NEGOTIATING VALUES
Norway in the wake of July 22

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The Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) is a non-profit institute established in 1959. The overarching purpose of the institute is to conduct research on the conditions for peaceful relations between states, groups and people. The institute is independent, international and interdisciplinary, and explores issues related to all facets of peace and conflict.

NECORE (Negotiating Values: Collective Identities and Resilience after 22/7) is a research project funded by the Research Council of Norway under the SAMKUL program. It has focused on values, identity, and the ways in which society confronts and handles terror attacks such as the ones that struck Oslo and Utøya on July 22, 2011. Our work has been disseminated (and will continue to be disseminated after the project’s end) through a series of meetings, seminars, newsletters, articles, and books, based on analyses and research conducted by researchers from PRIO, the University of Oslo, the Institute for Social Research, Oslo & Akershus University College, the University of Agder; and UCLA (University of California – Los Angeles).

The responsibility and honour for the hypotheses, theories, findings, and views expressed in PRIO’s publications rest with the authors.

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Insight from the research project NECORE
led by the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO).
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Negotiating Values: Collective Identities and Resilience after 22/7
How does society respond to the most brutal of catastrophes? This is the starting point of the NECORE project.

Mass murders carried out for political or ideological goals strike terror into unsuspecting civilians, foment radical actions and reactions, and challenge the basic security of our societies. Over the last years, we have seen such attacks in Nairobi, Nice, Orlando, and Paris, to mention only a few of the places that have been struck. On July 22, 2011, it happened in Oslo and at Utøya in Norway. A self-styled nationalist fighter against immigration took the lives of 77 people in the worst armed attacks in modern, peacetime Norway.

“NECORE” stands for “Negotiating Values: Collective Identities and Resilience after 22/7”. We often think of a negotiation as something that goes on between adversaries. But to negotiate also means to find the right way, through everyday conversations and meetings. We believe that we are in constant negotiations, and these negotiations are more important than ever in the wake of events such as that of July 22.

At the time, Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg said that we need more democracy, more openness, and more humanity as we attempt to stand up to the horrors of the July 22 terror. But who are “we”? And how do we, in all our diversity, make those values resilient in the face of attacks that strike at the very heart of those self-same values?

While our observations and conclusions do not all point in the same direction, they do clearly describe a society where societal resilience rests on trust, but where this trust is engendered, formed, and communicated in ever new ways; where polarization is an ever-present challenge; and where consensus and dissent exist side by side in constant tensions and negotiations. Together, we believe that a deep awareness of these essential and ongoing negotiations, as well as broad invitations to partake in them in everyday life, is crucial if our society is to remain resilient in the face – and in the wake – of tragedies. There must be room for many different views and identities, yet at the same time society needs some shared and protected core democratic values that help ensure stability and peace.

We welcome you, through this booklet, to take a closer look at our research.
“A National Tragedy”

“We are faced with a national tragedy”. These were the words of Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg on the morning after the terror attacks in Norway on July 22, 2011: first on the Norwegian Government Headquarters in Oslo and then on a Labor Party youth camp at the island of Utøya. In all, 77 people were murdered. Physical and mental wounds were inflicted on many more, directly and indirectly. In the course of that Friday afternoon, in the middle of the Norwegian summer vacation, what is often thought of as a stable, peaceful, and harmonious nation was shaken to its core.

The aims and ideas of the perpetrator of the July 22 attacks could be found in a manifesto, published on the Internet that same afternoon, entitled “A European Declaration of Independence”. Therein, he called for a radical departure from current “political correctness” and a fight to reestablish European hegemony against inferior peoples.

The terrorist’s actions shocked Norway and the world. They also reminded us of the fact that in a modern democracy, we have to live with deep-seated differences and disagreements. The very nature of democracy is plural and heterogeneous. How do we avoid that spilling over into violence and terror?

The NECORE project takes as its point of departure that a society needs certain shared values in order to build resilience and resistance against violent conflict and terror. These values must not get in the way of disagreement and debate. Striking that balance is difficult, but it is arguably one of our most important tasks today.
Memory and Conflict

Memories are often used to legitimate conflict. This happens, for instance, when it is claimed that what was once done against one’s nation or group was so grave, so unfair, that one must fight back and reclaim one’s rights and one’s identity. Keeping such memories alive through narratives and commemoration often legitimates continued or even renewed conflict. How can we find ways of preserving and talking about memories that do not foment conflict, but instead create understanding and respect?

Memories are particular, yet at the same time they reveal something much more general about being human. I believe that it is only by recognizing this that we can have open and honest dialogues about memories. The perpetrator of the July 22 attacks drew on an understanding of history and memory that portrayed European history as being starkly and monolithically opposed to other civilizations and histories. That understanding tragically leaves little room for the common traits of memories, not least the fact that we all have identities, and we all have our commemorations, while being bound to live in the same world. Granted, each memory is unique. But memory is also a shared phenomenon: to have memories per se, and to fight against the marginalization of one’s memories and historical narratives, is deeply human. So is the need to comprehend injustice.

One of the core values of a post-July 22 society should indeed be openness; we must foster an openness to diverse narratives about memory and identity. We need to learn to live side by side with our different memories. We are creatures of history: we need to recognize that this is not in itself a threat to civilization, but an enduring part of the human condition.
How to unite citizens’ differences in increasingly diverse societies is a pressing concern all over Europe. A key challenge is to foster unity in diversity, whilst ensuring sufficient space for disagreement in the public sphere. In other words, we are confronted with a balancing act between cultivating unity and simultaneously allowing a wide enough space for disagreement and diversity.

Exploring the experiences of 21 influential actors in Norwegian public debate in the aftermath of the July 22 terror attacks, we identified both consensus-oriented and contestation-oriented approaches. We find that a balance of such approaches is necessary, in order to counter conflictual polarization and to avoid escalation of enemy images in public debate and society at large. The reason for this is not least that polarization in public debate contributes to producing and reinforcing enemy images. Such images entrench us-and-them divides, and are arguably a threat to democracy and to uniting citizens across various political outlooks, religions, and ethnicities. Countering polarization in public debate is therefore an intrinsic part of any effort to foster unity in diversity and to safeguard democracy.
The manner in which influential actors carry out public debate has direct consequences for individuals’ everyday engagement with debates about ethnic and religious diversity. 40 interviews in Oslo and Southern Norway indicate that it is common to experience public debate about ethnic and religious diversity as a matter of being “for” or “against” immigration, with limited space for expressing nuanced opinions. This polarization leaves sections of the public experiencing that their perspectives are not represented in public debate – regardless of whether they identify with the right or left side of the Norwegian political landscape. Furthermore, immigration and integration being highly controversial topics, some people more or less completely disengage from debating immigration in general or in certain arenas. They do so by avoiding everyday encounters where their opinions may cause frictions or be brushed aside as illegitimate. In some cases, they may reject the political establishment or mainstream media – in parts or entirely – and seek arenas where their perspectives are confirmed and legitimized. Such patterns run counter to the expressed ideas of “more openness” and a strengthened democracy in the wake of July 22.

Disengaged Public

Rojan Tordhol Ezzati
Doctoral Researcher at PRIO
(Peace Research Institute Oslo)
In the aftermath of July 22, 2011, references to “our values”, in stark contrast to the perpetrator’s values, were common. What is it about values that make them such a strong mobilizing tool to unify “us” in times of crisis? This was one of the questions inspiring the idea behind NECORE. An analysis of op-eds about July 22 over the three years that followed the attacks reveals a duality in the ways politicians, researchers, and media commentators talk about values: Values are often referred to as durable, agreed-upon ideals. As such, they are perceived to say something about “who we are”. However, what this something is depends very much on who you ask. This latter aspect is often missing in media, political, and academic references to values. While values as *ideals* had a unifying effect right after July 22, over time there is a need for incorporating existing *disagreements* about the origin, content, and implications of those values. Failing to do so reinforces the widespread tendency to mistakenly distinguish between “our values” and “their values” as static entities that are agreed upon once and for all. This can have a strong polarizing effect in society.

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**Collective Values and Collective Identities**

*Rojan Tordhol Ezzati*

Doctoral Researcher at PRIO (Peace Research Institute Oslo)
Studying how mainstream media helped orchestrate the national debate in the aftermath of the 2011 Oslo terror attacks, we have documented how the media are constitutive for resilience and recovery after national trauma. A broad literature argues that during and following national crises, the media move away from their everyday critical function to a ritual type of journalism, fostering adherence to shared values and support for national authorities. Based on our in-depth interviews with Norwegian debate editors, we have analysed how this type of national crisis discourse is substantiated and guarded through editorial decisions and policies. This furthermore gives us insights into how changes in the perceived climate of opinion and emerging critical voices gradually affect editorial practices and challenge the national consensus. Overall, editors representing the main national media express a stronger responsibility as guardians of a “master narrative” than their colleagues in the regional and niche media, who also emphasise the critical watchdog role. Our study argues that it is necessary to combine critical approaches (the media as channels for political authorities during crisis) and what we might call “cultural” approaches (the media as masters of ceremony) to crisis journalism in the contemporary multi-platform, multi-directional media landscape.

Kjersti Thorbjørnsrud
Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Social Research, Oslo
Terror attacks force democratic societies to mobilize, reinforce, and rethink core values, including media freedom and freedom of speech. We have studied how the traumatic events of July 22, 2011 challenged editorial practices related to editorial control and open debate in major Norwegian media organizations. Meeting the call for more research on disruptive media events in a hybrid media landscape, our analysis sheds light on how the professional media balance critical debate on the one hand with strategies for societal recovery in contemporary post-crisis contexts on the other. Based on in-depth interviews with debate editors, the study documents how terror profoundly challenges editorial practices, routines, and norms in media organizations, especially when debates are carried on in multiple formats and platforms. We find that in their online comment sections, the media organizations all moved towards a more interventionist policy, introducing multiple new control measures. For the debate editors, (re)gaining control of the online comment sections was the primary task in the immediate aftermath of the attacks. In the traditional op-ed formats, however, they selectively expanded the range of voices and included actors deemed too extreme prior to the attacks. When such deviating voices were included, the editors stressed the need to expose, contextualize, and counter these radical-right actors by bringing in responses from authoritative experts.

Tine Ustad Figenschou
Associate Professor at the Oslo and Akershus University College
Emergencies and emergency management are shaping the security politics of our time. In Norway, official reactions to the terror attacks in 2011 expressed a shift towards dealing with the unexpected. Two key terms illustrate this: preparedness and resilience. “Preparedness” has since 2011 become part of the name and mandate of the Ministry of Justice (“Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet”), and the concept of resilience has come to characterize a new understanding of security. Security is constantly generated in response to danger and is increasingly dependent on both planned and spontaneous forms of citizens’ self-organization. The concepts of preparedness and resilience describe the ability of society to handle the unexpected and to react spontaneously to emergencies. My research shows that the Internet and digital information flows are not only an integral part of how and where emergencies appear and are communicated, but also that they have come to influence emergency responses. Social media, cyber exercises, and computer programs do not only produce a lot of information. This data is increasingly used to deal with emergencies and restore security, meaning that digital information meets – and makes – what we might call “security in-formation”. In other words, not only does an increasing amount of information about emergencies circulate online, but digital data also contributes to security being “in formation”. Through all of this, digital information creates new relationships between people, emergencies, and self-care.

Mareile Kaufmann
Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Oslo
After the 2011 Norway terror attacks, the issue of free speech has been high on the agenda. In the often fierce debates, free speech has generally been viewed as a central Norwegian value. However, there have been strong disputes about whether free speech should be as limitless as possible, or whether it should be in some way legally constrained in order to ensure respect for minorities and avoid hate speech. Others have viewed this mainly as a moral, not a legal question. Does free speech, even if legally almost unconstrained, entail a moral responsibility with reference to its motivation, content, and potential consequences? Should this moral responsibility be based on what we might call “civility norms”, and if so, how should these be formulated? If we view free speech as a universal human right, does that at the same time entail the recognition of everyone’s dignity? I believe that free speech will be part of a continued value negotiation among citizens with diverse identities for many years to come. In light of this diversity, and the lack of consensus over the ultimate justification for free speech, a moral “free speech responsibility” – regarding both the protection and
News not only announces events that have happened; it also attempts to explain them. These explanations often contain the germ of a socially normative response—unintentionally or deliberately—that helps to direct both short-term actions and longer-term policy. Explanations tend to gravitate towards culturally established and accepted frames, and thus reveal pre-existing predilections. Comparing the US and Norwegian responses to the terror attacks in Oslo and at Utøya reveals a series of contrasting patterns in attitudes towards law enforcement, the ethics of intervention, the underlying causes of the event, and the lessons learned. Where Norwegian reactions initially avoided critical debate of the police or questions of how the terror attacks could have been avoided, US media were quick to ask questions about what went wrong and by implication promote certain solutions. My research examines the different ways in which the news plays a role in creating a framework for understanding, explaining, and responding to events. I focus on the cognitive processes of causal reasoning in the news, aiming to bring out the underlying assumptions, the emotions and implied values, and the suggested plans of action that help determine how we as a society examine our past and take charge of our future.
Selected NECORE publications

Here is a selection of publications from the NECORE project. Most of these texts have been written as a direct part of NECORE, while some are also part of other projects that our researchers have been involved with. In addition, several opinion articles, blog posts, and nine newsletters have been produced. These can be found at www.prio.org/NECORE.

Publications that are freely available online are marked with an Open Access logo and accompanied by a link to the publication.

In 2018, an anthology of articles from NECORE, with a summary and overview of the entire project, will be published as an open-access book with Cappelen Damm publishers.
Ezzati, Rojan Tordhol and Marta Bivand Erdal (2017) ‘Do we have to agree? Accommodating unity in diversity in post-terror Norway.’ *Ethnicities.*

Ezzati, Rojan Tordhol (in progress, to be published 2018) ‘Why Do People (Dis) engage in Debates about Diversity? Insights from Post-Terror Norway.’


We are grateful to our funder, the Research Council of Norway, our Advisory Board, our colleagues, and all the individuals who shared their thoughts and experiences through interviews and conversations and thereby made this research possible.
NECORE is a research project that has brought together researchers from several academic fields and institutions to ask the question: ‘where do we go from here?’ after the tragedy that took place in Oslo and at Utøya on July 22, 2011. NECORE stands for “Negotiating Values: Collective Identities and Resilience after 22/7”. Through studies of individual and collective self-understandings, of the media, of the emergency response, and of values such as freedom, democracy, dialogue, and memory in the wake of the terrorist attacks, NECORE asks questions – and tries to provide some answers – about modern Norwegian society and its foundations.