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Knopp, Philipp

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Article

Staying in the Game: Activation, Vigilance, and Normalization of Emergency Calls in Austria

Phillipp Knopp

University of Vienna and Bertha von Suttner Private University St. Poelten, Austria
philipp.knopp@suttneruni.at

Abstract

Influential accounts of vigilance and lateral surveillance assume that the shift from centralized to more dispersed, governmental forms of surveillance is driven by postmodern tendencies towards an almost unlimited proliferation of suspicion and surveillance. In contrast to former research, this analysis of Austrian public discourse on police emergency services highlights attempts to control, limit, and normalize civil vigilance. Drawing from the theoretical frameworks of governmentality studies, the paper shows that emergency services are a paradigmatic field for the analysis of participatory surveillance because they align interventionist police power with people's security activities. With the proliferation of an activation paradigm in Austrian policing their role shifts significantly. In this paradigm, a double-sided responsabilization and mobilization of citizens and police is propagated. On one side, active vigilance is discursively promoted to link local subjective awareness of anomalies and (dis)order with rapid police response. On the other side, in a phase of intense criticism, emergency services are subject to reconfigurations themselves: preemptive interventions, a normalization of response time, efficiency-oriented reorganization of its structure, and their application for the management of police resources and forces. However, it is shown that vigilance and response are always controlled, for example, by public rejections of particular kinds of hypervigilant activities. Emergency service discourse not only fosters but also limits vigilance. Therefore, normalization of oversteering hypervigilance points to paradoxes of governmental practices of activation in crime control.

Introduction

In the wake of digital datafication, critical police and surveillance studies scholars have turned their attention to new social risks that go along with so-called predictive technologies (Brayne 2021) and automated surveillance (Andrejevic 2020). In the shadow of these big issues, the old-fashioned but still central forms of reactive policing have been somewhat overlooked in the last few years. This paper studies one of these practices of interventionist policing: police emergency services. While the signs and signals of police emergency hotlines pervade our everyday life, many crucial aspects of emergency services remain understudied in surveillance studies.

Beyond the proliferation of emergency services in our daily lives, there is a manifold and renewed interest in emergency services in public discourse and in police forces. On one side, police emergency services have become a strategic site of datafication and quantified police management in many countries. Computer-aided dispatch systems still create some of the largest georeferenced police databases that are updated on a daily basis with every call (Lum et al. 2020). On the other side, the critical, abolitionist debates on defunding the police that followed the second wave of Black Lives Matter protests and movements against femicides

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in many European countries have shed light on the shortcomings, intersectional discrimination, and deadly consequences of police interventions that began with citizens' calls.

Despite technological developments in predictive policing and other types of digital surveillance, calling the police has remained at the heart of contemporary policing. Citizens' vigilant activity is still a primary resource for police operations in many Western countries. This paper sets out to investigate discursive struggles over emergency services and their role in contemporary activation paradigms in Austrian policing. Additionally, the configurations of power between state and civil society embedded in emergency services are analyzed. In contrast to diagnoses of a ubiquitous proliferation of lateral surveillance (Andrejevic 2004), the critical analysis of mass media discourse indicates that the modernist interplay of mobilization and control is still in place when it comes to police emergency services and vigilance.

The analysis focuses on the central European conservative democratic state of Austria that is characterized by a rather state-centered security domain.¹ Due to recent changes in the Austrian security sector, emergency services have gained new relevance in efficiency-oriented management and in connecting police mobility with local, contingent feelings of insecurity. In the activation paradigm, emergency services, which are usually depicted as reactive, time-critical policing practices that focus on singular dangerous events (Suchman 1997), have been discursively reconfigured towards relationship-building and preemption. The critical event of an emergency is normalized and partially removed from the center of attention.

What is at stake in the emergency-service-based activation of vigilance is the division of responsibility in policing itself. Therefore, I argue against the postmodernist assumption of a supposed blurring of the limits of lateral surveillance in favour of a perspective that considers its contradictions and control. To give a first overview of the dynamics of responsibilization, mobilization, and control in emergency service discourse, Figure 1 sketches out these discursive processes as a constant effort to normalize vigilance.

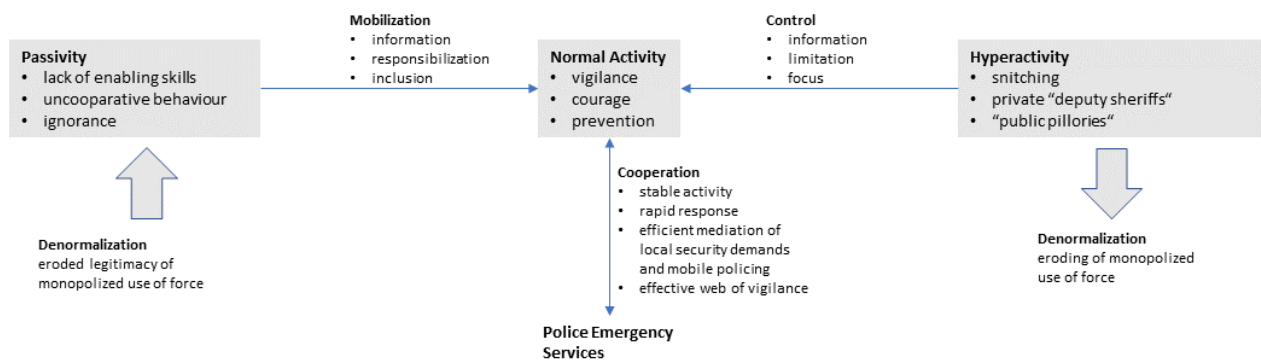


Figure 1: The normalization of vigilance

First, I outline the relevant literature before turning to governmentality approaches to crime control with a focus on activation and responsabilization in crime control. The next section provides a description of the method of critical discourse analysis and the body of data. Next, I describe how discourse identifies a passive population and hypermobile police as problems that accompanied the proliferation of the activation paradigm and outline the role of emergency services to respond to these problems. The activation paradigm promotes a vigilant citizen that connects their perceptions of insecurity to the police through the communicative act of reporting suspicious situations and persons. I then describe how struggles over emergency services reconfigure their workings by redefining the meaning of response time, extending the temporal area of legitimate claims for response, defining speed requirements, and aligning emergency

¹ Here, conservative designates a state model that aims to maintain the social and political status of its citizens in contrast to liberal and redistributing models (Esping-Andersen 1990).

services with the management of national police resources. These major reconfigurations already indicate that police response is not only widened and accelerated but also normalized. Finally, I highlight the attempts to limit oversteering hypervigilance. Instead of an ever-growing proliferation of vigilant surveillance, both police response and citizens' activity are mobilized and controlled at the same time. The conclusion discusses the resulting paradoxes of governmental activation in crime control.

The Study of Police Emergency Services: From Conversation Analysis to Governmentality Studies

In relation to its immense social relevance, emergency police services have not been studied adequately, although they have been central subjects for some sociological paradigms. Starting with Harvey Sacks' interest in the sequential ordering of calls at suicide prevention centers (Schegloff 1989), emergency control rooms have been crucial sites for the development of paradigmatic methods such as conversation analysis in ethnomethodology and interaction analysis in workplace studies (Luff, Hindmarsh, and Heath 2000).

Conversation analyses carved out the characteristic structure of police calls (Zimmerman 1984). Several studies focused on trust (Meehan 1989; Cromdal, Osvaldsson, and Persson-Thunqvist 2008), emotional support (Tracy and Tracy 1998; Lumsden and Black 2018), the role of information technologies and documents (Kameo and Whalen 2015), or the dramatic failure of single calls (Garcia 2015; Gillooly 2020).

Workplace studies scholars have analyzed the interaction and coordination in control room facilities as a specific, technology-dependent work environment. They argue that "centers of coordination" are oriented towards "problems of space and time, involving the deployment of people and equipment across distances, according to a canonical timetable or the emergent requirements of rapid response to a time-critical situation" (Suchman 1997: 42). It seems important to note that, even though the control room scheme is closely related to CCTV research in surveillance studies (Norris and Armstrong 1999; Smith 2004), police emergency control rooms—at least in Austria—are still mainly focused on calls and documentation rather than visual surveillance.² Communication technologies mediate and integrate the emergency process by circulating information that is interpreted by call takers, dispatchers, police on the beat, and senior officers (Normark and Randall 2005).

Beyond these interactionist approaches to emergency processes, ethnographic accounts have investigated the culture of police control rooms (Knopp 2020; Ellcessor 2021). Early studies scrutinize cultural values, norms, technologies, and rules of thumb in emergency call processing (Manning 1988; Black and Lumsden 2020). But they still have not considered the dynamics of the historical situation in which emergency service practices gain their specific shape and meaning.

A valuable point of departure is research in the field of governmentality studies. In contrast to the previously mentioned studies that focus on proceedings of emergency services, this research paradigm focuses on programmatic texts, strategy papers, or police campaigns. A few, highly valuable papers also point to the discriminatory roots of emergency services in the marginalization of racialized social groups (Mason 2022). Other scholars trace the historical connection between the implementation of emergency centers and efficient police management (Reeves and Packer 2013; Wilson 2019) or focus on contemporary anti-terror campaigns. The latter accounts highlight how police strategies rely on people's vigilance, suspicion, and awareness by also stigmatizing and stereotyping certain social, and often migrant, groups (Reeves 2012; Szpunar 2016; Larsson 2017; Emerson 2019). These studies do not put emergency services and public

² Although there are CCTV screens in Austrian emergency control rooms, they are usually not used for daily operation control. However, traffic control and control rooms for specific critical operations highly rely on CCTV and mobile camera surveillance. In this aspect, the language-centered practices also diverge significantly from the imaginaries of the security industry.

discursive struggles center-stage; nevertheless, concepts such as vigilance, responsabilization, and activation are highly relevant and will be discussed in the following theory section.

Theory: Emergency Services, Responsibilization, and Vigilance

Many distinguished accounts on contemporary developments in policing and crime control derive from governmentality studies. Following Michel Foucault (1991: 91), they reinterpret government as a form of power/knowledge that does not particularly belong to the state but “interweaves within the state and society.” The concept of governmentality connects social and political technologies, orders of knowledge, problematization, and ideals about the world and subjects:

Focusing upon the emergence and transformation of programmes, strategies and techniques for the conduct of conduct, such studies have described the rationalities and technologies underpinning a whole variety of more or less rationalized and calculated interventions that have attempted to govern the existence and experience of contemporary human beings, and to act upon human conduct to direct it to certain ends. (Rose 2000: 322)

Governmental technologies do not replace other forms of power but complement and sometimes augment the workings of discipline and sovereign interventionist power. As Foucault (2009) has famously argued, security has been a major field for the dispersal of governmental strategies. The shift from welfare-oriented security towards an understanding of security that focuses on crime control lies at the heart of late-modern transformations of power relations. The growing importance of crime control revealed “the limits of the sovereign state” (Garland 1996: 445). Issues concerning economic efficiency and efficacy required a reorientation of policing that began to incorporate new governmental strategies that have been described in terms of responsabilization, prevention, and managerial reorientation (O’Malley 1997). In Austria, these tendencies were accompanied by new unspecific juridical concepts of “danger” in “security policing” that extended police discretionary powers and widened their field of competence (Kretschmann 2022).

Governmental policing strategies have shifted their focus from the delinquent subject to situations of crime and (potential) victims’ conduct (O’Malley and Palmer 1996). Security should be achieved “through their own active self-promotion and responsibility for themselves and their families” (Rose 2000: 331). Responsibilization therefore redistributes security tasks from state agencies that are still primarily responsible for the execution of state power to secondary responsible entities like individuals, companies, or communities (Kölbel et al. 2021). It is deeply intertwined with activation discourses that not only promote self-motivation, being informed, training of individual skills, and self-guidance but also participation in security practices and prevention. In other words, responsabilization distributes competence in its four central dimensions: skills (being able to), readiness (being willing to), permission (being allowed to), and obligation (being expected to) (Pfadenhauer 2013). Activation emphasizes the first three aspects of competence. Responsibilization emphasizes the last dimension while relying on the idea that people know how to act “in the right way” with the “right” motivation. It is noteworthy that the character of activation and responsabilization is specific in each societal domain and changes significantly over time.

In the context of emergency services, vigilance is another core concept to understand new governmental crime control. Vigilant practices couple the sensory act of seeing with the communicative act of reporting to primarily responsible state actors (Brendecke 2020). They “harness the sensory capacities of its citizens” (Reeves 2012: 238). As I will argue below, it is precisely the communicative link that makes emergency services an important puzzle piece in governmental crime control. While agreeing on the importance of vigilance in contemporary paradigms of crime control, I would like to offer an understanding of vigilance that emphasizes its conflictual aspects. Many theorists of contemporary surveillance and crime control argue that activation and responsabilization are limitless in principle. Mark Andrejevic (2004: 293), for example, argues that in a sceptical postmodern culture, new governmental techniques create “a climate of generalized, redoubled risk” that renders everybody and everything a potential threat. Active vigilance is effectively

bound back and integrated with state agencies to augment disciplinary and sovereign powers through a “consensual agreement to govern oneself and others” (Reeves 2012: 246). In contrast, my analysis shows that vigilance is also a controversial issue.

This argument is substantiated by a more cautious perspective on governmental power that highlights the ongoing typically modern dialectics of mobilization and control (Lessenich 2010). It points towards a slightly different perspective that not only envisions emergency services as a form of policing that spreads and augments vigilance but also as a technique that shapes lateral surveillance and aims to control oversteering tendencies in order to intensify its workings.

These double-sided and conflictual processes are referred to as normalization. Normalization relies on data, statistical figures, and symbols that mark the boundaries of normality and abnormality (Foucault 2009). Normalist societies (Link 2013) do not find their optimum in a predefined and idealistic, and thus marginal, norm but within narrow or extended middle ranges that are deemed acceptable. They aim at bounded activity that does not transgress the limits of a supposed equilibrium of forces. To normalist societies, exponential growth seems as equally risky and threatening as rapid decline. Normality is an accomplishment of practices that try to achieve a “dynamic stabilization” (Rosa, Dörre, and Lessenich 2017: 53) of social processes. In this sense, the normalization of vigilance is an ongoing negotiation, conflict, and work on the active, vigilant subject that can fail or meet resistance (Marx 2003). Following the normalization argument, an exponential growth of citizens’ vigilance may become equally or even more threatening than their inactivity.

Method and Data

The data analysed to sustain this argument are mainly comprised of articles on emergency services in two Austrian newspapers. In addition, I examined two police strategy papers and two audit reports that have been referenced in media reports. The central method is critical discourse analysis (CDA). Discourse analysis enables researchers to approach flows of knowledge, patterns of reasoning and rationalities, as well as struggles and subjectivation processes as patterned relations of statements. The specific variant of CDA adopted in this paper is influenced by poststructuralist and Marxist traditions. Jäger and Jäger (2007) developed this approach in the early 1990s with a specific focus on processes of racialized exclusion and nationalist integration. They offer a toolbox of analytical techniques and concepts that allow for the analysis of discourse structure and in-depth interpretation of important discursive fragments. The analytical stance of my CDA was not so much interested in newspapers and the police as organized agents, but rather examined discursive relations of statements that build up to paradigms of policing. In other words, I do assume that police and media, besides their discretionary powers, are not autonomous actors that are able to set strategies all on their own. Activation and responsabilization are rather responses to problems that are defined within discursive arenas. The analysis therefore focuses on discursive struggles in which tensions and alliances arise between different and sometimes opposing statements. Discursive struggles constitute the relational space of power/knowledge that allows further statements and subject positions to emerge as intelligible or devalues and excludes them from specific discursive domains. In doing so, discursive struggles give rise to patterns, rules, and specific ways to speak about the world.

First, discourse analysis has to define the analytical body of data and the period of study.³ My analysis covers ten years (2010 to 2021). The first year of this investigation was characterized by two critical events in public emergency service discourse. First, the Austrian Court of Audit (2010) published a critical report about the organization of police emergency services. This discursive event became a recurring reference point for managerial criticism and a rationale for organizational change. Second, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior published its first national policing strategy. The paper outlined a community policing strategy that included a campaign to promote and reorganize emergency services called “112 – Real Heroes Call for Help” as a response to the Court of Audit’s criticism and requests from European institutions to advertise

³ A full list of the sources and additional information about the newspaper articles, reports, and strategy papers can be found in Appendix 1.

the European Emergency number “112.” The campaign was followed by a major organizational change that centralized emergency services by reducing the number of dispatch centers from ninety-nine to nine. This project ended in February 2021 and marks the end of the period of analysis.

I decided to rely mainly on print articles from two national newspapers—the liberal *STANDARD* and the conservative *KURIER*—because mass media discourse is a place of struggle and negotiations over policing, as well as a sphere in which mobilization and control of vigilance takes place.⁴ The selected articles included the words “police” and “emergency services” (in German: *Polizei* and *Notruf*). The search in the online newspaper archive WISO led to 1,068 results in *KURIER* and 120 results in *STANDARD* (search date: May 11, 2021), which were then preselected to keep the corpus manageable.⁵ After preselection, the body of data consisted of 126 newspaper articles (thirty-five in *STANDARD*; ninety-one in *KURIER*). In addition, the data included published versions of the strategy papers—in particular, the first national policing strategy from 2010 “Secure.Inside” (in German: *Innen.Sicher*; hereafter referred to as BM.I 2010) and its successor “Safe.Together in Austria” from 2017 (in German: *Gemeinsam.Sicher in Österreich*; hereafter referred to as BM.I 2017)—and two reports of the Court of Audit (2010, 2013) on police emergency services.

The following analytical steps identified the core contents of statements, involved temporalities, central issues, technologies, and main statements of every article. These were interpreted in terms of their internal/external relations to other statements, events, and discursive strands. During this structural analysis, I created a chronological situational map of the discourse (cf. for this method: Knopp 2021). Situational maps support analysis by laying out important elements (technologies, human actors, organizations, symbols, and norms) of the discourse and allow for relational analysis (Clarke, Friese, and Washburn 2018).

The structural analysis made it possible to identify the recurring statements and relations as well as the discursive events that heavily impact the direction of discourse (here: new police campaigns or the mentioned audit reports). The results built the basis for an informed selection of the most relevant discourse fragments for an in-depth interpretation of eleven articles that relate to discursive events and contain the most recurring statements (Jäger 2015). The in-depth interpretation was guided by analytical questions that focused on requirements towards emergency call processing; ends, rules, and evaluations of policing; emergency services’ relations to overall strategies of policing; and the relation between police and citizens.

Paradise Lost: Hypermobility, Inefficiency, and the Dominance of Criminal Others

Activation and responsabilization respond to specific historical situations in which problems arise that exceed the capacities of former security paradigms. Defining these major issues is indeed itself a matter of discursive struggles. As with any other practice, the role and relevance of emergency services align with these paradigmatic issues. While in Anglo-American countries this problem was a constantly high crime rate that was used to put pressure on welfare-oriented policing (Garland 2002), Austrian crime rates have never reached the level of these countries and even declined by 19.2% from 2005 to 2019.⁶ Nevertheless, the 2010s were characterized by constant criticism towards the organization of policing and emergency services: the Austrian Court of Audit published its first report on emergency services criticizing its efficiency, efficacy, and the low level of standardization; a new centralized model of rural policing was harshly criticised by the political opposition; supposedly “mobile criminals” were constructed as new forms

⁴ Although the role of newspapers in contemporary media environments may be shrinking, their publications are still major sites of discourse. Articles are appropriated, linked to, quoted, shared, and pilloried online.

⁵ I removed articles about other emergency hotlines (e.g., women’s emergency helplines, medical assistance), mere mentions of the most important emergency numbers in Austria, court and 697 police reports that merely mentioned that people had called the police via the emergency hotline, duplicates, as well as articles that used the phrase “emergency call” only figuratively.

⁶ Annual security reports of the Austrian Ministry of the Interior. The year 2019 is taken as the upper limit of the period because, in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a significant and exceptional decline of overall crime rates (Austrian Government 2006; BM.I 2020).

of threat to domestic security. To frame the analysis of the role that emergency services play in the activation paradigm, this section outlines the core narrative of this crisis.

The following introduction to a newspaper article reports the introduction of the new national policing strategy “Secure.Inside” in 2010 and vividly depicts the crisis situation. The new strategy included a turn to community policing, performance management, and higher expectations towards officers’ qualifications and responsibilities. It also entailed a project to centralize and promote emergency services and to introduce a new nation-wide computer aided dispatch system:

The villages’ own country constables do no longer exist. [...] The gendarme who sat in the pub with residents. He was a bit lenient when it came to alcohol checks—it could have caught him too—but he knew exactly what was going on among the people and where the “bad guys” lived. After the police reform and the cutbacks in small rural police forces, only armed patrol cars that move around are left. They are merciless with drunk driving, but no one tells them anything anymore. Both sides suffer from the noticeable alienation between citizens and the executive. But a revival of Polt [literary figure of a rural police officer, PK] sitting in the pub would not be effective either. Today, more than 60 percent of property crimes are committed by criminals from the East. In the fight against Moldavian or Serbian gangs, Polt’s local knowledge would no longer be helpful. (*KURIER*, December 30, 2010)⁷

The reported national police strategy paper describes the situation in similar ways: people do not know about crime related issues, the police are well-respected but people do not want to contact the police, citizens and institutions do not report to the police, the contact between the police and the population diminishes, and the police are the sole relevant actors within the security domain (BM.I 2010: 30). These interconnected problems are related to deep organizational transformations that started around the year 2000 and are best described as a fusion and centralization of police structures that followed a unification of rural Gendarmerie with urban police forces and resulted in a unified, national police force. This process included waves of closure of small, mostly rural police stations.

The above discursive fragment interprets these change processes as a shift from local community relations to a relentless police hypermobility that dissolves police-community relations. The “paradise” of the Keynesian police officer as a lenient community worker (O’Malley and Palmer 1996) is lost and cannot solve the new types of supposedly foreign problems. “Gangs from the East” figure as the externalized causes of serious crime. In the fight against these “alien others” (Garland 1996: 461) commentators and police urge for a new kind of cooperation between citizens and the police.

Furthermore, the crisis diagnosis contains a critique towards repressive encounters between police and citizens that cause alienation and inactivity. The orientation towards supposedly hypermobile criminals pulls police and citizens apart and creates a rupture in their once intimate relationship. The problematic situation, as John Dewey (1938) would call it, is characterized by a passive population and hypermobile, disoriented police force that seemingly has the “wrong” priorities as it orients towards the criminals and does not cultivate and care for the domestic relationship with citizens but rather criminalizes them. The diagnosis rejects two prior ways of crime control: the Keynesian paradigm in which police officers are imagined as social workers within communities and the mobile policing model in which police have marginal contact with citizens. Passivity of the population and hyperactivity of the police form two extremes of anomalous activity. While Austrian crime control up until the early 2000s mainly pertained to the Keynesian model of

⁷ All translations from German are my own.

a penal-welfare state (Stangl 2005),⁸ the new strategy reinforces community and societal mobilization as a national paradigm.

Activation Paradigm and Vigilant Citizens

The three-sided relationship of control (people, criminals, police) is framed as a natural two-sided opposition between the “alien criminal” on the outside and police and people on the inside. The domestic cooperation is to be restored. It is first and foremost the police that are made responsible for this task. The narrative of a rupture between the police and the public indicates several problem-solving strategies that aim to establish new bonds. These strategic aims are subsumed in a “society-wide approach” that addresses “all people who live in Austria” (BM.I 2010: 40, 9) as secondary-responsible security actors. The national program “Secure.Inside” establishes a framework of fifty-seven police projects in vast areas, with responsibility, prevention, networking, activity, and organizational performance as its key values.

The new focus on alliances with citizens accentuates a shift from a criminal-oriented approach towards the improvement of police-citizen relations. In doing so, the new paradigm not only faces up to discursive demands for active relationships to citizens but also redefines the structure of responsibility for domestic security. Security is understood as a “permanent social effort, a regime of daily life” (Legnaro 1997: 271). A central task of the police is to activate, inform, and guide these societal security activities. In emergency media discourse and police strategies, policing is conceived of as a participatory task of all members of society (Larsson 2017). The positive response to responsabilization makes individuals acknowledged members of society and subjects of security. Vice versa, the police shall be integrated into the dispersed and yet unknown security practices of the population and stabilize its central position in the control relation.

In 2010, this is where emergency services came into play. “Under the [campaign] title ‘112 – Real Heroes Call for Help’ the population is to be involved again in the fight against crime. [...] 112 is the Euro emergency number that is being developed into an international service. Citizens should not put themselves in danger but dial this emergency number without hesitation” (*KURIER*, December 30, 2010) The media report and the reported police campaign not only inform about the EU-emergency service to reduce inhibitions to call the police but also depict the negative consequences of intervening without the police (e.g., to become a victim oneself). While activating citizens’ courage, it simultaneously sets boundaries to this activity by imposing fear of victimization.

However, a significant difference to the community policing programs of the 1990s is the shrinking significance of the self-interested homo prudens that Pat O’Malley (1997) identified as the ideal subject neoliberal crime control. Firstly, the more recent ideas of active police-citizen relations in Austrian emergency service discourse do not refer to the imagination of humans as individual, rational risk managers. They do not call for the prudent entrepreneurs’ rational calculation but upon the subjects’ sense of insecurity and anomalous, suspicious behaviour. This is the situated sense for one’s own and others’ insecurity. It is not just about reflecting and preventing but also about acting “without hesitation” by calling the police. Secondly, the imagined citizens obtain their entitlement and motivation to act not primarily out of self-interest. They leave the moral void of neoliberal self-interested entrepreneurship to enter the moral obligation of “civic courage” (*KURIER*, July 10, 2014; BM.I 2010). Police and media discourse mobilize higher societal values, such as caring for others, fighting against terror (Andrejevic 2004; Larsson 2017), or defending the community (Johnston 1996), that often derive from civil society semantics (Lessenich 2010).

What comes into being is a morally obligated “vigilant subject” (Emerson 2019: 284) of everyday life that directs its attention towards specific phenomena and acts communicatively upon witnessing these phenomena by calling the police as the primarily responsible security actor. While some studies have analysed the vigilant subject in relation to terror and catastrophic scenarios, Austrian emergency service

⁸ For Garland (2002), penal-welfare states are characterized by reactive crime control, a focus on the delinquent, and a monopolization of responsibilities for crime control by state organizations.

discourse indicates that activation enrolls the vigilant citizen as a means of everyday crime control beyond exceptional emergencies. While the prudent subject might avoid risky situations for their own safety, the vigilant citizen shall not withdraw but witness. Through spatial and temporal presence it becomes a sensory element of the net of vigilance that augments the capacities of policing and the citizens themselves.

Emergency services gain relevance as an infrastructure of active civic vigilance. The vigilant citizens' competences are only secondary and depend on the communicative relation to the police with emergency services as an important intermediary between suspicion and intervention. Vigilant practices, therefore, show an interesting bifurcation. The communicative act of reporting through emergency calls constitutes both citizens and police as mutually responsive participants of policing who interweave sovereign powers of intervention and governmental powers of security (Reeves 2012; Larsson 2017). This includes the symbolic power to define what counts as suspicious and/or dangerous. The way that this power is distributed enables citizens to be the first definers in concrete suspicious situations while police still define the legitimate targets of vigilance and filter calls for intervention. Citizens' needs are shaped by information campaigns, mass media formats, the police's own strategic public relations efforts on social media, and in emergency calls themselves. Activation of vigilance is therefore never a pure unleashing of activity but a (discursive) shaping of individual and collective actions as a means of societal policing.

The new relevance of secondary security responsibilities of vigilant citizens is accompanied by discourse fragments that raise awareness and train skills in detecting crimes such as burglary, pickpocketing, or sexual violence that also promote who it is that is to be met with suspicion. Emergency service discourse depicts a variety of racialized discourse figures of the criminal other to inform and mobilize these senses: on the one side, there are discursive figures of the "wild Turkish" (e.g., *KURIER*, January 10, 2013) and "North African rapists" (e.g., *STANDARD*, February 25, 2021) or "Afghans with knives" (e.g., *STANDARD*, November 30, 2019). On the other side, there are constructions of organized burglars and criminal gangs from Croatia, Moldavia, Romania, or Serbia that are to be detected by attentive citizens whilst they plan their heists as well as the threat of international terrorism that is linked to Islam.⁹

Beyond defining these groups as usual suspects, othering also works in the construction of the inner side of the vigilant security collective. In emergency service discourse, the vigilant collective is not (primarily) turned against its own people. The collective effort is mobilized to target externalized crime and danger, and thereby it is directed and controlled. However, vigilant citizens still have to be watchful on the inner side of the collective, because the "devious criminal gangs" from Eastern Europe (later also "Arabic clans") may engage camouflage tactics by using private security companies to hide in plain sight and sneak into the heart of the vigilant collective. It is warned that the "technician who installs the alarm system" might also work as a "'sideline' spy for a gang of burglars" (*KURIER*, January 5, 2014). Uncertified private security may become an entrance hole for criminals and, therefore, is required to be regulated. In sum, with its alien others, emergency service discourse creates a whole vigilant world for the security collective that is depicted in Figure 2. The figure also sketches out the upper and lower boundaries of legitimate activity that will be discussed in more detail in the next sections.

⁹ There are different positions on the way the threat of terrorism should be handled. While the awareness for terrorist activities and attacks is encouraged, there are also voices that criticize anti-terror campaigns as scaremongering (*STANDARD*, August 31, 2018; *KURIER*, June 28, 2017). When there was a terrorist attack in Vienna in 2020, emergency response was extolled for its rapid response, while secret service was harshly criticized.

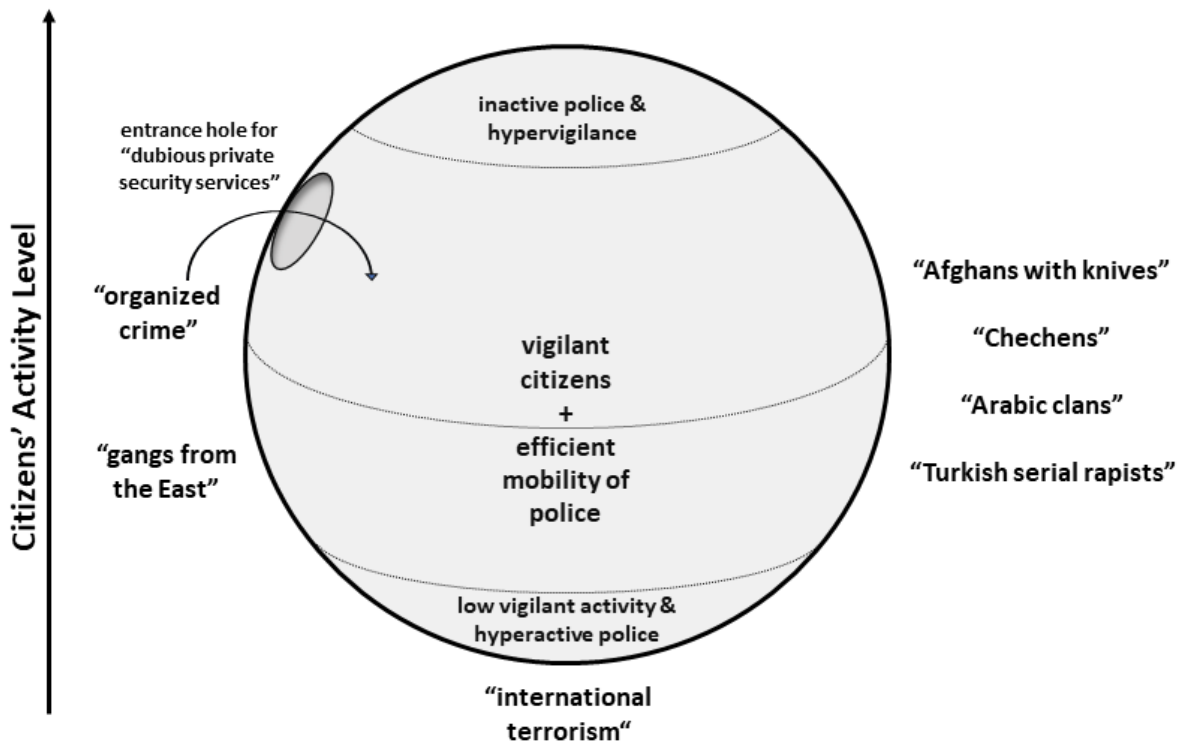


Figure 2: *The world of the vigilant collective in emergency service discourse*

Reconfigurations of Emergency Services in the Activation Paradigm

The above sections have shown that responsabilization and activation have become key discourse strategies in Austria. Police remained in place as the primarily responsible actor for the circulation of security knowledge and the legitimate use of force. However, activation also pulls emergency services into their realm. Their organizational structure becomes itself an object of criticism, responsabilization, and reconfiguration. These reconfigurations can be described in terms of a slight shift towards preemption, from local and stationary police offices to vigilant communication spaces, from event time to normalized time, and towards the managerialization of the control room.

In contrast to a notion of an emergency as evident danger, a first reconfiguration of emergency response in the activation paradigm is that police not only intervene in cases that are characterized by a factual situation of threat but also respond preemptively if vigilant citizens find themselves in suspicious situations. In the collective fight against “gangs,” discourse fragments invoke emergency calls when citizens observe suspicious individuals: “In the greater Vienna area, one of the hotspots of twilight burglaries, increased traffic controls must be expected. [...] A decisive component of the police strategy is the population. The executive bodies request to dial 133 at the slightest suspicion” (*KURIER*, December 12, 2016). An appropriate situation for calling the police does not have to entail an ongoing crime or evident danger. Rather, the anticipation of crime and the uncertainty about the others’ future actions are defined as valid reasons to call for police interventions. East European strangers in the neighbourhood are deemed legitimate reasons to be suspicious and call the emergency number because they might be observing their next target for a burglary. The reactive response enters the realm of preemption that intervenes in supposed crimes that are yet to be realized.

Second, space was discursively reconfigured as a space of vigilant communication and police movement rather than a territory that has to be densely occupied by (symbolic) monuments of police power (i.e., police stations). Emergency services become central mediators in this new spatial practice. Discursive criticism redefined how emergency services may play their role to create a good relationship between citizens and the police. Static police stations were reframed as an “expensive and inefficient telephone service” (*KURIER*, December 22, 2012) because they could not do anything but call the control room to send officers. “Today, it is not about how long it takes the citizen to get to the nearest police station—it is how long it takes the police to get to the citizen” (vice-president of the Vienna police Mahrer qtd. in *KURIER*, February 28, 2014). People would not use police stations as they did in the past, but telecommunications and intervention speed are supposed to meet public criticism of former mobile/centralized and static/decentralized police strategies and citizens’ expectations. What takes place is a shift to a way of mobile policing aligned with local security demands via emergency service communications. Active relations are not built in spatial proximity like they were in the past but in rapid, targeted response. In emergency service discourse, police-public-relations become intricately temporal relations. And equally important, it is again not an evidently dangerous event that sets the pace for intervention, but it is the need for an active relationship indicated by the number of emergency calls and measured by response time.

It is not surprising that this idea of controlled mobilization was also accompanied by criticism of a lack of speed. A third reconfiguration was therefore a normalization of response times. Especially during discursive struggles over further cutbacks, quicker responses became a recurrent demand that the police were confronted with. The above quote from the Viennese police vice-president occurred during a wave of police station closures in 2014 in which public conflicts emerged between the mayor of the Austrian capital Vienna,¹⁰ the Viennese police, and the Ministry of the Interior. This conflict led to the establishment of a new temporal standard for high-priority police interventions in Vienna of three minutes and fifty seconds (*KURIER*, February 7, 2014). It is not necessary to go into detail about the different discursive positions and claims here, but it is of importance that these struggles led to a formal definition of the pace of emergency interventions to resolve the conflicts. This formalization of speed norms is not to be understood as a way of speeding up police interventions—the police general of Vienna was quoted just two months later saying that the average response time in such priority cases is three minutes and thirty seconds (*KURIER*, April 20, 2014). Police are not guided by a marginal norm but obligated to respond within a temporal range of normality that relates the single event with millions of other events that are quantified and measured to establish the boundaries of acceptable response times. Again, standardization partially removes the emergency event from the centre by introducing a new orientation for interventions that is not readily described by absolute acceleration.

The fourth of the interrelated major discursive reconfigurations of emergency services followed the two Court of Audit (2010, 2013) reports. These reports criticized the police for not enacting the managerial capacities that result from the datafied communications of the emergency control rooms with citizens and patrol units. The “bureaucracy behind 133” (*KURIER*, May 25, 2010) became a prominent discursive signifier that urged for a managerial reorganization of control rooms. In response, the police revived former projects such as the centralization of control rooms, the introduction of performance indicators, and the implementation of modern information technologies at a national level that should enable a “real time” overview and analytics of police resource allocation in relation to citizens’ vigilant activities. Emergency services were rediscovered as a way to measure and manage police resource-performance relations (cf. Wilson 2019).¹¹ Activation of citizens went hand in hand with the obligation of the police to maintain an efficient and effective organization of emergency call response. Emergency services were reimagined from a new public management perspective. As with the other reconfigurations, the management perspective on

¹⁰ Note that about one quarter of the Austrian population (eight million inhabitants) lives in the capital city of Vienna, which is why it is of high importance in national discourse.

¹¹ When Viennese police first introduced radio police cars and a central information room for emergency services in 1955, the intensified use of police resources was already envisioned by some high-ranked officers as the big pay-off of mobile police officers coordinated by a control room (Knopp 2023: 86–89).

emergency services does not focus primarily on the single emergency event. It is introduced into a series of statistical data points and relations to the allocation of resources. The activation paradigm partially turns away from the event. What is present in all these reconfigurations is a new focus on temporal, spatial, social, and economic relations. Furthermore, these reconfigurations relate to normal spectra and introduce certain limits to police responses to vigilance.

Controlling Vigilance

Just like policing programs, theories of participant surveillance often envision the relation of police and vigilant citizens as consensual cooperation. The analysis of public discourse indicates that vigilance is a matter of struggles over the competencies of callers and the police. Also, some instances of limitation and normalization have already been found. Vigilance has been focused on culturally racialized criminal others as an instance of limiting the scope of vigilance by focusing attention on externalized groups. Private security companies have been made an object of suspicion. These cases already indicate that the proliferation of vigilance is not limitless. This section deepens the discussion of the active discursive limitation of citizens' vigilant practice.

Throughout the discourse period, some reports scandalize the excessive and “false” use of emergency calls by individuals and state the sentences (up to six months in prison) for emergency call misuse from time-to-time (*KURIER*, October 24, 2020). While these normative occasions of public sanctioning routinely underline that emergency calling is a serious matter and is to be used responsibly, there are also events that render vigilant practices into a major problem for the police. Therefore, I will turn to vigilance in the context of social crises to focus on a significant dilemma of the activation paradigm. According to Jürgen Link (2013), crises are discursive and affective states in which a loss of normality is diagnosed and felt. The fear of denormalization is often accompanied by demands for a strict restauration of normality. In the discourse period from 2010 to 2021, two bigger crises of denormalization became relevant in emergency service discourse: the crisis of the European migration regime in 2015 that was followed by waves of right-wing mobilizations in 2016 and the COVID-19 pandemic starting from 2020.

The crisis of the European migration regime in the year 2015 was followed by a spread of vigilante groups and right-wing mobilizations in German speaking countries. Police reacted to this autonomous vigilantism by adopting their community policing tactics.¹² Following the strategy paper “Safe.Together in Austria” (BM.I 2017), vigilante groups should be invited to join community roundtables on security issues so that communities can take up their feelings of insecurity and channel them into the normal range of joint security practices. Additionally, police shall take proper measures such as increased patrolling.

The following newspaper article speaks of the fears of denormalization and the efforts to normalize attention, refocus, and limit vigilant activities during the crisis:

“Over the past 15 years, the city’s population has increased by 12 percent, but crime shows a 16 percent decrease.” However, the police general added, assaults and cybercrime are on the rise. [...] The drug problem in Vienna is “now under control” and the city has no “no-go areas, like Paris!” Mahrer stressed the difference between gangs of burglars and asylum seekers, saying, “Refugees don’t break in. These are organized gangs from the East.” A gentleman’s suggestion to have all dog owners in Vienna patrol the streets was rejected: “We don’t need deputy sheriffs in the city.” (*KURIER*, February 18, 2017)

The police general highlights the average statistical decline of crime rates to counter subjective perceptions of increased insecurity that the crisis fosters. High-crime anomalies (“drug problem,” “no-go-areas”) are

¹² Vigilantism describes a form of vigilant activity that starts to form proper organizations independent from states’ security goals that tend to become violent movements (Johnston 1996).

negated. The focus of suspicion is redirected from refugees who were made a major object of suspicion and hostility to “the usual suspects,” the “gangs from the East.” The pejorative use of the term “deputy sheriff” reinforces the rejection of autonomous vigilantism by denying their competence to intervene. Oversteering vigilance is confronted with statistical arguments that aim to redirect vigilance towards a cooperative and police-led stance.

Denormalization is not only often characterized by an increase of fear and aggression against marginalized groups but also relates to diverging definitions about who the suspicious “others” are. Hyperactive vigilantism endangers the police power to define the relevant suspects of vigilance. Vigilante groups themselves become an instance of denormalization in the relationship between citizen and the police. Vigilantism is defined as a threat of parallel, possibly illegal use of force. While passivity forms the lower boundary of the police-public-relations spectrum, proper vigilantism forms part of its upper boundary (see Figure 2).

The same statistically informed normalization of the expectancy of crime and danger is also used to criticize “exaggerated” statements about the risk of terror attacks. When, in 2017, the Director of the European police office Europol publicly warned against the highest risk of terrorist attacks in twenty years, a report criticised:

Looking at the figures of the Global Terrorism Database, it is indeed the case that in 2015 [...], there were the most terrorist attacks in Europe since 1997 and the most terrorist victims since 2004. However, in the late 1970s and early 1990s, there were actually three to four times as many terrorist attacks and deaths as there are now. “The terror threat in Austria has been constant for years,” the Interior Ministry stresses. (*KURIER*, June 28, 2017)

Even though threats are not totally denied, the statements allay the state of awareness and counter certain invocations of vigilance by reclassifying their meaning and relevancy. These calls for calm realign the definitions of what a serious threat is and reorder security discourse and perceptions.

The problem of oversteering vigilance also became apparent in the COVID-19 pandemic. During the first lockdown phases in the year 2020, a rapid increase in public awareness of breaches of lockdown measures in social media was reported, leading to discursive attempts to normalize vigilant activity. A few newspaper reports criticized lateral surveillance and public reporting of all kinds of daily deviances.

Firstly, the emergency number 133 is the “single point of contact” [in English in the original] to the police, “otherwise we will not intervene. If someone calls and says that a group of youths is walking on the Danube Island, then that is completely useless for us,” says the spokesman. In any case, there is an increased number of patrols. In the first week alone more than 1,500 charges were filed for violations of the Covid 19 Measures Act. There have been no arrests for this so far, but seven arrests were “Covid-related,” according to police. (*STANDARD*, March 27, 2020a)

According to the newspaper article, emergency reporting on lockdown breaches amplified in number and type,¹³ making vigilance ineffective for crime control. Furthermore, vigilantism used social media as “a public pillory” (*STANDARD*, March 27, 2020b). Again, the discourse fragment statistically proves that police act against breaches of COVID-19 measures and criticizes activities that oversteer the spectrum of normal vigilance as “snitching” (*STANDARD*, March 27, 2020b). Emergency services are offered as an

¹³ There are no statistical numbers for COVID-related emergency calls because the police classification system was not adapted to contain a proper category for the related types of deviance. However, during my field visits in a police control room, officers reported that they felt an increase of COVID-related calls.

alternative to deviant or morally condemned vigilantism while also restricting the instances worth calling for, as some calls are evaluated as “useless” spying.

In both denormalization crises, citizens’ activity reaches the upper boundary of vigilantism that threatens the vigilant police-citizen relation with its distribution of informing/mobilizing/intervening (police) and seeing/reporting (active citizens). Vigilance is redirected, remodelled, and reconnected to fit it back into the limits of governmental policing. In the following summary, I will interpret these tendencies to control vigilance within broader paradoxes of activation in crime control.

Conclusions: The Paradox of Activation

In his seminal paper, David Garland (1996) argues that the myth of the sovereign state as the only legitimate actor in crime control crumbled with the advent of welfare-oriented policing. My argument conversely points towards the limits of the activation of secondary responsible actors as a central technology of governmental crime control. These limits lie in the police’s sovereign symbolic power to “have the last say” (Reemtsma 2003: 16) about what is defined as danger and crime. In this paper, the normalization of vigilance has been described as a dialectical interplay of mobilizing and controlling citizens’ vigilance and a multifaced intensification that is produced in discursive struggles (among other production sites) rather than an unlimited proliferation.

In the research period between 2010 and 2021, an activation paradigm spread into emergency service discourse that is known in many other Western countries. My focus on emergency services pointed to the discursive struggles and police criticism that accompany the new paradigm and its relation to reactive forms of policing. First, the police were criticized for being hyperactive and hypermobile in the hunt for “foreign criminal gangs.” Citizens were conceived of as passive and uncooperative. In emergency service discourse, these relations were defined as inherently temporal relations of communications and movements aligned with subjective local security demands. Rapid response was not only considered an exigency of particular emergency events but also a strategy to cultivate active relations.

Citizens should become vigilant subjects of security that are trained in sensing suspicious situations, obligated to call the police for their own and others’ sake, motivated by moral sentiments of civic courage, and encouraged to call the police without hesitation. Responsible citizens have to be heard and taken seriously by the police. The ideal subject of this policing paradigm does not pursue self-interest and is neither imagined as an individualist nor a rational risk taker but instead longs for an active cooperation with the police for the sake of public interest.

The police should respond to the activity of the population with increased contact to renew the supposedly fractured, alienated relationship and break down communication barriers. In this context, emergency services allow them to weave a web of vigilance that is thought to be able to tackle central issues related to efficiency-oriented cutbacks. Call-based connectivity is supposed to bridge the problem of police hypermobility and citizens’ passiveness.

The new relevance of emergency services was first met with new criticism that went hand in hand with several discursive reconfigurations: interventions aiming at preemption, a partial shift from the catastrophic event to relationship management, the normalization of speed, and resource monitoring. While the activation paradigm affected the organization of emergency services and mobilized vigilance, the latter was also limited, especially when activity exceeded the “right way” to become active or “the right amount.” Vigilantism, hypervigilance, and oversteering denunciation became a control problem to the new activation paradigm.

In contrast to other studies on contemporary vigilance, I have shown that the interplay of mobilization and control of vigilance deals with a fundamental tension in late-modern policing. In the case of comprehensive denormalization, vigilance may turn from an extension of police power (Andrejevic 2004; Larsson 2017)

into a transgression of the division of labour in governmental crime control that itself becomes a threat that is policed. The “liberal paradox” (Lessenich 2010: 307) of activation lies in the problem that the vigilant net might produce more insecurity than the police may be capable or willing to respond to. Activation and responsabilization prove to be a tightrope walk of criticism, encouragement, and containment. Vigilance and emergency services were reconfigured as an important power technique to bind the guided awareness for insecurity and crime back to sovereign police power. Emergency service discourse deals with the consequences of activation and police engage in normalizing their own practice and citizens’ vigilance to stay in the game themselves. Emergency services then can be understood as a governmental technology of vigilance through which suspicion is enacted and controlled both on a discursive level and with the communicative interactions of single emergency calls.

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Appendix 1: Cited Data

The cited newspaper articles go beyond the eleven articles that were examined using in-depth analytical techniques.

Type of Data	Date	Title	Author
Outlet: KURIER			
Newspaper article	May 25, 2010	<i>Notrufzentralen. Die Bürokratie hinter 133</i>	Matthias Hofer
Newspaper article	Dec. 30, 2010	<i>Neue Strategien. Die Polizei setzt künftig auf "echte Helden"</i>	Wilhelm Theuretsbacher
Newspaper article	Dec. 22, 2012	<i>Reformplan. 20 Polizeiinspektionen sperren in der Nacht zu: Mehr Beamte auf der Straße</i>	Wilhelm Theuretsbacher
Newspaper article	Jan. 10, 2013	<i>Menschen sind durch Vorfälle verunsichert</i>	Michael Berger
Newspaper article	Jan. 05, 2014	<i>Technik ersetzt den Dorfpolizisten</i>	No information
Newspaper article	Feb. 07, 2014	<i>In 3 Minuten 50 vor Ort</i>	Michael Berger
Newspaper article	Feb. 28, 2014	<i>Jedes vierte Wachzimmer in Wien wird geschlossen</i>	W. Theuretsbacher and B. Ichner
Newspaper article	April 20, 2014	<i>Wir sind in 3.30 Minuten vor Ort</i>	Michael Berger
Newspaper article	July 10, 2014	<i>Pfefferspray-Attacke in U-Bahn</i>	Dominik Schreiber
Newspaper article	Oct. 12, 2016	<i>Schachmatt den Dämmerungseinbrechern</i>	Michael Berger
Newspaper article	Feb. 18, 2017	<i>Wien braucht keine Hilfssheriffs</i>	Michael Berger
Newspaper article	June 28, 2017	<i>Europol-Chef warnt vor weiteren Terroranschlägen</i>	No information
Newspaper article	Oct. 24, 2020	<i>2.000 falsche Notrufe: Junger Mann nervt Polizeileitstelle</i>	Patrick Wammerl
Newspaper article	Feb. 25, 2021	<i>Mord in Favoriten: "Sie hat sich mit den Falschen eingelassen"</i>	Markus Strohmayer
Outlet: STANDARD			
Newspaper article	Aug. 31, 2018	<i>Europol-Chef warnt vor weiteren Terroranschlägen</i>	nw
Newspaper article	Mar. 27, 2020	<i>Hochbetrieb bei Polizeinotruf</i>	red
Newspaper article	Mar. 27, 2020	<i>Vernaderung, Verwarnung und der Neffentrick</i>	No information
Newspaper article	Nov. 30, 2019	<i>Verdächtiger nach Mord an Ehefrau in Justizanstalt</i>	Austrian Press Agency (APA)
Government Documents			
Audit report	May 2010	<i>Polizei-Notruf</i>	Austrian Court of Audit
Audit report	Aug. 2013	<i>Bericht des Rechnungshofes. Polizei-Notruf, Follow-Up-Überprüfung</i>	Austrian Court of Audit

Press version of strategy paper	Dec. 28, 2010	<i>112 - Echte Helden holen Hilfe. Fachgespräch mit Innenministerin Maria Fekter</i>	Austrian Ministry of the Interior (BM.I)
Press version of strategy paper	2017	<i>Press material: Gemeinsam.Sicher in Österreich</i>	Austrian Ministry of the Interior (BM.I)