



Article

Counterterrorism Evaluation and Citizens: More Than about Policing?

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Abstract: The police force is one of the few institutions still trusted by the public today. Yet, whilst the recent waves of terrorism have “stimulated” academic activity on the determinants of public fear of terrorism, much less academic effort has been focused on measuring and assessing the effectiveness of anti-terrorism strategies. The present article makes some contributions towards addressing this gap by investigating what shapes public attitudes towards the effectiveness of terrorism policing. Using Eurobarometer data, our results demonstrate that objective national economic, societal and political indicators do not tend to influence popular opinion on the effectiveness of the police in dealing with terrorism. They also show that individuals’ perceptions about the national socio-economic situation are better predictors of public opinion on terrorism policing than individuals’ financial and social positions or levels of education. The influence of these perceptions on public attitudes towards the effectiveness of counterterrorism seems to be more potent than the one on public fear of terrorism found in the extant literature. The implications of these findings are then considered.

Keywords: policing; public opinion; terrorism; citizens’ social positions; socio-economic perceptions; socio-economic aggregates



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1. Introduction

In the aftermaths of 9/11 and the now recurrent waves of Islamic terrorism in Europe and beyond, counterterrorism practices and policies around the world have experienced dramatic changes, especially policing strategies and organisations (see, for example, [Deflem and Chicoine 2019](#)). This context has inter alia stimulated academic activity on terrorism and its impact on nations and citizens ([Echebarria-Echabe and Fernández-Guede 2006](#); [Akhtar et al. 2010](#); [Edling et al. 2016](#)). There has, however, been much more limited evaluative work performed on measuring and assessing the effectiveness of anti-terrorism strategies and their implications for the relationship of the police with the public ([Lum et al. 2006](#); [Weisburd et al. 2009](#); [Van Um and PISOIU 2015](#); [Jore 2019](#)). Extant literature on terrorism suggests that feelings of security are psychologically fashioned on the basis of an interaction between information about the environment and personal profiles of individuals ([Bar-Tal and Jacobson 1998](#); [Huddy et al. 2002](#)). More specifically, whilst prior empirical research has found that citizens’ social conditions and perceptions about the national economic, societal and political situation—rather than the objective national context—explain public attitudes towards terrorism ([Hewitt 1990](#); [Huddy et al. 2002](#); [Von Sikorski et al. 2017](#); [Balestrini 2020](#)), extant literature about terrorism has not investigated whether these factors shape national publics’ opinions about the policing of terrorism. We contend here that the related factors could influence the latter.

This paper examines the following questions. It empirically analyses the effect of objective national indicators such as unemployment, press freedom, crime, income dispersion, immigration, the positioning of political party leaderships on multiculturalism, and terrorism impact (global terrorism index) on public views on the policing of terrorism. It also empirically examines whether citizens’ perceptions about the national economic, societal and political situation explain popular opinion about the policing of terrorism

more than citizens' financial and social positions or levels of education. Expanding the public opinion literature on the policing of terrorism, the main findings presented here indicate that the objective national economic, societal and political context does not tend to influence popular opinion on the effectiveness of the police (and other law enforcement authorities) in tackling terrorism. They also suggest that individuals' perceptions about the national socio-economic situation are better predictors of public opinion on terrorism policing than individuals' financial and social positions or levels of education. Whilst the results in this paper confirm previous research findings on the influence of subjective national socio-economic considerations on public fear of terrorism and public confidence in non-terrorist policing, here there are two main differences. Firstly, in contrast to earlier research on public fear of terrorism and public trust in the police, a nation's actual level of terrorism or crime rate is not found to impact on national publics' assessments of counterterrorism effectiveness. Secondly, the sway of citizens' perceptions about the national economic, societal and political situation on public opinion about terrorism policing seems to be more significant than on public fear of terrorism or public confidence in general policing. Nevertheless, in agreement with earlier research results about public attitudes towards terrorism and general policing, the patent policy inference from our findings here is that public scepticism about the effectiveness of the police in handling terrorism seems to be more than just a matter of policing issues. It appears to be connected with the general public malaise with economic, societal and political outputs. The growing policy convergence of national governments across the EU on the management of socio-economic issues tends to generate pervasive economic, cultural (identity) and physical safety concerns in national publics, which feed into public assessments about terrorism policing. Hence, easing these concerns may require policy actions that go well beyond those specifically aimed at tackling terrorism.

We start with a discussion of previous research on public opinion about terrorism, then formulate two hypotheses, which are tested on the basis of Eurobarometer datasets for all the EU member states in 2015 and 2017. The findings are then discussed in conjunction with their broader implications for the study of public opinion and terrorism.

2. Past Research on Public Attitudes towards Terrorism and Hypotheses Formulation

By and large, citizens in EU member states are concerned about terrorism in periods of low and high terrorist activity (see [Eurobarometer 75.4 2011](#); [Eurobarometer 85.1 2016](#)). These concerns endure not only in places affected by terrorist attacks but well beyond. The "foreign" nature of terrorism in Europe and the political discourse framing the fight against terrorism as more than a physical existential threat may have contributed to make it more prevalent in citizens' minds. Over the last two decades, terrorism in Europe tends to have predominantly been Islamic and has often been associated with foreign terrorist organisations outside Europe.¹ Political discourse about Islamic terrorism has been formulated not only as a battle to keep people safe from physical terrorist aggression, but also as a struggle to defend freedom against oppression and protect Western values ([Schmitt and Shanker 2005](#)). In other words, this combat has been cast as a civilisational enterprise, to defeat both a physical existential threat and a cultural peril. Radical political parties and conservative factions in mainstream political parties have played a role in stimulating this sense of physical insecurity and cultural danger. They have integrated their condemnation of Islamic terrorism into their general critique of current pro-economic and -cultural globalisation policies followed by the EU and national governments. The EU and national governments are the focal point of their criticism: foreign policy meddling in the internal affairs of the Middle East (and beyond), the deemed porosity of national borders, the poor management of migration and immigrant integration policies, disproportionate leverage of multinational companies in world politics, inadequate economic development in developing nations and the defence of national identity, too liberal law and order policies.² More frequent exposure to news reports about terrorism—with some of these associating Islam with terrorism or terrorists of the Islamic state ([Ahmed and Matthes 2017](#);

Gerhards and Schäfer 2014; Satti 2015)—has also generally induced people to fear terrorism and generate negative opinions about Muslims and Arabs. Citizens' levels of education, however, moderate these effects (Das et al. 2009; Oswald 2005; Nellis and Savage 2012; Von Sikorski et al. 2017). In relation to the social identity theory (Inglehart and Welzel 2005), the related sense of physical and cultural threat among citizens is likely to stimulate in-group solidarity on both national and Western levels and non-Western (principally Muslim) out-group hostility. Personal cultural and ethnic proximity with the victims of terrorist attacks has moreover been found to drive public perceptions of terrorist threats (Avdan and Webb 2019).

Beliefs about security or feelings of security are psychologically shaped through an interaction between information about the environment and personal profiles of individuals (Bar-Tal and Jacobson 1998). Thus, women, citizens with lower education levels, citizens of lower social conditions and those who have right-wing ideological views are more prone to fear potential terrorism (see, for example, Huddy et al. 2002; Bar-Tal and Jacobson 1998; Haner et al. 2019). Females are usually more subject to socio-economic pessimism and fear than males and this generally tends to trigger gloomier risk assessments regarding terrorism (Lerner et al. 2003). People of higher social conditions, with a higher education, are more predisposed to possess the intellectual and cognitive skills to make a more rational, reasoned assessment about terrorism. They also generally feel less vulnerable and are less liable to be subjected to emotions such as fear, which negatively affects people's perceived likelihood and threat of terrorism (Weber 2003; Fischhoff et al. 2003; Lerner et al. 2003). Individuals with right-wing ideological views usually attach more importance to law and order policy issues and as such are generally more fearful of potential terrorist attacks (Sury et al. 2016; Best 2018; Haner et al. 2019). However, what was shown to be more important to explain national publics' fear of terrorism is national publics' perceived economic, cultural and physical (safety) insecurities. Citizens' perceptions about the national economic, societal and political situation have been found to be a more powerful predictor of their attitudes towards terrorism than citizens' financial and social positions, or levels of education, and the objective national socio-economic context itself (Balestrini 2020).

There is a popular malaise with the economic and social outputs of national governments and the EU that feeds into public attitudes towards terrorism. Mainstream political elites are not perceived as responding adequately to the widespread economic, cultural and social insecurity of national publics. In the last two decades, the growing policy convergence of mainstream left- and right-wing governments towards inter alia economic liberalisation, less public spending, freer international trade, significant industrial or service offshoring, mass immigration, cosmopolitanism and a tendency to decriminalise crime³ (Budge et al. 2001; Hooghe et al. 2008; Bakker et al. 2015) tends not to have met popular assent. Across EU member states, people tend to be preoccupied by current economic and cultural globalisation, more specifically unemployment and social aspects, mass immigration, crime, multiculturalism and corporate delocalisations. This malaise has also contributed to a distrust of the mass media and national and European political institutions—including political parties and politicians. It is often shared across class and ideological divides (Dalton 2004, 2006; Rodrik 2018). Apart from a country's actual level of terrorism,⁴ no other objective national socio-economic indicator—be it unemployment, income dispersion, press freedom, crime, immigration or the positioning of political party leaderships on multiculturalism—was found to influence public fear of terrorism (Balestrini 2020). The policy convergence of mainstream left- and right-wing political elites witnessed in the last few decades has contributed to make objective national economic, societal and political indicators largely irrelevant to explain public attitudes towards terrorism. There are relatively inconsequential policy differences between EU member states. Thus, the latter have a similar integration into the world economy: EU member states are generally more exposed to globalisation than, for example, China, the Russian Federation and the United States (OECD 2020). National economic, societal and political policy choices are

largely fashioned by the country's membership of the EU. These choices are not always popular among national publics. Citizens tend to view current economic and cultural globalisation (promoted by the EU) as excessive, negatively affecting their well-being and more generally their way of life.⁵ They tend to see globalisation as increasing social inequalities, benefiting primarily large companies and threatening national cultures (see, for example, [Eurobarometer 69.2 2008](#); [Eurobarometer 72.4 2009](#); [Eurobarometer 73.4 2010](#); [Sides and Citrin 2007](#)). This framework is likely to create a sense of common economic, cultural and physical (safety) threats among EU individuals, which nurtures people's assessments about potential terrorism.

However, whilst citizens are preoccupied by terrorism, two institutions retain their trust: the police and the army. Thus, 69% and 72% of EU citizens in 2015 and 2017, respectively, tended to trust the police. A total of 71% and 73% of EU citizens in 2015 and 2017, respectively, also tended to trust the army. By contrast, only 31/31% and 35/36% tended to trust the national parliament and government, respectively, in the same periods of time ([Eurobarometer 83 2015](#); [Eurobarometer 88 2017](#)). Although there are some national variations between EU member states, the police and the army tend to be much more trusted by national publics than the national parliament and government. There is a fairly extensive literature on public trust in general policing—in other words, the policing of non-terrorist crime. Public confidence in the police relates to public assessments of police effectiveness (see, for example, [Kochel et al. 2013](#); [Morrell et al. 2019](#)).⁶ Citizens' crime perceptions and the homicide rate were found to influence public trust in policing ([Sindall et al. 2012](#); [Reisig and Parks 2000](#); [Stack et al. 2007](#); [Jang et al. 2010](#)). Individuals' satisfaction with democracy in their country was also found to sway public confidence in the police—it was, moreover, found to be the most important predictor of the latter ([Jang et al. 2010](#)). These results seem to imply that public trust in policing is not just influenced by crime and citizens' crime perceptions, but also by public opinion about the state of the socio-economic situation in their country.

We can next consider how people rate the effectiveness of the police (and other law enforcement authorities) in tackling terrorism and what factors could sway their assessment. As [Table 1](#) demonstrates, individuals deem the policing of terrorism to be only moderately effective. There are limited variations across countries. Citizens are even more critical of the role of the police (and other law enforcement authorities) in dealing with arms trafficking and illegal immigration (human trafficking)—activities that can be connected with terrorism:⁷ weighted EU scores of 2.98 (1.24)⁸/2.92 (1.28) and 3.07 (1.31)/2.96 (1.30) for, respectively, arms trafficking and illegal immigration in 2015 and 2017 ([Eurobarometer 83.2 2015](#); [Eurobarometer 87.4 2017](#)).

What could help account for the disparity between citizens' relatively high level of trust in the police and the army, and their at best mediocre assessments of these institutions' involvement in terrorism management? It is contended here that national levels of immigration, income dispersion, crime, terrorism impact, unemployment, press freedom and the positioning of party leaderships on multiculturalism—in other words, the objective national economic, societal and political context—do not predict public opinion on the policing of terrorism. It is therefore hypothesised that the objective national economic, societal and political context does not explain public opinion on the effectiveness of the police and other law enforcement authorities in tackling terrorism (Hypothesis H1). The rationale for this is that objective national measures of economic, societal and political factors cannot be differentiators of public attitudes towards terrorism policing as the growing policy convergence of national governments in favour of economic and cultural globalisation has largely eliminated any substantial output differences between countries that could have impacted on these attitudes. Put differently, objective national economic, societal and political indicators are similar enough across EU member states to conceal popular dissatisfaction with the socio-economic situation that could have an influence on popular opinion about the effectiveness of terrorism policing. Across the EU, citizens tend to oppose many of the policy orientations followed by national governments and the EU in the last

two decades. They thus tend to inter alia oppose mass immigration, favour some forms of protectionism, and embrace a more expansive social protection and the use of referendums on European integration (and other aspects) and the need to be tougher on crime. These popular preferences are generally shared across class and ideological boundaries and the socioeconomic traditions of each nation (Dalton 2006; Sides and Citrin 2007; Ifop-AMDLE 2011; Stiglitz 2017; Rodrik 2018).

It was demonstrated that objective national indicators such as the crime rate and a nation's actual level of terrorism are likely to influence public confidence in policing and public fear of terrorism, respectively (Stack et al. 2007; Jang et al. 2010; Balestrini 2020). It is argued here that these relationships are unlikely to apply in the context of terrorism policing. This is so as while the police (and the army) are highly trusted by the general public, the latter is probably cognizant of the fact that the police have to work within the legal framework and more generally the economic, societal and political context that national governments and the EU have contributed to create. Moreover, political parties in opposition (including populist parties) tend to exonerate and even praise the police in terrorism management and point the finger at governments in power for any deemed inadequacies or wrong-doings. Opposition parties and more particularly radical political parties integrate terrorism in the broader context of their critique of the policies followed by national governments and the EU: the porosity of EU external borders, Schengen agreements that can facilitate human and arms trafficking, poor management of legal migration and integration of legal immigrants, meddling foreign policy in the Middle East (and beyond), deficient economic development of developing countries and too lax law and order policies. Political parties play a part in cueing mass attitudes toward this end (De Vries and Edwards 2009; De Vries 2017; Polakow-Suransky 2017). National publics are also generally better educated than in the past and tend to be more sophisticated. People's access to increased information opportunities and their likely direct or indirect encounters with many of today's economic and societal issues help nurture this greater sophistication. This does not imply that people are knowledgeable about the details of public policies. Nevertheless, in the same way as for the evaluation of commercial products and services, although faced with incomplete information, individuals are able to make (sometimes unconscious) calculations of the costs and benefits associated with particular public policies. People tend to have some awareness of the influence of the EU in the management of economic and societal issues. For example, they seem particularly critical of the way the migration emergency is being dealt with by the EU and its potential impact on terrorism and question the Schengen agreements (see, for example, Századvég Foundation 2018). They tend to have a more elaborate view of the EU policy contribution—including its influence on national policies—than what they have been credited for in most of the extant literature. Across socio-economic policies—the economic policy, unemployment, terrorism, health and social security, migration, and external EU borders—citizens' discontent with the EU policy involvement was found to be in the majority. This appraisal, far from being random, appears consistent and interconnected from one policy to another. The masses seem critical of the deemed excessive EU policy inclination for economic and cultural globalization and are concerned about its resultant effects on their welfare. This appraisal was found to be true largely irrespective of education and financial boundaries (Eurobarometer 85.1 2016; Balestrini 2019).

Table 1. Public Opinion about the Effectiveness of Terrorism Policing (Average Score per Country).

“To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: The police and other law enforcement authorities in (OUR COUNTRY) are doing enough to fight . . . ? (1 to 5 scale, where 1 = Totally Agree, 2 = Tend to Agree and, 3 = Don’t Know, 4 = Tend to Disagree and 5 = Totally Disagree”					
28 Countries	2.64 ¹ (1.28)/2.59 ² (1.31)	Spain	2.65 (1.38)/2.27 (1.27)	Netherlands	2.48 (1.12)/2.20 (1.14)
Belgium	2.50 (1.21)/2.51 (1.26)	Finland	2.08 (0.99)/2.07 (1.08)	Bulgaria	3.13 (1.44)/3.08 (1.44)
Croatia	2.72 (1.31)/2.75 (1.35)	France	2.65 (1.25)/2.81 (1.31)	Poland	2.61 (1.13)/2.54 (1.06)
Luxembourg	2.57 (1.13)/2.35 (1.09)	United Kingdom	2.53 (1.25)/2.59 (1.30)	Portugal	2.97 (1.20)/2.50 (1.12)
Cyprus	3.00 (1.39)/2.73 (1.32)	Hungary	2.57 (1.35)/2.22 (1.26)	Sweden	2.39 (1.19)/2.48 (1.30)
Czech Republic	2.90 (1.27)/2.54 (1.18)	Greece	2.79 (1.35)/2.90 (1.39)	Slovenia	3.13 (1.25)/3.05 (1.37)
Germany	2.63 (1.30)/2.80 (1.37)	Ireland	2.61 (1.29)/2.96 (1.34)	Slovakia	3.03 (1.24)/3.01 (1.30)
Denmark	1.88 (0.99)/1.99 (1.12)	Italy	2.71 (1.33)/2.48 (1.34)	Austria	2.48 (1.30)/2.47 (1.35)
Estonia	2.45 (1.01)/2.40 (1.05)	Lithuania	2.80 (1.11)/2.68 (1.13)	Romania	2.86 (1.39)/2.61 (1.32)
Latvia	2.66 (1.10)/2.61 (1.13)	Malta	2.76 (1.31)/2.82 (1.19)		

Note: ¹ Weighted score with standard deviation between brackets. ². Figures in italics are for 2017. Source: Eurobarometer Surveys 83.2 and 87.4 (2015 and 2017).

Economic, cultural and physical (safety) insecurities arising from the fairly widespread popular dissatisfaction with political institutions and their economic, societal and political outputs are likely to feed into public opinion about the effectiveness of the police in tackling terrorism. Consistent with earlier research that found that citizens' concerns about their country's direction and the state of democratic practice in their country are a key individual (level) predictor of, respectively, public opinion about terrorism threat and public confidence in policing (Balestrini 2020; Jang et al. 2010), it is maintained here that public perceptions about the economic, societal and political situation explain more public attitudes towards the effectiveness of terrorism policing than citizens' financial and social positions or levels of education. It is therefore hypothesized that citizens' perceptions about the national socio-economic situation are better predictors of public opinion on terrorism policing than citizens' financial and social positions or levels of education (Hypothesis H2).

To recapitulate, the hypotheses are the following:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *The objective national economic, societal and political context does not explain public opinion on the effectiveness of the police and other law enforcement authorities in tackling terrorism.*

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *Citizens' perceptions about the national socio-economic situation are better predictors of public opinion on terrorism policing than citizens' financial and social positions or levels of education.*

3. Methodology

The purpose of the hypotheses is to investigate the relationship between the objective national economic, societal and political context, citizens' social circumstances and perceptions about the national socio-economic situation, and public opinion on the effectiveness of the police and other law enforcement authorities in coping with terrorism. The study is conducted in 28 EU Member States using factor analysis⁹ and a two-level hierarchical linear model that allows the combination of individual-level and country-level data.¹⁰ For the individual-level data, Eurobarometer surveys 83.2 (2015) and 87.4 (2017) are used. The country-level data are principally based on Eurostat data for 2015 and 2017. The choice of data is motivated by the availability of particular questions to test the hypotheses. It also arises from the need to test the hypotheses in both a period of high and lower terrorist violence in the EU in 2015 and 2017, respectively (Europol 2019). The key goal in developing the regression models is to examine the unique effects of independent variables on the dependent variable. National weights are used to ensure the national representativeness of the samples.

The following question was employed to operationalize the dependent variable: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: The police and other law enforcement authorities in (OUR COUNTRY) are doing enough to fight ... ? (1 to 5 scale, where 1 = Totally Agree, 2 = Tend to Agree and, 3 = Don't Know, 4 = Tend to Disagree and 5 = Totally Disagree".

1. Terrorism
2. Arms Trafficking
3. Human Trafficking

The first variable gauges the opinion of people on the effectiveness of counterterrorism. It is about public assessments of whether the police are doing a "good job" to tackle terrorism-related crime or of whether the job the police are doing is one that citizens can rely on.¹¹ This variable enables us to measure whether national publics' anxieties connected with the objective national context, their individual social positions and perceptions sway people's assessments of terrorism policing. Arms and human trafficking can be associated with terrorism. A factor analysis revealed that "Terrorism", "Arms Trafficking" and "Human Trafficking" variables represent one underlying construct (see Table 2).¹² It measures public opinion about the policing of terrorism. As a result, the outcome variable consists of

a composite score of these three questions. The “Terrorism” dependent variable will also be tested on its own (see Model 1 in Tables) and its results compared with the composite score (Model 2).

The independent variables below are employed to test the hypotheses:

Unemployment—unemployment rate (Eurostat definition) (Source: Eurostat 2019a).

Freedom of the Press—press freedom index (Source: Reporters without Borders 2019). The press freedom index measures the state of media freedom throughout the world. It reflects the degree of freedom that journalists, news media and citizens enjoy in each country, and the efforts made by the authorities to respect and ensure respect for this freedom. The higher the figure, the more limitations to the freedom of the press there are in a country—the scale ranges from 0 to 100.

Terrorism impact—terrorism impact score (Source: Institute for Economics and Peace 2017). It gauges the direct and indirect impact of terrorism in a country in terms of its effect on lives lost, injuries, property damage and the psychological after effects of terrorism. To account for the after effects of trauma that terrorist attacks have on a society, the Global Terrorism Index takes into consideration the events of previous years as having a bearing on a country’s score in the current year, with a decreasing weight each year. The higher the figure, the higher the terrorism impact in a country is—the scale ranges from 0 to 10.

Table 2. Factor Analysis.

Varimax Rotated Factor Loadings	
Item	Factor 1: Terrorism Policing
“Terrorism” ¹	0.83 (0.84)
“Arms Trafficking”	0.86 (0.89)
“Human Trafficking”	0.85 (0.88) ²
Eigenvalues	2.15 (2.27)
Percentage of variance explained	72 (76)
α	0.80 (0.84)

Notes: $N = 28,082$ and $28,093$ (2015 and 2017). ¹ “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: The police and other law enforcement authorities in (OUR COUNTRY) are doing enough to fight . . . ? (1 to 5 scale, where 1 = Totally Agree, 2 = Tend to Agree and, 3 = Don’t Know, 4 = Tend to Disagree and 5 = Totally Disagree”. ² Figures between brackets are for 2017. Source: Eurobarometer Surveys 83.2 and 87.4 (2015 and 2017).

Income dispersion in society (Gini coefficient)—Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income (Source: Eurostat 2019a). The Gini coefficient measures the extent to which the distribution of income or consumption expenditure among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A Gini index of 0 represents perfect equality, while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality (in income distribution). The coefficient has been calculated taking into account taxes and transfer payments (for example, welfare payments).

Size of the immigrant population (in the country)—proportion of the immigrant population in the total (country) population (Sources: EUDO 2019; Eurostat 2019b; OECD 2019). This variable has been calculated as follows: the number of persons acquiring the nationality of the country of residence in the last 10 years (by naturalisations or other means, for example, birth, up to 2015 and 2017) is added to the number of foreigners in the country. This sum is divided by the total population and multiplied by 100 in order to indicate the proportion of immigrants in the total population in each country. The related variable enables us to have a more complete picture of the extent of immigration in the EU. Strictly speaking, a person recently naturalised is of course not a foreigner. However, this person originates from the process of immigration and all immigration has an economic, political and social impact on the state. That is the reason why researchers who try to calculate the costs of immigration integrate them in the immigrant population (see, for example, Gourevitch 2008). Since most countries do not have accurate figures

on immigration and emigration and given the public sensitivity of the information, these figures need to be assessed with caution. The majority of immigrants in EU countries are from non-EU countries. Models presented here were also run with net migration and asylum applications (both per thousand inhabitants) and similar results were obtained.

Positioning of party leaderships on multiculturalism—(Source: [Bakker et al. 2015](#); [Polk et al. 2017](#)). Weighted aggregate expert scores per country are calculated from the raw expert data for the 2014 and 2017 Chapel Hill Expert Surveys on the positioning of political parties on multiculturalism in EU member states.¹³ The score of each political party is weighted according to the percentage of votes obtained at the national election most prior to the Eurobarometer year. A score of 0 means the leadership of a political party strongly favours multiculturalism, whilst a score of 10 means the same strongly favours the assimilation of immigrants. Models (below) were also tested with median expert scores per country and similar results were obtained.

Crime—crime per head of population (recorded by the police) (Source: [Eurostat 2019b](#)).

Country Direction—employing the question “In general, things are going in the right direction, neither in the right nor in the wrong direction or in the wrong direction in our country”. Two variables were created as follows:

In the first variable, the response “things going in the right direction” was coded as 1 and all the other responses were coded as 0. In the second variable, “neither in the right nor in the wrong direction” was coded as 1 and all other responses were coded as 0.

“Things going in the wrong direction” is as a result the baseline group for both variables. The country direction variable and the “voice counts in the EU” variable (see Appendix A) enable us to measure how people feel about the national economic, societal and political context. The EU has a key impact on national policies and tends to be increasingly criticized for an alleged democratic deficit (see, for example, [Habermas 2012](#)).

Difficulties in paying bills—difficulties in paying bills at the end of the month ([Eurobarometer 83.2 2015](#); [Eurobarometer 87.4 2017](#)). Two dummy variables were employed as follows: In the first variable, respondents who occasionally have difficulties in paying bills were coded as 1 and the other two groups (“those who most of the time” and “almost never or never” have the same) were coded as 0. In the second variable, respondents who almost never or never have payment difficulties were coded as 1 and the remaining two groups (“those who most of the time” and “occasionally” have the related difficulties) were coded as 0. “Most of the time” is the baseline group since it is the group that is expected to deem a terrorist attack at home more likely.

Social class—social class ([Eurobarometer 83.2 2015](#); [Eurobarometer 87.4 2017](#)). Two dummy variables were created as follows: In the first variable, respondents belonging to the middle class of society were coded as 1 and the other two groups (working and higher classes of society) were coded as 0. In the second variable, respondents belonging to the higher class of society were coded as 1 and the other two groups were coded as 0. Working class is the baseline group since it is the group that is expected to judge a terrorist attack at home more likely (see, for example, [Huddy et al. 2002](#); [Von Sikorski et al. 2017](#)). Social class generally remains a reliable indicator of citizens’ education, occupation and earnings (see, for example, [Whitty 2001](#)).

Education—age when people stopped full-time education ([Eurobarometer 83.2 2015](#); [Eurobarometer 87.4 2017](#)).

In keeping with previous research on terrorism, the following are control variables: gender, age, ideology and voice counts in the EU (see Appendix A for the operationalisation of these variables).

4. Results and Analysis

An analysis of variance is first conducted to determine whether there is a significant variation in public opinion on terrorism policing at the individual and national levels (see Table 3). As both the individual and national variance components are significant, there

is significant variance in EU opinion at both the individual and national levels: in 2015, 95.61% of the variance is explained at the individual level $((1.527)/(1.527 + 0.070) \times 100)$ and 4.39% at the national level $(0.070/(0.070 + 1.527) \times 100)$, and in 2017, 95.37% of the variance is explained at the individual level $((1.566)/(1.566 + 0.076) \times 100)$ and 4.63% at the national level $(0.076/(0.076 + 1.566) \times 100)$. The data measurement at the individual level explains this unequal split (Steenbergen and Jones 2002). There is also similar variance at the national level in the 2015 and 2017 data. This implies that the level of terrorist violence does not seem to impact on public opinion about counterterrorism—terrorism violence being more significant in 2015 than in 2017. Models are specified in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 3. ANOVA.

	Estimates 2015	Estimates 2017
Fixed Effects		
• Constant	2.746 ** (0.044)	2.648 ** (0.051)
Variance Components		
• Individual level	1.527 ** (0.012)	1.566 ** (0.001)
• Country level	0.070 ** (0.016)	0.076 ** (0.002)
$-2 \times \log$ likelihood	45,182.870	45,428.090

Notes: Table entries are maximum likelihood estimates with estimated standard errors in parentheses. ** Significant at $p < 0.01$. Source: Eurobarometer Surveys 83.2 and 87.4 (2015 and 2017).

The coefficients for unemployment, terrorism impact, income dispersion, immigration, crime and the positioning of party leaderships on multiculturalism are not (statistically) significant and therefore do not influence people's opinions about the effectiveness of the police in dealing with terrorism in both 2015 and 2017.¹⁴ These coefficients are also not (statistically) significant with the composite score of "Terrorism", "Arms Trafficking" and "Human Trafficking" as the dependent variable. The coefficient for press freedom is only (statistically) significant with terrorism as the dependent variable in 2015. The direction of the coefficient for press freedom infers that citizens in nations where press freedom is greater are more likely to be of the view that the police are doing enough to fight terrorism. In the light of these results, Hypothesis H₁ is supported. Therefore, the objective national economic, societal and political context does not explain public opinion on the effectiveness of the police and other law enforcement authorities in tackling terrorism.

These results tend to echo authors' findings (2020) about the absence of impact of objective socio-economic indicators on public fear of terrorism. However, they contradict Reisig and Parks' (2000); Stack et al.'s (2007) and Jang et al.'s (2010) results about the effect of crime rate on public confidence in the police. The economic and societal policy convergence of national governments has probably played a part in counteracting the effect that the objective national economic, societal and political environment could have on public attitudes towards counterterrorism. This convergence "hides" a pervasive popular discontent with the socio-economic situation in EU member states. As we will see below, this discontent sways popular opinion about the effectiveness of terrorism policing. Though, here there are two differences with the extant findings about what motivates public fear of terrorism. Here, terrorism impact does not influence how people feel about the effectiveness of terrorism policing, contrary to its effect on public fear of terrorism. Citizens are probably aware of the fact that the police and other law enforcement authorities have to work within an economic, legal, political and societal structure devised by national governments and the EU. The police and other law enforcement authorities may be considered by them as a mere executant of political decisions. Political party opposition to national governments reinforces this idea by praising police actions but yet indicting politicians in office for any deemed inadequacies or wrong-doings in tackling terrorism (for example, Booth 2019). The other difference here is that press freedom has an effect on public opinion about terrorism policing (but only in 2015, a period of significant terrorist activity). In nations where press freedom is more limited, individuals are more

likely to think that the police are not doing enough to fight terrorism. This may also bring some support to the explanation that national publics tend to blame politicians in power for inadequacies or malpractices in counterterrorism rather the police force itself. Press freedom is a matter for national parliaments and governments. These institutions, through laws and regulations they establish, facilitate or impede press freedom.

Table 4. Regression Estimates of Public Attitudes towards Terrorism Policing.

	Model 1 ^b 2015	Model 1 2017	Model 2 2015	Model 2 2017
Constant ^a	2.623 ** (0.039)	2.592 ** (0.056)	2.870 ** (0.022)	2.860 ** (0.028)
Education	−0.001 (0.018)	−0.037 * (0.017)	0.013 (0.007)	−0.004 (0.008)
Gender	0.020 * (0.008)	0.005 (0.008)	0.010 ** (0.003)	0.004 (0.003)
Age	0.037 ** (0.009)	0.034 ** (0.009)	0.030 ** (0.004)	0.027 ** (0.004)
Ideology	0.026 ** (0.008)	0.040 ** (0.008)	−0.003 (0.003)	0.004 (0.003)
Occasional Financial Difficulties	−0.032 * (0.013)	0.006 (0.015)	−0.013 * (.006)	0.009 (0.006)
Almost No and No Financial Difficulties	−0.030 * (0.014)	−0.005 (0.016)	−0.017 ** (0.006)	−0.000 (0.007)
Middle Class	−0.030 ** (0.009)	−0.029 ** (0.010)	−0.010 * (0.004)	−0.010 * (0.004)
Higher Class	−0.014 (0.009)	−0.024 * (0.010)	−0.002 (0.004)	−0.005 (0.004)
Right Country Direction	−0.172 ** (0.009)	−0.258 ** (0.009)	−0.088 ** (0.004)	−0.127 ** (0.004)
Neither Right Nor Wrong Country Direction	−0.072 ** (0.009)	−0.085 ** (0.009)	−0.037 ** (0.004)	−0.037 ** (0.004)
Voice Counts in the EU	0.161 ** (0.009)	0.151 ** (0.009)	0.076 ** (0.004)	0.082 ** (0.004)
Press Freedom	0.123 * (0.045)	0.026 (0.078)	0.048 (0.025)	−0.043 (0.039)
Unemployment	−0.051 (0.044)	−0.067 (0.066)	0.030 (0.025)	0.006 (0.033)
Terrorism Impact	0.018 (0.047)	0.057 (0.073)	0.017 (0.026)	0.038 (0.036)
Gini Coefficient	−0.034 (0.041)	0.037 (0.070)	−0.014 (0.023)	0.034 (0.035)
Size of the immigrant community	−0.001 (0.029)	0.007 (0.045)	−0.001 (0.016)	−0.019 (0.022)
Crime	−0.146 (0.075)	−0.027 (0.050)	−0.034 (0.043)	0.019 (0.052)
Positioning of Party Leaderships on Multiculturalism	−0.005 (0.032)	0.105 (0.071)	0.003 (0.018)	0.072 (0.036)
N (Nations)	28	28	28	28
N (Individuals)	28,082	28,093	28,082	28,093
−2 × log likelihood	35,593.920	35,248.590	17,745.170	18,182.910

Notes: Table entries are maximum likelihood (standardised) estimates with estimated standard errors in parentheses. ^a Values for the Constant are B coefficients. ^b “Terrorism” (Model 1) and composite score of “Terrorism”, “Arms Trafficking” and “Human Trafficking” (Model 2). ** significant at $p < 0.01$; * significant at $p < 0.05$. Source: Eurobarometer Surveys 83.2 and 87.4 (2015 and 2017).

Table 5. Regression Estimates of Public Attitudes towards Terrorism Policing.

	Model 1^b 2015	Model 1 2015	Model 1 2017	Model 1 2017
Constant ^a	2.621 ** (0.039)	2.623 ** (0.039)	2.592 ** (0.056)	2.591 ** (0.057)
Education	−0.002 (0.018)	−0.001 (0.018)	−0.037 * (0.017)	−0.0370 * (0.017)
Gender	0.020 * (0.008)	0.020 * (0.008)	0.005 (0.008)	0.005 (0.008)
Age	0.037 ** (0.009)	0.037 ** (0.009)	0.034 ** (0.009)	0.034 ** (0.009)
Ideology	0.026 ** (0.008)	0.026 ** (0.008)	0.040 ** (0.008)	0.039 ** (0.008)
Occasional Financial Difficulties	−0.031 * (0.013)	−0.032 * (0.013)	0.006 (0.015)	0.007 (0.015)
Almost No and No Financial Difficulties	−0.029 (0.015)	−0.030 * (0.014)	−0.005 (0.016)	−0.005 (0.016)
Middle Class	−0.030 ** (0.009)	−0.031 ** (0.009)	−0.029 ** (0.009)	−0.029 ** (0.009)
Higher Class	−0.014 (0.009)	−0.016 (0.009)	−0.025* (0.009)	−0.028 ** (0.009)
Right Country Direction	−0.173 ** (0.009)	−0.172 ** (0.009)	−0.258 ** (0.009)	−0.258 ** (0.009)
Neither Right Nor Wrong Country Direction	−0.071 ** (0.009)	−0.072 ** (0.009)	−0.085 ** (0.009)	−0.085 ** (0.009)
Voice Counts in the EU	0.161 ** (0.009)	0.161 ** (0.009)	0.151 ** (0.009)	0.151 ** (0.009)
Press Freedom	0.123 * (0.045)	0.123 * (0.045)	0.026 (0.078)	0.027 (0.078)
Unemployment	−0.051 (0.044)	−0.051 (0.044)	−0.068 (0.066)	−0.068 (0.066)
Terrorism Impact	0.018 (0.047)	0.018 (0.047)	0.058 (0.073)	0.057 (0.073)
Gini Coefficient	−0.034 (0.041)	−0.034 (0.041)	0.037 (0.070)	0.037 (0.070)
Size of the immigrant community	−0.001 (0.029)	−0.001 (0.029)	0.007 (0.045)	0.006 (0.045)
Crime	−0.146 (0.075)	−0.146 (0.075)	−0.028 (0.050)	−0.027 (0.050)
Positioning of Party Leaderships on Multiculturalism	−0.005 (0.032)	−0.005 (0.032)	0.106 (0.071)	0.105 (0.071)
Right Country Direction X Almost No and No Financial Difficulties	0.007 (0.008)	−	−	−
Right Country Direction X Middle Class	−	−0.011 (0.008)	−0.006 (0.008)	−
Right Country Direction X Higher Class	−	−	−	0.014 (0.008)
N (Nations)	28	28	28	28
N (Individuals)	28,082	28,082	28,093	28,093
−2 × log likelihood	35,593.610	35,593.070	35,248.360	35,246.980

Notes: Table entries are maximum likelihood (standardised) estimates with estimated standard errors in parentheses. ^a Values for the Constant are B coefficients. ^b "Terrorism" (Model 1). ** significant at $p < 0.01$; * significant at $p < 0.05$. Source: Eurobarometer Surveys 83.2 and 87.4 (2015 and 2017).

The findings for Hypothesis H_{II} underscoring the importance of citizens' perceptions about the national socio-economic situation as a driver of public attitudes towards countert-

errorism tend to accredit the idea that politicians rather than the police are held responsible for shortcomings and deficiencies in handling terrorism. Thus, citizens' concerns about their country's direction (and European integration) explain more public attitudes towards counterterrorism than citizens' financial and social positions or levels of education in both 2015 and 2017 (see Table 4).¹⁵ The effect of people's dissatisfaction with their country's direction (and European integration) on public opinion about terrorism policing is true for both the dependent variables—that is to say, the "Terrorism" dependent variable and the composite dependent variable made of the "Terrorism", "Arms Trafficking" and "Human Trafficking" scores. National publics anxious about their country's socio-economic situation and the perceived EU democratic deficit are more likely to be critical of the effectiveness of terrorism policing. The influence of citizens' education and financial and social positions on public views on the effectiveness of the police (and other law enforcement authorities) in tackling terrorism is much more limited. Individuals with lower education levels, of lower social conditions and in a weaker financial position tend to be more sceptical about the effectiveness of counterterrorism. In view of these results, Hypothesis H2 is supported. Citizens' perceptions about the national socio-economic situation are better predictors of public opinion on terrorism policing than citizens' financial and social positions or levels of education. Our results confirm earlier research findings (Jang et al. 2010; Jackson and Bradford 2019; Balestrini 2020) on the rather marginal role of education and social positions in structuring public fears about terrorism and public attitudes towards police effectiveness. However, what is even more significant here compared to these extant research findings is that people's perceptions about the national socio-economic situation and EU integration seem to have an even greater sway on public opinion about terrorism policing than on public fear of terrorism. Additional statistical analyses bring further insight. The non (statistical) significance of the interactions between citizens' financial or social positions and their concerns about their country's direction (see Table 5)¹⁶ shows that public dissatisfaction with national economic, societal and political outputs tends to influence public attitudes towards counterterrorism, regardless of class and financial divides. This also echoes recent research findings about public attitudes towards terrorism (Balestrini 2020). Public unease with national economic, societal and political outputs is widespread and nourishes people's assessments about terrorism policing. Citizens are generally critical of the deemed excessive penchant for economic and cultural globalisation of national governments and the EU—populist parties play a part in encouraging them to do so—(Dalton 2004, 2006; Rodrik 2018; Sides and Citrin 2007). Our findings here seem to show that popular scepticism towards counterterrorism has its roots in this discontent.

5. Conclusions and Implications

What could help explain public scepticism about the effectiveness of a generally popular institution such as the police in dealing with terrorism? Furthering the public opinion literature on terrorism, the findings of this paper offer the following explanations. They suggest that objective national economic, societal and political gauges—specifically unemployment, income dispersion, crime, press freedom, immigration or the positioning of political party leaderships on multiculturalism—do not tend to explain variance in public opinion on the effectiveness of the police (and other law enforcement authorities) in tackling terrorism. They also denote that people's perceptions about the national socio-economic context influence more public attitudes towards terrorism policing than individuals' financial and social positions or levels of education. Whilst these results confirm the pre-eminence of subjective national socio-economic considerations (over objective ones and individuals' social positions) in the literature on public opinion about terrorism and general (non-terrorist) policing, here, such subjective considerations are found to be a more potent determinant of citizens' appraisals of counterterrorism effectiveness. Furthermore, contrary to the previous research on public opinion about terrorism, a nation's actual level of terrorism does not seem to influence national publics' assessments of terrorism policing. The growing policy convergence of national governments across the EU on the

management of economic and social issues over the last two decades is at the source of widespread economic, identity and physical safety concerns for national publics, which seem to feed into public appraisals of terrorism policing.

The political implications of this research are that addressing citizens' concerns about the effectiveness of terrorism policing could be a "mammoth of a task" for decision-makers. This enterprise should thus not only entail taking policing measures to tackle individuals' physical safety anxieties about terrorism, but it should also endeavour to see to a relatively widely shared feeling of economic, societal and political discontent among citizens that makes its way towards a common assessment of the deemed somewhat questionable effectiveness of counterterrorism policing. This undertaking may involve revisiting sensitive policy fields such as economic deprivation, immigration or multiculturalism. As hinted in the setting of public opinion literature on globalisation, immigration or political systems (see, for example, [Balestrini 2014, 2016](#)), policy changes may not, however, need to be wholesale. Engaging the public in the policy-making process may help to address issues successfully, draw nearer to public economic, societal and political concerns but also provide more durable citizens' commitment towards institutions of governance. Though, this course is likely to be contested by stakeholders who would see their influence on policy-making decrease—namely a section of the political elites and large business interests. The police and the army are one of the few institutions still trusted today by national publics. Yet, their credibility in terms of fighting terrorism seems to be to some extent challenged. Considering the magnitude and far-reaching effects of popular socio-economic discontent on public policy assessments, can policy-makers afford to keep it business as usual?

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Appendix A

Operationalisation of control variables.

Gender—(0) Male and (1) female categories.

Age—In years.

Political Ideology—Ideological views of respondents from 1 (left) to 10 (right).

Country Voice Counts in the EU—using the question "Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement: "My voice counts in the European Union" 1/Totally agree, 2/Tend to agree, 3/Tend to disagree and 4/Totally disagree".

Notes

- ¹ The main concern reported by EU member states relates to jihadist terrorism. A large majority of fatalities and casualties arising from terrorist attacks in Europe are classified as Islamic terrorism in the related period. Furthermore, a large proportion of arrests for terrorism-related offences are linked to jihadist terrorism ([Europol 2019](#)).
- ² Popular scepticism towards many of these matters moreover outstrips the electoral weight of such parties ([Rodrik 2018](#)).
- ³ A decriminalisation policy to grant greater consideration to the social causes of crime.
- ⁴ This effect is only true when terrorist violence is substantial.
- ⁵ This scepticism towards globalisation has moreover contributed to the rise of populism and growing public support for radical political parties (see [Inglehart and Norris 2016](#)).
- ⁶ Police presence and fairness also affect public confidence in policing ([Morrell et al. 2019](#)).
- ⁷ Populist political parties and factions in mainstream political parties are particularly "encouraging" the connection and inter alia pointing to the lack of EU external and national effective borders (see, for example, [Zalan 2015](#)).
- ⁸ The standard deviation for each weighted score is between brackets.

- ⁹ This method is appropriate since my concern is with examining whether several outcome variables have similar patterns of responses and therefore are all associated with a latent variable (i.e., here, public attitudes towards policing terrorism) (Tabachnick and Fidell 2013).
- ¹⁰ As one examines how national economic, societal and political contexts shape individual differences in attitudes towards counterterrorism, a two-level hierarchical linear model is employed. This method is appropriate since the concern is with explaining variation at both the individual and national levels. A multi-level model enables us to explore causal heterogeneity and test the generalisability of findings across different national contexts (Steenbergen and Jones 2002). This model also corrects for the dependence of observations within countries—intraclass correlations—and makes adjustments both within and between the parameter estimates for the clustered nature of the data (Snijders and Bosker 1999). The dependent variable (composite score of terrorism, arms and human trafficking) has been transformed (square root transformation) so as to improve model fitting and better respect regression assumptions.
- ¹¹ This is tantamount to an expectation of competence that is consistent with a prevalent definition of trust across different disciplines—the willingness of trustors to make themselves vulnerable to a trustee (PytlikZillig and Kimbrough 2015).
- ¹² The result of the Kayser–Meyer–Oklin test was 0.71 (0.72 for the year 2017), exceeding the recommended value of 0.5, and the Bartlett’s test of Sphericity reached statistical significance (<0.01), which supported the use of factor analysis (Bartlett 1954; Kaiser 1974). The terrorism policing assessment scale has a reasonable internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.80$ and 0.84 in 2015 and 2017, respectively).
- ¹³ Here, we draw upon expert survey data rather than manifesto project data as the former tend to be more reliable, flexible and provide immediately usable information (see, for example, Mikhaylov et al. 2012; Benoit and Laver 2007). The use of expert survey or mass survey data tends to prevail in the most recent empirical political research.
- ¹⁴ Introducing country-level independent variables one by one in the regression models does not modify our results.
- ¹⁵ In other words, the direction of the coefficients in Table 4 indicates that the more people think that things are going in the wrong direction in their country (or the more they believe that their voice does not count in the EU), the more they are of the opinion that the police and other law enforcement authorities in their country are not doing enough to fight terrorism (or arms and human trafficking).
- ¹⁶ Interaction terms should only be tested if constitutive terms are statistically significant, as recommended by Brambor et al. (2006). Due to space limitation, full results are not presented here for the models integrating the interaction terms. These are, however, available from the corresponding author upon request.

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