SECURITY CULTURE INDICATORS.
KEY ISSUES TO MEASURING SECURITY CULTURE
AND SOME METHODOLOGICAL CAUTIONS

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Abstract: *Although security studies have strong roots in sociology and other social sciences, they sometimes fail to take advantage of useful topics and methodologies that are mainstream knowledge for social scientists. Public security culture (and the efforts to measure it) is one of these subjects that could be better "exploited" by security studies scholars using classic sociological instruments.*

Keywords: *security culture; security studies; methodology; sociological survey; IR theory.*

Methodological issues in security studies and the theory of international relations. Security as a social subject

One of the most important issues affecting the theory of International Relations is that too much is written on this topic. The methodological debate has become very important in IR not only due to a sudden awareness of the problems it faces, but mostly under the quantitative pressure of the dedicated published body.

Fertile in nuances, approaches, crossovers, fragmentation and requalification, the group of disciplines from within the scope of International Relations does not succeed, most of the times, in finding the solution for the problem of finely attuning theory with the empirical field. And if someone did come up with a solution to this particular problem, it was either unnoticed or it fell into oblivion, captive in the dialectics of thesis/antithesis and less synthesis, which is altogether a characteristic of the fierce debates taking place in this field of scientific knowledge.

The domain is abundant in theoretical paradigms and is lacking in methodological paradigms that would accomplish the precise reason why methodology exists: to guide the research studies (and, given the highly applicative character of some of the domains circumscribed to IR, to guide the drafting of doctrines and policies).

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As it is plain, the theoretical and methodological debate over sociology has its problems, crises and transformations. It also has a multi-paradigmatic character. The advantage of sociology of (international) security would be the one of conceptual and methodological clarity, as much as the framework of sociology is able to provide. But, in any case, this sociological framework would be an older, more coherent and better equipped one than those of other border domains which have forgotten their theoretical and methodological forefathers.

Separated from their social theoretical, backgrounds entire theoretical landmarks and case collections fail to combine into a scientific object. And they just might deserve a better treatment if international security studies paid more attention to its social roots.

Lastly, a security issue – be it constructed or identified – is a social issue, and the international political system is a social system, namely one of the most important ones. That brings us to the subject of *security culture*, maybe the "most" sociological aspect of IR theory and security studies.

Measuring security culture. An operational model

Sometimes the connection between international security studies and sociology means more than recovering those methodological roots mentioned above. Sometimes this connection can generate strangely important study topics. We say strangely important regarding the fact that they are somehow neglected by mainstream scholars in IR and security studies.

A good example in this case would be the *security culture* concept.

The most famous book on security culture might be Peter J. Katzenstein's (editor), *The Culture of National Security*[1]. It is a collective book probably aimed at developing the subject that the title announces. Although a very comprehensive and analytical work, it fails to cover all the issues raised by the topic in question. Katzenstein's book is rather centered on the security culture of the international environment perspective, and it does not bring much for the researchers studying the public (or "popular") security culture. That's where the sociological perspective should step in.

Measuring security culture is a provocative undertaking. Approaches centered on security culture are already part of the mainstream in security studies theory. However, work on security culture lacks empirical content. As well as in the case of other security studies concepts, there is too much theoretical and speculative debate around *security culture* and not enough data.

Of course, security studies have a certain specific, including a methodological one. Although some research methods and techniques that are common for social scientists cannot be applied in vast areas of security studies, the methodological principles of social sciences remain valid even in this field.

Security culture is certainly a topic closer to sociology than others in the field. It is actually one of the rare study objects in security studies that can be approached through classic sociological methods, like the *sociological survey*.

However, the main challenge in measuring security culture is defining what kind of security culture we are interested in. As a concept, public security culture will include elements of public opinion and social cognition, public perception, attitudes etc. It is not the purpose of this article to explain approaches and models scholars use to tackle political or civic culture, but I will remind that, methodologically, security culture can be investigated similar to political or civic culture.

The key issue is transforming a theoretical concept of security culture into a methodological concept. A methodological concept means, from a sociologist's point of view, *one that can be measured*.

This implies establishing relevant dimensions and indicators as objective signs of the security culture. The way to making the concept measurable is what social scientists call *operationalization* – at the end of this process we should have a list of social and security indicators that would allow us to approach the studied phenomenon with a certain validity and fidelity. After all, security culture, seen as what people understand, think or even fear in the field of domestic and international security, is a public opinion phenomenon and methodologies aimed at measuring it have to be fit for this type of studies.

After taking into consideration the main major possibilities to construct an operational model of security culture, it became clear that the most efficient way to study public security culture is through a standard public opinion survey, in which security culture indicators should evolve from operational dimensions regarding security topics rather than collective psychological dispositions.

For such an approach, the researcher will be guided by scientific literature on the subject, discussions with other experts and also, why not, by opinion polls (or other types of psychosociological research) which reveal vulnerabilities, fears, risks etc. perceived at the societal level.

Although it brings up a methodological risk, this is a more comfortable approach. The methodological risk we mentioned is obviously the one regarding the question of validity and fidelity. It is crucial to know that we are measuring what we are supposed to measure. And it is also important to rest assured that if we were to repeat the research process (in similar conditions) we should obtain similar or identical results. Of course the first step is writing the research instrument and let it face the reality, and not just once.

That sends us to our real challenge: setting the dimensions and selecting the indicators of the concept in question. The theoretical basis that would ease our efforts to create an adequate research tool is grounded in political culture studies and in sociological research on cultural characteristics of various social segments (of course, the questionnaire based sociological survey is the method we propose to be used in studying the subject). Taking into account the fact that we do not have significant security culture surveys in Romania, our first step in establishing how valid our measurement model can be is actually the pursuit for theoretical validity and fidelity. The phase in which we are is one of

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[1] Katzenstein, Peter J., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics,* New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

operationalization (as said above) of the security culture concept. The first „wave" of such an opinion research should not focus so much on scientific investigation results, but on the design and the content of the research tool. Such a project, in this phase, should not be interesting for the scientific community (or for the both of them: social scientists and IR/security scholars) in terms of results. It should be interesting in terms of setting a method of studying public security culture periodically (for example once a year, twice a year etc.) for a long time, that would allow us to compare data on public perception over security issues from „wave" to „wave".

Six dimensions of the operational model

Studying scientific literature and discussing with academic security studies and IR experts, guided by the approach mentioned above, led us to the following operational model aimed at measuring public security culture (dimensions and types of indicators).

Our proposal sets six operational dimensions for measuring public security culture:

A few cautions that a security culture researcher should have in mind and some conclusions regarding future works on the subject

Having a valid methodological approach and a strong and theoretically grounded list of indicators does not always ensure the quality of the sociological measurement. Here are a few issues that a good list of indicators or a good sociological survey regarding security culture cannot answer if not taken into consideration before data collection.

1. *Security* and *insecurity* are opposable, but the same thinking applies in the case of the opposability between security culture and the lack of security

		Types of indicators
1st Dimension	Security and defence institutions/organizations (domestic)	Security and defence institutions: notoriety indicators, trust and reliance indicators, perceived reaction capacity
2nd Dimension	International environment. Events, states and international organizations	International institutions trust and reliance indicators, opinion regarding international and security events, assessing globalization, perceived war threat, perceived international threats, other countries' attitudes regarding Romania, evaluation of international system
3rd Dimension	Socioeconomic aspects of security. Daily and non-military security	Public agenda, relation citizen-state, social and economic vulnerabilities
4th Dimension	Public fears. Perceived threats and collective vulnerabilities	Threats and fears. Evaluation of perceived threats and collective vulnerabilities
5th Dimension	Victim Indicators. Individual Threats and vulnerabilities	Perceived public safety, perceived victimization frequency, appeal to authorities in case of victimization
6th Dimension	Terrorism. Natural disasters. Nuclear security	Perceived possibility/probability that such events can occur (terrorist, natural disaster or nuclear security events)

Table no. 1

culture. It is important for the researcher to carefully design the research tool in order not to induce the idea that the opposite of security is insecurity. The same way, it is also important not to induce the idea that the opposite of security culture is the lack of security culture. Both observations can and should be drawn from the research. If they are not drawn from the research, they are irrelevant.

2. At least in first phase of our intended study, we can expect to have a typology with the following categories (linked, of course, with relevant socio-demographic variables, but also with explanations for which a social segment with certain sociological identifiable particularities is in one or some other situation).

People who own a certain degree of security culture.

People who rather posses a culture of insecurity.

People who don't possess a sufficient degree of any of the above mentioned characteristics (due to a lack of information, interest in this sense etc).

3. It is predictable, at least according to what several surveys indicate and also from our own previous studies, for the third category mentioned above to represent more likely a massive number. The second category, of the ones who own the "insecurity" culture, is however the most interesting. The insecurity culture, if identified among a quite significant number of "pessimists" it is a social construct in the sense of Berger and Luckmann[2], and it relies on *a fear* or *an interest* on the issue, but also on its "unproblematic" reproduction caused by social interactions, media, or educational stereotypes etc. The insecurity culture is not a form of apathy or anomic existence in relation to the system. It has a kind of informal transfer, as long as security culture benefits at least theoretically of a framework of social desirability and even of an intellectual infrastructure.

It remains to be seen in the context of periodically applied surveys on security culture if our questionnaire manages to discriminate between the three categories, to identify some correlations and to substantiate the typology.

4. Taking into account the three points mentioned above, measuring security culture may seem not such a simple sociological exercise, although it appeals to standard methodologies. Most difficulties are not induced by the method of research itself, but by the phenomenon that is our study object. A population unfamiliarized with (internation-al) security topics might give "unusual" answers to a usual sociological investigation. That might lead the researcher to the wrong conclusion in assessing public security culture. A population who is repeatedly asked by sociologists on her fears, perceptions, reliance, support regarding security topics, institutions, etc., is a population who will develop better awareness of national and international security issues and probably a better security culture.

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[2] Berger, Peter L.; Luckmann, Thomas. *The Social Construction of Reality*, New York: Anchor Books, 1966.