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The rising fear of terrorism and the emergence of a European security governance space: citizen perceptions and EU counterterrorism cooperation

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ABSTRACT

Among a wide range of challenges, EU member states have been facing a growing threat from terrorism in the recent years. The primary responsibility for combating terrorism lies with each individual member state, although the threat is becoming increasingly cross-border and diverse. Regardless of whether terrorism poses a real or perceived threat to the states' and citizens' security, public opinion is one important force behind the extensive counterterrorism efforts undertaken in Europe. In this article, we explore the influence of public opinion on EU policy within the security domain in the period 2005–19. We investigate the relationship between the number of attacks carried out on EU territory and citizens' increased concern for terrorist attacks, as well as the attention given to this topic by EU decision-makers. Based on data from Eurobarometer, the Global Terrorism Database, and evidence from official documents, we perform an analysis of the connection between public perception and anti-terrorism policy coordination in the EU. The results of this investigation point to increasing levels of collective securitization and an ever-stronger focus on security and counterterrorism in the European Union. Our findings are related to policy formation in the EU.

Introduction

Terrorism has become an increasingly important subject for European citizens over the last 15 years. Although intergovernmental cooperation to fight terrorism started as early as the 1970s (e.g. TREVI), EU-level policy-making in the domain of Justice and Home Affairs (JHA), and especially in the field of anti-terrorism, has seen an increase since 2004. This article contributes to the scholarship on the political and bureaucratic dimensions of EU multi-level decision-making in a domain of core-state powers. We investigate the covariation between terror attacks within EU-countries, citizens' perception of terror, and JHA Council resolutions with explicit reference to terrorism.

There are recent tendencies of enhanced collective securitization and more integration of a European terror-prevention policy framework, that is more tightly coordinated at the EU-level. Already in 2004, in reaction to the Madrid train attacks, EU leaders had agreed to establish a Counter-terrorism Coordinator. The dreadful attacks in France, 2015, arguably prompted the EU Passenger Names Record (PNR) directive of 2016. And, in the same year, Europol created the European Counter Terrorism Centre as a response to the EU's urgent operational coordination needs. By discussing the key factors and the drivers of the policy-making process, we study the influence of the perceived

threat of terrorist attacks between 2013 and 2018. More precisely, we look at the extent to which the political and societal repercussions of this perceived security crisis have affected policy making in the EU. We argue that the perception of terrorist threats and subsequently the politicization of terrorism in Europe creates pressure for the creation of EU-level initiatives on the issue of terrorism. The hypothesis is, thus, that the occurrence of terrorist attacks positively impacts the threat perception of citizens, which in turn is directly correlated with politicization of terrorism, i.e. attention paid to the issue by political elites at the European level."

In a generic definition, politicization combines three elements: increased issue salience, a polarization of opinions, and the expansion of actors and audiences (De Wilde, Leupold, and Schmidtke 2016). The contestation by citizens affects policy debates in the EU and member states and focuses the policy response on a narrow range of issues perceived to be at the heart of the problem. In the EU-JHA context, the heightened perception of threats to Europe may have contributed to increasing politicization and in strong pressure to elevate the policy framework's security objectives, especially counterterrorism and border control, above other cooperation priorities.

Despite a new 'integration demarcation' and the current tendency towards re-nationalization, the EU system of multi-level governance is generally seen as the world's most advanced system of power transfer via supranational delegation (Henökl 2014a; Kriesi 2016; Schimmelfennig 2014). Therefore, an insight into preference-formation, goal-definition and strategy-design in the EU's tightly interwoven governance network, coupling national and EU administrations together, may be particularly telling and can be seen as a case of transnational public administration. Our ambition is to investigate if there is an increase in JHA resolutions with explicit mention to terrorism in the period hallmarked by increased public attention to this topic.

This article is structured as follows. In the next section, we outline the theoretical argument derived from the existing literature on EU multi-level governance and terrorism studies respectively. We then present the data and method before entering into a discussion of findings and drawing conclusions in support of our argument. The analysis produced evidence of a strong correlation between precipitating events, public opinion and political salience, contributing to a push for collective securitization and the gradual integration of security governance in the EU.

The theoretical argument

We combine two frameworks explaining institutional change within the European Union at different levels. At the meta-level, we employ the toolkit advanced by scholars focusing on core state powers (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2014) in order to investigate whether, and if so, how EU institutions extend their sphere of competence to executive powers, notably different areas of security administration (border management, law-enforcement and judicial cooperation, intelligence and anti-terrorism activities – in short, policing).

In the growing literature on EU counterterrorism cooperation, some authors have criticized the EU, for example Bures (2010, 2011), arguing that many of the counterterrorism instruments lack a proper implementation at the state-level, and that they lack effectiveness. Others (e.g. Argomaniz, Bures, and Kaunert 2015, 2017; Cross 2017; Monar 2007, 2015) paint a more positive picture of the EU as an actor that has accomplished a lot following the major attacks in Madrid and London, especially in the development of bureaucratic bodies and the coordination of the competent national authorities of the member states. The building of capacities at the EU-level has clearly increased the EU's presence in the counter-terrorism realm, defined as 'the materialization and development of EU policies and their translation into national systems and the establishment of institutional actors with the necessary powers and resources to fulfil the objectives laid out in the official EU strategy documents' (Argomaniz, Bures, and Kaunert 2015, 195). More recently, state-of-the-art scholarship on EU security governance detects considerable 'supranational entrepreneurship' from institutions at the European level and underlines the growing importance of this policy field in Europe (Kaunert 2018).

When it comes to understanding as to how this capacity building at the EU-level and the concomitant competence-upload are actually happening, we draw on the theories of multi-level governance and multi-level administration (Eberlein and Grande 2005; Egeberg and Trondal 2017; Piattoni 2014; Zürn 2010). The more the EU becomes involved in not only policy development but also policy coordination and implementation, the more important become issues of administrative interaction between the involved administrative levels. This article contributes insights from administrative decision-making theory and organizational analysis to the field of antiterrorism, pointing to politicization as the main connection between them, in order to explain the mechanisms of EU-level governance. In doing so, the article fills a gap in research on European security studies.

Lacking an administrative basis to implement supranational policies, the EU has long been dependent on member states' administration (Bauer and Becker 2014). Under the pressure of contestation and political mobilization due to terror, the EU has recently built considerable capacity in the realm of JHA and counterterrorism measures, traditionally a core-area of state-power. Taking this situation into account, the EU administrative system has been portrayed as a multi-level and 'nested' or 'network administration' (Egeberg 2006) where institutions at different levels of government 'are linked together in the performance of tasks' (Hofmann and Türk 2006, 583; Henökl 2014b). Administrative capacity-building at the EU-level has repeatedly become a point of contention along the 'cosmopolitan-nationalist' cleavage line (Grande and Kriesi 2015, 191). Since the end of the 'permissive consensus' in the aftermath of the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht, such competence-upload has been regarded as a challenge to administrative autonomy and sovereignty of member state governments, particularly in areas of core-state powers, such as security policy (e.g. Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2014; Henökl and Trondal 2015).

Further, we explain *how* policy change, aiming at reform and coordination at the EU-level to achieve higher degrees of interoperability, information exchange and more tightly coupled cooperation between services is actually taking place. In order to do so, our point of departure is the supposition taken from organization theory that links between and within levels of government also affect policy-making practice and governance patterns; this is particularly important where these practices and patterns reflect executive strategizing in a way of readjusting, reforming and restructuring bureaucratic rank and file, (re-)directing resources (attention, time, personnel, expertise and budgets) to allow for policy coherence and efficacy. As a consequence, these developments have a measurable influence on decision-making behaviour (Christensen and Lægreid 2011; Henökl 2015; March and Olsen 1995). Concerns and considerations may change in their relative levels of priority, importance and context. Communication is key: who do relevant policy makers talk to? From whom do they receive advice? Who are these elites and what is their power? What catches their attention? Who do they really listen to?

Quite obviously, the point of the matter is political salience. How do decision-makers anticipate the people's verdict on their performance on issues that the public thinks are vital? This phenomenon finds expression in efforts of collective securitization, frequently caused by 'a single precipitating event or a set of cascading events of gravity sufficient to disrupt [the] status quo and prompt a perception by the securitising actor (and its audience) that the qualitative character of the internal or external security environment has worsened' (Kaunert and Léonard 2019; Sperling and Webber 2019). The perception of transnational threats such as terror triggers a reflex of collective securitization, and in the European case frequently and increasingly so to the establishment of joint EU security governance structures (Sperling and Webber 2019; Wæver 2011). Argomaniz, Bures, and Kaunert (2015, 197) qualify EU-policy formulation aiming at counter radicalization as 'incident driven, a direct – and sometimes inconsistent – reaction to the bombings in Madrid and London' (see also Bakker 2015).

On the relationship between terrorism and public opinion, most studies show that when the public fears acts of terror, voters tend to turn to support more right-wing parties, more hawkish politics, and stronger leaders (Berrebi and Klor 2008; Getmansky and Zeitzoff 2014; Hersh 2013). This strand of literature also includes Merolla and Zechmeister (2009) study which finds that in the context of terrorist threat, voters stray from their long-term political predisposition, and instead

tend to favour strong leaders. In other words, the causal chain proposed is that terrorist attacks would, through the pressure of the electorate, lead to a rise of politicization and salience of this issue with both citizens and politicians, forcing the latter to take targeted policy action. As for the politicization of external policies, the main focus has been on a general rise in importance of security concerns (Costa 2018; Schmidt 2019).

Terrorism differs from crime in that it is designed to harm random victims and to instil general fear in an entire population, a process in which media reporting plays an important part (Williamson, Fay, and Miles-Johnson 2019). Evidence from Israel show that persons in areas with more exposure to terrorist attacks have greater fear than those residing in less exposed areas (Shechory-Bitton and Cohen-Louck 2018), while Todd, Wilson, and Casey (2005) demonstrate that previous experience of terrorist attacks also have a national impact. To sum up, terrorist attacks would be expected to have most effect locally, then nationally, and to a lesser degree (but still present) in other countries.

In the EU multi-level system, efforts to design coherent responses to complex or 'wicked' policy problems present a three-dimensional coordination challenge: 1) horizontal (among actors at the same level, such as line ministries or Commission Directorate-Generals); 2) vertical, (cross-cutting policy sectors spanning various governance levels); and 3) the need to develop an outward orientation to meet 'real-world' needs. Such 'contingent coordination' confronts bureaucracies with the demand to adapt to evolving problems, thus requiring a high degree of flexibility to 'utilize existing capacity in an unpredictable and complex situation', as in the case of political turbulence and heightened crisis perception (Ansell, Sørensen, and Torfing 2017; Bulmer and Joseph 2016; Head and Alford 2015; Kettl 2003, 256). Crises may represent 'critical junctures' in the evolution of institutions because system-changing decisions need to be taken (Cappoccia and Kelemen 2007; Gourevitch 1986). Moreover, in times of crisis, administrative decision-making tends to become more centralized since the most senior decision-makers take it upon themselves to deal with the threats that have led to the crisis (Dahlström, Peters, and Pierre 2011; t'Hart, Rosenthal, and Kouzmin 1993). Because 'an urgent response is required in an uncertain situation threatening fundamental values or life-sustaining systems', the crisis facilitates the reallocation of decision-making power to the executive and centralizes the direction of political attention and the allocation of resources (Ansell, Sørensen, and Torfing 2017, 2).

In brief, the article promotes the following argument: Triggered by a series of precipitating events, labelled as (Islamist) terror attacks, decision-makers anticipate the mobilizing power of fear and invest their efforts and political capital into the elaboration of security-related policy. The mobilization of public opinion is fuelled by increased media attention on the salient topics of safety and control. In response, politicians and bureaucrats across state boundaries and governmental levels engage in a plethora of direct and indirect authoritative measures (legal as well as non-legislative action, commitments to coordination and cooperation, exchange of information, prioritization, acts of reform, etc.). The European security governance space is multifaceted and has been shaped over several decades, and our focus is on whether the recent acts of terrorism and citizen perception is associated with increased politicization and counter terrorism activity at the EU level (Bakker 2015). However, at the same time we stress that there are multiple causes of EU policy action, which include the direct response to terrorist threat as well as policy entrepreneurship (in which attacks as well as public opinion can create a window of opportunity). There are, of course, caveats with our analysis, as our data will show correlations between terrorist attacks, perceptions, and mentions of terrorism in Council resolutions. EU policy making is complex including several transmission mechanisms in a union of relatively heterogeneous states.

Data and method

We investigate data on perceptions and terrorism for all 28 EU countries together with empirical material as to the initiatives taken at EU-level to address this perceived threat of terrorism and prevent attacks on the European mainland. This is done in order to: a) present the development over time of perceptions of terrorism and actual impact of such high-impact adverse events on public opinion and policy making as well as the connection between these; and b) go beyond investigating the relationship between perceptions of terrorism and actual EU policy, this paper offers an updated cartography of an emerging EU security governance space, spanning authorities and competences from across member states and inter- and intra-administrative hierarchies and networks.

Data on perceptions of terrorism are gathered from the Eurobarometer (European Commission 2020). This includes annual data from the 28 EU member states for the period 2005–2019 which shows the percentage in each country who think that terrorism is one of the two most important issues currently facing their country. The overall numbers for the EU countries are presented in Figure 1. In parallel, we examine proposals and measures launched in official documents and working papers such as Council Conclusions, Commission initiatives, and motions by the European Parliament, aiming at both establishing new structures or connecting existing authorities in the perspective of creating an integrated security governance space in Europe. Combining the rich and thus far unexploited quantitative empirical material on terror attacks with citizens' perceptions of threat and crisis together with the qualitative data on EU action in the field of JHA we show that crisis perception created a sense of urgency at the various governance levels involved in formulating EU anti-terror strategies. The amount of mentions in Council resolutions is not a direct counter terrorism policy measure, but it provides us with measure of the degree of awareness of the topic with the policy makers.

We employ regression models to help determine whether the effect of fatalities and incidents on perceptions are robust when including other explanatory variables. Further, we present random effect models rather than fixed effects. The reason for this is that some EU countries fortunately have not experienced fatalities or incidents during the period in question and would as such be left out of a fixed effects model. In a random effects model, they are included but contribute only through the

Figure 1. Graph of standardized variables *perception of terror* and *fatalities.*

between effects estimator of the RE model (Mehmetoglu and Jakobsen 2017). The control variables are all gathered from the World Bank (2019). These include *per capita GDP* (in thousands), *GDP growth* (in percentage), *population* (log transformed), and *unemployment* (percentage). All the explanatory variables are lagged 1 year. We present one model with *fatalities* alone together with the above-mentioned control variables (Model 1 in Table 1), and one where we add *incidents* to the same model (Model 2). The equations for the two models are presented below:

$$y_{it} = \beta_{0RE} + \beta_{1RE}x_{1it} + \beta_{2RE}x_{2it} + \beta_{3RE}x_{3it} + \beta_{4RE}x_{4it} + \beta_{5RE}x_{5it} + v_i + e_{it} \qquad [1]$$

$$y_{it} = \beta_{0RE} + \beta_{1RE}x_{1it} + \beta_{2RE}x_{2it} + \beta_{3RE}x_{3it} + \beta_{4RE}x_{4it} + \beta_{5RE}x_{5it} \qquad [2]$$
$$+ \beta_{6RE}x_{6it} + v_i + e_{it}$$

Our analysis covers all 28 EU countries and a total of 343 observations in the period 2005–2019 for the dependent variable, and period 2004–2018 for the independent variables.[1] In Table 2 we present the correlation between perception of terror and number of incidents, number of fatalities, and both incidents and fatalities lagged one year. We see that the highest correlation is between perceptions and last year's number of fatalities. The standard errors in both models are clustered by country. As we are examining the entire population of all EU member states and not just a sample, we are generalizing within *stochastic model theory* rather than within *sample theory*. The generalization is from the observations present in the process or mechanism that brings about the actual data (Gold 1969; Henkel 1976). Our starting point is a nondeterministic experiment which implies that the results of the experiment will vary, even if we try to keep the conditions surrounding it constant.

Table 1. RE model of the determinants of perceptions of terrorism, 2005–2019.

	Model 1	Model 2
Fatalities	0.104***	0.095***
	(0.011)	(0.009)
Number of incidents	–	0.045***
		(0.016)
Per capita GDP	0.018*	0.012
	(0.010)	(0.009)
GDP growth	0.126***	0.119***
	(0.039)	(0.040)
Population	0.824***	0.598***
	(0.215)	(0.165)
Unemployment	−0.058***	−0.066**
	(0.027)	(0.028)
Intercept	−10.947***	−7.371
	(3.320)	(2.559)
Overall R^2	0.313	0.345
Groups	28	28
N	343	343

Note: *$p < .10$, **$p < 0.05$, ***$p < 0.01$. All explanatory variables are lagged one year. Population is log transformed. The observations are clustered using Huber-White robust standard errors (White 1980).

Table 2. Correlation matrix of perceptions of terrorism, number of incidents, and deaths from terrorist attacks.

	Perception
Number	0.324
Lagged numbers	0.353
Fatalities	0.304
Lagged fatalities	0.439

Table 3. RE model of the determinants of perceptions of terrorism, 2005–2019.

	Model 1	Model 2
Fatalities	0.104***	0.095***
	(0.011)	(0.009)
Number of incidents	–	0.045***
		(0.016)
Per capita GDP	0.018*	0.012
	(0.010)	(0.009)
GDP growth	0.126***	0.119***
	(0.039)	(0.040)
Population	0.824***	0.598***
	(0.215)	(0.165)
Unemployment	−0.058***	−0.066**
	(0.027)	(0.028)
Intercept	−10.947***	−7.371
	(3.320)	(2.559)
Overall R^2	0.313	0.345
Groups	28	28
N	343	343

Thus, the use of confidence intervals and significance levels makes sense, even if we are investigating the entire population. A lack of statistical significance indicates that the association produced by nature is no more probable than that produced by chance (Gold 1969; Mehmetoglu and Jakobsen 2017).

Discussion of the findings

In this section, we present our findings and analyse them in the light of the theoretical framework based on the methodological approach outlined above. In Table 3 we see that there has been an increase of terror attacks resulting in more than 10 civilian deaths in the period 2015–2017. France stands out as that country which experienced most and deadliest terror attacks, including the Bataclan shooting and the Nice truck attack – two events that spurred the decision on the EU Passenger Names Record (PNR) directive of 2016, to collect potentially valuable travel-data for the fight against terrorism. We have chosen to focus on deaths rather in addition to the actual number of attacks as the former is likely to receive more widespread media attention then the latter, thus increasing the likelihood of having a more profound impact on citizens' perceptions.

Then, we turn to our first argument: with the terror attacks, we see a mobilization of citizen's awareness of terrorism as an important issue facing their country. Figure 1 shows the standardized variables of percentage of citizens believing that terrorism is one of the two most important issues currently facing their country, as well as the number of fatalities from terror attacks in the European Union. The data on the former variable was collected by Eurostat (European Commission 2020)) and the latter by the Global Terrorism Database (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) 2019). The general trend of increased perception of threat to radical-islamist terror, especially from 2014/2015 to 2017, is prevalent in the larger EU countries such as Germany, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom as well as many smaller countries. From Figure 1 we can observe that for most years two surveys have been conducted by Eurobarometer. There is no data for 2011, and there are three recordings for 2014.[2]

Own compilation 2020.

To account for a time lap between fact and figure, we gathered hardball information on the year prior to the measurement of perceptions since it is reasonable to assume that a terror attack in the previous year will influence people's fear of terrorism at a point of time 1 year later.
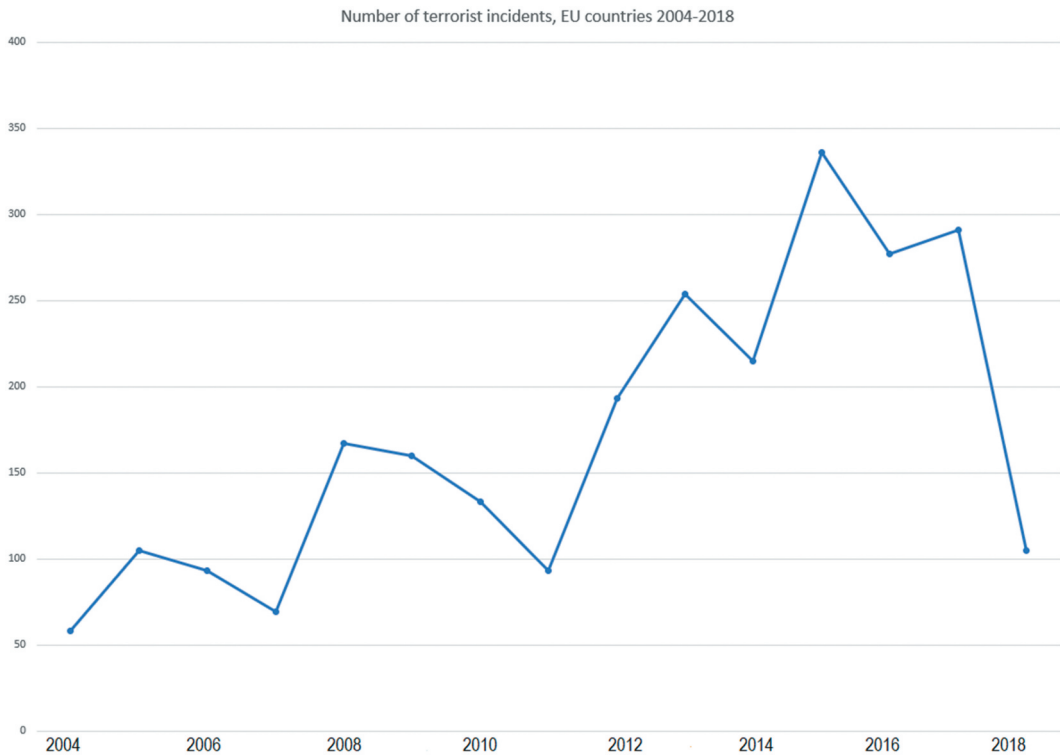
Figure 2. Absolute number of terrorist incidents in the European Union.

In Figure 1 we have juxtaposed fatalities and perceptions on terrorism, we observe a pattern. The fear of terrorism is high in 2005–2008, relatively low in the years 2009–2014, before risings sharply reaching its highest level in 2017, and then dropping. The trend in Figure 1 is affected by the major terrorist attacks, starting with the Madrid train bombings in 2004 followed by the London bombings in 2005. The period 2006–2014 was one of relatively few terror-related deaths within the European Union.

In Figure 2 we present the number of terrorist incidents recorded. According to the Global Terrorism Database (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) 2019), an incident is the recording of the use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor where the objective has been to reach a political, economic, religious or social goal through coercion. Thus, the perpetrators of the incidents must be sub-national actors. We see from the graph that there is an increasing trend of terrorist incidents over time in Europe, but the pattern is not as similar to citizens' perceptions as that of the number of terrorist-related fatalities.

The relationship between terror attacks and citizen perception

In this part of the empirical discussion, we test the relationship between terror attacks (both number of attacks and fatalities) on citizens' fear of terrorism. Here, we have chosen to collapse the data on perceptions into yearly observations. First, we present the correlations between *perception* and *number of incidents* as well as *fatalities*, both recorded the same year as perception and lagged (1 year). We see that the correlation is strongest between perception and fatalities, where the highest value by far (Pearson's coefficient of 0.439) occurs for fatalities lagged 1 year.

It is not surprising that incidents such as the Madrid train bombings influence people's perceptions both instantly and the following year, and that the public's fear of terrorism is lower in those

years where there are fewer fatalities. As noted, other factors also influence public opinion, with economic issues constantly at the top of citizens' concerns (Sperling and Webber 2019). The most important issues over the last decade has been economic issues, immigration, and health, yet terrorism has also risen as a matter of concern to European citizens. From Figure 1 we see that for the years marked by the 2008/09 financial crises the percentage stating terrorism is low. This period coincided with the delaying of some EU initiatives as well as a period of low citizen trust in the EU.

As this coincides with a relatively calm period with regard to fatalities, we have chosen to perform a regression analysis to help determine whether the effect of fatalities and incidents is robust when including other explanatory variables. However, there seems to be a clear 'spillover' effect, namely across national borders and individual member states' public opinion. This is to say that incidents in one EU country result in mobilizing public opinion in other countries.

From both models presented in Table 1 we see that the effect of fatalities on EU citizens' perceptions is robust when controlling for other factors. For each additional terror-related fatality the value for EU countries will, on average, increase by around 0.2 on the dependent variable. This is also by far the strongest empirical finding. There is also a positive effect of *number of incidents*. However, the substantial effect is much weaker, and it is also less than the effect of both population and unemployment. The effect of per capita GDP is positive but not significant at the .05-level. GDP growth is both positive and significant, indicating that if the economy is going well more people will be concerned with terrorism rather than, for example, financial problems.[3] The same reasoning can be attributed to the negative effect of unemployment, which is also significant. The higher the unemployment, the less concerned people are with terrorism. Lastly, population is positively correlated and significant. This is not surprising as the largest EU member states (such as Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, and Spain) are also the major targets of large terrorist operations.

To sum up, we have presented the development over time of perceptions of terrorism, and we have seen that in large parts these are determined by terrorist fatalities. In addition, perceptions of terrorism are to a certain degree also dependent on other factors. If the economy of a country is not doing well, other issues acquire increased importance. Critical among all factors, the effect of major terrorist attacks is so strong and both statistically and substantially significant that it must be considered as the main determinant of EU citizens' fear of terrorism.

Fear of terrorism belongs to what is known as the 'safety domain' (Boehnke et al. 2002) and, *ipso facto*, is regarded as a topic of highest political salience. Other important safety domain issues are border security and irregular immigration. Perceived threats to national or personal security consequently lead to political contestation and mobilization at the national level. Our analysis accounts for this, as it is situated at the country-year level. We have accordingly investigated country-year level explanatory variables. At the individual level, variables such as age, gender, education, and number of household members also influence a person's overall fear of terrorism (Brück and Müller 2010).

Political consequences of terror and perceived threat-levels

In this section, we look to investigate the last part of our argument: that as a response to terrorism and public perception of terrorism, politicians and bureaucrats are expected to approach this issue to a larger degree. Studying the data, both from the terror and threat perceptions, and looking at the political consequences in the form of initiatives and measures adopted to combat terrorist threats in Europe, it would seem that the period 2015–2016 marks a turning point. An accumulation of several high-impact incidents in the largest EU member states (France, Germany, and Belgium) in combination with the peak of the 'migratory crisis', clearly represents a change of pace in the political dynamics of the struggle against terrorism in Europe. We see a rise in casualties as well as threat perception and an upping in the initiatives launched at the EU-level. Security was gaining salience also domestically, when several EU-sceptical law-and-order as well as populist right-wing parties

could benefit from a generalized feeling of insecurity and loss of control (Germany, Austria. Hungary, Poland, Italy, France, and the UK).

As a response to the threat of terror, which also can be argued to have led to political contestation, member state's governments called for decisive anti-terrorism measures at the European level, underlining the common challenge posed by this transnational threat. Subsequently, the EU took a number of initiatives to supply the means to increase its capacity to effectively combat terrorism. In 2015, the Commission launched the 'EU agenda on security' encompassing a wide range of measures in the JHA field marking the establishment of the 'Security Union' with Sir Julian King as the first Commissioner responsible for this portfolio.[4] This new agenda, set by EU heads of state in February in an ambitious statement on counterterrorism, identified three areas: 1. 'ensuring the security of citizens', 2. 'prevention of radicalization and safeguarding values', and 3. 'cooperation with our international partners.[5] Subsequently, the EU established partnerships with countries in the vicinity, i.e. the Western Balkans, North Africa, the Middle-East and Turkey, which prioritize capacity-building and cooperation in the areas of terrorism, organized crime and cybercrime as interlinked threats with strong cross-border and external dimensions (Cross 2017; Kaunert 2009[8]). In the realm of external and development policy, the Commission's proposal for the 2021–2027 multi-annual financial framework has allocated the most significant increases for security, migration control and counter-terrorism programs (Tsourpas 2019).

Internally, the EU has already put into place a range of legal, practical, and support measures to underpin a European area of internal security coupling together EU-level institutions and agencies, particularly Europol, Eurojust and Frontex, with member states and their national authorities. The Frontex' mandate and resources have been expanded to include counterterrorism in its border security mission. Also, a strategy to combat financing of terrorism and several other flanking measures such as legislation on firearms and explosives has been taken.[6] More than ever before,
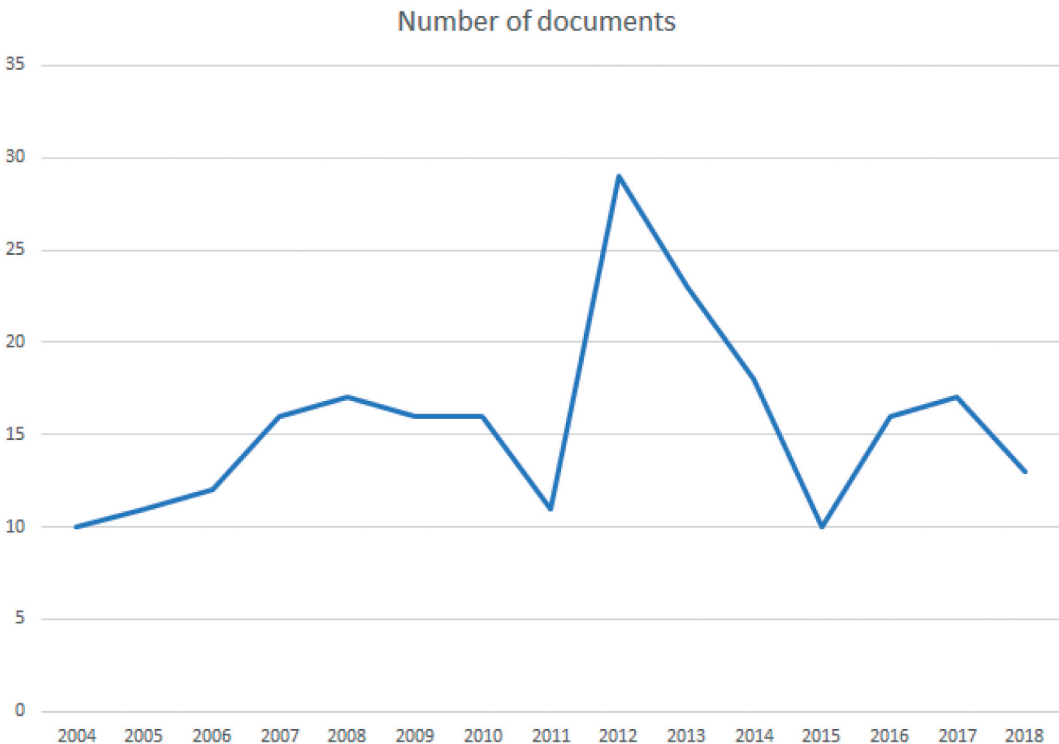
Figure 4. JHA Council Resolutions with explicit reference to 'terror' in Europe. Source: European Commission (2020).

EU member states are now engaged in sharing increasing levels of terrorism-related information via Europol and the Schengen Information System. Finally, in other contexts information-sharing and the interoperability of EU databases have been major focus areas, among others via the European Counter-Terrorism Centre within Europol and a counterterrorism register within Eurojust.

JHA documents with reference to terrorism

The timeline of terror-related policy-making by the EU executive can be seen in the number of Council documents directed at different EU-CT initiatives (Figure 4).

Figure 4 shows the absolute numbers of documents (Resolutions of the EU-JHA Council between 2004 and 2018), making explicit reference to 'terror', 'terrorism' (or 'anti'- and 'counterterrorism') in Europe. The data has been retrieved from the Council's own document database and analysed sequentially for each year. An initial increase in the frequency of numbers can be detected in the aftermath of the Madrid and London bombings in 2004 and 2005 respectively, pointing to a delayed awareness (considering a time lag of 1 year) for the possibility that Europe's mainland might indeed be a target for terrorism.

It should also be mentioned that the Madrid attacks led the European Council to establish the post of European Union Counter-Terrorism Coordinator[7] and the London attacks the following year led to an increased focus on so-called 'home-grown' terrorism. We then see a sharp increase in the number of documents in 2011–2012 where 'terror' is mentioned. These marked the beginning and advancement of the Arab Spring as well as the start of the Syrian rebellion and its violent repression by the Assad regime. The intensity decreased over time until a turning point was reached in 2015 when Europe experienced mass arrivals of refugees (the so-called 'migration crisis') and several precipitating events, namely the attacks on Charlie Hebdo, Bataclan, Brussels, Nice and Berlin/Breitscheidtplatz. Viewed together with the data on citizens' perceptions (Figure 1), the empirics would support a correlation between precipitating events and growing political salience. The measured trend is even more pronounced if we focus our analysis on the number of mentions, i.e. how many times 'terror' appears in the documents (Conclusions from JHA Council meetings) over the same period of time, as in Table 5, below:

Considering the functioning of the multi-level policy coordination among EU member states, the EU-level institutions, and the effect of political, social and economic crises in the EU and neighbouring regions, the paper gauges the extent to which the political ramifications of terrorism affected policy making in Europe. It has been argued that the perception of threat creates pressure for the centralization of decision-making at the pinnacle of government hierarchies (Dahlström, Peters, and Pierre 2011). This has the effect of focusing policy debates on a narrow range of security-related issues, decisive for elevating ('uploading') the corresponding tasks and responsibilities to the EU-level. In the JHA context, but also in the field of the European neighbourhood policy, the heightened perception of terror threats resulted in strong pressure to elevate the policy framework's security objectives, especially counterterrorism and border control, above other cooperation measures. The above graph (Figure 5) suggests a first real peak after 2012 in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, coinciding with the hostilities in Syria (again, taking account of the time lag). There is a second sharp rise in 2015 subsequent to several incidents or precipitating events. Another factor also supporting the hypothesis might appear to be the year 2012 being the first with a recorded number of terrorist attacks in years.[8]

The prominence of the 2015/16 attacks in Paris, Brussels and Berlin with relatively high numbers of casualties[9] together with rising figures of arriving refugees contributed to this risk and crisis perception, creating a sense of urgency at the various governance levels involved in preference – and policy-formation. This, in turn, increased the desire for central steering at the core of the EU's decision-making system (Johansson and Tallberg 2010; Rhodes and Dunleavy 1995).

Evidently, the topic gained in importance in accordance with the rising number of incidents and casualties on European territory, indicating the salience of 'terror' in the political debate at member-
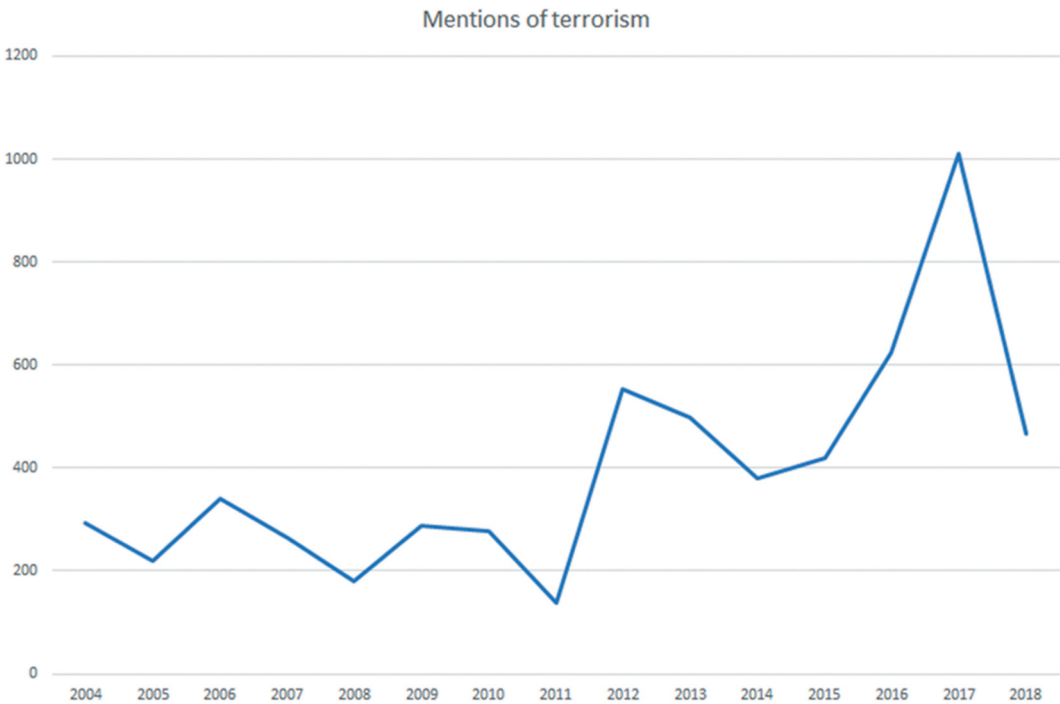
Figure 5. Absolute numbers of mentions of 'terror' in JHA Council Conclusions. Source: European Commission (2020).

state and EU-level. The peak in the first graph (Figure 1) reflects the large number of terrorist incidents in 2015–16 and the subsequent decline a following (taking into account the lag in suspected causal connection here). The main difference between Figures 4 and 5 is the relatively few mentions after the Madrid-attacks in 2004. A possible explanation is that this incident was seen as a one-of-a-kind involving the war against Al-Qaida, and the general sense was that this would not become a more general perception of uncertainty. In later years, commencing 2011, the higher numbers of mentions of terrorism mirrors an increased level of the perception of threat emanated by terrorist attacks.

There are caveats with our analysis that deserves attention. First, one can question whether there is a real pressure for responsiveness captured by the Eurobarometer data, as policy is also motivated by other institutional interests. Economou and Kollias (2019) state that the effect of terrorist attacks are weak, short-lived, and affect only a limited number of policy preferences. This can be seen in relation to the tradition of security policy and counterterrorism measures being a core-state policy area. Yet, there is a strong correlation between our measures, and we argue that citizen concern together with other factor should be regarded as a possible explanation of increased emphasis on EU counter-terrorism policy measures.

Conclusion

Having examined empirical evidence from a number of qualitative and quantitative sources, on the balance the study supports the hypothesis formulated above. We find that the series of incidents resulting in the violent death of persons on European soil have had significant bearing on the perceptions of threat, mobilizing the fear of terrorism among the electorate and to some degree also the subsequent reactions by the political and administrative elite (anticipating or in response) to voters' verdicts, influencing their concerns and considerations, and finally their decision-making

behaviour. Considering Eurobarometer data, analysing the results of a document study of all JHA Council meetings between 2004 and 2018, and following the discussion within the political, expert and media context, the paper traces the correlations and establishes a positive regressive link; factoring out different intervening variables, our findings in combination with the argument outlined in the theory section underpin the hypothesis formulated in the introduction. The data presented here delivers convincing support for drawing a causal connection between a series of tragic, 'precipitating' events, and the politicization of terror, and – in prolongation – the emergence of a European security governance space.

In detail, the analysis and discussion of the empirical material has produced ample and reasonably robust evidence of a strong correlation between terror attacks, threat perception and public opinion, and, consequently, the rise of political salience, exercising pressure on politicians and thereby contributing to a push for collective securitization and the gradual integration of security governance in the EU. Altogether, the increased levels of contestation and salience are believed to have given EU-CT policies a stronger strategic priority and a higher level of attention in the executive decision-making process at the European level. Considering the evidence presented and given the aforementioned caveats, one may speak of an incremental 'executivization' of EU anti-terrorism measures.

We must, of course, take into account that there are several mechanisms at play when it comes to policy formation, and the focus of our paper has been on one of them. The channel in which public fear of terrorism can be translated into policy is through the electoral channel. Citizens can either vote for parties that raise the importance of counter terrorism measures, or well-informed politicians senses public concern and react on this. However, it is important to point out that the EU institutions are also concerned with the general security of the Union regardless of public opinion, and that there is also a direct link (not channelled through citizen perceptions) from terrorist events to policy. For example, the resurgent threat of Al-Qaida in the Arabian peninsula, the expansion of the Islamic State with its requirement of foreign fighters from Europe, as well as its inspiration to sympathisers within the European Union has constituted a direct and immediate threat against the security of the EU.

Future research in this field needs to focus on the administrative processes, which are at the same time enabling as well as resulting from this emerging security governance space, as well as on questions of accountability of the increasingly interwoven bureaucratic structures in this crucial area of core state powers. By means of document analysis and process – tracing research, this could expose some of the underlying mechanisms at the macro- and meso-levels, enabling us to distinguish between crucial sub-processes at national and EU-levels regarding both political and bureaucratic arenas.

Another line of research should address the question of whether and how aspects that are not at the core of traditional security concepts have come into the focus of more recent literature on 'human security' connect to this emerging EU governance space.

Notes

1. For robustness, we have also run the models as pooled OLS and fixed effects, with results similar to those presented in Table 1.
2. We use data on fatalities from terror attacks and the number of terrorist incidents in the period 2004–2017 obtained from the *Global Terrorism Database* (START 2018). The former includes all victims (including attackers) who died as a direct result of a terrorist attack. We have chosen to exclude casualties from the 2016 crash of EgyptAir Flight 804 which in the Global Terrorism Database was coded as fatalities in Greece. This flight was from Paris on its way to Cairo when it crashed into the Mediterranean Sea killing 66 people.
3. We also found a moderating effect of per capita GDP on fatalities which was significant at the 10% level, showing that the lion's share of the effect of fatalities on the dependent variable is driven by the above average rich countries.
4. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/e-library/documents/basic-documents/docs/eu_agenda_on_security_en.pdf
5. De Kerchove, Gilles, 'What has the European Union done to keep us safe from terror', Europe's World, 17 June 2019.

6. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/fight-against-terrorism/
7. https://www.euronews.com/2014/03/11/threat-of-terrorist-attack-in-europe-still-serious-warns-eu-security-chief
8. According to data from Europol Te-SaT Report, the following numbers on earlier terror attacks had been recorded: 0 in 2011; 3 in 2010; 1 in 2009; 0 in 2008; 4 in 2007; 1 in 2006; cf. *European Terrorism Situation and Trend Repor*t, at: https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/eu-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report#fndtn-tabs-0-bottom-2
9. 2015 was the deadliest year in Europe, with 150 victims of terrorism; followed by 2016 with 135 deaths.

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