

European Workshops in International Studies 2020 Call for papers

Anxiety in international relations

Workshop convenors:

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During the last few years, statements according to which we are currently living in an age of anxiety seem to have become increasingly common. However, despite being the prevailing emotion of our times, anxiety has received scant attention in International Relations (IR) theory. Anxiety has wrongly been conflated with fear, and almost since its inception, IR theory has assumed that much of international behavior is guided by the fear of specific threats to state survival. However, today, the uncertainties surrounding the future of the world economy, the unforeseeable terrorist attacks, the lure of radical fundamentalist ideologies, and unexpected shocks to global governance, such as Brexit, all evoke a pervasive anxiety about what we do not know and what we cannot control, rather than the fear of a specific and known enemy. Yet we know little about the political implications of anxiety.

Anxiety occupies a prominent place in diverse traditions of political, social, and psychological thought that we as IR scholars have yet to delve deeply into. When properly theorized, the concept of anxiety can provide a unique vantage point to situate the historically specific circumstances of contemporary international order, broaden our understanding of techniques of government in foreign and domestic policy, and socio-psychological bases of individual and mass mobilization and agency. Several theoretical research programs in IR – ontological security studies, research on emotions, as well as psycho-analysis – have already established a strong basis for a closer and more holistic engagement with the social as well as psychological dynamics and processes implicated in anxiety. In that sense, a fuller theorization of anxiety contains the promise of connecting and thereby further developing disparate research programs exploring similar international phenomena.

Papers for this workshop are expected to address, but do not need to be limited to, the following questions:

- What are the alternative vantage points to theorize the implications of anxiety for international politics? In what ways do ontological security studies, psycho-analysis, existentialist approaches, post-structuralist and socio-psychological approaches to anxiety complement and/or contradict with one another?
- What role(s) does anxiety play in processes of securitization and desecuritization? What is the contribution of anxiety to critical security studies?
- How is anxiety related to and how does it impact individual and state agency in international politics? Through what mediating factors is anxiety converted into different agencies?
- How is anxiety related to uncertainty? What are different types of uncertainty and how do they generate anxiety in different ways?
- How is anxiety related to socio-political change and identity change?
- How does anxiety impact the political attitudes of individuals and the decision-making processes of elites?
- How and with what consequences for international politics is anxiety related to other emotions?