



***Shootings: Political Violence is Upending
Election Campaign and Democracy***

Student Name: XU CONG

Student Number: 1155231277

Global Studies Programme, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

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Instructor: Eric Sautédé

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[On 13 July, former US President Donald Trump was shot at](#) while delivering a speech at a campaign rally in Pennsylvania. Trump only suffered minor injuries, and was seen standing with his fist raised, lines of blood streaked across his face, an American flag billowing in the breeze behind him while being swiftly removed by the secret services. This moment quickly became an iconic image widely circulated in the media. Some analysts believe that the shooting will have a positive impact on Trump, becoming his future campaign “plus points”, while for the controversial Biden and the Democratic Party, the negative pressure on them further intensified. The incident will, without doubt, have an as-yet-unknown effect on the course of the election and provoke deeper reflections on the procedural democracy.

Domestic and international reactions: Unanimous denunciation of political violence. Following the incident, US President Joe Biden condemned the assassination attempt in a televised address, [telling Americans that US politics must never be a "killing field"](#). Similarly, voices from federal officials, state officials, and citizens all expressed shock and outrage at the shooting. For instance, [Barack Obama stated on social media, “There is absolutely no place for political violence in our democracy.”](#) Globally, many leaders of state and government, as well as international organisations, denounced the assassination attempt and expressed good wishes to Trump. For example, [German President Steinmeier in a public statement said, “Such violence will threaten democracy.”](#)

Impact on the Current U.S. Election: Trump’s victory, Biden’s withdrawal, and Harris’ succession. This attack on Trump is very similar to the shooting against George Wallace in 1972, forcing him to renounce campaigning for the presidential election. However, unlike Wallace, Trump was fortunate to survive almost unscathed – Wallace remained paralyzed all his life –, and can use this near-death experience as a potent political narrative, positing as a hero not abated by any form of adversity. In addition, the incident could reinforce [the “law and order” slogan repeatedly emphasized by Trump](#). This is actually one of his favorite campaign creed, and the Republican Party has been using it to attack the Democrats for lax law enforcement, supposedly leading to more and more crimes in the United States. Since a disastrous performance in the first presidential debate, Joe Biden has endured a difficult few weeks. Facing a dual pressure from election controversies and a COVID-19 infection, [the 81-year-old recently announced his decision to withdraw from the race](#). He endorsed US Vice-President Kamala Harris to unite fellow Democrats and the country. [The fledgling Harris campaign raised a staggering \\$100m plus in the 36 hours after Mr Biden’s exit](#). Meanwhile, a new national survey by Reuters and Ipsos shows her with [a two-point lead over Trump, 44% to 42%](#). This increases her momentum. It seems that, after over three weeks of profound concern for the president's health and his capacity to continue campaigning, the Democratic Party has regained its vitality at this moment. Next, the primary challenge and opportunity for Harris is [to capitalise](#)

[on the public's aversion for Trump, to match the enthusiasm held by many on the right hold.](#) This is still shaping up to be a close contest in November, reflecting deep political divisions in American politics.

Broader Implications for Democratic Politics Worldwide: Political radicalisation is bound to undermine the democratic process. In recent months, Biden has considerably increased his personal attacks on Trump on the campaign trail, in order to emphasize the sense that Trump would be a threat to American democracy and deepen the public's negative perception of him. Nevertheless, after the incident, Biden had to stop his aggressive strategy, at least for a while, as Trump's role shifted to a victim of the shooting. Continuing to attack a victim could potentially damage the compassionate and caring leadership image that Biden has cultivated, so his campaign announced that [it was suspending all of upcoming public appearances, as well as the immediate withdrawal of all television campaign ads \(which contain attacks on Trump\)](#). In fact, just days before Trump was targeted, [Biden had said "it's time to put Trump in a bullseye."](#) This mistake began to "ferment" and became a reason for Biden to be attacked. Thus, JD Vance, Trump's presidential running mate, a right-wing populist, stated that ["democratic aggressive rhetoric led directly to Trump's attempted assassination."](#) In conjunction with [2021 United States Capitol attack](#) (Encouraged by Trump, demonstrators supporting him used violent means to occupy the Capitol building in an attempt to overturn the results of the election), we can observe a trend toward radicalization in American politics, which may exacerbate the divisions in society, as well as the undermining of the democratic system.

The Negative Impact of Social Media: conspiracy theories and hate are dominating social feeds. Within minutes of the news breaking about the assassination attempt on Donald Trump, [posts filled with evidence-free speculation, hate and abuse have racked up millions of views on X.](#) Assassination attempts on US presidents have historically served as magnets for conspiracy, the most famous being the killing of John F Kennedy in November 1963. But this incident against Trump was the first to take place in real time, so it comes as no surprise that erroneous rumors spread. It is thus a familiar pattern, but yet spread further and will surely continue to do so as it gets widely amplified by social media. For instance, some posts suggest the "order" for the assassination "likely came from the CIA" and accused Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton and Mike Pence of being involved. Though there is no evidence to support any of that, but the posts has been seen 4.7 million times.