREMISM

Balak, Marie L.

Monterey, CA; Naval Postgraduate School

https://hdl.handle.net/10945/71431

NAVAL
POSTGRADUATE
SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**THE NEXUS OF SOCIETAL
FRAGILITY AND EXTREMISM**

by

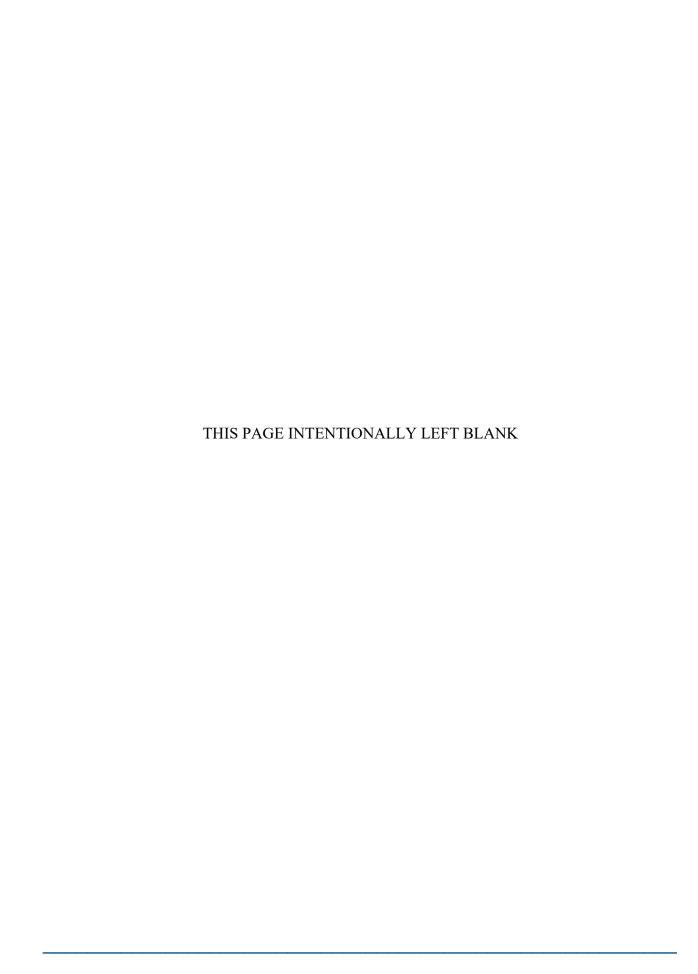Marie L. Balak

December 2022

Co-Advisors: Cristiana Matei
                                               Anders Strindberg (contractor)

Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		*Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188*

1. AGENCY USE ONLY *(Leave blank)*	2. REPORT DATE December 2022	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's thesis	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE THE NEXUS OF SOCIETAL FRAGILITY AND EXTREMISM		5. FUNDING NUMBERS	
6. AUTHOR(S) Marie L. Balak			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A		10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.			
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.		12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE A	

13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)

January 6, 2021, raised several questions about whether democracy in the United States is backsliding. With domestic extremism on the rise and polarization deepening, the nation's society is fragile and, thus, requires a framework that can provide the breadth and depth necessary to examine these core issues. This thesis aims to explore the relationship between societal fragility—social norms, institutions, trust, and social cohesion—and extremism. It examines democracy, extremism, and then fragility, including current frameworks and their limitations in applicability to a nation such as the United States. Based on these examinations, the societal fragility framework, along with its core components, was established. Using a case study analysis, the thesis examines January 6 in the United States and the 2022 presidential election in Brazil through the societal fragility lens, as both case studies present high levels of extremism and political violence. This thesis finds that societal fragility creates an environment that fosters extremism. It recommends that democracies prioritize rebuilding a culture of tolerance within society, as well as institutional trust through transparency and accountability. Furthermore, by implementing methods to hold political leaders accountable for their use of undemocratic rhetoric, democracies can improve societal fragility and minimize the growth of extremism.

14. SUBJECT TERMS societal fragility, democracy, extremism, social norms, institutions, trust, misinformation, disinformation, polarization, democratic regression, democratic stability, social cohesion, Brazil, United States, social cohesion, democratic backsliding, public discourse			15. NUMBER OF PAGES 153
			16. PRICE CODE
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE Unclassified	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

THE NEXUS OF SOCIETAL FRAGILITY AND EXTREMISM

Marie L. Balak
Lieutenant/Paramedic, Gainesville Fire Rescue
BBA, Stetson University, 2007

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES
(HOMELAND SECURITY AND DEFENSE)**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
December 2022**

Approved by: Cristiana Matei
                Co-Advisor

                Anders Strindberg
                Co-Advisor

                Erik J. Dahl
                Associate Professor, Department of National Security Affairs

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

ABSTRACT

The events of January 6, 2021, raised several questions about whether democracy in the United States is backsliding. With domestic extremism on the rise and polarization deepening, the nation's society is fragile and, thus, requires a framework that can provide the breadth and depth necessary to examine these core issues. This thesis aims to explore the relationship between societal fragility—social norms, institutions, trust, and social cohesion—and extremism. It examines democracy, extremism, and then fragility, including current frameworks and their limitations in applicability to a nation such as the United States. Based on these examinations, the societal fragility framework, along with its core components, was established. Using a case study analysis, the thesis examines the January 6 events in the United States and the 2022 presidential election in Brazil through the societal fragility lens, as both case studies present high levels of extremism and political violence. This thesis finds that societal fragility creates an environment that fosters extremism. It recommends that democracies prioritize rebuilding a culture of tolerance within society as well as institutional trust through transparency and accountability. Furthermore, by implementing methods to hold political leaders accountable for their use of undemocratic rhetoric, democracies can improve societal fragility and minimize the growth of extremism.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADL	Anti-Defamation League
BLM	Black Lives Matter
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
LGBTQ+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and others
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
RGCT	realistic group conflict theory
SIT	social identity theory
SMT	social movement theory

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The storming of the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, left many citizens and scholars questioning the democratic stability and health of the United States. While it is easy to assume that the majority of people who entered the Capitol that day were members of far-right extremist groups, Robert Pape found this assumption to be inaccurate.[1] Indeed, when examining the hundreds arrested, he found a concerning shift in the characteristics of people willing to take up violence due to significant feelings of disenfranchisement.[2] Most of those arrested had no affiliation with groups or organizations deemed domestic violent extremists, such as the alt-right, suggesting that extremism had been growing in unique ways within the United States.[3] With polarization also growing and contributing to problematic tensions within society, it is important to understand how these societal conditions relate to and facilitate the growth of extremism.[4] This thesis, thus, aims to examine the relationship between societal fragility—social norms, institutions, trust, and social cohesion—and extremism in democratic nations to explore solutions for improving democratic stability and prevent democratic backsliding.

The societal fragility framework was developed to examine democratic nations and their societies specifically. While other frameworks for fragility exist, they are biased toward democratizing countries or other forms of governing and, therefore, are limited in their application to more established democratic nations. By examining the current frameworks and important characteristics of a civil society, including social norms, institutions, trust, and social cohesion, the societal fragility framework provides the breadth

---

[1] Robert A. Pape, "Understanding American Domestic Terrorism: Mobilization Potential and Risk Factors of a New Threat Trajectory" (presentation, Chicago Project on Security and Threats, University of Chicago, April 6, 2021), https://d3qi0qp55mx5f5.cloudfront.net/cpost/i/docs/americas_insurrectionists_ online_2021_04_06.pdf?mtime=1617807009.

[2] Pape.

[3] Pape.

[4] Lori R. Hodges, "Systems Fragility: The Sociology of Chaos" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2015), 25, https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/45197.

and depth necessary to explore societal changes and challenges for established democratic nations, thereby overcoming the limitations of existing frameworks.

To examine the relationship between societal fragility and extremism, this thesis uses a comparative case study analysis of January 6 in the United States and the 2022 presidential election in Brazil. Each case presents high levels of extremism and severe divisions within society, which at times manifest in political violence. After a brief exploration of the history and events relevant to each nation's current environment, the societal fragility framework is applied and a comparative analysis presented.

The comparative analysis shows that both the United States and Brazil are experiencing significant changes in social dynamics that suggest societal fragility. Given several commonalities between the cases, this thesis submits the following key findings about societal fragility and extremism:

- Whether a threat is actual or perceived, societal fragility and extremism are still impacted.

- Historical context is important for understanding societal fragility and extremism.

- Fragile societies create an environment where extremism can easily gain traction.

- The inability of a government to rectify systemic inequalities negatively impacts societal fragility and enables the acceptance of extremism as a solution.

- Political leaders' rhetoric significantly influences societal fragility and the acceptance of extremism.

- Social norms have the greatest impact on societal fragility and extremism.

This research suggests that when societies are fragile, many of the social barriers that help societies self-regulate, especially social norms, are weakened, thus creating an

environment where extremism can grow. Often drawing on a nation's historical challenges, citizens can become emboldened to publicly display attitudes and behaviors not previously considered socially acceptable. Political leaders greatly contribute to societal fragility and the attitudes that influence the us-versus-them mentality of extremism through their rhetoric. Significantly concerning to the stability of democracies is that the impact of a perceived threat is just as powerful in societal fragility and extremism as an actual threat. This finding presents a noteworthy challenge for democracies due to their high levels of interconnectedness, thus providing several ways for people to connect socially and share information, including false narratives, conspiracy theories, misinformation, and disinformation. Fragile societies, thus, create an environment that enables the growth of extremism. To improve societal fragility, reduce the appeal of extremism as the main solution for conflicts, and ultimately prevent democratic backsliding, this thesis recommends the following:

- Rebuild a culture of tolerance within society.

- Rebuild institutional trust through transparency and accountability.

- Implement methods to hold political leaders accountable for their undemocratic rhetoric.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Chief Hillhouse and Chief Sutton: Thank you for your continued support and encouragement throughout my career with Gainesville Fire Rescue. Your encouragement and support throughout the program have meant a lot.

To my friends, especially the Tug-of-War Champions: Thank you for bearing with me over the last year and a half and for being some of my biggest cheerleaders.

To the Book Club (Earl, Alvin, and Mike G.): Somehow, we just stuck together from the very beginning, and I wouldn't have had it any other way. We challenged each other, laughed at each other, learned from each other, helped each other, and more importantly, celebrated each other. You guys are rock stars, and I appreciate your friendship.

To my fellow cohortians: You all made the program a special experience in the best kind of way. I've walked away with some great friendships, lots of hilarious memories, a ton of funny memes, and a network of outstanding people—professionally and personally. David Greenstein, thank you for the sanity and thesis check-ins.

To Scott, Greta, and Marianne: You three are the unsung heroes who help make this program run and constantly go above and beyond to help students succeed. There are not enough thank yous.

To my advisors, Cristiana Matei and Anders Strindberg: Thank you for having faith in me and helping me bring my thesis to life. You both are incredibly talented scholars, and you made quite the team for this thesis. I can't thank you enough for sharing your expertise and being great mentors.

To my family: Getting through the last 18 months of life and school would not have been possible without your love and support. Mom and Dad, thank you for instilling in me a strong work ethic and for giving me the trait of stubbornness, which has helped me push my own limits. To my husband, Joe: You have always encouraged me to be my best, loving me and supporting me through it all, despite having to carry most of the world on your back while I wrote my life away at home. I'm grateful every day to call you my partner.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

I.   INTRODUCTION

Society in the United States is becoming increasingly fragile.[1] Indeed, an evaluation of the sources of social capital in the United States—trust, social norms, and networks—reveals concerning signs of fragility because of the systemic effects of growing polarization.[2] Citizens and political leaders avoid interactions and conversations that might challenge their belief systems.[3] Avoiding these interactions fosters an us-versus-them mentality around beliefs and cultivates "high conflict," creating an unproductive environment for conflict resolution.[4] For example, the politicization and heated debates over COVID-19 vaccine mandates have sparked a flurry of legal battles, state executive orders, and fines for noncompliance.[5] Social media, which has changed how citizens interact with information and each other, has transformed the norms under which society operates, consequentially deepening polarization in American society.[6] For instance, misinformation and disinformation spread via social media platforms fuel controversies

---

[1] As defined by Hodges, fragility is "a quality that leads to weakness or failure within a system, sometimes resulting in cascading effects (the domino) that can lead to systemic failures and collapse." Lori R. Hodges, "Systems Fragility: The Sociology of Chaos" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2015), 17, 25, https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/45197. Much of the research surrounding social systems utilizes social capital as markers of fragility. Cascading effects can include authority failures (e.g., civil unrest), service entitlement failures (e.g., poverty or less access to resources), and legitimacy failures (e.g., a shift toward or away from democracy).

[2] Hodges, "Systems Fragility," 25.

[3] Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018).

[4] Amanda Ripley, *High Conflict: Why We Get Trapped and How We Get Out* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021), 4.

[5] "The Political Fight over Vaccine Mandates Deepens Despite Their Effectiveness," NPR, October 17, 2021, https://www.npr.org/2021/10/17/1046598351/the-political-fight-over-vaccine-mandates-deepens-despite-their-effectiveness.

[6] P. W. Singer and Emerson T. Brooking, *LikeWar: The Weaponization of Social Media* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2019).

1

and enable conspiracy theories, affecting public trust in the government, institutions, and other citizens.[7]

Yet again, COVID-19 presents another strong example; social media has bred false narratives and unsound medical advice about the virus, necessary precautions, and treatment options.[8] As a result, public trust in government has declined and reduced public confidence in agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).[9] These signs of fragility and their associated challenges, in turn, influence how communities in American society build resiliency and cohesiveness to recover during times of crisis.[10] Problems are inevitable in complex systems, particularly in the environment today, enabling a breakdown of democracy during this increasingly fragile time.[11]

Extremism has grown amid an increasingly fragile society. According to the U.S. Intelligence Community's assessments, extremism, including domestic violent extremism,

---

[7] Mustafa Canan and Anthony Akil, "A Warfare Domain Approach to the Disinformation Problem," in *Proceedings of the 15th International Conference on Cyber Warfare and Security*, ed. Brian K. Payne and Hongyi Wu (Norfolk, VA: Academic Conferences and Publishing Limited, 2020), https://doi.org/10.34190/ICCWS.20.023. Misinformation is "incorrect or misleading information." *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. "misinformation," accessed December 27, 2021, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/misinformation. Disinformation is "false information deliberately and often covertly spread (as by the planting of rumors) in order to influence public opinion or obscure the truth." *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. "disinformation," accessed December 27, 2021, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/disinformation.

[8] Stephanie Alice Baker, Matthew Wade, and Michael James Walsh, "The Challenges of Responding to Misinformation during a Pandemic: Content Moderation and the Limitations of the Concept of Harm," *Media International Australia* 177, no. 1 (2020): 105, https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X20951301.

[9] Baker, Wade, and Walsh, "Challenges of Responding to Misinformation," 2; Michael S. Pollard and Lois M. Davis, *Decline in Trust in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention during the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2021), https://doi.org/10.7249/RRA308-12.

[10] James A. Thomson, *A House Divided: Polarization and Its Effect on RAND* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010), https://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/OP291.html. Polarization is "division into two sharply distinct opposites." *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. "polarization," accessed December 27, 2021, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/polarization.

[11] Lukianoff and Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind*, 22; Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, eds., *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Crisis, Breakdown and Reequilibration* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 15.

is rising in the United States.[12] Since 2015, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence has noted a significant increase in violent extremism.[13] An analysis of recent events, including the insurrection on January 6, 2021, demonstrates a tendency toward violence from citizens not necessarily associated with extremist ideologies, such as the alt-right, but rather from citizens who feel disenfranchised politically and ethnically.[14] This profile shift poses an interesting challenge for threat identification as extremism permeates the United States.

Scholars have little understanding of the societal fragility–domestic extremism nexus in the United States. As fragility impairs the nation's response to a crisis, extremism poses a complex and growing threat.[15] Understanding these challenges and their impact on American society and democracy is essential for finding solutions to these vexing problems. This thesis examines the interaction and influences of societal fragility on extremism. An enhanced understanding of this relationship provides the opportunity to re-evaluate approaches to countering extremism.

A.   RESEARCH QUESTION

How does societal fragility facilitate the growth of extremism in democratic nations?

---

[12] Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Unclassified Summary of Assessment on Domestic Violent Extremism* (Washington, DC: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2021), 2, https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/reports-publications/reports-publications-2021/item/2194-unclassified-summary-of-assessment-on-domestic-violent-extremism. *Extremism* is "the belief that an in-group's success or survival can never be separated from the need for hostile action against an out-group." J. M. Berger, *Extremism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018), 44.

[13] Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *2021 Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community* (Washington, DC: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2021), 24, https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/reports-publications/reports-publications-2021/item/2204-2021-annual-threat-assessment-of-the-u-s-intelligence-community.

[14] Robert A. Pape, "Understanding American Domestic Terrorism: Mobilization Potential and Risk Factors of a New Threat Trajectory" (presentation, Chicago Project on Security and Threats, University of Chicago, April 6, 2021), https://d3qi0qp55mx5f5.cloudfront.net/cpost/i/docs/americas_insurrectionists_online_2021_04_06.pdf?mtime=1617807009.

[15] Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Assessment on Domestic Violent Extremism*, 2.

B. RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis aimed to better understand how societal fragility and extremism interact.[16] This knowledge can drive future policies and efforts related to domestic violent extremism, free speech, misinformation/disinformation, or other forms of censorship, hopefully enabling the United States to resist democratic regression, increase both democratic and social stability, and strengthen security.

To this end, this research used a qualitative analysis with a three-step approach. The first step independently analyzed the societal fragility components. The criteria used for societal fragility—social norms, trust, and social cohesion—were selected based on the role of social capital on fragility. Institutions were added to this set of criteria due to their level of influence on society and impact on democratic regression. The second step involved a comparative case study analysis, which used the same framework of analysis— social norms, institutions, trust, and social cohesion. The case studies selected included the January 6 event in the United States and the 2022 Brazilian presidential election. I selected these events because they threatened democratic stability and showed signs of growing extremism. Last, the findings of the comparative analysis—which established whether, where, and how societal fragility and extremism intersected—led to recommendations to help diminish both societal fragility and extremism. Ultimately, this thesis provides a foundation from which the United States can stabilize its democracy and combat extremism.

The data collection for the analysis in this thesis included multiple types of primary sources, including government reports. Secondary resources consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, research reports, news articles, and other forms of media.

---

[16] Hodge's definition of fragility is used in this thesis: "A quality that leads to weakness or failure within a system, sometimes resulting in cascading effects (the domino) that can lead to systemic failures and collapse." Hodges, "Systems Fragility," 15. Berger's definition of extremism is used here to focus on the underlying viewpoint of extremists, irrespective of ideological affiliation: "the belief that an in-group's success or survival can never be separated from the need for hostile action against an out-group." Berger, *Extremism*, 44.

C.   CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter II provides a review of literature on democracy and extremism. The chapter examines defining factors of democracy, as well as frequent causes of democratic regression. It also explores important global changes over the last 50 years that have generated potential causes for regression. Chapter II finishes with a review of extremism, analyzing how it needs to be defined rather than how it has traditionally been defined, as well as looking at contributing factors. Chapter III reviews literature and frameworks on fragility. It then explores each of the selected components of the societal fragility framework—social norms, institutions, trust, and social cohesion—in more depth. Chapter IV examines the January 6 event in the United States and uses the societal fragility framework to analyze societal conditions. Chapter V follows the same configuration for the events leading up to the election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and extending to the 2022 presidential election. The thesis concludes with a comparative analysis of the two case studies, presenting important findings and suggesting recommendations that can be applied to the United States to improve the stability of society while also helping to reduce extremism.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Questions have arisen about whether democracy in the United States is failing. As research from scholarship on democracy and extremism has found—most notably, Fathali Moghaddam, J. M. Berger, Steven Levitsky, and Daniel Ziblatt—extremism and authoritarianism have a level of interconnectedness that may allow democracies to slip into dictatorships. As this thesis aims to determine connections, if any, between societal fragility and extremism, this chapter first looks at democracy itself to better understand what it is and the impacts of the current environment on its stability. This chapter provides a review of the literature on extremism, including how it is defined in this thesis and what factors contribute to the rise of extremism.

A. DEMOCRACY

Democracy has been studied and debated for millennia; however, new challenges have arisen within the past half century, resulting from significant changes in the environment of modern liberal democracy. This section examines the academic and expert debates on democracy and democratic backsliding—or "the state-led debilitation or elimination of any of the political institutions that sustain an existing democracy."[17] It starts with a discussion of key components of democracy, followed by common causes of democratic backsliding, and finishes with the signs and symptoms of backsliding, which tend to be cyclical. This review analyzes only the most accepted signs from scholars.

1. What Is Democracy?

Democracy and its various characteristics must first be defined to understand what is at risk with democratic backsliding. Vast research has debated the meaning of democracy. Robert A. Dahl outlines five criteria for an ideal democracy:

1. Effective communications;
2. Equality in voting;

---

[17] Nancy Bermeo, "On Democratic Backsliding," *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 1 (2016): 5, https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0012. Other terms are synonymous with democratic backsliding, such as democratic regression, democratic decline, and democratic erosion.

3. Gaining enlightened understanding;
4. Exercising final control over the agenda;
5. Inclusion of adults.[18]

Dahl contends that all the criteria must be met to achieve political equality and, therefore, an ideal democracy.[19] Linz and Stepan concur that democracy must include basic human freedoms such as free speech; however, they add the criterion of a free, competitive, nonviolent environment among political leaders.[20] Linz and Stepan's addition is interesting, as it encourages an environment of diverse political parties, but it also acknowledges the competitiveness and need for discourse that come along with it. The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index has a similar set of criteria as Linz and Stepan, evaluating states in the following five areas each year: "electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties."[21] Even though the Democracy Index is a good tool, it is best used to gauge where democracies fall on a spectrum comparatively but not whether they are ideal democracies. Since this thesis centers on members of society, a combination of Dahl's and Linz and Stepan's criteria is used. In addition to the set of five criteria outlined by Dahl, a competitive and nonviolent political environment, as suggested by Linz and Stepan, is incorporated, creating a well-rounded set of criteria focusing on the social expectations and implications of democracy.

2. Democratic Backsliding and Failure

A common misconception about democratic failure is that it is typically a quick occurrence—mostly caused by military coups; however, many scholars agree that failure is more often a result of erosion over time. Failing democracies have been studied across various geographic, social, cultural, and economic contexts to understand the diverse causes. Levitsky and Ziblatt address the common misconception that military coups primarily account for

---

[18] Robert A. Dahl, *On Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 38.

[19] Dahl argues that democracy is both an ideal, in the sense that the democratic criteria have never been fully achieved, and an actuality constituting the spectrum on which democratic nations fall in relation to the criteria. Dahl, 38.

[20] Linz and Stepan, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*, 5.

[21] Economist Intelligence Unit, *Democracy Index 2021: The China Challenge* (London: Economist Intelligence Unit, 2022), 3, https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2021/.

democratic failure and, thus, such failure happens rapidly.[22] Although the authors found that during the Cold War, military coups did cause democratic collapses, military force and coercion are rarer triggers of democratic erosion.[23] Huq and Ginsburg agree with Levitsky and Ziblatt, arguing that although democracies can sometimes collapse with a rapid transformation to authoritarianism—authoritarian reversion—this is not very common.[24] Many scholars—Linz and Stepan, Levitsky and Ziblatt, Huq and Ginsburg, and Tubbs, among others—contend that democratic decline now more frequently results from multiple interconnected variables.[25] Thus, the literature surrounding the causes of democratic failure has shifted away from historical experiences involving military takeovers.

Scholarship has examined multiple areas of democracy that might be the culprit of slow, democratic erosion. For example, Huq and Ginsburg warn that constitutional regression is another means of democratic decline and is the most significant concern in the United States.[26] In this deterioration, three areas—elections, rights to free speech, and legal processes—erode simultaneously as a result of decreased electoral competition, allowing one party to gain control and compromise the three areas.[27] Tubbs presents a different perspective, contending that the main tipping points for failed democracies are "economic inequality, phobias, and perceived threats from outsiders."[28] Regardless of the divergence on variables, research suggests a shift from military coups to a more gradual erosion of democracy involving multiple facets of the system and society, making identification and prevention of backsliding more complex.

---

[22] Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Crown, 2018), 3.

[23] Levitsky and Ziblatt, 3.

[24] Aziz Z. Huq and Tom Ginsburg, "How to Lose a Constitutional Democracy," Public Law Working Paper No. 642 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2017), 78, http://www.ssrn.com/abstract=2901776.

[25] The authors point to several variables, including the infringement of human rights, economic conditions, the influence of leadership, government overreach, and unproductive institutions, to name a few. Linz and Stepan, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*; Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*; Huq and Ginsburg, "How to Lose a Constitutional Democracy"; Christian D. Tubbs, "Conditions of Democratic Erosion: Has U.S. Democracy Reached a Tipping Point?" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2018), http://hdl.handle.net/10945/61290.

[26] Huq and Ginsburg, "How to Lose a Constitutional Democracy," 78.

[27] Huq and Ginsburg, 84, 117–19.

[28] Tubbs, "Conditions of Democratic Erosion," 8.

As elected officials are chosen by the people to represent the people, they often have a significant influence over important aspects of the democratic state and, therefore, potentially play a role in democratic decline. Extensive research has revealed an array of views on the relationship between leadership and failed democracies. Linz and Stepan argue that democratic decline is a multifaceted problem; however, they emphasize the role and influence of leadership on democratic processes, which can shift democracies toward authoritarianism.[29] Many other scholars agree on the influence that leadership's behavior has on democratic regress. For example, Levitsky and Ziblatt assert that democracies fail because of elected leaders who slowly dismantle democratic processes by operating in gray areas, testing the system's limits, and gradually moving to more authoritarian measures.[30] Moghaddam agrees with this claim, confirming leadership's importance in societal progress and its ability to influence key areas of democratic success: minority rights, meritocracy, and freedom of expression. In his view, if leaders cease to deliver on the citizens' needs and act on self-serving interests, such as power, democracy will regress to a more authoritarian state.[31] Similarly, Svolik proposes that voters do not intentionally elect authoritarian figures; however, a vulnerability in the democratic system itself results in candidates bargaining between fundamental democratic values and partisan dividends to build support.[32] Regardless of differences in nuances of influence, an abundance of research suggests that the behavior of elected officials can have harmful effects on democracy, thereby contributing to democratic decline.

Integral to a democracy's stability and, as a result, democratic backsliding is society's belief in government legitimacy—both a cause and symptom of leadership and social norms. The relationship between a government and its citizens is complicated, featuring a continuous feedback loop that results in legitimacy. The majority of citizens must believe their government is legitimate because without legitimacy, according to Linz and Stepan, the

---

[29] Linz and Stepan, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*, 33.

[30] Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 3–7.

[31] Fathali M. Moghaddam, *The Psychology of Democracy* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2016), 10–75.

[32] Milan W. Svolik, "Polarization versus Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 3 (2019): 23, https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0039.

government is unsustainable.[33] Linz and Stepan further explain that government legitimacy is the responsibility of both the citizens and elected officials—to follow the outlined laws whether the member of society agrees or not.[34] Additionally, the government's responsibility is to uphold the laws to garner trust from citizens.[35] The required level of mutual responsibility can present significant challenges if it is unbalanced or perceived as unfair. Huq and Ginsburg concur on the necessity of balancing government, the rule of law, and civil liberties, which if left unbalanced, can create democratic instability.[36] Absent this relationship or norm, political violence can ensue and, if supported by political leaders and mishandled in the eyes of the citizens, delegitimize the government and erode authority, causing democracy to die, according to Linz and Stepan.[37] Moghaddam agrees, adding that when citizens feel that law, whether in its formation or interpretation, is contradictory or unfair, collective disobedience such as revolutions can result.[38] He elaborates that the importance of a population's belief that a government is legitimate has repercussions beyond the domestic realm, potentially extending to international partnerships.[39] According to Moghaddam, the participation of the United States in the United Nations with an attitude that is viewed as above the international law provides an example of legitimacy concerns extending beyond the domestic realm, impacting relationships beneficial to democracy on a broader level.[40] Research points to the importance of a populations' belief in government legitimacy for democratic stability, not as a sole tipping point but with far-reaching impacts on society's relationship to government institutions and international partnerships.

---

[33] Linz and Stepan add to this claim, stating that citizens' perceptions of the government's effectiveness and efficacy are established over a long period. They go on to argue that while legitimacy is an integral piece of success, government legitimacy from the majority alone is insufficient to create a stable democracy. Linz and Stepan, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*, 16–17.

[34] Linz and Stepan, 17.

[35] Linz and Stepan, 17.

[36] Huq and Ginsburg, "How to Lose a Constitutional Democracy," 90.

[37] Linz and Stepan, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*, 56–58.

[38] Moghaddam, *The Psychology of Democracy*, 79–86.

[39] Moghaddam, 91.

[40] Moghaddam, 91.

11

Research on democracy and backsliding is extensive, and while there does not appear to be a one-size-fits-all explanation for democratic failure, understanding the potential pitfalls and their implications is integral to the longevity and stability of democracy. The next section reviews some of the circumstances that have hampered scholars' efforts to determine whether democratic failure is indeed imminent.

3. Democratic Backsliding—The Last 50 Years

Democratic backsliding is not a new concept, nor is this the first time in U.S. history that questions have arisen over the nation's democratic stability. As the world has evolved, so has democracy. Research surrounding the impacts of changing social norms, phobias, globalization, and polarization have been of interest to scholars in evaluating potential causes of democratic backsliding around the globe over the last 50 years.

Various scholars have examined how social norms have evolved and impacted democracy, including processes that have previously relied on checks and balances to maintain democratic stability and limit backsliding. Both informal and written norms, such as compromise, forbearance, and mutual toleration, have played important roles in political and legislative efforts for democracies; however, Klein and others find that this acceptance no longer prevails.[41] According to Klein, as well as Levitsky and Ziblatt, existential conflicts are infiltrating the political system and causing leaders to win by any means necessary.[42] The changing motives and frequency of filibustering, leading to legislative gridlocks and unresolved conflicts, demonstrate these norms' erosion.[43] Indeed, Pildes finds that the productiveness of Congress in the United States has dramatically decreased since the 1970s, resulting in fewer laws enacted because of political fragmentation and limited government

---

[41] Ezra Klein, *Why We're Polarized* (New York: Avid Reader Press, 2021), 207; Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 9.

[42] Klein, *Why We're Polarized*, 207; Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 9.

[43] Klein, *Why We're Polarized*, 224; Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 135.

ability to provide solutions for citizens' key issues.[44] A concerning side effect of stalemates and significant conflict in legislative processes, as argued by Levitsky and Ziblatt, is the draw of a state's citizens toward civil war as a means of resolution.[45] These scholars and others argue that democratic checks and balances had produced effective legislative efforts and qualified elected leaders until the 1970s.[46] The changing use of traditional checks and balances, then, has impacted society's belief in a legitimate government and contributed to democratic backsliding.

Another important change related to checks and balances involves political moderates and their contributions toward compromise. Huq and Ginsburg argue that democratic stability hinges on the influences and agendas of elected leaders and their alliances, as areas of the Constitution, such as the First Amendment, are vulnerable to interpretation by the U.S. Supreme Court.[47] Indeed, they further explain that "a handful of judicial appointments, combined with an aggressive uptick in the activity levels of the Supreme Court, could produce a judiciary that is decidedly part of the governing coalition, rather than a check upon it."[48] Svolik elaborates that moderates play an essential role in the checks and balances of the political system because they are more likely to prioritize democratic principles over their own preferences or partisan loyalties.[49] As a result, the likelihood of undemocratic principles and leaders gaining traction is reduced, limiting democratic erosion in a polarized society.[50]

Not only have social norms changed in the political landscape, as exhibited in legislative efforts, but the population has changed as well. The decay of societal norms, such

---

[44] As defined by Pildes, political fragmentation happens "when political authority—the power to make and influence public decisions and policy—is dispersed into so many different hands and power centers both inside and outside the state [that] it becomes difficult to marshal and sustain the necessary political power for governments to function effectively." Richard H. Pildes, "The Age of Political Fragmentation," *Journal of Democracy* 32, no. 4 (2021): 146–47, https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2021.0058.

[45] Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 113.

[46] For example, the tenured party officials approved legislative and presidential party candidates. Klein, *Why We're Polarized*, 178; Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*.

[47] Huq and Ginsburg, "How to Lose a Constitutional Democracy," 85.

[48] Huq and Ginsburg, 165.

[49] Svolik, "Polarization versus Democracy," 27.

[50] Svolik, 27.

as open-mindedness and tolerance, is another cause of democratic decline.[51] Levitsky and Ziblatt, for instance, claim that history has proven norm erosion a precursor to failed democracies—as sorting and polarization of society takes holds, decreasing toleration and deepening rivalries begin to divide citizens.[52] Society's norms are changing, though, according to Canan and Akil as well as Levitsky and Ziblatt, who believe norm erosion is a side effect of disinformation and polarization.[53] In this connection, Canan and Akil stress that excessive information hinders people's ability to think critically and evaluate the data presented.[54] Because these types of interactions shape perceptions, the authors argue that using mis/disinformation as propaganda can influence and change the norms and values under which society operates.[55] The lengthy pandemonium, confusion, and fear that occurred, and is still occurring, surrounding COVID-19 is an illustrative example. Hodges agrees that social norms play a vital role in the stability and resiliency of social networks, especially extensive ones; however, if citizens perceive inequalities, this gap can cause the network to erode.[56] As norms contribute to the ebb and flow of society, significant movement away from democratic norms can stimulate further erosion.

Phobias and fear of outside threats, which have increased among citizens since September 11, 2001, have significant impacts on society and are two conditional markers of democratic erosion.[57] Tubbs, for one, maintains that part of the strain on democracy in the United States arises from these two tipping points, contributing to a weakening and even a

---

[51] Levitsky and Ziblatt, in agreement with Moghaddam, argue that shared democratic norms among citizens play a vital role in upholding the Constitution and, therefore, democratic stabilization. Moghaddam maintains that qualities such as open-mindedness and a tolerance for uncertainty are requirements for a successful democratic society. It is through social norms, according to Hodges, that society can build the networks needed for survivability. Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 7; Moghaddam, *The Psychology of Democracy*, 48–54; Hodges, "Systems Fragility," 26.

[52] Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 113.

[53] Canan and Akil, "A Warfare Domain Approach to the Disinformation Problem," 2; Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 9.

[54] Canan and Akil, "A Warfare Domain Approach to the Disinformation Problem," 2.

[55] Canan and Akil, 4–6.

[56] Hodges, "Systems Fragility," 27.

[57] Among the three "tipping points," according to Tubbs, is economic inequality. Tubbs, "Conditions of Democratic Erosion," 8; Lily Rothman, "Fear in America: Why We're More Afraid Than Before," *Time*, January 6, 2016, https://time.com/4158007/american-fear-history/.

14

rejection of both society's and leadership's commitment to democratic principles.[58] As Rothman points out, "Fear doesn't exist in a vacuum," so there are multiple environmental influences on and from fear.[59] For instance, Konty, Duell, and Joireman propose that several industries, including the media, have underlying self-interests in leveraging fear.[60] The authors argue that as fear increases among citizens, they turn to media outlets for more information, in turn generating more revenue from ads and subscriptions for the outlets.[61] Claiming that powerlessness can be a cause of fear, these scholars also contend that fear is leveraged by politicians to shift citizen reactions from more significant threats to lesser ones to advance political legislative efforts.[62] What is concerning, particularly if phobias and fear of outside threats contribute to weakening democratic values, is Glassner's argument that societal fears grow exponentially through the process of shared exchanges and interactions.[63] It is through rapidly growing fears and phobias, whether actual or perceived, that extensive democratic values begin to soften, resulting in a tipping point for democratic erosion.

Globalization, while traditionally lauded for connecting people, has also come under scrutiny for its systemic impacts on economic inequality, which can lead to democratic destabilization.[64] Moghaddam posits that although globalization has enabled some pivotal social justice movements, it has also contributed to economic inequalities, allowing a small group of decision-makers to represent the majority.[65] Indeed, Huq and Ginsburg find that the United States has faced a growing economic inequality gap since the 1970s.[66] As such, the

---

[58] Tubbs, "Conditions of Democratic Erosion," 4, 76.

[59] Rothman, "Fear in America."

[60] Mark Konty, Blythe Duell, and Jeff Joireman, "Scared Selfish: A Culture of Fear's Values in the Age of Terrorism," *American Sociologist* 35, no. 2 (2004): 94, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27700387.

[61] Konty, Duell, and Joireman, 94.

[62] Konty, Duell, and Joireman, 98.

[63] Barry Glassner, *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), xxxvi, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[64] *Globalization* is used as a catch-all term to describe the interconnectedness of populations, cultures, and countries. Globalization includes such things as technology, information, traded goods, and partnerships. Melina Kolb, "What Is Globalization?," Peterson Institute for International Economics, August 24, 2021, https://www.piie.com/microsites/globalization/what-is-globalization.

[65] Moghaddam, *The Psychology of Democracy*, 37.

[66] Huq and Ginsburg, "How to Lose a Constitutional Democracy," 81.

authors warn of the correlation between economic gaps and a higher acceptance of draconian leadership, which can result in failed democracies.[67] In Moghaddam's view, the concentration of power enabled by economical inequalities contributes to democratic regress because it stifles social cohesion and produces fear of extinction in minorities.[68] While Tubbs agrees that economic inequality marks a tipping point for democracies, the causes of poverty, such as unemployment and less education, have had a more significant impact on erosion.[69] As a result, several scholars—Munck, Moghaddam, Ginseng, Huq, and others—contend that globalization's effects need more significant evaluation to determine whether their impact on democracy is desirable.[70] The research indicates globalization can contribute to growing economic inequality, which influences factors such as societal fear and ideological tendencies, resulting in the destabilization of democracy.

Ever-widening polarization and its impacts on democracy have been of interest to scholars researching democratic erosion to understand its threat level. One corpus of literature suggests that polarization poses a significant democratic threat.[71] Levitsky and Ziblatt argue that deep-rooted resentment caused by differing ideologies and beliefs creates distrust, affecting the ability of citizens and leaders to cooperate and form necessary coalitions for a functioning democracy, therefore, impacting stability.[72] Klein counterargues that polarization in itself does not pose a threat to democracy; however, current environmental impacts, such as geographic separation based on ideologies and beliefs, should raise concern.[73] Scholars Linz, Stepan, and Pildes contend that conflict between political parties is a healthy and natural

---

[67] Huq and Ginsburg, 81.

[68] Moghaddam, *The Psychology of Democracy*, 36.

[69] Tubbs, "Conditions of Democratic Erosion," 9.

[70] Ronaldo Munck, "Globalization and Democracy: A New 'Great Transformation'?," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 581 (May 2002): 20, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1049703; Huq and Ginsburg, "How to Lose a Constitutional Democracy"; Moghaddam, *The Psychology of Democracy*.

[71] Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 220; Alaina Miller, "Confederate Symbols and Their Impact on U.S. Democratic Governance" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2022), http://hdl.handle.net/10945/71020.

[72] Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 220.

[73] Klein, *Why We're Polarized*, 38.

occurrence, but Pildes argues that when conflict impedes governance, it becomes troublesome for democracies.[74] Indeed, when citizens view political leaders or parties as dishonest, citizens more readily adopt violence to express their discontent, which is a touchstone of deteriorating democracies.[75] Of concern is that many scholars—including Levitsky and Ziblatt, as well as Pildes—agree that polarization in the United States among elected officials and the public had been expanding before President Trump's election.[76] To that point, Macy et al. argue that polarization is more prevalent among political elites and represents a tipping point for democracy in the United States, as exhibited by the inability of partisans to unite during a crisis, such as the pandemic.[77] As institutions and political leaders in a highly polarized environment attempt to appeal to a wider audience, Klein argues that a continuous feedback loop is created, making a snowball of separation resulting in democratic decline, as both citizens and elected officials struggle to negotiate and compromise on disagreements.[78] Furthermore, according to Linz and Stepan, decreased pragmatism and outbidding from elected officials resulting from extreme political polarization can create additional instability in the democratic system.[79] Regardless of the varying perspectives, scholars agree on the significance of growing polarization and share concern over its systemic impacts on the stability of democracy.

Scholarship has long attempted to understand causes, influences, and early warning signs of democratic erosion. Over the last 50 years, the environment in which liberal

---

[74] Richard H. Pildes, "Romanticizing Democracy, Political Fragmentation, and the Decline of American Government," *Yale Law Journal* 124, no. 3 (December 2014): 818, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43617040.

[75] Linz and Stepan, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*, 31.

[76] Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*; Pildes, "Romanticizing Democracy," 818. See also Klein, *Why We're Polarized*; Alan I. Abramowitz and Kyle L. Saunders, "Is Polarization a Myth?," *Journal of Politics* 70, no. 2 (2008): 542–55, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022381608080493.

[77] Michael W. Macy et al., "Polarization and Tipping Points," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118, no. 50 (2021): 1, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2102144118.

[78] Klein, *Why We're Polarized*, xix.

[79] Linz and Stepan, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*, 26–27. "The term 'ethnic outbidding' refers to an auction-like process where ethnically-based political parties adopt extreme ideological positions as a means of distancing themselves from rival parties." Brandon Stewart and Ronald J. McGauvran, "What Do We Know about Ethnic Outbidding? We Need to Take Ideology Seriously," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 26, no. 4 (2020): 405, https://doi.org/10.1080/13537113.2020.1809897.

democracies exist has changed, creating a new set of challenges for achieving democratic stability. Social norms, polarization, and globalization have their own influences, which can contribute to either democratic erosion or stability. To navigate current and future challenges, democracies must gain a better understanding of the conditions that can promote erosion.

B. EXTREMISM

This section of the literature review focuses on extremism, examining its various definitions and identifying the definition used in this thesis. Additionally, it details a few widely used theories for understanding the relationship between extremists, society, and the environment with which they interact. Last, this section discusses commonly accepted factors contributing to the rise of extremism.

1. Background on Extremism

There are several definitions of extremism, each with its own premise for understanding an individual's perception of reality. J. M. Berger proposes that extremism be defined as "the belief that an in-group's success or survival can never be separated from the need for hostile action against an out-group."[80] He argues that extremism is not tied to any specific ideology but can cover a wide range or even fall within multiple categories.[81] Berger goes on to say that the difference between terrorism and extremism is that the former is a tactic while the latter is a set of beliefs.[82] By viewing an extremist's reality using "in-groups" and "out-groups," practitioners can gain a deeper understanding of extremism and the behavior and beliefs surrounding it. On the opposite side of the spectrum, some have chosen to take the approach of "I will know it when I see it," which can have detrimental effects, both socially and legislatively.[83] Such an approach to extremism relies on an individual's own experiences and reality to set criteria, thus providing a limited perspective and inconsistencies in its

---

[80] Berger, *Extremism*, 44.

[81] Berger identifies several major categories: "racial/ethnic, religious, nationalist, anti-government, anarchist, classist, single-issue movements, and gender, sexual-orientation, and sexual identify." Berger, 26–30.

[82] Berger, 30.

[83] Berger, 1.

18

understanding and, therefore, any solutions. Another subjective definition of extremism is found in *Meriam-Webster*—"the quality or state of being extreme"—which also lacks guidance about what is considered extreme.[84] Moving closer to Berger's definition, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) interestingly incorporates an individual's operating outside of society's generally accepted norms into its definition of extremism, which provides some level of relativity to behaviors considered extreme.[85] While ADL's definition aims to provide more definitive criteria for classifying extremism, it still falls short, as social norms are highly subjective and prone to change. Other definitions of extremism can be derived from those of domestic violent extremism, with removal of the violence requirement. In that regard, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence defines an extremist as "an individual based and operating primarily in the United States without direction or inspiration from a foreign terrorist group or other foreign power and who seeks to further political or social goals wholly or in part through unlawful acts of force or violence."[86] Given all the variances in defining extremism, Berger presents the most inclusive, timeless, and structured definition, providing the widest lens through which to view and, therefore, understand extremism.

Despite the challenge that scholars and practitioners have faced in agreeing on a definition of extremism, like democracy, it has a long-standing history tied to varying ideological trends. Berger argues that the earliest documented instance of extremism dates back to Rome's capture of Carthage in the second century BCE.[87] As time went on, extremism evolved, along with societies' and nations' definitions of it. While ideologies and beliefs seen as extremist by societies and states varied before September 11, 2001—the Spanish conquistadors, the abolitionist movement in America, and anti-Semitism in Germany, to name a few—there was a hard shift in focus and definition following the devastating attacks on the World Trade Center.[88] Muslims and jihadist movements became the primary focus of

---

[84] *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. "extremism," accessed May 4, 2022, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/extremism.

[85] "Extremism," Anti-Defamation League, accessed May 4, 2022, https://www.adl.org/resources/glossary-terms/extremism.

[86] Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Assessment on Domestic Violent Extremism*, 3.

[87] Berger, *Extremism*, 6–7.

[88] Berger, 9–20.

the United States, fueled by a will to seek retribution and lead the war on terror, ultimately establishing jihadism as an ideological marker for extremism and, therefore, terrorism moving forward.[89] As such, Imran Awan argues that part of the problem with several current understandings of extremism is the constraint of criteria to a certain period, as trends of ideologies and belief systems change over time.[90] Awan's argument is exemplified in the United States, as society's framing and understanding of extremism has become convoluted as a result of domestic threats, challenging how society interprets and identifies extremism. Berger points out, "The complexity of extremism now bedevils all discussions, exacerbated by an all-too-human tendency to describe any political difference in the extremist frame."[91] Extremism, while around for millennia, has traditionally taken on ideologies and beliefs associated within current events; however, doing so can constrain an understanding of extremism, which directly impacts approaches to it, as trends shift over time.

Integral to the understanding of extremism are the psychological, social, and behavioral influences to which scholars have applied various theories. Berger proposes that social identity theory (SIT) provides the best approach for examining extremism, utilizing in-groups and out-groups to explore the relationships that give rise to the phenomenon.[92] SIT is a sociological theory that provides a framework for examining the relationship between groups and individuals, including social influences on behavior, narratives, self-image, and social identity.[93] By providing a lens into the behaviors of in-groups and out-groups, the analytical framework considers the importance of collectivism while also acknowledging the self-reflection piece of the individual.[94] While originally developed for intergroup conflict, SIT has been applied by scholars—Berger, Moghaddam, Strindberg, and others—to

---

[89] Berger, 18–20.

[90] Brian Blakemore and Imran Awan, *Extremism, Counter-Terrorism and Policing* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2013), 13, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[91] Berger, *Extremism*, 19–20.

[92] Berger, 44.

[93] Social identity is part of a person's identity, shaped through the content and meaning of social connections. Anders Strindberg, *Social Identity Theory and the Study of Terrorism and Violent Extremism* (Stockholm: FOI, 2021), 14–17, https://www.foi.se/en/foi/reports/report-summary.html?reportNo=FOI-R--5062--SE.

[94] Strindberg, 17–22.

understand extremism in general and violent extremism in particular.[95] Because identities can overlap and often come from multiple social sources, a flexible framework that seeks to understand an individual's experiences, motivations, and influences at a deeper level is needed for extremism.[96] In connecting SIT to extremism, Berger argues that the success of the in-group is directly tied to an unbreakable need for aggressive actions toward the out-group.[97] Thus, SIT provides a well-rounded framework from which to analyze the context and complexity of extremism.

While Moghaddam agrees that SIT contributes significantly to the understanding of extremism and radicalization, he contends that material factors can also be contributors, so multiple theories are needed to understand the movement toward extremism.[98] Realistic group conflict theory (RGCT) is one that can be used to understand the relevance of materialistic factors in conflict.[99] RGCT proposes that scare resources, such as economic interests, social status, and militaries, are the driving forces of conflict between groups, leading to hostility that is reflected through the use of stereotypes and social distancing.[100] Moghaddam suggests that mutual radicalization occurs on a pendulum, with the reasons for conflict swinging back and forth from materialistic (as highlighted in RGCT) to psychological (as described by SIT).[101] As Jay Jackson points out, one of the flaws with RGCT is the assertion that contact and interaction with members of outside groups do not impact one's perception of or behavior toward them, as tensions cannot be reduced in this manner.[102] The theory proposes, instead, that resolution can only be achieved through superordinate goals—

[95] Berger, *Extremism*, 44; Strindberg, *Social Identity Theory*, 4; Fathali M. Moghaddam, *Mutual Radicalization: How Groups and Nations Drive Each Other to Extremes* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2018).

[96] Strindberg, *Social Identity Theory*, 29.

[97] Berger, *Extremism*, 2, 24.

[98] Moghaddam, *Mutual Radicalization*, 8, 21.

[99] Moghaddam, *Mutual Radicalization*, 20; Jay W. Jackson, "Realistic Group Conflict Theory: A Review and Evaluation of the Theoretical and Empirical Literature," *Psychological Record* 43, no. 3 (1993): 396, ProQuest.

[100] Jackson, "Realistic Group Conflict Theory," 398.

[101] Moghaddam, *Mutual Radicalization*, 21.

[102] Jackson, "Realistic Group Conflict Theory," 400.

or common goals that require groups' collective efforts and cannot be achieved solely by an individual group.[103] Given RGCT's requirement of superordinate goals, the theory can be used in combination with SIT, but its usefulness as a primary framework is limited.

Social movement theory (SMT) is also helpful for explaining extremism.[104] Marsden proposes that SMT provides analysis at various levels—meso, micro, and macro—creating a typology that enables a greater understanding of relationships between groups and the state in sociopolitical environments.[105] According to the author, SMT's use of political opportunity and resource mobilization as key factors makes the theory applicable to terrorism and, therefore, extremism.[106] Each of these is further broken down to create a group construct, used to characterize a group's interests.[107] While Marsden argues that SMT has many unexplored applications for extremism and terrorism, she identifies its limitation in dynamic environments, so the theory is best used for dormant groups.[108] Additionally, as Strindberg argues, categorization can lead to associating individuals with specific group characteristics as opposed to understanding the underlying motivations and factors influencing the individuals.[109] As a result, SMT's insight into extremism is limited to the shared motivations or characteristics of the entire group.

---

[103] Jackson, 401.

[104] "Social movement theory [SMT] attempts to explain the origins, growth, decline, and outcomes of social movements." SMT examines various several key areas: "movement organization, political opportunities and processes, culture, and social psychology." Suzanne Staggenborg, "Social Movement Theory," in *Encyclopedia of Social Theory* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2005), 754, https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412952552.

[105] Sarah V. Marsden, "A Social Movement Theory Typology of Militant Organisations: Contextualising Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 28, no. 4 (October 2014): 754, https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2014.954039.

[106] Marsden, 751.

[107] Four categories comprise resource mobilization: types of resources (e.g., moral, cultural, social-organizational, human, and material); utility; mechanisms (e.g., movement of self-production, aggregation, appropriation, and patronage); and processes. Political opportunities consist of three variables: openness of the political system, the level of stability, and the state's means of handling those who challenge it. Marsden, 754–56, 761.

[108] Marsden, 756.

[109] Strindberg, *Social Identity Theory*, 11.

While this subsection has explored and applied several theories to better understand extremism, SIT seems to provide the most flexible and contextual framework for analyzing extremism, particularly in dynamic environments.

2. Contributing Factors to the Rise of Extremism

A group of scholars—including Moghaddam, Prince, Berger, and others—argues that a significant point of entry for extremism involves some type of larger grievance.[110] Moghaddam suggests that the grievance can be as simple as a feeling of unfairness that, if unaddressed, can lead to anger and frustration.[111] Jane Prince and Berger agree, contending that extremists have such a significant grievance that it leads to an existential threat against themselves and their values.[112] Indeed, Berger, Hogg, Kruglanski, and van den Bos argue that as a result of existential threats to their identity, individuals search for certainty from groups with similar threat perceptions, thereby fueling the movement toward extremism.[113] After finding a group that shares similar grievances, individuals begin to feel supported, and their threat concerns are legitimized.[114] This process begets self-categorization, whereby individuals classify themselves compared to other social categories (in-groups and out-groups), resulting in a social identity tied to the in-group.[115] A common misconception surrounding extremism, however, is that these existential threats are caused by structural components of society, such as socioeconomic status.[116] According to Prince and Berger,

---

[110] Moghaddam, *Mutual Radicalization*; Blakemore and Awan, *Extremism, Counter-Terrorism and Policing*; Berger, *Extremism*, 129. Berger defines *grievance* as "the cause of the offender's distress or resentment, a perception of having been treated unfairly or inappropriately." Additionally, it is a sustained feeling, as opposed to a short-lived one.

[111] Fathali M. Moghaddam, "The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration," *American Psychologist* 60, no. 2 (February 2005): 163, http://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.60.2.161.

[112] Berger, *Extremism*, 127; Blakemore and Awan, *Extremism, Counter-Terrorism and Policing*, 57.

[113] Berger, *Extremism*, 135; Michael A. Hogg, Arie Kruglanski, and Kees van den Bos, "Uncertainty and the Roots of Extremism," *Journal of Social Issues* 69, no. 3 (September 2013): 414, https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12021.

[114] Blakemore and Awan, *Extremism, Counter-Terrorism and Policing*, 58.

[115] Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke, "Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (2000): 224, https://doi.org/10.2307/2695870.

[116] Berger, *Extremism*, 113; Blakemore and Awan, *Extremism, Counter-Terrorism and Policing*, 57.

research shows that extremists are rarely of low socioeconomic status or educational level.[117] As such, Berger proposes that existential threats can be the result of a gamut of perceived problems with the underlying feeling that individuals cannot solve the problems on their own.[118] Regardless of the cause for grievance, the resulting existential threats drive an individual's movement toward extremism.

Social media has played an integral role in the growth of extremism as it presents an opportunity for increased connectedness. Jensen has found the use of social media has contributed significantly to the radicalization of extremists in the United States.[119] He maintains that extremists have stated intentions to use social media for sharing content, connecting with those who are like-minded, and spreading their narratives.[120] Schoep agrees, arguing that extremists are maneuvering around algorithms on social media to post propaganda.[121] While social media has not historically been a primary means of radicalization, Jensen argues that more extremists are moving toward social media being their primary source for radicalization.[122] He proposes that mainstream platforms are among the most utilized, with Facebook ranking first, followed by YouTube and Twitter.[123] Williams et al. argue that extremists attempt to soften their messaging and posts on social media to draw more followers, obtain funding, coordinate events, and spread propaganda.[124] The level of interconnectedness enabled by social media has encouraged extremists to adopt its use more readily.

---

[117] Berger, *Extremism*, 113; Blakemore and Awan, *Extremism, Counter-Terrorism and Policing*, 57.

[118] Berger, *Extremism*, 136–38.

[119] Michael Jensen et al., *The Use of Social Media by United States Extremists* (College Park, MD: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, 2018), 1, https://www.start.umd.edu/publication/use-social-media-united-states-extremists.

[120] Jensen et al., 2.

[121] Anita Chandra et al., *Exiting Extremism: What Binds People to Extremist Groups and How Organizations Help Them Leave* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2021), https://www.rand.org/pubs/presentations/PTA1071-1.html.

[122] Jensen et al., *The Use of Social Media by United States Extremists*, 3.

[123] Jensen et al., 5.

[124] Heather J. Williams et al., *The Online Extremist Ecosystem: Its Evolution and a Framework for Separating Extreme from Mainstream* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2021), 3, https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA1458-1.html.

Extremism is complex in nature, leveraging group dynamics while also requiring a deeper understanding of an individual's motivations and grievances. As scholars such as Awan and Berger have suggested, a wider lens is necessary for exploring both causes and solutions to growing extremism in the United States.

C. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this literature review was to discuss the two underlying themes of this thesis—democratic backsliding and extremism. By examining past literature, one can deduce that the current environment with which liberal democracy exists is a dynamic and complicated one, making democratic stability challenging. With the rise of extremism, it is important for democracies, including the United States, to further examine the influences of societal fragility.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

III. SOCIETAL FRAGILITY FRAMEWORK

The United States is facing some precarious times as social dynamics are contributing to questions about potential democratic backsliding. Extremism is on the rise, with an increasing tendency toward violence.[125] Trust in government's ability to uphold constitutional rights and protect its citizens is wavering.[126] Polarization among both political leaders and citizens is creating bottlenecks in democratic processes.[127] While research is thorough on democratic backsliding, finding ways to prevent it, slow it down, or reverse it is minimal. In the United States, the solution to extremism is typically through counter-radicalization methods; however, the dynamics of society are complex, particularly in a democracy where freedom of speech and expression are highly valued civil liberties. A more introspective approach might provide a wider lens to help determine and implement long-term solutions.

My concept of societal fragility leverages frameworks of fragility used in social systems and nations to create a framework for examining democratic societies. As extremism is becoming more mainstream in the United States and extending into the political system through public leaders, counter-radicalization efforts will only be effective if more deeply rooted grievances and social influences are better identified. The societal fragility concept aims to close that gap for democratic nations. This chapter explores current research and frameworks on fragility, their use by governments and organizations, and their limitations. Next, this chapter proposes a new framework for societal fragility, which includes the components of social norms, institutions, trust, and social cohesion. The chapter concludes with a more thorough examination of each of the components, showing the framework's efficacy in examining fragility through a wider lens.

---

[125] Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Assessment on Domestic Violent Extremism*, 1.

[126] Baker, Wade, and Walsh, "Challenges of Responding to Misinformation," 2; Pollard and Davis, *Decline in Trust in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*.

[127] Pildes, "The Age of Political Fragmentation," 146–47.

A.   DEFINING NATIONS, SOCIETY, AND CULTURE

The purpose of this thesis is to examine society in a democratic nation or state. Therefore, it is important to explore some of the characteristics that make societies, nations, and states unique. Many of the limitations of current frameworks are the result of the nuances of nations and societies. Thus, exploring these differences provides context for the limitations of other frameworks and leads to the societal fragility framework, which can be used to evaluate a democratic society.

One of the most important and defining traits of a nation is its culture, which contributes to understanding the dynamics of the nation.[128] While language and religion can also be traits of nations, culture acts as a unifying characteristic.[129] Generally, culture can be defined as a set of values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that help a group of people make sense of their reality.[130] Comparatively, culture has no role in the legal recognition of a state/country.[131] Indeed, to be recognized as a state, four main qualifications must be met: "(a) a permanent population; (b) a defined territory; (c) government; and (d) capacity to enter into relations with other States."[132] Thus, culture is a differentiating factor between a nation and a state.

Democratic nations often include a wide range of cultures. The cultures exist independently; however, citizens frequently associate themselves with more than a single culture.[133] For example, citizens might associate with a religious group, but they are often

---

[128] Jason Shvili, "Difference between a State and a Nation," WorldAtlas, July 13, 2021, https://www.worldatlas.com/geography/difference-between-a-state-and-a-nation.html.

[129] Shvili.

[130] Martyn Barrett, *Competencies for Democratic Culture: Living Together as Equals in Culturally Diverse Democratic Societies* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2016), 19; Antonio Lebrón, "What Is Culture?," *Merit Research Journal of Education and Review* 1, no. 6 (July 2013): 126; Brady Wagoner, Ignacio Brescó de Luna, and Vlad Glaveanu, eds., *The Road to Actualized Democracy: A Psychological Exploration* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2018), 218.

[131] It is worth noting that *state* and *country* are synonymous. Individual states within the United States, for example, are considered jurisdictions and not recognized as states under international law. Shvili, "Difference between a State and a Nation."

[132] Arthur Watts, "State/Nation-State," Princeton Encyclopedia of Self-Determination, accessed December 1, 2022, https://pesd.princeton.edu/node/676.

[133] Barrett, *Competencies for Democratic Culture*, 19.

part of other groups, such as generational or occupational groups that share a different culture.[134] While several cultures exist within a democracy, an overarching democratic culture widely accepted by a majority of the population is integral to the health of democracy.[135] An example includes the dynamics of a civil society, which foster both shared and individual values and goals.[136] In this connection, Marc Alexandre, Alys Willman, and Ghazia Aslam have observed a unique relationship between a nation and its citizens, whereby certain aspects, such as a nation's culture, are a direct reflection of its citizens.[137]

Democracies often rely on civil society as a means of achieving a democratic culture and sustaining democracy itself. The premise of a civil society is that its members share "interests, purposes, and values," which society uses to take voluntary collective action.[138] In civil societies, individuals can maintain their own goals and purposes while also understanding, accepting, and pursuing the shared values necessary to maintain civil society.[139] With this shared acceptance, civil societies have the capability to produce collective action to solve several problems on their own with minimal government intervention.[140] Since democracies rely significantly on citizen engagement, a civil society, therefore, also plays an important role in the overall health and culture of a democracy.[141] Cultural shifts can also result from civil society for various reasons,

---

[134] Barrett, 19.

[135] The culture of democracy fosters civic engagement through voicing opinions and having conversations about citizens' needs. When such liberties are hindered or muted, civic disengagement can result. Barrett, *Competencies for Democratic Culture*, 17–19; Wagoner, Luna, and Glaveanu, *The Road to Actualized Democracy*, 216.

[136] Marc Alexandre, Alys Willman, and Ghazia Aslam, *Societal Dynamics and Fragility: Engaging Societies in Responding to Fragile Situations* (Herndon, VA: World Bank Publications, 2012), 82, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[137] Alexandre, Willman, and Aslam, 10.

[138] Alexandre, Willman, and Aslam, 82.

[139] Robert D. Putnam, *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 248, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[140] Michael Edwards, *The Oxford Handbook of Civil Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.

[141] Putnam, *Democracies in Flux*, 7.

including changes to interests and values, as well as a weakening of civil society due to low levels of trust among members.[142] As such, civil societies significantly contribute to democracies in multiple ways by reinforcing and maintaining democratic culture, which ensures the longevity of democracy.

Societies also have several unique characteristics that differentiate them from other closely related concepts, including communities. Edward Shils defines society as "a differentiated and coordinated system of the institutional and freely adaptive actions of individuals, self-reproductive through time and taking place within a territory which has meaning to those who reside in it."[143] Thus, societies often include a wide range of diversity—e.g., ethnic, religious, and racial, to name a few. While diversity is a significant characteristic of a society, a community more often shares common interests and, therefore, is comparatively less diverse than a society.[144] As a result, communities frequently experience fewer conflicts.[145] Due to society's diversity, the pursuit of a democratic culture serves as the commonality on which a society relies to help navigate conflict.[146] Thus, despite societies and their challenges being more complex in nature, it is necessary to explore these challenges to gain a deeper understanding for democratic stability.

As culture plays an integral role in both nations and societies, particularly for democracies, it has an important connection to societal fragility. With a general understanding of nations, societies, and culture, current fragility frameworks can be evaluated with a more scrutinous lens.

---

[142] Alexandre, Willman, and Aslam, *Societal Dynamics and Fragility*, 50.

[143] Edward Shils, "Society: The Idea and Its Sources," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 15, no. 55 (1) (1961): 93, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23940287.

[144] Shared interests may include such activities as fishing, religion, sexual orientation, or dedication to family. "What Is the Difference between a Community and a Society?," Reference.com, March 25, 2020, https://www.reference.com/world-view/difference-between-community-society-e0707c82ee8c07d.

[145] Reference.com.

[146] Barrett, *Competencies for Democratic Culture*, 15.

B.   DERIVING A SOCIETAL FRAGILITY FRAMEWORK

Fragility has been examined and applied to various contexts; however, democracies, particularly more-developed ones, are often overlooked in these types of evaluations. Given the growing concern over democratic backsliding in the United States, it is necessary to have a framework that can provide a more in-depth examination of underlying factors contributing to volatile social environments and leading to fragility. *Fragile*, at its most basic dictionary definition, means "easily broken or destroyed; constitutionally delicate: lacking in vigor."[147] When applied in other contexts, such as nations and social systems, its definition reflects the nuances of each. This section explores a few of the most common frameworks used for fragility, as well as their limitations when applied to more established democratic nations and societies.

1.   Current Fragility Frameworks

Three main frameworks examine fragility in states, territories, and communities. The United States has developed a Global Fragility Strategy as part of its National Security Strategy to help identify and partner with fragile states looking to democratize.[148] Another large framework, developed by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), examines fragility across multiple components.[149] Last, fragility has been examined at a more micro-level in its application to communities in the context of emergency management.[150] Each established framework provides some insight on components valuable to exploring fragility within societies.

The U.S. Department of State and other agency partners developed the Global Fragility Strategy as part of the Global Fragility Act of 2019.[151] According to the strategy,

---

[147] *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. "fragile," accessed December 10, 2021, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fragile.

[148] Department of State et al., *United States Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability* (Washington, DC: Global Publishing Solutions, 2020), 1.

[149] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *States of Fragility 2022* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2022), https://doi.org/10.1787/c7fedf5e-en.

[150] Hodges, "Systems Fragility," 9.

[151] Department of State et al., *Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability*, 1.

states are deemed fragile if their instability, exhibited through signs of increased violence and armed conflict, has the potential to threaten security and operations of the United States.[152] The Department of State finds that "fragility results from ineffective . . . and unaccountable governance, weak social cohesion, and/or corrupt institutions or leaders who lack respect for human rights."[153] To improve a state's stability and resilience, the strategy outlines that assistance from the United States focuses on supporting and allocating tailored resources toward political drivers that contribute to such conditions.[154] These political drivers cover a wide range of activities, such as assisting in areas of policy, strengthening and creating institutions, combating disinformation, helping to build various types of partnerships, and building strong social networks focused on inclusion.[155] The strategy is valuable to the categorization of fragile states as it identifies important factors that contribute to instability.

The OECD provides yet another framework for examining fragility in countries and territories. The organization utilizes five domains—economic, environmental, political, security, and society—with plans to add a sixth dimension for human capital.[156] Society, the third largest contributor to fragility after environmental and economic dimensions, is examined through eight indicators that affect social capital and social cohesion.[157] Indeed, indicators such as access to justice, gender inequality, the strength of civil society, and horizontal inequality contribute to a country/territory's societal fragility score.[158] The organization compiles data from resources such as the Gender Inequality Index to evaluate the various indications.[159] Unlike the Global Fragility Strategy of the United States, which primarily examines countries wanting to democratize, the OECD's framework applies to a

---

[152] Department of State et al., 1.

[153] Department of State et al., 3n.

[154] Department of State et al., 7.

[155] Department of State et al., 8–10.

[156] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *States of Fragility 2022*.

[157] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

[158] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

[159] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

variety of governing types.[160] Many of the indicators used to examine society, however, are important features of democracies, so they can provide insight into societal fragility.

Another framework for fragility comes from its application in emergency management, where community fragility is examined.[161] In her exploration of fragility in complex systems, Lori Hodges defines fragility as "a quality that leads to weakness or failure within a system, sometimes resulting in cascading effects (the domino) that can lead to systemic failures and collapse."[162] As a result, community fragility is the result of tipping points that individually are not failure points but collectively can cause a system to fail.[163] Hodges and Anirudh Krishna find that social capital plays a significant role in a community's ability to be resilient in high-stress situations and emergencies, as it impacts the quality of relationships within a community.[164] Hodges, Krishna, and Putnam agree that the three primary components of social capital include trust, social norms, and networks.[165] Adding to the argument, Hodges contends that social cohesion and vulnerability also contribute to a community's stability, as weakness in this area can negatively impact trust within the community and the effectiveness of institutions.[166] Indeed, Krishna argues that social capital is necessary for social cohesion and society's participation within democracies.[167] Hodges and Haider agree with the need for social cohesion to reduce social vulnerabilities and, as a result, fragility.[168] As such, communities

---

[160] The OECD profiles 57 countries/territories, including Yemen, South Sudan, Somalia, Central African Republic, Syria, Chad, Afghanistan, Haiti, Burundi, Iraq, Sudan, Congo, Mali, Venezuela, Zimbabwe, Equatorial Guinea, Libya, Cameroon, and Uganda.

[161] *Community* is defined as "unified groups of individuals with a common purpose before, during and after emergencies and disasters," including non-governmental agencies, volunteers, homeowners' associations, and religious-affiliated groups. Hodges, "Systems Fragility," 13–14.

[162] Hodges, 15.

[163] Hodges, 16.

[164] Hodges, "Systems Fragility," 25; Anirudh Krishna, *Active Social Capital: Tracing the Roots of Development and Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), ix, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[165] Hodges, "Systems Fragility," 25–26.

[166] Hodges, 29.

[167] Krishna, *Active Social Capital*, 31.

[168] Hodges, "Systems Fragility," 26; Huma Haider, *Community-Based Approaches to Peacebuilding in Conflict-Affected and Fragile Contexts* (Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham, 2009), 12, http://epapers.bham.ac.uk/642/.

with higher social capital can navigate more severe problem sets, resulting in increased resiliency and less fragility.[169] While there are differences between societies and communities, including the challenges associated with greater diversity, much can be learned from the relationship between social capital and resiliency.

Each of the frameworks provides its own perspective and approach to exploring fragility, serving as a jumping-off point for a further examination of democratic societies. However, much is left to be explored.

2.   Current Framework Limitations

The current frameworks for examining fragility provide several underlying similarities; however, no single framework provides the necessary indicators for the complexity of a society within a democratic nation. Due to the significance of culture within societies and nations, a framework examining fragility should reflect and analyze the values and attitudes of the nation.

One of main limitations of the established frameworks, specifically those of the United States and OECD, is their applicability to only certain states and territories. Indeed, both approaches are used to examine either states looking to democratize or states/territories that use alternative governing methods.[170] Their application impacts the methodology and criteria utilized to evaluate fragility. Indeed, while the U.S. model lacks more specific criteria to evaluate states, both frameworks leverage data sources that often place more-developed nations as outliers. Therefore, more-developed nations might not categorically be considered fragile; however, examining social dynamics further might show otherwise. Additionally, while the OECD's framework is more specific and identifies important factors that contribute to a fragile society, the theoretical implications of such factors on behavior, beliefs, and values that provide the basis for culture are missing. Thus, while both the Global Fragility Strategy and the OECD's construct provide a beneficial

---

169 Krishna, *Active Social Capital*, 2.

170 Department of State et al., *Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability*, 1; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *States of Fragility 2020* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1787/ba7c22e7-en.

starting point, they are insufficient as individual frameworks to evaluate societal fragility for established democratic nations.

The framework used to explore fragility within communities, while more flexible in examining larger social dynamics, does not entirely account for the supportive role of institutions in maintaining societal stability. Indeed, while Hodges's framework acknowledges the influence of institutions in community fragility, it does not appear to be a crucial component for communities. Regardless, the role and relationship of institutions, a theme that appears in all three frameworks, is worth incorporating into the societal fragility framework. Indeed, Trauschweizer and Miner argue that the measurement of state fragility is based partly on the relativity of the state institutions' effectiveness to a baseline expectation of theoretical and lawful determinations of a sovereign state.[171] The OECD concurs, incorporating the impact of institutions in its environmental dimension— determined the largest contributor to state fragility.[172] Similarly, regarding social systems, Putnam notes that institutions can foster growth or decline in social capital, as they provide a means of participation for citizens.[173] Adding to the argument, Krishna suggests that due to institutions' ability to either encourage or discourage citizen participation, they impact society's effectiveness.[174] Thus, from the perspective of both a nation and society, institutions can contribute to fragility.

If the United States and other democratic nations wish to better understand the volatile state of affairs and the increasing growth of extremism, current frameworks surrounding fragility need to dig deeper to evaluate factors creating changes in society and making it more fragile.

---

[171] The other two parts include general functions and political processes of the state. Ingo Trauschweizer, *Failed States and Fragile Societies: A New World Disorder?* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2014), 5, https://www.amazon.com/Failed-States-Fragile-Societies-Disorder/dp/0821420917.

[172] Other areas of examination in the environmental dimension include climate and health risks. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *States of Fragility 2020*.

[173] Putnam, *Democracies in Flux*, 17.

[174] Krishna, *Active Social Capital*, 9–10.

C.   FACTORS IMPACTING SOCIETAL FRAGILITY

By incorporating pieces of the various current frameworks on fragility, this thesis elaborates a framework of societal fragility through the lens of social norms, institutions, trust, and social cohesion. The selection of four dimensions is the result of their relevance to culture, a defining characteristic of both societies and nations. In this framework, social cohesion is used in lieu of social networks, as it is a better indicator of participation and effectiveness of social networks.[175] Institutions are also incorporated into the framework, as the feedback loop between institutions and society greatly influences both society and the overall well-being of the nation. The following subsections examine each of the four dimensions more thoroughly, including each dimension's contribution to societal fragility.

1.   Social Norms

Social norms are seen throughout various aspects of society and provide guidance for how citizens are expected to interact within society. Schultz et al. argue that social norms have a significant influence on individuals' behavior.[176] According to Jonathan Baron, "A social norm is a principle or rule of behavior, which is maintained among members of a group of people both by trying to follow it and by trying to enforce it upon each other."[177] Indeed, Bursztyn, Egorov, and Fiorin posit that social norms help individuals differentiate between desirable and less desirable behavior, even behavior considered stigmatized.[178] Social norms also impact a society's culture, as they influence which values the majority of citizens collectively agree on.[179] A democracy, therefore, is

---

[175] Alexandre, Willman, and Aslam, *Societal Dynamics and Fragility*, 10.

[176] P. Wesley Schultz et al., "The Constructive, Destructive, and Reconstructive Power of Social Norms," *Psychological Science* 18, no. 5 (2007): 429, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40064634.

[177] Jonathan Baron, "Social Norms for Citizenship," *Social Research* 85, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 229, ProQuest.

[178] Leonardo Bursztyn, Georgy Egorov, and Stefano Fiorin, "From Extreme to Mainstream: The Erosion of Social Norms," *American Economic Review* 110, no. 11 (November 2020): 1, https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20171175.

[179] Wagoner, Luna, and Glaveanu, *The Road to Actualized Democracy*, 226.

unsustainable without a significant number of its citizens accepting and practicing democratic norms and values.[180]

While laws provide a certain level of guidance for behavior in society, social norms are primarily determined and maintained by the group—in this case, society.[181] Benabou and Tirole have found that norms can be the result of various factors, including rewards and punishments in society; concerns about individuals' own behaviors that make them more cognizant of others; and actions such as volunteering, which expose an individual to others' behavior.[182] While Thomas Risse concurs that social interaction influences norms, he adds that institutionalization, discourse, morality, and persuasion can also lead to the creation of social norms.[183] He says that a combination of multiple methods—not a single mechanism—creates the acceptance of norms.[184] Despite the various ways that norms might be adopted, citizens are responsible for enforcing and monitoring them.[185] Thus, social norms can shift and adapt over time depending on changes within the greater society.

When it comes to democracy, social norms tend to center on civil liberties. One category of norms can be classified by citizens' treatment of and interaction with each other. Open-mindedness, respect, tolerance, forbearance, and reciprocity are among the key norms supporting democracy.[186] It is through collective acceptance and adherence to such norms that a democratic society can operate and navigate through conflicts.[187] Tolerance—the ability to acknowledge and accept differing opinions, viewpoints, or

---

[180] Wagoner, Luna, and Glaveanu, 276.

[181] Baron, "Social Norms for Citizenship," 229.

[182] Roland Benabou and Jean Tirole, "Laws and Norms" (working paper, National Bureau of Economic Research, 2011), 28, https://doi.org/10.3386/w17579.

[183] Thomas Risse, "International Norms and Domestic Change: Arguing and Communicative Behavior in the Human Rights Area," *Politics & Society* 27, no. 4 (December 1999): 530, https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329299027004004.

[184] Risse, 530.

[185] Wagoner, Luna, and Glaveanu, *The Road to Actualized Democracy*, 227.

[186] Barrett, *Competencies for Democratic Culture*, 12–13.

[187] Baron, "Social Norms for Citizenship," 229.

beliefs from one's own—can work in opposition at times in democracy.[188] In one regard, free speech is highly valued by democracies, which means that citizens' tolerance can extend to hate speech.[189] To counteract such a dynamic, tolerance can manifest in citizens' ability to speak out against speech or actions they might disagree with or find wrong.[190] Therefore, a resulting feedback loop allows the majority to determine what is agreeable or disagreeable in society. Reciprocity and forbearance are other important norms developed by democratic societies, as they require a measure of trust that other members will show restraint and mutual respect in their actions, particularly when others are in need.[191] This norm also contributes to an efficient society.[192] Social norms in democratic societies usually involve civil liberties, which balance both individualism and collectivism.

Another set of social norms common within democracies focuses on citizen accountability. Self-efficacy, responsibility, and civic-mindedness all require a certain level of self-awareness, particularly of one's own ability, on the citizen's part.[193] For example, self-efficacy involves the individual's self-confidence to understand, analyze, and act on issues.[194] Self-efficacy, however, is insufficient unless it is paired with an actual ability.[195] Therefore, a high level of self-efficacy paired with a high level of ability stimulates individuals to engage actively while low self-efficacy and a high level of ability often result in inaction by the individual.[196] For democracies, which rely on civic engagement from citizens, low self-efficacy can have detrimental effects. Civic-mindedness also requires self-awareness among citizens about their role and responsibility

---

[188] *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. "tolerance," accessed June 27, 2022, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tolerance; Tarah Foster Williams, "The Fragility of Tolerance: Rights, Responsibilities, and the Challenge of Speaking Up" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2017), 3–5, http://hdl.handle.net/2142/97721.

[189] Williams, "The Fragility of Tolerance," 3–4.

[190] Williams, 3–4.

[191] Putnam, *Democracies in Flux*, 7–8.

[192] Putnam, 8.

[193] Barrett, *Competencies for Democratic Culture*, 12–13.

[194] Barrett, 42.

[195] Barrett, 42.

[196] Barrett, 42.

within society and their communities.[197] Among these responsibilities are acknowledging that one's behavior impacts others, actively contributing within society, and pursuing conversations with others who have different perspectives or backgrounds.[198] Social norms, therefore, comprise behaviors and attitudes that also require the citizen to self-reflect.

For democracies, social norms help citizens navigate the challenges of a diverse society. Levitsky and Ziblatt's metaphor makes the connection clear: "Like oxygen or clean water, a norm's importance is quickly revealed by its absence."[199] Thus, examining social norms as a component of societal fragility can provide valuable insight.

2. Institutions

Institutions come in many different forms and have various functions. Institutions include not only formal branches of government but also organizations such as law enforcement, educational facilities, and media outlets.[200] As such, they provide a wide range of services for society. The establishment and function of institutions in society are ultimately designed to aid in satisfying core needs, such as security, education, and economic regulation, which require a significant amount of public trust.[201] While not all institutions require elections for appointment, voting is one means by which society can select or remove figures from positions.[202] Indeed, society upholds a belief in institutions to act in the best interest of citizens and to uphold the principles of democracy.[203] Citizens' perceptions of institutional effectiveness and, thus, legitimacy are based primarily on two

---

[197] Barrett, 41.

[198] Barrett, 41.

[199] Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 102.

[200] Paul Howe, "Eroding Norms and Democratic Deconsolidation," *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 4 (October 2017): 16, https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0061.

[201] Mark Warren, "Trust and Democracy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Social and Political Trust*, ed. Eric M. Uslaner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 77–78, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190274801.013.5.

[202] Warren, 80–81.

[203] Warren, 80–82.

significant factors—the institution's ability to provide an adequate service and its alignment with democratic principles.

While institutions provide a wide variety of services to members of society, one of their key functions is to provide citizens with factual information to enable informed decision-making.[204] Essential to democracy is the ability of its citizens to obtain, process, and develop informed decisions.[205] The opportunity to generate informed opinions is a shared responsibility, however, as part of the civic duty of citizens is to think critically and analyze the information they are consuming.[206] Regardless, institutions, especially media outlets and social media platforms, have a significant influence on the information that is presented and consumed by society.[207] Thus, institutions can impact how citizens process information, whether fact or opinion, as well as transform their perspectives and biases.[208] Institutions, therefore, can have a widespread influence on society.

Political parties are also an influential institution in society, not to mention their corresponding elected officials. As one criterion for democracies involves holding free and competitive elections, differences among political parties are healthy and necessary.[209] The parties help to serve as gatekeepers for democracy as long as, politically, they strive to uphold and prioritize democratic values and norms themselves.[210] Despite any differences between political parties, maintaining a democracy is a shared responsibility.[211] Additionally, elected officials, through their actions and words, can

---

[204] Jennifer Kavanagh and Michael Rich, *Truth Decay: An Initial Exploration of the Diminishing Role of Facts and Analysis in American Public Life* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018), 33, https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2314.

[205] Dahl, *On Democracy*, 38.

[206] Barrett, *Competencies for Democratic Culture*, 42.

[207] Luke J. Matthews et al., "Individual Differences in Resistance to Truth Decay: Exploring the Role of Reasoning and Cognitive Biases" (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2022), 2, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA112-17.html.

[208] Matthews et al., 1.

[209] Linz and Stepan, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*, 5.

[210] Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 24–26.

[211] Levitsky and Ziblatt, 24–26.

control social norms—whether democratic or undemocratic.[212] Therefore, both political parties and politicians act as filters in maintaining democracy.[213] Due to the role of elections, the relationship between citizens, political parties, and politicians is a cyclical one.

Institutions serve many functions for societies and nations. Not only do they provide core services to citizens, but many also have the ability to purposefully influence perceptions, biases, and worldviews of those they serve. As such, institutions are worthy of examination in the context of societal fragility.

3.   Trust

Trust is simple to define but complex in nature. Succinctly, trust is "assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something."[214] There are, however, many different forms of trust, including social, generalized, and institutional.[215] The most basic form, social trust, is built through an individual's interactions and direct experiences with another individual or entity.[216] Building trust with different individuals or entities that are different from oneself or with which one has no first-hand experience requires generalized trust.[217] This type of trust leverages social norms, which provide general behavioral guidelines and expectations for social interactions.[218] Warren also delineates two types of institutional trust—first order and second order—which are determined by the function of the institution.[219] Institutions that provide some type of good or service to the public, such as national security, criminal justice, public information, or natural resource management, rely significantly on public trust, so they fall under first-

---

[212] Levitsky and Ziblatt, 25.

[213] Levitsky and Ziblatt, 20.

[214] *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. "trust," accessed June 27, 2022, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trust.

[215] Warren, "Trust and Democracy."

[216] Warren, 83–84.

[217] Warren, 84–85.

[218] Warren, 84–85.

[219] Warren, 89–91.

order institutional trust.[220] In democracies, society expects these institutions to be more removed from politicization.[221] Second-order institutions, however, rely less on public trust, as a certain level of mistrust is expected due to their being driven by political interests.[222] Political parties and politicians make up much of this category of trust, thus requiring public engagement, discourse, and voting to ensure a balance is struck between the nation's and citizens' needs.[223] If second-order institutions are left unchecked, society can easily move away from democracy as political interests become the primary driver over constitutional duties.[224] For society, such a shift away from constitutional duties can create a snowball effect toward further distrust.

Within democracy, trust has several functions. For one, trust provides a sense of security for society, as citizens trust others in society to operate under collective norms and with altruism.[225] Trust also provides society with certainty, as actions, behaviors, and outcomes can be somewhat predicted, allowing opportunities for collective action.[226] Furthermore, this predictability allows society to be more productive in times of conflict, as citizens spend little time worrying about adherence to societal norms, such as reciprocity.[227] Indeed, when citizens have a high level of trust in other citizens, they are more likely to volunteer, participate in their communities, show tolerance toward differing views, and even demonstrate trustworthiness themselves.[228]

According to several scholars—Lenard, Miller, Uslaner, and Warren—trust is greater among citizens with shared interests, which can have both positive and negative

---

[220] Warren, 89–90.

[221] Warren, 89–90.

[222] Warren, 90–92.

[223] Warren, 90–92.

[224] Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 126.

[225] Warren, "Trust and Democracy," 75–76.

[226] Warren, 75–76.

[227] Putnam, *Democracies in Flux*, 7.

[228] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, revised and updated edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 136–37.

effects.[229] Lenard and Miller argue that having a shared interest and identity, such as nationality, can bridge gaps between diverse groups of people.[230] Indeed, Hodges argues that frequent interactions result in higher levels of trust, which bolster a communities' resilience.[231] On the other hand, trust has the potential to reinforce in-group and out-group dynamics.[232] Indeed, while Lenard and Miller recognize the benefits of a collective identity, they also posit that stronger in-groups and out-groups can result in the discontinuity effect, whereby distrust is automatically assumed against those in the out-group, resulting in competitiveness and the inability to work collectively.[233] Therefore, while high levels of trust can have several positive impacts on society and citizen engagement, there is also the potential for detrimental effects.

One of the significant challenges with trust is that it is hard to earn and easy to destroy.[234] Kramer argues that this characteristic is the result of citizens' more easily identifying and accepting negative events that fuel distrust, holding their credibility higher than more positive events that build trust.[235] Furthermore, a lack of transparency and accountability reduces trust, particularly in the case of government institutions.[236] While initial interactions often lend a modicum of trust, one might consider this trust to be merely "giving the benefit of the doubt," but a robust level of trust is built over continuous

---

[229] Patti Tamara Lenard and David Miller, "Trust and National Identity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Social and Political Trust*, ed. Eric M. Uslaner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 57, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190274801.013.36; Eric M. Uslaner, "The Study of Trust," in *The Oxford Handbook of Social and Political Trust*, ed. Eric M. Uslaner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 5–6, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190274801.013.39; Warren, "Trust and Democracy," 81–82.

[230] Lenard and Miller, "Trust and National Identity," 57.

[231] Hodges, "Systems Fragility," 32.

[232] Warren, "Trust and Democracy," 83–84.

[233] Lenard and Miller, "Trust and National Identity," 61.

[234] Roderick M. Kramer, "Ingroup–Outgroup Trust: Barriers, Benefits, and Bridges," in *The Oxford Handbook of Social and Political Trust*, ed. Eric M. Uslaner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 100–1, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190274801.013.37.

[235] Kramer, 100–1.

[236] Nabamita Dutta and Sanjukta Roy, "State Fragility and Transparency," *International Journal of Development Issues* 15, no. 3 (2016): 203, ProQuest.

43

interactions and experiences.[237] Trust, therefore, can easily fluctuate between trustworthiness and distrust.

4. Social Cohesion

Social cohesion is the ability of a society to safeguard its members, thus minimizing inequalities and social divisions.[238] Indeed, strong social cohesion leads to increased collaboration and collective action.[239] As a result, social cohesion allows society to navigate conflict in a productive way, without violence.[240] Therefore, social cohesion plays a significant role in state stability.[241] When social cohesion is lacking, discrepancies over social inequalities and disparities frequently lead to conflict.[242] Hodges contends that common social vulnerabilities include inaccessible resources—for example, electricity, political representation, justice, water, healthcare, or social capital.[243]

Social cohesion impacts many of the topics previously covered—social norms, institutions, and trust. Similar to social norms, social cohesion also benefits from a shared national identity, as it helps to strengthen institutions and their effectiveness.[244] Additionally, changes in social norms impact social cohesion, as expectations of interacting changes reshape groups.[245] Hodges posits that social cohesion also impacts both the trust and strength of formal institutions.[246] She argues there is a direct correlation between social cohesion, trust, and institutions: when social cohesion decreases, trust and

---

237 Uslaner, "The Study of Trust," 6–7.

238 Evie Browne, *State Fragility and Social Cohesion*, GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1027 (Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham), 1, https://gsdrc.org/publications/state-fragility-and-social-cohesion/.

239 Browne, 3.

240 Browne, 4.

241 Browne, 5.

242 Browne, 4.

243 Hodges, "Systems Fragility," 29–30.

244 Browne, *State Fragility and Social Cohesion*, 6.

245 Browne, 4.

246 Hodges, "Systems Fragility," 29.

institutional strength also decrease, and vice versa.[247] Therefore, social cohesion is sown throughout many aspects of societal fragility.

D.   CONCLUSION

The societal fragility framework utilizes several components—social norms, institutions, trust, and social cohesion—allowing for an exploration of the unique characteristics of nations and societies. Indeed, the dynamics of society have a profound impact on democracy, so they are worth examining even in the most well-established of democracies.[248] Drawing from other frameworks on fragility, societal fragility aims to examine the breadth and depth of social dynamics in a necessary attempt to understand the growth and increased acceptance of extremism. The interwoven pieces of social norms, institutions, trust, and social cohesion provide an opportunity to evaluate fragility from a familiar yet new, wider perspective. As extremism typically begins with an individual's underlying grievance, whether real or perceived, causing a feeling of existential threat, societal fragility can provide insight into the complexities driving its growing acceptance.

---

[247] Hodges, 29.

[248] Putnam, *Democracies in Flux*, 6.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

IV. CASE STUDY: THE UNITED STATES—JANUARY 6

The storming of the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021, was, on its surface, the result of citizens' beliefs and discontent surrounding the 2020 election results. The January 6 events are worth examining, particularly in the context of societal fragility and extremism due to the unique characteristic of the individuals—not previously associated with groups or militias considered extremist—partaking in the storming.[249] Pape's finding about extremists—their need to take significant action to rectify a grievance—suggests that existential threats, which are a key underlying factor in extremism, existed among a wider population of citizens. Therefore, a further examination of January 6 might provide some additional insight into the influence of societal fragility and an increased acceptability of extremist behavior.

This chapter begins by exploring the reactions against U.S. civil rights legislation in the 1960s, which have contributed to underlying tensions in American society. It then examines two contributing factors in the tumultuous environment leading up to the presidential election: COVID-19 and law enforcement reform. Following the historical context, the chapter covers multiple events and circumstances surrounding the 2020 election, as well as January 6. The chapter concludes by applying the societal fragility framework to gain further insight into January 6.

A. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Before the 1960s, national efforts began to move the United States toward becoming more egalitarian through legislation and programs aimed at improving racial injustice.[250] It was during the 1960s, however, that the civil rights movement gained

---

[249] Affiliations with the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, Three Percenters, Aryan Brotherhood, and others were examined. Robert A. Pape, *American Face of Insurrection* (Chicago: Chicago Project on Security and Threats, 2022), 12, https://d3qi0qp55mx5f5.cloudfront.net/cpost/i/docs/Pape_-_American_Face_of_Insurrection_(2022-01-05).pdf?mtime=1654548769; Robert A. Pape and Keven Ruby, "The Capitol Rioters Aren't Like Other Extremists," *Atlantic*, February 2, 2021, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/02/the-capitol-rioters-arent-like-other-extremists/617895/.

[250] Seth Radwell and Jonathan Israel, *American Schism: How the Two Enlightenments Hold the Secret to Healing Our Nation* (Austin, TX: Greenleaf Book Group Press, 2021), 253.

significant traction due in large part to Martin Luther King Jr., along with millions of others who joined in protests and marches.[251] That decade brought some pivotal legislation toward greater equality with the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act.[252] While many citizens viewed these events as progress, these civil and legislative efforts also contributed to the hardening of racial and political divisions for others.[253] The rise in additional movements—for women's and gay rights—over the next several years generated concerns among some conservatives, leading to feelings of an existential threat.[254] In fact, as several scholars—most notably Carothers, Radwell, Levitsky, and Ziblatt—argue, it was the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s that spiraled the United States into a different, deeper kind of polarization and politicking.[255] As such, the progress toward equal rights brought with it some divisions within society as well.

Over the next two decades, the United States experienced some notable political shifts and changes. During the 1980s, conservatives gained control of the executive branch with the election of Ronald Reagan.[256] Part of Reagan's appeal to the masses was his populist rhetoric, which condemned the weaponization of "big government" by liberals and promoted overall government distrust.[257] A greater separation between the two main political parties—Republicans and Democrats—occurred under Reagan's presidency.[258] Despite any progress made toward advancing equality during the 1960s and 1970s, the 1980s and 1990s brought about further socioeconomic and racial separation throughout

---

[251] Radwell and Israel, 254.

[252] Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 144; Radwell and Israel, *American Schism*, 260.

[253] Radwell and Israel, *American Schism*, 265; Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 144.

[254] Radwell and Israel, *American Schism*, 265.

[255] Thomas Carothers and Andrew O'Donohue, *Democracies Divided: The Global Challenge of Political Polarization* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2019), 65, http://muse.jhu.edu/book/67890; Radwell and Israel, *American Schism*; Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*.

[256] Radwell and Israel, *American Schism*, 265.

[257] Terri Bimes and Quinn Mulroy, "The Rise and Decline of Presidential Populism," *Studies in American Political Development* 18, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 140, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898588X04000082; Radwell and Israel, *American Schism*, 266.

[258] Carothers and O'Donohue, *Democracies Divided*, 73–74.

much of society.[259] The 1990s also included a more aggressive form of politics in the legislature—"politics as warfare"—due in large part to Newt Gingrich and others, mostly conservatives.[260] As shown throughout this case study, several of these themes still exist today in the United States.

While this section provides just an overview of the civil rights movement and its aftermath, the 1960s and 1970s have had long-standing effects on society and the country. It was during this time that underlying sentiments about racial, ethnic, ideological, and political differences likely germinated in current citizens.[261] With newfound historical insight, the case study moves on to the 2020 presidential election year, which brought its own challenges.

B.   CONTRIBUTING FACTORS LEADING UP TO THE ELECTION

In the United States, 2020 was a tumultuous year, so the context of environmental and political conditions helps set the tone for the January 6 event. During the early months of the year, COVID-19 started wreaking havoc in several ways across the United States. The unknowns of the virus not only triggered a high level of fear among citizens, but they also stressed the healthcare system, created economic hardships, and challenged the effectiveness of institutions in one fell swoop.[262] As both society and the nation's leadership grappled with how to reduce the impact of COVID, a strong political divide began emerging around the best approaches to prevention and treatment.[263] According to the review of the COVID response by the House Select Committee on Oversight and Reform, politics rather than science often provided the guiding principles in these

---

[259] Radwell and Israel, *American Schism*, 266–72.

[260] The concept of "politics as warfare" involves an unwillingness to compromise, name-calling toward the opposition, and other methods that might obstruct legislation efforts. Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 148–49; Carothers and O'Donohue, *Democracies Divided*, 74.

[261] Carothers and O'Donohue, *Democracies Divided*, 66–68.

[262] Lauren Bauer et al., "Ten Facts about COVID-19 and the U.S. Economy," Brookings Institution, September 17, 2020, https://www.brookings.edu/research/ten-facts-about-covid-19-and-the-u-s-economy/.

[263] Claudia Deane, Kim Parker, and John Gramlich, *A Year of U.S. Public Opinion on the Coronavirus Pandemic* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2021), https://www.pewresearch.org/2021/03/05/a-year-of-u-s-public-opinion-on-the-coronavirus-pandemic/.

49

efforts.[264] In addition, the CDC, whose critical function was to provide accurate and reliable information to the public, was undermined by then-President Trump and White House staff, as it was prevented from participating in press briefings in an attempt to downplay the severity of the virus.[265] Furthermore, uncertainty and fear of the virus created the opportunity for misinformation and disinformation to spread more easily as people sought to gain knowledge, ultimately influencing their own interpretations and perspectives on the virus.[266] This spread created an "infodemic" as the misinformation and disinformation added to the already significant volume of information about the virus.[267] Social media companies were then pushed to form new policies to regulate the false information, in turn generating citizen concern over the violation of free speech.[268] As a result, COVID was both highly publicized and politicized in the United States. Polarization in society grew, with one side of society feeling frustration toward those who refused to follow mask mandates and social distancing precautions, while the other side believed that masks were ineffective, even oppressive.[269] Ultimately, the politicization, the often contradictory nature of available information, and a lack of transparency by various institutions fed into and exacerbated existing tensions in society. As COVID was still rampant throughout the presidential election, it is important to acknowledge its contribution to growing societal tensions.

Another large schism in 2020 involved law enforcement and the sentiment of unfair, targeted, and excessive use of force on minorities, specifically black people. Highly

---

[264] House Committee on Oversight and Reform, Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, *Inefficient, Ineffective, and Inequitable: The Trump Administration's Failed Response to the Coronavirus Crisis: Interim Staff Report* (Washington, DC: House of Representatives, 2020), 2–3.

[265] Erin Banco, "Emails Reveal New Details of Trump White House Interference in CDC Covid Planning," POLITICO, November 12, 2021, https://www.politico.com/news/2021/11/12/trump-cdc-covid-521128.

[266] Deane, Parker, and Gramlich, *Public Opinion on the Coronavirus Pandemic*.

[267] Baker, Wade, and Walsh, "Challenges of Responding to Misinformation," 103–4.

[268] Baker, Wade, and Walsh, 103–4.

[269] Patrick Van Kessel and Dennis Quinn, "Both Republicans and Democrats Cite Masks as a Negative Effect of COVID-19, but for Very Different Reasons," Pew Research Center, October 29, 2020, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/10/29/both-republicans-and-democrats-cite-masks-as-a-negative-effect-of-covid-19-but-for-very-different-reasons/.

publicized events including the deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd contributed to the growth of a nationwide, and eventually global, social movement—Black Lives Matter (BLM)—which encouraged important conversations and drew attention to systemic racism with a heavy focus on the justice system.[270] While BLM was founded in 2013, the deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd fueled a powerful resurgence.[271] The use of force by police officers in these incidents was publicly viewed as excessive and unwarranted, and it left many citizens questioning the parameters for such force by officers, especially in the case of lower-level offenses.[272] Starting in May 2020, the United States saw months of demonstrations and protests across the nation, encouraging the "defunding of police" and the need for reformed policing practices.[273] Convoluting the main issue of reform, however, were the mixed perceptions, understandings, and definitions of what defunding the police meant.[274] The variances created further challenges in public discourse, exacerbating polarization within society. As with COVID, while some states and cities were quick to address the challenge—Colorado, New York, Virginia, Sacramento, and Washington, DC, among others—there were still stark differences in perspectives across partisan and racial lines.[275] On August 28, 2020, approximately 50,000 people from around the nation attended the March on Washington to draw attention to the inequalities

---

[270] Jennifer Cobbina-Dungy et al., "'Defund the Police': Perceptions among Protesters in the 2020 March on Washington," *Criminology & Public Policy* 21, no. 1 (2022): 148, https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12571.

[271] "About Page," Black Lives Matter, accessed December 1, 2022, https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/.

[272] Kenny Lo, "Assessing the State of Police Reform," Center for American Progress, July 16, 2020, https://www.americanprogress.org/article/assessing-state-police-reform/.

[273] Cobbina-Dungy et al., "Defund the Police," 148–49.

[274] Based on polling, defunding the police took on multiple meanings and understandings. Some felt that completely eliminating law enforcement was beneficial. Yet others, feeling that dissolving law enforcement would result in complete anarchy, believed defunding would mean reforming practices and reallocating funds toward more training. Still others felt as though law enforcement was ineffective and the funds should be reallocated to other community agencies and organizations that could better manage conflict and security. Cobbina-Dungy et al., 164.

[275] Lo, "Assessing the State of Police Reform"; Carroll Doherty et al., *Majority of Public Favors Giving Civilians the Power to Sue Police Officers for Misconduct* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2020), 5, https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/07/09/majority-of-public-favors-giving-civilians-the-power-to-sue-police-officers-for-misconduct/.

in civil rights, specifically targeting voting and policing.[276] Based on the number of participants, BLM became one of the largest social movements in U.S. history.[277] Therefore, tensions within society continued to rise as the battle over systemic racism resulted in further political and racial divides.

In summary, signs of significant tensions within society were on the rise due to COVID and the concern over law enforcement reform. Feelings of fear, uncertainty, and disenfranchisement were exhibited by many citizens. Thus, the 2020 election occurred during a challenging environment and year for the United States.

C.   LOSING TRUST IN THE ELECTION

Losing trust in the election process occurred in several stages. The narratives around the election—surrounding a lack of voting security and conspiracy theories—came from many directions. For many citizens, these narratives led to significant distrust in the election process and its results.

As the presidential election quickly approached, false narratives began circulating over ballot security and contributed to the story buildup of a stolen election.[278] Pictures and videos of mail-in ballots that had allegedly been discarded in dumpsters were decontextualized and leveraged to spread false narratives.[279] These pictures were used primarily by social media influencers to question the reliability of the U.S. Postal Service and the mail-in system, suggesting that another key institutional process had been compromised.[280] Additionally, the rollout of a new method for voting—the drop box—which was supposed to be a flexible voting solution during the pandemic, created further

---

[276] Michael Wines and Aishvarya Kavi, "March on Washington 2020: Protesters Hope to Rekindle Spirit of 1963," *New York Times*, August 28, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/28/us/march-on-washington-2020.html.

[277] Larry Buchanan, Quoctrung Bui, and Jugal K. Patel, "Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in U.S. History," *New York Times*, July 3, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/03/us/george-floyd-protests-crowd-size.html.

[278] Center for an Informed Public et al., *The Long Fuse: Misinformation and the 2020 Election*, v1.3.0 (Stanford: Election Integrity Partnership, 2021), 49, https://purl.stanford.edu/tr171zs0069.

[279] Center for an Informed Public et al., 49–50.

[280] Center for an Informed Public et al., 52–59.

confusion and continued to build concern over voting security.[281] Also trending was #Sharpiegate, whose narrative involved conservative votes being invalidated due to voters being given sharpies for ballot marking.[282] Furthermore, other false narratives spread the myth that voter registration for hundreds of thousands of dead people was being used to cast Democrat votes.[283] While these trending stories were debunked and properly contextualized after surfacing, many citizens still believed in the conspiratorial efforts to interfere with the election.[284]

In September 2020, as the election got even closer, the "stop the steal" movement resurfaced and gained significant momentum among citizens.[285] The movement capitalized on the slew of misinformation and disinformation about ballots, proposing that the election was being stolen due to flaws in the election system and corruption.[286] The movement gained significant traction as citizens engaged via news articles, YouTube videos, and social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.[287] One of the biggest media proponents of the movement was Fox News, the most used and trusted news source for Republicans and, therefore, Trump supporters.[288] Further contributing to the elaborate narrative of stop the steal was the QAnon movement, which was deemed a domestic

---

[281] Center for an Informed Public et al., 51.

[282] Center for an Informed Public et al., 50.

[283] Center for an Informed Public et al., 50.

[284] Center for an Informed Public et al., 50.

[285] This was not the first instance that the phrase "stop the steal" had been used. Indeed, it was also used leading up to the 2016 presidential election by Roger Stone, who had long-standing ties with Trump. The phrase was also leveraged in other political contexts. Atlantic Council's DFRLab, "#StopTheSteal: Timeline of Social Media and Extremist Activities Leading to 1/6 Insurrection," Just Security, February 10, 2021, https://www.justsecurity.org/74622/stopthesteal-timeline-of-social-media-and-extremist-activities-leading-to-1-6-insurrection/.

[286] Atlantic Council's DFRLab.

[287] Center for an Informed Public et al., *The Long Fuse*, vii; Atlantic Council's DFRLab, "Timeline of Social Media and Extremist Activities."

[288] Mark Jurkowitz et al., *U.S. Media Polarization and the 2020 Election: A Nation Divided* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2020), https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2020/01/24/u-s-media-polarization-and-the-2020-election-a-nation-divided/.

terrorism threat by the FBI in 2019.[289] A predominantly radically right movement, QAnon frequently leverages multiple conspiracy theories to support the idea that Satanic-worshipping high-level influencers are controlling many aspects of society, including government, the media, and the movie industry.[290] During the election, the movement utilized a conspiracy theory that posed Trump as a prophet-like figure who was battling the "deep state," a corrupt circle of high-level leaders run by pedophiles, which helped to provide meaning behind an election being stolen.[291] This narrative involving Trump created the persona that he was a justice warrior fighting for democracy. The conspiracy theory and QAnon movement spread rapidly, with citizen knowledge and exposure to QAnon growing from about 23 percent in March 2020 to nearly 50 percent in September 2020.[292] When Trump was asked about the movement and its followers, Trump said, "I don't know much about the movement, other than I understand they like me very much, which I appreciate. . . . I've heard these are people that love our country."[293] While this statement might not directly condone QAnon or the actions of its followers, the undertone suggests a certain level of patriotism and nationalism in its efforts, which contributed to stop the steal's gaining momentum in society.

The great replacement was another conspiracy theory gaining traction on both sides of the political spectrum. In the United States, the great replacement connects race with the continuing challenges of immigration, capitalizing on fears and suggesting that white

---

[289] Jana Winter, "Exclusive: FBI Document Warns Conspiracy Theories Are a New Domestic Terrorism Threat," Yahoo! News, August 1, 2019, https://news.yahoo.com/fbi-documents-conspiracy-theories-terrorism-160000507.html.

[290] James Suber and Jacob Ware, "Examining Extremism: QAnon," *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (blog), June 10, 2021, https://www.csis.org/blogs/examining-extremism/examining-extremism-qanon.

[291] Robert A. Pape, *Deep, Divisive, Disturbing and Continuing: New Survey Shows Mainstream Support for Violence to Restore Trump Remains Strong* (Chicago: Chicago Project on Security and Threats, 2022), 27, https://cpost.uchicago.edu/publications/deep_divisive_disturbing_and_continuing_new_survey_shows_maintream_support_for_violence_to_restore_trump_remains_strong/.

[292] "5 Facts about the QAnon Conspiracy Theories," Pew Research Center, November 16, 2020, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/11/16/5-facts-about-the-qanon-conspiracy-theories/.

[293] Tom Dreisbach, "Here's What We Know about Links between Extremists and Trump Allies," NPR, July 11, 2022, https://www.npr.org/2022/07/11/1110961285/the-next-jan-6-committee-hearing-will-focus-on-the-role-of-qanon-and-extremists.

people are being purposefully replaced by people of other races and nationalities.[294] These fears create a perceived existential threat for some predominantly white citizens.[295] In his research on January 6, Pape found that the great replacement was a key driver of the insurrectionists.[296] Because these people perceive a direct threat to their place in society—whether socially, or economically, or politically—they feel discontent and hate toward others who are not white.[297] A number of citizens in the United States believe that Democrats are pushing immigration laws to significantly reduce white power and influence.[298] Indeed, some conservatives perceive immigration as "akin to invasion."[299] The great replacement incorporates growing fears involving potential inequalities with a policy-related topic—immigration—which has helped the theory gain mainstream traction.

As the presidential election began and votes started rolling in, elected and appointed officials started contributing to the narrative of a stolen election. In early November, Trump began contesting the validity of votes, particularly in swing states, and took legal action to preempt the counting of votes.[300] This action legitimized many citizens' already growing concern over election security. As investigations were taking place in swing states, Peter

---

[294] The theory, originating in 2011 with roots in French neofascism, was later leveraged by identitarians, members of a radical right movement. Identitarianism became a global movement and made its way to the United States. While the great replacement focuses on ethno-cultural concerns in Europe, race is the main focus of the theory in the United States. Christopher J. Adamczyk, "Gods versus Titans: Ideological Indicators of Identitarian Violence" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2020), 5–8, https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/66032; Lauretta Charlton, "What Is the Great Replacement?," *New York Times*, August 6, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/06/us/politics/grand-replacement-explainer.html.

[295] Charlton, "What Is the Great Replacement?"

[296] Pape, *Deep, Divisive, Disturbing and Continuing*, 27.

[297] Masood Farivar, "What Is the Great Replacement Theory?," Voice of America News, May 18, 2022, https://www.voanews.com/a/what-is-the-great-replacement-theory-/6578349.html.

[298] Joseph Chamie, "The 'Great Replacement' Theory Rejects History and Reality," *The Hill*, July 18, 2022, https://thehill.com/opinion/immigration/3564238-the-great-replacement-theory-rejects-history-and-reality/.

[299] Andrew H. Kydd, "Decline, Radicalization and the Attack on the U.S. Capitol," *Violence: An International Journal* 2, no. 1 (2021): 6, https://doi.org/10.1177/26330024211010043.

[300] Atlantic Council's DFRLab, "Timeline of Social Media and Extremist Activities"; Center for an Informed Public et al., *The Long Fuse*, vii.

Navarro, Trump's trade adviser, published the "Navarro Report."[301] The report, which used misinformation, focused on voter fraud and was used by Trump to publicly claim that it was "statistically impossible to have lost the 2020 election."[302] As Trump publicly condemned early election results, citizens started rallying and connecting online to organize protests. Several marches to Washington, DC, in support of Trump and stop the steal were coordinated by citizens—one of which was planned for January 6, 2021.[303] Elected officials including Congressman Paul Gosar of Arizona, Senator Josh Hawley of Missouri, Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, Congressman Madison Cawthorn of North Carolina, and Congressman Mo Brooks of Alabama also publicly condemned the results of the election and encouraged citizen attendance on January 6.[304] Still, as Joe Biden's presidential win became solidified through voting, Trump publicly and privately called on Vice President Mike Pence to overturn the election results during the congressional meeting.[305] Additionally, as online coordination among his supporters ramped up for the rally on January 6, Trump tweeted a call to action: "Big protest in D.C. on January 6. Be there, be wild!"[306] Even as of this writing, further information on the influence and involvement of elected and appointed officials leading up to January 6 continues to surface.

In sum, many citizens lost trust in the 2020 election for several reasons. The use of misinformation and disinformation targeting ballot security was leveraged, and the distrust culminated in the stop-the-steal movement, fueled by conspiracy theories and the

---

[301] Claudia Grisales, "Jan. 6 Panel Subpoenas Former Trump White House Trade Adviser Peter Navarro," NPR, February 9, 2022, https://www.npr.org/2022/02/09/1079670795/jan-6-panel-subpoenas-former-trump-white-house-trade-adviser-peter-navarro.

[302] The writers had leveraged misinformation to compile the report on election fraud. Grisales, "Jan. 6 Panel Subpoenas Former Trump White House Trade Adviser"; Atlantic Council's DFRLab, "Timeline of Social Media and Extremist Activities."

[303] Other well-attended marches took place on November 14, 2020, and December 12, 2020. Atlantic Council's DFRLab, "Timeline of Social Media and Extremist Activities."

[304] Atlantic Council's DFRLab.

[305] Brian Naylor, "Pence Says Trump Is Wrong to Insist VP Could Have Overturned Election Results," NPR, February 4, 2022, https://www.npr.org/2022/02/04/1078367504/pence-says-trump-is-wrong-to-insist-he-could-have-overturned-election-results.

[306] Atlantic Council's DFRLab, "Timeline of Social Media and Extremist Activities."

movement's promotion by political leaders. As such, the loss of trust from citizens came from multiple sources and gained extensive traction within society.

D.   JANUARY 6

The day of January 6 brought two separate events, one of which was the historic storming of the Capitol. As the rally at the Capitol was increasing in size and intensity, Trump spoke nearby at the Save America rally.[307] During his speech, Trump portrayed a threat to democracy and elicited a call to action, saying, "Now, it is up to Congress to confront this egregious assault on our democracy. And after this, we're going to walk down, and I'll be there with you, we're going to walk down, we're going to walk down."[308] Meanwhile, at the Capitol, what originally started as a peaceful protest quickly escalated into a riot.[309] Approximately 2,000 people attempted to make entry into the Capitol that day, more than 700 of whom have been formally charged with illegal entry.[310] Some of those citizens entered the House Chambers and other areas of the Capitol, stealing and vandalizing property and belongings.[311] Of those charged with making entry, 215 were charged with an act of violence.[312] As a result of the rapid violent escalation, about 140 police officers were injured, and five people died.[313]

---

[307] Helen C. Harton, Matthew Gunderson, and Martin J. Bourgeois, "'I'll Be There with You': Social Influence and Cultural Emergence at the Capitol on January 6," *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice* 26, no. 3 (2022): 2, https://doi.org/10.1037/gdn0000185.

[308] Trump was referencing walking down to the Capitol where the other rally was taking place. Atlantic Council's DFRLab, "Timeline of Social Media and Extremist Activities."

[309] Harton, Gunderson, and Bourgeois, "I'll Be There with You," 1.

[310] Pape, *American Face of Insurrection*, 3.

[311] Harton, Gunderson, and Bourgeois, "I'll Be There with You," 2.

[312] Pape includes the following six violent offenses: assaulting, resisting, or impeding certain officers; using a dangerous weapon; inflicting bodily injury; engaging in physical violence in a restricted building or grounds; destruction of government property; and threatening a federal officer. Pape, *American Face of Insurrection*, 14.

[313] Harton, Gunderson, and Bourgeois, "I'll Be There with You," 2.

E.   MAKING SENSE OF JANUARY 6

January 6 became a date for the history books in the United States. Labeled as an insurrection, the storming of the U.S. Capitol left many asking, How did we get here? And what does the future of the United States look like? While media and society have been quick to label those charged with entering the Capitol as prior right-wing extremists, Robert Pape found this was not the case, at least compared to historical data. Indeed, 89 percent of those arrested were found to have no prior extremist group, militia, or gang affiliations.[314] Through the analysis of demographics, such as socioeconomic status and education, Pape interestingly found that the people charged represented the mainstream population of the United States.[315] This finding indicates a shift in demographics from those historically arrested for right-wing extremist activities, as seen between 2015 and mid-2020.[316]

Examining the core underlying grievances of those in attendance on January 6 offers insight into the motivations and shared realities of those citizens. Using public statements by those charged, Pape identified that most of the underlying causes involved the belief that the election had been stolen, dissatisfaction with the government, concerns about violations of civil liberties, and the need to do one's patriotic duty.[317] A small percentage identified with being "swept up" in the crowd for one reason or another, whether wanting to witness history in the making or being captivated by the energy of the crowd.[318] This finding suggests that many citizens had self-awareness as the event evolved. While most people showed remorse for their illegal actions, very few abandoned

---

[314] Affiliations with the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, Three Percenters, Aryan Brotherhood, and others were examined. Pape, *American Face of Insurrection*, 12; Pape and Ruby, "The Capitol Rioters Aren't Like Other Extremists."

[315] Pape found that the people arrested were predominantly 35–54 years old and came from the middle class. Pape, *American Face of Insurrection*, 3; Pape and Ruby, "The Capitol Rioters Aren't Like Other Extremists."

[316] Pape, *American Face of Insurrection*, 5.

[317] Robert A. Pape, *"Patriotic Counter-Revolution": The Political Mindset That Stormed the Capitol* (Chicago: Chicago Project on Security and Threats, 2022), 4–7.

[318] Pape, 7.

their original motivations and grievances.[319] Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that citizens have deep-rooted grievances that made their actions feel justifiable at the time and that these grievances persist.

F.   SOCIETAL FRAGILITY ANALYSIS

The storming of the Capitol on January 6 provides an interesting case study through which societal fragility and its connection to extremism can be explored. The event has had continued effects on society and has caused a significant disconnect between members of society in the various components of societal fragility—social norms, institutions, trust, and social cohesion. Indeed, both Pape and a recent political poll found that citizens who believed that the election had been "stolen" viewed Trump's call to action as his exercising the right to challenge election results while other sides of the political spectrum viewed his actions as a crime.[320] This difference in perception among citizens of events leading up to and including January 6, coupled with the shift of demographics of those taking action to settle grievances, is worth exploring further.

1.   Social Norms

As discussed in Chapter III, social norms provide guidelines for social interactions and how citizens are expected to interact with their environment. These social norms are the result of various factors, such as generally agreed-upon values in society, and are reinforced by institutions. In the United States, human rights and civil liberties help shape the social norms within society by prioritizing and upholding rights such as equality, freedom of speech, and freedom of expression. The "marketplace of ideas" approach used by the United States relies on these freedoms to balance and debunk false, inaccurate, or radical ideas and information.[321] When the marketplace no longer acts as an effective filter, these types of ideas can come to the forefront and gain traction.

---

[319] Pape, 16.

[320] Reid J. Epstein, "As Faith Flags in U.S. Government, Many Voters Want to Upend the System," *New York Times*, July 13, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/13/us/politics/government-trust-voting-poll.html; Pape, *Patriotic Counter-Revolution*, 16.

[321] C. Edwin Baker, *Human Liberty and Freedom of Speech* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 4, ProQuest Ebook Central.

59

Leading up to January 6, society was already battling several significant issues surrounding human rights—COVID and law enforcement reform—which ended up increasing political and racial tensions within society. Both had started to cause and reinforce not only perceptions toward others based on political and racial lines but also democratic qualities such as reciprocity and tolerance, which play important roles in diverse societies. Indeed, the BBC argues that even in the 1990s, the United States was battling similar issues around police brutality and equal voting rights for minorities.[322] What changed, however, was society's ability to generally agree on inequalities that posed problems, as well as compromise and work toward solutions.[323] The statements and language used when discussing citizens with differing perspectives or opinions exemplified the lack of consensus. Online, ideas and posts involving coups significantly increased.[324] QAnon contributed to this narrative, as many Trump supporters started to believe that it was the Democrats who had staged a coup to keep Trump from being re-elected.[325] As a result, anger, hate, and even violence ensued, directly targeting those in opposition of the stolen election.[326] Actions included armed citizens' standing outside polling sites, chanting, "Stop the steal."[327] The political divisions grew drastically into an us-versus-them narrative, which no longer encouraged or promoted common discourse but generated anger and hate.

In a polarized society, as shown during the January 6 event, where politics are a driving force, the relationship between racism and political party affiliation has significant impacts on social norms. During elections, emotions are often heightened, and social

---

[322] "US Election 2020: Why Racism Is Still a Problem for the World's Most Powerful Country," BBC News, October 30, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/election-us-2020-54738922.

[323] BBC News.

[324] "At the Extremes: The 2020 Election and American Extremism: Part 1," *Anti-Defamation League* (blog), September 24, 2020, https://www.adl.org/blog/at-the-extremes-the-2020-election-and-american-extremism-part-1.

[325] "At the Extremes."

[326] "At the Extremes."

[327] Atlantic Council's DFRLab, "Timeline of Social Media and Extremist Activities."

identities become closely tied to political parties.[328] In this type of environment, citizens are apt to endorse behaviors and attitudes in support of those they consider the in-group, particularly leaders.[329] Examining this relationship in the context of January 6, there appeared to be a shift in social norms by many of those who were arrested and had no prior connection to violent extremist behavior.

One of the ways that social norms are developed is through the observable behaviors of others, which can have detrimental effects when hate and bigotry become more apparent in society.[330] While hate and bigotry have not been eradicated in American society, growing racial and political issues came to the forefront during the 2020 election. Contributing to the spread, Trump had been publicly criticized multiple times for his rhetoric, which had often been characterized by citizens and the media as racist, sexist, and homophobic.[331] While Trump was shamed by some, he was also heralded by others, including those associated with the far right.[332] Indeed, during the 2020 presidential debate, Trump even stated "stand back and by" when he was asked about violent-prone groups and militias who supported him.[333] Regardless of the intentionality behind Trump's statement, it was viewed as public recognition by groups such as the Proud Boys.[334] In response to Trump, a well-known member of the Proud Boys posted on Parler, "Trump basically said to go f*** them [Antifa and the left] up! this makes me so happy."[335] The argument could be made that Trump's silence following this bigoted post implied his approval of the message. Public figures carry sizable influence, so they contribute significantly to behaviors and attitudes that become socially acceptable. Indeed, Trump

---

[328] Carina Hoerst and John Drury, "Social Norms Misperception among Voters in the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election," *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 21, no. 1 (2021): 316, https://doi.org/10.1111/asap.12269.

[329] Hoerst and Drury, 316.

[330] Hoerst and Drury, 314.

[331] Hoerst and Drury, 316.

[332] Hoerst and Drury, 316.

[333] Hoerst and Drury, 316.

[334] Atlantic Council's DFRLab, "Timeline of Social Media and Extremist Activities."

[335] Atlantic Council's DFRLab.

61

was not alone when it came to highly criticized rhetoric. Other elected and prominent figures, including Paul Gosar, Josh Hawley, Madison Cawthorn, Louie Gohmert, and Marjorie Taylor Greene, have publicly promoted ideas and attitudes around conspiracy theories, violence, and hatred.[336] Therefore, the increased overt bigotry and hate arguably are partially the result of observed behavior, as seen by various leaders and other like-minded members of society.

Online communication and social media also influenced the perception and adoption of social norms during 2020 and leading up to the presidential election. Important to social norms is the ability of online platforms to enable echo chambers, where like-minded people can interact, share information, and coordinate.[337] Social networks provide another means for citizens to interact or at least have the perception of interacting with others where in-person encounters are less likely (e.g., with politicians or out-of-state family, friends, and strangers). When it comes to sharing information, however, people are more likely to share negative information, causing the information to spread faster.[338] With negative information spreading more easily, it helps to explain how the misinformation and disinformation involving ballots and the larger narrative of a stolen election spread so rapidly via online platforms. Since social norms—deemed acceptable behavior by the majority of society—are also influenced by a person's social networks, the expanded connections that online platforms provide allow for greater influence over one's understanding and adoption of social norms.[339] As a result, online social networks helped to foster the growing political and racial tensions, as well as the growth of conspiracy theories, which encouraged stigmatizing citizens based on political party affiliation. Therefore, in-groups and their identities were hardened, providing social guidelines whereby one would be accepted by the in-group. For many of Trump's supporters, these

---

[336] Atlantic Council's DFRLab, "Timeline of Social Media and Extremist Activities"; Sarah McCammon, "Violent Rhetoric Grew More Mainstream in Conservative, Intellectual Circles," January 28, 2021, in *Morning Edition*, produced by NPR, radio segment, MP3 audio, 5:09, https://www.npr.org/2021/01/28/961470082/violent-rhetoric-grew-more-mainstream-in-conservative-intellectual-circles.

[337] Atlantic Council's DFRLab, "Timeline of Social Media and Extremist Activities."

[338] Harton, Gunderson, and Bourgeois, "I'll Be There with You," 7.

[339] Harton, Gunderson, and Bourgeois, 7.

online networks perpetuated the belief in perceived threats such as the election's being stolen, white victimhood, the far-left's trying to stage a coup, anti-immigration, and xenophobia.[340] Such beliefs ultimately helped fuel the "if you're not with us, you're against us" attitude characteristic of the us-versus-them mentality, which had social impacts on relationships, friendships, and online communities.[341] Therefore, both the perception of changing social norms and actual changes occurred in part from the echo chambers enabled by social networks and online communication.

Social norms were influenced in several ways leading up to and surrounding the 2020 presidential election. Particularly concerning was society's consensus on "fundamental disagreements on core American values and goals."[342] Whether these were actual or just perceived disagreements is moot as even the perception of such impacts the social norms through which society operates.

2. Institutions

The weakening and corruption of and distrust in institutions were underlying themes of the leading grievance surrounding January 6—a stolen election. While the purpose of this section is not to prove the extent to which institutions were compromised, the societal impacts whether actual or perceived are still significant.

While most citizens at the Capitol were protesting due to their belief that the election had been "stolen," other significant events leading up to that day contributed to the growing sentiment that institutions were corrupt and ineffective. The institutional responses to both COVID and police brutality, albeit different catalysts, fostered citizen concern over the ability of institutions to effectively provide their intended functions—

---

[340] White victimhood aligns with the great replacement theory. Hoerst and Drury, "Social Norms Misperception among Voters," 317–19.

[341] Harton, Gunderson, and Bourgeois, "I'll Be There with You," 8.

[342] Carroll Doherty et al., *Amid Campaign Turmoil, Biden Holds Wide Leads on Coronavirus, Unifying the Country* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2020), 7, https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/10/09/amid-campaign-turmoil-biden-holds-wide-leads-on-coronavirus-unifying-the-country/.

security, health, and safety.[343] The perceived, and arguably actual, decrease of institutional effectiveness created a basis on which further skepticism could be built, as seen by the stop-the-steal movement.[344] By leveraging uncertainty and fear that were already stirring, the movement worked to legitimize the perception that the institutions were controlled by one political party in favor of one side and to the detriment of the other.

More importantly, the suggestion and growing belief that the election process is rigged and corrupt directly threaten an important democratic process that acts as a check and balance between society and institutions. Indeed, elections are one of the main ways in which a democratic society holds a government accountable.[345] As such, it provides a means for citizens to advocate their interests and hold elected officials responsible for the institutions they serve in.[346] Due to the role elections play in democracy, it is easy to see how citizens' emotions and frustrations escalated so rapidly surrounding the 2020 election narratives, turning into what some must have felt was an existential threat based on their actions. Additionally, this narrative was encouraged and promoted by parts of the executive branch, which openly criticized the security of the election process. One concern is the level of influence that such elected positions have on public opinion and perspectives, paired with the spread of false narratives. This combination not only impacts citizen trust in various ways, which are discussed more thoroughly in the next subsection, but also legitimizes the public view that the government and its democratic processes are corrupt and do not accurately reflect the people they serve. Therefore, the narrative of a stolen and

---

[343] Sarah Repucci and Amy Slipowitz, *Democracy under Lockdown* (Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2020), 10–11, https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2020/democracy-under-lockdown; Kim Parker, Juliana Menasce Horowitz, and Monica Anderson, *Amid Protests, Majorities across Racial and Ethnic Groups Express Support for the Black Lives Matter Movement* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2020), 5, https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/06/12/amid-protests-majorities-across-racial-and-ethnic-groups-express-support-for-the-black-lives-matter-movement/.

[344] Jasmine Aguilera, "'An Epidemic of Misinformation.' New Report Finds Trust in Social Institutions Diminished Further in 2020," *Time*, January 13, 2021, https://time.com/5929252/edelman-trust-barometer-2021/.

[345] Hollie Russon Gilman and K. Sabeel Rahman, *Rebuilding Democratic Infrastructure* (Washington, DC: New America, 2019), 21, http://newamerica.org/political-reform/reports/rebuilding-democratic-infrastructure/.

[346] Warren, "Trust and Democracy," 80–82.

corrupt election suggested a significant threat to the means through which citizens hold institutions accountable.

News media also contributed to society's perception and belief in a stolen election. As citizens turn to the media to provide accurate and reliable information to help them make informed opinions and decisions, media can have significant influence over public opinion. Indeed, research has found that citizens tend to operate in their own news bubbles based on partisan lines, which was particularly the case around the 2020 election.[347] Fox News is among the outlets most criticized for its hard stop-the-steal push and, as a result, is now the defendant in sizable lawsuits for its use of misinformation in reporting.[348] In one of the lawsuits brought against Fox News, New York State Supreme Court Judge David B. Cohen stated, "Fox News turned a blind eye to a litany of outrageous claims about plaintiffs, unprecedented in the history of American elections, so inherently improbable that it evinced a reckless disregard for the truth."[349] As a trusted news source by a significant body of citizens, more often Republicans, Fox News reinforced the narrative of stop the steal and contributed to the deep-rooted motivations of many of those who attended the January 6 event.[350] News outlets' traditional role of providing society with reliable, fact-based information has drastically shifted to include more subjectivity and opinion.[351] Generally, society recognizes this shift, as a recent poll by the *New York Times* and Sienna College found that a vast majority of respondents lack confidence in media and news outlets' ability to provide accurate and fair news.[352] Despite a majority of society lacking confidence in news media, outlets still serve as an important source of information to help navigate real-world events. Therefore, news media had the ability to influence public

---

[347] Jurkowitz et al.

[348] Bill Sternberg, "Fox News' Potentially Expensive Embrace of 'Stop the Steal,'" Free Speech Center, April 6, 2022, https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/post/2812/fox-news-potentially-expensive-embrace-of-stop-the-steal.

[349] Sternberg.

[350] Pape, *Deep, Divisive, Disturbing and Continuing*, 34–36.

[351] Jennifer Kavanagh et al., "Facts versus Opinions: How the Style and Language of News Presentation Is Changing in the Digital Age" (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2019), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB10059.html.

[352] Epstein, "Faith Flags in U.S. Government."

65

perceptions and opinions around the 2020 election, contributing to the various narratives of a stolen election.

As tensions and frustrations within society grew leading up to the 2020 election, institutions played an integral role in shaping and influencing the narratives of a stolen election. Among one of the most influential and important motivational drivers was the perception of a broken and corrupt election process and, thus, the inability of institutions to accurately reflect the interests of their citizens. While arguably much of the belief around weakened and corrupt institutions was based on perception, other contributors, such as the shift in news media reporting, could be viewed as an actual concern. Like social norms, whether perceived or actual, significant challenges and changes to an institution's functionality can impact society's stability and lead to fragility.

3. Trust

All types of trust—social, generalized, and institutional—discussed in Chapter III can be examined within the context of this case study.[353] As a cornerstone of legitimization, trust plays an important role in the stability of society and democracies. Therefore, its wavering can have systemic effects, particularly because distrust has the capability of projecting a lack of trust in other organizations or experiences.[354] In the January 6 context, the bleeding over and growth of distrust in its various forms become apparent.

Institutional trust, particularly first order, was impacted in many ways leading up to January 6. As discussed earlier, society continued to lose faith in the ability of institutions to effectively deliver on their services before the 2020 election. Trust had already been negatively impacted for many citizens due to institutional responses involving

---

[353] Social trust is the result of direct interactions. On the other hand, with generalized trust, social norms help to build trust between individuals with differing opinions/perspectives or where there is minimal to no interaction. Institutional trust comes in two forms—first and second order. First-order trust occurs when an institution provides a service, and it comes with a generalized expectation of being removed from politicization. Second-order trust, which follows looser expectations, fosters a certain level of distrust as it is reserved for politicians; thus, elections are used to manage the distrust.

[354] Tom Christensen and Per Lægreid, "Trust in Government: The Relative Importance of Service Satisfaction, Political Factors, and Demography," *Public Performance & Management Review* 28, no. 4 (2005): 504, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3381308.

COVID-19 and police brutality. Distrust continued to build as QAnon sparked concern over a coup taking place at the hands of Democrats and other elitists. This narrative flooded over into feelings of distrust for core democratic institutions, such as the Supreme Court, which has traditionally been relied on to uphold the Constitution in a fair and unbiased way. Indeed, according to a recent poll by the *New York Times* and Sienna College, most respondents felt that Supreme Court rulings are becoming politicized and shifting away from constitutional alignment.[355] This sentiment was expressed by several citizens on January 6, one of whom stated, "OK. Supreme Court's not helping us. No one's helping us. Only us can help us. Only we can do it. Whatever we have to do. What do you think 1776 was?"[356] In some cases, the level of citizen distrust of institutions to effectively deliver on their services and protections was so systemic that citizens perceived the only option was to take action to mitigate their grievance. While there was a range of levels and causes of distrust in first-order institutions, it was a common theme of January 6.

Second-order institutional trust is harder to examine, as it was arguably strengthened in some respects and weakened in others leading up to January 6. One example of this type of trust manifests between citizens and politicians.[357] Even though there is an acceptable level of distrust expected in this relationship, the stop-the-steal narrative suggested that citizens could no longer manage their distrust through voting. The election results affected second-order trust as the appointment of Biden to president either reinforced or diminished faith in a legitimate election process. Furthermore, Trump's public challenge to Pence about overturning the election results suggested that there should be a concern for distrust even within party lines. Trump's public challenge of his own vice president presented an opportunity for additional rifts in society, as Trump's supporters chanted for Pence to be hung.[358] Therefore, in one regard, second-order trust was

---

[355] Epstein, "Faith Flags in U.S. Government."

[356] Pape, *Patriotic Counter-Revolution*, 19.

[357] Warren, "Trust and Democracy," 90–92.

[358] Patricia Zengerle and Richard Cowan, "Trump Pressed, Threatened Pence to Overturn Election, Panel Hears," Reuters, June 17, 2022, https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-capitol-jan-6-panel-turns-attention-pence-thursdays-hearing-2022-06-16/.

strengthened between Trump and his supporters; however, considerable distrust spread—even among citizens identifying as Republican—as separations grew.

Social and generalized trust appeared to follow a similar path as second-order trust, both strengthening and weakening. While the development of two types of trust differs based on a person's interaction level, trust or distrust was reinforced as a result of one's belief or disbelief in a stolen election. As a result, in-group and out-group dynamics hardened between those who supported Trump and those who did not. Instead of discourse focusing on ways to improve opportunities for and security of voting, those who had differing opinions were targets for frustration and distrust. As social norms help shape the behavior society deems acceptable, a shift away from forbearance and tolerance has negative effects on generalized trust. Therefore, the intolerance exhibited between the two sides of the stop-the-steal narrative resulted in weakened generalized trust, as well as social trust. Meanwhile, trust naturally strengthened among supporters of the movement, regardless of differences that might have generated other trust dynamics. Ultimately, social and generalized trust both experienced some significant impacts as a result of January 6.

The storming of the Capitol and the contextual events leading up to the 2020 election posed some interesting challenges for trust in society. Generally, society's trust of institutions and other members of society appeared to weaken. While trust is important in legitimizing a democratic government, in diverse societies, a certain level of trust is necessary for a functioning and productive democratic society. It is through trust that society gains a sense of security and certainty, which were plausibly challenged by January 6. Indeed, January 6 affected all forms of trust, which is concerning as trust is easy to lose and challenging to build back.[359]

4.   Social Cohesion

Social cohesion directly correlates with each of the criteria previously discussed—social norms, institutions, and trust. The correlation is due to their interconnected relationship. Social cohesion, however, specifically relates to society's ability to navigate

---

[359] Kramer, "Ingroup–Outgroup Trust," 100–1.

conflict, which often requires effective collaboration and productive discourse.[360] Social vulnerabilities and disparities, such as those exhibited surrounding January 6, are often the source of conflicts that pose threats to social cohesion.[361] Indeed, before January 6, society was already struggling to navigate conflict due to COVID and police brutality. Significant political and racial divisions had trickled down into each state based on how it decided to approach and implement solutions to the related problems. As shown by the number of protests involving COVID and police reform, presumably, social cohesion was already being challenged going into the 2020 election.

Social cohesion appeared to continue breaking down leading up to the election. While the government had attempted to improve the opportunity for voting with the creation of drop boxes at polling sites, the added voting method generated further concern over ballot security. Along with the other narratives involving ballots that were fueled by misinformation, the feeling of political vulnerability ran rampant. Commonly, citizen satisfaction with the government correlates with one's political party affiliation holding the executive branch.[362] A shift in executive leadership can also impact one's feelings about the well-being of the country's future.[363] With social cohesion already at risk, added disparities, whether perceived or actual, contributed to further separation, which hindered society's ability to unite during a time of crisis.

While disagreement and frustration over whether the election had been stolen formed the spearhead of January 6, QAnon and the great replacement also contributed to many citizens' feelings of vulnerability. QAnon's narrative about the deep state encouraged fear of a political takeover by Democrats, which Republicans felt would significantly threaten their rights and the future of the United States. Based on a survey by Pew Research Center, a large majority of Democrats felt that these conspiracy theories

---

[360] Browne, *State Fragility and Social Cohesion*, 3.

[361] Hodges, "Systems Fragility," 29–30.

[362] Pew Research Center, *Americans' Views of Government: Decades of Distrust, Enduring Support for Its Role* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2022), 69–70, https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/06/06/americans-views-of-government-decades-of-distrust-enduring-support-for-its-role/.

[363] Pew Research Center, 70.

were bad for the United States while just under half of Republicans said they were good.[364] The significant disconnect over such conspiracy theories shows the severe political polarization and the lack of social cohesion as a result. Also contributing to many Republicans' feelings of fear and vulnerability was the great replacement, which suggested that increasing numbers of minorities would threaten the white population and its rights. Furthermore, immigration policy was among the most prominent issues in the 2020 election, creating further opportunities for fears to grow over potential disparities. As a result, QAnon and the great replacement both contributed to concerns over a loss of rights by many citizens, hardening political divisions and reducing social cohesion.

While society's capacity for social cohesion before the 2020 election was questionable, several contributing factors since January 6 have furthered divisions. The extent of this disconnect is concerning, as it involves crucial national issues, such as immigration. Indeed, stable democracies depend on compromise to help rectify inequalities, in effect enabling social cohesion.

G.   CONCLUSION

Since January 6, the United States has continued to experience events that suggest societal fragility and generate further political division. One such controversy has involved the Supreme Court's ruling to reverse *Roe v. Wade*, eliminating a 50-year constitutional right to abortion and further contributing to an already volatile environment.[365] Now, in addition to lingering societal frustration and fears of inequality, many feel as though another personal freedom has been removed.[366] Similar to many of the sentiments and their roots presented in this case study, the overturning of *Roe* elicits past feelings of oppression and inequality experienced by many women and minorities.[367] Therefore,

---

[364] Pew Research Center, "5 Facts about the QAnon Conspiracy Theories."

[365] Adam Liptak, "In 6-to-3 Ruling, Supreme Court Ends Nearly 50 Years of Abortion Rights," *New York Times*, June 24, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/24/us/roe-wade-overturned-supreme-court.html.

[366] Liptak.

[367] Karine Coen-Sanchez et al., "Repercussions of Overturning *Roe v. Wade* for Women across Systems and beyond Borders," *Reproductive Health* 19, no. 1 (2022): 4, https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-022-01490-y.

deep-seated anger continues to resurface in various ways. Even though most of society disapproves of the Supreme Court's ruling, severe partisan divides exist over support of the Supreme Court and the circumstances in which an abortion should be permissible.[368] The continuing division and frustrations following January 6 suggest that the challenges of societal fragility still exist and are worth examining for purposes of improving democratic stability.

While January 6 shocked much of the U.S. population, several factors contributed to such significant grievances that they spurred some citizens to take up violence. During the writing of this case study, the House January 6 Committee was still investigating the event to better understand its causes in the hopes of creating policy and procedural changes to prevent such an event from happening again.[369] Regardless, the belief and loyalty surrounding an illegitimate election continue to flourish in American society, despite the debunking of misinformation and false narratives.[370] Over a year later, approximately two-thirds of Republicans still believe the election was stolen.[371]

Context plays an important role in understanding the environment in which a notable event takes place. For the United States, COVID and highly publicized events involving police brutality provided a pathway for further distrust and social divisions. The existential threat of a stolen election broke the threshold for several citizens, compelling them to take more severe action. While a common theme throughout the case study was actualized versus perceived threats, it can be concluded that even a perceived threat can have enduring systemic side effects in society. As Lilliana Mason, a political scientist, points out, "When we're voting, we're not just voting for a set of policies but for what we

---

[368] Reem Nadeem, *Majority of Public Disapproves of Supreme Court's Decision to Overturn* Roe v. Wade (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2022), 4–6, https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/07/06/majority-of-public-disapproves-of-supreme-courts-decision-to-overturn-roe-v-wade/.

[369] Luke Broadwater, "House Finds Bannon in Contempt for Defying Jan. 6 Inquiry Subpoena," *New York Times*, October 21, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/21/us/politics/bannon-contempt-jan-6-subpoena.html.

[370] David Leonhardt, "'A Crisis Coming': The Twin Threats to American Democracy," *New York Times*, September 17, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/17/us/american-democracy-threats.html.

[371] Joel Rose and Liz Baker, "6 in 10 Americans Say U.S. Democracy Is in Crisis as the 'Big Lie' Takes Root," NPR, January 3, 2022, https://www.npr.org/2022/01/03/1069764164/american-democracy-poll-jan-6.

think makes us Americans and who we are as a people."[372] This sentiment reaffirms the extent and depth to which citizens feel at risk in their current environment. The United States is arguably experiencing the impacts of societal fragility. When examining each of the criteria—social norms, institutions, trust, and social cohesion—there have been noteworthy shifts away from features integral to democracy.

The aforementioned poll by the *New York Times* and Sienna College found that 58 percent of people surveyed, including those on both sides of the political spectrum, believe that the democratic system in the United States needs reform.[373] Indeed, ties to conspiracy theories and violent extremism groups and militias continue to grow within politics. The Proud Boys now occupy six seats on the Miami-Dade Republican Executive Committee, contributing to intra-party conflict at meetings.[374] Liliana Ros, a party leader for over 40 years, said, "The meetings are a bunch of fights, people screaming. The nice people—the decent people, the people that are real Republicans—are leaving."[375] The ties and support for conspiracy theories are not just at the local level; they have also manifested at the national level. Senator Doug Mastriano of Pennsylvania supports a strong Christian identity, which promotes no separation of church and state and blends with QAnon narratives.[376] Indeed, other elected officials, including Congresswomen Marjorie Taylor Greene and Lauren Boebert, have historically supported conspiracy theories such as QAnon.[377] The growing public support of movements and conspiracy theories at the local and national political level is concerning as it reflects the significant divide within society.

---

[372] Leonhardt, "A Crisis Coming."

[373] Epstein, "Faith Flags in U.S. Government."

[374] Patricia Mazzei and Alan Feuer, "How the Proud Boys Gripped the Miami-Dade Republican Party," *New York Times*, June 2, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/02/us/miami-republicans-proud-boys.html.

[375] Mazzei and Feuer.

[376] Elizabeth Dias, "The Far-Right Christian Quest for Power: 'We Are Seeing Them Emboldened,'" *New York Times*, July 8, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/08/us/christian-nationalism-politicians.html.

[377] Blyth Crawford and Marc-André Argentino, "QAnon Women in Politics Part Two: QAnon Careers," Global Insights on Extremism and Technology, April 29, 2021, https://gnet-research.org/2021/04/29/qanon-women-in-politics-part-two-qanon-careers/.

72

January 6 is an important case study for examining the relationship between societal fragility and extremism. The events that took place at the Capitol generated a humbling reflection on whether democracy has been backsliding in the United States. Even though most of society is concerned with the future of democracy in the country, the social dynamics have escalated to political affiliations representing stereotypes of fellow citizens as either "good" or "bad."[378] As the case study has shown, the United States has demonstrated concerning social changes that suggest, when examined using the societal fragility framework, the country's society is fragile.

---

[378] Nick Corasaniti et al., "Voters See Democracy in Peril, but Saving It Isn't a Priority," *New York Times*, October 18, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/18/us/politics/midterm-election-voters-democracy-poll.html.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

V. BRAZIL AND THE 2022 ELECTION

Brazil provides another opportunity to examine the potential relationship between societal fragility and extremism, particularly with its 2022 election. Both frontrunning presidential candidates—Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva ("Lula") and Jair Bolsonaro—served as presidents before, so citizens had extensive historical context to draw from in determining which candidate to support. Therefore, it is important to examine the potential historical influences that contributed to Brazil's volatile and polarized environment. This chapter begins with a brief history of the country's democratization, followed by a series of events and conditions that led to the election of Jair Bolsonaro. It then examines the country under Bolsonaro's leadership and the 2022 election. Following the historical examination, the case study concludes by analyzing Brazil's 2022 election through the societal fragility lens.

A. BRAZIL'S TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

Unlike the United States, Brazil is a fairly new democracy, having shifted away from authoritarianism in 1974 through a self-initiated transition.[379] It took over a decade for Brazil to complete its transition through a directly elected president in 1990.[380] Throughout its transition, the military had a significant influence and involvement in the direction and development of Brazil.[381] As shown in various parts of this case study, the military still plays an important role across many facets of government. In its transition, however, Brazil faced several challenges, including systemic corruption, significant socioeconomic imbalances, and crime.[382] Despite such challenges, Brazil made

---

[379] From 1964 to 1985, Brazil was ruled by a military junta. In 1974, Brazil started slowly transitioning toward a democracy. Florina Cristiana Matei, Carolyn Halladay, and Thomas C. Bruneau, *The Routledge Handbook of Civil–Military Relations*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2021), 214, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003084228; Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stephan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 168.

[380] Linz and Stephan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, 167–68.

[381] Linz and Stephan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, 168–69; Matei, Halladay, and Bruneau, *The Routledge Handbook of Civil-Military Relations*, 214.

[382] Luciano Da Ros and Matthew M. Taylor, *Brazilian Politics on Trial: Corruption and Reform under Democracy* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2022), 3; Matei, Halladay, and Bruneau, *The Routledge Handbook of Civil-Military Relations*, 214.

noteworthy strides in democratization over the years, leading to the country's worldwide recognition in 2010 for its progress in governance.[383] Such progress was in part due to Lula of the Workers' Party, who served as president from 2003 to 2010.[384] During this time, opportunities flourished for many citizens, particularly those in the poor and working class, helping to alleviate the socioeconomic inequalities that had developed.[385] Brazil's economy continued to grow, eventually becoming the sixth largest worldwide in 2012.[386] While it appeared that the country was well on its way toward achieving political and economic power, Brazil began to experience some growing tensions related to the country's journey to democracy, including increased socioeconomic mobility, improved educational opportunities, and increased minority support. These growing tensions ultimately led to the election of a populist leader in 2018.

B.   CONDITIONS LEADING TO BOLSONARO'S ELECTION

Succeeding Lula was his chief of staff, Dilma Rousseff; however, it was during his term that Brazil started to experience an array of events that led to growing dissatisfaction with the Workers' Party and movement toward more conversative leadership. Classified as the most significant political crisis since the protests leading to the country's transition to democracy, the June Days were a series of mass protests that took place in over 400 cities throughout Brazil beginning on June 17, 2013.[387] While increased public transportation fare was one of the significant grievances of the mass demonstrations, the underlying issues appeared much greater for many citizens.[388] For example, even though increased educational opportunities for the poor and working class helped to significantly reduce

---

[383] Benjamin Junge et al., eds., *Precarious Democracy: Ethnographies of Hope, Despair, and Resistance in Brazil* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021), 1.

[384] The Workers' Party, *Partido dos Trabalhadores* or PT, is on the left side of the political spectrum. Junge et al., 1.

[385] Junge et al., *Precarious Democracy*, 1; Linz and Stephan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, 166.

[386] Junge et al., *Precarious Democracy*, 1.

[387] Sean Purdy, "Brazil's June Days of 2013: Mass Protest, Class, and the Left," *Latin American Perspectives* 46, no. 4 (2019): 15–16, https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X17699905.

[388] Purdy, 15–16.

poverty and ultimately create a "new middle class," its impact created mixed feelings among citizens.[389] Many people in the upper and middle class perceived the new mobility as a threat to their own livelihoods and, therefore, power.[390] Grievances, however, were not confined solely to the higher social classes. Indeed, while people considered part of the new middle class were getting to experience newfound luxuries such as homeownership and personal vehicles, the supportive infrastructure—for example, larger streets, garages, and policing—lagged.[391] With a lack of protections to support their new luxuries, barriers for adoption continued to exist and left some citizens dissatisfied despite the increased buying power.[392] Similar sentiments were shared about a lack of necessary infrastructure to support the new schools and universities, as concern over quality of education and resources, such as libraries and laboratories, surfaced.[393] These grievances and others contributed to the political crisis of 2013, ultimately resulting in many citizens abandoning the Workers' Party.[394]

Brazil had made several efforts over the years to reduce corruption, but in March 2014, the country launched its largest anti-corruption investigation yet—*Operação Lava Jato* (Operation Car Wash)—which ultimately contributed to the election of Jair Bolsonaro as president.[395] While the investigation initially looked into money laundering at a local car wash, it quickly escalated into a more complex network of companies, people, and even political figures.[396] Indeed, after several years, the investigative task force claimed to have

---

[389] Junge et al., *Precarious Democracy*, 41.

[390] Junge et al., 63.

[391] Junge et al., 45.

[392] Junge et al., 45.

[393] Purdy, "Brazil's June Days of 2013," 19.

[394] Brazil had also been selected to host the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics, generating frustration among many citizens due to the country's investment in "mega-events" amid existing infrastructural issues. Purdy, "Brazil's June Days of 2013," 15–16; Junge et al., *Precarious Democracy*, 2.

[395] The investigation was also known as Car Wash. George Mészáros, "Caught in an Authoritarian Trap of Its Own Making? Brazil's 'Lava Jato' Anti-Corruption Investigation and the Politics of Prosecutorial Overreach," *Journal of Law & Society* 47, no. S1 (October 2020): S58, https://doi.org/10.1111/jols.12245; Ryan K. Jensen, "Corruption in Brazil: Why Are Manifestations on the Rise?" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2018), 18–24.

[396] Mészáros, "Caught in an Authoritarian Trap," S58.

made 295 arrests and 278 convictions as a result of its findings.[397] Then-president Rousseff was one of the political leaders implicated in the scandal, leading to her impeachment following charges of federal budget manipulation.[398] Therefore, after her impeachment in 2016, Michel Temer came to serve as interim president until the 2018 election.[399] Adding to the reach of the investigation was the controversial arrest and imprisonment of former president Lula, who was convicted in 2017 of corruption, money laundering, and accepting a bribe.[400] As a result, Lula could not participate in the 2018 election, in which he was the frontrunner.[401] With the reputations of several larger political parties tainted by the investigation, Jair Bolsonaro surfaced as an appealing presidential candidate to many, particularly because of his previous experience as a congressman and his promises for change.[402]

Bolsonaro embraced the use of social media to engage citizens and generate a political presence throughout his campaign.[403] Despite initially lacking political support, he generated significant public backing through his use of various social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp.[404] Online, Bolsonaro portrayed himself as an ordinary and relatable citizen while also promoting anti-government, populist

[397] Ricardo Brito and Gram Slattery, "After Seven Years, Brazil Shuts Down Car Wash Anti-Corruption Squad," Reuters, February 3, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-corruption-idUSKBN2A4068.

[398] Simon Romero, "Dilma Rousseff Is Ousted as Brazil's President in Impeachment Vote," *New York Times*, August 31, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/01/world/americas/brazil-dilma-rousseff-impeached-removed-president.html.

[399] Temer served as vice president and naturally assumed the position after Rousseff's impeachment. Romero, "Dilma Rousseff Is Ousted."

[400] "Brazil's Lula: From President to Prisoner," BBC News, June 11, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-10841416.

[401] Mészáros, "Caught in an Authoritarian Trap," S66.

[402] Da Ros and Taylor, *Brazilian Politics on Trial*, 146.

[403] Ricardo F. Mendonça and Renato Duarte Caetano, "Populism as Parody: The Visual Self-Presentation of Jair Bolsonaro on Instagram," *International Journal of Press/Politics* 26, no. 1 (2021): 219, https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161220970118.

[404] Isabele Mitozo, Gabriella da Costa, and Carla Rodrigues, "How Do Traditional Media Incorporate Statements from Political Actors in Social Media? An Analysis of the Framing of Jair Bolsonaro's Tweets in Brazilian Journalism," *Brazilian Journalism Research* 16, no. 1 (2020): 160, https://doi.org/10.25200/BJR.v16n1.2020.1256; Mendonça and Caetano, "Populism as Parody," 210–19.

ideas.[405] As such, he appealed to most of society in his "fight against the elites," which leveraged Brazil's long-standing battle with corruption.[406] Bolsonaro also capitalized on other current societal concerns by using tactics such as memes and images to generate support in his campaign.[407] Bolsonaro often disseminated misinformation, particularly on WhatsApp, contributing to his influence and eventual election win in 2018.[408] One appeal of a social media presence for political figures is the public's ability to access them, getting information and opinions directly from the source as opposed to traditional media.[409] Indeed, a poll during the election in October 2018 found that nearly 50 percent of respondents used social media as a method for staying informed.[410] Thus, Bolsonaro's social media presence significantly contributed to his 2018 election win.

C. BRAZIL UNDER BOLSONARO

Shortly after his election, COVID-19 struck Brazil hard, and Bolsonaro's approach to protecting the country met criticism by many citizens.[411] Indeed, the country was experiencing around 2,600 deaths from the virus per day, among the highest worldwide, and in 2020, when asked to respond to those grieving, Bolsonaro replied, "I'm sorry about all the deaths, but it is the destiny of each of us."[412] His comment was one of several

---

[405] Pedro Santos Mundim, Fábio Vasconcellos, and Lucas Okado, "Social Networks and Mobile Instant Messaging Services in the Election of Jair Bolsonaro as President of Brazil in 2018," *Dados* 66, no. 2 (2023): 19, https://doi.org/10.1590/dados.2023.66.2.291.

[406] Santos Mundim, Vasconcellos, and Okado, 19.

[407] Mendonça and Caetano, "Populism as Parody," 219.

[408] Rafael Evangelista and Fernanda Bruno, "WhatsApp and Political Instability in Brazil: Targeted Messages and Political Radicalisation," *Internet Policy Review* 8, no. 4 (2019): 3, https://doi.org/10.14763/2019.4.1434.

[409] Mitozo, Costa, and Rodrigues, "Statements from Political Actors in Social Media?," 158; Santos Mundim, Vasconcellos, and Okado, "Social Networks and Mobile Instant Messaging Services," 8.

[410] Santos Mundim, Vasconcellos, and Okado, "Social Networks and Mobile Instant Messaging Services," 6.

[411] Heloísa Traiano and Terrence McCoy, "Brazil Is Rocked by Political Turmoil as Pandemic Outlook Darkens," *Washington Post*, March 30, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/03/30/brazil-cabinet-bolsonaro-chaos-pandemic/.

[412] Amy Erica Smith, "Covid vs. Democracy: Brazil's Populist Playbook," *Journal of Democracy* 31, no. 4 (2020): 76, https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0057; Traiano and McCoy, "Brazil Is Rocked by Political Turmoil."

generating the public perception that Bolsonaro cared little about the impacts of the virus.[413] Struck particularly hard by COVID were indigenous populations, who lacked access to important healthcare facilities for treatment.[414] The Ministry of Health was responsible for managing much of the COVID response. In May 2020, General Eduardo Pazuello took over as health minister after two civilians resigned due to disagreements with Bolsonaro.[415] Once heralded for its responses to other public health crises, the Ministry of Health fell under criticisms for its contributions to the COVID response.[416] While quickly reversed by Congress, Bolsonaro ordered the Ministry of Health not only to recategorize deaths by comorbidity but also to stop reporting information on total cases.[417] As a result, Congress decidedly took over reporting of COVID data.[418] Despite extensive citizen frustration and discontent with Bolsonaro's response to the pandemic, some continued to show support for the president, believing that he had minimal control over the high death toll.[419]

Amazonia has presented another significant point of contention among citizens, leadership, and Bolsonaro. Home to many of Brazil's indigenous people, lush forests, and diverse wildlife, the region has come under recent threat from agribusiness.[420] After coming into office, Bolsonaro shifted the responsibility of deforestation from the Environmental Ministry to the Agriculture Ministry, whose leadership included people involved in agribusiness.[421] In addition, Bolsonaro's denial of climate change and its potential environmental impacts resulted in the closure of Brazil's climate change

---

[413] Smith, "Covid vs. Democracy," 77.

[414] Smith, 76.

[415] Andrea Ribeiro Hoffmann, "Brazil under Bolsonaro," *Latin American Policy* 11, no. 2 (2020): 336, https://doi.org/10.1111/lamp.12200.

[416] Smith, "Covid vs. Democracy," 81–82.

[417] Smith, 81–82.

[418] Smith, 82.

[419] Smith, 86.

[420] Lucas Ferrante and Philip M. Fearnside, "Brazil's New President and 'Ruralists' Threaten Amazonia's Environment, Traditional Peoples and the Global Climate," *Environmental Conservation* 46, no. 4 (December 2019): 261, http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0376892919000213.

[421] Ferrante and Fearnside, 261.

section.[422] Most concerning to many citizens, environmentalists, and people worldwide has been the significant increase in deforestation, which rose to a 12-year high in 2020.[423] Many environmentalists are concerned about the global impact of such vast deforestation, as rainforests significantly offset carbon emissions, thereby helping to minimize climate change.[424] From the viewpoint of many citizens and scholars, Bolsonaro and his policies have been to blame for current problems associated with the Amazon.[425] Encouraging Amazon land usage for agriculture and mining, loosening environmental licensing, expanding the use of pesticides, and reducing funding for regulatory agencies have all been part of Bolsonaro's agenda.[426] For several citizens, the increase of forest fires and deforestation along with a decrease in fines and penalties has raised questions over the government's actual level of concern for the environment.[427] Therefore, the future of Amazonia has garnered significant public interest.

Bolsonaro has a long-standing history with the military, which has greatly influenced much of his presidency. As a former paratrooper and Army captain, he has been heavily supported by military personnel.[428] Prior to Bolsonaro, several of the previous presidents had dismantled or reduced the influence and involvement of the military.[429] Much of the military felt particularly slighted under Rousseff, as a truth commission examined abusers and suggested prosecutions to violators of human rights during Brazil's

---

[422] Ferrante and Fearnside, 261.

[423] "Brazil's Amazon: Deforestation 'Surges to 12-Year High,'" BBC News, November 30, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-55130304.

[424] BBC News.

[425] BBC News, "Brazil's Amazon"; Ferrante and Fearnside, "Brazil's New President and 'Ruralists' Threaten Amazonia's Environment," 261–62.

[426] Ferrante and Fearnside, "Brazil's New President and 'Ruralists' Threaten Amazonia's Environment," 261–62; BBC News, "Brazil's Amazon."

[427] "The Might and the Right: How Far Will Brazil's Military Back Bolsonaro?," International Crisis Group, July 1, 2021, https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/brazil/might-and-right-how-far-will-brazils-military-back-bolsonaro.

[428] International Crisis Group.

[429] Wendy Hunter and Diego Vega, "Populism and the Military: Symbiosis and Tension in Bolsonaro's Brazil," *Democratization* 29, no. 2 (2022): 244, https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.1956466.

dictatorship, including military personnel.[430] Such persecutions ultimately violated the military's amnesty, which had been secured in 1979.[431] Therefore, Bolsonaro's previous military experience, along with this public support of the institution, produced an opportunity for a strong relationship between the two entities.[432] As such, Bolsonaro significantly increased the number of active and retired military personnel holding civilian and political positions under his administration.[433] Indeed, he understood and acknowledged the level of expertise that the military could provide in such areas as security, public health, and other public services.[434] Interestingly, despite the country's history under a military junta, most Brazilians found the strong military presence under Bolsonaro provided some necessary balance to the president's leadership, regarding former military members as "adults in the room."[435] Thus, the relationship between Bolsonaro and the military has been unique and highly influential.

As Bolsonaro's first four-year term as president came to a close, the 2022 election presented an opportunity for Brazilians to maintain or shift the current direction of the country. Brazil's presidential election generated much interest, garnering even global attention. As a society, however, Brazilians faced some significant challenges and tensions involving the two main candidates—Bolsonaro and Lula—deserving further exploration.

D.   THE 2022 ELECTION

Brazil's history played a significant role in the 2022 presidential election, as both Lula and Bolsonaro emerged as early frontrunners. On the left side of the political spectrum, Lula gained a following from policies that helped to increase opportunities for lower-class citizens, thereby improving equality and reducing poverty. His aim was to

---

[430] Hunter and Vega, 244.

[431] Hunter and Vega, 244.

[432] Hunter and Vega, 344.

[433] Matei, Halladay, and Bruneau, *The Routledge Handbook of Civil-Military Relations*, 217.

[434] Matei, Halladay, and Bruneau, *The Routledge Handbook of Civil-Military Relations*, 217; Hunter and Vega, "Populism and the Military," 342.

[435] Hunter and Vega, "Populism and the Military," 342; Matei, Halladay, and Bruneau, *The Routledge Handbook of Civil-Military Relations*, 214.

increase social programs and adjust the minimum wage to reflect inflation rates.[436] In addition to promoting more sustainable energy and food sourcing, Lula aimed to address the various issues involving the Amazon by increasing regulation, as well as protecting areas of conservation, including areas with indigenous people.[437] From the opposite side of the political spectrum—the right—Bolsonaro's plans overlapped to an extent with Lula's. For example, he planned to reduce poverty by providing temporary cash handouts and creating new jobs.[438] Bolsonaro also promoted the culture of family, appealing to many conservatives, including Catholics and evangelicals, through his anti-abortion stance and opposition to expanding comprehensive sexuality education to include such topics as gender and sexual orientation.[439] Additionally, while he had already expanded access to firearms, he promised to continue expanding on these efforts and further improve crime rates, stating, "Legitimate defense is a fundamental right."[440] Both presidential candidates offered previous experience that highlighted their ability to deliver on the promises and targeted efforts of their respective campaigns, which generally aligned with either the right or left side of the political spectrum.

While Bolsonaro and Lula each outlined their proposed ideas for Brazil's future, both candidates were met with significant criticisms that could have influenced citizen support. While Lula's case involving Lava Jato was annulled by the Supreme Court, some

---

[436] Ana Ionova, "Lula vs. Bolsonaro: What to Know about Brazil's Election," *New York Times*, September 30, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/30/world/americas/brazil-election-bolsonaro-lula.html.

[437] Daniel Carvalho, "Lula Seeks to Mend Brazil Alliances Frayed by Amazon Destruction," Bloomberg, September 3, 2022, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-09-03/lula-seeks-to-mend-brazil-alliances-frayed-by-amazon-destruction.

[438] Ionova, "Lula vs. Bolsonaro."

[439] Ionova, "Lula vs. Bolsonaro"; Cristian González Cabrera, *"I Became Scared, This Was Their Goal": Efforts to Ban Gender and Sexuality Education in Brazil* (Human Rights Watch, 2022), https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/05/12/i-became-scared-was-their-goal/efforts-ban-gender-and-sexuality-education-brazil.

[440] Ionova, "Lula vs. Bolsonaro."

citizens still associated him with heavy corruption.[441] Bolsonaro faced his own challenges with overcoming many citizens' dissatisfaction with his COVID response and pursuit of agribusiness in the Amazon regardless of worldwide environmental impacts.[442] Additionally, Bolsonaro has had a strong relationship with the miliary, particularly since he served in the Army as a captain.[443] While some citizens supported and appreciated Bolsonaro's motivation for order and authority, others were concerned about the potential for reverting back to the authoritarian history of Brazil.[444] The fear of reversion came as a result of Bolsonaro's increasing the military's oversight powers, as well as the significant increase—33 percent—of active military members holding government positions, including in the cabinet.[445] Therefore, the difference in candidates generated discussions over democracy versus authoritarianism for Brazil's future.[446] The concerns over each of the presidential candidates presented a challenge for citizens as they prepared to vote for the 2022 election.

Fear over a broken and ineffective election system also grew among many citizens.[447] For years, Bolsonaro had been voicing discontent over the reliability of the voting system, suggesting that paper ballots were necessary to help combat irregularities.[448] When approached about supporting evidence of irregularities, however,

441 Carrie Kahn, "What You Need to Know about Brazil's Presidential Election," NPR, September 30, 2022, https://www.npr.org/2022/09/30/1125649427/brazil-president-election-bolsonaro-lula; John Otis, "Former Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula Da Silva Went from Jail to Frontrunner," NPR, August 7, 2022, https://www.npr.org/2022/08/07/1116218433/former-brazilian-president-luiz-inacio-lula-da-silva-went-from-jail-to-frontrunn.

442 Ionova, "Lula vs. Bolsonaro."

443 International Crisis Group, "The Might and the Right."

444 International Crisis Group.

445 International Crisis Group.

446 Paulina Villegas and Gabriela Sá Pessoa, "As Brazil's Election Day Approaches, Fear of Violence Grows," *Washington Post*, September 27, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/09/27/bolsonaro-brazil-election-political-violence/.

447 Jack Nicas, "Bolsonaro's New Ally in Questioning Brazil's Elections: The Military," *New York Times*, June 12, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/12/world/americas/brazil-election-bolsonaro-military.html.

448 Nicas.

he presented misinformation and disinformation, which had been debunked.[449] Furthermore, 75 days before the election, Bolsonaro met with several foreign diplomats to share worry over Brazil's voting system's being rigged.[450] His presentation was not just for the diplomats; it was publicly broadcast using Facebook live.[451] One of the solutions that Bolsonaro had proposed was incorporating the military into the voting process, allowing the military to conduct its own presidential vote count.[452] Some argued—judges, journalists, foreign diplomats, and other politicians—that Bolsonaro's rhetoric contributed to the idea of a potential coup.[453] Indeed, after stating "We have three alternatives for me: Prison, death or victory" at one of his rallies, many citizens and others questioned whether Bolsonaro would peacefully concede if he were not elected.[454] On one side— Bolsonaro's—the supposed weaknesses in the voting system posed a national security threat.[455] Supreme Court Judge Edson Fachin shared the opposing view that "these problems [were] artificially created by those who want to destroy the Brazilian democracy," suggesting that such claims against the voting system could have significant impacts on Brazil's future.[456]

Some citizens avoided showing public support for either candidate before the election for fear of being verbally or physically attacked.[457] The political violence came from both sides—right and left—as citizens became emboldened to act in support of their

---

[449] André Spigariol and Jack Nicas, "Bolsonaro Gathers Foreign Diplomats to Cast Doubt on Brazil's Elections," *New York Times*, July 19, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/19/world/americas/brazil-bolsonaro-election-fraud-claim.html.

[450] Spigariol and Nicas.

[451] Spigariol and Nicas.

[452] Nicas, "Bolsonaro's New Ally in Questioning Brazil's Elections."

[453] Nicas.

[454] Jack Nicas, "Bolsonaro vs. Lula: Brazil Faces Radically Opposed Options in Divisive Election," *New York Times*, October 1, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/01/world/americas/bolsanoro-lula-brazil-election.html; International Crisis Group, "The Might and the Right."

[455] Nicas, "Bolsonaro's New Ally in Questioning Brazil's Elections."

[456] Nicas.

[457] Villegas and Sá Pessoa, "As Brazil's Election Day Approaches, Fear of Violence Grows."

party.[458] While polarization in Brazilian society had existed in previous elections, candidates maintained a level of respect, which helped to manage any escalation to political violence.[459] Indeed, the 2022 election brought about growing intolerance between many citizens, even challenging highly valued family dynamics.[460]

The election resulted in a tight race between Lula and Bolsonaro. During the first round, Lula came out in the lead, but he did not achieve the 50 percent of votes necessary to secure a first-round win.[461] The election moved to its second round, where Lula and Bolsonaro faced off directly.[462] With 50.9 percent of the votes, Lula won the majority vote and was elected president.[463] While much of Brazil awaited Bolsonaro's reaction and potential objection to peacefully concede, some citizens created road blockades to protest the election results, proposing that Bolsonaro should not concede.[464] Others, including political figures, such as Bolsonaro supporter Sergio Moro, promoted the idea of uniting society and the results being the "will of the people."[465] A couple days after the election, Bolsonaro made a public speech, agreeing to the presidential transition and encouraging any protests to remain peaceful.[466] Despite the election's not falling in his favor for continued presidency, Bolsonaro made no additional remarks or suggestions about election

[458] Villegas and Sá Pessoa.

[459] Villegas and Sá Pessoa.

[460] Villegas and Sá Pessoa, "As Brazil's Election Day Approaches, Fear of Violence Grows"; Junge et al., *Precarious Democracy*, 35.

[461] Vanessa Buschschlüter, "Brazil's Lula and Bolsonaro Face Run-off after Surprisingly Tight Result," BBC News, October 3, 2022, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-63112509.

[462] Buschschlüter.

[463] Brian Ellsworth and Lisandra Paraguassu, "Lula Narrowly Defeats Bolsonaro to Win Brazil Presidency Again," Reuters, October 30, 2022, https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/brazil-votes-heated-bolsonaro-vs-lula-presidential-runoff-2022-10-30/.

[464] Anthony Faiola and Gabriela Sá Pessoa, "Bolsonaro Hasn't Conceded to Lula. Is He Following the Trump Playbook?," *Washington Post*, October 31, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/10/31/bolsonaro-lula-brazil-election/.

[465] Faiola and Sá Pessoa.

[466] Jack Nicas and André Spigariol, "Bolsonaro Agrees to Transition, Two Days after Losing Brazil Election," *New York Times*, November 1, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/01/world/americas/bolsonaro-protest-brazil-election.html.

fraud, to the surprise of many citizens.[467] As of this writing, however, Bolsonaro's Liberal Party has explored suing the Superior Electoral Court to annul the election results.[468] Thus, the 2022 presidential election was close yet ended in a generally peaceful concession of Lula as the next president.

Even though Bolsonaro agreed to the transition to Lula as president, the social dynamics have been affected. Hundreds of large protests from Bolsonaro supporters have shut down highways across the nation.[469] As the defense ministry performed its own analysis of the voting process and any potential fraud, thousands of citizens gathered outside military institutions in multiple cities, including Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo.[470] Many of those citizens were protesting for the need of military action to keep Bolsonaro as president.[471] Even with Bolsonaro's agreement to transition the presidency, society has shown continued signs of high tensions and frustrations, which are likely to persist based on Brazil's extensive history with corruption and inequalities. Societal fragility is one method for examining the potential challenges moving forward and the relationship to extremism.

E.   SOCIETAL FRAGILITY ANALYSIS

Brazil's 2022 presidential election provides an interesting case study for examining the connection between societal fragility and extremism. Even though the election was recent and future impacts are not yet evident, the country has continued to face several challenges involving corruption and notable inequalities, which have exacerbated deep-rooted tensions. Such tensions have affected the stability of society, even reaching

---

[467] Nicas and Spigariol.

[468] Cedê Silva, "Bolsonaro's Party Double-Deals Again on Election Fraud Conspiracy," *The Brazilian Report* (blog), November 16, 2022, https://brazilian.report/liveblog/2022/11/16/bolsonaro-party-election-conspiracy/.

[469] "Bolsonaro Supporters Block Brazil Roads for a 2nd Day as President Refuses to Accept Election Loss," CBS News, November 1, 2022, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/brazil-election-results-2022-protest-lula-bolsonaro-road-blocks/.

[470] Diane Jeantet and Carla Bridi, "Brazil Armed Forces' Report on Election Finds No Fraud," ABC News, November 9, 2022, https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/brazil-armed-forces-report-election-finds-fraud-93024939.

[471] Jeantet and Bridi.

cherished family dynamics. Therefore, the underlying grievances surrounding the election are worth examining further.

1. Social Norms

While democracies leverage civil liberties to help establish norms, Brazil has experienced some significant inequalities that could impact the creation and acceptance of such norms. For example, even though social programs have helped to improve multiple inequalities, general support for democracy has wavered among citizens over the years.[472] In addition, Brazil's institutions have struggled to reflect and support democratic norms consistently.[473] Institutions help to reinforce social norms, but if they do not support an egalitarianism culture, they may instead smother citizens' attempts to achieve greater levels of equality.[474] One explanation for this variance in prioritizing democratic norms, according to Greenwald, hearkens back to the age of Brazil's democratic transition.[475] He suggests that with nearly half of the country's citizens having experienced the previous authoritarian regime, it is sometimes viewed with nostalgia, particularly with the struggles that have been encountered throughout the democratization process.[476] Indeed, the attitudes and fears involved with attempts at closing the gaps suggest that many citizens disagree on the extent to which providing democratic civil liberties to all citizens is necessary.

Free speech, press, and expression have also been suppressed, at times through violence. Not only have journalists been threatened for reporting on controversial topics, including politics, but some have also been murdered for publicizing illegal or corrupt

---

[472] Ribeiro Hoffmann, "Brazil under Bolsonaro," 335.

[473] Ribeiro Hoffmann, 335.

[474] Ulisses Terto Neto, "Democracy, Social Authoritarianism, and the Human Rights State Theory: Towards Effective Citizenship in Brazil," *International Journal of Human Rights* 21, no. 3 (2017): 294, https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2017.1298733.

[475] Glenn Greenwald, *Securing Democracy: My Fight for Press Freedom and Justice in Bolsonaro's Brazil* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2021), 12.

[476] Greenwald, 12.

activities.[477] Women have also encountered a significant number of threats and violence, especially in politics. While 30 percent of political party candidates must be women, there are few protections in place to prevent threats and physical attacks against women candidates, which results in a lack of interest in participation and, therefore, representation.[478] This fear among minority citizens was legitimized in 2018 with the assassination of Marielle Franco, Rio de Janeiro's city councilwoman, who was highly regarded by many citizens for being the first black and lesbian official.[479] Additionally, Brazil ranks highest in the world for violence and deaths for the LGBTQ+ community.[480] In support of a fair and free election, the United Nations publicly encouraged Brazil to protect these higher-risk groups of minorities, so they could vote and have political freedom without the fear of abuse.[481] Such levels of targeted violence and threats suggest that important social norms, including tolerance and forbearance, are generally weak within society. This weakness impacts the freedom of expression and norms that establish what is socially acceptable or unacceptable.

The use of social media and networks also contributed to changing social norms. The ability of citizens to connect easily, not only to each other but also to political figures and other high-level influencers, presents its own challenges. Indeed, social media platforms allow people of a high level of influence, including political figures, to generate and promote their own narratives and frames on issues, bypassing traditional media.[482] Bolsonaro was known for his social media presence and generated a significant following

---

[477] Andrea Ratiu, *Democratic Institutional Strength before and beyond Elections: The Case of Brazil* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2022), 7, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/democratic-institutional-strength-ahead-and-beyond-elections-the-case-of-brazil/.

[478] Ratiu, 6.

[479] Junge et al., *Precarious Democracy*, 183.

[480] Alex Yates, "LGBTQ+ Rights in Brazil," *UAB Institute for Human Rights Blog*, September 30, 2022, https://sites.uab.edu/humanrights/2022/09/30/lgbtq-rights-in-brazil/.

[481] Hélène Pilloud, "Brazil: UN Experts Call for Peaceful Elections," United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, September 22, 2022, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/09/brazil-un-experts-call-peaceful-elections.

[482] Mitozo, Costa, and Rodrigues, "Statements from Political Actors in Social Media?," 160.

across multiple platforms, including Twitter and Instagram.[483] Since the use of language and information by political figures is typically magnified by social media, norms can potentially be influenced—positively or negatively—by prominent figures.[484] With Bolsonaro's prominence on social media, his rhetoric and narratives had the potential to contribute to underlying tensions and growing intolerance within society.

The separation and polarization occurring among much of society over support for either Bolsonaro or Lula also suggests a weakening of democratic social norms. While polarization was not unique to the 2022 presidential election, as it manifested in previous elections, the growing sentiment of animosity and hate toward others depending on which candidate they supported was unique.[485] Indeed, multiple murders occurred over differences in candidate support.[486] The drivers behind these surges in hatred and violence are best explained by the weak relationship between political parties and ideology in Brazil.[487] Due to this weak relationship, caused by the numerous political parties in the system, a candidate's performance and personal interests form the primary drivers of citizen support.[488] As such, hostility and the us-versus-them mentality are often the result of a negative political identity as opposed to an ideology or other reinforcing in-group feature.[489] The increased polarization and acts of political violence, therefore, provide another example of weakening norms of tolerance and forbearance.

---

[483] Mitozo, Costa, and Rodrigues, "Statements from Political Actors in Social Media?," 160; Mendonça and Caetano, "Populism as Parody," 210–19.

[484] Daniel L. Byman, "How Hateful Rhetoric Connects to Real-World Violence," *Brookings* (blog), April 9, 2021, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/04/09/how-hateful-rhetoric-connects-to-real-world-violence/.

[485] João Areal, "'Them' without 'Us': Negative Identities and Affective Polarization in Brazil," *Political Research Exchange* 4, no. 1 (2022): 3, https://doi.org/10.1080/2474736X.2022.2117635.

[486] Mauricio Savarese, "New Killing Adds to Fears of Brazil Election Violence," AP News, September 26, 2022, https://apnews.com/article/jair-bolsonaro-violence-caribbean-elections-presidential-fd03fa062043edec3f8cd1f7e9cae3a2.

[487] Areal, "Negative Identities and Affective Polarization in Brazil," 2.

[488] Areal, 2.

[489] "Negative political identities emerge independently out of a strong rejection of the opposing side's party or political figurehead, and can exert strong independent effects on political behaviour." Areal, 2.

90

Intolerance for malfeasance and corruption is a norm of high importance to many Brazilians.[490] The country has an extensive history of corruption, which at times has prevented it from making significant progress democratically.[491] While Brazil has made noteworthy progress in establishing processes to greatly improve accountability, the 2022 election brought to the surface past feelings and concerns over corruption.[492] Brazilians expect not only that political leaders refrain from illegal actions but also that citizens help to uphold this standard through their voting.[493] Interestingly, both Bolsonaro and Lula were tied to corruption investigations although both vowed to further improve measures for accountability.[494] With both candidates having some tie to corruption, even with Lula's annulment, many citizens must wrestle with a compromise of this social norm.

Being a younger democracy and still having nuances of authoritarianism, Brazil has struggled with implementing and reinforcing democratic social norms. Significant challenges in achieving civil liberties have contributed to society's slow adoption. Furthermore, the political divide has generated intolerance, which impacts other components of societal fragility, such as trust and social cohesion.

2.   Institutions

Despite Brazil's institutions being fairly young, many have shown significant strength in maintaining democratic checks and balances.[495] Congress's quick overturn of Bolsonaro's order to recategorize COVID-related deaths, for example, showed the institution's ability to avoid an action that could have been unconstitutional.[496] Indeed,

---

[490] Taylor C. Boas, F. Daniel Hidalgo, and Marcus André Melo, "Norms versus Action: Why Voters Fail to Sanction Malfeasance in Brazil," *American Journal of Political Science* 63, no. 2 (2019): 386, http://www.jstor.org/stable/45132484; Neto, "Democracy, Social Authoritarianism, and the Human Rights State Theory," 289.

[491] Jensen, "Corruption in Brazil," 8.

[492] Kahn, "What You Need to Know about Brazil's Presidential Election."

[493] Boas, Hidalgo, and Melo, "Norms versus Action," 385.

[494] Scott B. MacDonald, "Brazil's Looming Presidential Election," Global Americans, September 22, 2022, https://theglobalamericans.org/2022/09/brazils-looming-presidential-election/.

[495] Nicas, "Bolsonaro's New Ally in Questioning Brazil's Elections."

[496] Smith, "Covid vs. Democracy," 82.

even as false narratives and misinformation began to spread about a corrupt election process, many institutions stepped up to debunk such falsities, including the Supreme Court, the Senate, the media, and multiple civic organizations.[497] With several institutions voicing the unacceptability of such narratives being spread, the encouraging rhetoric of Bolsonaro was reduced.[498] In another instance, regardless of Bolsonaro's public disapproval of the LGBTQ+ lifestyle and various limiting legislative efforts on gender ideology, the Supreme Court ruled that acts of homophobia and transphobia would hold the same criminal charge as racism.[499] Frustrated with the continued pushback of some institutions, Bolsonaro both encouraged and participated in protests advocating that Congress and the Supreme Court be closed.[500] Regardless, several institutions have maintained their strength and achieved important checks and balances to contribute to Brazil's democratic efforts.

One of the more highly debated yet concerning institutional challenges has been the significant role of the military and its growing power. While the military had publicly stated its commitment to upholding the Constitution, some citizens questioned the loyalty of the military had Bolsonaro refused to concede after losing the election.[501] Even though the military expanded its power, both through obtaining security control over the Amazon and by holding several federal positions, it came under much scrutiny.[502] Indeed, its attempts to control wildfires and rapid deforestation left many citizens frustrated.[503] Furthermore, military personnel have been associated with corruption and embezzlement involving deforestation and COVID.[504] Traditionally, the military has taken an apolitical stance, but the proliferation of military personnel in federal positions, including in the

---

[497] Ratiu, *Democratic Institutional Strength*, 5.

[498] Ratiu, 5.

[499] "Brazil Supreme Court Rules Homophobia a Crime," Reuters, June 14, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-homophobia-idUSKCN1TF02N.

[500] Smith, "Covid vs. Democracy," 83.

[501] International Crisis Group, "The Might and the Right."

[502] International Crisis Group.

[503] International Crisis Group.

[504] International Crisis Group.

cabinet, helped facilitate a shift toward a more political nature.[505] Some officers, such as General Azevedo e Silva, the defense minister, resigned because he "endeavored to preserve the armed forces as an impartial state institution."[506] His resignation spurred the resignation of another three military chiefs—of the Army, Navy, and Air Force.[507] Such resignations fueled further concern over the intentions of increased military power.[508] With the presidential election, many citizens lost faith in the ability of the military to uphold its function while staying apolitical, which presented an interesting challenge for the institution.

Brazil's inability to reduce and prevent crime has been a significant concern for most citizens.[509] Indeed, there are 50,000 murders in Brazil each year, with major cities being controlled by organized-crime groups and militias.[510] Several factors have contributed to citizen frustration, including the sentiment that officials have not delivered justice fairly and consistently.[511] Therefore, many citizens have felt that being a criminal is "good for business," as those incarcerated often experience a more luxurious lifestyle, and their families receive social benefits.[512] In addition, Brazilians have also faced police brutality, including the frequent use of excessive force.[513] After examining reports from recent incidents involving lethal force by law enforcement, the United Nations called on Brazil to reform its law enforcement guidelines, determining there had been "an

---

[505] Brian Winter, "Messiah Complex," *Foreign Affairs*, July 26, 2022, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/brazil/2020-08-11/jair-bolsonaro-messiah-complex.

[506] International Crisis Group, "The Might and the Right."

[507] International Crisis Group.

[508] International Crisis Group.

[509] Ionova, "Lula vs. Bolsonaro."

[510] Oliver Stuenkel, "Democracy Is Dying in Brazil," *Foreign Affairs*, September 3, 2022, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/brazil/2021-11-01/democracy-dying-brazil.

[511] Linz and Stephan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, 179.

[512] Junge et al., *Precarious Democracy*, 54.

[513] "Brazil: UN Experts Decry Acts of Racialised Police Brutality," United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, July 6, 2022, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/07/brazil-un-experts-decry-acts-racialised-police-brutality.

unconscionable disregard for human life."[514] Unsettling and frustrating for many citizens, however, is the lack of accountability for such actions by law enforcement.[515] Therefore, a pervasive feeling of injustice lingers among a majority of citizens, as crime continues to be a significant problem in Brazil.

Both perceived and actual institutional ineffectiveness was evident leading up to the 2022 election. Indeed, there has been a continued failure of security for most citizens. Even though some institutions have made progress in their ability to deliver key services to society, the arguably reckless handling of COVID and the continued systemic corruption leave citizens questioning the ability of the various institutions.

3. Trust

Social and generalized trust were both affected up to and during the 2022 election. Changes in social trust were primarily seen in family dynamics. For some, family dynamics changed based on a difference of support for presidential candidates within families.[516] As one citizen commented, "These elections have forever changed my perception of people close to me."[517] With family being such a highly regarded aspect of most citizens' lives—further exhibited by Bolsonaro's leveraging of it during his campaign—rifts within family units created a strain on social trust. Generalized trust also experienced a noticeable weakening, as citizens became fearful of publicly showing support for either candidate due to increasing violence. Additionally, citizens of minority groups experienced higher levels of harassment and violence, thus affecting their ability to trust strangers and others in society. As such, a wide range of citizens experienced challenges to generalized trust. Trust related to citizen-to-citizen interactions, therefore, weakened further as the presidential election approached.

First-order institutional trust, while strong in some institutions and weak in others, has continued to be challenged beyond the election. Indeed, institutions such as Congress

---

[514] United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

[515] Stuenkel, "Democracy Is Dying in Brazil."

[516] Junge et al., *Precarious Democracy*, 35.

[517] Junge et al.

and the Supreme Court made several decisions in support of Brazil's Constitution that fostered citizens' trust in government to improve long-term inequalities within society. One such example was the legal ruling by the Supreme Court on homophobia and transphobia. Such rulings help to promote the culture and social acceptance of equal rights for all citizens. The military also experienced higher levels of overall skepticism because of its close ties to Bolsonaro and, thus, a level of untrustworthiness leading up to the 2022 election. While the military's response after the election might have been the more accurate indicator of citizens' trust, the number of federal positions held by military personnel could have already affected their trust of the military as an institution. Additionally, trust in law enforcement following the election continues to be generally low. Though such dwindling trust is not new to law enforcement, Brazil's ineffectiveness at significantly reducing crime contributes to an overall distrust that the country's institutions can work collectively to provide security for citizens. More importantly, the lack of trust in institutions that provide security has resulted in some citizens' losing trust in democracy itself and glorifying the authoritarian regime during which they rarely worried about security and crime. First-order institutional trust, therefore, has experienced an array of changes—some positive, some negative—and will continue to face challenges even into Lula's tenure as president.

Second-order institutional trust has been greatly influenced by corruption. Indeed, Brazil has historically encountered numerous instances of systemic corruption. While a certain level of mistrust exists with these types of institutions, the narrative around voting being corrupt poses a risk to one of the key processes through which citizens manage the distrust. Both presidential candidates had their own associations with and accusations of corruption. Even though Lula's charges were annulled and Bolsonaro's associations are still being investigated, the perceptions still impact citizen trust. There was also significant citizen distrust of Bolsonaro, particularly the fear of a coup had he lost the election. This distrust, though, was a matter of perspective as several of those who supported Bolsonaro trusted his narratives and campaign ideas for Brazil's future. Therefore, while the level of influence sometimes depended on the perspective of the citizen, corruption continues to play an important role in second-order institutional trust.

95

Diminishing trust in its various forms should be of significant concern to Brazil. Indeed, the continued issues of corruption, crime, and vast inequalities have impacted citizen trust in each of its forms. While Brazil has historically struggled with trust, many citizens have now reached a point where a loss of trust has extended into their feelings about democracy generally.

4. Social Cohesion

Many of the discussions in the previous subsections related to Brazil's social cohesion. Three significant barriers have hindered the country's ability to achieve the high level of social cohesion that could produce the collective action to solve long-term problems—the current political divide, widespread disparities, and inequalities for minorities.

The country has struggled to achieve a level of social cohesion that enables the productive navigation of conflict. Indeed, when examining Brazil's society, the levels of violence, particularly political violence, show that many citizens find it difficult to manage their differences. Additionally, inequalities continue to be a core issue within the country, which shows society's inability to come together to better support those who are disenfranchised. Indeed, many citizens in the upper socioeconomic class feel threatened by the opportunities to help reduce such inequalities. Such widespread disparities and inequalities help to generate segmentation within society, thus hindering the ability of society to develop social cohesion. Similarly, targeted harassment and violence toward minority groups greatly contribute to society's inability to achieve social cohesion. Therefore, it is the combination of significant levels of violence related to inequalities and various forms of conflict that suggests social cohesion is low for Brazil.

F. CONCLUSION

The 2022 election of Lula to president has given hope to many citizens in Brazil's movement toward a more egalitarian society. The nation, though, has several challenges ahead—social, economic, environmental, and political. Brazil presents with significant social divides over viewpoints for the future direction of the country, as exhibited by the

political violence surrounding the election and the large protests following it. Inequality, in both civil rights and socioeconomic status, continues to be rampant in Brazil with levels ranking among the highest in the world.[518] In addition to the nation's significant differences in income distribution, Brazil is also facing inflation problems, which further challenge the existing widespread inequalities.[519] While shortly after Lula's confirmed win, the Supreme Court began taking measures to help with deforestation by reactivating the Amazon Fund, the impacts from the extensive losses in Amazonia are a crucial concern.[520] Politically, with a large number of parties being represented in the legislature, fragmentation in a politically charged and divided society presents its own challenges, including the inability to compromise to make progress in each of the aforementioned areas.[521] Therefore, despite increasing hope following the election of Lula by a large segment of the population, Brazil has several obstacles still ahead that are likely to contribute further to the nation's societal fragility.

Many of the notable tensions within society throughout the 2022 election were connected to Brazil's long-standing history with corruption, disparities, and crime. Thus, context is necessary for understanding drivers and motivations behind the rise of political violence and examining the various components of societal fragility. Under Bolsonaro, society had been challenged even more in reinforcing and maintaining democratic social norms, including tolerance. Such challenges were exhibited not only by continuing battles over civil liberties for minorities but also by the severe political divisions that influenced family dynamics. While some institutions, such as Congress and the judiciary, counteracted a few recent instances of government overreach, corruption and dissatisfaction over high

[518] Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2022 Country Report—Brazil* (Gütersloh, Germany: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022), 17, https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report?isocode=BRA&cHash=5ff1fcaef3c7a15008cdce0d7bd1efa9.

[519] Marcela Ayres and Lisandra Paraguassu, "Lula's Market Lure Fades after Brazil's 'Liz Truss Moment,'" Reuters, November 11, 2022, https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/brazils-lula-faces-setback-markets-fret-over-spending-cabinet-picks-2022-11-11/.

[520] Andrew Downie, "Brazil Supreme Court Ruling to Reactivate Amazon Fund Gives Hope in Fight to Save Rainforest," *Guardian*, November 4, 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/04/brazil-supreme-court-ruling-to-reactivate-amazon-fund-gives-hope-in-fight-to-save-rainforest.

[521] Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2022 Country Report—Brazil*, 15.

crime rates impacted society's perceptions of effectiveness and trust in institutions. Social and generalized trust within society also weakened as many citizens became fearful of showing support for their favored candidate due to targeted violence. Such noteworthy changes in trust between citizens were partially the result of weakening democratic social norms. Furthermore, these shifts in social dynamics negatively impacted social cohesion, making navigating and solving conflicts even more challenging for society. Therefore, Brazil's history has played an integral role in understanding the significance and roots of concerns for many citizens, ultimately contributing to the feeling of existential treats, which is a characteristic of extremism.

The 2022 presidential election presents an interesting case study through which societal fragility and extremism can be examined due to the complexity of Brazil's democratic history. Several key issues—corruption, crime, and inequalities—have continued to challenge Brazil's ability to provide a stable democracy and, therefore, strengthen some of the components within the societal fragility framework. Additionally, whether Bolsonaro's Liberal Party will sue the government and what effects that might have on society have yet to be seen. However, a change in societal conditions has emboldened citizens to take up violence. When examined through the societal fragility framework, these changes suggest that Brazil's society is fragile.

VI. CONCLUSION

This thesis sought to examine the relationship, if any, between societal fragility and extremism in democratic nations. It began by examining the challenges presented to the United States with societal changes and growing extremism. As national issues become increasingly politicized, segmentation and polarization ensue, hindering society's ability to have productive discourse and navigate conflict. Additionally, the United States has also seen a concerning increase of extremism. To better understand the relationship between societal challenges and extremism, this thesis built the societal fragility framework, which examines each topic at its roots. Unlike other frameworks, societal fragility can be applied to even the most established democracies to examine social changes that impact democratic stability, therefore aiding in the identification of democratic backsliding. Furthermore, by examining society's relationship with extremism, the framework provides a wider lens through which underlying causes of extremism can be viewed, creating the opportunity for the development of longer-lasting solutions. This exploration was accomplished by completing a comparative case study analysis using the societal fragility framework. This chapter begins with the comparison of findings from each of the societal fragility components—social norms, institutions, trust, and social cohesion—of January 6 in the United States to those of Brazil's 2022 presidential election. Next, this chapter includes findings and recommendations based on the comparison. The chapter finishes with areas for future research and final concluding thoughts.

A. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

When examining and analyzing the United States and Brazil within the societal fragility framework, several interesting similarities and differences come to the surface. Both countries experienced noteworthy shifts in democratic social norms, far-reaching influence by political leaders on institutional ineffectiveness, significant loses in multiple forms of trust, and weak social cohesion primarily stemming from inequalities. Notable differences between the United States and Brazil were often the result of cultural and historical variances. These differences were seen in the driving forces of the

99

us-versus-them mentality, long-standing institutional challenges, the causes behind some of the distrust, and the influence of conspiracy theories on social cohesion. While the United States and Brazil have different approaches for achieving democracy and are arguably at different points on the democratic spectrum, several commonalities still exist between the nations when it comes to societal fragility and extremism. Through this comparative analysis, each component of the societal fragility framework is examined for similarities and differences, culminating in several findings on the nexus of societal fragility and extremism.

1. Social Norms

Both the United States and Brazil have experienced shifts in social norms. A drifting away from essential democratic norms—forbearance, reciprocity, self-efficacy, responsibility, and tolerance—has occurred for the nations. Despite the various causes, changing social norms for democracies can impact democratic stability by allowing less democratic norms to enter, such as the growth of extremism seen in both case studies.

The United States and Brazil have encountered several common catalysts for changes to social norms. Before each case study event, both countries faced conditions that affected large segments of society and ultimately began to influence social norms. A shared pre-condition for the United States and Brazil was the COVID-19 response, which left a majority of citizens feeling frustrated, dissatisfied, and vulnerable. Additionally, both nations have experienced widespread challenges around inequalities, which have affected social norms. For Brazil, many conflicts have stemmed from opportunities for citizens of lower socioeconomic status and equal rights for minorities. In the United States, conspiracy theories, such as the great replacement, in addition to the nation's continuing struggles with immigration, have fueled beliefs around inequalities. Further contributing to changing social norms for both countries have been the role and influence of political leaders on society. Political leaders in both the United States and Brazil have used social media heavily, with far-reaching and systemic impacts due to the increasing opportunities for connection and communication. False narratives and open bigotry and hate spread by leadership have influenced social norms by publicly shaping what is acceptable or

100

unacceptable behavior, particularly toward minorities, reinforcing and hardening social norms. Social norms have, therefore, been influenced by several common factors in the United States and Brazil, making their maintenance even more challenging.

One of the unique differences exists between the us-versus-them mentality seen in both countries, which has generated severe in-groups and out-groups often incorporating hatred. Despite both countries having an us-versus-them mentality involving politics, for the United States it has typically been rooted in ideologies and issues of specific political parties. Several issues have been labeled as either a Democratic or Republican problem; however, rifts have formed even within the Republican Party. For example, in the United States, even if citizens associate with the Republican Party, they might still be ostracized for not being "Republican enough." In Brazil, however, the us-versus-them dynamic has been driven primarily by negative identity because of the multi-party system and the lack of ideology or beliefs tied to a specific party. In other words, while the parties exhibit left-leaning or right-leaning tendencies, they have been more flexible in their interests and approaches because they are driven by the candidate and not a political platform. Therefore, social norms in Brazil, while still impacted politically to an extent, have not been reinforced as much by political affiliation as they have been in the United States. Thus, different driving forces have produced the us-versus-them mentality, resulting in more nuanced shifts in social norms for each nation.

A breakdown of democratic social norms in the United States and Brazil has been one of the causes for increasing, sometimes violent, extremism that both countries have experienced. Tolerance, compromise, and forbearance have diminished significantly across each nation. Public displays and representations of dislike and hatred have become more commonplace, leading to greater acceptance of these behaviors as a new norm. With participation in such behaviors from political leaders, multiple levels within these societies have reinforced new norms that center on intolerance.

2. Institutions

Despite the democratic age of each nation, institutions in the United States and Brazil have shown notable similarities and differences that have impacted societal fragility.

101

In both cases, each nation's history has played an important role in forming perceptions of institutional ineffectiveness and the general sentiment of government dissatisfaction. Even though Brazil has had a lengthy history with the military and authoritarianism, the comparative analysis with the United States provides important insights on societal fragility and extremism.

The institutions share several important features that threaten the legitimacy of each country's democracy. For one, both countries have experienced false narratives around a corrupt election. The implications of this narrative extend to other parts of the societal fragility framework, however; when it comes to institutions, the ability to provide free and fair elections is one of the hallmarks of democracy. Therefore, even the perception of institutions failing at one of their key services can have cataclysmal consequences. Additionally, the United States and Brazil have experienced the use of false narratives by political figures who, due to positions of high influence, have legitimized the idea that institutions and government are corrupt. In both cases, feelings and perceptions of injustice have been expressed by a majority of the population.

A comparison of the countries reveals several nuances surrounding their respective institutions. While both countries have experienced sentiments of their institutions' inability to provide key services, the focus in Brazil has been on long-standing issues of corruption, crime, and inequalities, which were accentuated leading up to the election. For the United States, many citizens have been frustrated with the actual effectiveness of institutions, such as the news media and Congress; however, public perception of ineffectiveness has also been heavily influenced by conspiracy theories, misinformation, and disinformation. Another significant difference relates directly to Brazil's history with the military, which has generated skepticism about the country's future as a democracy. The level of influence and power that currently exists for the military due to the quantity of federal positions its members hold has raised the question of whether the military can withstand Bolsonaro's political influence following his election loss.

Interestingly, the commonalities between the United States and Brazil center on a key function of institutions—elections. The differences, however, have resulted from a combination of factors, including historical context. Because institutional effectiveness is

determined by citizens over time and across interactions, it is crucial to examine societal fragility within a historical context. A wider lens also provides the opportunity to explore more structural grievances that contribute to or enable the growth of extremism.

3. Trust

The impacts of social norms and institutions are often made evident in citizens' trust. Both the United States and Brazil have experienced changes to and reductions in trust across its various forms. The implications of these losses will have long-term effects.

For both countries, first-order institutional trust has been weakened across several institutions. The United States and Brazil have exhibited diminishing trust in law enforcement to act fairly and justly—although police brutality is significantly more pervasive and egregious in the latter. With both countries also sharing narratives around a corrupt election process, citizens perceive that society's method for controlling acceptable levels of distrust of politicians has been compromised. Thus, Brazil and the United States have experienced a loss of both forms of institutional trust because of perceived and actual corruption.

When it comes to social and generalized trust, however, Brazil and the United States differ in some unique ways. While both have faced challenges with weakening trust, the differences are caused by how in-groups and out-groups are strengthened or weakened. In the case of the United States, trust has been strengthened by in-group dynamics, which also increase distrust of out-groups. Brazil has experienced a somewhat different relationship between trust and group dynamics. In its case, a distrust of out-groups has been reinforced because of negative identities—a dissociation with groups or individuals based on a strong dislike of their affiliations. Therefore, in-group dynamics and trust are distinctive in Brazil.

Trust is a volatile component of societal fragility because it is easily weakened yet hard to build. Therefore, its loss will have long-term effects on democracies and social stability. Particularly concerning for both the United States and Brazil is the systemic loss of trust between members of society themselves, as well as the various layers within institutions. The inability of citizens to trust each other encourages segmentation in society,

103

increasing polarization, and fostering the development of the us-versus-them mentality characteristic of extremism.

4. Social Cohesion

The challenges that the United States and Brazil have experienced in the other components of societal fragility carry over to social cohesion. Both countries currently have low levels of social cohesion, which is worrisome for the future of their democracies.

The United States and Brazil experience many of the same challenges when it comes to social cohesion, including underlying conditions, troubles involving inequalities, and political polarization. Both countries' underlying conditions and events contributed to many citizens feeling disgruntled before the events examined in the case studies. Disagreements over inequalities within society have underpinned social cohesion problems for both countries. A common driving force behind these disagreements is the belief that reducing disparities will result in the loss of opportunities or power for others. Additionally, severe polarization in both the United States and Brazil has contributed to significant political violence, as detailed in the case studies. These instances of political violence indicate waning social cohesion, so this common finding suggests that social cohesion is weak for both countries.

While Brazil and the United States share several traits regarding social cohesion, one of the differences lies in the contributing factors. For instance, in the United States, conspiracy theories that include racial, ethnic, and political overtones have been leveraged, contributing to lingering sentiments about inequalities. In Brazil, however, conspiracy theories were leveraged primarily by Bolsonaro to suggest a corrupt voting process. The differences in the use of conspiracy theories, therefore, capitalize on each nation's history to help gain traction, ultimately impacting social cohesion through a significant acceptance by citizens.

Social cohesion presents a problem for the United States and Brazil. Since social cohesion enables a society to navigate conflict, diminishing social cohesion poses a problem for the countries in the future.

B.   FINDINGS

The preceding discussion reveals that the United States and Brazil are experiencing several commonalities involving societal fragility and extremism. Shifting social norms that hinder democracy, challenges to the perception of institutional effectiveness, a significant loss of trust, and weak social cohesion suggest that the United States and Brazil are experiencing societal fragility. Such changes in social dynamics enable an environment where extremism can flourish. By exploring the relationship between societal fragility and extremism, this thesis has deepened the understanding of these dynamics. Several findings from this exploration can help inform and shape future solutions to improve the stability of democratic societies, approach extremism, and prevent democratic backsliding.

1.   Whether a Threat Is Actual or Perceived, Societal Fragility and Extremism Are Still Impacted.

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that whether a threat is actual or perceived by a majority of society, the impact on societal fragility and extremism is still the same. It is the feeling of a severe threat that affects the reality of citizens, thus influencing the way they interact with others and their world. If a threat reaches the threshold of an existential crisis, which depends on the individual, then the person may begin to exhibit high levels of hatred, indicative of extremism. If most of society experiences the feeling of an existential threat, regardless of any differences in cause or origin, the dynamics within society will change. For democracies, such changes have severe implications and can result in societal fragility along with increased levels of extremism. The feeling of coming under threat impacts each component of the societal fragility framework—social norms, institutions, trust, and social cohesion. Democratic-centered social norms, including forbearance, reciprocity, self-efficacy, responsibility, and tolerance, help citizens navigate and participate in society. Existential threats often prompt feelings that promote self-preservation and self-protection, which are sometimes necessary, but if prolonged or severe enough, they can inhibit democratic social norms. Other areas of the societal fragility framework are also impacted, as several forms of trust weaken and social cohesion wanes. Institutions can also be at risk, as such institutions as the executive branch, the legislature, and other government institutions are said to reflect

the needs and wants of the citizens they serve in democracies. Even more concerning, with the use and rapid spread of false narratives, misinformation, disinformation, and conspiracy theories, a perceived threat can gain traction and destabilize society. Indeed, perceptions can influence reality and citizens' interactions with their world, thus impacting societal fragility and extremism.

2. Historical Context Is Important for Understanding Societal Fragility and Extremism.

Historical context—significant events, challenges, and movements in a nation and society's history—is crucial to the societal fragility framework, as it provides a deeper understanding of the influences for each of the societal fragility components. It is also mutually beneficial to view extremism through a historical lens, as grievances are often built over time and from a set of exposures that result in an existential threat. Without context, it is easy to assume that the cause of such increases in political violence and extremism is citizen irrationality. While irrationality might be the cause in some cases, an examination of historical influences provides a connection between citizens and their beliefs that might otherwise be overlooked. Indeed, societal fragility and extremism is rarely, if ever, the result of a stand-alone event but rather a culmination of events and interactions. Therefore, the analysis of societal fragility and extremism benefits from historical context, making it helpful in identifying catalysts of changes and shifts. If taken out of context, they would not provide the depth necessary to determine long-term solutions.

3. Fragile Societies Create an Environment Where Extremism Can Easily Gain Traction.

As a society experiences a weakening of the four components—social norms, institutions, trust, and social cohesion—barriers of entry for extremism begin to crumble. Society's role in social norms is to help regulate what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior; however, when citizens including high-level influencers promote hate and bigotry, others may become emboldened to do the same (or worse). If left unaddressed by society, both by citizens and leadership, the behaviors and attitudes previously deemed

106

socially unacceptable are more likely to become reinforced as acceptable. Thus, instead of promoting and pursuing tolerance, the environment can foster expressions of hate. Due to the interconnectedness of the societal fragility components, institutions, trust, and social cohesion also bear the brunt of such weakening. In some cases, such as those presented in this thesis, this interconnectedness enabled various forms of extremism to surface and become more prevalent.

4. **The Inability of a Government to Rectify Systemic Inequalities Negatively Impacts Societal Fragility and Enables the Acceptance of Extremism as a Solution.**

Systemic inequalities generate several challenges for democracies and society as they can often be the focal point of disagreements. Inequalities can be actual, as seen in Brazil by the severe socioeconomic differences, or perceived, as exhibited through the great replacement in the United States. Due to civil liberties being the bedrock of democracy, the presence of significant inequalities can fuel intolerance and feelings of distrust, which are some of the indicators of societal fragility. Additionally, if balancing the inequalities or working to provide rights to those who are disenfranchised is not prioritized by the government, such actions will encourage segmentation within society and make achieving a civil society more challenging.

Regardless of the differing perspectives on what injustices cause inequalities, when a vast segment of the population feels disenfranchised, dissatisfaction with government ensues. When this dissatisfaction and frustration reach the point of becoming an existential threat, rectifying the issue on their own may become an appealing solution for citizens. Widespread disgruntlement lends itself to generating an us-versus-them environment whereby in-groups and out-groups solidify and grow. Extremism, therefore, becomes an acceptable approach for viewing and interacting within society. For some citizens, as was exhibited in both case studies, the groups' differences can become so hardened and the grievances so significant that the perception of violence becomes the only solution.

107

5.   Due to a High Level of Influence, Political Leaders' Rhetoric Has Significant Influence on Societal Fragility and the Acceptance of Extremism.

In both cases, political leaders have publicly participated in controversial, sometimes bigoted, rhetoric. As citizens trust elected officials to act on behalf of their interests, the promotion of false narratives and targeted, hateful commentary can have a widespread and potentially catastrophic impact. Social media provides limited filtering capabilities, if at all, easily allowing the promotion and spread of such narratives, particularly since messaging from political leaders on the platforms is often magnified. With little to no accountability provided, the new methods for communication have increased the opportunities to influence society. Thus, the use of hateful and bigoted rhetoric generates the perception that public expression of such ideas is socially acceptable. Through such promotion, the guidelines under which society normally operates—social norms—are challenged, as are the other components of societal fragility including trust, social cohesion, and even institutions. Additionally, due to the high level of influence that political leaders hold and the trust placed on their positions of power, they often serve as an information source for many citizens. Therefore, if extremist content is presented, promoted, or condoned by political leaders, citizens may adopt the same sentiments.

6.   Social Norms Have the Greatest Impact on Societal Fragility and Extremism.

Social norms, while only one component of societal fragility, have the greatest influence on the other framework components. Despite all the components being interrelated, the prioritization of democratic values and norms within society would improve institutions, trust, and social cohesion, placing social norms at the cornerstone. Indeed, in democracy, institutions are ideally a reflection of society, the result of free and fair elections. Even though the relationship between society and institutions is often cyclical, society is ultimately responsible for the leaders it elects to represent the population, thus heavily influencing the direction of institutions. Additionally, social norms help members of society develop generalized trust by providing agreeable guidelines for interactions. Social cohesion, then, is a reflection of strong social norms and trust, as

108

well as institutional support. Based on the extensive role of social norms, it can be concluded that they have the greatest influence on societal fragility and can act as a barrier to the widespread acceptance of extremism.

In summary, when a democratic nation experiences societal fragility, the resulting environment expands the acceptance of extremism. Extremism has become more acceptable in large part because society has moved away from democratic norms, which establish acceptable or unacceptable behaviors and attitudes within society. While members of society play a significant role in the regulation and adoption of norms, it is a shared responsibility between society and the government. Furthermore, the nation's history—as well as the individual's—contributes significantly to one's perspective and perception of the world. Since changes to societal fragility and the adoption of extremism occur over time, understanding the role of history is important in gaining a deeper understanding of potential solutions to both.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations provided here serve as potential starting points for reducing societal fragility and extremism. Therefore, democracies need to continue building on the following suggestions, particularly regarding social norms. Notably, the following recommendations are not immediate solutions to societal fragility or extremism, so improvements are more likely to be seen over a longer period. Just as shifts toward societal fragility and extremism have occurred over time, the same holds true for their solutions.

1. Rebuild a Culture of Tolerance within Society.

Societies involve significant diversity—cultural, racial, ethnic, and religious. Tolerance is, therefore, an important democratic social norm that needs to be developed and fostered for the purpose of achieving a stable society. Prioritizing tolerance needs to occur from the bottom up, as well as from the top down within society.

For citizens, rebuilding tolerance involves having vulnerability, as open-mindedness is required by the individual. Through open-mindedness, preconceived notions can be set aside, creating opportunities for new ideas and perspectives to be heard, thus

helping to rebuild tolerance. Being open-minded, however, is not enough. Citizens must also expose themselves to differing perspectives and opinions, practicing self-awareness and self-evaluation in the process in order to improve. Understanding the overall importance of improving tolerance and re-visiting the associated civic responsibilities in maintaining democracy can foster a culture that rebuilds tolerance for citizens.

Institutions and political leaders must also contribute to the efforts of rebuilding tolerance. By prioritizing tolerance in practice, elected officials can help ease the legislative bottlenecks that occur and improve the effectiveness of governing institutions. Having a high level of influence, political leaders have the opportunity to help shape and promote a culture of open-mindedness and compromise, which can aid in further adoption by citizens. Other institutions, including the media, also play a vital role by holding themselves accountable for the actions and information shared, thereby contributing to or hindering the rebuilding of tolerance.

2. Rebuild Institutional Trust through Transparency and Accountability.

Transparency is a necessary component in building back trust. As such, institutions need to focus on incorporating more transparency. Even though increased transparency might lead to some difficult or negative outcomes as it can shine a light on inefficiencies or deficits, it can also provide an opportunity to re-evaluate the institution to improve its service. Consistency by institutions is crucial, as repetitive experiences by citizens are necessary to rebuild trust. Providing transparency should also occur in a timely manner, relative to an event that might elicit significant distrust. Even if information is still being gathered or analyzed, communication is vital for the purposes of transparency and trust.

Improving transparency should be prioritized by all types of institutions, as a collective effort is necessary to build back trust. Transparency alone, however, is not enough to foster trust. Accountability is also a necessary component, requiring ownership when mistakes are made or miscommunications take place. Since some institutions act as sources of information, such as media outlets, transparency can be as simple as drawing a harder line between opinion and fact-based information for the audience. Additionally,

maintaining and reinforcing a higher standard for fact-checking and information-sourcing should be established as a means of increasing accountability. Repeatable and honest efforts, from the perspective of society, toward solutions for historically divisive issues, such as immigration, need to occur. For the judicial, legislative, and executive branches, accountability needs to occur from within their membership to produce a better balance between the pursuit of political agendas and the necessity of compromise in the solution-making process. By making substantial strides to improve transparency and accountability within the three government branches, institutional trust within society may improve more immediately.

3. Implement Methods to Hold Political Leaders More Accountable for Undemocratic Rhetoric.

Due to their high level of influence within society, political leaders and their chosen rhetoric need to be held accountable. Rhetoric involving false narratives or bigoted commentary contributes to the acceptance of the same behaviors and attitudes throughout the rest of society. While this recommendation must be balanced with civil liberties, including the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, there is no discounting the reach and influence of politicians within society. Whether through social media or other means, the ability of political figures to communicate through unfiltered methods has far-reaching effects, which if left unaddressed have the potential to threaten a nation's democracy. Part of holding political leaders accountable falls on the shoulders of citizens through the process of voting; however, the responsibility cannot fall solely on the citizens. Within the community of political leadership, other leaders must understand and prioritize the need to support the democratic norms that are essential to the well-being of the democracy. Media outlets may also contribute to holding leaders accountable, as they can provide context or minimize attitudes and behaviors through their news reporting. Therefore, holding political leaders accountable for undemocratic rhetoric and narratives is the responsibility of many, including citizens through voting, other leaders, and institutions such as the media.

D.   FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESEARCH

This thesis provides a starting point for research on societal fragility and extremism. There are still additional areas and applications that are worth exploring for further insight. Future research in the following areas can help provide supplemental knowledge that will benefit efforts for democratic stabilization.

1.   Apply the Societal Fragility Framework to Democratic Nations Not Experiencing High Levels of Extremism.

The societal fragility framework was applied specifically to democratic nations battling significant events involving extremism. An area of research beneficial to the future of homeland security is to apply the framework to democracies where extremism is not as prevalent and a large showing of violence has not ensued. Indeed, much of the current research and many frameworks used for fragility and extremism are biased toward underdeveloped or democratizing countries. By applying this framework across a wider variety of democracies, including well-established ones, further insight can be gained on effective solutions and preventive measures to societal fragility and, therefore, democratic regression.

2.   Explore Methods to Improve Public Discourse.

Improving society's ability to have productive public discourse is essential to the well-being of democracy and, therefore, requires additional research. Research should focus on the roles of both citizens and institutions, including the media. New ways of connecting, such as social media, present notable challenges for discourse that deserve further exploration. Additional research on best approaches for promoting and building democratic norms, such as tolerance, forbearance, reciprocity, and responsibility, is important to efforts for improving public discourse. Such qualities are integral in achieving effective and productive discourse. With political leaders having such a high level of influence, further research is needed on additional methods for holding political leaders accountable for their rhetoric. Examining approaches from other democratic nations might provide additional insight on approaches applicable to the United States. As information is becoming more readily available to people, finding effective ways to manage and navigate

112

misinformation, disinformation, false narratives, and conspiracy theories is also beneficial in improving public discourse. Thus, future research opportunities surrounding public discourse are vast yet necessary for improving democratic stability.

E. FINAL THOUGHTS

As shown in the case of the United States, even well-established democracies are susceptible to vulnerabilities that can potentially result in democratic backsliding. Traditional frameworks, however, are limited in examining nations and societies like the United States. The societal fragility framework aims to close this gap, as it can be applied to examine existing and potential challenges in nations of varying degrees of democracy.

The evaluation and analysis of the United States within the societal fragility framework show a concerning trend, which if left unaddressed can have severe consequences. Thus, it is crucial that the United States prioritize re-stabilizing society to prevent further backsliding. One of the major challenges ahead will be the length of time required to improve each of the components of societal fragility. As such, diligence and consistency with recommendations and interventions will aid in the progression toward a more stable society and democracy. Another major challenge for the United States, and a potential turning point, will be the 2024 presidential election. For society, the election will be an opportunity to take a step collectively toward increasing stability, if it so chooses.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

LIST OF REFERENCES

Abramowitz, Alan I., and Kyle L. Saunders. "Is Polarization a Myth?" *Journal of Politics* 70, no. 2 (2008): 542–55. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022381608080493.

Adamczyk, Christopher J. "Gods versus Titans: Ideological Indicators of Identitarian Violence." Master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2020. https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/66032.

Aguilera, Jasmine. "'An Epidemic of Misinformation.' New Report Finds Trust in Social Institutions Diminished Further in 2020." *Time*, January 13, 2021. https://time.com/5929252/edelman-trust-barometer-2021/.

Alexandre, Marc, Alys Willman, and Ghazia Aslam. *Societal Dynamics and Fragility: Engaging Societies in Responding to Fragile Situations*. Herndon, VA: World Bank Publications, 2012. ProQuest Ebook Central.

Anti-Defamation League. "Extremism." Accessed May 4, 2022. https://www.adl.org/resources/glossary-terms/extremism.

Anti-Defamation League (blog). "At the Extremes: The 2020 Election and American Extremism: Part 1." September 24, 2020. https://www.adl.org/blog/at-the-extremes-the-2020-election-and-american-extremism-part-1.

Areal, João. "'Them' without 'Us': Negative Identities and Affective Polarization in Brazil." *Political Research Exchange* 4, no. 1 (2022). https://doi.org/10.1080/2474736X.2022.2117635.

Atlantic Council's DFRLab. "#StopTheSteal: Timeline of Social Media and Extremist Activities Leading to 1/6 Insurrection." Just Security, February 10, 2021. https://www.justsecurity.org/74622/stopthesteal-timeline-of-social-media-and-extremist-activities-leading-to-1-6-insurrection/.

Ayres, Marcela, and Lisandra Paraguassu. "Lula's Market Lure Fades after Brazil's 'Liz Truss Moment.'" Reuters, November 11, 2022. https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/brazils-lula-faces-setback-markets-fret-over-spending-cabinet-picks-2022-11-11/.

Baker, C. Edwin. *Human Liberty and Freedom of Speech*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. ProQuest Ebook Central.

Baker, Stephanie Alice, Matthew Wade, and Michael James Walsh. "The Challenges of Responding to Misinformation during a Pandemic: Content Moderation and the Limitations of the Concept of Harm." *Media International Australia* 177, no. 1 (2020): 103–7. https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X20951301.

Banco, Erin. "Emails Reveal New Details of Trump White House Interference in CDC Covid Planning." POLITICO, November 12, 2021. https://www.politico.com/news/2021/11/12/trump-cdc-covid-521128.

Baron, Jonathan. "Social Norms for Citizenship." *Social Research* 85, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 229–53. ProQuest.

Barrett, Martyn. *Competencies for Democratic Culture: Living Together as Equals in Culturally Diverse Democratic Societies*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2016.

Bauer, Lauren, Kristen Broady, Wendy Edelberg, and Jimmy O'Donnell. "Ten Facts about COVID-19 and the U.S. Economy." Brookings Institution, September 17, 2020. https://www.brookings.edu/research/ten-facts-about-covid-19-and-the-u-s-economy/.

BBC News. "Brazil's Amazon: Deforestation 'Surges to 12-Year High.'" November 30, 2020. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-55130304.

———. "Brazil's Lula: From President to Prisoner." June 11, 2019. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-10841416.

———. "US Election 2020: Why Racism Is Still a Problem for the World's Most Powerful Country." October 30, 2020. https://www.bbc.com/news/election-us-2020-54738922.

Benabou, Roland, and Jean Tirole. "Laws and Norms." Working paper, National Bureau of Economic Research, 2011. https://doi.org/10.3386/w17579.

Berger, J. M. *Extremism*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018.

Bermeo, Nancy. "On Democratic Backsliding." *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 1 (2016): 5–19. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0012.

Bertelsmann Stiftung. *BTI 2022 Country Report—Brazil*. Gütersloh, Germany: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022. https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report?isocode=BRA&cHash=5ff1fcaef3c7a15008cdce0d7bd1efa9.

Bimes, Terri, and Quinn Mulroy. "The Rise and Decline of Presidential Populism." *Studies in American Political Development* 18, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 136–59. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898588X04000082.

Black Lives Matter. "About Page." Accessed December 1, 2022. https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/.

Blakemore, Brian, and Imran Awan. *Extremism, Counter-Terrorism and Policing*. London: Taylor & Francis, 2013. ProQuest Ebook Central.

116

Boas, Taylor C., F. Daniel Hidalgo, and Marcus André Melo. "Norms versus Action: Why Voters Fail to Sanction Malfeasance in Brazil." *American Journal of Political Science* 63, no. 2 (2019): 385–400. http://www.jstor.org/stable/45132484.

Brito, Ricardo, and Gram Slattery. "After Seven Years, Brazil Shuts Down Car Wash Anti-Corruption Squad." Reuters, February 3, 2021. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-corruption-idUSKBN2A4068.

Broadwater, Luke. "House Finds Bannon in Contempt for Defying Jan. 6 Inquiry Subpoena." *New York Times*, October 21, 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/21/us/politics/bannon-contempt-jan-6-subpoena.html.

Browne, Evie. *State Fragility and Social Cohesion*. GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1027. Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham. https://gsdrc.org/publications/state-fragility-and-social-cohesion/.

Buchanan, Larry, Quoctrung Bui, and Jugal K. Patel. "Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in U.S. History." *New York Times*, July 3, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/03/us/george-floyd-protests-crowd-size.html.

Bursztyn, Leonardo, Georgy Egorov, and Stefano Fiorin. "From Extreme to Mainstream: The Erosion of Social Norms." *American Economic Review* 110, no. 11 (November 2020): 3522–48. https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20171175.

Buschschlüter, Vanessa. "Brazil's Lula and Bolsonaro Face Run-off after Surprisingly Tight Result." BBC News, October 3, 2022. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-63112509.

Byman, Daniel L. "How Hateful Rhetoric Connects to Real-World Violence." *Brookings* (blog), April 9, 2021. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/04/09/how-hateful-rhetoric-connects-to-real-world-violence/.

Canan, Mustafa, and Anthony Akil. "A Warfare Domain Approach to the Disinformation Problem." In *Proceedings of the 15th International Conference on Cyber Warfare and Security*, edited by Brian K. Payne and Hongyi Wu, 1–10. Norfolk, VA: Academic Conferences and Publishing Limited, 2020. https://doi.org/10.34190/ICCWS.20.023.

Carothers, Thomas, and Andrew O'Donohue. *Democracies Divided: The Global Challenge of Political Polarization*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2019. http://muse.jhu.edu/book/67890.

Carvalho, Daniel. "Lula Seeks to Mend Brazil Alliances Frayed by Amazon Destruction." Bloomberg, September 3, 2022. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-09-03/lula-seeks-to-mend-brazil-alliances-frayed-by-amazon-destruction.

117

CBS News. "Bolsonaro Supporters Block Brazil Roads for a 2nd Day as President Refuses to Accept Election Loss." November 1, 2022. https://www.cbsnews. com/news/brazil-election-results-2022-protest-lula-bolsonaro-road-blocks/.

Center for an Informed Public, Digital Forensic Research Lab, Graphika, and Stanford Internet Observatory. *The Long Fuse: Misinformation and the 2020 Election*. v1.3.0. Stanford: Election Integrity Partnership, 2021. https://purl.stanford. edu/tr171zs0069.

Chamie, Joseph. "The 'Great Replacement' Theory Rejects History and Reality." *The Hill*, July 18, 2022. https://thehill.com/opinion/immigration/3564238-the-great-replacement-theory-rejects-history-and-reality/.

Chandra, Anita, Brian Michael Jenkins, Ryan Andrew Brown, Alina I. Palimaru, Amarnath Amarasingam, Myrieme Churchill, Chris Buckley, and Jeff Schoep. *Exiting Extremism: What Binds People to Extremist Groups and How Organizations Help Them Leave*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2021. https://www.rand.org/pubs/presentations/PTA1071-1.html.

Charlton, Lauretta. "What Is the Great Replacement?" *New York Times*, August 6, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/06/us/politics/grand-replacement-explainer. html.

Christensen, Tom, and Per Lægreid. "Trust in Government: The Relative Importance of Service Satisfaction, Political Factors, and Demography." *Public Performance & Management Review* 28, no. 4 (2005): 487–511. http://www.jstor.org/stable/ 3381308.

Cobbina-Dungy, Jennifer, Soma Chaudhuri, Ashleigh LaCourse, and Christina DeJong. "'Defund the Police': Perceptions among Protesters in the 2020 March on Washington." *Criminology & Public Policy* 21, no. 1 (2022): 147–74. https://doi. org/10.1111/1745-9133.12571.

Coen-Sanchez, Karine, Bassey Ebenso, Ieman Mona El-Mowafi, Maria Berghs, Dina Idriss-Wheeler, and Sanni Yaya. "Repercussions of Overturning *Roe v. Wade* for Women across Systems and beyond Borders." *Reproductive Health* 19, no. 1 (2022): 184. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-022-01490-y.

Corasaniti, Nick, Michael C. Bender, Ruth Igielnik, and Kristen Bayrakdarian. "Voters See Democracy in Peril, but Saving It Isn't a Priority." *New York Times*, October 18, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/18/us/politics/midterm-election-voters-democracy-poll.html.

Crawford, Blyth, Marc-André Argentino. "QAnon Women in Politics Part Two: QAnon Careers." Global Insights on Extremism and Technology, April 29, 2021. https://gnet-research.org/2021/04/29/qanon-women-in-politics-part-two-qanon-careers/.

118

Dahl, Robert A. *On Democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020.

Da Ros, Luciano, and Matthew M. Taylor. *Brazilian Politics on Trial: Corruption and Reform under Democracy*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2022.

Deane, Claudia, Kim Parker, and John Gramlich. *A Year of U.S. Public Opinion on the Coronavirus Pandemic*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2021. https://www.pewresearch.org/2021/03/05/a-year-of-u-s-public-opinion-on-the-coronavirus-pandemic/.

Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development, Department of Defense, and Department of the Treasury. *United States Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability*. Washington, DC: Global Publishing Solutions, 2020.

Dias, Elizabeth. "The Far-Right Christian Quest for Power: 'We Are Seeing Them Emboldened.'" *New York Times*, July 8, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/08/us/christian-nationalism-politicians.html.

Doherty, Carroll, Jocelyn Kiley, Nida Asheer, and Calvin Jordan. *Amid Campaign Turmoil, Biden Holds Wide Leads on Coronavirus, Unifying the Country*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2020. https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/10/09/amid-campaign-turmoil-biden-holds-wide-leads-on-coronavirus-unifying-the-country/.

Doherty, Carroll, Jocelyn Kiley, Andrew Daniller, Bradley Jones, Hannah Hartig, Amina Dunn, Hannah Gilberstadt, Ted Van Green, and Vianney Gomez. *Majority of Public Favors Giving Civilians the Power to Sue Police Officers for Misconduct*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2020. https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/07/09/majority-of-public-favors-giving-civilians-the-power-to-sue-police-officers-for-misconduct/.

Downie, Andrew. "Brazil Supreme Court Ruling to Reactivate Amazon Fund Gives Hope in Fight to Save Rainforest." *Guardian*, November 4, 2022. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/04/brazil-supreme-court-ruling-to-reactivate-amazon-fund-gives-hope-in-fight-to-save-rainforest.

Dreisbach, Tom. "Here's What We Know about Links between Extremists and Trump Allies." NPR, July 11, 2022. https://www.npr.org/2022/07/11/1110961285/the-next-jan-6-committee-hearing-will-focus-on-the-role-of-qanon-and-extremists.

Dutta, Nabamita, and Sanjukta Roy. "State Fragility and Transparency." *International Journal of Development Issues* 15, no. 3 (2016): 202–23. ProQuest.

Economist Intelligence Unit. *Democracy Index 2021: The China Challenge*. London: Economist Intelligence Unit, 2022. https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2021/.

119

Edwards, Michael. *The Oxford Handbook of Civil Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Ellsworth, Brian, and Lisandra Paraguassu. "Lula Narrowly Defeats Bolsonaro to Win Brazil Presidency Again." Reuters, October 30, 2022. https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/brazil-votes-heated-bolsonaro-vs-lula-presidential-runoff-2022-10-30/.

Epstein, Reid J. "As Faith Flags in U.S. Government, Many Voters Want to Upend the System." *New York Times*, July 13, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/13/us/politics/government-trust-voting-poll.html.

Evangelista, Rafael, and Fernanda Bruno. "WhatsApp and Political Instability in Brazil: Targeted Messages and Political Radicalisation." *Internet Policy Review* 8, no. 4 (2019). https://doi.org/10.14763/2019.4.1434.

Faiola, Anthony, and Gabriela Sá Pessoa. "Bolsonaro Hasn't Conceded to Lula. Is He Following the Trump Playbook?" *Washington Post*, October 31, 2022. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/10/31/bolsonaro-lula-brazil-election/.

Farivar, Masood. "What Is the Great Replacement Theory?" Voice of America News, May 18, 2022. https://www.voanews.com/a/what-is-the-great-replacement-theory-/6578349.html.

Ferrante, Lucas, and Philip M. Fearnside. "Brazil's New President and 'Ruralists' Threaten Amazonia's Environment, Traditional Peoples and the Global Climate." *Environmental Conservation* 46, no. 4 (December 2019): 261–63. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0376892919000213.

Gilman, Hollie Russon, and K. Sabeel Rahman. *Rebuilding Democratic Infrastructure*. Washington, DC: New America, 2019. http://newamerica.org/political-reform/reports/rebuilding-democratic-infrastructure/.

Glassner, Barry. *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things*. New York: Basic Books, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central.

González Cabrera, Cristian. *"I Became Scared, This Was Their Goal": Efforts to Ban Gender and Sexuality Education in Brazil*. Human Rights Watch, 2022. https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/05/12/i-became-scared-was-their-goal/efforts-ban-gender-and-sexuality-education-brazil.

Greenwald, Glenn. *Securing Democracy: My Fight for Press Freedom and Justice in Bolsonaro's Brazil*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2021.

Grisales, Claudia. "Jan. 6 Panel Subpoenas Former Trump White House Trade Adviser Peter Navarro." NPR, February 9, 2022. https://www.npr.org/2022/02/09/1079670795/jan-6-panel-subpoenas-former-trump-white-house-trade-adviser-peter-navarro.

Haider, Huma. *Community-Based Approaches to Peacebuilding in Conflict-Affected and Fragile Contexts*. Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham, 2009. http://epapers.bham.ac.uk/642/.

Harton, Helen C., Matthew Gunderson, and Martin J. Bourgeois. "'I'll Be There with You': Social Influence and Cultural Emergence at the Capitol on January 6." *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice* 26, no. 3 (2022): 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1037/gdn0000185.

Hodges, Lori R. "Systems Fragility: The Sociology of Chaos." Master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2015. https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/45197.

Hoerst, Carina, and John Drury. "Social Norms Misperception among Voters in the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election." *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 21, no. 1 (2021): 312–46. https://doi.org/10.1111/asap.12269.

Hogg, Michael A., Arie Kruglanski, and Kees van den Bos. "Uncertainty and the Roots of Extremism." *Journal of Social Issues* 69, no. 3 (September 2013): 407–18. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12021.

Howe, Paul. "Eroding Norms and Democratic Deconsolidation." *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 4 (October 2017): 15–29. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0061.

Hunter, Wendy, and Diego Vega. "Populism and the Military: Symbiosis and Tension in Bolsonaro's Brazil." *Democratization* 29, no. 2 (2022): 337–59. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.1956466.

Huq, Aziz Z., and Tom Ginsburg. "How to Lose a Constitutional Democracy." Public Law Working Paper No. 642. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2017. http://www.ssrn.com/abstract=2901776.

International Crisis Group. "The Might and the Right: How Far Will Brazil's Military Back Bolsonaro?" July 1, 2021. https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/brazil/might-and-right-how-far-will-brazils-military-back-bolsonaro.

Ionova, Ana. "Lula vs. Bolsonaro: What to Know about Brazil's Election." *New York Times*, September 30, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/30/world/americas/brazil-election-bolsonaro-lula.html.

Jackson, Jay W. "Realistic Group Conflict Theory: A Review and Evaluation of the Theoretical and Empirical Literature." *Psychological Record* 43, no. 3 (1993): 395–413. ProQuest.

121

Jeantet, Diane, and Carla Bridi. "Brazil Armed Forces' Report on Election Finds No Fraud." ABC News, November 9, 2022. https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/brazil-armed-forces-report-election-finds-fraud-93024939.

Jensen, Michael, Patrick James, Gary LaFree, Aaron Safer-Lichtenstein, and Elizabeth Yates. *The Use of Social Media by United States Extremists*. College Park, MD: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, 2018. https://www.start.umd.edu/publication/use-social-media-united-states-extremists.

Jensen, Ryan K. "Corruption in Brazil: Why Are Manifestations on the Rise?" Master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2018.

Junge, Benjamin, Sean T. Mitchell, Alvaro Jarrin, and Lucia Cantero, eds. *Precarious Democracy: Ethnographies of Hope, Despair, and Resistance in Brazil*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021.

Jurkowitz, Mark, Amy Mitchell, Elisa Shearer, and Mason Walker. *U.S. Media Polarization and the 2020 Election: A Nation Divided*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2020. https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2020/01/24/u-s-media-polarization-and-the-2020-election-a-nation-divided/.

Kahn, Carrie. "What You Need to Know about Brazil's Presidential Election." NPR, September 30, 2022. https://www.npr.org/2022/09/30/1125649427/brazil-president-election-bolsonaro-lula.

Kavanagh, Jennifer, William Marcellino, Jonathan S. Blake, Shawn Smith, Steven Davenport, and Mahlet Gizaw. "Facts versus Opinions: How the Style and Language of News Presentation Is Changing in the Digital Age." Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2019. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB10059.html.

Kavanagh, Jennifer, and Michael Rich. *Truth Decay: An Initial Exploration of the Diminishing Role of Facts and Analysis in American Public Life*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018. https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2314.

Kessel, Patrick Van, and Dennis Quinn. "Both Republicans and Democrats Cite Masks as a Negative Effect of COVID-19, but for Very Different Reasons." Pew Research Center, October 29, 2020. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/10/29/both-republicans-and-democrats-cite-masks-as-a-negative-effect-of-covid-19-but-for-very-different-reasons/.

Klein, Ezra. *Why We're Polarized*. New York: Avid Reader Press, 2021.

Kolb, Melina. "What Is Globalization?" Peterson Institute for International Economics, August 24, 2021. https://www.piie.com/microsites/globalization/what-is-globalization.

Konty, Mark, Blythe Duell, and Jeff Joireman. "Scared Selfish: A Culture of Fear's Values in the Age of Terrorism." *American Sociologist* 35, no. 2 (2004): 93–109. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27700387.

Kramer, Roderick M. "Ingroup–Outgroup Trust: Barriers, Benefits, and Bridges." In *The Oxford Handbook of Social and Political Trust*, edited by Eric M. Uslaner, 95–116. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190274801.013.37.

Krishna, Anirudh. *Active Social Capital: Tracing the Roots of Development and Democracy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. ProQuest Ebook Central.

Kydd, Andrew H. "Decline, Radicalization and the Attack on the U.S. Capitol." *Violence: An International Journal* 2, no. 1 (2021): 3–23. https://doi.org/10.1177/26330024211010043.

Lebrón, Antonio. "What Is Culture?" *Merit Research Journal of Education and Review* 1, no. 6 (July 2013): 126–32.

Lenard, Patti Tamara, and David Miller. "Trust and National Identity." In *The Oxford Handbook of Social and Political Trust*, edited by Eric M. Uslaner, 57–74. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190274801.013.36.

Leonhardt, David. "'A Crisis Coming': The Twin Threats to American Democracy." *New York Times*, September 17, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/17/us/american-democracy-threats.html.

Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. *How Democracies Die*. New York: Crown, 2018.

Linz, Juan J., and Alfred Stephan. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Linz, Juan J., and Alfred Stepan, eds. *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Crisis, Breakdown and Reequilibration*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

Liptak, Adam. "In 6-to-3 Ruling, Supreme Court Ends Nearly 50 Years of Abortion Rights." *New York Times*, June 24, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/24/us/roe-wade-overturned-supreme-court.html.

Lo, Kenny. "Assessing the State of Police Reform." Center for American Progress, July 16, 2020. https://www.americanprogress.org/article/assessing-state-police-reform/.

Lukianoff, Greg, and Jonathan Haidt. *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure*. New York: Penguin Press, 2018.

MacDonald, Scott B. "Brazil's Looming Presidential Election." Global Americans, September 22, 2022. https://theglobalamericans.org/2022/09/brazils-looming-presidential-election/.

Macy, Michael W., Manqing Ma, Daniel R. Tabin, Jianxi Gao, and Boleslaw K. Szymanski. "Polarization and Tipping Points." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118, no. 50 (2021): 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2102144118.

Marsden. Sarah V. "A Social Movement Theory Typology of Militant Organisations: Contextualising Terrorism." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 28, no. 4 (October 2014): 750–73. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2014.954039.

Matei, Florina Cristiana, Carolyn Halladay, and Thomas C. Bruneau. *The Routledge Handbook of Civil–Military Relations*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2021. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003084228.

Matthews, Luke J., Andrew M. Parker, Katherine Grace Carman, Rose Kerber, and Jennifer Kavanagh. "Individual Differences in Resistance to Truth Decay: Exploring the Role of Reasoning and Cognitive Biases." Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2022. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA112-17.html.

Mazzei, Patricia, and Alan Feuer. "How the Proud Boys Gripped the Miami-Dade Republican Party." *New York Times*, June 2, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/02/us/miami-republicans-proud-boys.html.

McCammon, Sarah. "Violent Rhetoric Grew More Mainstream in Conservative, Intellectual Circles." Produced by NPR. In *Morning Edition*, January 28, 2021. Radio segment, MP3 audio, 5:09, https://www.npr.org/2021/01/28/961470082/violent-rhetoric-grew-more-mainstream-in-conservative-intellectual-circles.

Mendonça, Ricardo F., and Renato Duarte Caetano. "Populism as Parody: The Visual Self-Presentation of Jair Bolsonaro on Instagram." *International Journal of Press/Politics* 26, no. 1 (2021): 210–35. https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161220970118.

Mészáros, George. "Caught in an Authoritarian Trap of Its Own Making? Brazil's 'Lava Jato' Anti-Corruption Investigation and the Politics of Prosecutorial Overreach." *Journal of Law & Society* 47, no. S1 (October 2020): S54–73. https://doi.org/10.1111/jols.12245.

Miller, Alaina. "Confederate Symbols and Their Impact on U.S. Democratic Governance." Master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2022. http://hdl.handle.net/10945/71020.

Mitozo, Isabele, Gabriella da Costa, and Carla Rodrigues. "How Do Traditional Media Incorporate Statements from Political Actors in Social Media? An Analysis of the Framing of Jair Bolsonaro's Tweets in Brazilian Journalism." *Brazilian Journalism Research* 16, no. 1 (2020): 152–77. https://doi.org/10.25200/BJR.v16n1.2020.1256.

Moghaddam, Fathali M. *Mutual Radicalization: How Groups and Nations Drive Each Other to Extremes*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2018.

———. *The Psychology of Democracy*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2016.

———. "The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration." *American Psychologist* 60, no. 2 (February 2005): 161–69. http://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.60.2.161.

Munck, Ronaldo. "Globalization and Democracy: A New 'Great Transformation'?" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 581 (May 2002): 10–21. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1049703.

Nadeem, Reem. *Majority of Public Disapproves of Supreme Court's Decision to Overturn* Roe v. Wade. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2022. https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/07/06/majority-of-public-disapproves-of-supreme-courts-decision-to-overturn-roe-v-wade/.

Naylor, Brian. "Pence Says Trump Is Wrong to Insist VP Could Have Overturned Election Results." NPR, February 4, 2022. https://www.npr.org/2022/02/04/1078367504/pence-says-trump-is-wrong-to-insist-he-could-have-overturned-election-results.

Neto, Ulisses Terto. "Democracy, Social Authoritarianism, and the Human Rights State Theory: Towards Effective Citizenship in Brazil." *International Journal of Human Rights* 21, no. 3 (2017): 289–305. https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2017.1298733.

Nicas, Jack. "Bolsonaro's New Ally in Questioning Brazil's Elections: The Military." *New York Times*, June 12, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/12/world/americas/brazil-election-bolsonaro-military.html.

———. "Bolsonaro vs. Lula: Brazil Faces Radically Opposed Options in Divisive Election." *New York Times*, October 1, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/01/world/americas/bolsanoro-lula-brazil-election.html.

125

Nicas, Jack, and André Spigariol. "Bolsonaro Agrees to Transition, Two Days after Losing Brazil Election." *New York Times*, November 1, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/01/world/americas/bolsonaro-protest-brazil-election.html.

NPR. "The Political Fight over Vaccine Mandates Deepens Despite Their Effectiveness." October 17, 2021. https://www.npr.org/2021/10/17/1046598351/the-political-fight-over-vaccine-mandates-deepens-despite-their-effectiveness.

Office of the Director of National Intelligence. *2021 Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community*. Washington, DC: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2021. https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/reports-publications/reports-publications-2021/item/2204-2021-annual-threat-assessment-of-the-u-s-intelligence-community.

———. *Unclassified Summary of Assessment on Domestic Violent Extremism*. Washington, DC: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2021. https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/reports-publications/reports-publications-2021/item/2194-unclassified-summary-of-assessment-on-domestic-violent-extremism.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. *States of Fragility 2020*. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1787/ba7c22e7-en.

———. *States of Fragility 2022*. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2022. https://doi.org/10.1787/c7fedf5e-en.

Otis, John. "Former Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula Da Silva Went from Jail to Frontrunner." NPR, August 7, 2022. https://www.npr.org/2022/08/07/1116218433/former-brazilian-president-luiz-inacio-lula-da-silva-went-from-jail-to-frontrunn.

Pape, Robert A. *American Face of Insurrection*. Chicago: Chicago Project on Security and Threats, 2022. https://d3qi0qp55mx5f5.cloudfront.net/cpost/i/docs/Pape_-_American_Face_of_Insurrection_(2022-01-05).pdf?mtime=1654548769.

———. *Deep, Divisive, Disturbing and Continuing: New Survey Shows Mainstream Support for Violence to Restore Trump Remains Strong*. Chicago: Chicago Project on Security and Threats, 2022. https://cpost.uchicago.edu/publications/deep_divisive_disturbing_and_continuing_new_survey_shows_maintream_support_for_violence_to_restore_trump_remains_strong/.

———. *"Patriotic Counter-Revolution": The Political Mindset That Stormed the Capitol*. Chicago: Chicago Project on Security and Threats, 2022.

———. "Understanding American Domestic Terrorism: Mobilization Potential and Risk Factors of a New Threat Trajectory." Presented for the Chicago Project on Security and Threats, University of Chicago, April 6, 2021. https://d3qi0qp55mx 5f5.cloudfront.net/cpost/i/docs/americas_insurrectionists_online_2021_04_06. pdf?mtime=1617807009.

Pape, Robert A., and Keven Ruby. "The Capitol Rioters Aren't Like Other Extremists." *Atlantic*, February 2, 2021. https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/02/ the-capitol-rioters-arent-like-other-extremists/617895/.

Parker, Kim, Juliana Menasce Horowitz, and Monica Anderson. *Amid Protests, Majorities across Racial and Ethnic Groups Express Support for the Black Lives Matter Movement*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2020. https://www. pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/06/12/amid-protests-majorities-across-racial-and-ethnic-groups-express-support-for-the-black-lives-matter-movement/.

Pew Research Center. *Americans' Views of Government: Decades of Distrust, Enduring Support for Its Role*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2022. https://www. pewresearch.org/politics/2022/06/06/americans-views-of-government-decades-of-distrust-enduring-support-for-its-role/.

———. "5 Facts about the QAnon Conspiracy Theories." November 16, 2020. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/11/16/5-facts-about-the-qanon-conspiracy-theories/.

Pildes, Richard H. "The Age of Political Fragmentation." *Journal of Democracy* 32, no. 4 (2021): 146–59. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2021.0058.

———. "Romanticizing Democracy, Political Fragmentation, and the Decline of American Government." *Yale Law Journal* 124, no. 3 (December 2014): 804–52. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43617040.

Pilloud, Hélène. "Brazil: UN Experts Call for Peaceful Elections." United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, September 22, 2022. https://www. ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/09/brazil-un-experts-call-peaceful-elections.

Pollard, Michael S., and Lois M. Davis. *Decline in Trust in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention during the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2021. https://doi.org/10.7249/RRA308-12.

Purdy, Sean. "Brazil's June Days of 2013: Mass Protest, Class, and the Left." *Latin American Perspectives* 46, no. 4 (2019): 15–36. https://doi.org/10.1177/ 0094582X17699905.

Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Revised and updated edition. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020.

127

———. *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. ProQuest Ebook Central.

Radwell, Seth, and Jonathan Israel. *American Schism: How the Two Enlightenments Hold the Secret to Healing Our Nation*. Austin, TX: Greenleaf Book Group Press, 2021.

Ratiu, Andrea. *Democratic Institutional Strength before and beyond Elections: The Case of Brazil*. Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2022. https://www.atlanticcouncil. org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/democratic-institutional-strength-ahead-and-beyond-elections-the-case-of-brazil/.

Reference.com. "What Is the Difference between a Community and a Society?" March 25, 2020. https://www.reference.com/world-view/difference-between-community-society-e0707c82ee8c07d.

Repucci, Sarah, and Amy Slipowitz. *Democracy under Lockdown*. Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2020. https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2020/democracy-under-lockdown.

Reuters. "Brazil Supreme Court Rules Homophobia a Crime." June 14, 2019. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-homophobia-idUSKCN1TF02N.

Ribeiro Hoffmann, Andrea. "Brazil under Bolsonaro." *Latin American Policy* 11, no. 2 (2020): 335–38. https://doi.org/10.1111/lamp.12200.

Ripley, Amanda. *High Conflict: Why We Get Trapped and How We Get Out*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021.

Risse, Thomas. "International Norms and Domestic Change: Arguing and Communicative Behavior in the Human Rights Area." *Politics & Society* 27, no. 4 (December 1999): 529–59. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329299027004004.

Romero, Simon. "Dilma Rousseff Is Ousted as Brazil's President in Impeachment Vote." *New York Times*, August 31, 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/01/world/americas/brazil-dilma-rousseff-impeached-removed-president.html.

Rose, Joel, and Liz Baker. "6 in 10 Americans Say U.S. Democracy Is in Crisis as the 'Big Lie' Takes Root." NPR, January 3, 2022. https://www.npr.org/2022/01/03/1069764164/american-democracy-poll-jan-6.

Rothman, Lily. "Fear in America: Why We're More Afraid Than Before." *Time*, January 6, 2016. https://time.com/4158007/american-fear-history/.

Santos Mundim, Pedro, Fábio Vasconcellos, and Lucas Okado. "Social Networks and Mobile Instant Messaging Services in the Election of Jair Bolsonaro as President of Brazil in 2018." *Dados* 66, no. 2 (2023): 1–37. https://doi.org/10.1590/dados. 2023.66.2.291.

Savarese, Mauricio. "New Killing Adds to Fears of Brazil Election Violence." AP News, September 26, 2022. https://apnews.com/article/jair-bolsonaro-violence-caribbean-elections-presidential-fd03fa062043edec3f8cd1f7e9cae3a2.

Schultz, P. Wesley, Jessica M. Nolan, Robert B. Cialdini, Noah J. Goldstein, and Vladas Griskevicius. "The Constructive, Destructive, and Reconstructive Power of Social Norms." *Psychological Science* 18, no. 5 (2007): 429–34. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40064634.

Shils, Edward. "Society: The Idea and Its Sources." *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 15, no. 55 (1) (1961): 93–114. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23940287.

Shvili, Jason. "Difference between a State and a Nation." WorldAtlas, July 13, 2021. https://www.worldatlas.com/geography/difference-between-a-state-and-a-nation.html.

Silva, Cedê. "Bolsonaro's Party Double-Deals Again on Election Fraud Conspiracy." *The Brazilian Report* (blog), November 16, 2022. https://brazilian.report/liveblog/2022/11/16/bolsonaro-party-election-conspiracy/.

Singer, P. W., and Emerson T. Brooking. *LikeWar: The Weaponization of Social Media*. Boston: Mariner Books, 2019.

Smith, Amy Erica. "Covid vs. Democracy: Brazil's Populist Playbook." *Journal of Democracy* 31, no. 4 (2020): 76–90. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0057.

Spigariol, André, and Jack Nicas. "Bolsonaro Gathers Foreign Diplomats to Cast Doubt on Brazil's Elections." *New York Times*, July 19, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/19/world/americas/brazil-bolsonaro-election-fraud-claim.html.

Staggenborg, Suzanne. "Social Movement Theory." In *Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, 754–59. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2005. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412952552.

Sternberg, Bill. "Fox News' Potentially Expensive Embrace of 'Stop the Steal.'" Free Speech Center, April 6, 2022. https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/post/2812/fox-news-potentially-expensive-embrace-of-stop-the-steal.

Stets, Jan E., and Peter J. Burke. "Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (2000): 224–37. https://doi.org/10.2307/2695870.
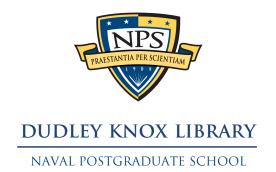
Stewart, Brandon, and Ronald J. McGauvran. "What Do We Know about Ethnic Outbidding? We Need to Take Ideology Seriously." *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 26, no. 4 (2020): 405–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/13537113.2020.1809897.

Strindberg, Anders. *Social Identity Theory and the Study of Terrorism and Violent Extremism*. Stockholm: FOI, 2021. https://www.foi.se/en/foi/reports/report-summary.html?reportNo=FOI-R--5062--SE.

Stuenkel, Oliver. "Democracy Is Dying in Brazil." *Foreign Affairs*, September 3, 2022. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/brazil/2021-11-01/democracy-dying-brazil.

Suber, James, and Jacob Ware. "Examining Extremism: QAnon." *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (blog), June 10, 2021. https://www.csis.org/blogs/examining-extremism/examining-extremism-qanon.

Svolik, Milan W. "Polarization versus Democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 3 (2019): 20–32. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0039.

Thomson, James A. *A House Divided: Polarization and Its Effect on RAND*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010. https://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/OP291.html.

Traiano, Heloísa, and Terrence McCoy. "Brazil Is Rocked by Political Turmoil as Pandemic Outlook Darkens." *Washington Post*, March 30, 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/03/30/brazil-cabinet-bolsonaro-chaos-pandemic/.

Trauschweizer, Ingo. *Failed States and Fragile Societies: A New World Disorder?* Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2014. https://www.amazon.com/Failed-States-Fragile-Societies-Disorder/dp/0821420917.

Tubbs, Christian D. "Conditions of Democratic Erosion: Has U.S. Democracy Reached a Tipping Point?" Master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2018. http://hdl.handle.net/10945/61290.

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. "Brazil: UN Experts Decry Acts of Racialised Police Brutality." July 6, 2022. https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/07/brazil-un-experts-decry-acts-racialised-police-brutality.

U.S. Congress. House Committee on Oversight and Reform, Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis. *Inefficient, Ineffective, and Inequitable: The Trump Administration's Failed Response to the Coronavirus Crisis: Interim Staff Report*. Washington, DC: House of Representatives, 2020.

Uslaner, Eric M. "The Study of Trust." In *The Oxford Handbook of Social and Political Trust*, edited by Eric M. Uslaner, 3–14. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190274801.013.39.

Villegas, Paulina, and Gabriela Sá Pessoa. "As Brazil's Election Day Approaches, Fear of Violence Grows." *Washington Post*, September 27, 2022. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/09/27/bolsonaro-brazil-election-political-violence/.

Wagoner, Brady, Ignacio Brescó de Luna, and Vlad Glaveanu, eds. *The Road to Actualized Democracy: A Psychological Exploration*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2018.

Warren, Mark. "Trust and Democracy." In *The Oxford Handbook of Social and Political Trust*, edited by Eric M. Uslaner, 75–94. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190274801.013.5.

Watts, Arthur. "State/Nation-State." Princeton Encyclopedia of Self-Determination. Accessed December 1, 2022. https://pesd.princeton.edu/node/676.

Williams, Heather J., Alexandra T. Evans, Jamie Ryan, Erik E. Mueller, and Bryce Downing. *The Online Extremist Ecosystem: Its Evolution and a Framework for Separating Extreme from Mainstream*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2021. https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA1458-1.html.

Williams, Tarah Foster. "The Fragility of Tolerance: Rights, Responsibilities, and the Challenge of Speaking Up." PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2017. http://hdl.handle.net/2142/97721.

Wines, Michael, and Aishvarya Kavi. "March on Washington 2020: Protesters Hope to Rekindle Spirit of 1963." *New York Times*, August 28, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/28/us/march-on-washington-2020.html.

Winter, Brian. "Messiah Complex." *Foreign Affairs*, July 26, 2022. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/brazil/2020-08-11/jair-bolsonaro-messiah-complex.

Winter, Jana. "Exclusive: FBI Document Warns Conspiracy Theories Are a New Domestic Terrorism Threat." Yahoo! News, August 1, 2019. https://news.yahoo.com/fbi-documents-conspiracy-theories-terrorism-160000507.html.

Yates, Alex. "LGBTQ+ Rights in Brazil." *UAB Institute for Human Rights Blog*, September 30, 2022. https://sites.uab.edu/humanrights/2022/09/30/lgbtq-rights-in-brazil/.

Zengerle, Patricia, and Richard Cowan. "Trump Pressed, Threatened Pence to Overturn Election, Panel Hears." Reuters, June 17, 2022. https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-capitol-jan-6-panel-turns-attention-pence-thursdays-hearing-2022-06-16/.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST

1.   Defense Technical Information Center
                Ft. Belvoir, Virginia

2.   Dudley Knox Library
                Naval Postgraduate School
                Monterey, California