

## Editorial Remarks: Youth at Risk

Wilhelm Heitmeyer, Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence, University of Bielefeld, Germany  
Steven F. Messner, University at Albany, United States

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Youth must always be analysed with respect to two aspects: Firstly, as a societally shaped phase of life that varies socially and culturally across countries and regions, characterized by different chances of social integration and dangers of disintegration. Secondly, as individual biographies playing out in a specific societal dynamic of integration/disintegration, where experiences with violence as perpetrators or victims play an important role.

Life in particular societal constellations presents risks for certain parts of the young generation, just as the behavior of youth may itself pose risks in some societal situations. The way the general relationship varies across different national and cultural contexts is the question we have chosen to home in on in this issue of the journal. Post-war, post-dictatorial, developing, transformative, and precarious societal contexts form consistent points of reference for the contributions, which include both country-specific case studies and comparative investigations.

In the Central and South American context, our frame is shaped by post-dictatorial and post-war factors:

*Alejandro Isla* and *Daniel Pedro Míguez* consider the origination of violence in post-dictatorial contexts, focusing on confrontational mechanisms between the police and the young urban poor in contemporary Argentina. Their research seeks to explain the underlying processes behind the growth in crime rates and increases in lethal police/civilian encounters during the 1990s. They call attention to

the important role of transformations of the social structure (such as growing unemployment and poverty) and repressive traditions that have been re-invigorated in recent years.

*Anika Oettler* focuses on the Central American fear of youth, especially in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, which is driven by the magnitude of the regional drug trade and the rates of murder attributed to youth gangs. Oettler explores national differences and variations in threat levels and patterns of attention, arguing fundamentally that current Central American debates on juvenile delinquency are closely intertwined with national and transnational myths that provide citizens with a significant frame of meaning.

In the African context it is development conditions, post-war constellations, and the role of the state that are of prime importance:

*Josjah Kunkeler* and *Krijn Peters* address the issue of youth, armed conflict, and urban violence in developing countries, starting from the observation that young people are major participants in contemporary intra-state armed conflicts. They argue that such involvement is often portrayed as criminal violence rather than as political or ideologically motivated struggles, demonstrating this in a study of the post-war reconstruction phase in Sierra Leone. Their thesis is that the urban youth violence in many developing countries should not be separated from its political roots.

Marc Sommers' issue is security, governance, and Africa's youth bulge. Examining the cases of Rwanda and Burundi, he argues that African governments and their international supporters are frequently underinformed about the priorities of most youth, resulting in distorted assessments of everyday realities. Sommers concludes that the relations between states and their massive populations of young, marginalized, and alienated citizens directly impacts the security and development prospects of African nations.

In the European context we are looking at adolescents and their attitude to violence in the context of rapid transformation processes and social instability:

Eva M. Groß and Berit Haußmann report comparative research in Eastern European transformation societies, investigating whether circumstances since the collapse of communism have affected the motives that underlie adolescents' approval of violence. Their questionnaire survey allows them to compare cities in Russia, Poland, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic with one another and with western and eastern Germany. They draw on Institutional Anomie Theory to interpret the findings, arguing that the results support the hypothesis that problematic institutional adap-

tation processes in situations of rapid transformation can foster instrumental motivations for youth violence.

David Hugh-Jones, Alexia Katsnidou, and Gerhard Riener report a laboratory experiment based on Greek students in the context of the December 2008 riots in Greece, after the killing of a fifteen-year-old student by a policeman. They test whether media reports can affect people's willingness to harm those in opposing political groups by examining students' allocations between themselves and others in modified dictator games. The results indicate that media reports can have appreciable effects, although the patterns are not entirely consistent with influential theories. The authors believe that experimental work will become increasingly important in studying the motivations behind political protest, contentious politics, and even civil conflict.

We are delighted that the contributions exhibit such a broad spectrum of methodology, ranging from constructivist discourse analysis to attitude surveys and experimental approaches. Taken together they supply ample justification for the framing of our focus section: Youth at Risk.

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