

Workshop Proposal:

PUBLIC OPINION, FOREIGN POLICY AND THE USE OF FORCE IN TURBULENT TIMES

**European Consortium for Political Research Joint Session of Workshops
Nottingham, United Kingdom 2017**

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Abstract

This workshop intends to move forward the discussion over state the role of public opinion in foreign policy, approximately 20 years after the last ECPR workshop on such an issue. Three are the reasons that make such a workshop timely and relevant. The first reason is theoretical. It has to do with the progress of the debate on both the sources, correlates and effects of public opinion on foreign and security policy. In the last 20 years, several new theoretical and methodological developments have contributed to progress in the way we know and study these topics. The second reason is empirical. We have now many more comparative high quality survey data than in the 1990s. As a consequence of the globalization of public opinion studies (Heath, Fisher and Smith, 2005), new comparative projects have been launched, such as the Transatlantic Trends Survey, the PEW Global Attitudes Project, the Globscan PIPA Project. They have increased the amount of data available over time and enlarged the scope of the comparison, to include new countries. Last, but not the least, in the last two decades, the interest for public opinion and foreign policy has dramatically increased as a consequence in the 2000s of 9/11 and its aftermath and in the 2010s as a consequence of the growing challenges to the borders of the EU and of the economic crisis, the EU has undertaken a process of radical reconsideration of the entire integration process. As a consequence of the twofold challenges without (Ukraine, Libya, Syria, Turkey, etc.) and within (the economic and financial crisis; the lack of capacity for a coherent and compassionate refugee policy) the EU borders, European foreign and security policy has gained a growing attention.

I. INTRODUCTION

This workshop intends to move forward the discussion over state the role of public opinion in foreign policy, approximately 20 years after the last ECPR workshop on such an issue. Three are the reasons that make such a workshop timely and relevant.

The first reason is theoretical. It has to do with the progress of the debate on both the sources, correlates and effects of public opinion on foreign and security policy. In the last 20 years, several new theoretical and methodological developments have contributed to progress in the way we know and study these topics. Theoretically, framing and a growing attention to the role of the media in attitude formation have moved the agenda further in a interdisciplinary direction. The study of foreign policy and public opinion has availed itself on the one hand of the study of framing effects (e.g. Boetcher and Cobb, 2006) in explaining individual level attitudes and preferences in foreign policy and on the other hand it has paid more attention at the dynamic between elites, public opinion and the media in shaping attitude formation and change over international crises (e.g. Hayes and Guardino, 2011; Baum 2005). These theoretical developments have been paired with new methodological developments. On the one hand, the study of public attitudes on foreign policy has seen a growing use of experimental survey design in studying the impact of multiple conditions on general attitudes, as shown in the literature on the role of casualties and on audience costs. On the other hand, the field has seen also some progress along the quantitative-qualitative divide with the use of the concept of "strategic narratives" and the role of argumentation in shaping public attitudes, as an additional link to the policy-opinion connection (e.g. Irondelle, Merand and Foucault, 2015; Dirk, 2014).

The second reason is empirical. We have now many more comparative high quality survey data than in the 1990s. As a consequence of the globalization of public opinion studies (Heath, Fisher and Smith, 2005), new comparative projects have been launched, such as the Transatlantic Trends Survey, the PEW Global Attitudes Project, the Globscan PIPA Project have increased the amount of data available over time and enlarged the scope of the comparison, to include new countries.

Last, but not the least, in the last two decades, the interest for public opinion and foreign policy has dramatically increased. In the decade of the 2000s, as a consequence of 9/11 and its aftermath, especially in Afghanistan and Iraq, public opinion has played a growing and more complex role in the foreign policy of European countries. Moreover, a truly Transatlantic dimension of public opinion interaction has been emerging, shedding further light on similarities and differences among modern democracies on these issues. In the decade of the 2010s, in part as a consequence of the growing challenges to the borders of the EU and of the economic crisis, the EU has undertaken a process of radical reconsideration of the entire integration process. As a consequence of the twofold challenges without (Ukraine, Libya, Syria, Turkey, etc.) and within (the economic and financial crisis; the lack of capacity for a coherent and compassionate refugee policy) the EU borders, European foreign and security policy has gained a growing attention.

For all these reasons, we think that an opportunity to systematically reflect upon these issues is not only timely but also theoretically appropriate. This reflection can be the springboard for a new wave of studies, that both in Europe, the United States and in other regions of the

world might help to strengthen the robustness of our theoretical arguments and the scope of our empirical generalizations.

Fundamental gaps in our understanding still exist and it is now time for a stock-taking exercise in this area. In particular, we think this reflection should address new issues such as:

- the study of elites' attitudes on foreign and security policy and the mutual connection between public opinion, representative democracy and actual policy outcomes;
- the study of the public opinion-foreign policy connection in other democratic, quasi-democratic and non-democratic context. We know too little on how public opinion affects foreign policy in democratic countries (e.g. Japan and India), in pseudo-democracies such as Russia and in non-democratic regimes such as China, Iran or Pakistan.
- the application of new methods of analysis such as social media and discourse analysis, as well as new theoretical approaches, such as the theory of strategic narratives.

II. WHAT WE KNOW AND DO NOT KNOW

Twenty-five years after Holsti's (1992) thorough review of the study of foreign policy and public opinion, and after two comparative efforts (Nacos, Shapiro and Isernia, 2000; Everts and Isernia, 2000; 2015) to extend what we knew of the United States, the interest for the relationships between public opinion and foreign policy has continued to grow. There is, by now, a substantial amount of research on the determinants of public support for the use of military force. Overall, we can distinguish in this field *three waves of studies* on the determinants of public attitudes towards foreign policy.

After a first, pre-theoretical stage in the 1930s, in which the main attention was on ways of measuring attitudes toward war, the end of World War II generated a complacent consensus about the willingness and pliability of the public in supporting the use of force under a wide set of circumstances. This complacency melted away with the Vietnam war which brought forth an 'agonizing reappraisal' of the nature of the alleged 'permissive consensus', generating a spate of studies about support for war heavily critical of the Americans' willingness to approve the use of force. Out of this reappraisal, a new consensus emerged: public support for the use of force was limited and short-lived at best, fickle and uncertain at worst. With the end of the Cold War and the experience of the Gulf War of 1991 this conclusion was turned upside down, showing that, under some (perhaps, very specific) conditions, war and support could indeed go together. The Post-Cold War period saw many instances in which force was used, albeit with mixed ratings in public support. The 9/11 terrorist attack and the Iraq war of 2003 tested these changed conditions once again, adding some further qualifications to the Post-Cold War optimistic reading of public support for the use of force.

An appropriate way to synthesize the vast and differentiated literature on this topic is to recur to the well-known metaphor of the 'funnel of causality' by Campbell and collaborators (1960), in which, moving from the most distal factors to those proximate to the situation we have a flow of three blocks of independent variables, considered at different times and by different perspectives as *the* most important in explaining support for war and the use of force: *socio-demographic*, *predispositional* and *situational* variables. Over time, the interest has moved from one block to another, without losing of sight the previous blocks.

In the 1950s and 1960s *socio-demographic explanations* that look at socio-economic and group characteristics of the respondent to differentiate levels of support for the use of force

were emphasized. Race, education and gender were among the variables more frequently singled out for explanation, with socio-economic status and age much less frequently invoked.

In the 1970s and the 1980s, *predispositional variables* explain support for the use of force, referring either to the general ideological stance of the respondent or to more specific posture-based predispositions, such as internationalism (Caspary, 1970; McClosky, 1960), authoritarianism (McClosky, 1958) or self-esteem (Sniderman and Citrin, 1971). While earlier studies stressed the 'moodiness' and volatility of public opinion at the mass level (Almond 1950, 1960, Converse 1964) research in the 1970s and 1980s established that public opinion is much more stable and that, if it changes, it changes in a meaningful fashion (Holsti, 1992; Hurwitz and Peffley, 1987; Page and Shapiro, 1988, 1990). European studies on this question were much less frequent, but those available confirmed American findings (e.g. Flynn and Rattinger, eds. 1985; Everts 1996; Isernia 1996).

The last and most recent wave of studies focuses on *situationally-driven explanations* that look at the structure of the situation, and in particular at the conditions and events occurring in the external world, to explain support for the war. Here, casualties have assumed a great importance in discussions on the determinants of support for the war, but they are not the only factors in this category. The role of multilateralism, legitimacy and the objectives of the intervention have also attracted a lot of attention.

The challenge ahead is not so much to press for adding further predictors to what it is already a quite long list of candidates, but rather to find ways of combine explanations at different levels, to allow for a more nuanced appreciation of the interaction between contextual variables, predispositional predictors and situational factors in shaping more complex explanatory patterns.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED

The workshop is open to a wide range of contributions both from an empirical and theoretical viewpoint. Comparative studies are especially welcome. The main thrust of the workshop is not only to describe and possibly explain difference and similarities of attitudes toward the use of force and foreign and security policy in general among public opinion, political elite and the military, but also to address the fundamental question of how the three interact among themselves and affects policy-making, looking not only to the Western European countries and United States, but also to non European countries, such as Japan, India and Russia. In this connection our workshop intends to address in a comparative perspective a set of more specific goals:

1. A first task, is (1) to assess the implications of the fundamental changes in the international system which took place in the last few years for attitudes toward the use of military force of a) the general population, b) the political elite and c) the military and (2) to point to the possible sources of differences of attitudes. Specifically, the question is to what extent the increasing number of peace-keeping, peace-enforcing and peace-supporting operations carried out by a variety of intergovernmental institutions affects the perception of the role of the military and the assessment of the acceptability and desirability of the employment of military force in its various forms.

2. A second task is to study the opinion-policy connection and the role public opinion in both its organized and non-organized form plays in the calculations of decision-makers and the

military in the decisions to use force. Does public opinion set the broad context in which decision-makers make their calculations about the available feasible alternatives? Who is leading whom in the decisions to undertake a military operation abroad or to abstain from this?

3. A third task is devoted to study the implications of the EU and Transatlantic institutional context on the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy. As a consequence of the increasing interaction in an highly interdependent political context such as the one in which the European countries are embedded as part of the EU institutions and the one in which they interact with the United States in the Transatlantic area, we intend to study what changes these contextual factors produce in the way public opinion reacts to international events. Does public opinion position and distribution of attitudes on issues in one country affect the way public opinion perceive the issues in another?

4. Finally, the workshop would offer also an opportunity to discuss possibilities and perhaps bring about the start of a systematic international collection of the available empirical data available on this issue in Europe and elsewhere, in order to offer a more systematic evaluation of what we know and what we do not know about the opinion-policy connection in foreign policy and security issues. At least one session of the workshop should be set aside specifically for a discussion of this issue and related questions of international cooperation.

To conclude, we think that such a workshop will contribute not only to bridge the knowledge gap on the opinion-policy connection in foreign and defense issues between Europe and the United States, but also that it will make a solid contribution to a better understanding of the nature and implications of the role contemporary democracies with respect to the use of military force in the present international context.

IV. PARTICIPANTS, PAPERS AND FUNDING

The workshop will attract both empirical and theoretical papers primarily from the community of those studying public opinion and foreign policy, including the role of elite and the military in the foreign policy process. Other relevant or wider perspectives will not be excluded, however. The papers could offer a comparative assessment of the distribution and determinants of attitudes toward the use of force among the public, the elite and the military. They could also address the question of the relationship between public opinion at both the mass and the organized level and government policies concerning the use of the military.

We are confident that the workshop could produce an edited volume with an available market that goes from international relations and foreign policy specialists to students of public opinion, political psychology and military sociology and which could also attract the interest of practitioners in the field.

Persons likely to be interested in participation in the workshop besides the directors include the following (preliminary):

Fabrizio Coticchia (University of Genova)
de Vreese Claes (University of Amsterdam)
Gaspere Genna (University of Florida)
Christopher Hill (Cambridge)
Bastien Irondelle (CERI, Paris)

Cigdem Kentmen (Izmir University of Economics)
Philippe Manigart (Belgium Royal Military Academy)
Thomas Risse-Kappen (Freie Universitaat)
Harald Schoen (Mannheim University)
Jason Reifler (Exeter)

The participation of the following American scholars in the workshop would be desirable:

Matthew Baum (MIT)
Richard Eichenberg (Tufts University)
Peter Gries (Oklahoma)
Brian Rathbun (USC)
Paul Goren (Minnesota)
Joshua Kertzer (Harvard)
Richard Herrmann (Ohio State University)

To help in funding our workshop we intend to look to sources such as occasional calls from the British Academy, the Leverhulme Trust and the Compagnia di San Paolo, Italy for conference support.

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Biographical Note

Pierangelo Isernia is professor of political science and chair of the Department of Social, Political and Cognitive Sciences at the Università di Siena. He has a M.A in Law from the University of Roma, and a PhD in International relations from the University of Padua. He has been visiting scholar at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (Merriam Laboratory for Analytical Political Research) and the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Institute for Social Research and the University of Stanford, Department of Political Science. Prof Isernia has coordinated or been partner in several European funded projects in the 6th, 7th and Horizon2020 programs. He is presently coordinating, with Maurizio Cotta, a three years Project, EUEngage, under Horizon2020. His research interests are in public opinion and foreign policy, attitude change and deliberative. democracy. He is series editor (with Maurizio Cotta) of the Oxford University Press INTUNE series on European Integration and has published several articles in professional journals and edited books on these topics. His most recent book is *Public Opinion, Transatlantic Relations and the Use of Force* (Palgrave, 2015, with Philip Everts).

Thomas Scotto is Professor of Government and Chief Scientific Officer to the Essex County Council, University of Essex. He has a Ph.D. from Duke University and has been at Essex Since 2007. Professor Scotto is the recipient of multiple awards from the Economic and Social Research Council of the United Kingdom to study cross-national attitudes towards foreign policy matters. His articles on the topic appear in journals such as *International Studies Quarterly*, *Canadian Foreign Policy*, *Political Behaviour*, and *the British Journal of Politics and International Relations*. Professor Scotto's work on the topic of public opinion and foreign affairs is covered widely in the media and has been used by political elites in the United States and the United Kingdom.