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# Taking the "terror" out of "terrorism" The promise and potential of fear-reducing education

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**Keywords:** trust, terrorism, fear reduction, democratic resilience

## Highlights:

- Terrorism works primarily through spreading fear, and terrorism-induced fear has adverse effects on psychological and social life.
- Preventing terrorism cannot be limited to preventing physical violence; it must also be linked to ensuring freedom from fear.
- Past research suggests that education can be a determinant of resilience against terrorism-induced fear.
- The combination of powerful knowledge and relational trust is a promising approach for building resilience against terrorism-induced fear.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to explore how education can help students develop democratic resilience as a bulwark against terror-induced fear, securitization, and possibly even extremism itself.

**Approach:** This article presents findings from a qualitative study exploring security governance in Norwegian secondary schools. The empirical corpus draws on 16 semi-structured interviews with educators to explore their perspectives on security governance in schools.

**Findings:** The securitization of education risks normalizing fear culture in schools. Trust can likely be used to prevent or reduce the emergence of such fear. This study explores educational narratives by analyzing how a combination of cognitive trust and emotional trust may help students to build democratic resilience against terror-induced fear. In this context, helping students develop more sophisticated understandings of the social world and ensuring trustful relationships is a promising peacebuilding and potentially de-securitizing approach to explore in education.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

A central aspect of terrorism is to heighten and exploit fear and anxiety to coerce people. In different parts of the world, fear of terrorism has been associated with increased reliance on enemy images, ethnocentrism, and decreased support for democratic values (Gadarian, 2010). As such, terrorism is not only a threat because of its potential to cause physical harm but also because of the fear that it generates. Pioneering terrorism scholar Martha Crenshaw wrote, “The political effectiveness of terrorism is importantly determined by the psychological effects of violence on audiences” (1986, p. 400). The relevance of emotions is well documented in the context of terrorism (Schmid, 2011). Emotional appeals containing fear and insecurity are also within wider “risk society” where people's threat perception is vital for the organization of society (Beck, 1992). Within the lens of risk society thinking, threat perceptions not only harness fears of issues like terrorism, but it also invites the public to be directly involved in security governance. In other words, threat perceptions are a dominant feature in the securitization of contemporary social life.

Recently, Kearns, Betus and Lemieux (2021) wrote that public perceptions of terrorism are out of line with reality. Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the subsequent “global war on terror”, alarming and exaggerated statements regarding the threat of terrorism have fostered new cultures of fear. Despite the hyperbole surrounding the global war on terror, risk assessments reveal that terrorism poses a small risk to people, especially in comparison with other present dangers to human wellbeing (Sjøen, 2020). On one hand, this points to a discrepancy between perception and reality that has been thoroughly examined by risk scholars (Slovic, Fischhoff & Roe, 1981). On the other, this discrepancy accentuates the prominence of (mis)using fear in security governance to normalize social vigilance and control.

Normalizing social vigilance and control has caused a preemptive turn in counterterrorism with a shift towards pre-crime security governance (Ellefsen, 2021). This shift is based on the assumption that homegrown terrorists, the source of our insecurity, are potentially hiding everywhere. Through preemptive securitization, public fields are encouraged to mobilize the specter of preventive measures against the threat of terrorism. Yet, as mentioned, terrorism only poses a small risk of victimization. In fact, the costs of terrorism often come from the fear and subsequent reaction, or overreaction, it inspires (Mueller, 2005, p. 487). Despite growing insights into terror-induced fear and its deleterious social consequences, we still know little about how such fear can be prevented (Does, Kantorowicz, Kuipers & Liem, 2021).

Admittedly, the jury is out regarding how societies can best protect themselves from fear of terrorism. On this note, schooling have been suggested as a mitigating factor against such fear as education appears to be positively associated with lower levels of terror-induced fear (Christensen & Aars, 2019). Yet, while scholars have pursued questions of how fear of war and terror impacts children for decades (Moses, Aldridge, Cellitti & McCorquodale, 2003), the bulk of what is written provide school staff with a prescription

for dealing with crisis and trauma after exposure to violent attacks (Gelkopf & Berger, 2009; Shah, Yezhuang, Shah, Durrani & Shah, 2018). Limited attention has been directed at how schooling can reduce or prevent fear responses proactively. Thus, the intersection of fear and analysis of fear reduction in certain aspects of the educational domain is underdeveloped (Sjøen, 2021). Considering how terrorism can have far-reaching social consequences, this is a subject with important implications, particularly since curricula can be affected easily through educational policy.

The present article focuses on how education can help reduce fear of terrorism. By drawing on semi-structured interviews with 16 educators in Norwegian secondary schools, this study pursues the following research question: How can education support students to build democratic resilience against terror-induced fear?

Norway represents an important case for studying terror-induced fear as it has endured a history of right-wing violence spanning decades. In 2011, Norway experienced one of the deadliest right-wing terrorist attacks in recorded history. In addition, during the rise and fall of the Islamic State (ISIS), a surge of foreign fighters travelled from Norway to the Middle East to partake in the warfare. The political attention to terrorism and extremisms also proliferated in this period, with over 40 security policy documents having been released since 2010. In 2020, the objective of “preventing extreme attitudes, behaviors and terrorism” was even securitized into the social studies curriculum (Directorate for Education, 2020, p. 4). Accordingly, it is important to research how these security responses can affect educational practice.

In terms of theory, this paper applies Does et al.’s (2021) notion of calculative (cognitive) trust and relational (emotional) trust with the aim of exploring how trust can be combined pedagogically in the context of fear-reducing education. More specifically, this study discusses the fear-reducing potential of combining analytical thinking aimed at helping students develop a more sophisticated understanding of the social world, alongside relational dimensions that are a matter of emotions and values. However, a point of clarification is needed here. While researchers have been studying risk intensively across the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities, there is, as mentioned, a relative dearth of information on how schools can be used to mitigate terror-induced fear proactively. Extrapolating from the rich literature on risk and security is likely to cause both theoretical and empirical mismatches. Nevertheless, this study will hopefully demonstrate how democratic resilience can offer important openings in fear-reducing education.

This article is structured as follows. First, key concepts and theoretical perspectives on terror-induced fear, security governance, and fear reduction are introduced. Following this, the research methodology is discussed before attention is turned to the empirical findings. Finally, key findings are discussed and summarized.

## 2 TERRORISM AND FEAR

The use of violence, or threats thereof, to coerce an audience is an age-old strategy of power. According to Meisels (2008), terrorism has likely existed since the dawn of humankind. As Mueller more bluntly puts it, "Terrorism will never go away: It has always existed and always will" (2005, p. 491). Yet, what is terrorism, and why are some armed groups labelled as terrorists and not as freedom fighters? The exercise of defining violence as "terroristic" is arguably only easy in political rhetoric. Most scholars, however, agree that terrorism entails political violence or threats thereof (Schmid, 2011). Thus, Leon Trotsky's explanation of terrorism as the "use of violence and intimidation, especially for political purposes" shares some consensus in research (Meisels, 2008, p. 12). Yet, demarking terroristic violence from other forms of political violence based on intimidation and emotional reaction may result in applying normative judgment over analytical coherence.

Here, terrorism is understood as a form of political violence or threat thereof. In an attempt to delineate terrorism from other forms of political violence, Bandura (1990) argues that terrorism constitutes a horrific form of violence that is usually aimed at innocent people. Yet, this understanding evokes its own set of challenges. First, defining terrorism in terms of victimization is problematic. If a terrorist act simultaneously kills civilians and non-civilians, it would be macabre to suggest that some of those who were victims the same attack were causalities of terrorism, while others were not (English, 2016). Second, as Meisels (2008) claims, victims of terrorism are not always innocent in any strict sense. This reveals the ambiguous demarcation between "terrorists," "freedom fighters," and "oppressors." There is reluctance to recognize state violence as a form of terrorism. Most governments will not characterize their use of violence as terrorism. Yet, can citizens truly be characterized as innocent if they support an oppressive regime, albeit not in a military sense but through the paying of taxes and participation in electoral systems? Moreover, if states carry out oppression and violence against specific groups, could any part of that society be legitimate targets for acts of counter-violence (Meisels, 2008)? The list of Nobel Peace Prize winners who at some point were placed on a "terrorist list" is indicative of this antagonism.

This article will not engage in the very heated discussion of the ontological, axiological, or epistemological presuppositions undergirding the terms "terror," "terrorists," and "terrorism." Suffice to say that these are normative concepts commonly used to describe illegitimate political violence (Bjørgo, 2016). Therefore, to specify, terrorism is understood as physical acts or psychological threats of indiscriminate violence to advance a political cause, which is elucidated in the following segment of Schmid's definition of terrorism:

> [C]alculated, demonstrative, direct violent action without legal or moral restraints, targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants, performed for its propagandistic and psychological effect on various audience and conflict parties. (2011, p. 86)

While Schmid’s definition is not without criticism, what it does offer is two elements that are the subject of some consensus: that terrorism is 1) violent actions without legal or moral restraints and 2) actions that target mainly civilians. Individuals, groups or states who carry out political violence under these circumstances will often combine the following terroristic strategies: gaining attention and communicating a message, creating a climate of fear, and getting the audience to give in to specific demands (Bjørgo, 2016, p. 38).

Emotions are thus integral to understanding both terrorism as a phenomenon and the use of terroristic strategies. In fact, the term “terrorism” itself derives from the Latin word “terrere”, which means to frighten. This term was popularized during a particularly violent spell during the French Revolution called the Reign of Terror (1793—1794), in which the French government committed mass oppression and execution of its adversaries. Historically, “terrorism” was mainly used to describe state or state-supported violence. However, since the 1960s, terrorism has become a highly notorious subject due to many hijackings, assassinations, bombings, and diplomatic kidnappings carried out by non-state groups. Thereafter, non-state violence became the modus operandi for the conceptualization of modern terrorism.

As already indicated, fear is a crucial part of almost every definition of terrorism (Schmid, 2011). Moreover, fear is a natural instinct that has important survival value. Yet, while fear certainly has beneficial value, it also holds deleterious consequences for humans, for instance by causing anxiety. According to Pyszczynski (2004), fear is understood as an unpleasant emotion toward a known or understood threat. Anxiety, on the other hand, is excessive and unfocused fear, usually toward an unknown threat. The source of anxiety tends to be obscure, kept hidden from our awareness, and therefore extremely difficult to control. Thus, anxiety constitutes a more diffuse form of fear in which it is not always obvious just what it is we are afraid of. Fear and anxiety are mutually causing emotions that produce similar stress hormones and reactions. These are among the most intolerable emotions humans are capable of experiencing (Pyszczynski, 2004).

Scholars have devoted much attention to how terror-induced fear impacts economic, social, and political systems. Research, particularly in the United States, indicates that fear of terrorism can affect financial markets, consumer spending, air travel, public opinion, trust in government, and political orientation (Does et al., 2021). Yet, fear of terrorism has also been found to induce undesirable psychological states in individuals, including increased levels of distress (Shah et al., 2018). This can lead to flawed decision making in an attempt to minimize the impact of risk perceptions. When people attempt to minimize risk based on subjective threat perceptions, they can sometimes expose themselves to even greater risks. A famous example of this is the increase in the number of fatal highway crashes in the United States following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. As described by Does et al. (2021, p. 1271), while driving is much riskier than flying, many US citizens decided to drive rather than fly after 9/11, which led to an increase in fatal crashes. The casualties of the

highway crashes can be viewed as an example of the indirect damages of terrorism mediated through our subjective risk perceptions.

As succinctly stated by English, "terrorism is a peculiar category of violence, because it has a cockeyed ratio of fear to harm" (2016, p. 5). However, fear of terrorism is not limited to psychological or emotional phenomena, as it is also politically consequential for how elites communicate to the public, and ultimately for political opinion formation (Gadarian, 2010). Thomas Hobbes wrote in *Leviathan* (1987) that fear of violent death is the primary motive for humans to organize societies. Consequently, fear is inextricably linked with governance, and people who express concerns about terrorism may be more likely to adopt hawkish policy views. Research also reveals that terror-induced fear can be associated with increased intolerance and ethnocentrism, as well as decreased political participation (Enjolras et al., 2019; Solheim & Jupskås, 2021). Moreover, fear of terrorist attacks has moved political leaders in many countries to curtail democratic rights (Christensen & Aars, 2019). In this securitized climate, vocal opposition of the dominant political framing of terrorist threats, for instance from teachers or students, can be interpreted as support or association with extremist elements in society.

There are indications that the Norwegian counterterrorism approach is based on a commitment to protect human rights and democracy (Solheim, 2019). However, recent analysis also reveals growing political urgency and politics of terror fear where school staff are expected to be vigilant towards presumed vulnerable students and report concerns to relevant authorities (Sjøen & Mattsson, 2022). According to Ragazzi (2018), many education professionals resent being considered as aides to the security services. This dilemma might be crucial for why research has consistently found educational resistance towards security governance in schools (Busher, Choudhury, Thomas & Harris, 2017; Taylor & Soni, 2017). People do not normally turn to teaching in order to counter terrorism, and the idea of using pedagogical environments to protect the state from "risky" students may not sit easily with school staff. This skepticism is mirrored in much research as educators believe that security governance does not necessarily reduce risk in schools but may very well add to it (Sjøen, 2020). However, it should be kept in mind that, while the stoking of fear and the encouragement of securitization is often incited by political elites, the public also bears responsibility for the securitization of social life, or as Mueller (2005, p. 498) writes, "the author and the public corrupt one another at the same time."

## 2.1 Security governance in schools in the "age of terrorism"

Security governance has become something of a cottage industry. Based on Ulrich Beck's (1992) notion of risk society, this can be understood through the increasing focus on threats produced by human behavior such as climate change, crime, war and terrorism. Terrorism represents a particular pervasive experience of threat, and this must be considered when understanding how risks are constructed and ultimately regulated in social life. During the last decade, security policy initiatives aimed at preventing

radicalization, terrorism, and extremisms have proliferated across much of Europe (Ragazzi, 2018). Educational systems are commonly placed at the forefront of such efforts, usually under the terms “preventing violent extremism” (PVE), “countering violent extremism” (CVE) or “preventing radicalization and violent extremism” (PRVE) (Sjøen, 2021). There is no need to lose sight of the trees in the proverbial forest of terms; the main proposition that features in the security governance of schools is how the implementation of PRVE policy can have an impact on future levels of violence. Clearly, this proposition is not new as educational systems have engaged in conflict-transforming objectives for centuries. On the face of it then, these policy developments might be seen as a continuation of historical steps toward helping young people in the development of their attitudes and behaviors in support of democracy and peace.

Recent literature reviews on security governance in schools suggest that educators view themselves as responsible for preventing pupils’ engagement with extremism (Taylor & Soni, 2017; Sjøen & Jore, 2019). Further, there are indications that this might be achieved by helping students develop their capability for critical thinking, moral responsiveness, and civic behaviors. Thus, a promising approach to preventing extremism includes a stronger emphasis on inclusive and relational pedagogy. However, there is evidence that school staff experience growing pressure to identify students who are perceived as vulnerable to radicalize toward violent extremism, which illustrates the shift to pre-crime suspicion in educational environments (Sjøen & Jore, 2019). One of the most common themes across the literature on security governance in schools is how preventive responsibilities can create a culture of fear and suspicion by normalizing surveillance, control, and vigilance (Taylor & Soni, 2017).

Another powerful and alarming theme in the literature is that security governance in schools tend to affect students and educators unevenly. In particular, research on the securitization of education over the last four decades has consistently shown that security governance in school is associated with causing or reinforcing increased intolerance and prejudices against minorities (Sjøen, 2020, p. 113). Minorities are also more likely to be subjected to the performative level of security governance and many students describe stigmatization, suppression and control based on their cultural or religious orientations (Taylor & Soni, 2017). The dichotomy between liberty and security is clearly a false one; sometimes, more security generates more insecurity. In other words, security measures that are implemented to help students feel safe can be experienced as a form of surveillance. The social reproduction of insecurity can also affect trust levels between students, among students and school staff, and between people and authorities. Lack of trust might affect willingness to raise flags when concern in detected, ultimately inhibiting preventive measures. Available research shows the importance of trustful relations to facilitate successful preventions (Dalgaard-Nielsen & Schack, 2016). Mistrust, on the other hand, can hinder efficient preventions while also being a key factor in fueling the radicalization process they aim to prevent (Ragazzi, 2018).

Hence, aspects of terror-induced fear and mistrust, and its potentially deleterious effects is at risk of merging into the educational world of learning, socialization, and development. Yet, while terrorism is associated with fear and anxiety, the aim of preventing fear is conspicuously lacking throughout much of the European security policy field (Sjøen, 2021). On one side, fear can serve to secure legitimacy in the expansion of governments and social vigilance and control, which has been documented in various research (Ahmed, 2015; Ellefsen, 2021). However, if people feel that their fears are not addressed properly, this could also lead them to lose trust in their governments or in democracy itself (Christensen & Aars, 2019). Considering then how fear of terrorism has consistently been at the top of public concerns for decades, and how such fear can cause declining political participation, democratic education should attempt to mitigate terror-induced fear and its deleterious consequences.

As mentioned, empirical research supports the assumption that education in combination with democratic experience can be a significant determinant of how people build resilience against terror-induced fear (Christensen & Aars, 2019). Still, when delving into the literature on terror-induced fear and education, much of what is written focuses on education in societies characterized by protracted violent conflict (Gelkopf & Berger, 2009; Zembylas, 2021), terrorism-affected societies (Does et al., 2021; Shah et al., 2018), or societies with high frequencies of marauding terrorist firearm attacks, such as school shootings (Altheide, 2009; Chibaro & Jackson, 2006). Moreover, attention has conventionally been aimed at mental health and responses to trauma after exposure to war and terrorism (Moses et al., 2003; Shah et al., 2018). Limited attention has been directed at reducing terror-induced fear before the fact; this is a shortcoming as attitudes adopted before experience with terrorism appear vital for how societies cope with violent attacks if and when they occur (Enjolras et al., 2019; Solheim, 2019).

To summarize, terrorism is not only a threat because of its potential to cause physical harm but also because of the fear and anxiety that it generates. Accordingly, the reduction of fear is central to dealing with terrorism (Bjørgo, 2016). After all, the question of countering terrorism cannot be isolated to just the case of preventing extreme violence; it must also be linked to the spectrum of providing security while maintaining democracy and freedom. As noted by Gelkopf and Berger (2009), the classroom can serve as a fear-reducing environment by promoting normalcy, inclusion, and support. Hence, pursuing democratic resilience through trust-based education is a promising approach to prevent or reduce terror-induced fear.

## 2.2 Calculative and relational trust as bulwarks against terror-induced fear

Studies on risk and security in various countries suggest that trust might mitigate fear of terrorism (Does et al., 2021; Enjolras et al., 2019). Using this insight, this section explicates how trust can be applied in educational contexts to affect fear of terrorism. "Trust" is defined by Does et al. as "a psychological state comprising the intention to accept

vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (2021, p. 1278). In line with this reasoning, trust is relational, extending from social capital. According to Solheim (2019), Norway is one of the highest-ranking countries for societal trust, and Norwegians’ trust in authorities is also generally high. This dimension of trust is reflected in the relatively low levels of terror-induced fear among Norwegians pre- and post-experience with the 2011 terrorist attacks (Enjolras et al., 2019, p. 49).

In their study of trust as a mitigating factor of fear of terrorism, Does et al. (2021) apply a fear-reducing framework conceptualized in two dimensions: calculative trust and relational trust. Hence, they apply a well-rounded understanding encompassing cognitive and emotional dimensions. Calculative trust is based on people’s rational assessment of past performance by relying on consecutive inference about the future. By contrast, relational trust is an emotional acceptance of risk as embedded in human life. Calculative trust is slow and analytic, driven by evidence and logic, while the latter is fast and unreflective, driven by emotions and values (Does et al., 2021). Rational decision making requires both sets of judgments as risk perception includes affective variables dealing with emotions and cognitive variables dealing with analyzing probabilities.

Security threats are always in part an objective reality and in part a subjective judgment of perceived reality. Thus, “threat” is a notion that humans have invented to help them understand and cope with risks. Building trust to mitigate terror-induced fear might encompass acquiring knowledge about terrorism and strengthening trustful relationships. Concerning the former, studies have shown that people can update their views on and gain better knowledge by reading factual information about terrorism (Kearns et al., 2021). People can also be persuaded by factual data, such as statistics about the likelihood of being a victim of a terrorist act, which can lead to more updated views on the lethality of terrorism. However, people are more likely to accept information that confirms their preconceived views of the world. Educators must therefore find cogent ways of presenting complex issues that are clouded by uncertainty and may be distorted by subjective perceptions.

Emotions also plays a role in risk analysis by bringing issues of values, process and relationships into the equation. According to Zembylas (2020), emotions are not only an inevitable part of the securitization process, but they also create opportunities to counter forms of securitization that work through normalization and democratization. Although Does et al. (2021) apply relational trust in the context of people’s trust in government, it should be possible to infer the notion of trust to educational environments, for instance as trust between teacher and student and inclusive environments. While trust levels will typically vary across different groups of students and educators, relational trust is likely the most important aspect of helping students cope with terrorism-related fears and uncertainties (Sjøen & Jore, 2019). The significance of trust is in other words well documented regarding terrorism-related issues (Jerome & Elwick, 2019). Zembylas accentuates this:

> Educators need to offer young people pedagogical opportunities that pay careful attention to identifying and interrogating the affective, ethical and political conditions of securitised discourses and practices within and beyond classroom spaces and seek actions and practices that negotiate alternatives ways of life. (2020, p. 500)

By engaging in affective trust, students can be supported in reflexive awareness, which means rejecting the naïve and binary terrorism discourses of good versus evil. Productive engagement with affective variables is assumed to enable calculative trust by connecting heart and mind (Does et al., 2021). According to Enjolras et al. (2019), the effect is dependent on social and cultural structures; thus, the importance of using inclusive pedagogical strategies and engaging with students’ subjectification cannot be overstated for these purposes (Sjøen & Jore, 2019).

## 3 METHODOLOGY

This paper is based upon findings from a research project (2017—2020) studying security governance in Norwegian schools. It draws on an empirical corpus from in-depth interviews with 16 educators (eight females, eight males) in Norwegian secondary schools. The purpose of the study was to explore the intersecting of security and education, particularly by studying how educators understand and apply efforts to prevent radicalization, terrorism, and extremisms in their practice. Although the research project was initially not intended to provide explicit attention on terror-induced fear, this theme emerged consistently in the data.

The Norwegian educational system is structured into three levels: primary school, ranging from grades 1—7 (ages 6—13); lower secondary school, ranging from grades 8—10 (ages 13—16); and upper secondary school, ranging from grades 1—2 for vocational education and from grades 1—3 for general education (ages 16—19). Participants for this study were strategically sampled from lower- and upper-secondary schools in municipalities that at the time were described by Norwegian authorities as having a high prevalence of extremist milieus (Sjøen, 2020, p. 59). On average, the interviews were between 45—90 minutes, and the conversations were audiotaped. The questions asked covered topics such as how the educators made sense of radicalization, violent extremism, and terrorism; what they viewed as the underlying causes; their encounters with these phenomena; how they proposed handling prevention; and the social consequences of (counter)terrorism in schools. The study was carried out in accordance with ethical research guidelines, and the national ethical review board approved the project prior to data collection.

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, an inductive strategy for identifying and interpreting patterns in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, a three-leveled analytical approach was applied. First, verbatim transcripts of the interviews were analyzed to identify codes and categories in the textual content. Here,

emphasis was placed on familiarizing how the interviewed educators described terrorism-related issues, preventing extreme forms of violence, and the social consequences of security governance in schools. In the second level of analysis, the emerging codes and categories were scrutinized to help identify general themes and patterns. These themes were the subject of continued revision. The third level of analysis involved interpretating the themes. Three themes were identified in the analysis: securitization and the emotionalization of terror-induced fear, critical capacity, and trustful relationships to counter fear.

There were several limitations to this approach. First, the findings are based on a small number of strategically sampled participants; thus, these findings are not generalizable beyond the research context. In addition, the empirical corpus rests solely on how a selection of educators understands and describes terror-induced fear; students’ perspectives on these matters are not examined. Thirdly, the subjective nature of this research also limits this study. However, the aim of this study was to accumulate new insight into an important issue, which at a later stage can be the subject of more precise investigations.

# 4 FINDINGS

In this section, the findings are presented based on the three aforementioned themes: securitization and the emotionalization of fear, critical capacity, and trustful relationships. These findings are then discussed in the light of how calculative and relational trust may contribute to democratic resilience with the purpose of reducing terror-induced fear. Finally, the study is summarized and concluded.

## 4.1 Securitization and the emotionalization of terror-induced fear

The empirical record suggests the emergence of security governance in the selected Norwegian secondary schools. In particular, the educators described growing attention on and responsibility to detect and counter students radicalizing toward extremism and terrorism.

> I firmly believe that [preventing violent extremism] is within our mandate as teachers. Even if I do not have much personal experience with this topic. I am still inclined to believe that my role as a teacher enables me to contribute to these issues (Male, 48 years)

> I believe that teachers should be much more observant of vulnerable youth who change their attitudes or expressions in radical ways (Female, 49 years)

This preventive responsibility appears to cause pressure on several of the educators, which manifested both externally and internally. For instance, many explained external expectations from student families, professionals, local communities and politicians to be vigilant to any sign of violent extremism.

> It makes a strong impression when the [former] Norwegian Prime Minister declares on television that “we”, the society, and especially those working with young people, have a responsibility to prevent them from radicalization (Female, 41 years)

> During the last years, we have been instructed by the police and health care workers about the importance of preventing radicalization. We have also received information on where to report our concern and there was a training course for preventing violence like school shooting (Male, 43 years)

Performing vigilance in schools seems to be a crucial part of security governance among the research subjects. Vigilance can in some cases serve as a precursor for implementing security measures including video surveillance in schools, armed police officers on campuses, and roadblocks around the vicinities of the schools.

Some educators described pressure from the police and security services to share information on students. However, this line of communication is often one way. Police and security services would only on rare occasions share any information with school staff, which for some was understandable, yet could also be a source of additional fear and uncertainty.

> We were recently informed by the police that a former foreign fighter had been reintegrated into a nearby municipality. However, we were not told who this individual was, which only causes suspicion and uncertainty for us in “the field” (Male, 48 years)

From external to internal pressure, the latter was related to the educators’ own fear about how they at a later stage could be held accountable for students committing extreme violence. During periods of uncertainty, this pressure may increase the risk of school-staff reacting too often or too much, to be “on the safe side”. As several explained, the potential responsibility of having “future terrorists” slip through their educational net led to greater vigilance to be on the safe side.

> It is better to report concern one time too many than not at all (Female, 41 years)

> I remember the trial of Anders Behring Breivik [the perpetrator of the 2011 terrorist attack in Norway], where there was considerable attention on his upbringing and his problematic period in kindergarten and school. There were even some suggesting that the teachers and social workers who had been in contact with him had some blame for his tragic upbringing (Male, 52 years)

In terms of emotionalizing fear, there were several cues in which fear and anxiety were performed in the interviews. Still, at the time of the interviews, the Norwegian Policy Security Services (PST) presented national threat assessments in which it was described as “likely” that Norway would be struck by Islamic terrorism.

> Radicalization to me has become something quite frightening. Something extreme. I mostly think about terrorism with all the focus there is in the media (Female, 41 years)

> It causes some worry when the PST [the Norwegian Police Security Services] claims it is likely that Norway will be struck by terrorism this year (Female, 59 years)

Alarmist threat assessments coupled with substantial media coverage of violent attacks in and outside of Europe put terrorism at the top of many people’s mind. Although the educators in this study were not necessarily fearful of terrorism per se, there were frequent mentions of emotional ambivalence regarding security governance in schools in their descriptions.

> Schools can perhaps prevent students from being disenfranchised socially, culturally or economically. […] I am not so sure that schools should contribute by profiling suspicious students (Male, 42 years)

Emotional ambivalence was also present regarding how social concerns of terrorism could cause insecurity, fear, and suffering for students. This was demonstrated in several ways. First, terrorism represents a normative subject, and several teachers problematized how to constructively handle this emotive subject in the classroom. While most respondents agreed that terrorism is a contemporary topic that deserves attention in school, some expressed uncertainty about whether teachers have sufficient knowledge and competence to do so.

> I believe that a greater focus on teaching controversial issues in classrooms can be a good way towards working preventively against threats of extremism and racism. There are many topics that people think about in black and white, and students should be guided towards appreciating value complexity. However, I am not convinced that all teachers have the necessary competence to do this (Male, 63 years)

Furthermore, many educators voiced concerns about how to teach about terrorism without demonizing specific groups or cultures. Islamic extremism has been at the core of security concerns post-9/11, and many were reluctant to further a “villain portrayal” of young Muslims. Several argued that assumptions of Muslims as susceptible to being drawn toward terrorism were disrespectful and at odds with inclusive education. More than half the participants described awareness of immigrant and Muslim students being harassed or even threatened based on their religious and cultural identity.

> A female Muslim student I know who was wearing a hijab had been harassed by an older woman on the bus. The woman had loudly declared to the girl and the rest of the passenger that come next election; the politicians would throw her “kind” out of this country (Male, 41 years)

Extremism and terrorism can cause fear and insecurity, which may result in accepting exceptional regulatory actions, most notably the preemptive turn with the shift from post-crime to pre-crime counterterrorism. At first glance, the normalization of security governance seems to target educators and their professional responsibility to educate and safeguard students from violent extremism and terrorism. However, for educators, this has implications for students by calling into question educational practices that have accompanied security governance, most notably expectations of controlling and surveilling students. Thus, these narratives are indicative of educational resistance of security governance, especially the framing of Muslims as individuals who need to be watched and protected from extremist elements.

## 4.2 Critical capacity for engagement with terrorism-related issues

The second theme to be explored concerns complexities surrounding terrorism-related issues. Comprehending social theories about terrorism can be challenging for both teachers and students. Yet, the educators in this study believed that if students are supported to learn about terrorism, they might also be willing to appreciate the complexities and engage in thorough analysis of the phenomenon.

> I think that school is an important arena where young people are encouraged to gain a deeper understanding of the world we live in (Female, 41 years)

Many educators spoke about the need to facilitate learning activities that are enjoyable, interesting, and relevant to students’ interests and needs.

> I always have to start with the students that are in my classroom and their needs. I believe that students have more opinions and ideas about the social world than we teachers are sometimes aware of. […] The important question is how young minds can be expanded by knowledge (Female, 59 years)

In particular, promoting multiple perspectives was described as an approach for strengthening students’ critical capacity. Critical capacity is here understood as an immersion in deeper learning, one that reflects a willingness to accept a diversity of perspectives and the possibility of looking at a phenomenon from different angles. Several talked about providing deeper insights into young peoples’ perceptions of terrorism by encouraging them to engage with possible causes of terrorism.

> If we look at this issue in a wider sense, presenting multiple perspectives in teaching can help students towards deeper understanding (Male, 59 years)

A reference can be made to Michael Young’s notion of “powerful knowledge” by providing students with concepts and perspectives for thinking about the social world (Jerome & Elwick, 2019). For these educators, teaching about terrorism was associated with critical education aimed at developing an understanding of terroristic history, politics, and ideology. Critical literacy was also emphasized in immersion in education as a bulwark against binary and simplistic portrayals of terrorism-related issues.

> I think that the “radicalization” term is a problematic one. We often associate radicalization with young people joining ISIS. This is certainly a concerning image for us working with the young people. But is it accurate? Radicalization can also be related to critical questions such as “what is right” and “what is wrong” and “what kind of world would we want to live in” (Female, 41 years)

Several spoke about how opinions and beliefs informed by in-depth knowledge could help young people become more knowledgeable. Moreover, they believed that critical capacity was beneficial for scrutinizing alarmist media discourses.

> Radicalization is certainly on the rise in the media, but I do not know if this phenomenon constitutes a larger problem now than before. Perhaps it is more on the contrary. Populism may be on the rise, but I do not have the impression that extremism is a larger problem now than before. Students should be helped to understand these nuances (Male, 56 years)

Several educators also placed the fact that talking about terrorism can provoke or even frighten students within the broader realm of controversial issues.

> Every single day I risk saying something that could offend my students. However, I think it is my ability to handle such situations that determines whether we can have a meaningful discussion about it (Male, 41 years)

The topic of “terrorism” can be seen as provocative, yet educational content needs to mirror the social world outside of school and much of social life is characterized by disagreement and conflict. Recognizing the conflictual nature of controversial topics like terrorism will therefore require recognizing the questions and uncertainties that students bring into the classroom. Some of the educators claimed that discussing controversial issues in school could help students to think critically and act radically democratic.

### 4.3 Trustful relationships

Terrorism is a highly emotive subject, and the participants in this study uniformly agreed that relational trust was the basis for dealing with terrorism as a subject and preventing young people from radicalizing toward extremisms.

> It is not a good idea to exclude or punish students for their beliefs or opinions. That will only risk of reinforce or risk that they develop extreme behaviors in the longer run. I believe that it is more effective to include and safeguard students and this principle should always be on a teacher's mind (Male, 63 years)

This statement highlights a belief in the capacity of educators and their enactments with securitization and possibly de-securitization processes in schools. Furthermore, the ability to develop critical capacity was intimately linked with how educators are able to establish supportive relationships and where students have a genuine sense of belonging in inclusive environments.

> In my experience, it is often the students who express radical or extreme opinions who have the greatest need for support and care (Male, 59 years)

Trustful relationships can have an impact on students with respect to motivation, learning, socialization, and wellbeing, and in the educational narratives emerging from this study, transformative development is grounded in the ways that social relations shape emotions, beliefs, and values. Recognizing the emotions and feelings that students bring into the classroom can be used as the starting point of educational efforts to reduce the fear of terrorism.

As some participants expressed, democratic resilience cannot be learned by having the “right” values transmitted from instructivist educational regimens. On the contrary, there was consensus among the educators that students should not be moralized but encouraged to explore different knowledge, values, and beliefs through trustful and inclusive relations.

> When there is concern that students are developing racist attitudes or extreme religious attitudes, the underlying problem often seems to be stigmatization, exclusion or identity issues. The last thing these students need is for the teacher to point the finger and instruct them what they should or should not feel (Female, 49 years)

It was believed that support rather than prescription could help students to make informed decisions themselves. Here it is appropriate to warn about schools becoming arenas for instructing students to think and behave in certain ways. As Zembylas (2021) argues, if institutionalized norms in school are narrowly focused on “appropriate” emotional cues of terrorism, the risk is that students expressing different emotions can be suspected of siding with terrorists. According to many of the educators, this problem is all too real for minority and Muslim students.

> It is becoming increasingly difficult for immigrant students who repeatedly are exposed to negative stories about immigrants in the media and from politicians. Even the question of wearing a hijab has now become a question of terrorism (Male, 59 years)

It has been documented in different parts of the world that securitization processes can have a chilling effect on educational practice by silencing students (Sjøen & Jore, 2019). Therefore, the classroom should ideally represent a context that promotes normalcy and inclusion to support freedom of speech. Empathy and tolerance emerge as important prerequisites through which educational differences can be resolved and reasonable actions are made possible. In this context, empathy and tolerance are not seen as outcomes of trustful relationships in an inclusive school but as preconditions for them.

# 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research is to explore how education can help students develop democratic resilience, which stands as a bulwark against terror-induced fear, securitization, and possibly even extremism itself. In times of crisis, people will look to politicians and institutions for guidance. There is reason to believe that the effects of terrorism may very well be contingent on how political and institutional elites, along with the media, frame threats in public life. As Solheim (2019, p. 38) argues, empirical research shows that it is possible to mobilize the public around democratic values, which may help to mitigate the negative effects of terrorism. Mitigating the negatives of terrorism is crucial for human security, especially when considering how the objective of creating fear is a basic part of terroristic strategies (Bjørgo, 2016) and that maintaining fear is part of security governance (Ahmed, 2015). Exaggerated portrayals of terrorism and draconian security measures are more likely to create insecurity or false security than they are to ensure human security. In other words, if people succumb to fear instead of resisting it, terrorist groups and fearmongering politicians can, at least in some ways, be seen as successful in achieving their stated goals. The need to resist fear is rather succinctly described by Hoffman and Shelby (2017, p. 618), who claim that societies’ engagement in self-injurious behavior while pursuing security may explain why terrorism persists even though those that use it rarely get what they want.

Terrorism perceptions tend to be more subjectively constructed than objectively calculated (Mueller, 2005). It might also be useful to remind the reader that terrorism is a peculiar problem to be safe from, seeing that it is very often the terrorist threats that are being prevented and not violence itself. Many terrorism scholars concur that risk communication with the purpose of preventing terror-induced fear should be part of efficient counterterrorism (Bjørgo, 2016; Does et al., 2021; Mueller, 2005). Yet, as noted, fear is also crucial to the maintenance of suppressive ideology. According to Ahmed (2015), the prominence of fear and suspicion as tools of insecurity has served to normalize the expansion of securitization in the global war on terror. This marks the political tension between fear management and fearmongering as political actors may deliberately exaggerate threats to promote support for certain policy views (Christensen & Aars, 2019).

## 5.1 Reducing terror fear in education

According to the educators in this study, increased knowledge combined with relational trust may operate as a way of building democratic resilience, which might stand as a bulwark against terror fear. This implies that there is a role for trust-based education in transforming the ways students understand (counter)terrorism and the social consequences of securitization. Mueller (2005, p. 496) argues that although the stoking of fear can be beneficial for humans, cases like “terrorism, shark attacks, and airplane flying” are exceptions to this. Discussions about the probabilities and outcomes related to these exceptional types of dangers can be a promising approach for reducing terror-induced fear.

In the research reported here, the educators emphasized the need to expose students to scientific knowledge that would allow them to gain deeper insights into the complex phenomenon that is terrorism. Students often have a thirst for knowledge, and this can be used to motivate them to learn about terrorism (Jerome & Elwick, 2019). Considering the educational narratives explored in this study, using motivation to facilitate immersion into the scientific world of knowledge, enquiry, and scrutiny might help to facilitate learning opportunities for students. In a study by Kearns et al. (2021), participants were able to update their understanding after learning factual information about terrorism. While their study was not able to provide explanations for why this transformation occurred, trust in scientific reasoning was related to the participants’ fear-reducing development.

Jerome and Elwick (2019) argue that many young people may miss interpretive framing of terrorism and, when exposed to representations of terrorism, may pick out facts and issues that seem of most interest. Therefore, by drawing on powerful knowledge, students could be encouraged to move beyond superficial and binary representations of terrorism as good versus evil. This can be facilitated by learning about the history of terrorism, the groups who perpetrate such acts, and competing models for understanding these social phenomena (Jerome & Elwick, 2019). People who are given more details about terrorism are also more likely to accept this knowledge and gain more calculative trust (Kearns et al., 2021). Kearns et al.’s (2021) experimental study indicates that there is a transformational potential when someone is motivated to have thorough insight into terrorism while being willing to engage in a deeper level of cognitive processing. This can help students develop more differentiated understandings of the sociopolitical world in which there are multiple interpretations and meanings to be considered (Jerome & Elwick, 2019). According to the educators in this study, appropriate strategies for building democratic resilience should include curricular activities that are enjoyable, interesting, and relevant to students’ needs and interests.

Still, there are some parts of the human experience that cannot be controlled by quantifiable predictions or facts about risks and their likely outcomes. Affect and emotions are inevitable parts of human beings, and the threat of terrorism evokes multiple emotive responses in people (Zembylas, 2020). For instance, fear of terrorism is likely to result in less political participation (Solheim & Jupskås, 2021). Building trust to prevent terror-induced fear will therefore require proper integration of cognitive and emotional dimensions. In this study, a common theme in the data is, first, the narrative that educators must support young people in developing their identities, beliefs, and worldviews, and second, that this should be carried out through inclusion and trust. Thus, the participants express a recognition of the emotions that students bring into classrooms. Moreover, developing calculative trust by learning powerful knowledge without appropriate recognition of emotions may not generate desired outcomes. After all, threats cannot be reduced to complex technical questions; they are also characterized by subjective judgment. As noted by Slovic and colleagues more than four decades ago,

> We believe that much of the responsibility lies with the schools, whose curricula should include material designed to teach people that the world in which they live is probabilistic, not deterministic, and to help them learn judgement and decision strategies for dealing with the world. (1981, p. 31)

Relational trust is believed to mediate calculative trust (Does et al., 2021). This means that supportive relationships between educators and students can ideally encourage analytical thinking and powerful learning about terrorism. However, while educated individuals on average are less fearful compared to less educated individuals (Christensen & Aars, 2019), changing risk perceptions occurs slowly.

Does et al. (2021) argue that some measures may be ineffective at reducing fear among people. Although trustful relationships appear to be a particularly promising avenue, people may experience greater levels of anxiety when confronted with risks they cannot control, avoid, or protect themselves against (Hoffman & Shelby, 2017). Terrorism tends to rank among the most uncontrollable risks to human wellbeing. According to the research participants in this study, trustful relationships may help to reduce some of the uncertainty around terrorism-related issues, for instance by creating space for discussing terrorism as a controversial issue in school. For Christensen and Aars (2019), a sensible approach for reducing societal fears of terrorism is precisely by giving precedence to speech and arguments over force, for example, through open debates and non-violent conflict resolution. Trust-based relationships, which protect students’ wellbeing and dignity, are an integral part of Norwegian educational practice but are also one of the primary arguments for ensuring human security in democratic educational systems.

## 5.2 Concluding thoughts

This study was motivated by an under-researched field within the topic of security governance in school. While fear is inextricably linked with terrorism, the notion of preventing terror-induced fear is somewhat absent in the security policy field (Sjøen, 2021). There is, rightly so, a burgeoning literature exploring the implications of war, terrorism, and conflict on children’s wellbeing (Moses et al., 2003). However, the research literature is scant regarding how school and education can help students build general democratic resilience against terror-induced fear. Considering how education is a cornerstone of an inclusive and democratic society, the potential for schools to help students develop their capability for critical thinking, moral responsiveness, and civic behaviors is well-worth pursuing for these purposes.

Educators in this study uniformly emphasize the importance of trustful relations in the context of preventing fear of terrorism. There is a convincing body of evidence on how these educational narratives are mirrored by school staff in many parts of the world (Sjøen & Jore, 2019). This is uplifting as an examination of the field of risk and security studies indicates the significance of trust to affect or change feelings and emotions. Relational trust is robustly related to reducing fear of terrorism (Does et al., 2021; Enjolras et al.,

2019). Consequently, instead of exclaiming that homegrown terrorists might strike anywhere at any time, political elites should encourage social, political, and democratic trust in a broad sense, which may help in developing democratic resilience against terror-induced fear.

The implication of this is that trust-based relationships are the fear-reductive basis to build on. However, the potential of trust has wider implications than reducing fear, and there are indications that trust-based networks are a source of resilience against violent extremism (Dalgaard-Nielsen & Schack, 2016; Ellefsen, 2021). Thus, it might be useful to de-securitize societal efforts to prevent violent extremism by allowing local networks to cultivate trust and a degree of freedom to test local solutions and democratic resilience. This might serve as a bulwark against a range of social negatives, perhaps even political and extreme violence itself (Ravndal 2017; Solheim, 2019; Sjøen, 2021).

When fear of terrorism is considered in this light, it can no longer be looked at in isolation, but must be addressed in the sociopolitical context of how risks are framed and regulated. In an educational sense, democratic resilience may serve a transformational purpose if students and educators are encouraged to critique one another, testing arguments, or seeking clarification. Democratic resilience should also involve disseminating and scrutinizing political discourses that convey exaggerated messages of fear and political scaremongering. Findings from this study indicate the existence of educational resistance and critical awareness of alarmist discourses in media and politics.

However, previous research in Norway also indicates that educators refer the most cases of concerns of extremism to relevant authorities (Sjøen, 2020), a finding that is transferable to other parts of Europe (Busher et al., 2017). While this tendency can be explained by the relatively close proximity between educators and students, as well as the considerable amount of time that young people spend in school, these findings also exemplify the contradictory expectations on educators, asking them to build trust and social cohesion, while at the same time requiring them to employ a logic of suspicion against future terrorists (Ragazzi, 2018).

Clearly, these results should inspire future empirical and theoretical research to draw on the extensive theories of risk perception and risk management across the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities from the last 50 years and to extrapolate into research on security and education. Considering also how warfare is now being brutally brought back to the European continent, exploring avenues to prevent or reduce the stoking of political fear is perhaps as important as ever.

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