

EDITORIAL

Dear Reader,

The Capitol in Washington is the quintessential symbol of democracy. The storming of this inner sanctum of American democracy in early 2021 illustrated just how vulnerable democratic societies are. Willingness to engage in violence against state institutions has also risen in other countries over the past few years. Incidents often seem to be unrelated to one another in any discernible way; experts speak of “stochastic terrorism.” However, rather than depicting socially isolated individual perpetrators at work, the latest evidence points to a strategy of interconnected and like-minded actors. With lies and conspiracy theories, they create a psychological environment that makes such acts of terror possible.

The dissemination of malware programs is a relatively new form of criminality, which allows electronic devices to be spied upon. Since security is often a secondary concern during the development of new software, programs frequently contain vulnerabilities that can be exploited by criminals. Researchers are hopeful that a new method will help to detect these security holes more efficiently.

The security of a society is contingent upon how it deals with its criminals: “Lock them up – forever!” This is how former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder asserted sex offenders should be dealt with in 2001. Other violent crimes also elicit calls for tough sentences. But do longer prison terms reduce an individual’s propensity to commit acts of violence? Findings from social psychology and neurological research suggest that a sentence based on retribution, deterrence, and exclusion encourages the very violence it seeks to prevent.

This issue of *Max Planck Research* is the first following a huge change. Our long-standing chief editor and highly valued colleague Helmut Hornung has recently entered retirement. His favorite bon mot, “the gap he leaves in his absence is a worthy replacement,” does not apply in his case: we miss him! But we promise to continue running the magazine with the same enthusiasm for exciting stories about science.

We hope you enjoy this issue!

Your editorial team