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Working Paper

Migration and terrorism

Diskussionsbeiträge, No. 2020-06

Provided in Cooperation with:

Wilfried Guth Endowed Chair for Constitutional Political Economy and Competition Policy,
University of Freiburg

Suggested Citation: Krieger, Tim (2020) : Migration and terrorism, Diskussionsbeiträge, No. 2020-06, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Wilfried-Guth-Stiftungsprofessur für Ordnungs- und Wettbewerbspolitik, Freiburg i. Br.

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/233073>

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Diskussionsbeiträge / Discussion Paper Series

No. 2020-06

Migration and Terrorism

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September 2020

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Abstract

This chapter explores the complex interaction between migration and terrorism. It proposes a ‘terrorism-migration cycle’ to investigate systematically this interaction at every stage of the migration process. Importantly, no stage of the migration process is independent of what happened on the previous stage, affecting how terrorism and migration interact. It is shown that terrorism may be a trigger of migration in the origin country, that only particular selections of migrants choose to leave a country, and that these migrants then sort into different destinations. The role of migration governance as a means to avoid the influx of potential terrorists is explored as well as the responses of destination-country populations and governments to the threat of imported terrorism. As yet other challenges, homegrown terrorism within immigrant communities and political violence directed against immigrants are discussed. Finally, it is argued that there are feedback effects of diasporas on the origin countries of immigrant communities.

1. Introduction

Migration is a complex phenomenon. At the individual level, decisions have to be made about whether and when to leave a country and where to go. Individual migration decisions add up to migration flows at the aggregate level, which some countries will welcome and other countries fight. Outgoing and incoming groups change the composition of populations, which may result in political and cultural as well as economic and social effects, both today and in the long run. Migration flows need to be governed at the national and international level; sometimes this happens successfully, sometimes not. Finally, there are continued linkages between origin and destination countries even long after people have crossed borders.

Against this backdrop, how is migration related to terrorism? The ‘International Terrorism: Attributes of Terrorist Events’ (ITERATE) dataset (Mickolus et al. 2016) defines *transnational* terrorism as

“the use (or threat of use) of anxiety-inducing, extra-normal violence for political purposes by any individual or group (acting for or in opposition to established governmental authority) when such action is intended to influence the behavior of a target group wider than the immediate victims and when, *through the nationality or foreign ties of its perpetrators, its location, the nature of its victims or the mechanics of its resolution, and its ramifications transcend national boundaries*” (p. 1, emphasis added).

This definition embraces the possibility of a link between migration and terrorism. Consequently, the public discourse discusses whether immigrants pose a threat to national security, mostly because of the widespread concern that they *could* be terrorists; in the words of Caplan & Weinersmith (2019: 87): “the most emotionally powerful anti-immigration argument in the universe... terrorism”.

This unfavorable view, however, ignores the previously described complexity of migration processes. In fact, there are many more ways in which migration and terrorism may interact. For instance, the definition above also includes the possibility that migrants become victims of terrorism. The present chapter explores these linkages and interactions in a systematic way, thereby following the idea of what may be called a ‘terrorism-migration cycle’, highlighting the various stages of the migration process and its connection to terrorism. The cycle starts in the origin country of migrants (Section 2), where terrorism may be one important trigger for emigration. Those who decide to leave a country are, however, a specific selection out of all potential emigrants and they sort into specific destination countries (Section 3), depending on their selection, migration costs and the governance of migration (Section 4). In destination countries, some migrants may indeed turn out to be terrorists but could very well be the victims of (right-wing) domestic terrorist activity, too (Section 5). Again, the initial selection of migrants plays a decisive role. Finally, there may be a feedback loop from destination to origin countries of migrants, e.g., through diaspora support and remittances channeled to terrorist groups (Section 6). Figure 1 summarizes the idea of the terrorism-migration cycle; its details will be explained in the remainder of this chapter.

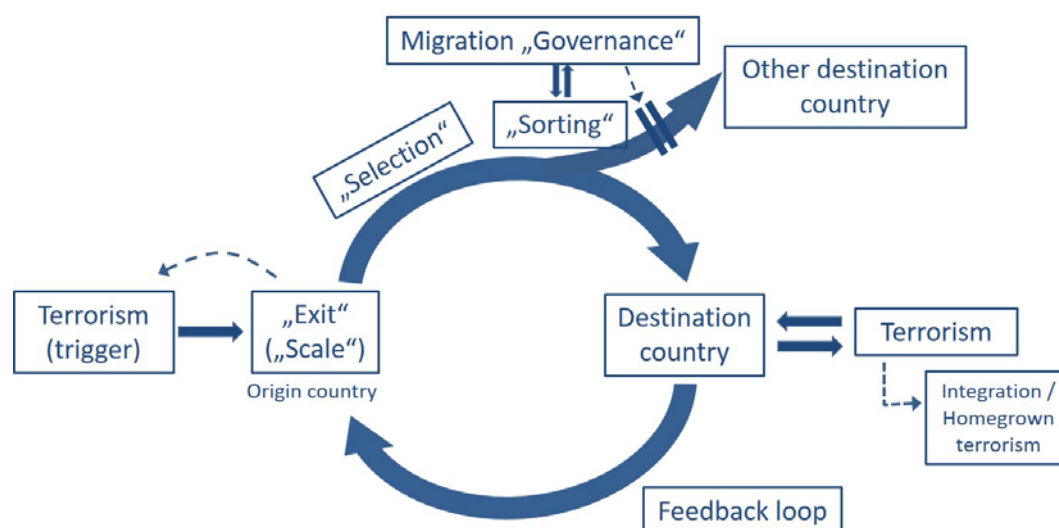


Figure 1: The Terrorism-Migration Cycle

2. Terrorism and Emigration

2.1 Flight from Terrorism

The standard approach in migration economics postulates that utility-maximizing individuals decide to migrate to a different location if, and only if, the benefits of migration exceed – monetary and non-monetary – migration costs (Borjas 1987; Sjaastad 1962). Not only do these costs differ between individuals, they are also influenced by a variety of factors in both origin and destination countries. Resulting from this, migration decisions can be described as a combination of *push* and *pull factors* (Falco and Rotondi 2016).

While pull factors make migrants leave for a specific destination country, Falco and Rotondi (2016: 122) – not mentioning the purely economic factors (e.g., poverty, unemployment) – define push factors as “forces driving the individual to move voluntarily from his own country,

including conflict, drought, famine, or extreme religious activity”¹, i.e., more generally, as individual-level grievances. These political, economic, social, religious and ethnic grievances may be important triggers for emigration. The perceived threat, or actual danger, of being harmed by terrorists can be interpreted as a grievance along these lines. The cost-benefit calculus of potential migrants changes once they have become targets of terrorist activity: the (opportunity) cost of staying increases.

Even if one’s own life and health is not at risk, terrorism is known to result in poor economic and political outcomes. These outcomes, such as low economic growth rates (e.g., Sandler and Enders 2008) and violations of human rights (e.g., Dreher et al. 2010), are also common drivers of emigration (e.g., Hatton and Williamson 2003; Moore and Shellman 2004; Wong and Celbis 2019). For instance, continued terrorist activity may make a country a less attractive place for business and investment (e.g., Bandyopadhyay et al. 2014). If job-market prospects worsen because of this, the cost-benefit calculus of local employees changes and may make them look for jobs abroad.

There is empirical evidence that other types of conflict, such as civil war and internal armed conflict, are drivers of emigration (e.g., Reuveny and Moore 2009; Echevarria and Gardeazabal 2016); some studies also focus on terrorism as the potential reason for emigration and flight. Dreher et al. (2011) investigate whether terrorist activity in a sample of 152 countries results in (legal) migration to the OECD; Belmonte (2019) studies the effect of (separatist) terrorism in South Tyrol as a push factor of migration. In comparison to other conflicts, both studies indicate weak (and not overly robust) ‘direct’ emigration effects on average. Possibly, the threat of terrorism does not change the cost-benefit calculus of the majority of people sufficiently to make them migrate. This, however, is different for some selections of members of society who appear to have a strong preference to leave. These ‘selection effects’ will be discussed in the next section.

2.2 Terrorists as Migrants

Economists also assume that terrorists follow a cost-benefit logic (Sandler et al. 1983). Terrorists are assumed to be rational actors that weigh the benefits of terrorism (e.g., from achieving certain political goals) against terrorism’s costs (e.g., from capture) and opportunity costs (e.g., from foregone earnings from non-violence when engaging in terrorism). Only if the former exceeds the latter, violent action becomes a viable option. In addition, terrorists need to plan their strategies carefully as they have to economize on limited resources.

Migration, if part of the preparation of a transnational terrorist act, may affect a terrorist’s behavior mainly through the cost dimension.² First, terrorists may use existing routes of (illegal) migration and large migration waves, in which they can hide, as low-cost ways to enter a target country. One of the major concerns of European security forces during the 2015 refugee crisis was that members of the *Islamic State* could be among Syrian refugees, which were allowed to enter the European Union without security checks.³ Second, existing immigrant communities (‘diasporas’) in destination countries may serve as convenient safe havens and places to receive

¹ Note that the quote refers to ‘voluntary’ moves. In contrast, IOM (2019: 77) defines *forced migration* as a “migratory movement which, although the drivers can be diverse, involves force, compulsion, or coercion”. Arguably, terrorism-induced emigration is somewhere between voluntary and forced, as terrorist incidents are usually rare and those who decide to leave have some agency in doing so.

² The cost-benefit ratio may also change and affect the level of terrorist activity if a terrorist group successfully achieves its aim of driving members of the out-group out of their territory (thereby, e.g., reaching autonomy).

³ Some perpetrators of the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris may have entered the European Union through the Greek island of Leros (Washington Post 2016).

support (e.g., Sheffer 2006; Hoffman et al. 2007). These communities may also become recruiting grounds. We will return to this problem below.

3. Migrant Selection and Sorting

3.1 Conceptual Issues

Following Grogger and Hanson (2011), migration decisions can be split into three dimensions. First, the *scale* of migration indicates how many people decide to leave a country (or, more precisely, the fraction of the population that emigrates) once some migration trigger, here: terrorism, occurs. Second, the *selection* of migrants provides information on the composition of a group of emigrants with respect to an individual characteristic, e.g., their skill level (Borjas 2014) or degree of risk-aversion (Bauernschuster et al. 2014), relative to the population left behind. Third, the *sorting* of migrants refers to the composition of emigrants by characteristic and by destination.

These three dimensions are not always easy to disentangle as they partly overlap and interact. Ultimately, they imply that neither those who decide to leave a country are a random draw from the origin-country population nor are those who want to enter a specific destination country. The latter are not even representative of the group who emigrated because individuals with different characteristics may also prefer different destinations and sort into them accordingly. More specifically, selection occurs only if people have previously decided to migrate at all, and the sorting of migrants is closely tied to their previous selection.

3.2 Migrant Selection and Terrorism

Again, all three decisions are assumed to follow a rational decision logic. While personal living and working conditions in terror-ridden countries may generally be unpleasant and give rise to emigration intentions, they nevertheless tend to impact actual migration decisions of individuals differently. For instance, returns to education decrease with socioeconomic insecurity resulting from terrorism, thereby lowering the well-educated workers' skill premiums more than the ones of less-skilled workers. Compared to the costs of previous high-level education and given the earnings prospects in other countries (net of migration costs), premiums may become too low. At the same time, skilled workers have better possibilities to emigrate as many destination countries have skill-selective immigration policies (Docquier et al. 2007). Hence, rational skilled workers who worry about their irreversible human-capital investment may feel the wish to emigrate (scale), their desire to do so is stronger than the one of low-skilled workers (selection), and destinations are likely chosen based on individual earnings prospects which differ depending on the skills actually being offered by the migrant (sorting).

The works by Dreher et al. (2011) and Belmonte (2019) provide evidence that selection takes place with terrorism in the origin country being a strong predictor of *skilled* emigration, which itself may have detrimental effects on economic development ('brain drain') and could thus result in a vicious circle of emigration, poor economic prospects resulting in terrorism, and further emigration.⁴ Since education often goes along with other benefits in life, it is not surprising that an advantaged social position (resulting from money and connections) in combination with *motivation* and *opportunity* led to an earlier and safer emigration from conflict-ridden Syria in 2015 (Schon 2019).

⁴ Note, however, that the effects of skilled emigration may not necessarily lead to a brain drain but could also induce a brain gain. For a discussion and empirical evidence, see Beine et al. (2008).

Migration economics mostly focusses on selection based on observable socio-economic variables (e.g., education and skill levels, occupation, income, gender) and, less frequently, the ability to cross cultural barriers (Falck et al. 2012; Krieger et al. 2018). Other dimensions of potential selection have remained largely unexplored; they are, however, of particular interest not only for understanding the terrorism-migration nexus but also for prospective destination countries' immigration policies.

Migrants' psychological wellbeing may be destabilized by personal experiences of violence and terrorism in their home countries (e.g., Farzanegan et al. 2017). Physically strong and resilient migrants may be the first to enter dangerous (illegal) migration routes (Brücker et al. 2019; Hatton and Williamson 2003). These migrants' attitudes toward political, social and religious issues may be shaped by their previous experiences of violence and the actual migration (e.g., on precarious boats on the Mediterranean Sea), too. For instance, when people flee from terrorism it is a priori unclear whether they prefer peaceful ways of conflict resolution (Fabbe et al. 2019; Hazlett 2020; Tellez 2019) or whether their 'hearts are hardened' (Grossman et al. 2015; Hirsch-Hoefler et al. 2016).

Brücker et al. (2019) provide evidence from large surveys that refugees coming to Germany during the 2015 refugee crisis were similar to German respondents in terms of political (e.g., support of free elections and civil rights protection) and gender (e.g., importance of paid employment for a woman's independence) values, but differed in family values (e.g., lower tolerance of premarital sex and homosexuality). This suggests that these refugees were a favorable selection in the sense of having relatively liberal attitudes in several dimensions that match with attitudes in the destination country. However, it is difficult to predict whether the favorable attitudes that were recorded soon after these people entered Germany continue to hold in the long run. We will return this issue below when discussing homegrown terrorism.

In contrast to this, much of the political debate about the terrorism-migration nexus refers to a different, less explored dimension of potential selection: a supposedly disproportionate share of terrorists among migrants. If (migrating) terrorists were a random draw of the entire population, there would be the same (very small) share of terrorists among migrants and the population left behind. This discussion is, however, somewhat misleading. The empirical literature shows that neither migrants nor terrorists are such a random draw, and both groups in fact have similar socio-demographic characteristics. Just like migrants (e.g., Borjas 1987; Chiquiar and Hanson 2005), terrorists are young with specific, above-average skills (Krueger and Maleckova 2003; Berrebi 2007; Gambetta and Hertog 2017) and thus differ significantly from comparable groups staying behind, i.e. in a sense they are a 'positive selection'.⁵ Hence, it is very well possible that a disproportionate share of young males among the migrants entails a disproportionate share of terrorists; a similar argument is made with respect to the migration-crime nexus (Leerkes et al. 2019).

3.3 Migrant Sorting and Terrorism

The sorting of migrants into destinations is closely related to their previous selection patterns. Among the most important factors that pull migrants into a country are existing migrant networks and a common cultural background. With their supportive role when it comes to settling smoothly in a host country, diasporas explain the majority of the variability of international migration flows, selection and sorting (Beine et al. 2011). Cultural proximity between origin and host country populations (not just migrant communities) also lowers the

⁵ It is, however, an open question whether migrating terrorists are a positive selection of all terrorists, as would be the case when, e.g., perpetrators involved in transnational terrorism have different characteristics, in particular higher skills, than (domestic) terrorists who are active in their origin countries.

cost of migration (Krieger et al. 2018). When relating this proximity to terrorist activity, Bove and Böhmelt (2020a) find that a higher proximity can curtail terrorism diffusion. The closeness in norms, customs and beliefs allows for easier integration, making it more difficult for terrorist organizations to radicalize and recruit newly arriving immigrants.

More generally, Grogger and Hanson (2011) find that the relative stock of more-educated migrants in a destination is increasing in the absolute earnings difference between high and low-skilled workers. Hence, skill-selective emigration resulting from terrorist activity, as in Dreher et al. (2011) and Belmonte (2019), ought to direct migrant flows toward, or pull them into, countries with large earnings differentials (or inequality).⁶ Other selection criteria will lead to different sorting patterns, but have rarely been considered in the literature. Some predictions are nevertheless possible.

If terrorism is directed against ethnic or religious minorities (Basuchoudhary and Shughart 2010; Piazza 2012) or aims at suppressing an open and liberal society by, e.g., establishing a theocracy (e.g., Hashim 2014), migrants likely choose destinations that represent the opposite of what they experienced at home. These destinations then tend to be open, liberal, ethnically diverse and secular countries (at the same time, they may be highly attractive to be attacked by transnational terrorists for the very same reasons).⁷ Women, if they have a say in (family) migration decisions, which depends strongly on gender norms (Nivalainen 2004), ought to be interested in places where women's rights are valued higher.

However, more practical reasons (often based on economic considerations) determine sorting choices already at an early stage, independent (or only indirectly influenced by) host-country policies. Hence, there is only limited agency in migration decisions, which are constrained by factors like the lack of knowledge about alternative destinations, geographical proximity (often combined with the wish to be able to return quickly), lack of existing networks, lack of resources, reliance on networks of human smugglers and traffickers, as well as legal obstacles (Rüegger and Bohnet 2018).

4. How Migration Governance Shapes Migration Flows

4.1 Security Threats and Migration Governance

The ultimate sorting of migrants into destinations cannot solely be explained by the location preferences of migrants, but one also needs to take into account the destination country's willingness or obligation to accept them (Krieger et al. 2020), often making the ultimate settlement a second-best outcome for migrants only. 'Willingness' refers to cases in which national immigration policy may be more or less restrictive, while 'obligation' applies when, e.g., international law requires a country to accept an immigrant for humanitarian reasons. Therefore, migration governance at the national and international level influences the ultimate sorting outcomes. What is more, migrants' sorting preferences may also affect migration governance.

With immigration policy as their choice variable, governments carefully weigh the benefits and costs of immigration to maximize their country's national welfare. Immigration policies refer to a "government's statements of what it intends to do or not do (including laws, regulations, decisions or orders) in regards to the selection, admission, settlement and deportation of foreign citizens residing in the country" (Helbling et al. 2017: 82). The main benefit of immigration,

⁶ Destination countries may benefit from the inflow of skilled workers through reduced terrorist activity (Brockhoff et al. 2015).

⁷ Minority suppression may not necessarily lead to emigration, but could itself trigger terrorist activity as a means of asymmetric warfare (see, e.g., Satana et al. 2013).

from an economic perspective, can be summarized by the ‘immigration surplus’ which results from production complementarities between immigrant workers and other factors of production at home (Borjas 1995; Boubtane et al. 2016); costs may arise, e.g., through negative effects on the labor market or as fiscal burdens (Dustmann and Frattini 2014).

Potential and actual security threats, including possible (transnational) terrorist activity, which may result from migration, add to these costs and thereby change (im-)migration policies or, more generally, governance at the national and international level (Adamson 2006; Dowty and Loescher 1996).

4.2 Terrorism Diffusion through International Migration and Government Responses

The literature on the conflict-migration nexus indicates on that armed conflicts such as civil wars spread across borders through population movements (e.g., Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006). Analogous investigations have recently related terrorism to migration with inconclusive results so far. Neither is there strong evidence for terrorism actually crossing borders through migration nor for the opposite.

Choi and Salehyan (2013) and Milton et al. (2013) show that *refugee* inflows increase the likelihood of transnational terrorist activities in the destination countries, with already existing large refugee populations, e.g., in refugee camps, contributing significantly to this finding. In contrast, Polo and Wucherpfennig (2019) do not find evidence that hosting refugees leads to more terrorism against nationals of the host country (if at all, refugees become a target of terrorism; see the discussion below).

In terms of *migration* flows, Bove and Böhmelt (2016) show that terror events in one country indeed travel to another state via migration. Migrants stemming from terrorism-prone states drive this effect; migration per se leads to a decrease in terrorist activity. Dreher et al. (forthcoming) confirm this result but show that – in contrast to widespread belief – origin countries with large Muslim populations are not responsible for this effect. They also show that while a larger stock of foreigners in a country leads to more terror attacks, the same happens for an increase in domestic population, implying a pure *scale effect*. Finally, Forrester et al. (2019) do not find evidence that immigration leads to more terrorism in destination countries.

This weak evidence for migration-induced terrorism leaves the politically highly relevant question open, though, whether there were only few migrating terrorists or proactive immigration policies hindered many terrorists from entering the countries. There is convincing evidence, though, that the fear of transnational terrorists coming to the country has changed national defense, security, privacy, foreign and immigration policies (Epifanio 2011; Messina 2014; Neumayer et al. 2014). Regarding the latter, Bandyopadhyay and Sandler (2014) highlight in a game-theoretical model how a proper mix of immigrant quotas (limiting unskilled labor quotas, increasing scarce skilled labor quotas) can help to improve counterterrorism.

Governments indeed pursued stricter immigration and visa policies in the face of terrorist threats (Fitzpatrick 2002; Martin and Martin 2004; Neumayer 2006; Avdan 2014; Dreher et al. forthcoming),⁸ although the empirical evidence is not unequivocal. For instance, Helbling and Meierrieks (2020) find that a greater exposure to transnational terrorism results in stricter migration controls in OECD countries, but not with stricter migration regulations. Through this, governments aim to not only reduce terrorism but also avoid electoral defeat because of terrorism undermining perceptions of public safety and economic stability. Böhmelt and Bove

⁸ Note, however, that some studies put these findings in context with broader trends toward more restrictive immigration policies (e.g., Luedtke 2009; Rosenblum 2009), i.e., the net effect of terrorism on immigration policies remains unclear.

(2020b) report that immigration policies have a moderating effect in the sense that only if they are very lax a destination country may experience more incoming terrorism. In contrast, Choi (2019) finds that immigration policies are not at all responsive to terrorist activity.

4.3 Challenges to International Counterterrorism Policy Coordination

If countries raise restrictions to immigration in the national interest, this has repercussions in the international arena. Only rarely do the interests of countries align. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, international policy coordination was possible; for instance, UN Security Council Resolution 1373, para. 2(g), demanded (all) countries to “(p)revent the movement of terrorists or terrorist groups by effective border controls and controls on issuance of identity papers and travel documents”. This coordination may come, however, at a price when international agreements mostly benefit powerful countries but shift some of the costs of counter-terrorism measures to otherwise uninvolved countries (Krieger and Meierrieks 2019). One problem that may arise from this situation is that some countries might ‘sell’ the benefits from coordinated counterterrorism measures of the international community by providing a sanctuary to terrorists (Lee 1988).

There is, however, a more general problem underlying international efforts to fight transnational terrorism. The incentives of countries to coordinate through international law are prone to a prisoner’s dilemma. According to Lee (1988), repressive domestic counterterrorism measures may have two effects. They can either eliminate an internationally oriented terrorist group, i.e., they generate a positive externality to the international community. Alternatively, the measures can drive the terrorist group to a neighbor country (if the group can achieve its goals there as well), causing a negative externality; here, the group will search for the weakest link on the international counter-terrorism map (Sandler and Enders 2004). Immigration restrictions will likely have the second effect only and lead – following standard externality theory (e.g., Cornes and Sandler 1996) – to an overprovision with respect to border enforcement. Bove et al. (forthcoming) provide evidence of anticipatory effects and find that proximity to targeted countries leads to the implementation of more restrictive migration policy regimes.

A variant of this problem can be observed in the European Union where the enforcement of the Union’s external border remains suboptimally low because several EU member states freeride on the enforcement spending by states bordering the Mediterranean Sea (Boeri and Brücker 2005; Haake et al. 2013; Mayr et al. 2012). This again leads to a weakest link problem (Papadopoulou 2004), which is aggravated by the fact that migrants can easily cross EU-internal borders within the Schengen Area. For instance, security concerns related to the 2015 refugee wave to Europe resulted from this problem.

5. Migration as a Trigger of Conflict and Terrorism in the Destination Country

5.1 Homegrown Terrorism

The previous section has shown the difficulties of establishing a strong empirical relationship between migration and terrorist activity. This does not imply, however, that there is a lack of evidence of terrorists with immigration background or status. For instance, the works by Camarota (2002), Kephart (2005), Leiken (2004), and Leiken and Brooke (2006) find that immigration background plays a relevant role in their large samples of suspected and convicted terrorists in Northern America and Western Europe. Evidence from major recent terror events in, e.g., Paris (2015), Brussels (2016) and Berlin (2016), points into a similar direction: several perpetrators had an immigration background. At the same time, these examples indicate another layer of complexity because they often involve ‘homegrown terrorism’ where “perpetrators are

citizens and residents born, raised, and educated within the countries they attack” (Wilner and Dubouloz 2010: 33), with only their parents or grandparents being actual immigrants. This is why Hinkkainen (2013) emphasizes that homegrown terrorism follows a logic of domestic rather than transnational terrorism.

Wilner and Dubouloz (2010) identify three main sources of radicalization of persons with immigration background in Western (host) countries: socio-political alienation, deepening religious identity, and anger over foreign policy. Specifically, (self-)radicalization is a process with various stages, leading from non-activism to political activism, then to extremism and finally to violent extremism or terrorism. Each stage involves its own specific incentives and calculi (Krieger and Meierrieks forthcoming), in which political-institutional and socio-economic factors interact with individual-level grievances. Importantly, the process may take time and even span generations with second- and third-generation immigrants most to radicalization (Roy 2005).

This leaves policymakers with a wide range of options for counterterrorism measures beyond stricter immigration policy; for instance, social and anti-discrimination policies. Dreher et al. (forthcoming) provide empirical support for this reasoning. They find that the more migrants’ rights are restricted and the stricter the immigration laws as well as policies that segregate foreigners living in a country, the more likely become feelings of alienation among these population groups resulting in an increase of terrorism risk. Thus, even if the selection and sorting of migrants initially look favorable from a host-country’s perspective, there is no guarantee that their attitudes will be transmitted across generations; in this respect, immigration policy relates not only to the here and now but needs to be interpreted as an intergenerational project.

5.2 Domestic Attitudes and Policymaking

Host-country populations who are afraid of (im)migration-related terrorism, regardless of whether it is a perceived or actual threat, respond in various ways. Helbling and Meierrieks (forthcoming) propose an integrated framework to explain the effects of terrorism on the attitudes of natives toward immigration, the effects of terrorism (potentially being a consequence of previous immigration) on electoral behavior and its role in (immigration) policymaking, as well as the interactions between these effects. They argue that, in general, attitudes towards immigrants get more negative in case of fear and actual or perceived threats from transnational terrorism (see also Hitlan et al. 2007; Huddy et al. 2005). This attitudinal change may be conducive to the electoral success of right-wing (populist) political parties that oppose immigration. Finally, incumbent politicians will respond to this challenge by introducing more restrictive immigration policies in order to secure political survival.

Given heightened levels of insecurity, fear and anxiety in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, a number of studies for various Western countries indicate increased levels of xenophobia and Islamophobia (e.g., Echebarria-Echabe and Fernandez Guede 2006; Sheridan 2006). Many large-scale terror events left a negative imprint on natives’ views regarding immigration (e.g., Boomgaarden and De Vreese 2007; Schüller 2012; Ferrín et al. 2020) and led to increased preferences for more restrictive immigration policies (e.g., Finseraas et al. 2011; Finseraas and Listhaug 2013). This happened not only within the attacked country but spilled over also to other countries (Helbling and Meierrieks forthcoming). Interestingly, however, there is evidence that these effects were again not very long lasting (Legewie 2011; Cappiali et al. 2018). This may leave only a small window of opportunity for policymakers to frame migration as a security issue that requires swift action.

In a democracy, fear of immigration-induced terrorism and dissatisfaction with lax border regimes can in principle be easily voiced at the ballot box. With their anti-immigration platforms, populist parties on the right wing of the political spectrum tend to benefit most from increased concerns about immigration (Rydgren 2008; Oesch 2008). At the same time, also (transnational) terrorist activity has been shown to boost right-wing parties' voting shares in various countries (e.g., Kibris 2011; Berrebi and Klor 2008; Getmansky and Zeitzoff 2014). Helbling and Meierrieks (forthcoming) point out, however, that a nexus between all three variables, transnational terrorism, anti-immigration views and right wing voting has yet to be established empirically. Right-wing parties may simply get elected because of their tough-on-terror rhetoric in times of terrorism. This shift in voting behavior, in turn, puts incumbent governments, that fear to not be re-elected (Bali 2007; Gassebner et al. 2008), under pressure to also set homeland security on top of their political agendas (Krieger and Meierrieks 2019) and act tough on terrorism as well as – possibly – immigration. The actual outcomes of this process were discussed in Subsection 4.2.

5.3 Immigrants as Victims of Political Violence

Native populations may not only resort to voicing their opposition to immigration in elections, hoping for the government to respond by tightening immigration policies, but take matters in their own hands. In extreme cases, immigrants may become victims of terrorism directed against them. This may be particularly relevant when migrants, regardless of whether they are legally, illegally or as refugees for humanitarian reasons in the country, are linked to external terrorist threats (Polo and Wucherpfennig 2019). McAlexander (2020) finds that right-wing terrorist activity increased with more refugees and non-European immigrants entering Western Europe; Jäckle and König (2017) provide similar evidence for the 2015 refugee crisis. Arguably, this may foster the willingness of immigrants (and – potentially – descendants of former immigrants) to resort to violent means of conflict resolution as well (Dreher et al. forthcoming). Alternatively, these negative experiences of migrants in their host country might even make them consider a return to their origin countries.

6. Feedback Effects

The conflict-migration cycle concludes with a feedback loop running from host to origin countries. Recent immigrants and naturalized former migrants, i.e. the diaspora, typically do not simply abandon their linkages with their origin countries, but rather continue them in various ways. Furthermore, diasporas are endogenous to conflict (Collier and Hoeffler 2004): when conflict intensity increases, more people leave the country and form or enlarge (based on their selection and sorting) diasporas. This may have positive or negative feedback effects on terrorism in the origin countries.

An enlarged foreign community abroad has more financial resources and political influence to support conflict at home, turning it worse (Bove and Böhmelt 2019). Historical examples include diaspora support for the Irish Republican Army from Irish communities in the United States and for al-Fatah and Hamas from Palestinians living in Europe, the US and the Middle East. Other prominent groups receiving support include the Tamil Tigers (LTTE), the Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK) and Hezbollah (Piazza 2018).

Diasporas put pressure on international institutions and foreign states to push their agenda (Shain and Barth 2003) or change the distribution of aid (Lahiri and Raimondos-Miller 2000). Financial remittances have played an important role in the conflict literature for a long time, too. While some authors find remittances to be sent for peaceful purposes (Regan and Frank

2014), others provide evidence that they helped to finance rebel groups and terrorism (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Elu and Price 2012). In principle, diasporas may influence their origin countries also by supporting peaceful forms of conflict resolution, e.g., the Irish diaspora in the United States eventually lobbied for the Good Friday Agreement. This would be the case if the diaspora consists mainly of immigrants who oppose further conflict (Petrova 2019); this depends, again, on the selection and sorting of immigrants.

In the terrorism literature, Mascarenhas and Sandler (2014) find that financial remittances are associated with more terrorist activity in the remittances-receiving country. Other studies are less specific with respect to the type of remittances, although do not exclude a relevant role of financial remittances. The transmission channel from diasporas to terrorist activity in the origin countries may also be ‘social remittances’. These are “the ideas, behaviours, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving to sending country communities” (Levitt 1998: 927). For instance, Piazza (2018) shows that the existence of transnational ethnic diasporas make a quick resolution of campaigns by terrorist groups to which these diasporas are linked less likely. Piazza and LaFree (2019) find Islamist terrorist organizations to be somewhat reluctant to resort to high-casualty terrorism, as they fear to lose their diaspora support.

7. Conclusions

This chapter aimed at providing insights into the complex relationship between terrorism and migration by introducing the concept of a terrorism-conflict cycle. In this cycle, terrorism and migration interact at various stages.

While most of the political and academic debate centers on the impact of the immigration of potential perpetrators into host countries and the effects resulting from this, e.g., in terms of actual and perceived terrorist threats, changes in attitudes or electoral outcomes, other questions have received less attention despite their policy relevance. Specifically, a better understanding of the role of selection and sorting of migrants as well as their interplay with migration governance at the national and international level may help policymakers, who are concerned about the security of their citizens, to steer – at least to some degree – migration flows into a more favorable direction with a lower terrorism threat. It may also help them to find solutions to international coordination failure.

Considering the empirical literature, one may conclude that there is no strong evidence that terrorism is ‘imported’ through migration, as it is usually assumed in public and political discourse. In the industrialized world, incoming migrants are most often a positive selection causing economic gain but relatively little violent harm. One needs to recognize, though, that the – in this context – most important question, whether national immigration policies helped significantly to better protect citizens, has yet to be answered convincingly.

Two important policy implications remain. First, linking terrorism to immigration has the potential to stir up public discourse. It may therefore have severe detrimental effects, resulting in political and economic costs in the long run. Second, failure to integrate immigrants and their descendants into a society may come at a high price, potentially in terms of homegrown terrorism. Policymakers need to be aware that immigration policy changes for short run political gain and re-election may eventually backfire.

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