



RESILIENZ

Forschungsgruppe 2539
Mediävistik & Soziologie

Call for Papers “On the resilience of terrorism”

Online Workshop of Project 4 “Resilience Processes in the Face of Disruptive Phenomena. On the Societal Perception of Security Policies and Terrorist Threats”, headed by Prof. Dr. Martin Endreß, of the DFG funded research group 2539 “Resilience. Phases of Societal Upheaval in Dialogue between Medieval Studies and Sociology”, Trier University, Germany

March 24, 2022 –March, 25 2022

Resilience has recently become a guiding concept in dealing with security challenges of various kinds in large parts of terrorism and security research. It is employed to identify strategies, structural principles, resources, and behavioural patterns that will contribute to either prevent disruptive events or to minimise potential damage and to ensure the functioning of basic services on which the state and society depend. Because of this, resilience often receives a normative impregnation, according to which an increase in resilience is always desirable and therefore to be promoted through targeted measures. Viewed from the perspective of social units that are exposed to such threats, especially terrorist ones, this is not surprising. However, the fact that terrorist groups are also confronted with challenges to their existence posed by their environment is less often considered under the concept of resilience. But terrorist groups also formulate strategies to ensure the survival of the group and to preserve their ability to act in the face of existential challenges. This behaviour can be analysed in terms of resilience as well and this is one of the objectives of the workshop. Here, we understand resilience as a heuristic for the study of non-linear change that focuses on processes of coping, adaptation and transformation with reference to the social construction of disruptive phenomena.

In the relationship between terrorists and the social units responding to terrorism, we are dealing with a figuration consisting of several actors who align their respective courses of action. To fully grasp this figuration, it is necessary to examine the actions of a multiplicity of actors who are part of this network of relationships. For this reason, it is not sufficient to examine only the actions and the patterns of interpretation of the actors targeted and affected by terrorism, but the actions and protective measures of terrorist groups themselves must also be considered in their interconnectedness with the former. If resilience is viewed in a normatively neutral way as a heuristic for analysing the action of social units in the face of specific challenges, it is a promising instrument for analysing the aforementioned figuration. Accordingly, an added analytical value of such a conceptualisation lies in the social constructionist perspective of resilience heuristics as well as in their focus on the relational embedding of terrorist organisations in their social, cultural, and political environment. This emphasises the mutual, interrelated actions of terrorist groups and the entities designed to counter them. Within the framework of this reciprocal figuration, processes of coping, adaptation, and transformation take place, from which can be concluded how actors deal with phenomena of continuity and discontinuity regarding their collective identity or their functionality.

Based on the thesis of the mutual interdependencies between counter-terrorism measures and terrorist (response) strategies, the workshop aims to elaborate this reciprocal relationship with the help of the resilience heuristic. It aims to identify processes of coping, adaptation and transformation of terrorist groups, which have so far been only marginally investigated using such a concept. Furthermore, its objective is to take first steps to compare the resilience of terrorist and counter-terrorist actors with regard to the strategies, resources, and dispositions that are applied and (potentially) effective in these processes. Altogether, the figuration as a whole and the interrelationship between terrorist and counter-terrorist groups will be discussed. In order to achieve this, the workshop is oriented towards the following guiding thematic complexes:

Structural dimension

To successfully implement measures to counter challenges that threaten the existence of terrorist groups, structural resources are needed on which these measures can be based. These structures can be, among others, economic, social, political, geographical or cultural. They enable a certain practice of resilience, which in turn relates to the specific nature of the threats these groups face (or perceive and interpret as being faced with). Due to the relevance of structural aspects, questions such as the following will be explored within the framework of this thematic complex:

What economic foundations of terrorist groups can be identified and how do these groups counter the threats to these foundations?

How are social and geographical spaces used to circumvent or actively counter anti-terrorist actions?

Which processes of coping, adaptations, and/or transformation can be identified regarding the structural constitution of terrorist organisations in the face of changing anti-terror strategies by the entities fighting terrorism, and how do the latter react to them?

Symbolic dimension

With regard to the practice of violent acts, terrorist groups need to formulate strategies to legitimise the existence and actions of the group. In order to be able to understand the legitimisation of the use of violence, it is necessary to analyse the logic and justification offered by terrorist groups in the sense of an examination of the inward and outward production of legitimacy. The production of legitimacy is an ongoing process that is intended to maintain the group's existence. The following questions can be addressed:

What strategies of legitimation within the group do terrorist actors pursue to justify their own acts of violence? How are these communicated and what dispositions underlie them?

What are the central interpretative patterns of terrorist organisations with regard to their view of the world? How are these patterns of interpretation expressed in the legitimisation work of terrorist groups?

To what extent can a dialectical relationship be observed regarding the interaction between normative contexts of justification of terrorist organisations and the state actors fighting them?

The identity of terrorist organisations

For the resilience of organizations, the reference to their self-attribution of identity is of great relevance. The process of identity formation is never complete, but must be constantly reproduced. This further introduces the aspect of temporality and addresses the question of continuities and discontinuities with regard to the attribution of identity of organizations towards themselves. Especially in the context of disruptive events, the aspect of the identity of a social unit becomes crucial. Contributions in this category can for example be oriented towards the following questions:

What role does the reference to the past and the future play in the constant reproduction of the identity of a terrorist organisation?

To what extent can commonalities and differences between so-called 'old' and 'new' terrorism be identified as a result of processes of coping, adaptation, and/or transformation and related resilience strategies?

What continuities and discontinuities can be identified within the framework of the reciprocal relationship between terrorist groups and the social units fighting them regarding the practices of violence, the production of legitimacy or illegitimacy and the ideas of social orders?

Due to the ongoing Corona pandemic, the workshop will take place **online via Zoom** on 24 and 25 March 2022. We look forward to receiving abstracts for contributions (200-300 words, English or German) addressing the above-mentioned topics. Please send your submissions as well as possible further questions to Lars Grimm (grimml@uni-trier.de) and Martin Endreß (endress@uni-trier.de) – both collaborators in project 4 of the DFG research group – by 31 January 2022.