
In 2015, France was the target of two terrorist attacks, on 07 January against the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, which killed 12 people, and on 13 November against various locations in Paris, in which 130 people died. France may have a long history of terrorist attacks on its soil (Start GDT, 2017) but these two led to reactions of shock and dismay among the public and politicians. The first attack saw demonstrations throughout France, culminating in a mass gathering in Paris with many world leaders in attendance (Le Monde, 2015). The second attack, the deadliest on French soil since 1945, led the then President, the Socialist François Hollande, to declare France at war with terrorism (Hollande 2015). Pledging to “marshal the full strength of the state to defend the safety of its people” (Hollande 2015), he declared war on the Islamist State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and immediately proclaimed a state of emergency. First established during the Algeria war, it is a regime of exception granting the executive authorities a wide range of enhanced powers allowing them to bypass ordinary legal procedures in the name of responsiveness (Vie Publique 2018). In 2015, its main measures involved house arrest for anyone suspected to be a terrorist threat, police raid, ID control, house and car search, restricting freedom of movement, banning associations, closing down public places, including religious sites, and forbidding demonstrations (Vie Publique 2018). Most of these measures, based on a pre-emptive approach aimed at neutralising suspects before they act, applied to anyone for whom there were “serious reasons to believe that his/her behaviour constitutes a particularly serious threat to public security and public order” (Legifrance 2018). They also did not need the prior authorisation of a judge, with appeals only possible retrospectively and to administrative judges rather than penal ones, which under the French system gives fewer rights to the accused (De Massol De Rebetz and Van der Woude 2019, 14). Implemented through an enhanced deployment of armed and security forces and justified by the need to be “implacable […] in this new context of war” (Hollande 2015), it was renewed six times by the French Parliament and ended nearly two years later on 1 November 2017.

The state of emergency proved contentious, both in terms of its necessity, when the authorities had a wide-ranging anti-terrorist legislation at their disposal, with 22 laws passed since 1986 (Vie Publique 2015), and in terms of its risks for liberties. A significant number of scholars, legal practioners, human rights associations, and some newspapers were highly critical and challenged four main aspects: 1) the enhanced repressive powers it gave to the state authorities, thereby putting liberties at risk (Bourdon 2017; Salas 2016a). 2) The expansion of the executive at the expense of the judiciary (Fédération Internationale des Droits de l’Homme 2016), thus blunting a key brake to executive power. 3) The lack of definition as to what the serious reasons to believe an individual to be a threat were or said threats (Cassia 2016), opening the door to arbitrariness and abuse (Garapon 2017a). The authorities relying instead on secret and virtually unchallengeable notes from the intelligence service to assess the threats an individual represented fuelled accusations of a surveillance society (Salas 2016b). 4) Its exceptionalism, with the discursive construction of
extraordinary threats (Bogain 2017), legitimising a state of exception, i.e. the suspension of the juridical order allowing the executive power to prevail over all others (Agamben 2015a). This led to warnings that the exceptional was turning into the permanent (Agamben 2015b).

However, despite these criticisms, the state of emergency proved overwhelmingly popular both among politicians and with public opinion. The vote for its renewals averaged 87.79% in the Lower House of French Parliament and 91.97% in the Upper House (Assemblée nationale 2019; Sénat 2019). As for public opinion, all the polls conducted throughout the period showed a very high level of support, as illustrated by the following table, collating the responses from various IFOP polls (2015; 2016a; 2016b; 2017a; 2017b) to the question asking whether the state of emergency should continue:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 15</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 16</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 16</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 17</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 17</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This endorsement was accompanied by an overall support for authoritarian and right-wing preferences in security matters, as demonstrated by the survey analysis carried out by Brouard et.al (2018) and Vasilopoulos et.al (2018). This reaction is not surprising, as a large body of research has shown how the threat of terrorism and a heightened desire for security has led to preferences for more conservative and authoritarian policies (Davis and Silver 2005; Kibris 2011; Merolla and Zechmeister 2009; Perrin 2005). Many scholars have highlighted how terrorism has drawn public opinion to endorse aggressive and repressive policies, enhanced state power, restrictions of liberties, as well as intolerance towards minorities (Hetherington and Suhay 2011; Nail et al. 2009; Van de Vyver et al. 2016). They have been shown to support what De Goede has dubbed “the exceptional governance of risks and dangers“ (2008), underpinned by a reassertion of state power and restriction of civil liberties (Jackson 2005; Peffley et al. 2015).

French public opinion may have overwhelmingly supported the framework of a state of emergency but how did members of the public talk about security politics during its implementation? Uncovering and analysing what public opinion says and thinks is important because, as Campbell suggested, their narratives serve to shape the conditions of possibility in politics by legitimising “certain dispositions and orientations while opposing and delegitimizing others” (1998, 10). Within security studies, Jackson and Hall identified the need for “detailed empirical research on the specific language and text produced by lay members of the public” (2016, 3) in order to make sense of the broader discursive environment in relation to terrorism, and to understand how the discourses of state authorities are reproduced, legitimated or challenged. The aim of this article is therefore to contribute to this agenda by analysing how French public opinion conceptualised security politics during a state of emergency and whether their conceptualisation evolved the longer
the state of emergency lasted. It will do so by focusing on the measures they advocated to counter terrorism when commenting online to articles about the state of emergency published by two main French newspapers. The French state of emergency has two characteristics that make it a particularly suitable object of study. 1) It provides a framework of measures against which what the public advocated, which I have labelled “lay remedies”, can be compared. It therefore enables an analysis of the extent to which public opinion reproduces or challenges their state authorities in a period the executive constructed as exceptional. 2) It lasted two years and included a major terrorist attack in the middle of it, in Nice on 14 July 2016, which killed 86 people. This means that any evolution in the conceptualisation of security can be tracked. The analysis is therefore guided by the following two research questions:

Q1: How did online readers conceptualise security politics to counter terrorism during the state of emergency?

Q2: To what extent did the duration of the state of emergency affect the conceptualisation of security politics?

The central claim of this article is that online readers conceptualised security politics as disciplining and taming the national body, thereby grounding anti-terrorism on the production of governable subjects embracing unfettered state power. In doing so, they not only normalised their authorities’ securitising discourse but also shaped the political conditions for an ever-widening executive-led security and disciplinary regime. The next sections outline first the theoretical framework and the methodology used before exploring the main findings of this research.

**Theoretical framework and methodology**

This article is based on the “everyday narrative” theoretical framework, a relatively recent addition to the “narrative turn” in IR and its focus on language and the discursive construction of reality (Pears 2016). Within security studies, scholars within the poststructuralist and critical constructivism tradition have studied the discursive construction of identities, foreign policy, and security practices by political elites and the media (for example, Baker-Beall 2014; Booth 2005; Campbell 1998; Crenshaw 2014; Doty 1996; Jackson 2005; Hansen 2006; Patrick 2014; Matthews 2015; Shepherd 2013). This large body of work has demonstrated how political elites and the media, by privileging one perspective over another, have shaped “our understanding of war and terrorism” (Baker-Beall 2014, 2), and constructed terrorism as a source of danger that legitimated a certain type of responses and specific security practices (Heath-Kelly et al. 2014).

However, this research has been accused to suffer from methodological elitism (Stanley and Jackson 2016, 224) by tending to focus predominantly on discourses produced by the elites, thereby overlooking the other side of the discursive process, i.e. how public opinion interpret and react to them. This criticism is not about minimising the importance of this research but simply to point out, as Jarvis and Lister argued (2013, 158), that there is a “propensity to speak for, rather than to (or, perhaps better, with) ‘ordinary’ people”. Omitting “ordinary” citizens means disenfranchising them (Bertrand, 2018). Yet, how
citizens receive and react to elite discourses matters because political authorities constantly seek to legitimise their security practices in order to receive their consent (Buzan et al. 1998; Hodges 2011). This is why scholars have sought to gain a better understanding of how ordinary citizens make sense of security, terrorism and counter-terrorism, by focusing on their everyday narratives (for example Crawford and Hutchinson 2015; Jackson and Hall 2016; Jarvis and Lister 2013, 2015, 2016; Pears 2016; Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2016). By adopting a bottom-up approach, they have developed a “socially based, culturally informed, constructionist approaches to the everyday politics of security” (Gillepsie 2007, 278). By analysing how people express themselves and what discourse they produce, they have given public opinion a voice and rectified the elitist bias of many studies. By focusing on “the voices and action of regular people” (Vrasti 2013, 60), they have enriched our understanding of how public opinion makes sense of terrorism and counter-terrorism, and the extent to which they offer a space for resistance to elite discourses and practices. The two research questions of this article contribute to this agenda by examining how members of the public think about counter-terrorism under a state of emergency and how they shape the conditions of possibility in politics.

This article explores everyday narrative via online comments. Everyday narrative research has used various approaches, including focus groups (Jarvis and Lister 2013), ethnography (Gillepsie and O’Loughlin 2009) and conversation analysis (Jackson and Hall, 2016). They are all very valuable but, as Stanley and Jackson recognised, they tend to be “contrived situations” (2016, 232), due to self-censorship in the presence of a researcher, peer pressure, group think or desire to please the interviewers (Cho and Hong 2009). Online comments, on the other hand, give access to more unadulterated opinions, due to their anonymity and largely unmoderated nature (Ampofo et al. 2013). They provide a more honest insight into people’s opinions than traditional forms of audience participation because they are less artificial and enable participants to express themselves freely. They also give a better insight into what people think than survey analysis because, by requiring respondents to react to pre-prepared questions, surveys restrict their responses and do not capture how people talk about issues. This is why analysing online comments has gained traction in recent years in many fields (for example Barr 2011; Cho and Hong 2009; Freeman 2011; Kotevyko et al. 2013; Loke 2013), including in politics and IR (for example Da Silva and Crilley 2017; Douai and Nofal 2012; Jamal et al. 2015; Metzger et al. 2016). Online comments on news articles are of course not without limitations. Their voluntary process means that there is bias towards those with access to the internet, those who read the news online and those who feel strongly about the discussed issues. Similarly, given the anonymous nature of online comments, it is difficult to take into account socioeconomic or cultural profiles. This is why the findings of this article are not intended to offer an exact reflection of public opinion as a whole but they do provide an important insight into the way security is conceptualised by ordinary citizens online. The value of this approach resides “in the everyday context in which they are shared with others” (Da Silva and Crilley 2017, 166), thereby enabling researchers to access directly a social reality.

This article presents a content analysis of the comments on the state of emergency posted by readers of the digital version of two French newspapers, Le Monde and Le Figaro. They
were chosen because they are considered the main two dailies in France (Statista 2020) and because they offer a good balance in terms of political views, with Le Monde classed as left-leaning and Le Figaro as right-leaning (Clare and Abdelhady 2016). In addition, they held different views on the state of emergency, with Le Monde highly critical and Le Figaro endorsing it. Considering that the state of emergency lasted two years and was renewed 6 times during this period, it was necessary to include an element of selectivity (Todd 2009, 19) to keep the sample to a manageable size. It was decided to collect data for the first renewal (14 November 2015 to 25 February 2016), the third (22 July 2016 to 21 December 2016), which followed the major new attack in Nice on 14 July, and the last (16 July 2017 to 30 October 2017). The three periods were chosen to enable an examination of any evolution of the conceptualisation of security politics throughout the state of emergency, and to explore whether a new attack had an impact on how readers talked about anti-terrorism.

Articles from up to 2 weeks before and after were included, in order to capture views during the period leading to a renewal and immediately after. Articles were retrieved through the LexisNexis database, with the keyword “state of emergency (état d’urgence)” in their headlines. This yielded a sample of 134 articles, 72 from le Monde and 62 from Le Figaro. Comments were then read, including those that were part of a thread, and sifted so that only those focusing on what readers would do to counter terrorism were kept. After ensuring equal sample size between the two sources, the final sample consisted of 3530 distinct comments: 1154 for period 1, 1140 for period 2 and 1236 for the final period.

The sample was analysed through a mixed method design. To answer the first research question, the sample was analysed through an inductively generated code frame (Boyatzis 1998) based on the identification and classification of themes emerging from the data (Reichertz 2007). The unit of analysis was a single posting, as recommended by Holtz et al. (2012). Initial codes were generated by identifying concepts related to specific types of remedies put forward and what was said about their impact. The second stage involved identifying themes among the codes. The final stage entailed re-arranging the codes around these thematic units (Gibbs, 2008). This qualitative approach was complemented by tabulating the frequencies of the codes (Williams 2019, 53), in order to track the evolution of how security politics was conceptualised, thereby informing the second research question. The frequencies were based on coding each theme detected in each comment as one, irrespective of how often it was referenced within a single posting. The presentation of the data is in line with the Association of Internet Researchers recommendations for ethical Internet research (Markham and Buchanan, 2012), with respect to anonymity and privacy. Personal consent was not needed, as the comments used are publicly available. In addition, usernames were not included and the quotes used in this article were translated from French, which would make tracing them to their authors impossible.

Q1: How did online readers conceptualise security politics to counter terrorism during the state of emergency?

The content analysis of online comments revealed three main themes as to what should be done to counter terrorism: a) establishing a securitarian state, b) neutralising the Muslim
migrant Other, and c) curbing liberties and rights. The analysis that follows outlines how each functioned to conceptualise security policy as taming and disciplining the national body. Whilst challenging French authorities for being too timid, this conceptualisation normalised their actions and led to the discursive construction of governable subjects that shaped the conditions for unfettered state power. A fourth narrative, calling for the removal of the state of emergency, provided an alternative conception that did contest this conceptualisation but was too much of a minority to challenge it.

1 – A securitarian state

The remedies advocated displayed three features that functioned discursively to construct a securitarian state: state-led discipline, intentionality, and exceptionalism. Together, they contributed to the meta-narrative of taming the national body by subjecting it to a wide range of disciplinary mechanisms unencumbered by common law.

84.20% of all the measures advocated were based on the executive wielding discipline. Their scope and content grounded counter-terrorism on mobilising state power to set up a far-reaching disciplinary and coercive regime. Scope-wise, they implied an all-encompassing state controlling space, bodies and mind, as illustrated by the following table charting the most prominent examples:

Table two – A disciplinary framework - remedies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Space</th>
<th>Bodies</th>
<th>Mind</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Military intervention against ISIS</td>
<td>• Kill all suspected terrorists / Jihadists</td>
<td>• Eradicate community-based identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Expel*</td>
<td>• Incarcerate in secure units*</td>
<td>• Eradicate radical Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Sort out” areas with a high level of migrants</td>
<td>• Create a French Guantanamo*</td>
<td>• Combat Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Military state and exceptional jurisdiction to control the country</td>
<td>• Electronic tagging*</td>
<td>• Force the Muslim community to sort itself out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Control or close down border</td>
<td>• Forbid all demonstrations</td>
<td>• Create a French Patriot act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Strip French nationality of suspected terrorists</td>
<td>• Strict state with strict policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deny entry to French Jihadists</td>
<td>Stricter penalties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stop immigration / Stricter immigration policy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More intelligence service / police / military to be deployed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Clean up” France</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All suspected terrorists; All migrants with a conviction; All migrants; All illegal migrants; All radial Islamists.*

In terms of content, a comparison between the remedies advocated and the measures implemented by the French authorities revealed that 54.16% of them (64.33% of the disciplinary measures) departed markedly from the already strict state of emergency by either extending its scope and nature or taking it in an opposite direction. Whereas the authorities had put suspected terrorists under house arrest, readers advocated killing, expelling, or incarcerating them, with frequent references to a French Guantanamo in a remote French island. Border controls became border closure. Forbidding demonstrations if they present a security risk turned into banning them all. Strict security policies became strict policies in all areas. Stripping the nationality of dual nationals convicted of terrorism was expanded to all suspects, including single nationals. The state of emergency itself was transformed into a military state and a series of exceptional jurisdictions. Whereas the state of emergency did not involve any changes in immigration policies, the measures advocated stopping it or implementing a stricter policy. Key remedies were the opposite of what the authorities had advocated. The calls for national unity (Hollande 2015) turned into eradicating any community-based feelings and “sorting out” areas with a high level of immigration. Calls for Islam not to be targeted (Hollande 2015) were transformed into demands for it to be fought. Calls for harmony (Hollande 2015) became a demand to “clean up” the country. The coercive nature of the disciplinary regime readers constructed was further enhanced by the fact that 79.40% of all remedies corresponded to calls for a stricter state, 58.89% for it to be reorganised to make it stronger, i.e. more repressive, and 56.51% included punitive repression. In advocating remedies that gave the state repressive powers that were both wider and stronger than the state of emergency, readers grounded security politics on a disciplinary state constructed as taming the national body by any means necessary. The following comment epitomises this conceptualisation: “No weakness towards terrorism. Harsh measures needs to be taken. Let’s not be to be starry-eyed do-gooders”.

Online readers expanded the state-sponsored disciplinary regime further by putting the national body under its control through their endorsement of a pre-emptive framework.
targeting intentionality. 55.74% of all the remedies and 66.20% of the disciplinary measures involved pre-crime strategies, whereby suspected intention is tracked down and penalised rather than actual deeds. The following table illustrates how suspected intentions led to specific pre-crime measures:

*Table three – Enemy penology framework*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-emptive remedies</th>
<th>Suspected intention</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Combat Islam</td>
<td>Islam leads to terrorism</td>
<td>“A liberticidal religion, a deadly ideology”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stop/control immigration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expel/incarcerate migrants</td>
<td>Migrants are potential terrorists</td>
<td>“Why do we welcome people who hate us and kill us?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sort out areas with a high level of migrants.</td>
<td></td>
<td>“It is imperative to have on our soil […] fewer people likely to carry out terrorist acts in 20 years’ time.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control/ close down borders</td>
<td>Terrorists can enter</td>
<td>“The Schengen area is a sieve for weapons, terrorists, it is abetting crime.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eradicate community-based feelings</td>
<td>Multiculturalism leads to terrorism</td>
<td>“The successive French governments, […], have allowed […] in France a community that refuse the values of the Republic and advocate a liberticidal and barbaric ideology”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expel, incarcerate, tag, kill suspected terrorists</td>
<td>They are bound to act</td>
<td>“What are we waiting for to get rid of all those individuals who are or will be responsible for troubles?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By conferring extended powers to the authorities to track down intention, online readers grounded security politics on enemy penology, i.e. neutralising and excluding from the community a perceived enemy based on what they might do despite having no proof of their guilt (Delmas Marty, 2017). Indeed, table three shows not only that not only the presumption of innocence was ignored but also that individuals were dehumanised,
reduced to mere levels of dangerousness. The national body was therefore disciplined through generalised suspicion.

A final feature, exceptionalism, served to facilitate the potency of the disciplinary regime by removing legal hurdles that stood in the way of state action. Not only did 66.25% of readers support the existence of a state of emergency, by itself outside common law, but 41.90% of all remedies, and 49.76% of all disciplinary measures, implied exceptional measures suspending national and international law. Thus, killing all suspected terrorists or “cleaning up” France fall foul of article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The indefinite incarceration of suspected terrorists without proof breaches its article 5, whereas expelling all migrants, migrants with prior conviction not linked to terrorism, or suspected terrorists breaches its article 8. Creating an army state or exceptional jurisdiction are not part of French common law. Closing down borders permanently is against EU law, and stripping the nationality of anyone without dual citizenship breaches the treaty preventing the creation of stateless individuals signed by France. Exceptionalism, combined with the previous logic of intentionality, constructed a securitarian state rejecting the traditional principles of French justice based on ordinary law, proportionality, and punishing someone for their deeds and not for what they might do (Garapon 2017b). By advocating instead pre-crime strategies and bypassing common law to mete out exceptional punishment, the remedies advocated constructed unregulated state violence. The rule of law therefore became an impediment to security conceived as the neutralisation of suspects at all costs. This, in turn, challenged the discourse of the French authorities, who went to great length to frame the state of emergency as respecting this principle (Bogain 2017).

The discursive construction of a securitarian state grounded counter-terrorism on the state disciplining and taming the national body. It implied an all-encompassing state designed to control it, subject it to a full range of disciplinary mechanisms and to generalised suspicion, unhindered by common law. Buzan et al. (1998) have shown how, to be successful, the political moves towards a supposedly more secure society requires public understanding and support. Online readers did challenge the discourse of French authorities but by pushing the four underpinnings of the state of emergency much further, they normalised the more timid measures of these authorities. By operating within the police order set up by the state of emergency, they legitimated it. Foucault (1979) demonstrated how what he called the logic of governmentality involves individuals internalising dominant knowledge and discourses and becoming compliant. By constructing a securitarian state, readers produced governable subjects willingly embracing unfettered state power. By granting the state much more extended powers than what the state of emergency gave it, they widened the political conditions of possibility. The Executive became authorised to do as it pleased to tame the national body to defeat terrorism.

2 – Neutralising the Muslim migrant other

The construction of a securitarian state begs the question of whom the national body had to be protected from. Research has shown the prevalence of the othering process in states’
anti-terrorism policies, based on the reassertion of specific national identities (Jackson 2005; Hutcheson et al. 2004) designed to demarcate the national in-group from dangerous outgroups (Salter 2002). As any construction of a national “Self” is dependent on the creation of differences with an “Other” (Billig 1995), identity politics has been central to states’ response to terrorism (for example, Jackson 2006; Lazar and Lazar 2004).

The analysis of the lay remedies put forward revealed such an identity-based logic, with the French in-group threatened by two suspicious Others deemed not French enough, Muslims and immigrants. Thus, the majority of all remedies, at 64.93% (77.12% of all disciplinary measures), targeted Muslims and migrants, who readers equated. Counter-terrorism policy was therefore constructed on the explicit fear of the Muslim migrant other as a source of insecurity that needed to be neutralised. The following table charts the specific disciplinary mechanisms the remedies advocated subjected them to, which includes the items within the broad categories “Eradicate radical Islam” and “Combat Islam” in table 2.

Table four – Disciplining the Muslim migrant Other

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disciplinary mechanisms</th>
<th>Remedies Islam</th>
<th>Remedies Immigration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Control                 | • Reorganising French Islam  
                           • Stricter secularism  
                           • Forcing the Muslim community to sort itself out | • “Sorting out” areas with high level of migration  
                           • Discarding citizenship by birth |
| Expel                   | • Suspected Islamists  
                           • Radical imams  
                           • All Muslims | • Migrants* |
| Isolate and incarcerate | • Suspected Islamists  
                           • Radical imams | • Migrants*  
                           • Discarding citizenship by birth |
| Destroy                 | • Closing down mosques  
                           • Killing all suspected Jihadists  
                           • Banning all Muslim symbols  
                           • Eradicating radical Islam  
                           • Combatting Islam | • Eradicating community-based identity (“communautarism”) |
| Preventing entry        | • Forbidding French Jihadists to come back | • Stricter immigration policy  
                           • Stopping all immigration  
                           • Closing down borders |

*Migrants with a prior conviction, irrespective of its nature/ all migrants / all illegal migrants
Two techniques underpinned the construction of the Muslim Migrants as the dangerous other. The first is an essentialisation process whereby they were made dangerous not for their actions but for who they were. Calling for a stricter immigration policy, for all migrants to be expelled and for more secure borders imply that any migrant is by definition dangerous. Similarly, calling for Islam to be controlled, fought or destroyed constructs it, and by extension all Muslims, as intrinsically dangerous. The comment, “no Islam, no Islamism”, with the implied conclusion “no terrorism”, epitomised this essentialisation process. In addition, by basing their measures against Muslims and migrants on the suspicion of what they might do rather than their actual actions, readers reified every Muslim and migrant as potential terrorists, implicitly transforming “might” into “bound to”. They effectively depersonalised them by constructing what Nickels et al. have called a “suspected community” (2012). The remedy advocating the end of citizenship by birth starkly confirms this, because if French nationality is reserved solely to anybody with French parents and no longer for being born and having lived in the country, then the implication is that migrants and their children are inherently dangerous.

The second technique is a dissimilation process (De Cillia et al. 1999), whereby their dangerousness came from not being French enough. By calling for a fight against Islam, for a stricter secularism, and for the Muslim community to sort itself out, online readers constructed Islam as not fit for French society. In terms of immigration, the twin references to eradicating “communautarism” and “sorting out” areas with a high level of immigration are key to understanding how danger was constructed as deviancy from French society. The first is a negative concept in France to refer to groups expressing their belonging to a specific community, which is deemed to threaten the concept of universalism at the heart of French Republicanism, i.e. the idea that being French means no differences based on gender, race, ethnicity, or religion (Lefebvre 2010). Its existence therefore implied that no one from a migrant background was truly French since they refused to relinquish their identity. Similarly, “sorting out” areas with a high level of migration, referring to them as “lost to the Republic”, infers that they were deviant for refusing to be part of the national body.

The construction of the migrant Muslim Other as a threat was enhanced by three remedies (“cleaning up France”, “more competent politicians”, “non-lenient policies”) that held politicians responsible for their dangerous presence on the territory. The following accusations underline how readers grounded security policy on the neutralisation of Islam and Immigration:

- Mass immigration: “For the last 20 years, the authorities have opened the immigration floodgates [...] the slaughtering that took place on 13/11 is a direct consequence”.
- Islam left unchecked: “Thanks to our wonderful careless rulers [...], France, [...], is being corrupted by deep-rooted Islam which gets more and more radical”.
- Communautarism: “Here are [terrorist attacks] the results of 20 years of lax policies [...] integration has been a failure, even more than that...France has been rejected”. 
• Crime by Muslim migrants: “here are [terrorist attacks] the results of 40 years of lax policies. The more the religion of peace and love is here the higher insecurity becomes”.

• Non-respect of the law by Muslim migrants: “France is paying for its laxness. Everyday we find out how its security and legal laxness has allowed these individuals [Islamist terrorists] to prosper”.

This identity-based securitising discourse added to the conceptualisation of security politics as taming the national body by delineating a clear line between the in-group and a dangerous outgroup who needed to be subjected to a range of disciplinary mechanisms wielded by stronger and stricter leaders. Security policy was therefore based on excluding Muslims and migrants from the community. In doing so, readers challenged their authorities, who had been very careful not to blame Islam or immigration for terrorism, let alone an internal weakening of the nation by politicians. They constructed instead the foreign terrorist Other as the dangerous outgroup (Bogain, 2017). The fact that the Muslim Migrant other contributed to 65% of all remedies is therefore a very important finding because it indicates that online readers widened the possibilities of action towards an identity-based disciplinary regime targeting communities within the national body. By constructing Muslims and migrants as undesirable readers did not just reinforce the discursive link between terrorism, Islam and immigration, which research has shown to be prevalent in Western liberal democracies (Nickels et al. 2012; Baker-Beall 2014), but they opened the door to systemic discriminations and unconstrained violence against minorities based on an exclusionary conception of the national body.

3– Curbing liberties and rights

When discussing the impact of their remedies, 63.66% of readers found liberties and rights secondary to security and argued that curtailing them was necessary because they deprived a country “of its freedom to decide what actions to take against terrorism”. By constructing them as hindering security through obstructing state action, readers turned them into a source of danger. Thus, one of the most repeated arguments was that they should not be used as an excuse not to act, because “too much freedom kills freedom” and “constraints should be preferred to condolences”. This construction therefore grounded counter-terrorism on curbing rights and liberties in order to protect the national body. In other words, it is “better to stay alive than die within a democratic framework”. The source of this danger was located in the protection rights afforded to “non-honest” individuals. 61.90% deemed either that their own rights were not affected by a state of emergency, explaining that, as “honest” citizens, they were not worried because “rights are not harmed unless you have something to hide”, or that “non-honest” individuals such as suspected terrorists were given “too many rights”. In both cases, this implied that rights were a danger for erecting an array of legal hurdles to actions against those who were deemed a threat to security, as epitomised by this comment: “It is about time to ignore […] those famous rights behind which the terrorists and murderers hide”. From this argument, two viewpoints came to the fore as to which status human rights should have. On the one hand, a significant minority,
29.13%, deemed them superfluous. At the most extreme, they branded them “bad”, “a waste of time”, “useless”, and called for their abolition, as well as any institutions representing human rights, such as the ECHR or Amnesty International. A milder variation was to call for them to be ignored. On the other hand, the majority argued that curtailing rights was unfortunate but necessary for their own protection because only security would enable them to flourish in the long run. Thus, the most repeated sentence in the sample was “security is the first freedom”, which constructed security as the bedrock for all other rights. Seen from this point of view, rights needed to be curtailed in the here-and-now to ensure their existence in the long-term.

In constructing rights and liberties as a source of danger, it is argued, online readers redefined their scope, purpose, and membership. In terms of scope, they were downgraded to be of use in time of peace only. Readers pointed out that security was paramount in these “exceptional times”, in the light of “the exceptional nature of the threats facing the country”, and at a “time of war”. In doing so, they limited rights and liberties for peacetime only, as epitomised by the following comment: “yes to judges in peace time, no to bureaucracy and the fussy analysis by legal experts who are away from the battleground. Force needs to act alone for a while”. In terms of their purpose, by constructing security as their bedrock readers redefined them as the right to be protected, therefore as freedom from fear only, which implied state action, irrespective of the consequences, as the following comment illustrates: “I am expecting the government to do everything to protect our safety”. In doing so, they operated a fundamental redefinition of their purpose, breaking away from the historical conception of liberties as enabling individuals to be protected against the encroachment of the state (United Nations, 2019), leaving them instead at its mercy. In terms of membership, readers redefined who was entitled to them by constructing a dichotomy between “honest” citizens and the “non-honest” Other. In stating that “Human rights are the rights of the honest man, not the rights of the suspected criminal man”, they restricted them to a certain class of citizens only, thereby rejecting their universality. It also indicates that in order to ensure the security of the law-abiding majority the suspect Other must forego their rights, as epitomised by the argument that incarcerating suspected terrorists does not infringe human rights because “the laws that protect us should not protect our enemies”. The suspect other therefore saw their rights removed in order to make the majority feel secure.

The construction of rights and liberties as a danger to security redefined them as expendable, at the mercy of the state, only needed by law abiding citizens and, in some cases, in need to be abolished. This redefinition added to the conceptualisation of security politics as disciplining and taming the national body by removing any hurdle to state actions against terrorism and turning liberties into an elastic concept that can be shrunk and abolished in the name of security. Furthermore, it demarcated a clear boundary between a “non-honest” outgroup that needed to be disciplined through having all their rights removed and an “honest” in-group who needed to be protected. Online readers did reproduce the discourse French authorities had relied on to justify the state of emergency, with its stress on the country being at war and facing apocalyptic threats, and the defence of rights and liberties through security (Bogain 2017). However, by constructing rights and
liberties as a source of danger, by removing the vague and potentially wide category of “non-honest” individuals from the national body, and, in some cases, by rejecting human rights themselves, they went much further than their authorities, who never advocated such measures. Bigo noted that terrorism has led to a “concept of freedom that has become more dangerous for the fundamental rights of individuals that even traditional security measures [could be]” (2006, 38). Online readers demonstrated the danger inherent in this logic, by constructing rights and liberties themselves as a danger to security, setting the political conditions for all of them to be dismissed by state authorities in the name of security. In doing so, they eroded the very concept of freedom, turning it into “an escape from freedom” (Fromm 1941). They therefore reinforced the logic of governmentality by creating political subjects willing to let the state do whatever it takes to ensure security.

4 – Human security

A minority put forward remedies that challenged dominant logics by constructing an alternative political imagination to the framework set up by the state of emergency and legitimated by the majority of readers. They offered disruptive openings (Rancière 1999) by introducing a series of “wrongs” into the security debate. The 15.80% of non-repressive remedies challenged the dominant disciplinary framework by putting forward instead “our values” and the fight against all discriminations as better alternatives to counter terrorism. They saw terrorism as rooted in alienation arising from inequalities and oppression. This was the case both for the Middle East (“The more we spread chaos in the Middle East, as has been the case for years, the more we import it in France”) and for France itself. Indeed, they saw the terrorist attacks as an attempt to exploit the socio-economic divisions within French society and explained the appeal of terrorism among some sections of the population by the social conditions that led to disfranchised individuals feeling excluded and alienated. The following comment illustrates this stance: “People of North African origins are regularly reminded that they are not enough integrated in French society […]. The message keeps being ‘you will never be integrated!’ It is no wonder that a small minority has given up integration and chosen a different path”. Similarly, the 36.34% who put liberties ahead of security challenged the dominant logics of control, surveillance and punishment by highlighting the danger of a police state, pointing out how this logic ends with individuals subsumed by the state (“Security? Not so fast. With the end of the rule of law, nothing protects the ordinary citizen anymore against state violence and arbitrariness”). In addition, by comparing terrorism to road accidents or domestic violence, and asking why these two issues, which kill far more than terrorism, were not a priority, they disrupted the underpinnings of the exceptional threat discourse, stressing instead how political elites create societal insecurities.

It is argued that their conceptualisation of security politics was based on de-securitising moves, away from the dominant disciplinary logics. Thus, their arguments were based on the respect of democratic values (“in a war of values, the best way to defend them is to be faithful to them, comes what may”), social cohesiveness through tackling discriminations and social inequalities (“the priority should be to tackle the roots of the problems, i.e.
everything that generates hatred in our society: racism, exclusion, poverty”), education and social justice. In doing so, they conceptualised security politics as human security, i.e. “working towards minimising all forms of physical, structural and cultural violence” (Jackson et al. 2009, 225). In rejecting state-centric disciplinary policies to focus on emancipation, non-violence, human rights and social justice, they radically challenged the dominant conceptualisation of security politics and opened up a space for resistance and the possibility of a different discursive environment promoting human security. However, they remained firmly in a minority.

This section has demonstrated how the remedies advocated constructed three dominant themes that conceptualised security politics as disciplining and taming the national body. Led by an all-encompassing state, security politics meant subjecting the national body to a range of disciplinary mechanisms unhindered by legal principles that demarcated a clear line between an honest French in-group who needed to be protected and the Muslim migrant other as the enemy within. As a result, rights and liberties were redefined as subservient to the need for security, and at the mercy of the state. Challenges to this conceptualisation did occur, with an alternative based on human security, but they were very much a minority. This conceptualisation challenged French authorities, as their own measures and discourses were far more timid. However, by going much further, it served to legitimate the framework set up by the authorities and to normalise the securitising discursive environment. If narratives serve to shape the conditions of possibility in politics, this conceptualisation can only embolden French authorities to expand their powers, safe in the knowledge that its citizens constructed governable subjects willingly embracing unrestrained state power, irrespective of the consequences on rights, liberties and minorities. However, this assessment is based on the aggregated comments spanning the whole period of the state of emergency. It is therefore necessary to analyse the evolution over the period to draw further conclusions.

Q2: To what extent did the duration of the state of emergency affect the conceptualisation of security politics?

Does the duration of a state of emergency affect the way security is conceptualised? In this particular case, did its long duration lead to security as disciplining and taming the national body becoming more popular or to an increased desire to move away from it towards alternatives such as human security? To answer this question, the evolution of each percentage mentioned in the previous section was tracked over the three periods chosen for this article. As they provided evidence for the disciplinary conceptualisation of security, any shift between the three periods analysed would indicate a stronger or weaker endorsement of this conceptualisation. A trend analysis revealed that the longer the state of emergency lasted the stronger the endorsement became, as the overall mean for all the percentages increased by +5.34 percentage points between the first and the last periods, with every single one displaying an increase. The state of emergency being unable to stop new attacks, with a major one and a succession of low-level ones throughout the period,
therefore did not lead to exploring alternatives but instead to increasing demands for extending its reach ever further.

The analysis of what was more extended (chart 1) shows that the longer the state of emergency lasted, the more readers embraced the demeaning of rights, the support for an emergency framework, pre-emptive measures, and the othering process. This therefore suggests that Islam, migrants and rights became increasingly constructed as the major barriers to security and the target of a disciplinary regime.

Because the second period analysed in this article included a new major attack, it is important to test whether the overall shift to a stronger endorsement of the disciplinary conceptualisation of security was steady or affected by a new significant event. Trope and Liberman (2010, 440) pointed out the importance of temporal proximity and “psychological distance” when analysing public opinion, which suggests that being near to an event may affect attitudes. The results reveal that the Nice attack had a clear impact, as the period encompassing it (Period 2) displayed a strong hike in support for security as disciplining the national body, with an overall difference of +10.91 percentage points compared to the first period, and +5.57 compared to the third. This suggests that a new attack did not just create an immediate shock that led to an increased endorsement but it also entrenched it, as the differences between the second and third periods were much smaller than between the second and first.

An individual shift analysis revealed that although every figure increased in period 2 compared to the other two periods combined, liberties were the most affected (chart 2), with irrelevancy of rights displaying by far the sharpest rise at +22.94 percentage points. When combined with the shifts occurring between periods 2 and 3 (chart 3), it can be
argued that the attack shifted the focus on immediate exceptional and stronger actions, irrespective of their impact on rights, whereas once the shock subsided, readers went back to setting up the wider disciplinary regime. Thus, liberties and exceptional measures decreased the most between the second and third periods whereas measures pertaining to the wider disciplinary framework (strict state, pre-emptive measures, punitive repression and suspicious others), which were not overly affected by a new attack, either increased in period 3 or decreased only marginally. By comparing this trend to the overall evolution analysed earlier, we can therefore suggest that rights and the Muslim migrant other stand out as the most affected by the duration of the state of emergency.
Considering that Le Monde and Le Figaro hold two different standpoints, in terms both of their political leanings and attitudes towards the state of emergency, a question arises as to whether the trends established so far were evenly distributed amongst both sets of readers or whether the position of the newspapers affected the conceptualisation of security politics. This runs into methodological difficulties because online commentators do not necessarily share the political leaning or editorial line of a newspaper, as the trolling phenomenon attests (Aro 2016). However, comparing the two sets of readers does give, at the very least, a broad indication of whether the overall trends seen thus far were shared equally or not. The results suggest that whilst both sets of readers saw an increased endorsement of the disciplinary conceptualisation of security politics over the period, the shift was far more marked for Le Figaro readers (+10.04 percentage points) than their counterparts in Le Monde (+0.64). Le Figaro readers (LFR) might have endorsed security as taming the national body more than Le Monde readers (LMR) but they, in turn, were far more impacted by a new attack. Table five shows that LMR experienced a stronger endorsement between the second and the other two periods combined than LFR. The key figure revolves around the evolution between the second and third periods, where LMR saw a much bigger drop in the taming process. This suggests that Le Monde readers were more affected by the attacks because once its immediate impact dwindled they retreated from taming the national body far more than Le Figaro readers.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
 & P2/P1 & P3/P2 & P2/other two combined \\
\hline
LMR & 10.54 & -9.9 & 10.22 \\
LFR & 11.28 & -1.24 & 6.26 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Impact of a new attack on the two sets of readers (in percentage points)}
\end{table}

Political leanings may explain the differences in the conceptualisation of security policy between the two sets of readers because these differences conformed to two of the main theories used to explain the shift of attitudes according to political leanings in periods of terrorism. The two sets conformed to the conservative shift hypothesis (CSH) model over the whole period and to the Reactive Liberals Hypothesis (RLH) in the immediate aftermath of an attack. CHS predicts that a shift to right-wing preferences in periods of terrorism will occur on all political sides but more markedly so for right-leaning voters who already have an authoritarian disposition (Merolla and Zechmeister 2009). With the disciplinary regime constructed by readers clearly marking it as right-wing and with readers of the right-leaning Le Figaro increasing their endorsement far more than readers of the left-leaning Le Monde, this model seems to have been followed. Similarly, RHL, which predicts that left-leaning individuals will shift more markedly to the right in the aftermath of a terrorist attack (Nail et al. 2009), was clearly on display after the Nice attack, as Le Monde readers were far more
impacted. If it is assumed that the majority of readers shared the same broad political leaning of their newspapers, this would suggest that political leanings had an impact the conceptualisation of security politics.

The final salient findings relate to individual shifts. First, the overall evolution (chart 4) revealed a striking difference between the two sets of readers. Whereas Le Figaro readers increased their support for every aspect over the period, and in particular irrelevancy of rights, their counterparts in Le Monde focused on the suspicious others within the framework of a state of emergency based on pre-emptive measures, whilst baulking at repression, exceptionalism and impacts on rights. This suggests that the longer the state of emergency lasted, the more unwilling Le Monde readers became to expand its disciplinary nature further, except when it concerned the Migrant Muslim Other. The fact that identity-based exclusion was a bigger focus for readers of a left-leaning newspaper is an important finding. It suggests that the marginalisation and demonisation of minorities might not be predominantly confined to right-leaning individuals, as might have been expected based on the literature linking hostility towards immigration and Islam to right-wing leanings (for example Brouard et al. 2018).

Second, a remarkable similarity was found in what a major attack affected. Both sets of readers had the same two largest shifts when comparing the second versus the other two periods combined, irrelevancy of rights (+22.54 percentage points for LMR, + 23.35 for LFR) and going further than the state of emergency (+14.33 and + 11.41). However, the Muslim migrant other was far more salient for Le Monde readers, increasing by +7.36 percentage, as opposed to +1.23 for Le Figaro readers. These figures suggest that the focus on immediate exceptional and stronger actions, irrespective of their impact on rights, highlighted earlier, is not dependent on political leanings, but focusing on the Muslim Migrant other might be.
The analysis of the relationship between the duration of the state of emergency and attitudes reveals four key findings: a) the conceptualisation of security politics as taming the national body grew more popular over the period. b) Proximity affects attitudes, with a new major attack leading to a higher threshold of support for the remainder of the period. c) Le Figaro readers shifted to an increased endorsement of the disciplinary conceptualisation of security policy far more than their counterparts in Le Monde did, whereas they, in turn, were more impacted by a new major attack and focused far more on the Muslim migrant other. Despite the difficulties in determining their political leaning accurately, this does seem to suggest that political inclinations were an important variable in how readers approached security politics. d) Rights and the suspicious Others became increasingly the main victims of the disciplinary regime advocated. Together, these findings suggest that the construction of compliant subjects embracing an unfettered state unleashing its powers against undesirables, whether the Muslim migrant other or liberties, became more and more popular and entrenched, opening up the political conditions for a state freed of all constraints.

Conclusion

This article presented three contributions to the every-day narrative agenda in relation to terrorism. First, it showed that the analysis of online comments on news articles is useful in expanding existing studies on everyday narratives beyond focus groups and interviews. It is acknowledged that online comments cannot be seen as an exact reflection of the population at large due to their self-selecting nature and attracting certain types of individuals with particular perspectives. However, digital methods do provide significant research opportunities to capture everyday discursive practices (Tremayne 2007), thereby enabling a richer understanding of what lay members of the public think. Second, it offered an analysis of what readers thought should be done to counter terrorism during the period of the state of emergency in France, thereby enabling to uncover the extent to which the official discursive environment on counter-terrorism is reproduced or challenged by lay members of the public and what the implications are. Third, it analysed the relationship between the length of a state of emergency and the conceptualisation of security politics. The analysis identified three main interlinked themes that discursively constructed an overall conceptualisation of security politics as taming the national body: security as a state-led disciplinary regime with unfettered powers, security as taming the Muslim migrant dangerous other, and security as taming liberties constructed as a danger. Although resistance to this conceptualisation was present, it remained a minority. It revealed that the longer the state of emergency lasted the more popular this conceptualisation became, with rights and the Muslim migrant Other the most affected, and a new major attack providing a significant contribution its popularity. It raised the prospect of a differentiated conceptualisation based on political leanings, with readers of the right-leaning Le Figaro advocating taming the national body far more than readers of the left-leaning Le Monde, and the latter moving away from taming all areas to disciplining the Muslim migrant other only and being more impacted by an attack. Based on these findings, it is argued that online
readers constructed a logic of governmentality based on citizens embracing a far-reaching expansion of state power, the shrinking of rights and liberties as well as the creation of undesirables who needed to be removed from the national body. Their conceptualisation of security politics might have challenged the authorities by advocating far stronger measures but by operating within the framework they set up, they gave a stamp of approval for the dominant securitising discourse, normalised the underpinnings of the state of emergency, and legitimated it.

What this article has uncovered is worrying for two main reasons. The first is that the state of emergency radicalised readers towards harsher measures through a deepening disciplinary regime that left liberties at the mercy of the state. Their discourse can only embolden state authorities, by making expanding disciplinary regimes the new normal. Evidence of this is apparent in the way the current French President, E. Macron, turned the state of emergency into common law in November 2017 (Le Monde 2017), effectively turning the exceptional into the permanent, without any meaningful opposition. Far from opposing it, 78% did not want the state of emergency to end (Odoxa 2017), underlining how hardened attitudes had become. Polls taken since the end of the state of emergency suggest that an ever-expanding disciplinary regime has remained the discursive norm among public opinion. In March 2018, 58% of the French considered that the authorities were not doing enough and 52% wanted the state of emergency to be re-established (Elabe 2018). In March 2019, 55% called for new exceptional legislation and 50% agreed that someone from the military should run France (Odoxa 2019). The terrorist attack in Strasbourg in December 2018 automatically led to calls for the state of emergency to be reinstated and for stronger measures to be taken (Le Figaro 2018). French authorities have effectively been given free rein in matters of counter-terrorism. This explains why scholars are worried about a gradual decline of the rule of law in France, “where the protection of the public order will take precedence over the protection of civil liberties” (De Massol De Rebetz and Van der Woude 2019, 17). With public opinion so firmly pushing for increasingly harsher measures, the pressure on politicians risks being too strong to oppose. If the danger of over-securitisation is to be avoided, the dominant discourse on security as taming the national body must be imperatively challenged and deconstructed.

The second is that it reveals a diminishment of citizenship, with the rejection of anyone from a migrant or Muslim background outside the national body and differential treatment advocated for anyone perceived not French enough. The vast majority of the measures advocated targeted them and were based on a pre-emptive framework designed to neutralise them. This, in turn, led to their dehumanisation and de-personification, as being classed as suspect meant that they were withdrawn from the national body, with rights not applied to them. The danger of ever-increasing hostility from the public is clear from the shift towards more measures against them throughout the period. Rampant discriminations (Adida et al. 2012; Fassin 2002), a hostile political environment with the rise of the Far-Right, the debates over the burqa or what it means to be French (Ratinaud and Marchand 2012) have already created a sense of alienation and exclusion amongst sections of the population (Chabal 2015; Jansen 2014). Rejecting from the national body Muslims, migrants or anyone from a migrant background can only further these feelings. Perceptions of being
targeted can only contribute to a declining sense of belonging, declining citizenship and deepening divisions within French society.

While this study analysed the conceptualisation of security politics as constructed by online readers, it focused on what online readers wanted and not how they expressed themselves. A discourse analysis on the language they used, their rhetorical devices, their legitimisation frames, their metaphors, their interpretive repertoires, or their cultural frames would give further insights into understanding how lay members of the public normalised the security discourses of their authorities or sought to oppose it.

Access to the datasets is available on request

References


