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For a left-wing security policy

Instead of leaving the topic to the right, left-wingers need to talk about local and global security

Read this article in German.

There are two topics that leftists all over the world shy away from: the nation-state and security. Or they just tend to parrot the rhetoric of conservatives on these issues. So currently, the right-wingers are keeping a close eye on the security situation in Europe as well as Latin America, a region whose progressives are traditionally closest to the European left. The fact that the right alone is claiming the topic of security has huge consequences: the threat of more intolerance and violence as more and more democracies move towards authoritarianism.

The left's animosity towards security policy stems from its tendency to equate security with military. In Germany, there're stark reminders of World War II and the crimes committed by the German army. In the 1970s and 80s, Latin America was dominated by military dictatorships, such as Chile under Pinochet. This created the association of security and military, and deterred left-wingers from talking about it. This reluctance, however, is preventing the left from clarifying what a progressive security policy consists of and what it should look like.

Well-connected right-wingers with a global reach, such as Steve Bannon's The Movement, have taken on this cause and managed to capture a large number of votes. Mexico was used in the populist election campaign in the US, because 'that's where all the drug traffickers are'. Equating foreigners to criminals is also a common tactic employed by the right in Europe.

More guns just lead to more violence

Security has long been one of the right's favourite political tools. Brazil is the most recent example: far-right Jair Messias Bolsonaro won the presidency with his right-wing rhetoric on security. At best, he will surrender the country to the same nationalist direction as Trump. At

worst, he will turn Brazil directly into a military state, with many of his ministers coming from the armed forces.

'Relaxing gun control, filling up the prisons, reducing the age of criminal responsibility to 16, a good criminal is a dead criminal'. These simplistic and misguided sentiments, disseminated on WhatsApp, won him a large number of votes and have sent the country back decades in its transition to democracy.

Left-wing or progressive security policy must put 'human security' at the heart of the political narrative.

Both in the US and Brazil, right-wingers together with evangelicals are also cosying up to the gun lobby, exerting a heavy influence on congress. The moralising discourse offers only an illusion of security by increasing gun ownership and improving 'self-defence'. It has only one purpose: to do business with fear, at the expense of human life. Statistics have long proven that more weapons just lead to more violence.

We need to talk about human security

A left-wing security policy that is fit for the 21st century must therefore be a pillar in revitalising social democracy. In recent years, an active search for security policy allies across the world has been increasingly driven by crises facing the EU and multilateralism. In a multifaceted world, where Europe can no longer rely on the protection of the US and southern countries prefer to replicate China's development instead of developing through democracy, this is something we need to revive.

Left-wing or progressive security policy must put 'human security' at the heart of the political narrative, a term used by the United Nations in the 1990s to describe this guiding principle. The 90s were a time of the 'new wars', as Mary Kaldor described post-Cold War conflicts, which were mainly characterised by domestic and identity conflicts (such as in the Balkans) and war economies (such as in West Africa).

What's more, the idea of human security can also serve as a basis for a more intense debate on the link to social justice – the core theme of social democracy. Poorer people are more likely to suffer from crime, as they live in areas where more violence occurs. The lack of legitimate job opportunities often pushes them into a life of crime or into drug gangs, which fight for influence in their territories.

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The global gentrification of cities is also behind the increasing privatisation of security: physical integrity is no longer a fundamental right, but a material luxury of the global upper class. Nations and communities of nations must ensure public safety for everyone. Security is therefore inextricably a social matter; we need security to prevent social deprivation and marginalisation and to promote social cohesion.

Local and global security

In an increasingly connected world, security policy is both a global and local issue at the same time. Security starts at an urban level, where simple preventive action, just having enough police on the streets, can do wonders. The military should not be routinely deployed to towns and cities. Its job is to protect external borders, not to fight rampant gang wars.

Global challenges have become more complicated. Neoliberal globalisation also promotes a kind of globalisation in the shadows – transnational organised crime such as money laundering and arms, drugs and human trafficking. These are groups that operate in the same way as multinational companies, only illegally.

The solution is to address the factors that exacerbate conflict, such as by regulating arms exports, financial markets and money laundering, reducing resource depletion in areas of conflict and taking action over the behaviour of multinational companies in undemocratic countries beset by conflict. Tackling these problems at such a disconcerting time, which affects everything that provides people with material and physical security – from the digital revolution to cyber warfare – is a huge task. And this huge task calls for progressive, non-repressive solutions.



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