Current Security Issues

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Structure of the Presentation

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SECONOMICS
– Socio-economics meets security

- Project supported by European Commission within the 7FP (http://www.seconomicsproject.eu/)

- Project systhetizes sociological, economic and security science into usable, concrete, actionable knowledge for policy makers and social planners responsible for citizens security.

- The project tries to identify security threats in transport (air, urban and super urban metro) and critical infrastructure.

- The project seeks to explore the challenges of pan European coordination in security outcomes for transport and critical infrastructure.

2. Perception of risk

Advanced modern societies are in many respects experiencing an unprecedented existential security compared to previous times; however, they are at the same time paradoxically concerned about security risks and safety threats;

Ulrich Beck (1992) has described this new phenomenon as a "Risk Society". Danger and insecurity have always been inherent to human life, especially in the form of natural disasters and the like;

However, post-modern societies experience a new type of risks, such as nuclear radiation, global warming, genetic modification of food, financial crises and terrorist attacks;

These types of risks are different from the previous ones, whereby they have such serious consequences that they constitute a predominant societal and political concern in post-modern societies;

In contrast to old types of risks stemming from natural causes, the new threats are mainly a product of human activity;

The new risks are also potentially much more severe than previously;

They are not temporally, spatially and socially circumscribed;

These risks do not respect boundaries of nation-states, generally have a long latency period and individual culprits are difficult to identify;

According to U. Beck, the new risks and particularly environmental risks have become a central dynamics that characterizes contemporary societies;

The new risks have led to a transformation of the whole society and social order;

As Beck argues, the main societal conflict is no longer over the re-distribution of "goods", such as income and material property, but over distribution of "bads" that result from realizations of the new risks, such as nuclear fallout and genetically modified food;

Social theorists have identified security and safety risks as one of the most crucial issues that contemporary Western societies are currently facing.

Our problem: how can we empirically study risks from a social science perspective?

How do individual citizens perceive risk?

What types of risks are people mostly concerned with?

Why do some people worry more about some risks than others?

Does concern about various risks have any impact on human behaviour and political decision-making?

2.1. Research on Risk Perception in Various Disciplines

Threats and risks are primarily studied within the so-called "risk assessment" analysis. Such studies include a variety of approaches how to study risks; social science approach is only a part of that.

In particular, social scientists focus on the concept of "risk perception", drawing on social psychology, another discipline that pays great attention to risk assessment.

Originally, the research of risk perception appeared in the late 1960s. In essence, risk perception was considered the major cause people's antagonism to technological development such as nuclear power;

As a consequence, researchers started to contend that perception of threats and risks is not only a matter of technical knowledge but also of subjective personal opinions and beliefs;

2.2./1 Definition of Risk Perception

Risk in general can be defined as the "likelihood that an individual will experience the effect of danger";

Social scientists focus on the concept of "perceived risk/threat/hazard". Perceived risk can be understood as the subjective assessment of the probability of this danger and how much people are concerned about potential consequences;

Risk perception includes three components:
1) subjective assessment that individual people make,
2) (un)certainty that is intrinsic to this assessment and
3) something that will have a negative outcome;

2.2./2 Definition of Risk Perception

Risk perception is studied as a targeted attitude to specific types of risks, such as terrorism, natural disaster, nuclear power, technological development, crime, etc.

As sociological and political science studies show, perceived threat can also originate in the social world and not only in new technologies and nature.

People can perceive the risk of losing their cultural identity, economic and political privileges, and feel threatened by some policies and specific groups of people, such as immigrants;

Threat thus clearly has a number of potential sources.

There are two basic types of risks: personal and collective/national/general

1) The personal risk represents a personal threat to the individual or the immediate family and is often related to feelings of personal insecurity and fear of physical harm

This can be measured by questions such as: "How concerned are you personally about yourself or a family member being the victim of a future terrorist attack in the United States") or "How large do you think that the risk is for you personally of the following?" and the list including variety of possible risks is offered;

2) The general, national and collective threat is a threat understood as a risk for the country or society as a whole, and does not have to entail a personal physical risk to an individual.

This can be studied through questions such as: "How concerned are you that there will be another major terrorist attack on U.S. soil in the near future?" or "How large do you think the risk is to people in Sweden of the following?", and the list including the same risk items as in the case of personal risk is offered;

The above-noted two types of threat differ in their consequences.

Sources of Perceived Risk – two theories

The risk literature has widely studied individual sources of threat perception.

There are two main classical theories used for explanation of perceived risk: the psychometric paradigm and cultural theory;

The basic assumption of the psychometric approach is that threats and risks are in reality interpreted or perceived by individuals.

Specifically, the traditional risk perception literature was interested in the following question: Why are some risks perceived as more severe than others?

This focus was motivated mainly by the fact that, surprisingly to risk assessment experts, some of the threats with a rather low actual probability of happening, such as radiation from nuclear power plant, were perceived as much greater risks than other threats that can potentially be more harmful, like X-rays.

Cultural theory

The second theory that belongs to the basic explanatory framework of risk perception is the so-called cultural theory. According to this perspective, the perception of risk is driven by more general attitudes towards the world around us;

Culturalists assume that people have specific worldviews that determine their interpretations of the surrounding world;

In contrast to the psychometric theory, possible risks and hazards are not expected to influence individual attitudes directly but through interpretative schemata;

Especially relevant to the explanatory potential in cross-individual research is that people naturally differ in their worldviews.

Two components are important in regards to an individual's general worldview:
1) his/her relations to groups (individual/group-based perspective on beliefs of right and wrong, responsibility etc.);
2) characteristics of rules that are needed for society according to that particular individual (the number of rules and the level of acceptance of these rules across society).

Gender factor

One of the stable findings of risk perception studies is the significant difference between men and women;

Women tend to exhibit a higher level of apprehension of both threats - the perceived personal and national - than men, despite the fact that they are not more likely to be affected by the threat;

The analysis will therefore compare cross-national differences in risk perception among male and female respondents;

Further analyses, which are beyond the scope of this report, will also incorporate other socio-demographic factors such as age, residence (city vs. countryside), family status (single vs. family), education (lower vs. higher), class and income and cross-section of these factors.

Consequences of Perceived Risk

Various consequences of threat perception have been widely documented in the literature - higher risk perception increases political intolerance, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and prejudices;

Threat perception also reduces cognitive abilities, leads to closed-mindedness and intolerance to challenging opinions;

Risk perception also supports individuals' willingness to forego basic civil rights and liberties;

Viscuci and Zeckhauser (2003) analyze how people are willing to sacrifice civil liberties to reduce the risk of terrorism on the case of airport checks of passengers, i.e. whether they should be random and standardized or targeted according to race, gender, nationality, etc.

Their analysis supports opinions that the discussion about liberties and terrorism is not about extreme views, i.e. sacrifice all liberties or none of them in the effort to lower the terrorism risk;

On the contrary, the individual attitudes have seemed to be rather conciliatory and a result of a series of trade-offs.

3/1 Goals and tasks for sociology

- Conceptualise security and risk as a social phenomenon and analyze their mutual interplay in public opinion and attitudes;

- Identify public perception and attitudes to risk;

- Estimate the risk tolerances and consumer-demand for security;

- Identify the value citizens place on this attribute;

- Among the three groups of agents (policy makers, stake holders and consumers) expectations, as well as interests might be identical or similar, but also disparate, biased or contradictory.

- In the policy chain the policy makers have to guarantee security of critical national infrastructure, the goal of the industry is to maximize the profit while minimizing the costs, and citizen-consumers expect (to a varying degree) guaranteed security, protection of privacy, but also minimize societal costs.

- In general, the population expects from the government and allows the government to maintain order and to guarantee the internal and well as external security. However, the citizen-consumer acceptance of the costs (visible/invisible immediate/extended effect) and the willingness to the risk is conditional and depends on the type of security, as well as the level of justification.

- Our research focus is on the dilemma between security and possible restriction of personal freedoms approached from the perspective of citizen and her acceptance of adopted measures;

- There are three case studies - airport case study, critical infrastructure case study and public transport case study. They differ in its focus and target groups, but share an emphasis on existing and emerging threats, actual and perceived security, measures adopted to avoid these, and provision of good and reliable service;

- Simultaneously, all three consider security costs and sociological impacts of adopted measures and policy decisions, and take into account public opinion reactions;

- In this respect all also share the impact of media as source of information and an important instrument of public opinion formation (both in positive and in negative sense).

4. Quantitative and qualitative data

There are two main approaches hiow to study this problem – quantitative and qualitative.

- By the quantitative approach we used number of cross-national surveys (ISSP, ESS and others), focused on number of issues connected with perceptions of risk and threats by citizens of multiple countries (across and outside the European Union);

- We reviewed the perception of risk and then sought to determine <u>varying degrees of risk tolerance as a function of different cultural and socio-economic conditions</u>;

- General overview of citizens 'perceptions and attitudes toward risk and security, conditionality of these, as well as attitudes to the various <u>trade-offs</u>, as demonstrated on the tensions between freedom and privacy on one hand and security on the other hand were determined;

- Our analysis showed interesting results; however, it also pointed to the <u>weaknesses of the secondary analysis of available international data</u> →

- Given the limited availability of relevant data, alternative strategy is outlined in the conclusions to obtain own data directly related to research needs of the project;

- Collection of qualitative data will hepl us to solve the dilemma between security and freedom, from the perspective of citizen and her acceptance of policy-decisions, legislation and measures as a response to existing and future threats;

- We decided to collect our own qualitative data to cover the role of media and social media in risk perception and attitudes. Analysis of <u>media and blogs</u> will allow us to cover two kinds of public: 1. general public (addressed by mainstream media) and 2. expert pubic (addressed by specialist blogs);

5. **Political communication:**

Political communication incorporates:

1) All forms of communication undertaken by politicians and other political actors for the purpose of achieving specific objecives;

2) Communication dressed to these actors by non-politicians such as voters and newspaper columnists;

3) Communication about these actors and their activities, as contained in news reports, editorials, and other forms of media discussion of politics;

5.1. Politics in the age of mediation

There are three main elements, between which the process of political communication is conceived and realized:

1. Political organizations – political parties, public organizations, pressure groups, terrorist organizations, governments;
2. Media
3. Citizens

- Political organizations appeals to media, as well as participates in programs, advertising, and media is their part of PR;

- Media reports, comments and analysis actions of political organizations to citizens

- Citizens vis-à-vis media – opinion polls, letters, blogs, citizen journalism

- **The purpose of all political communication is to PERSUADE;**

- The target of this persuasion – the audience is the second key element in the political communication process without which, no political message can have any relevance;

- Whatever the size and nature of audience, all political communication is intended to achieve an effect on the receivers of the message;

- In democratic political systems media function both as transmitters of political communication which originates outside the media organization itself, and as senders of political messages constructed by journalist and other producers such as bloggers;

- Political actors must use media in order to have their messages communicated to the desired audiences;

- The media of course, do not simply report, in a neutral and impartial way – media accounts of political events are laden with value judgments, subjectivities and biases;

5.2. Politics, democracy and the media

The media and the democratic process

Five functions of the communication media in 'ideal-type' democratic societies:

1. They must INFORM citizens of what is happening around them (monitoring function of the media);

2. They must EDUCATE as to the meaning and significance of the 'facts' (the importance of this function explains seriousness with which journalists protect their objectivity, since their value as educators presumes a professional detachment form the issues being analysed);

3. The media must provide PLATFORM for public political discourse, facilitating the formation of 'public opinion', and feeding that opinion back to the public from whence it came; this must include the provision of space for the expression of dissent, without which the notion of democratic consensus would be meaningless;

4. The media's function is also to give PUBLICITY to governmental and political institutions – the 'watchdog' role of journalism;

5. Media in democratic societies also serve as a channel for ADVOCACY of political viewpoints – this function may be also viewed as persuasion;

6. Our qualitative research

What questions we intend to address:

- How do media actually frame the implications of security and security technologies within the SECONOMICS case studies?
- What are the perceived trade-offs between security and privacy?
- Do questions of security dominate?
- Who are he proponents and opponents of security vs. Freedom (privacy)?
- Has the media coverage of terrorism made the public more sensitive to the issue of security? And, if so, how are the (security) threats perceived and discussed by the media?

Seconomics Summer School - Prague Graduate School in Comparative Qualitative Analysis 2013

- Participants covering 10 countries and international blogs: Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Spain, Italy, Germany, USA, UK, Mexico and Turkey;

- Two newspapers per country, left and right orientation;

- 4 international blogs in English language which include articles on all three topics were selected;

- Atlas.ti software was used for the analysis.

- Results published in serie of Prague SECONOMICS Papers on: www.seconomicsproject.eu