

Fear and insecurity in the politics of austerity

Janne Autto, Jukka Törrönen & Jef Huysmans

To cite this article: Janne Autto, Jukka Törrönen & Jef Huysmans (2021): Fear and insecurity in the politics of austerity, European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology, DOI: [10.1080/23254823.2021.1888763](https://doi.org/10.1080/23254823.2021.1888763)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23254823.2021.1888763>



© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 26 Feb 2021.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 230





[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)

Fear and insecurity in the politics of austerity

Janne Autto ^a, Jukka Törrönen ^b and Jef Huysmans ^c

^aUniversity of Lapland; ^bStockholm University; ^cQueen Mary University of London

ABSTRACT

This paper examines how fear and insecurity are deployed in disputes over austerity. Drawing on discussions on the cultures of fear and on the social and political process which weaves fear and insecurity into the fabric of society, we analyse how austerity was justified and opposed in the Finnish parliament in 2015. We bring out different renditions of fear in five registers of justification that were deployed in the dispute. The registers evoked fear with threats to national sovereignty, dangers to societal security, and threats of harm and vulnerability. In addition, the registers evoked fear by drawing rhetorical force from the welfare state identity and by intertwining fear with political trust. Even though the renditions of fear played an important role, our findings also speak against straightforward interpretation of the politics of austerity as an example of moving into a culture of fear and insecurity.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 13 March 2020; Accepted 4 January 2021

KEYWORDS Austerity; politics of fear; trust; welfare state; insecurity

Introduction

The politics of austerity, which spread to a number of Western countries in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2007–2008, is often associated with fear. Fears regarding the functioning of the economy and, especially, excessive government debt are a major motivation and justification for austerity (Blyth, 2013). The post-crisis political scenarios often evoked a fear of national bankruptcy resulting from a major budget deficit. As economist Paul Krugman (2015) states, ‘Every country running significant budget deficits – as nearly all were in the aftermath of the financial crisis – was deemed at imminent risk of becoming another Greece unless it immediately began cutting spending and raising taxes’. Yet, later the dreaded example of Greece was broadly seen more as a unique case (Krugman,

CONTACT Janne Autto  janne.autto@ulapland.fi

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

2015). The need to assuage the fears of external creditors, investors, corporations and even households is also used as a justification for austerity (Blyth, 2013; Bryan & Rafferty, 2017, p. 342; Cairns, de Almeida Alves, Alexandre, & Correia, 2016; Schäfer & Streeck, 2013, p. 20). Moreover, according to Mabel Berezin (2013, p. 258), the sovereign debt crisis had a significant impact on the political atmosphere in Europe: it speeded up the normalisation of the right and shook optimistic views of a united Europe which, according to Berezin, created a threat that fear and pessimism would become dominant political emotions.

Besides economic fears, the politics of austerity is argued to be based on moral fears. According to John Clarke and Janet Newman, the politics of austerity takes in a fear of moral disorder or ‘demoralisation’, which is ‘seen as the result of dependency-inducing statism and welfarism’ (2012, pp. 310–311). Moreover, political unrest and protest are seen as manifestations of moral disorder. On the other hand, as ‘(e)xpenditure cuts carry a significant risk of increasing the frequency of riots, anti-government demonstrations, general strikes, political assassinations, and attempts at revolutionary overthrow of the established order’, these are mentioned as fear-related reasons why governments want to avoid austerity measures (Ponticelli & Voth, 2011, pp. 24–25; see also Clarke & Newman, 2012, pp. 308–309).

Even though fear obviously seems to play an essential part in the politics of austerity, there is a lack of research on the relation between austerity and fear, not to mention the relation between austerity and the politics of fear. The politics of fear is rarely mentioned in the context of austerity; it is only regarded as a result of austerity and as taking a form of hostility towards ‘the others’, such as towards the unemployed and immigrants, or towards dissident voices, and blaming them for economic problems (Arampatzi, 2017; Bramall, 2013, p. 21). This kind of politics of fear is also contested ‘from below’ (Arampatzi, 2017). Salomi Boukala’s and Dimitra Dimitrakopoulou’s study (2017) makes an exception, as it analyses how the two main parties in Greece—the radical left *Syriza* and the conservative *New Democracy*—legitimated their political lines through a politics of fear and a politics of hope in the 2015 election and referendum campaigns. Their analysis shows that *New Democracy* constructed a fear that *Syriza* would drive the nation back to the hardships of austerity, which *Syriza* counterargued by linking fears towards austerity with threats to European heritage. The authors also show how political dichotomies are rhetorically constructed through fear and hope, but they do not focus on how the politics of fear works in political debates over austerity.

In this paper, we examine how fear and insecurity are deployed in disputes over austerity. The examination is grounded in discussions on the cultures of fear, and more broadly on the prevalence of social and political processes which weave fear and insecurity into the fabric of societies (Bourke, 2005; Furedi, 2002; Glassner, 1999; Isin, 2004). Our aim is not to illustrate the politics of austerity as yet another example of the presence of cultures of fear. Instead, we will show through the case of Finnish debates on austerity that there are different ways in which fear and insecurity have been introduced into political discussions on the socio-economic conditions following the financial crisis of 2007–2008. Fear is not a single political resource, but takes on different shapes within different discourses. We will also show that the registers of justification at play in these debates do not all foreground fear and insecurity, but also seek to organise the polity, for instance in terms of trust and equality.

With ‘registers of justification’ we mean the common ways of judging the fairness of austerity by defending it or opposing it. Our way of identifying registers and analysing their rhetorical use is influenced by Luc Boltanski’s and Laurent Thevenot’s (2006) idea on different types, more or less culturally shared ‘common worlds’ that can be used as a resource in justification without driving a dispute to a state of conflict. However, instead of using the concept of common world we use the concept of register to emphasise justification’s transformative, relational, and dialogical character. Rather than existing as pre-made worlds, registers’ content, meaning, shape and rhetorical force vary from context to context, in argumentative relation to each other. Furthermore, in accordance with pragmatic sociology our study aims to be analytically descriptive (see Boltanski, 2011) in contrast to the research that is based on normative presumptions or on a critical explanatory stance as is the case, for example, with studies that apply critical theories or critical discourse analysis.

In the paper, we firstly present discussions on the politics of fear and introduce the Finnish case. Secondly, we examine how austerity was disputed in the Finnish Parliament in 2015 and how the politics of fear was shaped through five registers of justification. The first three evoke fear through insecurities: (a) threats to national sovereignty; (b) dangers to societal security; and (c) harm and vulnerability. The fourth and fifth registers evoke fear by other means than security. One register draws rhetorical force from the welfare state identity, while the other intertwines with political trust. In the concluding section, we summarise our

findings on the politics of austerity and discuss them in terms of fear and political culture in general.

Examining austerity in light of the politics of fear

The link between austerity, fear, and insecurity can be seen as a manifestation of the presence of cultures of fear, which refers to the cultural circulation and sustaining of the 'belief that humanity is confronted by powerful destructive forces that threaten our everyday existence' (Furedi, 2002, p. vii). The socio-economic conditions triggering calls for austerity policies appear as yet another catastrophe, disaster, or existential crisis; one among the many that circulate and are enacted for example in entertainment, economics, politics, art, and news bulletins. Fear and insecurity have thus become a multiplicity of things: a resource of political debate and legitimacy, an organising principle of cultural scripts, a distinct mode of governing and citizenship, and a mode of legal practice (Aradau & van Munster, 2011, p. 336; Bourke, 2005; Isin, 2004; Sunstein, 2005).

Read against this background, the political debate on austerity appears as an expression of broader developments that allow turning fear into a political resource within parliamentary politics. In this context, both the content and the form of the enunciations of fear – the specific catastrophes or disasters – circulating in political debates are simply epiphenomenal. The key sociological issues to examine for understanding what is going on and what 'austerity' means in terms of a politics of fear are then the cultural, economic, political, and societal processes that generate fear as an organising device across society and situations, of which the political debate is but one expression.

In our opinion, this would be a mistake. It is worth looking more closely at how fear, insecurity, and disasters are deployed in disputes in the professional political field. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the political field is a distinct arena of practice that is not just an effect of socio-economic forces but has a degree of autonomy. It is a key field through which the integration of and connecting within a polity are generated and shaped. As Franz Neumann (1996 [1953]) extensively argued in the 1950s, following his study of the rise of Fascism in Germany, making fear and anxiety central organising principles of politics raises serious questions about democratic politics. Instead of pointing out that austerity politics is connected to the rise of fascism or similar authoritarian modes of politics, we deem it important to consider how fear and

insecurity are circulating as a resource within politics to understand how they operate and affect what is considered legitimate political practice. Discourses enacted in parliamentary disputes are a factor in the shaping and contesting of political legitimacy. We analyse this politics of fear by means of discursive registers of justification that draw on insecurities. In other words, fear is not primarily treated as a cultural product or analysed in terms of non-representational affect (Massumi, 1993). It is instead analysed by looking at how political justifications in disputes over austerity policies foreground and circulate insecurities. Within the broader debates on the study of emotions, we align with the argument for the continuing importance to study discourse (Wetherell, 2013) and do so within a broader analytical framework that focuses on registers of justification and their deployment in disputes (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999).

The second reason for us to examine parliamentary debates from the perspective of the politics of fear is to show that the debates articulate multiple discourses and thus cannot be reduced to the repetitive reinforcing of a politics of fear and insecurity. Politics is about disputes in which there is disagreement and conflict between participants on the accounts of situations and on the justifications of policy and value preferences. As we show through the case of Finnish debates on austerity, there are different ways in which fear and insecurity are introduced into the justification of various political reactions to socio-economic conditions following the year 2008. A detailed analysis of parliamentary disputes thus provides a nuanced analysis of the politics of fear, allowing us to observe how political austerity involves conceptualisations of fear that are tied to the justification of socio-political answers to economic challenges. Thus, rather than being a clear-cut entity, the politics of fear is a multifaceted phenomenon. The analysis also importantly nuances a reading that assumes we are indeed living in societies and polities of fear, by showing that the disputes over austerity do not simply deploy various registers of fear but also bring into play registers that work against a politics of fear. The latter is important because it cautions against understanding the politics of fear as expressing a major structural change towards societies and cultures of fear. The Finnish debates clearly show that we cannot reduce the political disputes on austerity to registers of insecurity. They include other important registers, in particular ones that foreground trust and equality rather than fear.

The case of Finland

We examine the deployment of fear and insecurities in the politics of austerity by analysing disputes over austerity policy in the Finnish parliament following the introduction of the Government Programme in May 2015. The previous government had already made spending cuts as a reaction to a prolonged economic downturn and growing public debt (Elomäki & Kantola, 2017, p. 231). However, a sharp turn towards embracing austerity took place in the parliamentary election of 2015 (see Autto & Törrönen, 2019, p. 79). The *Left Alliance* was the only major party defending reflationary policy instead of public spending cuts, which was interpreted as a major cause for their loss in the election.

The three parties receiving the most votes – the conservative *Centre Party*, the populist *Finns Party*, and the right-wing *National Coalition* – formed the new government. They sought to implement three measures to improve the national economy, each in keeping with the transnational austerity discourse (see Blyth, 2013; Farnsworth & Irving, 2018). Firstly, there would be spending cuts of four billion Euros. Secondly, the government would conclude a ‘social contract’, later dubbed the ‘competitiveness pact’ in order to improve national competitiveness by cutting labour costs. This included a freeze on salary rises, longer working hours, and higher pension contributions by employees (see Adkins, Kortesoja, Mannevu, & Ylöstalo, 2019). Thirdly, the government would strive to reduce bureaucracy and public regulation which, among other issues, would make it easier for employers to hire workers.

Even though austerity prevailed in discussions during the election campaign, the government’s announcement on the actual austerity measures aroused heavy criticism and protests. In a two-day parliamentary debate on the Government Programme, the austerity measures were heavily criticised by the opposition parties – even some MPs of the government parties concurred with the critique. In the following sections, we examine the dispute over the government’s austerity policies. We start by describing registers of justification which play on fears related to insecurity, after which we discuss registers of fear that have a looser connection to security threats and other risks.

The register of national security: Loss of sovereignty

In the studied parliamentary debates (see [Appendix](#)), the justifications for austerity are strongly based on existential threats to the sovereignty of

Finland. The government parties in particular play in various ways on fears of losing national independence. One of the key methods through which this securitising register (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998; Wæver, 1995) is shaped is the repetition of warnings that Finland would end up following ‘the path of Greece’ if tough austerity policies were not implemented. Using the reference to Greece, the government parties present the economic crisis as a matter of national security. In doing so, the government essentially demands that its austerity policies are to be given absolute priority and that extraordinary measures are a legitimate possibility (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 24). According to the government parties, by postponing austerity measures the country would run the risk of losing its power to make independent national decisions. Various images are employed to circulate this security register. They include ‘men with black briefcases’, familiar from news footage on the crisis of Greece where ‘men with black briefcases’ represent a takeover of national policies by the Troika of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund (see also Autto & Törrönen, 2019, p. 85):

‘... it is important that we keep these things in our own hands and not go down the path of Greece, which one day would lead to a situation where we cannot decide on financial matters by ourselves. If that happens, men with black briefcases will come and make our decisions for us’ (Hannu Hoskonen, Centre Party, record 13/2015);

‘When reforms are forgotten for a long time, one is forced on a road of cuts. Now we must simultaneously save and follow through major reforms. Finland has only two options: whether we make reforms by ourselves or someone does it for us. The child prodigy of the European economy has become a country running the risk of falling into a process of excessive deficit and Brussel’s budget control. We want to keep things in our own hands and make the needed decisions by ourselves. (...) We cannot continue on this road anymore’ (Prime Minister Juha Sipilä, Centre Party, record 13/2015).

Besides justifying austerity policies, the threat to national independence is used through imagery of Greece criticising the economic thinking of the left-wing parties who are in the opposition. For example, a member of the Finns Party asks if the left-wing parties are still saying “no” to adjustments, “yes” to additional debt, “yes” to the line of Greece, “yes” to that what happened to Syriza in Greece – in other words, “yes” to tying Finland to the Troika’s apron strings’ (Simon Elo, Finns Party, record 13/2015).

Other imageries through which the securitisation of economic policies takes place include the following:

1. Describing the nation as a 'sinking boat' and austerity measures as an attempt to keep it afloat;
2. Evoking a nationalist spirit by urging people 'to save the future of the fatherland' and 'to work for change which is needed to save Finland' (Minister of the Interior Sampo Terho, Finns Party, record 13/2015);
3. Equating the situation with the national hardships during the war and austerity policies with the post-war efforts to reconstruct the country (see also Bramall, 2013; Forkert, 2017) – imagery that is only very rarely brought up in parliamentary debate;
4. Describing Finland as being under threat of 'bankruptcy' with its lost competitiveness (Minister of the Interior Sampo Terho, Finns Party, record 13/2015) and as being vulnerable to cuts similar to those experienced by other EU countries in the worst cases.

This imagery portrays a dramatic situation in which the sovereignty of Finland is at stake. When linked to austerity measures as the necessary policy to address the situation, such securitisation seems to make austerity an undebatable, necessary policy option that urgently requires implementation. Moreover, by evoking a fear of even more dramatic and painful adjustment measures that would follow if austerity measures are not implemented immediately, any alternatives to austerity measures are rendered unthinkable because they would risk our national independence and increase the number of other adverse effects (see also Blyth, 2013; Clarke & Newman, 2012). Those defending austerity measures on these grounds repeatedly proclaim that they understand the pain that the measures will cause and that they would act otherwise if it were possible. In particular, the Centre Party and the Finns Party, which were not in the previous government, turn to 'blame avoidance' (Clarke & Newman, 2012; Giger & Nelson, 2010) by stating that they have no other options because the previous government neglected the needed adjustment measures (see also Autto & Törrönen, 2019): 'It is the last moment to turn the course of Finland' (Prime Minister Juha Sipilä, Centre Party, record 13/2015).¹

The register of societal security: Tearing the nation in two?

Opposition to austerity measures securitises the economic situation differently. Whereas government parties tend to foreground the threats of lost

national independence and economic solvency, metaphorically expressed as ‘Finland cannot go down the path of Greece’, opposition parties draw attention to the danger of austerity policy to societal security – the cohesion and unity of Finnish society – rather than external or internal dangers to sovereignty.² Especially, representatives of the Social Democratic Party and the Left Alliance argue that the government’s austerity measures risk undermining social peace and national unity. A Social Democratic Party MP describes this as a road to ‘serious conflicts’:

The fourth cornerstone [of a Nordic welfare society] consists of a culture of consensus and agreement. Earlier in the debate I cited an Aalto University research professor’s text from yesterday. I’ll read it once again here, that section: ‘Finland is an agreement society, blackmail does not work here. It is wild indeed: if you do not agree to salary cuts, we will punish the whole society with €1.5 billion cuts. We are on a way to serious conflicts’. If you do not believe us, the social democrats, believe at least the research professor (Maarit Feldt-Ranta, Social Democratic Party, record 14/2015).

Besides highlighting a narrative strategy of calling on experts to legitimise and provide credibility to a political point of view, a key theme of this discursive register is the social unfairness of austerity measures and the divisions they create in society. Austerity measures are criticised for being targeted at the most vulnerable social groups, such as people with a low income, the unemployed, pensioners, families with children, people with illness, the disabled, and workers in the public sector (especially women) who make up the majority of public-sector workers. The well-off, on the other hand, are seen to be left outside the ‘shared belt-tightening effort’. A representative of the Social Democratic Party, for example, questions the government’s nautical metaphor, according to which ‘we all are in the same boat’, by referring to special treatment of the elite and endangering of the life chances of other citizens: ‘Do you think it is fair that everyone is put in the same boat but only the citizens who have the highest status are given a life jacket?’ (Pia Viitanen, Social Democratic Party, record 14/2015). The unfairness of austerity unites the opposition parties regardless of their differences. For example, the Christian Democrats and Swedish People’s Party are generally milder in their critique of austerity policies, but now they do raise the theme of unfairness and inequality. Even some representatives of two government parties, the Centre Party and the Finns Party, criticise the unfairness of the austerity measures.

As the opposition parties at times explicitly articulate, the unequal treatment is not just a matter of fairness, but also of deepening social differences and dividing the nation into two.

‘This right-wing government, by its agenda and cuts, divides the Finnish society in a very unjust way into two groups, those who will succeed and those who will lose’ (Antti Rinne, Social Democratic Party, record 13/2015);

‘[By the government’s austerity policy] the rich get richer, the poor get poorer’ (Antti Lindtman, Social Democratic Party, record 13/2015);

‘The first aim of the government seems to be the protection and expansion of the privileges of the elite’ (Anna Kontula, Left Alliance, record 13/2015);

‘In terms of the cuts, we are not in the same boat, as the prime minister himself also confessed. Income differences will increase and inequality will grow’ (Aino-Kaisa Pekonen, Left Alliance, record 13/2015).

In this context, an MP of the Social Democratic Party refers to the well-known statement ‘What would we then be fighting for?’ by which Winston Churchill opposed cutting the budget for culture to support war efforts. In the spirit of this example, the MP states that she cannot accept ‘a budget adjustment that breaches the fundamental principles of the welfare state and increases inequality in our society’. She further argues that Finland would not be saved ‘by cutting services and by impoverishing people but, instead, by seeking ways to increase growth and employment’ (Satu Taavitsainen, Social Democratic Party, record 14/2015).

The division of society is linked to internal public security concerns. The discursive register securitises unfairness by asserting that an increase in inequality leads to an increase in social disorder and conflicts. For example, opposition parties point out that countries with great inequalities have the greatest problems with internal public security. They mobilise academic experts and church representatives, among others, who warn that austerity measures that overlook the fair participation of the well-off can trigger serious confrontations between groups of people:

The domestic security level in countries with the largest income disparities is always lower than in countries with the smallest income disparities.

Likewise, countries with the lowest income disparities score best in terms of productivity and economy. Perhaps for this reason, surprisingly many emeritus professors, archbishops and other people have raised their voice,

immediately after publication of the Government Program, appealing to the government to discontinue this trend of inequality (Sirpa Paatero, Social Democratic Party, record 14/2015).

A Left Alliance member expresses this internal dimension of the societal security register in a more accusatory way, by asking if the internal security budget is increased during austerity policies simply because the government is aware of the security risks of its austerity policies:

In early spring, I took part in a parliamentary working group on internal security and judicature, and there are several representatives on this floor who also participated in this group. During this work, it appeared that one, if not even the greatest, risk for Finland's internal security is increasing inequality, and I am very concerned about this. However, the government seems to have noticed this. Is this the very reason, honoured Minister of the Interior, why there is a proposal for an additional 50 million euros to the budget of internal security, so that security can be maintained while inequality in Finland is increasing? (Aino-Kaisa Pekonen, Left Alliance, record 13/2015).

The fear that the austerity measures intensify the division of society into two opposing groups is in the societal security register connected to a fear that the austerity measures would lead Finland to a political and social crisis, by ending a long-standing culture of compromise and trust between the social partners. While the government emphasises the importance of configuring a 'social contract' covering all main actors to achieve a leap forward in competitiveness involving a five per cent reduction in labour costs, the opposition accuses the government of trying to enforce the contract through blackmail by threatening the parties with bigger cuts and increased taxation, should the labour market organisations not accept it (see also Autto & Törrönen, 2019, p. 89). Thus, the opposition parties refer to the social contract as a 'Sicilian agreement' and 'tightening the screw' that benefits the side of employers. Along with Antti Rinne, the leader of Social Democratic Party, they also warn about counterreactions if people feel threatened and pressured by the contract and the 'mess' it creates (record 14/2015). Another MP of the Social Democratic Party equates the aim to build a social contract with similar kinds of efforts made in the early 1990s, leading to a serious economic and political crisis:

Based on the way of pushing this social contract through, I sense elements very similar to those in the beginning of the 1990s, when the Aho-Viinanen government declared cuts in unemployment benefits and abolishment of the general validity of agreements, and there were many other cuts as well. Then what happened? We had a societal crisis. I was on the Senate Square too, we were 50,000

workers from the central organisations of trade unions protesting against cuts, which were decided on unilaterally but which were also cancelled because of the threat of a general strike. I do not wish, in the situation that Finland is in at the moment, that this government of ours run by Sipilä plunges Finland into the same situation as we had in 1991. I am behind social agreement as the social democrats are in general. On equal terms, as in these negotiations throughout my working life, employers and workers meet one another. That way, we might improve our economy in the following years (Harry Wallin, Social Democratic Party, record 14/2015).

The background to this is the international economic downturn that Finland faced in the 1990s. It was deepened further by the collapse of the Soviet Union which was then a major export destination of Finland. At that time the government made large-scale public spending cuts by implementing the so called ‘cheese-slicer’ policy or, in other words, by making cuts equally in all policy sectors, which is often framed as a success story (Autto & Törrönen, 2019, p. 84). However, the policy was also criticised as a move away from the Nordic welfare state model towards a competition state (see Kantola & Kananen, 2013). In opposing the societal security register, an MP of a government party draws on the *success story* framing of the earlier cuts, stating that the Government rode out the ‘storm’ by making even greater public spending cuts than the current government is doing. Because of the tough cutting decisions, ‘Finland took off and the economy grew robustly over the next ten years’ (Arto Satonen, record 13/2015).

It follows that there are two different securitising registers at play in the politicisation of austerity. The national security register justifies and contests austerity on the grounds of its possible consequences for national independence and imageries of war and survival. The societal security register justifies and contests the policies on the grounds of social peace and cohesion as well as internal security. Although the former has been extensively mobilised by pro-austerity parties and the latter by those opposing austerity policies, our main point here is not to make a simple distinction between government and opposition, but rather to argue that political debates on austerity circulate a variety of fears and insecurities in the political system, inviting disagreements to be expressed through the national and societal security registers. Before turning to a non-security register pertaining to the questions of equality and welfare, we will introduce a third security register; one that foregrounds harm.

The register of harm and vulnerability

While the societal security register draws on internal and public security and the breakdown of social cohesion, its references to unfairness speak of not only inequality, but also the suffering of particular groups of people. The latter stands out as a distinct security register, because rather than narrating austerity as effecting social and political conflict, it foregrounds how austerity causes harm to groups and individuals. In security debates, harm and vulnerability are key registers for drawing attention from dangers faced by macro-entities, in particular the state and society in this case, to dangers faced by specific social strata, communities and/or individuals (Burgess & Taylor, 2004; Linklater, 2011). In the Finnish political dispute over austerity, the politicians foreground moral fears and obligations, and make a temporal difference between present and future harm as drivers for supporting or opposing austerity.

Interestingly, those supporting austerity do recognise that the harmful consequences of the policies are not evenly spread throughout society. For example, Prime Minister Sipilä (record 13/2015) admits, as critics claim, that the most serious effects of the cuts fall on people with the lowest incomes and acknowledges it with unassuming respect. The lower income strata are in a position that makes them especially vulnerable to cuts in public spending. Some MPs speak of the inevitability of 'sacrificing fairness' (Fairclough, 2016, p. 63), the inevitability that the worst-off (often called 'the weakest ones', who are the most dependent on public services and allowances) will be hurt the most. Tax increases would be the only way to increase the burden of the wealthy class, but it is considered to work against economic recovery by reducing the confidence of consumers and investors, which is one of the doctrinal cornerstones of austerity policy (Blyth, 2013).

Within this register, there is a trade-off between future and present harm. The responsibility of the current generation to take future generations' harm into account when deciding on socio-economic policies is deployed to justify austerity policies. Whereas opposers of austerity invoke a fear that austerity policy leads to social and political conflicts, those supporting it are more worried that without cutting public debt, the welfare of 'our' children and grandchildren will be seriously endangered. Appealing to children's best interest arouses feelings of sympathy, but also recasts austerity as a moral issue detached from political struggles between different interest groups (Helin, 2011). It puts governmental actors firmly in charge, with vulnerable people becoming mainly

objects of care without agency, as has been shown extensively in the critique of humanitarian and human security actions (for example, Boltanski, 2004 [1999]; Nyers, 2006). Those who justify austerity foreground that if the public debt is not reduced now, the burden of paying it back will fall upon future generations. Living with the current amount of public debt or increasing is described through metaphors such as ‘selling the future of our children’ (Juha Eerola, Finns Party, record 13/2015), ‘eating at the expense of future generations and from their table’ (Markus Lohi, Centre Party, record 14/2015; Anne-Mari Virrolainen, National Coalition, record 14/2015), and ‘handing today’s welfare bill over to future generations’ (Prime Minister Sipilä, television speech, 16 September 2015). Because of the magnitude of this threat, other policy options are condemned as morally indefensible and unjust:

In her speech, representative Taavitsainen just stated more or less that the youth of the present must be given a solid ground for the future. I totally agree with this. Hence, in this difficult situation, we had to make a government programme which is very tough but which also looks into the future. The incurring of debt must be stopped. Other solutions would not be fair to the future generations (Timo V. Korhonen, Centre Party, record 14/2015).

Opposers of austerity also mobilise mental images of vulnerable children, but they focus on harm in the present rather the future. A Social Democratic Party MP, for example, appeals to the government for not restricting unemployed parents’ right for their children’s day-care, since they are at the greatest risk of social exclusion. The MP calls this a ‘fatal mistake’:

When you are punishing the unemployed, it is wrong, but they are, we are, nevertheless, adults. Do not punish the children of unemployed people (Timo Harakka, Social Democratic Party, record 13/2015).

In addition, opposition to austerity also questions the idea that cuts today would protect future generations from harm. They warn those supporting austerity not to repeat the mistakes of the earlier government that implemented large-scale cuts in the context of a previous economic crisis, from which current generations are still suffering. In the words of a Social Democratic Party MP, ‘we are repeating the mistakes we made during the 1990s’ and ‘we are still cross-generationally paying the belt-tightening of those times’ (Merja Mäkisalo-Ropponen, Social Democratic Party, record 13/2015).

An MP of a government party similarly warns the government about excessive cuts in education policy, since this may lead to the re-emergence of the problems of the 1990s in education. He also asks the

government to ensure that even the poor will have a chance to pursue an education (Niilo Keränen, Centre Party, record 14/2015).

So far, we have shown how disputes over the justification of austerity policies circulate insecurities and fear through three distinct security registers: national security, societal security, and harm and vulnerabilities. Parties in the disputes draw on various elements of these registers and, in doing so, organise a politics of insecurities, that is, a contestation of justifications for and against austerity in the name of multiple insecurities mobilising notions of fear to shape and legitimise policy choices. Although the registers of insecurity play a significant role, political disputes over austerity are also significantly drawing on non-security registers. It is important to also include the latter so as to avoid an uncritical confirmation of the political cultures of the fear hypothesis: the idea that contemporary politics dominantly works through discourses and imageries of insecurities, risks, and fear.

The register of welfare identity and the primacy of equality

We have shown that opposition to austerity draws on the welfare state identity and the value of equality within a societal security register. It evokes references to class war and more generally to instabilities produced by watering down social cohesion. Yet, equality and welfare are also mobilised to bring non-security registers into play. Insofar as austerity debates are securitised, the non-security register can be seen as a de-securitising one; a register that engages the disputes on austerity without drawing on fears and insecurities. This register employs at least five strategies: internationalisation of the crisis; representing austerity as a value-choice; contesting the interpretation according to which there are no alternatives; emphasising the value of the welfare state; and turning austerity into a matter of the nation's reputation and influence.

For example, the opposition to austerity combines an internationalisation of the crisis with moving the dispute into one between left-wing and right-wing values. Recognising that the economic situation is serious, the social democrats criticise the government's interpretation for being overly national and neglecting the supra-national causes behind the economic crisis. Above all, the opposition questions the lack of alternatives to austerity by bringing in examples of how austerity has not worked in other countries. According to the opposition, the supporters of austerity emphasise the causes of the current problems that fit their value agenda, thus making an ideological choice rather than one informed by economic

necessity. In the words of Ville Niinistö (record 13/2015) from the Green Party:

The cabinet presenting its Government Programme is a traditional right-wing government. Its programme has also been regarded as republican. For the first time in the history of Finland, we have a government that consciously aims to reduce the authorities' responsibility for the citizens. The essence of the Government Programme is in its harsh list of cuts. Even its beautiful phrases are overshadowed by this. The government is cutting our public safety net, education and other services, which are meant for securing the equality of citizens. It has made a value choice, not an economic one. It has chosen between alternatives, not necessities. It has given up the dream. It says that everyone must suffer. It wants to reduce equality in our society. It wants to limit people's choices, especially the choices of those with a low income (Ville Niinistö, Green Party, record 13/2015).

Niinistö opposes the government parties by arguing that they use the socio-economic crisis as an opportunity to reinforce their republican policy rather than to increase equality. According to him, 'now is not the time to say that everyone must suffer, it is the time to reform Finland'. We should not give up the 'dream of a welfare state' by making such massive, direct budget adjustments (cit.). Instead, we should balance the state budget by carrying out brave reforms that increase employment. Similarly, Social Democratic Party and Left Alliance MPs justify their opposition to austerity by presenting an alternative policy that favours progressive income taxation, including capital income.

Emphasising the value of welfare and its institutionalisation in the welfare state constitutes a significant part of the contest. Those disputing austerity policies on welfare grounds assert the value of both welfare and the existing welfare-supporting policies. When the government takes a step off the path of the Nordic welfare state as a leap forward in competitiveness, the opposition consider it more of a leap into the unknown: 'entering uncharted waters' (Maarit Feldt-Ranta, Social Democratic Party, record 14/2015) and 'breaking the fundamental principles of the welfare state' (Satu Taavitsainen, Social Democratic Party, record 14/2015). Austerity policies that disregard investments in gender equality, education, and research are considered to veer the nation off a path that has proven successful.

In the dispute over welfare, nobody really argues explicitly for sacrificing the welfare state as such. Those supporting austerity, however, tend to challenge the justificatory register that asserts an alternative to

austerity policy. They do so by falling back on security registers in which cuts are presented as necessary to save the welfare state and in which words such as ‘rescue’, ‘endangering’ and ‘life buoys’ are central. For example, the government parties defend themselves against accusations by arguing that their austerity policy aims to rescue the ‘core of the welfare society’. As Prime Minister Sipilä (record 13/2015) highlights, cuts do not endanger the welfare society; ‘neglecting them would instead compromise it within a few years’. By not taking austerity measures we would prolong the recession and increase the unemployment rate, which in turn would jeopardise the nation’s ability to maintain the welfare state. In this sense a strict government programme is in fact a ‘life buoy of the welfare state’ (Kari Tolvanen, National Coalition, record 14/2015). An MP of the Centre Party encourages even the worst-off to entertain positive thoughts about austerity because ‘a healthy public economy is a poor person’s best friend’ (Antti Kurvinen, Centre Party, record 14/2017). A similar recognition of the value of the welfare state appears when justifications for austerity promise investments in public services in economically better times, which is an ambivalent defence of welfare provisions, given that the welfare state is traditionally considered a safety net for the worst periods in particular (see Autto & Törönen, 2019).

Equality and welfare are also endorsed for the sake of international reputation and influence. In particular, reductions in foreign aid and development budgets are seen to erode the country’s reputation for solidarity in the international community. Substantial cuts in development policy would endanger important projects in developing countries and jeopardise peace negotiation efforts. They would also weaken the international reputation and influence of the country in general. Former Minister of Foreign Cooperation Sirpa Paatero (Social Democratic Party) expresses this by stating that stepping off the Nordic path has significant consequences for foreign policy as well as national issues:

It is a big issue in terms of foreign policy, because development cooperation is an important part of our foreign policy and, so far, we have been that stable, responsible, reliable partner in both multilateral and bilateral work. It also affects, and mark my words, it affects other things than merely an individual school or health center (in Africa). It has an effect on our whole image. When we collapse to the level of the old Eastern European states, also our influence collapses. This is most unfortunate (Sirpa Paatero, Social Democratic Party, record 14/2015).

The register of trust

The previous section shows that we should not reduce the registers of dispute at play in austerity politics to security registers, despite their significant presence. In this section, we introduce yet another register that plays an important role: sustaining and maintaining trust. Although this register involves the use of the language of fear, it cannot be simply tagged to security registers. Rather than emphasising insecurities and trust as a tool to deal with them, the register of trust brings out the broader political and societal significance of investing in trust in disputes. Trust is thus here not understood as derivative of fear (as something needed in response to insecurities and fears) but a value and property of relations in its own right. Following Barbara Misztal, 'trust' is a reference through which bases for social cooperation, solidarity, and consensus are expressed and created. Although her work engages the rise in interest in trust in the 1990s in particular, she draws out more generally how conceptions of trust are related to enacting cooperations and societal integration (Misztal, 1996). In the Finnish case analysed here, trust in this sense is used as a resource for unifying actors and for legitimating and questioning austerity policy. In addition, it is represented as a practise of good governance.

Trust is first a discursive resource for unifying the key players into a joint effort to avoid political conflict. Both opposition to and support for austerity recognise that the policy can lead to political conflict, which may be detrimental to successfully addressing the situation. Government parties, for example, acknowledge that political confrontations obscure the nature of austerity as a joint effort (for example, Minister of Finance Alexander Stubb, National Coalition, record 13/2015; see also Kylä-Laaso & Koskinen Sandberg, 2020). This is also emphasised in the Government Programme, which states that confrontations and resistance to change are central threats to the government's policy objectives. In the parliamentary debates, MPs of the government parties emphasise that instead of inducing conflicts, we need to build trust and hope between the government, the opposition, and the people. An MP of the Finns Party, for example, brings out a concern over the negative effect that criticism of austerity may have on Finland's reputation (Ari Jalonen, Finns Party, record 14/2015), because a bad reputation can sap the confidence of foreign investors and creditors. Here, trust becomes an instrument for discrediting the dissenting voices and alternative policy formulations of the political opposition to austerity.

The calls for trust are not only a disciplining device, but also a major resource for legitimating policy choices. The trust at stake here is not between professional politicians but between governing politicians and citizens. Trust is a mode of cementing citizens and politicians into a supportive unity in favour of austerity policies. The government puts great effort in ensuring that people trust in them and their policy (see also Autto & Törrönen, 2019). They often argue that the government has no hidden objectives but rather speaks openly and honestly about the cuts. Prime Minister Sipilä (record 13/2015), for example, states that the government ‘confesses openly that these savings will hurt many groups’. With such arguments, the government parties emphasise that they are not only honest and transparent but also empathetic, as they understand the pain caused by the austerity measures. As mentioned earlier, the opposition accuses the government of blackmailing citizens by threatening them with bigger cuts and taxes if they do not accept the proposed ‘social contract’. The government parties defend themselves against these accusations by referring to the government’s honesty:

As regards this social contract, whether one thinks it is blackmail depends pretty much on how one looks at it. I do not think it is blackmail when the government tells very openly, in earnest, what kinds of adjustments we need and what we could do for the nation’s economy to avoid this worst-case scenario (Matti Vanhanen, Centre Party, record 14/2015).

The government not only petitions for trust in the proposed policies and for moving from conflict to trust between politicians, but also brings into play a societal notion of trust as a force through which society as a whole can be constructed and sustained. According to Prime Minister Sipilä (record 13/2015), ‘society should be built more on trust than on regulation and control’. Interestingly, trust becomes a replacement for governmental regulation and the role of bureaucracy in governance. The latter are presented as detrimental to economic improvements. An alternative is needed, because for the parties supporting austerity the current situation is a ‘cycle of atrophy’ caused by weakened competitiveness, an inability to take risks, rigid structures, bureaucracy, regulation, norms, and an inflexible labour market (for example, The Government Programme, 2015). Prime Minister Sipilä (record 13/2015) sums this up by stating that ‘we have lost our agility with excessive regulation and administration’. Austerity policy reducing governmental regulation and control is presented as a measure to decrease unemployment and improve the economy by freeing employers, enterprises, voluntary

organisations and citizens to pursue their aspirations (see also Farnsworth & Irving, 2018, pp. 463, 465). Getting rid of excessive regulation, then, is seen as a contributor to common good rather than a policy that only promotes the interests of enterprises and employers. The MPs of the Finns Party particularly emphasise the positive impacts that the reduction of regulation and norms will have on citizens' everyday life:

The Government Program aims at reducing bureaucracy and excessive regulation. Eliminating needless regulations that make everyday life difficult, one of the Program's objectives, is a significant step towards a free, smoothly functioning and economically sustainable society (Sami Savio, Finns Party, record 14/2015).

The interesting point here, however, is not the dispute over deregulation, but the fact that societal trust is discussed as an alternative practice of governance, one that justifies a significant reduction of regulative and procedurally objectifying governance.

Equally interesting is the notion that societal trust does not suffice as an austerity policy on its own. Its success also requires citizens to trust in the government, along the lines described earlier. The latter type of trust is understood to depend on strong leadership, consistent decision-making, and bold policies. Strong leadership is presented as a prerequisite for unravelling the regulative and bureaucratic constraints and for introducing the crucial spending cuts:

We should not dispute figures based on facts anymore, but rather boldly take a close look at them. In addition, the response to these figures can no longer be to take on more debt or to deny them. The required reforms must be carried out with strong and modern leadership as well as with strict indicators of success. The way we run the country will change from what we have become used to (Pertti Hakanen, Centre Party, record 14/2015).

The requirement for strong leadership transforms value preferences, interests, and moral questions in policy making into a question of the right kind of leadership (Elomäki & Kantola, 2017, p. 380). Trust arising from leadership translates here into the justification of a strong-minded commander that leads the nation toward a brighter future (see also Autto & Törrönen, 2019).

As can be expected, trust as a resource of political legitimacy plays out not only in supporting governmental policies but also in questioning them. The opposition parties firstly strongly question the trustworthiness of the government. In questioning the government's trustworthiness, statements of betrayal are mobilised, especially those according to

which the government has betrayed the voters with false campaign promises. Both the Centre Party and the National Coalition are reminded about their promise to not impose cuts on education and research, which already are suffering from major cuts by the previous government. The Finns Party, on the other hand, is reminded that they promised to improve pensioners' situations, but in the present austerity policy these people are among those who will suffer the most.

Secondly, trust is also challenged by questioning the motives of the leadership, in this case the government. Even if the government justifies austerity by the need to support the economy, it is accused of strengthening the privileges of the elite: 'Would it not be more honest to admit that rather than the GDP or the public economy, the government's foremost objective is to secure and widen the privileges of the elite?' (Anna Kontula, Left Alliance, record 13/2015). Thirdly, not only the leadership's reliability, but also its expertise and capability are contested: their ability to understand what is going on in the economy, how to address issues effectively and what the consequences of various policy options are. For example, most of the opposition parties argue that austerity will damage the public economy instead of fixing it. Cuts in education and research are categorised as measures that weaken the competitiveness of Finland. In addition, the cuts are claimed to decrease purchasing power, thereby having negative economic effects:

We are now continuing on a path of stringent fiscal policy involving massive, disproportionate cuts, even though Finnish policy-makers have been warned that continuing with a stringent fiscal policy and cutting low-income people's purchasing power may hinder our economic growth and employment. In my opinion, it gives a strange impression of the government's conception of the economic situation, given that the programme does not include even an estimation of what the effects of this economic policy may be in the recession that Finland is presently experiencing (Li Andersson, Left Alliance, record 14/2015).

If moral authorities, such as representatives of the church, were seen as important actors in the societal security register, here especially the economic authorities are mobilised in questioning the government's trustworthiness. A Social Democratic Party MP expresses her mistrust in the government's economic knowhow by referring to warnings given by the International Monetary Fund and economists. She states that she is not convinced by the government's economic line: '90 per cent of academic, alas, academic, economists think that cuts can be destructive in a time of economic problems. The IMF as well has warned about

practicing too strict an economic line' (Maarit Feldt-Ranta, Social Democratic Party, record 14/2015). She also reminds her audience that the financial experts who have praised the strict spending cuts in the media give a false impression of the policy. It may be good for the finance sector, but she doubts whether it is good for the whole of society. The leader of the Green Party (Touko Aalto, record 14/2015; see also Aalto's blog post, 16/9/2015) instead doubts the government's economic expertise by attacking its way of drawing an analogy between the nation and a private person and between the nation and an enterprise. According to him, the government's spending cuts are not a responsible policy in the time of an economic downturn. He refers to international economists who warn that cuts made on false grounds make the situation even worse. In addition, as we mentioned in the previous section, austerity policy is described as a leap into the unknown from a successful policy-path. In this way trust in the government and its austerity policy is destabilised by evoking fear of the possible outcomes that the government's lack of expertise and capability may bring. Although the registers of trust and equality are not security registers, this is one example of how, in their actual expressions, the justifications do intertwine various registers or draw in some elements that gesture towards evoking fears in justifications that mostly draw on non-security registers.

The main point of our analysis, however, is that trust is not simply a register of statements that depends on or works in direct conjunction with security registers. Different from integrating trust into securitising strategies and politics of fear as is the case when defining security practice as a distribution of trust and fear (Huysmans, 2006), the parliamentary debates on austerity in Finland show that it is a distinct register of dispute. It is a register that is less related to insecurities and more to justifying and contesting leadership, neo-liberal projects of deregulation, and attempts to create solidarity by presenting austerity as a joint effort.

Conclusions

In the preceding sections, we examined how fear and insecurity are deployed in the politics of austerity by looking at parliamentary debates in Finland. Instead of focusing on either economic or moral fears, which are brought out by the previous literature on the politics of austerity, our case study of the intense Finnish parliamentary debate that took place in 2015 aimed to explore a wide range of justificatory

registers used by political actors. We outlined five recurring registers with which austerity was judged.

Three of the registers circulated insecurities and fear in the justifications for and contestations of austerity policy. The first security register was a national security register, in which the financial crisis and budget deficit are securitised as an existential threat to the sovereignty of the state. This register was used to argue that the extraordinary austerity measures are legitimate because they are implemented to maintain Finland's independency. In this register, the increasing debt of the state represented a threat to the nation's sovereignty and was seen as risking to make Finland into 'another Greece' (see Blyth, 2013; Bryan & Rafferty, 2017). Moreover, the national security register poses a necessity to act in a situation in which 'there are no alternatives' to austerity, as has also been shown by earlier studies on the justification of austerity (for example, Clarke & Newman, 2012).

The second security register foregrounds societal security concerns and internal dangers to the social order that exists between classes. This register firstly emphasises a fear that unfairness of austerity policy will increase inequality, and as a result trigger confrontations between diverse social groups resulting in social instability. Secondly, it underlines that unfair and authoritarian policy-making may lead to political crises that will destabilise Finnish political culture and its sustaining of social peace. This societal security register was used mainly to oppose austerity. The previous studies also mention that austerity policies may create fear of internal insecurity (Clarke & Newman, 2012; Ponticelli & Voth, 2011). However, they do not systematically analyse how issues of societal and internal security have been mobilised significantly in political disputes over austerity. One explanation for this is that the studies have paid more attention to justification of austerity than to the ways it is opposed.

The third security register focuses on moral fears concerning the vulnerability of particular groups of people and the harm that might befall them. Even though the harm caused to the people who are already in a vulnerable position has been one of the most disputed issues in the politics of austerity (see Clarke & Newman, 2012; Fairclough, 2016; Hitchen, 2014), it has not been conceptualised in terms of the politics of fear. In this register, moral fears and obligations were used as drivers for supporting or opposing austerity. In addition, a temporal difference was made between present and future harm. Austerity measures were especially justified in relation to the interests of future generations and opposed in reference to present harm.

We also present, however, that the politics of austerity cannot be reduced to a politics of fear. The fourth register took shape by employing the justifications and disagreements that emphasise the value of welfare identity and the primacy of equality. In the Finnish case, the value of the welfare state was strongly emphasised. Although references to the welfare state may also include criticism of welfarism deriving from concerns over moral disorder and demoralisation as a result of welfarism (Clarke & Newman, 2012), we do not read this as another expression of the societal security register. The main reason is that welfare and equality emerged as contested reference points valued in their own right. In other words, there is a distinct register that justifies positions on austerity in the name of equality and welfare, including needs for reform, without depending on evoking societal insecurities. As we have shown, that does not mean the two registers do not get entangled at times in the actual political discourses. The concern with equality did intertwine with expressions of a fear of social instability arising from conflicts between different groups in the population. However, such intertwining does not imply that one register becomes absorbed in or reduced to the other. One of the analytical values of studying registers of justification in line with Boltanski and Thévenot's work (2006) is that it allows for observing various inconsistent, overlapping, juxtaposing registers as they are used by actors within single disputes. It avoids temptations to reduce registers to those that speak directly to one's disciplinary and analytical interest – in this case, security registers linked to a politics of fear. It shows how registers are formed and used in dialogical and argumentative relation to each other so that some elements of the security registers can also be used as elements in the non-security registers, and vice versa. However, as part of different registers, these elements attend to different purposes since in the security registers they are harnessed to serve the mobilisation of insecurities and fears and in the non-security registers they foreground other issues like welfare and equality.

The fifth and second non-security register deals with the need for trust and the importance of leadership. This register mobilises references to trust as a basis both for social cooperation, solidarity, and consensus for connecting political elites and citizens in a productive way. Our analysis of justification of political positions on austerity that refer to trust exemplify how similar elements may travel from one register to another register, in which case their meaning changes. The fifth register at places intertwines with the insecurity and fear registers, but also draws on distinct emotional and discursive resources. It is also demonstrated

that in the politics of austerity, fear and security can translate into a political struggle over trust (see also Autto & Törrönen, 2019). Between them, these five registers show the central role played by references to fear and insecurities in the justifications and contestations of austerity politics, but this is done in a more diverse and multi-dimensional way than in most of the existing literature.

It was also our objective to examine the position of fear and insecurities in present-day politics. In this respect, the analysis shows that politicising through registers of fear and insecurity does not imply an integrated culture of fear and anxiety, but rather a political contest in which quite different modalities of fear and insecurity are mobilised. In addition, they are not just mobilised to support austerity policies but also to oppose them. Importantly, the registers of justification and contestation move relatively easily between non-security and security registers, but without necessarily subjugating one to the other. In other words, rather than a culture of fear or the integration of the political field by insecurities and fears, we see a more varied set of registers of politicisation within and through which parliamentary debates shape the disputes over austerity with actors moving quite easily between them.

As a whole, our findings speak against interpretations that see a major shift in society towards cultures of fear. The circulation of discourses of fear plays a significant role but lifting it out of the debates risks ignoring that political disagreements work across multiple registers of justification where various renditions of fear and insecurity are intertwined with renditions of the value of equality and trust. As we show, neither can be reduced to the other in this intertwinement. Our findings thus show that fear, or even more than one kind of fear, is not all there is to how contemporary politics works, not even in a case which is considered a severe economic crisis.

Notes

1. Alexander Stubb, the previous Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance of the new government conversely notes that the forthcoming measures involving 4 billion Euros will be painful but, comfotingly, not as painful as the ones made by the previous government (Alexander Stubb, Minister of Finance, National Coalition, record 13/2015; 14/2015; see also Autto & Törrönen, 2019, p. 84).
2. Societal security originally refers to insecurities of national or regional identity (Wæver, Buzan, Kelstrup, & Lemaitre, 1993). It introduces a distinction between threats to cultural identity and threats to state sovereignty. However, the concept has also been used to point out how identity is entangled with

concerns about risking welfare and social cohesion and about internal or public security (Huysmans, 2006). It is in this latter meaning that we use the term here.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ORCID

Janne Autto  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2134-9781>

Jukka Törrönen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2473-6330>

Jef Huysmans  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7265-018X>

References

- Adkins, L., Kortesoja, M., Mannevu, M., & Ylöstalo, H. (2019). Experimenting with price: Crafting the new social contract in Finland. *Critical Sociology*, 45(4–5), 683–696.
- Aradau, C., & van Munster, R. (2011). *Politics of catastrophe: Genealogies of the unknown. Prio new security studies*. London: Routledge.
- Arampatzi, A. (2017). The spatiality of counter-austerity politics in Athens, Greece: Emergent ‘urban solidarity spaces’. *Urban Studies*, 54(9), 2155–2171.
- Autto, J., & Törrönen, J. (2019). ‘Yes, but all responsible Finns want to stop living on credit’: Feeling rules in the Finnish politics of austerity. *Citizenship Studies*, 23(1), 78–95.
- Berezin, M. (2013). The normalization of the right in post-security Europe. In A. Schäfer & S. Wolfgang (Eds.), *Politics in the age of austerity* (pp. 239–261). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Blyth, M. (2013). *Austerity: The history of a dangerous idea*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Boltanski, L. (2004 [1999]). *Distant suffering. Morality, media and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Boltanski, L. (2011). *On critique. A sociology of emancipation*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Boltanski, L., & Thévenot, L. (1999). The sociology of critical capacity. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 2(3), 359–377.
- Boltanski, L., & Thévenot, L. (2006). *On justification. Economies of worth*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Boukala, S., & Dimitrakopoulou, D. (2017). The politics of fear vs. the politics of hope: Analysing the 2015 Greek election and referendum campaigns. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 14(1), 39–55.
- Bourke, J. (2005). *Fear. A cultural history*. London: Virago.
- Bramall, J. (2013). *The cultural politics of austerity: Past and present in Austere times*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bryan, D., & Rafferty, M. (2017). Reframing austerity: Financial morality, savings and securitization. *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 10(4), 339–355.
- Burgess, J. P., & Taylor, O. (2004). Special section: What is human security? *Security Dialogue*, 35, 345–371.

- Buzan, B., Wæver, O., & de Wilde, J. (1998). *Security: A new framework for analysis*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rien.
- Cairns, D., de Almeida Alves, N., Alexandre, A., & Correia, A. (2016). *Youth unemployment and precariousness. Political participation in the austerity era*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Clarke, J., & Newman, J. (2012). The alchemy of austerity. *Critical Social Policy*, 32(3), 299–319.
- Elomäki, A., & Kantola, J. (2017). Austerity politics and feminist resistance in Finland: From established women's organizations to new feminist initiatives. In J. Kantola, & E. Lombardo (Eds.), *Gender and the economic crisis in Europe: Politics, institutions and intersectionality* (pp. 231–255). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fairclough, I. (2016). Evaluating policy as argument: The public debate over the first UK austerity budget. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 13(1), 57–77.
- Farnsworth, K., & Irving, Z. (2018). Austerity: Neoliberal dreams come true? *Critical Social Policy*, 38(3), 461–481.
- Forkert, K. (2017). *Austerity as public mood. Social anxieties and social struggles*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Furedi, F. (2002). *Culture of fear. Risk-taking and the morality of low expectation*. Revised edition. London: Continuum.
- Giger, N., & Nelson, M. (2010). The electoral consequences of welfare state retrenchment: Blame avoidance or credit claiming in the era of permanent austerity? *European Journal of Political Research*, 50, 1–23.
- Glassner, B. (1999). *The culture of fear. Why Americans are afraid of the wrong things*. New York: Basic Books.
- Greimas, A. J., & Courtés, J. (1982). *Semiotics and language. An analytical dictionary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Helin, A. (2011). Tulevat sukupolvet poliittisessa retoriikassa. Mitä ne ovat ja miksi niistä puhutaan? *Hybris*, 2. <http://hybrislehti.net/hybris-22011/tulevat-sukupolvet-poliittisessa-retoriikassa>.
- Hitchen, E. (2014). *The 'Austrian subject' and the multiple performances of austerity*. Durham: Durham University Theses.
- Huysmans, J. (2006). *The politics of insecurity. Fear, migration and Asylum in the EU*. London: Routledge.
- Isin, E. F. (2004). The neurotic citizen. *Citizenship Studies*, 8(3), 217–235.
- Kantola, A., & Kananen, J. (2013). Seize the moment: Financial crisis and the making of the Finnish competition state. *New Political Economy*, 18(6), 811–826.
- Krugman, P. (2015, April 29). The case for cuts was a lie. Why does Britain still believe it? The austerity delusion. *The Guardian*.
- Kylä-Laaso, M., & Koskinen Sandberg, P. (2020). Affective institutional work and ordoliberal governance: Gender equality in the parliamentary debates on the competitiveness pact in Finland. *NORA*, 28(2), 86–98.
- Linklater, A. (2011). *The problem of harm in world politics. Theoretical investigations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Massumi, B. (1993). *The politics of everyday fear*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Misztal, B. A. (1996). *Trust in modern societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Neumann, F. L. (1996 [1953]). The concept of political freedom. In W. E. Scheuerman (Ed.), *The rule of law under Siege. Selected essays of Franz L. Neumann and Otto Kirchheimer* (pp. 195–230). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Nyers, P. (2006). *Rethinking refugees: Beyond the politics of emergency*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Ponticelli, J., & Voth, H.-J. (2011). *Austerity and Anarchy: Budget cuts and social unrest in Europe, 1919–2009*. Discussion Paper Series No. 8513. London: Centre for Economic Policy Research.
- Schäfer, A., & Streeck, W. (2013). Introduction: Politics in the age of austerity. In A. Schäfer, & S. Wolfgang (Eds.), *Politics in the age of austerity*. (pp. 1–25). Cambridge & Malden: Polity Press.
- Sunstein, C. R. (2005). *Laws of fear: Beyond the precautionary principle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Törrönen, J. (2000). The passionate text. The pending narrative as a macro structure of persuasion. *Social Semiotics*, 10(1), 81–98.
- Wæver, O. (1995). Securitization and desecuritization. In R. Lipschutz (Ed.), *On security* (pp. 46–86). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Wæver, O., Buzan, B., Kelstrup, M., & Lemaitre, P. (1993). *Identity, migration and the new security agenda in Europe*. London: Pinter.
- Wetherell, M. (2013). Affect and discourse — what’s the problem? From affect as excess to affective/discursive practice. *Subjectivity*, 6(4), 349–368.

Appendix: Data and method

Our analysis mainly looks at a two-day parliamentary debate taking place over the Government Programme in June 2015. The transcription of the proceedings consists of 384 pages. The object of debate, the Government Programme (35 pages), is included in the data. The additional data consists of public speeches, public interviews and blog posts of the party leaders in which they justify or oppose the austerity policy in the context of the debate over economic policy in 2015.

The data were coded by using the ATLAS.ti software. In the coding we paid attention to how the government parties and opposition parties – while defending or opposing the austerity measures – describe the goal of their policy as an *object* of action and refer to various elements that assist, hinder and justify the pursuit of this objective as *helpers*, *opponents*, and *senders*. In this, we used the so-called ‘actant model’ (Greimas & Courtés, 1982; Törrönen, 2000). As our analysis above demonstrates, in the disputes between the government parties and opposition parties a large variety of actants participate in action for and against the austerity measures as objects, opponents, helpers, and senders. These include actants such as nations (national independency, fatherland, Greece, national competitiveness), institutional arrangements (welfare state, bureaucracy), experts (academics, representative of church), concepts (austerity, debt, social contract), images (lack of alternatives, unknown future, reputation, the future of our children), history (past, earlier events), emotions (fear, pain, suffering, trust), situations (recession, war), material things (4 billion Euros), and ideologies (inequality, right-wing values).

Using ‘actantial model’, in the coding we first identified the policy objectives presented in the debate (objects). Secondly, we coded what are regarded as the problems of or threats to achieving the objectives and what kinds of elements in the current economic situation hinder action (opponents). Thirdly, we identified the resources that would provide abilities and competences to solve the problems (helpers). Fourthly, we identified the actors, values or norms that justify the austerity measures or speak against them (senders; see Törrönen, 2000). In addition, we coded under one theme all the quotations in which the austerity of the economic crisis was considered in terms of fear or as a matter of security. After noticing that the current economic situation and austerity measures were often characterised by using specific metaphors, we also coded these. This coding paved the way for identifying the common registers of justification by which the politicians aimed to persuade people to approve or go against the austerity measures. It also helped us to find the most relevant quotations for the presentation of the results.