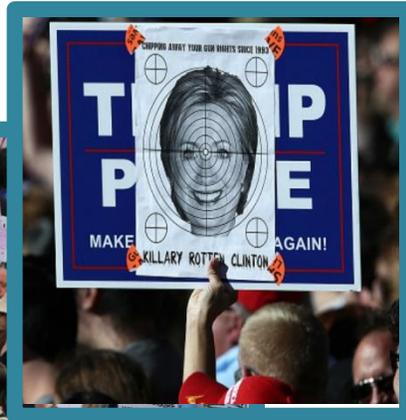GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

ELECTORAL VIOLENCE

A STUDY OF THE 2016 UNITED STATES PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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December, 2016

US ELECTION 2016

Executive Summary

This report by Georgetown University's "Electoral Violence" graduate class records, analyzes, and contextualizes electoral violence in the United States during the 2016 electoral cycle and establishes a baseline for future comparison. Along with the database, a description of the violence recorded, and key findings, the report includes a historical review of electoral violence in the United States with a comparison to 2016, a section on the role of social media in electoral violence, and suggested next steps for further research.

Electoral violence events were identified using conventional media sources such as NPR, CNN, ABC, Washington Post, Reuters, CBS, and New York Times, along with the local news website Patch.com. The social media websites Twitter and YouTube were also mined for events, although this report is not a comprehensive review of violent threats on social media.

In total, fifty-three electoral violence events were recorded in the study: 37 incidents, 4 acts of intimidation, and 12 threats. Forty-four of the 53 incidents occurred before Election Day, with most incidents occurring during the Primary Phase of the electoral cycle. Analysis of the events led to the following six key findings:

1. Rallies and Protests are flashpoints of violence.
2. Generally low-impact violence despite high-impact threats.
3. Primary Phase and Pre-General Election Day Phase violence primarily committed by Trump supporters or Republicans, while post-Election Day Phase violence primarily committed by anti-Trump aligned individuals.
4. Males appear to be the primary perpetrators and victims of electoral violence; perpetrators spanned all ages.
5. Pre-Primary Phase and Primary Phase violence was nationwide, while most post-Primary Phase violence occurred in "swing states".
6. Some incidents suggest a racial or ethnic component to violence.

The researchers suggest two primary paths for further research of electoral violence in the United States. First, social media represents a new vector for electoral violence, and a full-scale study using social media data-mining software would help improve understanding of this new vector for electoral violence. Second, further research is also needed regarding the causes of electoral violence in the United States. The causal factors behind most of the pre-Election Day violence remain unclear; while the historical review revealed that the violent rhetoric by Presidential candidates was unprecedented in American history, a dedicated study is needed to definitely link this rhetoric to recorded electoral violence events.

Introduction to Project

Presidential elections represent a time of transition for the American people and the United States government as a whole. As such, the presidential campaign, and the electoral cycle more broadly, is a time that is characterized by strong debates across segments of society. The 2016 Presidential election was one in which American society experienced a period of deep questioning of our current ideas, institutions, and way of life. The 2016 election cycle was characterized by a pervasive feeling of tension across society, characterized by a proliferation of

harsh rhetoric and instances of violence and intimidation. In an effort to better understand the 2016 election cycle, this report seeks to examine the instances of violence that were reported and record the context of these instance of violence within a database in order to uncover any relevant trends. A discussion of previous United States historical examples of election-related violence provides greater context for the 2016 cycle. An analysis of the violent events recorded will conclude this report with a deeper discussion of the findings.

I. Methodology

A. Definitions

Before beginning a discussion of electoral violence, it is important to first discuss what electoral violence is on a theoretical level. Multiple definitions of electoral violence exist in the literature, with a variety of common theme emerging. One definition of electoral violence describes it as "physical violence and coercive intimidation directly tied to an impending electoral contest or to an announced electoral result."[1] Other definitions describe electoral violence as "a sub-type of political violence in which actors employ coercion in an instrumental way to advance their interests or achieve specific political ends."[2] A last definition proposed in the literature describes the phenomenon as "any random or organized act or threat to intimidate, physically harm, blackmail, or abuse an electoral stakeholder in seeking to determine, delay, or to otherwise influence the electoral process."[3] These definitions provide the basis for our analysis of the 2016 United States Presidential Election. The US election was characterized by threats of violence between candidates and citizens alike. The definitions of electoral violence proposed in the literature provide a comprehensive standard by which to measure the occurrence of electoral violence.

B. Types of Incidents included in the survey

The types of incidents described in this report can be classified into three broad themes - threat, incident, and intimidation. Threat was defined as a verbal, media, or social media declaration by an individual of the intent to inflict violence on another individual or object. Incident was defined as a distinct instance or event of violence. Intimidation was defined as the attempt by an individual to instill fear in another individual in an effort to ensure a desired action.

Upon identifying the broader thematic category of threat, incident, or intimidation, the events coded in the database were then further subdivided into categorizations including attempted physical harm, murder, attempted murder, kidnapping or attempted kidnapping, intimidation, insult/verbal harassment, theft, vandalism, blackmail, and arbitrary detention.

C. Incident Profile Factors

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[1] Straus and Taylor, 2009
[2] Sisk, 2008.
[3] Fischer, 2002.

Incident profile factors have been divided into three main categories: locations, victims, and perpetrators.

The category of location is further subdivided into the geographical location including city and state, and the venue in which an instance of violence occurred. Venues in which an instance of violence may occur include rallies, conventions, party offices, polling stations, protests, and online/social media. In instances of online or social media violent incidents, the specific location has been unable to be determined as it occurred online, and as a result has been left blank in the database.

Victim profile factors are further subdivided in an effort to uncover any underlying trends. The type of victim of the instance of violence includes citizens, candidates, and objects. If appropriate, information is gathered on the victim's age, gender, race, and candidate or party affiliation. In some instances, not all information regarding victim profile factors was released, in these cases, as much information as was available has been included.

Profile factors of the perpetrators of violence have been subdivided similarly to the victim profile factors. Information was gathered along categories, including age, gender, race, and candidate affiliation.

D. Sources

Information gathered on violent incidents during the 2016 Presidential Election period was gathered from both conventional media sources and social media. In addition to the various forms of media reporting, finding from monitoring reports published by the Department of Justice, Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights, American Civil Liberties Union, Organization of American States, the Organization for the Security and Cooperation in Europe, and Ushahidi were also analyzed.

Conventional media sources included primary newspapers and reporting sites such as NPR, CNN, ABC, Washington Post, Reuters, CBS, and New York Times. In an effort to combat biased media reporting, the authors of this study identified media sources that were deemed least biased and most trusted. A variety of studies conducted by PEW Research Center and Business Insider were consulted in order to identify which media sources are the most widely trusted. The 2016 Presidential Election cycle was marked by the usage of social media by all parties in order to generate support and for citizens to share their views. In an effort to catalogue reports of violence, harassment, or threats, the authors of this study included information gathered from popular social media website such as Facebook and Twitter.

A variety of institutions monitored the elections for instances of violence or intimidation. The findings of these reports, where available, were consulted in the creation of these studies.

Department of Justice

The Department of Justice (DOJ) Civil Rights Division deployed more than 500 personnel to 67 jurisdictions in 28 states for the general election on November 8, 2016. The Civil Rights

Division of the DOJ is tasked with enforcing federal voting laws and ensuring that all citizens have access to polling places on Election Day.[4] In an effort to combat electoral fraud, DOJ officials were on hand at polling places and over the phone so that voters could report any complaints both before and on Election Day. At this writing, the DOJ has yet to publish an official report relating to the information gathered from their monitoring of the election. Those readers seeking further insights from the DOJ monitoring should consult the DOJ's on-line resources for the subsequent report.

Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights

The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights has a long history of protecting and advancing voting rights for all Americans. Their Voting Rights Project has performed several tasks throughout the election period: it responded to reports of deceptive voting information being spread on social media; makes voter education campaigns about new voter ID laws; posted election and post-election reports; fights the myth of voter fraud and spreads information about voter suppression, especially targeted against minorities; and seek to cross the divides that election politics in the United States have created. The Voting Rights Project also provides information for people to register to vote and to find polling stations near them. It also posts a collection of stories from people who experienced problems while voting, including long lines, difficulty registering to vote, and concerns about election fraud. It provides information about voter challenges, voter intimidation, and deceptive practices that may be found in the United States. The Voting Rights Project also litigates cases for voters who have been traditionally disenfranchised, and provides information about legal cases that have been passed regarding voter registration and minority voter access.

The group has not yet published a comprehensive review of the 2016 elections; more information can be found at: https://lawyerscommittee.org/project/voting-rights-project/.

American Civil Liberties Union

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) mobilized its resources to track and resolve issues of violations of voting rights. While it had a dedicated microsite on the 2016 Presidential Elections, it has been aimed at educating the public on their rights and the mechanisms to address their grievances. No formal report has been published by the ACLU at the time of this report.

The Organization of American States

The Organization of American States (OAS) sent an Election Observer Mission (EOM) to the United States for the first time to observe the 2016 election. Overall, the EOM reported few issues with the election itself and stated that all observed technical issues were resolved efficiently. The preliminary report did, however, comment on the heated rhetoric in the pre-Election Day Phase, writing that:

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[4] Justice Department, 2016

"The EOM observed with concern a rise in polarizing and divisive rhetoric during the campaign that could be interpreted as having a racial undertone. Furthermore, threats by one candidate to take judicial action against journalists for expressing their views and restricting their access to cover events were worrisome The Mission hopes that these expressions were all part of campaign rhetoric and civil dialogue will prevail among opposing views."[5]

The report can be found at: http://www.oas.org/eomdatabase/GetFileA.aspx?id=389-987-25-0

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) had an observation mission for the 2016 general elections in the United States. More than 400 observers were deployed overall. In addition to nearly 400 short-term observers, 26 long-term observers were deployed and observed the electoral campaign beginning in October 2016. Their report was mostly about the electoral administration and the electoral systems but one section about the campaign environment notes the tension surrounding the campaign.

"The campaign was characterized by a high degree of partisan hostility between the two major presidential candidates. Both candidates used a tone that was confrontational, often employing personal attacks during campaign events and characterizing each other as unfit for the office of president. Mr. Trump frequently used offensive and intolerant language against women, ethnic and racial communities, and people with disabilities. Mr. Trump also states that, if elected, he would put Ms. Clinton in jail. Ms. Clinton referred to a number of supporters of Mr. Trump as "deplorable." The negative rhetoric was often reflected in tightly contested congressional races. A few cases of disruption at rallies were reported."[6]

The OSCE report mentions three specific incidents relevant to the electoral violence. It mentions the firebomb attack against the Republican office in North Carolina and the church set fire by Republican supporters in Mississippi as examples of incidents. Moreover, it briefly explains how fears of intimidation at the polling stations on polling day were raised by Mr. Trump in a statement asking his supporters to watch the polls and prevent fraud.

The report can be found here: http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/usa/246356

Ushahidi

Ushahidi is an open source data platform that started in Kenya in response to violence in the 2008 elections. The site tracks and maps incidents in real time and is accessible to any citizen with access to a mobile phone or internet. It is a citizen driven initiative that can be hard to corroborate because there is no verification source beyond what the individual inputs. About 2 weeks before the 2016 US Presidential election, Ushahidi announced that they would be launching a US Election monitor so that Americans could report any electoral incidents they encountered or witnessed. The week of the election the site encouraged users to report their

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[5] OAS, 2016.
[6] OSCE, 2016.

experience at the polls, good or bad. However, the following week the format of the site and report categories changed; all positive reports and reports of potential voter fraud were removed. The site was in constant flux in regards to categories of reports and the mapping of incidents. Ushahidi is still accepting new reports for the US election and the current categories are as follows: Violence, Other, Protest, Harassment, Hate Speech and Threats. As of December 12 there are 108 reports of Violence, 19 reports of incidents marked as Other, 15 reports of Protest, 46 reports of Harassment, and 199 reports of Hate Speech and Threats.[7] The current database can be found here: https://usaelectionmonitor.ushahidi.io/views/map

E. Data Collection Techniques

Information gathered from conventional media sources were primarily gathered through online material. Online archives were searched for keywords such as "US Presidential Election," and "US Election Violence." A search of the relevant articles found was conducted and incidents that were reported on were included in the database. In order to ensure greater legitimacy, reports from one news source were corroborated with other sources.

Facebook posts and Tweets were chosen based on meeting at least one of the following criteria: legal/professional consequences for the individual who posted on social media because of post content, the post was removed from social media, and/or the post was reported on in by conventional media sources. There were many posts on social media that used violent language but were not included because the threats were not deemed serious. Many posts were angry and illustrated hatred of the Presidential candidates. That anger and frustration was noted as part of the general tone of the election but the individual posts were not included in the database.

F. Chronology

The database created for the purpose of this study categorized the instances of violence into four chronological phases: Primary Phase, Pre-General Election Phase, Election Day Phase, and Post-Election Phase.

The Primary Phase included incidents that occurred beginning in July 2015 until June 2016. The Pre-General Election Phase included all incidents occurring after the first party convention, therefore including all events beginning in July 2016 up until November 7, 2016. The Election Day Phase included instances of violence occurring on Election Day on November 8, 2016. The Post-Election Phase included any instances of violence occurring between November 9, 2016 and November 11, 2016. For the purpose of this research, data collection for the database was ended on November 11, 2016.

II. Database

A. Incident Database

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[7] Ushahidi, 2016.

The Incident Database utilized data that we collected from conventional and social media. The dataset is categorized based on the time during the electoral phase that it occurred, violence type, location, victim, and perpetrator. For threats that were made on the internet location and perpetrator characteristics were not always available. The violence type is broken down into threats, incidents, and intimidation. The violence description category further describes what occurred as either: physical harm, attempted physical harm, murder, attempted murder, intimidation, insult/verbal harassment, theft, vandalism, blackmail, and arbitrary detention. The dataset also includes the source where the incident was reported and a brief description of what occurred. The link to the database is here.

B. Video and Photograph Gallery

The videos that have been collected from the incidents reported on social media and have been compiled onto a YouTube channel. The videos are organized chronologically in relation to the election cycle. The videos include fights at rallies, protests, and some show multiple fights occurring at a single event. The videos are illustrative of the tensions present during the election cycle. This archive is by no means a complete list of videos uploaded onto social media platforms displaying violence, but it does offer a glimpse into the violence and anger that was present throughout the election. The link to the video archive is here.

C. Information Archive

Throughout our research, we consulted numerous articles from conventional media sources that reported on election violence and incidents in the United States. We have compiled all of the articles together as a point of reference. Some of the articles were found through research and others were received through daily google alerts set to mine for US election violence. The articles provide a glimpse into the environment and emotionality of the 2016 US Presidential Election. The Information Archive is in Annex I.

III. History of Election-Related Violence in the United States – Pre-2015

A.   Introduction

While the political rhetoric seen in the 2016 Presidential Elections (and its impact on social cohesion) is certainly startling to many observers, politically driven violence and physical assault, in varying degrees, has occurred in the United States (US) since its foundation. Unlike many other sites of electoral violence in the world, recorded/documented evidence of political/electoral violence in the US has typically been for candidates running for executive offices (Presidency, Mayor, Gubernatorial, etc.). A structural pattern emerges after reading documented accounts and reports is that the frustration of people is tapped into by the candidates and spills over into the social and civic space leading to public brawls and clashes between different social groups favoring diverse economic, or even ideological, interests. American politics also faces the unique challenge posed by Second Amendment as well as the cultural inheritance of armed rebellions against political power. In fact, Erica Chenoweth, a professor of International Relations at the University of Denver, claims it to be "a routine feature of American politics" around the end of 19th century, up until the Post-War period.

Given that, some of the experiences of the 2016 elections can be attributed to the legacies of events from the past, and in its aftermath, can be traced back to the 1800s. The middle of the nineteenth was when the United States witnessed an episode that fundamentally challenged their principles and understanding of culture, diversity and race. The Civil War had exposed the racial and ethnic fault lines in the American society that triggered a massive wave of anti-immigrant/xenophobia-driven violence take roots. The most noteworthy example is the attacks on the Irish-Catholic and German immigrants (in Maine and Chicago respectively) perpetuated by the Know Nothing Party, a political group that built its virulent message on xenophobia. This movement quickly stepped up and eclipsed the issue of slavery as the dominant concern of the time, even though it helped fuel and sustain racial aggression in the South that was born out of the Civil War and reached its peak during the Reconstruction.

B. 1968 Presidential Elections and the Populism Factor

But the most direct parallels to this election cycle that has been drawn in editorial op-eds are with the 1968 Presidential Elections. Given the nature of violence during the election cycle, the similarities between the two elections have not been missed. Both have been associated with the surge of populist candidates who harbor strong anti-establishment sentiments: George Wallace in 1968 and Donald Trump in 2016. Mr. Wallace's, who was a strong proponent of racial segregation, led a campaign that also provoked and incited violence at rallies. In one instance, black protesters had been surrounded by supporters of Mr. Wallace at a political rally and were reported to be shouting, "Kill 'em! Kill 'em!"

C. 1972 – 2012

There have been no reported accounts of violence or clashes taking place at campaign rallies throughout this period. And until 2005, the economy performed well leading to a net gain in economic expansion, despite the short recessions. Incidents and events that could have provoked conflictive social cleavages were also at a minimum during this time period.

D. Contrasting 2016 Election with the Past: Causes of Violence

Yet, despite the commonalities with 1968 and before, the 2016 Presidential elections have some notable differences.

1. **Social Media:** The most significant variable that acts as a confounder in detecting a pattern between the 2016 elections and the previous elections has been the role of social media. While there will be a greater discussion of this factor in the following pages, the presence of social media has had both virtuous and detrimental effects. On the one hand, social media has allowed itself to be used a mantle to forecast violence, convey threats and document incidents. But at the same time, it has changed the nature of information flow and has made it easier for social interaction — without necessarily adding to the accurate informing of the civic community.

2. **Nature of Threats:** Active statements advocating violence from the candidate (direct threats and otherwise) has been unprecedented in a US presidential campaign. While the dominant share of such threats can be attributed to the Republican nominee, there has certainly been a spillover effect into the elites across the partisan spectrum (sometimes even outside the political space). For instance, threats emerged from people who are held in high regard: Vice President Joe Biden and Hollywood actor Robert De Niro.

3. **Structural Causes:** Pre-election reports and post-election analyses have attributed the dynamics of this election to deeper issues of economic angst and anxieties, and not purely as racial or ideological phenomena. One evidence of this claim can be the Electoral College map, in which states like Michigan and Wisconsin and Pennsylvania where blue-collar workers primarily relying on manufacturing jobs voted typically for the Democratic party, switched their political support for the Republicans — some the first time since the 1970s. Analysts suggest the structural causes (unemployment, wage stagnation and inequality) caused the voters to desire change. In addition to that, the Republican Party, and their presidential candidate, laid out an economic message that helped them reach out to these voters wanting change. The voters' economic concerns, coupled with their concerns over immigration, trade and security, resonated with the campaign's message and allowed the political space for fringe groups condoning racial/ethnic violence to build a broad political platform for the candidate. It is because of this political support that acts of violence against non-white communities/immigrants as well as hate crime had been widely reported. And while this has not been the case in the past, it remains to be seen if this can become a formula for other candidates in the future to exploit anxieties and distress of the populace to propel a xenophobic/ethnically violent agenda while retaining electoral impunity.

4. **Assault on the Credibility of Institutions**: Often times, violence during the election cycle arises owing to the lack of trust and faith in the political process. Both sides have contributed to this phenomenon, but in different times. While Mr. Trump, who continuously claimed the "system to be rigged", provoked individuals to resort to extra-constitutional threats to secure the election, many "Not My President" or "Anti-Trump" protests had momentarily created a tense atmosphere in major cities across the country. Yet again, these incidents remain unprecedented and unseen in America's political history. One group of protesters went on to chant "We reject the President-elect" as they marched through the streets of Portland, Oregon.

E. Presidential Assassinations and Assassination Attempts

Another observation that can be made in the 2016 elections is the threat of assault/violence directed at both the candidates from either side of the aisle. Yet, violence against candidates has not been new, most famous one being the gun-duel between former Vice President Aaron Burr and former Secretary of Treasury Alexander Hamilton in 1804. Besides that, there have been nine other incidents in American history when Presidents and Presidential candidates were targets of assassins.

IV. Profile of Election-Related Violence

This section explores the Primary Phase, Pre-General Election Phase, Election Day Phase, and Post-Election Phase—along with a few incidents before the Primary Phase—and summarizes the general atmosphere of American politics, news, and social media during each phase. Patterns in the incident database are also explored here, among perpetrators, victims, and locations.

In total, this study surveyed 51 cases. Figure 1 is the graph comparing the numbers of the cases occurred in the different electoral phases. The electoral violence most frequently happened in the Primary Phase, while Election Day had only one incident. Figure 2 shows the number of the cases by month from August 2015 to November 2016. Different colors show different electoral phases. From August 2015 to June 2016 is the Primary Phase colored in yellow. The Pre-General Election Phase, from July to October, is colored in orange. Finally, Election Day and the Post-Election Phase in November is colored in red. March 2016 counted 10 cases, and this is the month in which violence most frequently happened. The number of violent events increased right before the election and the right after the election again. October and November witnessed 10 conflicts each. However, the trends of the violence are different in March and in October and November. While the violence in March dominantly occurred in the rallies, in October and November, the types of the violence were more various including protests on streets, vandalism, threat and intimidation on the Internet. In Figure 3, breakdown of the violence by type is provided. There is no very clear general pattern. However, the number of intimidation and threat seemed to increase after the Primary Phase (since July 2016).

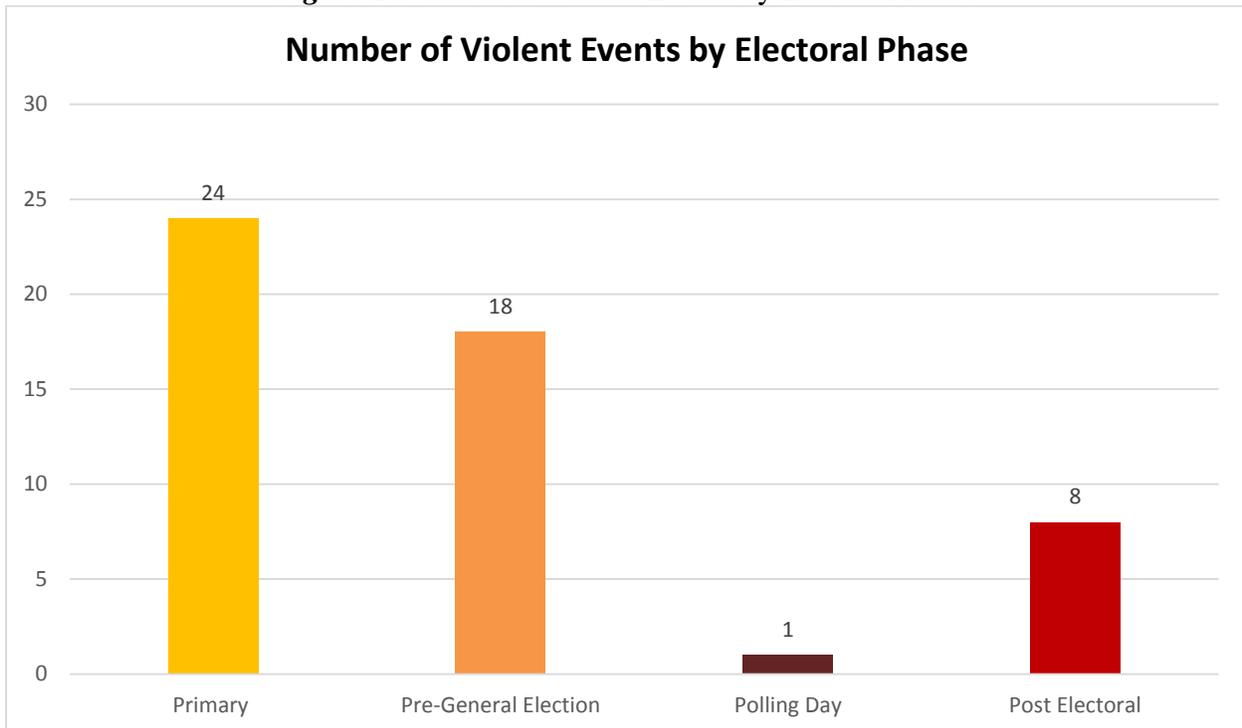*Figure 1* Number of Violent Events by Electoral Phase
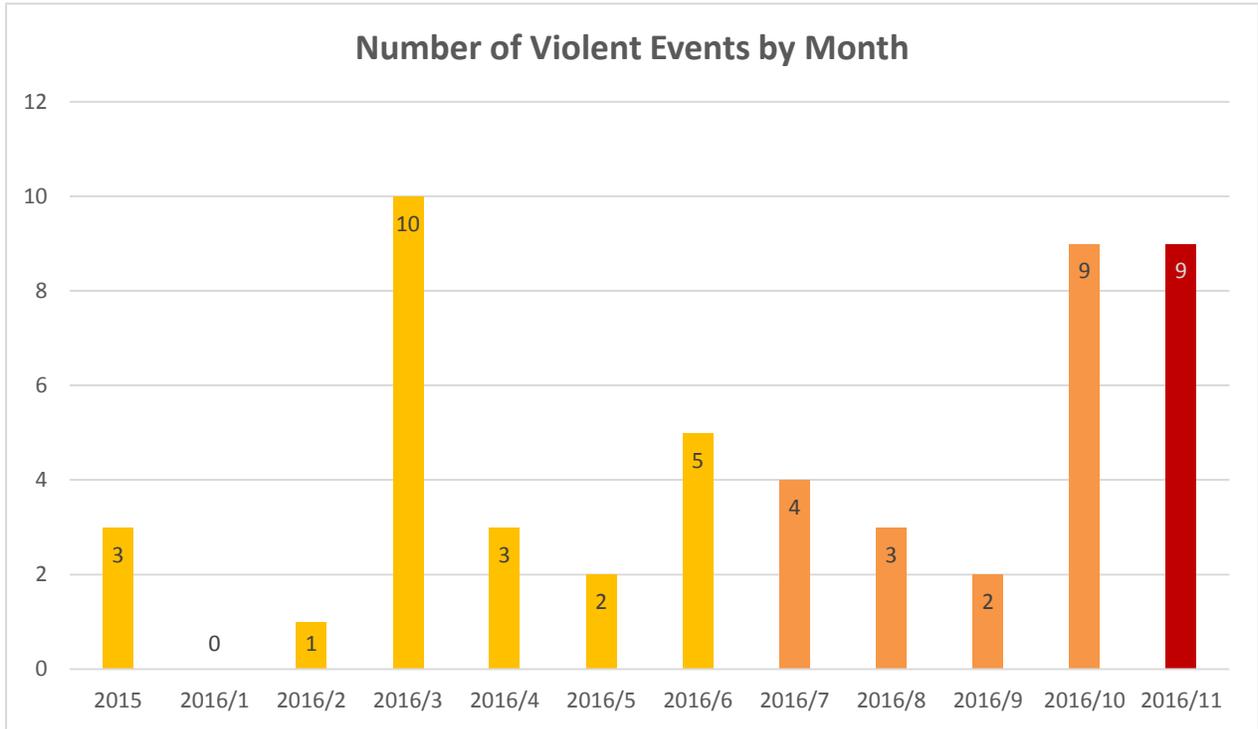
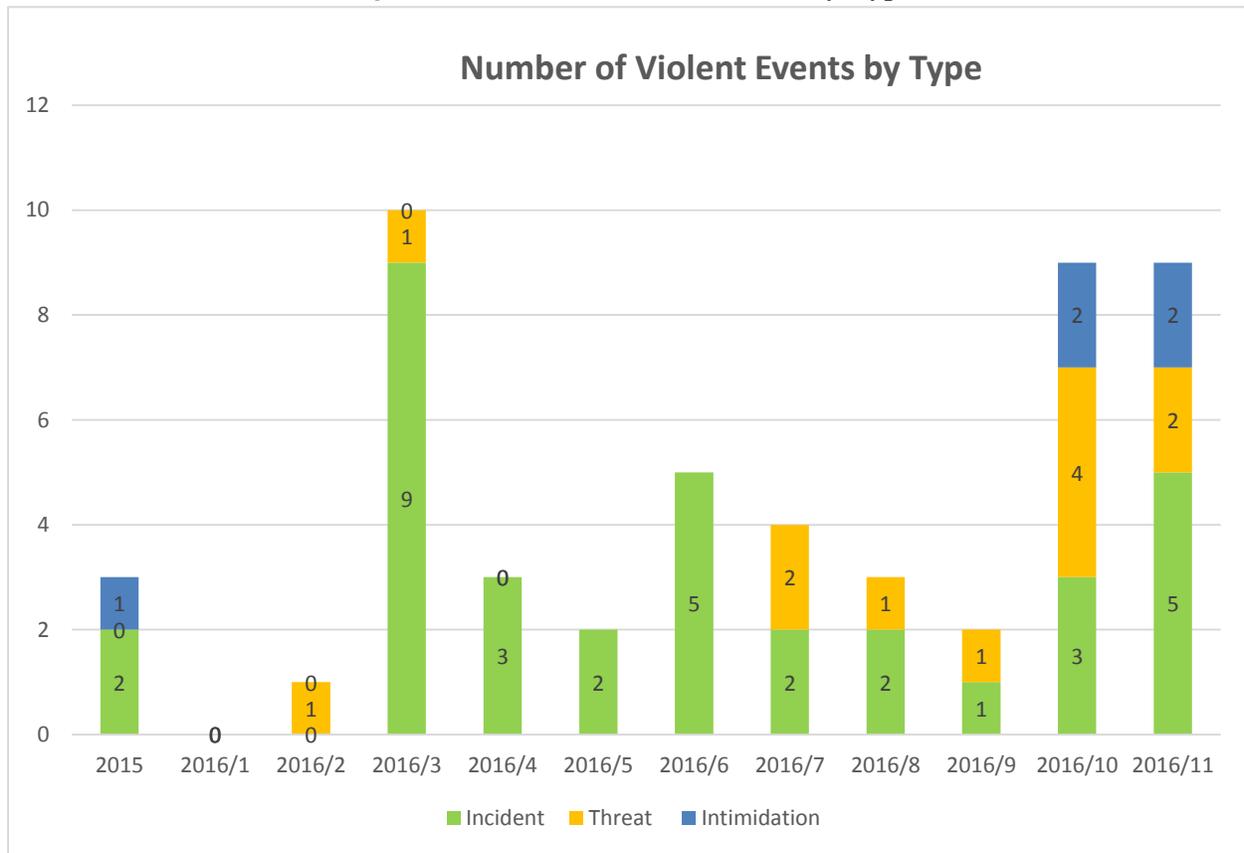*Figure 2* Number of Violent Events by Month

Figure 3 Number of Violent Events by Type

Number of Violent Events by Type

A.   *Primary Phase (July 2015- June 2016)*

This study identified 24 cases during this period. Especially after primary campaigns started, violence happened constantly (only three out of 24 events occurred in 2015 before the primary campaigns started).

As for the types of the incidents, physical harm was the most frequent. It is surprising that only two out of 24 cases of threat or verbal attack were recorded in our database during this period, even though attacking verbally seems to have lower barrier than attacking physically. The actual number may be much larger than two. It is possible that this survey missed a large number of verbal attacks. Other 22 were either physical attack, attempted physical attack, or vandalism.

Two vandalism cases were reported. In both cases, an excited group of people damaged objects around them to protest.

Regarding venue, most of the cases happened in the rallies or outside of the rallies except one online threat. In terms of geographical location, incidents happened in 10 states and California was the most frequent location recorded seven incidents.

In terms of the conflict mechanism, most of the incidents were related to the presidential candidate Mr. Trump. 22 out of 24 incidents occurred between Trump supporters and anti-Trump

citizens or were intended to attack or protest against Trump. Both Trump supporters and anti-Trump people were victimized. It is interesting to note that one protester against Trump claimed he was not democrat but independent and anti-Trump. The conflict mechanism seems to be different from the traditional partisan conflict from the beginning of this election. One of the two non-Trump incidents was the riot of Mr. Sanders supports and the other one was the violence at the white supremacist rally. The former was caused by the upset Sanders' supporters. This may show the level of the excitement and intolerance to the other candidate in Democratic Primaries. The latter occurred around racial issues (between white nationalists and protesters).

B. Pre-General Election Phase (July - November 2016)

The Pre-General Election Phase lasts from the end of the primaries until Election Day, from July until November 9. During this time, political rhetoric became more hateful and intense, with hashtags like "#hillary for prison" trending in response to Clinton's continued email scandal. The anti-Clinton rhetoric was spread not just by supporters of Trump, but of Bernie Sanders as well. Polarization on both sides of the aisle increased when Clinton called half of Trump supporters a "basket of deplorables," but most instances fueling polarization came from Trump and his supporters, especially targeted against women. In October, a tape surfaced showing Trump admitting to groping and sexually assaulting women, and soon after, thirteen women came forward accusing him of sexual assault. These women were insulted by Trump and threatened by some of his followers. Concerns rose that young people would use Trump as a role model and follow his example of how to speak to and about women, and how to treat them. As Election Day approached, many opponents used gender-based insults and slurs against Clinton on social media and on the news.

After Trump's poor debate performances, his numbers began to trail in the polls. In response, he accused the election of being rigged and journalists and the media of being biased against him. This led to the rise of hashtag "#rigged election" and similar hashtags as well as unverified news stories of voting booths that automatically changed Republican votes to Democrat ones. A white woman in Iowa cast a vote for Trump twice, fearing that her first vote would not count because of election rigging.

Trump stated during this period that he would accept the election results only if he won, and that he would persecute Clinton using his resources as president. This led Democrats and anti-Trump Republicans alike to fear undemocratic practices in the future as well as the deterioration of American democracy and the election process.

Incidents of electoral violence in this phase of the election were more concentrated in October as the election date approached and tensions rose. However, incidents occurred throughout, mostly involving three categories: online threats, incidents at rallies, and cases of property destruction focused in particular against political party offices. Incidents (excluding online incidents) tended to occur in North Carolina, Virginia, and Florida where the races were closely contested. There were a roughly even number of threats or harassment as compared to actual attacks; nine to seven, although most of these seven attacks were cases of property destruction. Therefore, while people are frequently the targets of threats, they are much less often the targets of actual physical violence.

The database holds seven accounts of online threats, five of which are against women and all of which were perpetrated by men. Three were threats to murder Clinton. Three targeted journalists, including two featuring anti-Semitic and sexist attacks against female reporters.

There were only three incidents at Trump rallies, two of which were minor incidents of Trump antagonizing the Washington Post and a woman with a crying baby. The last was a white male Trump supporter who slapped a man and a woman who were protesting the rally. The only incident of racial-based intimidation was not at a rally, but perpetrated by a white male Trump supporter who told a reporter that he would racially profile Mexicans, Syrians, and "people who can't speak American." The individual was one of many who responded to Trump's call on his campaign website to independently monitor elections and look for signs of fraud or misconduct at polling stations, in response to his own accusations of vote rigging.

There were six incidents of property destruction and vandalism, especially targeted at political parties. The victims of these incidents were divided evenly between Democrats and Republicans, but in many cases the perpetrators were unknown. The Hillsborough, North Carolina Republican Party office was firebombed by unknown perpetrators; the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Database was hacked, possibly by Russian intelligence; two men protested with guns outside the Palmyra, Virginia Democratic office; Trump's star on the Hollywood walk of fame was destroyed; and the Carrobor, North Carolina Democratic office was spray painted with the words "Death to Capitalism."

C. Election Day Phase

Election Day and night were largely peaceful throughout the United States despite fears that it would be otherwise. While there were a few cases of voter intimidation and some uncorroborated instances of violence near the polling station, which will be discussed in more detail below. In anticipation of Election Day Ushahidi launched an election monitor that enabled citizens to report their experience with voting. On Election Day there were 77 reports of voters who experienced no problems at their polling station. Positive reports were relatively evenly dispersed throughout the country. On the West Coast of the country all 6 reports praised the voting by mail process and the interaction with election officials. Throughout the Southwest, Midwest, and East Coast people reported short lines and well organized polling stations. There were also incidents of voter intimidation, violence, and malpractice. In Florida, Ushahidi reports that two poll workers were fired for "not working to level of integrity they were trained to". On Election Day Ushahidi received 15 reports of voter intimidation/suppression. Most of the reports were from the east coast and south and the victims were largely Clinton supporters. In New Mexico, a Twitter user tweeted out a picture telling voters to text in their votes for Hillary Clinton. No information was available in regards to the Twitter account and the incident could not be verified outside of Ushahidi. It should be noted that open source nature of Ushahidi means that the site and collection of data is constantly changing.

A man from Ohio was arrested and charged with threatening a successor to the Presidency after he tweeted a threat towards Republican candidate, Donald Trump. The man posted in a tweet that has since been deleted, "My life goal is to assassinate Trump. Don't care if I serve infinite sentences. That man deserves to decease [sic] existing". In the days that followed the election,

there were many tweets that referenced wanting to harm or kill President-elect Trump but there were no arrests made. A majority of these tweets did not display any motivation or intent to cause to Trump even though they used the hashtag assassinate Trump (#assassinateTrump). While many Twitter and Facebook users posted their feelings about the election and the anticipated results on the social media platforms This is the only incident that occurred on Election Day that has been recorded in our data set.

D. Post-Election Phase

The day following the election, Secretary Clinton delivered a concession speech and called for the nation to approach the President-elect with "an open mind". Clinton and President Obama appealed for unity and peace in the days and months following the election. On Twitter the hashtag "Trump riot" (#Trumpriot) began to circulate by those who were angered by the election results as well as individuals who were upset by people who were protesting Trump's win. The hashtag "Trump riot" (#Trumpriot) was first seen on Twitter in June 2016 when many news outlets were reporting violence at Trump rallies. The hashtag Not my President (#Notmypresident) circulated on Facebook and Twitter on days following the election and served as a rallying cry for many organizing protests. In Oakland on November 9 the crowd grew from 3,000 individuals to 6,000 in under an hour. There were reports of small fires in the streets, broken windows, and at least one police officer was injured. Our database has recorded 6 incidents, 1 threat, and 1 instance of intimidation during the Post-Election Phase. Our data collection cutoff was Friday November 11, 2016 though protests continued after this date.

Major protests occurred on college campuses and in major cities like Portland, Chicago, and New York. In Portland, 31 protesters were arrested. Videos have emerged of protesters and counter protesters fighting each in protests on the streets of Portland, Oregon during the protest the day after the election. After the tone, rhetoric, and contention throughout the campaign period protests from either side seemed inevitable. There were reports of a militia forming in Georgia if Secretary Clinton won the Presidential election. The New York Times reported on The Georgia Security Force, one of many extremist militias that have formed during the course of the election. The militiamen and women used code names to protect their identities and were motivated to organize because they feared that if Clinton were to become President that she would take away their guns. Following the election of Donald Trump, these groups fears were largely settled and the assumption can be made that they no longer feel that their rights are in danger.

The anger and division from this election cycle has shown up in the nation's classrooms. Many parents of students posted about incidents that happened in the classroom of social media and used the space to discuss their fears for their children. Hate speech, including swastikas, racial slurs, and threats of deportation have been the common theme in these incidents. The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) launched the hashtag "#reporthate" on Twitter to give individuals a space to report hate crimes and discrimination. From November 9 to November 12 SPLC had 200 cases of hate crimes. Slightly more than 140 occurred the day following the election. The cases were broken down by group targeted, venue, and state. There were 99 incidents K-12 schools and 67 in universities. Children who were Asian American and Latino were told that they would be deported by their peers and a teacher in Georgia was left a note in her classroom

telling her that her headscarf was no longer allowed and that she should "hang [herself] with it". Racial tensions have a long history of the United States and the incidents following the election and even some prior to the election highlight this trend. The majority of hate speech has been targeted at African Americans, there were 143 incidents reported, and immigrants, there were 96 incidents reported.

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning (LGBTQ) community has also been a target of hate speech in the post-election period. On social media organizations like the Human Rights Campaign and the Trevor Project shared resources for the LGBTQ community to find support and hotlines to call in case of crisis. The SPLC has recorded 43 incidents that were targeted against this community.

The Southern Poverty Law Center received about 10 substantiated claims of violence against Trump supporters. One incident was recorded on a cell phone camera and uploaded to Twitter. It showed 4 African American men beating up a white man in his 50s after a traffic altercation. Prior to the attack the 4 men asked the victim if he had voted for Mr. Trump, when the victim asked what relevance Trump had in the moment the 4 perpetrators began to beat and kick the victim. The man was knocked to the ground and repeatedly punched and kicked while the perpetrators were encouraged and cheered on by individuals off camera. Screams of "Don't vote Trump" can be heard as the man is beaten. The following day the 4 perpetrators were arrested and charged with vehicular hijacking and battery.

V. Conclusions

A.   *Role of Social Media in Election Violence*

Social media is a prominent feature of this election, spreading information and misinformation to the American public. The issues of false information and polarization are described below, as well as their effects on voters and the prominence electoral violence during the election.

Americans are increasingly getting their news from online sources. 35% of Americans report getting their news online often, 57% from television, 25% from radio, and only 20% from newspapers. The numbers change drastically by age; people aged 18-29 often get the news online 50%, and that number only decreases by 1% for ages 30-49. As the Internet grows in popularity, its influence over American knowledge and opinions grows as well. This is why the polarization and misinformation rampant in online news sources is becoming a dangerous problem.

In today's oversaturation of online content, Internet news sites must fight against clicktivism and motivate people to read their articles and to like or share them on social media. In order to do this, news sites are making the content of their stories more extreme and more attention-grabbing, but in the process the stories they report are increasingly false. This phenomenon is not new, and news sources have always exaggerated stories for increased sales, but social media gives anyone and everyone a new platform to do so on a much bigger scale. Especially in an election climate, news content is more polarized and partisan than ever before. The easiest way

to get an audience for political stories is to exaggerate partisan biases and stereotypes, angering readers enough to motivate them to share the story on social media.

This issue particularly affects hyper-partisan websites; 38% of right-leaning and 19% of left-leaning news sites' stories are mostly or somewhat false. However, moderate, non-partisan websites have few or no stories with false content. But hyper-partisan sites are growing in popularity to match or even overtake mainstream, non-partisan ones. Some hyper-partisan sites even masquerade as more legitimate, non-partisan news sources, so that even people on the lookout for false news stories may be tricked into believing incorrect information designed to polarize and anger readers.

But news stories are not the only content encouraging polarization on social media. Political memes can be especially dangerous for spreading misinformation and bias. Internet memes are concepts or ideas spread through images shared online. They require very little time and effort to share, and can be much more popular than online news, because instead of reading an article, a person can simply look at a picture. The lack of any semblance of scholarly or formal content makes memes more likely to have false information and to reinforce biases or spread strawman arguments about political opponents and voters across the aisle.

Social media, helped by Facebook algorithms and targeted ads, is becoming a personalized echo chamber for people who use it. This skews content away from moderate news sources, and therefore toward sources that are more likely to spread false and polarizing information. People are discouraged from exposure to any opinions or ideas that they disagree with or that may challenge their views, and encouraged to surround themselves with hyper-partisan content and false stories that confirm their own beliefs. This is contributing to the hate speech and negative rhetoric surrounding the 2016 election, as well as dangerous beliefs that can affect real-world actions, including the belief that the election is rigged or that journalists are biased, that a Trump presidency will threaten people's physical safety, or that supporters of a particular candidate are irrational and violent.

It can be difficult to identify specific false news websites, because new ones are created all the time, and many masquerade as legitimate news sites. A site pretending to be ABC News posted a false story titled "Donald Trump Protester Speaks Out: 'I Was Paid $3,500 to Protest Trump's Rally," which became so popular that even Donald Trump's son Eric posted it on Twitter. But not all false news sites pretend to be legitimate; many do not have a presence at all outside social media, and include *Addicting Info*, *The Angry Patriot*, *Occupy Democrats*, *Eagle Rising*, *US Chronicle*, and many more. The lack of presence outside social media means that they exist on the fringes of journalism, and therefore their claims are able to go unchallenged by other media. These sites can have millions of followers, and their stories can even reach Facebook's trending sidebar, giving them more legitimacy. Their stories do not specifically incite violence, but they fuel anger and hatred toward people across the aisle, and discourage common ground. They can even make people fear for their own safety, by spreading false stories that Trump wants to deport American Muslims, for instance. Fear, hatred, and polarization can drive people to drastic actions in the real world.

Hashtags, on the other hand, can be more blatantly inflammatory and can directly incite violence. Examples include hashtag "#killary" and "#hillary for prison," along with many others. Even the hashtag "#not my president" can be harmful, as it detracts from the legitimacy of the election. Refer to Annex 2 for a list of the most popular hashtags trending at various points throughout the election cycle.

Social media has been included in this study because threats and online harassment can lead to real-world violence, depending on the source and legitimacy of the threat. This study seeks to demonstrate the new role that social media plays in encouraging and contributing to electoral violence in the United States.

B. *Findings*

1. Rallies and Protests are flashpoints of violence

Most violent threats and incidents (excluding those that occurred online) during both the Primary, Pre-General Election, and Post-Election Day Phases took place at rallies or protests, with the majority of these incidents occurring either at Trump rallies or anti-Trump protests. The perpetrators at rallies were typically supporters of the candidate hosting the rally and the victims were opposition-aligned individuals protesting at the rally; the perpetrators and victims at protests before the election typically represented both sides, while violent incidents during the Post-Election Day Phase protests were typically perpetrated by the protesters and directed at either police or their political opponents. There is no direct evidence explaining the prevalence of violence at these venues, but we propose two potential overlapping reasons:

2. Generally low-impact violence despite high-impact threats

There is a disparity in the intensity of violence threatened—both online and in speeches or interviewed—and the actual intensity of most violent incidents. Documented threats frequently included either direct death threats to candidates and/or their supporters or suggestions—such as Trump's statement on "Second Amendment people"—that a candidate and/or their supporters should be killed.

The vast majority of violent incidents, however, consisted of levels of violence well below murder or attempted murder. Most violence directed at people only rose to the level of assault, and even the firebombing of a Republican office occurred when no staff was present. This suggests that the intensity of violent rhetoric generally outstrips the actual level of physical violence that individuals during this electoral cycle were willing to use against their opponents.

3. Pre-General Election Phase violence primarily committed by Trump supporters or Republicans, while Post-Election Phase violence primarily committed by anti-Trump aligned individuals

Of the 20 events recorded before Election Day where a perpetrator's political affiliation was recorded, 17 were conducted by Trump supporters or Republicans, indicating that these individuals were responsible for most of the violence during this phase of the election cycle. After Election Day, however, all four events where an affiliation was recorded were perpetrated

by anti-Trump-affiliated individuals, suggesting that this violence was primarily aimed at protesting against Trump's electoral victory. This fits the typical pattern of electoral violence, where the Post-Election Phase violence is often perpetrated by a defeated opposition.

4.   Males appear to be the primary perpetrators and victims of electoral violence; perpetrators spanned all ages

Only seven of the 53 recorded events included the ages and genders of both the victim and the perpetrator, preventing us from drawing definitive conclusions regarding typical characteristics. However, of the 28 perpetrators with identified genders of incidents or acts of intimidation only two were female, indicating that actual acts of electoral violence were primarily conducted by males; we also recorded no violent threats by females. Similarly, only five recorded victims of electoral violence were female non-candidates.

Data regarding the ages of perpetrators and victims is far less indicative of a strong pattern. The ages of perpetrators—which was recorded for only 20 out of 53 perpetrators—ranged from 18 to 78 years old with both a mean and median in the mid-40s, indicating that perpetrator ages were widely distributed across this spectrum. This remained true when threats were removed from the data as well, indicating that individuals of all ages were engaged in actual or attempted acts of physical violence or intimidation. Finally, the ages of only two non-candidate victims were recorded in the database, preventing us from drawing any conclusions about victim ages.

5.   Pre-Primary and Primary Phase violence was nationwide, while most Pre-General Election Phase violence occurred in "swing states"

Violent incidents during the Primary Phase of the election cycle occurred in multiple states and regions, most likely due to the broad nature of campaigning during this phase. The database includes incidents in twelve different states and does not appear concentrated in "swing states." Given that most incidents occurred at Trump rallies, this is most likely due to Trump campaigning nationwide during the Primary Phase, where each state offered him a chance to gain votes against his Republican opponents.

Violence during the Pre-General Election Phase during the run-up to Election Day, on the other hand, was concentrated in states identified as "swing states" where candidates were competing fiercely for votes. The database records one incident in Florida, four in North Carolina, two in Virginia, and one in Ohio; the only incidents outside a swing state occurred at a rally in California. Again, this is almost certainly a result of the prevalence of electoral violence at rallies; candidates were primarily holding rallies in swing states, leading to a higher rate of violent incidents in these locations.

6.   Some incidents suggest racial or ethnic component to violence

Only 12 of 53 event records include information on the races of both the perpetrator and the victim. Given this limited data, it is difficult to draw conclusions regarding how differences in race and gender between victims and perpetrators may have impacted electoral violence. A review of the incident database, however, suggests there may have been a racial component to some of this cycle's electoral violence. At least two incidents had explicit racial or ethnic connection—a man wearing a white nationalist group shirt in March 2016 assaulted protesters at

a Trump rally, while a Jewish reporter in July 2016 reported multiple anti-Semitic threats following her authorship of an article critical of Trump. Multiple other incidents, however, involved perpetrators and victims of different races, indicating that racial or ethnic tensions may have played a role in outbreaks of violence. For example, a white Trump supporter punched an African-American protester at a March 2016 Trump rally in North Carolina.

D. *Suggested Next Steps for Further Research*

This study seeks to establish a baseline of violent incidents, threats, and acts of intimidation during the 2016 United States electoral cycle. While the project captured some violent threats conveyed through social media, it did not constitute a comprehensive study of social media-related electoral violence and its effects on electoral violence writ large. A full-scale study using social media data-mining software would help improve understanding of this new vector for electoral violence.

Further research is also needed regarding the causes of electoral violence in the United States. The motivations of the anti-Trump violent perpetrators in the Post-Election Phase are clear and generally fit with existing theory on why a defeated opposition commits violence. Less clear, however, are the causal factors behind most of the Pre-General Election Phase violence. Of particular interest is the phenomenon of violent incidents at Trump rallies and anti-Trump protests; it is difficult to attribute these incidents to typical electoral violence motivations such as voter suppression or intimidating opposition voters, especially since these tactics generally did not spread beyond targeting individual protestors at Trump rallies or vice versa. In-depth study of the perpetrators is needed to understand their motives and triggers.

Annex I – Information Archive of Online Articles

This is the list of the articles which convey the rough and divided campaign environment for 2016 presidential election.

<u>Analysis of Electoral Violence</u>

VICE "Donald Trump and the long history of American politics turning violent"
http://www.vice.com/read/the-long-history-of-american-politics-turning-ugly-racist-and-violent

ABC news "The history of violence on presidential campaign trails"
http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/history-violence-presidential-campaign-trails/story?id=37634969

Washington Post "Violence at Trump's rallies? Here are 4 things to know about electoral violence around the world." https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/04/11/violence-at-trumps-rallies-here-are-4-things-to-know-about-electoral-violence-around-the-world/?utm_term=.9945ede3e9b1

Electoral Violence Project "Electoral violence and Donald Trump; what can conflict research teach us?" http://www.electoralviolenceproject.com/trump-electoral-violence/

Scientific America "Violence has long been a feature of American elections"
https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/violence-has-long-been-a-feature-of-american-elections/

<u>Hate Speech & Hate Crime</u>

Reuters "Hate speech seeps into U.S. mainstream amid bitter campaign"
http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2016/11/12/post-election-spate-hate-crimes-worse-than-post-911-experts-say/93681294/

CNN "Alleged Trump Supporters who beat homeless immigrant plead guilty"
http://www.cnn.com/2016/05/16/us/trump-supporters-immigrant-beating/index.html

USA Today "Post-election spate of hate crimes worse than post-9/11, experts say"
http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2016/11/12/post-election-spate-hate-crimes-worse-than-post-911-experts-say/93681294/

Forbes "Report: Trump's election led to a surge in hate crime"
http://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2016/11/30/report-trumps-election-led-to-a-surge-in-hate-crime-infographic/#757805065f0d

<u>Rigged Election Claim</u>

Boston Globe "Warnings of conspiracy stoke anger among Trump faithful"
http://www.bostonglobe.com/news/politics/2016/10/15/donald-trump-warnings-conspiracy-rig-election-are-stoking-anger-among-his-followers/LcCY6e0QOcfH8VdeK9UdsM/story.html

Daily Intelligencer "What happens if Trump supporters believe his 'rigged election' hype?"
http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2016/10/what-if-trump-supporters-believe-the-rigged-election-hype.html

<u>Fear for the Electoral Violence on Polling Day</u>

The Guardian, "Specter of election day violence looms as Trump spurs vigilante poll watchers"
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/05/election-day-violence-donald-trump-poll-watchers

Washington Post, "Will next week's U.S. elections lead to violence? Here's what environmental extremists can teach us." https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/11/01/will-next-weeks-u-s-elections-lead-to-violence-heres-what-environmental-extremists-can-teach-us/?utm_term=.34cd62da3e06

Vox "Make America violent again: Trump's rhetoric could cause election day mayhem - and worse" http://www.vox.com/world/2016/10/26/13412050/donald-trump-rigged-elections-violence

<Post-polling Protests>

NY Times "Protesters take anti-Trump message to his doorstep, and plan next Steps" http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/13/us/trump-protest-rallies.html

Annex 2: Hashtags from the Electoral Cycle

- #lockherup (lock her up)
- #Killary
- #Killary4Prison (Killary 4 Prison)
- #hillaryforprison (Hillary for Prison)
- #NeverTrump (Never Trump)
- #drumpTRump (dump Trump)
- #riggedelection
- #Imwithher (I'm with her)
- #MAGA (Make America Great Again)
- #nastywoman (nasty woman)
- #tinyhands (tiny hands)
- #BasketofDeplorables (Basket of Deplorables)
- #PodestaEmails (Podesta Emails)
- #TrumpTapes (Trump Tapes)
- #voteyourconscience
- #assassinateTrump
- #HillarysHealth (Hillary's Health)
- #Altrightmeans (Alt right means)
- #CrookedHillary (Crooked Hillary)
- #FeeltheBern (Feel the Bern)
- #notmyPresident (not my President)
- #Trumpriot (Trump riot)

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