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Long History of U.S. Political Violence Bullets Shatter Faith

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NEW YORK — In just under a decade, starting with the murder of John F. Kennedy on Nov. 22, 1963, the faith of many Americans in the reasonableness of their country's politics has been shattered by assassins' bullets six times.

If he lives, Gov. George Wallace of Alabama, who was shot Monday, will be the first major political figure to survive an assassination attempt since President Kennedy died in Dallas.

The others who fell to the assassins in this period were Malcolm X on Feb. 21, 1965; George Lincoln Rockwell, (head of the American Nazi Party) on Aug. 25, 1967; Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968; and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy in June, 1968.

SEVEN PRESIDENTS or presidential aspirants have been assassin's targets. Wallace was the latest in that category.

And of the nearly 1,350 men who have held the office of

governor since 1790, only one was killed by an assassin, William Goebel of Kentucky, in 1900. Six others have been targets.

In looking back over the history of violence toward presidents or would-be presidents, the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence concluded that "party affiliation, public policies, term of office, and political strength provide few clues about the likelihood of assassination."

Abraham Lincoln, for instance, the first president to be killed by an assassin, headed a divided nation during the Civil War, but William McKinley, the third president murdered, was a popular man in a relatively stable and unified era.

NOR, UNTIL RECENTLY, have assassinations or attempts been confined to presidents or political leaders who have exhibited strong leadership qualities. Presidents Lincoln and Kennedy did fit this category, but Presidents James Garfield and McKinley did not.

Presidents killed in office were Lincoln in 1865; Garfield

in 1881; McKinley in 1901, and Kennedy.

ATTEMPTS WERE made on the lives of Presidents Jackson in 1835, and Harry S. Truman in 1950. Neither was wounded. Theodore Roosevelt, a former president running again on the Bull Moose party ticket, was wounded in 1913.

Lincoln escaped assassination in February 1861, while president-elect. A plot to kill him in the Baltimore railway station was foiled. Lincoln was shot in the back and killed on Good Friday, April 14, 1865.

One pattern that does emerge, particularly during the last decade, concerning political assassinations is that they have occurred during periods of increasing civil strife.

THE ASSASSINATION of President Kennedy, for instance, was during the civil rights era. Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr., like Kennedy, were symbols of the black man's striving for a better life. So was Robert Kennedy. Wallace was on the other side politically, and engendered passions from his political position.