CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND THE FUTURE OF CIVIC SPACE

LESSONS FROM THE WAR ON TERROR

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About the Report

This report presents the findings of the research project Climate Emergency and the Future of Civic Space: Learning from the War on Terror based at the Conflict & Civicness Research Group, LSE IDEAS at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

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Foreward

Civil society and civic space are absolutely essential to the functioning of open, fair, transparent and accountable societies. Their absence signifies that something is fundamentally amiss in society. Despite the indispensable need for civic space to bring people in respectful and open dialogue with those who govern them, across the globe civil society experiences repression, constraint, harm, surveillance and, in some countries, annihilation.[1]

The polycrisis has intensified these negative trends in civic repression that have been in motion for over three decades, predating the 9/11 terrorist attacks but further rarified by the events of that day and their aftermath. As United Nations Special Rapporteur on Counter-Terrorism and Human Rights (2017-2023), I observed first-hand the ascendency of security architectures, infrastructures and norms and their deployment against civil society actors.

This timely report confirms a securitizing trend line and further illuminates how practices of prioritization, militarization and authoritarianism are being deployed to contain and suppress civil society. Key take-aways from this Report include the cogent reminder that securitization will not solve the climate crisis, but rather exacerbate it. Moreover, resources sapped by security containment will worsen climate challenges, not least because of the wastefulness of targeting those who are seeking to prevent and mitigate harm to the planet rather than those actors causing harm.

The Report highlights the seductive attractiveness of 'climate security' and climate emergency as a frame for responding to the climate crisis and urges policy makers and others to resist its use. I underscore the extent to which, over

centuries, the language of exceptionalism and emergency that have been used to respond to political violence and terrorism have operated in practice to limit democracy and undermine the rule of law. The slippage from exceptional response to normalized emergency has been well-practiced in the counter-terrorism context and this Report provides important lessons on how to avoid that pathway in the climate response context. Fundamentally, exceptionalism has consistently failed to address the conditions conducive to the production of violence and offer meaningful pathways to restore social and political equilibrium. Exceptionalism simply will not solve the polycrisis.

This Report reminds us of the value of contesting the language of emergency, security, and exceptionalism in response to our climate challenges. It urges us to center problem-solving, justice and solidarity in the work ahead. It is a cogent call to rethink the intellectual and policy responses that are being practiced from the Security Council to national parliaments on climate regulation. By reframing the past, it allows to think about different ways to speak about the future. It is an exceptionally well-timed intervention.

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Executive Summary

As the climate crisis escalates, so are efforts to securitize climate change. Climate emergency declarations and discourse are proliferating globally. Climate scientists are raising alarm about the existential threat to humanity and life on earth posed by the climate crisis. At the same time, climate security is becoming an increasingly popular frame among sections of the climate movement and a growing number of governments, militaries and corporate actors.

The impetus for securitizing climate change is often about prioritizing the issue and galvanizing transformative action for mitigation and adaptation. The reality of securitizing an issue, however, is that it tends to promote and legitimate militarized and authoritarian responses.

Drawing on insights and evidence from the war on terror and the spread of global counterterrorism in the past two decades, this report identifies three pathways to securitizing climate change – **prioritization, militarization** and **authoritarianization**. It explores the distinctive risks they create for the future of civic space and human rights, highlights opportunities to address these risks, and offers a set of recommendations.

The report identifies six key lessons from the war on terror and considers their relevance and implications for securitizing the climate crisis and the future of civic space. It highlights inflection points in the pathways to securitizing climate change where disruption of militarized and authoritarian responses is possible and innovation can help develop and elevate alternatives.

Our findings and recommendations are important beyond the defense of human rights and civic space.

Militarized and authoritarian responses may divert attention and resources away from climate mitigation and climate justice, and in that process prioritization narratives and efforts may be co-opted and subverted. In other words, the risk is that securitizing the climate crisis may become a substitute rather than a catalyst for addressing it. There is a real window of opportunity right now to prevent that from happening and to advance viable alternatives.

MIGRATION

CONSTITUENCIES FOR SECURITIZATION

ECO-AUTHORITARIANISM

CLIMATE SECURITY

DESECURITIZATION/ NORMALIZATION

THREAT FRAMING

FINANCE & PARTNERSHIPS

UN SECURITY COUNCIL

CLIMATE FINANCE & PARTNERSHIPS

CLIMATE CHANGE AT THE UNSC

INFORMALITY & SOFT LAW

LESSONS FROM THE WAR ON TERROR

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CLIMATE CRISIS

GREEN SACRIFICE ZONES

Introduction

As the climate crisis escalates, so are efforts to securitize climate change. Climate emergency declarations and discourse are proliferating globally. Climate scientists are raising alarm about the systemic, existential threat to humanity and life on earth posed by the climate crisis (Ripple et al. 2023). At the same time, climate security is becoming an increasingly popular frame among some sections of the climate movement and a growing number of governments, militaries and corporate actors.

The impetus for securitizing climate change is often about prioritizing the issue and galvanizing transformative action for mitigation and adaptation. The reality of securitizing an issue, however, is that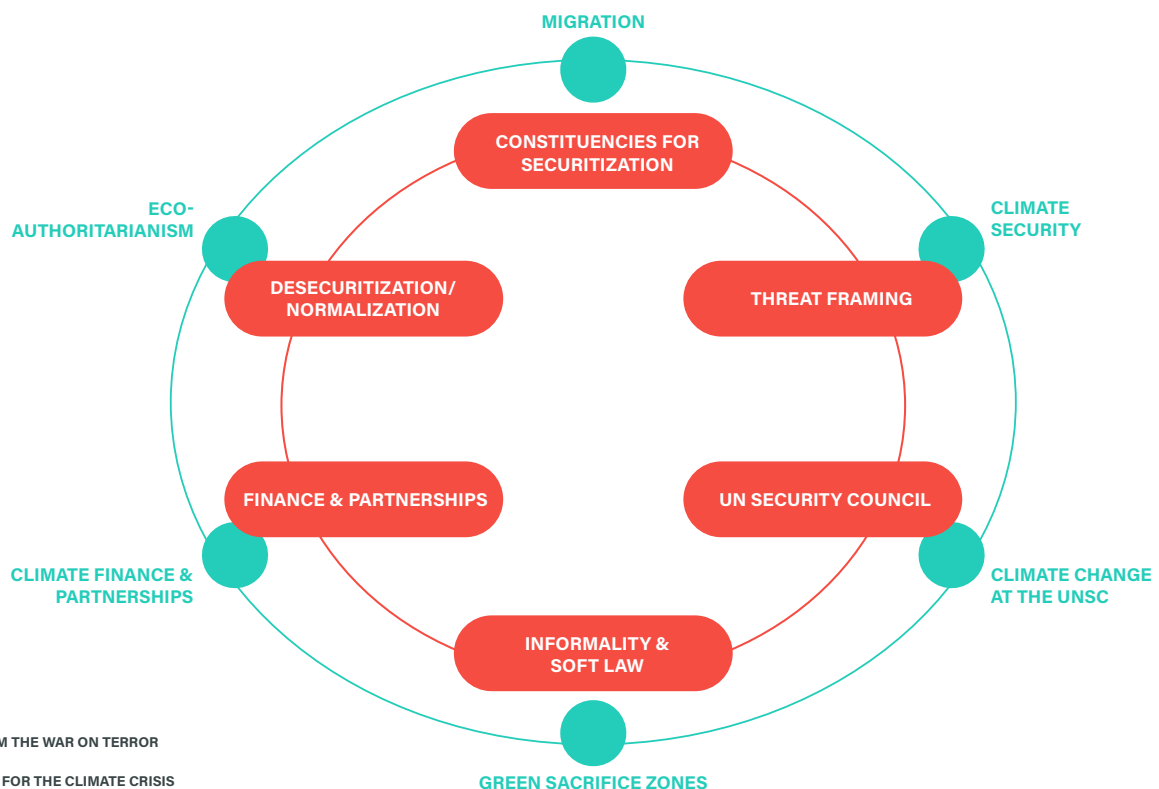 it tends to promote militarized and authoritarian responses to address real or perceived existential threats. This report aims to raise awareness about the risks of securitizing the climate crisis for the future of civic space and human rights and to consider opportunities to prevent and mitigate some of these risks through disruption and innovation.

The report argues that efforts to securitize climate change are already underway but their significance and implications are yet to be determined. It identifies three pathways to securitizing the climate crisis - *prioritization, militarization,* and *authoritarianization* – which create distinctive risks for the future of civic space and human rights. And it highlights the opportunities to address some of these risks by raising awareness among key actors, actively shaping the currently unsettled meaning of 'climate security' and advancing alternative frames such as 'climate justice', and embedding meaningful civic participation and human rights considerations in the evolving architecture for climate change adaptation and mitigation.

In exploring these risks and opportunities, the report draws on insights and lessons from the experience with the war on terror

and the spread of global counterterrorism over the past two decades. These insights are useful for two reasons. First, the war on terror has been a key driver of the closing civic space phenomenon as governments increasingly use counterterrorism and national security discourse, laws and policies to restrict rights and freedoms of association, assembly and expression (Hayes and Joshi 2020; Ní Aoláin et al. 2023). A securitized response to the climate crisis is likely to enable governments to repurpose and redeploy some of these security measures and instruments, and to adopt new restrictions on civic space (Joshi 2020). Second, mapping and analyzing the pathways of the war on terror provides critical insights into the nature and logic of emergency frames and securitization processes more generally. While climate change and terrorism are clearly very different, both have been framed as an existential threat that requires a global response, albeit so far by different actors and for different purposes. The lessons from the war on terror can help us to project future pathways for securitizing climate change, anticipating some of the risks involved and identifying openings for disrupting and developing alternatives.

Our findings have broader implications for addressing the climate crisis. Prioritizing climate action will be critical for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and averting climate catastrophe. There is a risk, however, that prioritization advocates and narratives that use the language of security may be co-opted and their goals subverted by militarization and authoritarianization. And that militarized and authoritarian responses become a substitute for the kind of far-reaching action needed to address the causes and

drivers of climate change. Militarization, for example, is already underway and there is a risk that it may divert attention and resources away from climate mitigation and resilience and subvert climate justice. There are parallels here with the ways in which the war on terror ended up 'mowing the lawn' rather than dealing with the structural causes of terrorism.

The report draws on desk research, exploratory conversations with academics and practitioners, and nearly two decades of studying the war on terror and its impacts and implications for human rights. Preliminary research findings were discussed at a workshop with activists and policy experts working on climate change, counterterrorism, and human rights, as well as a research seminar at the London School of Economics. The research has also benefitted from sustained input and ongoing feedback from an Advisory Group of civic space experts and funders. It further draws on research carried out by the Climate Insights Hub (2023), which involves elite interviews, social listening online, and attitude polling in the United States and European Union.

The report starts with an overview of the insights generated by research on securitization and climate change. It then explores different pathways to securitizing the climate crisis by highlighting their logics, actors/drivers, and implications for civic space. The report then identifies six lessons from the war on terror and considers their relevance and implications for the climate crisis and the future of civic space. The final section draws out the main conclusions and provides a set of recommendations.

1

Securitization Research & Climate Change

Securitization can mean different things depending on who is using that language and for what purposes.

In academic circles, the term securitization was popularized by scholars from the Copenhagen School of security studies (Buzan et al. 1998). According to their definition, securitization occurs when a securitizing actor frames an issue as an existential threat, the relevant audience accepts the need for extraordinary measures that break with normal rules and procedures to address that threat, and the measures are implemented (see Figure 1). Securitization effectively moves the issue from normal politics to exceptional politics. It can legitimate the use of emergency powers and the suspension of rights and freedoms to address the perceived existential threat.

SECURITIZING ACTOR
frames the issue as
an existential threat

RELEVANT AUDIENCE
accepts the need for
extraordinary measures

POLITICAL AUTHORITY
adopts extraordinary /
exceptional measures

Figure 1: Securitization theory: How securitization occurs

Source: Buzan et al. 1998.

Researchers have applied this understanding of securitization to a range of issues including terrorism, migration, HIV/AIDS, drugs, and cybersecurity, among others. Climate change and the environment have attracted growing interest in the securitization literature. The research to date suggests that efforts to securitize climate change are on the rise both at the national and international level but so far, they have been largely unsuccessful in the sense that the sort of exceptional measures that securitization scholars predict have not been adopted. At the most, securitization efforts have resulted in politicization of climate change. Figure 2 summarizes some of the insights from academic research that seeks to explain why that may be the case. In addition to these explanations, a more general point is that powerful political and economic interests have been vested in denying that climate change is an existential threat and have been actively working to challenge efforts to frame climate change in those terms.

Climate change is a threat without an 'enemy' but also no 'hero' to save the day

Rather than rallying support, efforts to securitize cause helplessness, disengagement

Why efforts to securitize climate change haven't yet worked?

Some states are reluctant to expand competencies of the Security Council

Misfit between gravity of threat and the modest measures proposed to address it

Figure 2. Climate Securitization Research: Why it has not worked so far

Sources: McDonald 2023; Prins 1993; Warner & Boas 2019.

As the climate crisis deepens and its consequences become more visible, climate securitization efforts are likely to escalate. The next section explores the different trajectories, or pathways, that climate securitization may take and considers their implications for the future of civic space.

2

Pathways to Securitizing the Climate Crisis

When the language of security is invoked, securitization can mean different things depending on the meaning of 'security' (Kaldor 2014). One meaning of security is about drawing attention to a particular issue in order to elevate its importance and direct more resources to address it. This is, for example, how the UN attempted to securitize development after the Cold War through the 'Human Security' agenda. Another meaning of security is about the military and security apparatus; seen in this way, securitization is linked to national security imperatives and involves bringing a particular issue within the purview of the military, police and intelligence agencies. In the context of the war on terror, for example, the proliferation of a global counterterrorism architecture subsumed and leveraged statebuilding and peacebuilding efforts for the purposes of fighting terrorism (Rangelov & Theros 2019). A third meaning of security is about creating a 'state of exception'. It involves assertion of sovereign power through the adoption of emergency measures and exceptional responses that go beyond normal rules and procedures. This understanding most closely resembles the notion of securitization developed by the Copenhagen School.

These three meanings of security can be linked to three potential pathways to securitizing climate change. We call these prioritization, militarization, and authoritarianization pathways. The different logics and actors driving the pathways and their divergent implications for civic space are summarized in Table 1.

The prioritization pathway is about highlighting the urgency of climate change action and is often driven by civic actors such as climate scientists and activist movements, for example, Extinction Rebellion, Fridays for Future, Sunrise, Youth Strike 4 Climate, and Action for Climate Emergency – as well as progressive actors within the security establishment. When these kinds of actors employ emergency frames and call for rapid transformative action, they seek to elevate the issue and prioritize it on public and political agendas. While their efforts may not call for exceptional emergency measures that restrict civic space or override justice concerns, critics contend that they may inadvertently contribute to such outcomes. For example, climate emergency declarations and framings may end up legitimating intrusive state surveillance and coercion to meet climate targets (Delina & Diesendorf 2013, p. 378). Inadvertently, this may lead to a backlash or repression of the very actors who use emergency frames to prioritize the issue.

A second pathway to securitizing climate change involves militarization. National militaries are becoming more engaged in addressing climate-related disasters and demanding more powers, resources and capabilities to lead the response to such crises in the future. This involves militarization of new areas of public policy (e.g., migration and borders, aid); a demand for new warfighting capabilities (e.g., desert warfare and heat-resilient technologies); and, increased geopolitical competition over critical resources (e.g., strategic minerals). The logic of this pathway can be glimpsed from what the Transnational Institute calls 'militarized adaptation' (Yeltekin 2022). Their research shows that the largest military powers are driving the framing of climate change as a security issue but that increasingly, low- and middle-income countries are also starting to integrate climate security framings into their national security strategies for a variety of different purposes.

While some of these purposes may be about accelerating climate action or advancing peacebuilding efforts (e.g., Bolivia, Small Island Developing States), others are about legitimating national military advancements (e.g., Brazil, India, Pakistan) and justifying external influence and interventions (e.g., in the Sahel). The militarization pathway highlights the risk that conventional security infrastructure controls the overall climate response while civilian response infrastructure is increasingly securitized.

A third possible pathway to securitizing the climate crisis is linked to creating a state of exception where executive power can be exercised and consolidated free of ethical, legal and procedural constraints. As Carl Schmitt famously put it, 'sovereign is the one who decides on the exception' (2010/1922). For example, there is evidence that China's turn to 'coercive environmentalism' involves employing security frames and emergency measures to centralise power e.g., by framing climate change as a security threat to continued economic development and prosperity (Sahu 2021). Some political theorists argue that as the climate crisis deepens, concern for democratic processes and individual rights may hinder the ability of governments to effectively address the security threat posed by climate change; therefore, some form of authoritarian governance may be necessary and legitimate (Mittiga 2022).

These three pathways to securitizing climate change are not exclusive and may be mutually reinforcing. For instance, the prioritization pathway may open up space for advocates of eco-authoritarianism or for special interest groups linked to the military-industrial complex and the border and surveillance industry to pursue securitization along those lines. At the same time, it is possible to imagine a situation where militarization backfires because it fails to address the underlying causes of climate change and deepens the crisis, therefore creating openings for climate scientists and activists to mobilize more multi-dimensional responses.

Different pathways can have distinctive impacts on civic space. The authoritarianization pathway presents the most serious risks for civic space because it involves the sort of exceptional emergency measures that securitization scholars predict. These are likely to include restrictions on freedoms of association, assembly, and expression; however, these kinds of restrictions may have differentiated effects on civil society. Recent research highlights that while authoritarian states tend to crack down on advocacy groups, they often rely on and create more opportunities for regime-friendly or apolitical groups involved in service delivery (Toepler et al. 2020). This means that the rise of eco-authoritarianism may open up some spaces for environmental actors and agendas that are aligned with government policies and priorities. Indeed, fine-grained empirical analysis of coercive environmentalism in China has highlighted the co-existence of centralized control by the authorities with 'democratic pockets' on the ground where environmental groups have been able to propose and experiment with solutions

(Li & Shapiro 2020). Nevertheless, authoritarianization is most likely to close down civic space as centralized, top-down policies may generate dissent and resistance that, in turn, may be met with further repression, censorship and coercion.

The militarization pathway raises a different but related set of risks for civic space and human rights. One risk is about the repurposing of counterterrorism discourse, tools and practices to target environmental activists, indigenous peoples, protestors and journalists. We have already seen this logic at play in the extension of emergency and exceptional measures to new domains such as disaster response (Hurricane Katrina), militarized policing of protests (George Floyd, Black Lives Matter, environmental protest), and criminalizing solidarity with migrants and refugees. At the extreme, the very victims of climate change, such as people displaced by extreme climate events, may be recast as 'threats' to be contained, for example, through border militarization and surveillance (Buxton 2021). Another risk for civic space in this pathway is more indirect. Pursuing militarized responses may limit the space for actors and approaches that emphasize addressing the structural causes of climate change and promoting climate justice. Militarized adaptation effectively becoming a substitute for mitigation.

The prioritization pathway creates both opportunities and risks for the future of civic space. On the one hand, the actors and agendas driving this pathway to securitizing climate change depend on civic space, rights and freedoms. The more these rights and freedoms are exercised, the more civic space may be expanded. At the same time, it creates the risk of crackdown and repression even by governments that are rhetorically committed to climate action. The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor, asserts that the increasing criminalization and repression of environmental protestors has become a global phenomenon: 'at its core it's about maintaining the power structures in place. This is true regardless of whether it's a dictatorship, democracy or a corrupt narco-state, and regardless of the state's professed commitment to human rights, protecting the environment and combating climate change' (Lakhani et al. 2023). This highlights another risk. Well-intentioned efforts to mobilise attention and resources for tackling the climate crisis may be co-opted by powerful state and corporate actors for their own purposes. In other words, the prioritization pathway may end up facilitating and legitimating militarization and/or authoritarianization.

Pathway	Logic	Actors / Drivers	Implications for civic space
Prioritization	Emphasizing the urgency of the climate crisis in order to direct attention and resources to addressing it	Climate scientists, movements and activists Green Parties, progressive groups and think-tanks Local authorities declaring a climate emergency International orgs; cultural producers and influencers	Opportunity to expand civic space for environmental actors and agendas Risk of co-option by powerful actors and discourses driving other pathways
Militarization	Bringing climate change responses under the security sector, particularly the fallout from climate crises	Major military powers National security establishments; regional and transnational security organizations Private security companies; geopolitics and national security think tanks	Adapting and expanding civic space restrictions justified on national security and counterterrorism grounds Crackdown on civic actors dealing with fallout of climate crises (e.g. migration)
Authoritarianization	Imposing top-down climate policies to reassert sovereignty and/or legitimate authoritarian rule	Authoritarian and backsliding states; States confronting sudden climate-related crises Reactionary and populist politicians + movements Academics and activists advocating for eco-authoritarianism	Increasingly repressed and closed civic space Potentially allowing to instrumentalize pockets of civic space for climate action

Table 1: Pathways to securitizing climate change

3

Lessons from the War on Terror

The war on terror and the ensuing expansion of counterterrorism norms and practices over the past 20+ years has been a laboratory for securitization. This section highlights six lessons from the war on terror about the risks of securitizing climate change and considers their implications for the future of civic space.

3.1 Constituencies for Securitization

Before securitization occurs, constituencies for securitization can be identified that are either 'shopping' for a new existential threat or trying to securitize a particular issue. Successful securitization takes place when a window of opportunity emerges for these kinds of actors to pursue their agendas. After the Cold War, the US experienced what has been described as a 'threat deficit' and the 9/11 attacks offered an opening (Buzan 2006). Securitization scholars have pointed out how there was a 'string of attempts to find a replacement for the Soviet Union as the enemy focus for US foreign and military policy: first Japan, then China, 'clash of civilizations' and rogue states' (ibid., p. 1101). And yet, none of these attempts succeeded to create the sort of credible threat that could underpin US leadership of global security policy until the attacks of 9/11.

Other types of constituencies for securitization are focused on a particular threat and develop a set of securitizing ideas and practices that are initially marginal or explicitly rejected. That changes when the right opportunity presents itself. The controversial USA Patriot Act adopted in October 2001, for example, included a number of provisions that had already been put forward in early drafts of the 1996 Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act prompted by the Oklahoma City bombings in April 1995. Some of these draft provisions included widening the definition of terrorism, the use of indefinite detention of non-citizens, enhancing the ability to use roving wiretaps and an expansion of presidential and police powers, among others. Most of these proposals were rejected in 1996 but, as analysts explain, they already indicated 'how the growing centrality of counterterrorism in US domestic and foreign policy would lead Congress to lower its guard and the public to tolerate reductions in their rights and liberties' (Zalman & Clarke 2009). A militarized approach to terrorism was also rehearsed in response to the 1998 bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and the 2000 attack on the USS Cole in Yemen. In response, the US carried out military strikes in places like Afghanistan and Sudan.

The role of catalytic events such as 9/11 was to provide 'windows of opportunity' for such constituencies for securitization to get the ideas and practices they had already developed and advocated from the margins to the mainstream. Different kinds of exceptional measures and emergency powers, previously rejected and considered unacceptable, now provided the foundation for the response.

One lesson is that cases of incomplete or 'failed' securitization can help us identify constituencies for securitization and the discourses and practices that are likely to be elevated when the right conditions are in place. Another lesson is that there are different types of constituencies for securitization. It is helpful to distinguish between those who are actively 'shopping' for an existential threat in order to advance their power and interests, and

those who are specifically focused on securitizing a particular issue. Disrupting the constituencies for securitization is about elevating and developing alternative discourses and practices early on that can be advocated for and accepted when windows of opportunity emerge. It is also about recognizing that certain discourses and practices can be co-opted and instrumentalized by constituencies for securitization in dangerous ways.

Implications for the Climate Crisis: Migration

One area where these lessons from the war on terror are particularly pertinent to the climate crisis is migration. The link between climate change and migration has been recognized for a long time, from rising sea levels to drought and desertification, increasing displacement as a result of climate-related events. However, what often attracts attention in the public domain are headline-grabbing predictions that exaggerate the number of climate-related migrants. An example is the Ecological Threat Register 2020 report published by the Institute for Economics and Peace, which predicts that 1.2 billion people will be displaced by ecological threats by 2050 (IEP 2020). While experts studying the impact of climate change on human mobility have criticized the report, it was widely picked up by media outlets and by environmental activists desperate to put more pressure on governments.

When climate movements in the Global North inflate the threat of large-scale migration to agitate for climate action, there is a risk of reinforcing existing anti-immigration agendas and discourses and of justifying securitized border management. Experts on climate change and migration have warned that misleading predictions like those made in the Ecological Threat Register serve to 'spark fear of a dystopian world in which

the Global North is overrun by people fleeing the Global South, bringing with them chaos, conflict, and destabilizing (largely White) democracies' (Nash & Zickgraf 2020). They point out that such narratives convert the ecological threat into a human threat and can be used to justify ever more restrictive anti-immigration measures and crackdowns on migrants' rights defenders.

Inadvertently, well-meaning environmental actors may end up providing opportunities for constituencies for securitization. While populist right-wing parties and movements have been predominantly anti-climate so far, they have also been shopping for issues that could be securitized to advance their political agendas and projects. A climate-related catastrophe, for example, could act as a catalytic event and provide a window of opportunity to instrumentalize the issue of climate change in new ways. The radical right so far do not organize around climate but they do organize around nature, which presents one route for ideas to cross. For example, some far-right parties in Europe explicitly link population growth and immigration to resource depletion and ecological disruption, allowing them to connect their nativist anti-immigration arguments to the conservation agenda (de Nadal 2022). Likewise, governments that have been securitizing migration for some time could see an opportunity in climate change to reinforce existing models of border management based on containment, detention and surveillance.

The risk for civic space is that the rights and freedoms of migrants as well as the citizens and civil society groups who advocate for and assist migrants are likely to be further curtailed. They are already undermined in the current system of externalizing European border controls to 'buffer' countries such as Niger, Libya and Turkey, for example, which enables human rights abuses of migrants and underwrites authoritarian repression in exchange for controlling migration routes. And some European countries are already criminalizing solidarity with migrants, including by prosecuting citizens, humanitarian workers, human rights

groups and activists providing assistance to migrants and refugees.

3.2
Threat Framing

Constituencies for securitization are important because when an opportunity arises, they can determine not only whether an issue is securitized but also how it is securitized; in other words, how the underlying threat is interpreted, framed, and responded to. At the time of the 9/11 attacks, an influential constituency within President George W. Bush's circle of advisors were the so-called neoconservatives, many of whom had served during the Reagan administration and had been preoccupied with new kinds of existential threats facing the United States throughout the 1990s. It was this group that was well-placed to impose a meaning on the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and call for a particular kind of response (Kaldor 2018).

Securitization involves framing a particular issue as an existential threat, thereby justifying emergency action outside normal rules and procedures. But how exactly that threat is framed has important implications. It determines the kinds of extraordinary measures that are adopted to address that threat. Therefore, it can be an inflection point in the pathways to securitization.

The Bush administration interpreted 9/11 as a foreign attack on the United States similar to Pearl Harbour, an analogy invoked repeatedly in speeches made by President Bush. Because the attacks were framed as an act of war, it justified a military response that included the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq on the basis of self-defence.

However, the Bush administration also asserted that the US was in a new kind of war with a new kind of enemy, which required responses that ended up stretching and subverting established rules of international law. Over time, the war on terror took the form of airstrikes and drone attacks to take out so-called 'high value targets' and relied on

intelligence gathered with tools such as torture, arbitrary detention, and mass surveillance.

An alternative framing of the 9/11 attacks would have interpreted them as crimes against humanity and would have entailed a justice and law enforcement approach. After the attacks, leading political analysts and legal scholars called for a US response rooted in international law and advocated for law enforcement and intelligence approaches to terrorism rather than military action (see, e.g., the 8 October 2001 issue of *The Nation*). That means treating the perpetrators not as political enemies that must be defeated militarily but as criminals who should be apprehended, prosecuted and punished (Wilson 2005). In other words, framing 9/11 as a foreign attack against the United States akin to Pearl Harbour rather than a crime against humanity justified a particular type of securitized response – warfighting and mass surveillance - and shut down alternatives – justice and law enforcement.

A key lesson from the war on terror for the climate crisis is the importance of considering not only whether climate change is securitized, but also how exactly it may be securitized. The framing of the underlying threat is critical because it determines and legitimates a particular set of securitized responses while, at the same time, closing down alternatives.

Implications for the Climate Crisis: Climate Security

It is much more difficult to impose a meaning on the threat posed by climate change that can be widely accepted and acted upon than it was to impose a meaning on the terrorist attacks of 9/11. This is evident in the growing discourse of 'climate security'. On the one hand, that discourse frames climate change as an existential threat and marginalizes other framings and approaches that may emphasise competing values such as 'climate justice'. At the same time, however, the meaning of 'climate security' is yet to be defined and settled (see Table 2). That presents opportunities to try and influence how the underlying threat is defined and shape the responses to ensure they are aligned with human rights and civic space considerations.

Some critics of the language of 'climate security' are concerned that framing climate change in security terms may end up fostering militarization. The Transnational Institute, for example, has carried out sustained research and advocacy to highlight these risks. They emphasize the dangers of securitizing the fallout of the climate crisis – climate related disasters, unrest, conflict, migration – rather than its root causes and portraying as a threat those who might challenge the status quo or bear the brunt of the crisis such as activists, refugees and migrants. In this scenario, climate security is pursued at the expense of climate justice, which would require transforming the economic systems that cause climate change and prioritizing the needs and solutions of frontline communities (Buxton 2021, p.1).

Others worry that the discourse of 'climate security' lends itself to emergency and exceptional measures that can pave the way for growing authoritarianization. There are tensions and trade-offs between the values invoked in addressing the climate emergency. They include speed (the urgency of climate action); participation (the involvement of affected communities in developing and implementing responses); and justice (addressing contemporary and historical patterns of inequity and injustice through reparations). The climate security framing may prioritise the speed of decarbonization at the expense of participation and justice, neglecting the questions of how decarbonization is implemented and with what consequences for vulnerable and marginalized communities and regions. Implementing rapid climate emergency action without broad public participation and support may push democracies towards a police state whereby 'the cure may be worse than the disease' (Kester & Sovacool 2017, p. 52). Moreover, state-led climate security strategies are likely to rely on security practices involving coercion and surveillance at the expense of justice considerations, which are often seen as luxuries in times of crises. As one commentator put it, 'the first things that get tossed out in an emergency are luxuries' (Lieven 2021, p. xxv).

The risks of the climate security discourse for civic space and human rights are significant but there are also opportunities for mitigating some of these risks before they get locked in and developing alternatives. The meaning of climate security is still unsettled, and different types of actors and agendas are currently employing that language differently. Advocates or proponents of alternative interpretations of climate security define the underlying threats differently and draw out often radically different conclusions about the policies needed to address them. Research so far has identified at least four different climate security discourses, which are clustered around two main meanings of security – national and international security, on the one hand, and human and ecological security, on the other. Table 2 captures these understandings of climate security by distinguishing them in terms of the referent object of security, underlying threat, and appropriate response.

	National Security	International Security	Human Security	Environmental Security
Whose security?	Nation states and militaries	International society	Individuals and communities	Ecosystems
Security from what?	Conflict, challenges to sovereignty & economic interests	Conflict, global and regional instability	Lives and livelihoods; welfare and well-being	Challenges to the equilibrium and resilience of ecosystems
Security by what means?	Adaptation to protect borders, critical infrastructure, industry	Adaptation and mitigation to prevent and address instability	Mitigation to address drivers and threats to individuals + communities	Transformation of societal patterns, systems and behaviours

Table 2: Concepts and discourses of climate security

Sources: McDonald, 2013 & 2018; Vogler, 2023.

There is a real opportunity to shape what meaning is imposed on the threat of climate change, and what understanding of climate security is accepted and translated into action. Some analysts are using the concept of frame contestation to consider how competing actors present alternative frames and advocate for different policy responses on that basis (Brzoska 2009; Grear 2020). In fact, recent research shows that even actors that we often view as largely monolithic, such as governments, can be divided internally on how they understand and frame climate security.

Analysis of 40 countries spanning different regime types and geographies shows that defence ministries tend to frame climate security in national security terms, whereas civil ministries frame it in terms of human and environment security. Defence ministries emphasize the indirect consequences of climate change mediated by social actors, such as conflict and migration, while civil ministries emphasize the direct impacts on people and the environment. In other words, rather than forming a monolithic bloc, governments exhibit considerable contestation between civil and military approaches to climate security (Vogler 2023, p. 19).

The unsettled meaning of 'climate security' and the ongoing contestations over it by a range of public and private actors present opportunities to develop climate security approaches that are aligned with human rights and civic space considerations. Recent research involving elite interviews, social listening online and public attitude polling in the US and EU underscores these opportunities (Climate Insights Hub 2023). It shows that so far, the discussion of climate change as a national security issue is largely limited to progressive, pro-climate voices who try to help the cause by expanding the coalition of people concerned about climate change. At the same time, it warns that dangerous narratives are starting to emerge among regressive actors and are likely to become more important as the climate crisis escalates.

There is a window of opportunity to inoculate elites and publics against such narratives and to promote climate security framings that provide genuine alternatives to militarization and authoritarianization.

3.3 Securitization at the UN Security Council

The story of counterterrorism at the United Nations is in some way counterintuitive. The expectation would be that by including this agenda in a multilateral institution, which is more open to civil society participation and where human rights considerations are a central pillar, would have moderated the excesses of the war on terror and better protected civic space. Instead, we have seen a dramatic expansion of the UN counterterrorism architecture, sometimes referred to as the fourth pillar of the UN, which includes the Security Council, the Counterterrorism Committee, the Counterterrorism Committee Executive Directorate, the Office of Counterterrorism, and the Global Counterterrorism Coordination Compact that includes 41 UN entities and other organizations such as Interpol and the Financial Action Task Force (Ní Aoláin et al. 2023, p. 46). In contrast, the only vehicle consistently seeking to inject human rights considerations and scrutiny in that sprawling architecture has been the under-resourced mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on protecting human rights while countering terrorism.

An inflection point in the pathways to securitization was the adoption of the war on terror agenda by the Security Council under Chapter VII of the UN Charter for maintaining international peace and security, which occurred shortly after 9/11. Security Council resolution 1373, inter alia, criminalized terrorist activities, banned terrorist financing and established a new mechanism, the Counterterrorism Committee, to monitor member state compliance. The Security Council expanded its 'legislative powers' with a host of subsequent resolutions under Chapter VII. This, in turn, spurred the proliferation of national counterterrorism legislation around the world with downstream effects on human rights and civic space. In the 2023 Global Study on the Impact of Counterterrorism on Civil Society and Civic Space, the UN Special Rapporteur on protecting human rights while countering terrorism identifies five characteristics of national counterterror legislation, policies and processes that have been particularly harmful (see figure 3).
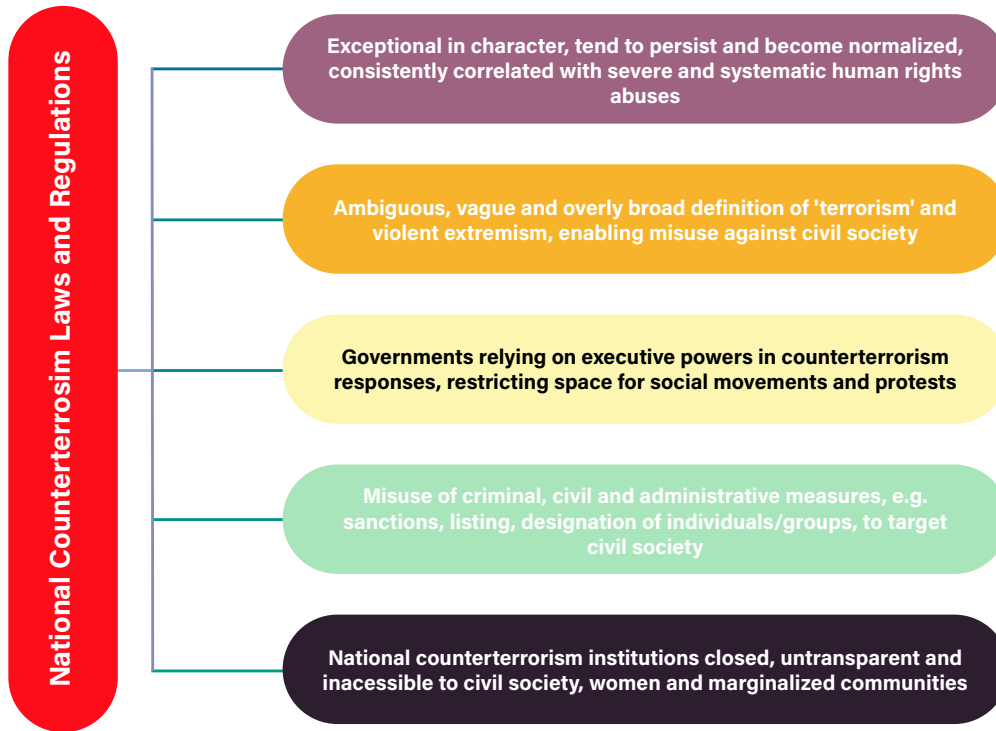
Figure 3: How National Counterterrorism Laws & Measures Impact Civic Space

Source: Ní Aoláin et al. 2023.

In effect, securitization at the Security Council triggered securitization at the national level. It created incentive pathways for state compliance and opportunity pathways for state abuse of counterterrorism norms and policies. Although the war on terror became more controversial and the narrative was muddled over time, counterterrorism laws and measures have consolidated and emerged as a key driver of closing civic space globally.

Implications for the Climate Crisis: Climate Change at the UNSC

Over the past decade, there have been growing calls for and attempts to bring climate change under the Chapter VII powers of the Security Council, elevating it as a threat to international peace and security. The election of countries that prioritize climate change to the Council, such as Small Island Developing States, has reinforced efforts to put the issue on its agenda. Proponents highlight the ability of the UNSC to issue binding decisions and affect change more rapidly, for example to develop early warnings systems and impose economic sanctions for violations of international climate treaties. Others, however, raise concerns that securitization may shift attention and resources away from adaptation and mitigation efforts towards emergency responses, while also amplifying the voices of security actors at the expense of climate scientists (Arias 2022, p. 5).

security risks. It also called for UN peacekeeping operations and political missions to deploy climate security capabilities. While the Security Council had deliberated climate change before, it was the first time a thematic resolution on climate change was tabled for a vote. Twelve Council members supported the resolution and 113 member states co-sponsored it.

However, China, India and Russia opposed the initiative from the start, arguing that there was no clear scientific case for linking climate change and security, and that bringing the issue under Security Council powers would detract from the work of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (Security Council Report 2022). In the final vote, 12 Security Council members voted in favour but Russia vetoed the resolution while India voted against it and China abstained. That outcome has been interpreted as suggesting that some major and emerging powers are reluctant to expand the competencies of the Security Council and create opportunities for international scrutiny and interference. In the debates, Russia, China and India put forward a range of arguments.

(McDonald 2023; see also UNSC 2021).

As the climate crisis escalates, the agenda of linking climate change and security at the UNSC is likely to gain more traction. From a human rights and civic space perspective, much would turn on how exactly climate change may be securitized in that forum; in particular, how the underlying threat is framed and whether it is linked to national/international security or human/environmental security (see the discussion in section 3.2). It is these kinds of considerations that are likely to determine whether Security Council action may create pathways for state compliance with and/or state abuse of climate security norms and practices to crack down on civic space and human rights. The lessons from the war on terror suggest caution, calling for careful consideration of who securitizes climate change at the UNSC and for what purposes, as well as what safeguards and mechanisms for human rights compliance and civil society participation should be put in place early on.

3.4 Informality and 'Soft Law' Pathways

The pursuit of the war on terror and the global counterterrorism agenda has led to a proliferation of counterterrorism 'soft law' and informal regulation. Within the broader counterterrorism ecosystem, these are some of the most opaque pathways to securitization. They have also been highly effective in excluding civil society and sidelining human rights considerations. Many securitizing norms and practices start off as 'soft law', for example as technical guidelines or best practices, but subsequently can 'harden' by being referenced in UNSC resolutions. Alternatively, they can also function as 'hard law' in practice – eliciting very high levels of compliance by states keen to securitize the issue or to be seen as reliable partners in the war on terror.

Analysis of the proliferation of 'soft law' counterterrorism norms and instruments shows how it has weakened human rights protections globally and provided a cover

> **In December 2021, the Security Council voted on a draft resolution proposed by Ireland and Niger which called for a comprehensive, whole-of-UN approach to address climate change and its effects. It asked the Secretary General to report to the Council on the security implications of climate change in relevant countries and regions, and to provide recommendations on addressing climate-related security risks.**

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They challenged those who argued that the Council was an appropriate forum for addressing climate change and questioned their motives, pushed back on what they viewed as efforts to securitize climate change, raised questions about the relationship between climate change and conflict, and argued that addressing climate change calls for a focus on development rather than security

for human rights violations in multiple national settings (Ní Aoláin 2021). Some of the norms and practices that have been most harmful for civic space have been produced by informal structures outside the treaty-based institutional architecture or through self-regulating initiatives. An example that has attracted significant attention in the past decade is the impact of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) which sets the global standards for anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing, and in particular, its Recommendation 8 for combatting the abuse of nonprofit organizations.

By assessing non-governmental organizations as 'particularly vulnerable' to being abused for terrorist financing purposes, the FATF standards have had a chilling effect on civil society. Their unintended consequences include bank de-risking and overregulation of NGOs as well as enabling states to crack down on human rights and democracy groups and other dissident voices, under the guise of complying with FATF standards. The issue has attracted growing civil society attention and pressure and so far, there have been two rounds of revisions to Recommendation 8, in 2016 and in 2023. While welcomed by civic space and human rights advocates, these revisions are seen as unlikely to address the serious harms incurred by civil society and to reverse the weaponization of the FATF regime as a whole (Alsancak & Reimer 2023; see also Human Security Collective 2023).

A key lesson from this experience is that once 'soft law' hardens and informal regulation is embedded in practices and institutions, they are very difficult to counter and reverse. That calls for sustained civil society input and human rights scrutiny in the deliberation and development of 'soft law' norms and standards to prevent harmful unintended consequences and deliberate misuse in the future.

Implications for the Climate Crisis: Green Sacrifice Zones

The risk of securitization via 'soft law' and informal regulation is significant for climate change because soft law has proliferated in the environmental field. In fact, the growth of international environmental 'soft law' can be attributed in part to its ability to respond to crises as they emerge and to lower the costs of state participation compared to formal international law-making procedures (Joule 2014). It is the flexibility and speed of environmental soft law that makes it attractive. However, it is precisely these characteristics that may also create risks for civic space if environmental soft law becomes a vehicle for securitization as counterterrorism soft law did.

One area of risk is the regulation of the so-called 'green sacrifice zones', which have been defined as 'places and populations that will be affected by the sourcing, transportation, installation, and operation of solutions for powering low-carbon transitions, as well as end-of-life treatment of related material waste' (Zografos & Robbins 2022, p. 543). From a climate justice perspective, the critical questions are what are the sacrifice zones, who is sacrificed and for what purposes, and who makes the decision to sacrifice these areas and communities. For example, there is growing awareness of the risk of harms and dispossession of indigenous and rural communities in the context of exponential growth in demand for transition minerals.

According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), reaching net-zero targets globally by 2050 would require a six-fold increase in critical minerals such as lithium, cobalt, graphite, and nickel (IEA 2023). The risks for human rights and civic space posed by this spike in demand can be glimpsed from the Transition Minerals Tracker, which has identified

more than 500 allegations of abuses in transition mineral mining between 2010 and 2022 (Business and Human Rights Resource Center 2023). Informal and 'soft law' regulation of such 'green sacrifice zones' can offer governments and corporate interests a convenient framework for flexible and rapid extraction at the expense of human rights standards and civic space considerations.

Green sacrifice zones are also becoming battlegrounds of geopolitical competition over raw materials. Resource access, along with other issues such as migration control, is a strategic priority for major powers and drives their international aid and cooperation with other countries. One example is the recently concluded Memorandum of Understanding between Serbia and the European Union establishing a Strategic Partnership on Sustainable Raw Materials, Battery Value Chains, and Electric Vehicles, which is linked to the development of a lithium mine in the Jadar Valley. The mining project has sparked a public outcry and a series of broad-based protests in Serbia. It has also highlighted the risk that EU accession policies in the Western Balkans may prioritize resource access to strategic minerals over democracy and rule of law reform (Burazer 2024).

3.5
Finance and Partnerships

Another way in which securitizing practices and elites become embedded and legitimized is through financial flows and partnership arrangements. In the war on terror, three different mechanisms can be identified. The first mechanism is about the role of security finance in reshaping agendas and incentivizing countries and institutions to join the war effort. For example, in a number of conflict-affected and developing countries, financial incentives helped to securitize development and state-building by repurposing and redirecting them towards counterterrorism objectives (Duffield 2005; Zyck 2012). In developed countries, counterterrorism finance similarly reshaped agendas and

triggered bureaucratic competition over funding streams. In the United States, for instance, the newly created Department of Homeland Security subsumed a range of agencies and issues (border control, immigration, disaster relief) under counterterrorism in 2002. As homeland security finance ballooned, it intensified competition for funding and threat inflation among public and private organizations seeking grants. In just three years, the list of potential terrorist targets in the US grew from 160 to more than 300,000 (Lustick 2008).

The second mechanism is about the unaccountable and opaque ways in which much of security finance has been mobilized in the war on terror. In 2017, the Stimson Center convened a nonpartisan study group to identify the total amount of counterterrorism spending by the United States since 9/11 and to evaluate its efficacy. It found that spending had exponentially risen but because it often took the form of emergency and war-related discretionary spending across a wide range of areas, it was very difficult to track and account for. The study group estimated that, by 2018, the total counterterrorism spending by the United States amounted to at least $2.8 trillion, while acknowledging that the figure was based on incomplete data which also precluded a reliable assessment of its efficacy (Stimson Study Group 2018).

A third mechanism involves leveraging security finance to forge partnerships on the ground with strongmen, local powerbrokers and armed groups. As long as they remained loyal partners in the war on terror, these actors continued to receive financial and political support despite mounting evidence of human rights abuses and corruption. In places like Afghanistan and Iraq, such partnership arrangements ended up generating and sustaining the kind of insecurity and violence that provided a justification for further security assistance and led to more abuses. The availability of security contracts and aid created a market where public authorities and private security companies converged to profit from the war. As security partners were largely exempt from international

and civil society scrutiny, oversight and accountability, a culture of impunity became entrenched (Rangelov & Theros 2019). Likewise, in Mali, which served as a critical hub for international counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel, financial assistance and other support to the Malian government and local security forces allied in the war on terror reinforced predatory governance and contributed to the collapse of civilian rule in the country (D'Amato & Baldero 2022).

The experience in the war on terror demonstrates the role of finance and partnerships in the pathways to securitization. A surge of untransparent financial flows can become a form of rent for predatory and repressive elites and practices, decoupling power and accountability. At the same time, partnership arrangements that purchase the loyalty of such allies can help to shield them from domestic and international scrutiny with serious impacts on governance, human rights and civic space. The role of public-private partnerships in capturing lucrative contracts can further concentrate power and exacerbate corruption. In the context of the climate crisis, the risk is that an influx of untransparent finance and unconditional partnerships can serve as vehicles for militarization and authoritarianization.

Implications for the Climate Crisis: Climate Finance and Partnerships

Understandably, much of the debate on climate finance has centred on issues of scale and equity. While current levels of climate finance have increased, recent assessments show that they remain far too low to deliver on the commitments of the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement (Bhattacharya et al. 2023). They also show that climate finance is concentrated in

developed economies and China at the expense of developing countries bearing the brunt of climate change impacts, and is heavily focused on mitigation rather than adaptation efforts.

Less attention has been directed to the dilemmas posed by climate finance for governance, human rights and civic space. Some of these dilemmas reflect what the UN has called a 'complex and fragmented landscape' for global climate finance, with decentralized governance that can be difficult to track and navigate (UNCTAD 2023). The UN has stated that, in spite of the proliferation of dedicated climate funds, the bulk of climate finance continues to be delivered through non-climate specific Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) vehicles outside of well controlled channels. This has prompted calls for creating a unified accounting framework for climate finance, including reforms of major funds such as the Green Climate Fund (ibid).

In addition to a lack of transparency of the global climate finance architecture, there is the challenge that much of climate finance is directed at high-risk sectors and geographies for corruption. Energy and transport, for example, attract the vast majority of finance for climate mitigation, mostly in the form of private finance which is particularly difficult to track (Buchner et al. 2023). Corruption cases have been reported across different types of climate finance and projects. They include, for example, multilateral funds managed by UNDP in projects in Russia, Armenia and Samoa, among others; mafia involvement in renewable energy contracts in Sicily; bribery of Indonesian authorities by private companies to permit illegal logging and palm oil planting in UN projects intended to conserve forests; corruption linked to construction contracts in Brazil's Odebrecht scandal and in South Africa's electricity company Eskom, as well as corruption in state-owned companies in Kenya implementing green energy projects with public funding (Enrici & Hubacek 2018; Farand 2021; Lo 2023; Nest et al. 2020).

The challenge is that the amount of climate finance directed to countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change must increase but these countries are also some of the riskiest places in terms of corruption. So far, in debates about corruption and climate finance, the main concern has been about the risk that corruption poses for the effectiveness of climate mitigation and adaptation projects. But the flip side of that is the risk that an influx of climate finance, without transparency and accountability safeguards, may deepen governance challenges such as corruption and repression. Table 3 presents the corruption perceptions index (CPI) rank by Transparency International and the civic space rating by CIVICUS of the top recipients of ODA climate-related finance in 2021 by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), as well as the top 10 countries that the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the World Resources Institute (WRI) considered to be most at risk from climate disasters in 2023.

Top 10 climate-related development finance overall, 2021 (OECD)	CPI rank, 2021	Civic Space rating, 2021	Top 10 countries most at risk from climate disasters, 2023	CPI rank, 2023	Civic Space rating, 2023
India	85	Repressed	Somalia	178	Repressed
Africa (regional)			Syria	178	Closed
Bangladesh	147	Closed	Democratic Rep of Congo	169	Repressed
Sub-Saharan Africa			Afghanistan	174	Closed
Indonesia	96	Obstructed	Yemen	174	Closed
Europe (regional)			Chad	164	Repressed
Colombia	87	Repressed	South Sudan	180	Repressed
Turkiye	96	Repressed	Central African Republic	154	Repressed
Mexico	124	Repressed	Nigeria	154	Repressed
Egypt	117	Closed	Ethiopia	87	Repressed

Table 3: Climate Finance, Corruption and Civic Space
Sources: CIVICUS 2021 & 2023; IRC 2023; OECD 2022; Transparency International 2021, 2023.

The figures show that the countries that urgently need climate funding at scale for climate adaptation and resilience are also some of the countries with the worst corruption ratings and with civic space that is either repressed or closed. Many are also conflict-affected states and have been recipients of counterterrorism and other forms of security finance over the past two decades. In these kinds of environments, there is a risk that climate finance can become a new form of rent that sustains securitizing elites and repressive practices. However, that outcome is far from inevitable. There is growing interest in environmental peacebuilding, for example, which seeks to promote peace through environmental protection and cooperation. If climate finance is aligned with peace and governance objectives, it could create space for civil society and public participation in both peacebuilding and climate adaptation.

Rolling out of climate finance and partnerships without centring issues of civic space can be problematic at two levels. Firstly, civil society input and participation is associated with better climate policies that are more likely to succeed, even in authoritarian settings.

Secondly, when climate finance and partnerships are decoupled from human rights and governance considerations, they can serve to sustain authoritarian power and fuel corruption.

The case of Vietnam illustrates how these risks may play out in practice. As a country particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, Vietnam has become a major recipient of climate finance including a Just Energy Transition Partnership with international partners to mobilize an initial $15.5 billion of public and private finance over a period of two years for its green transition. While CIVICUS lists civic space in the country as closed, Vietnam's rapid growth and effective economic performance has been heralded as a major development success story. Its commitment to tackling climate change, linked to this improved economic performance, has been seen as an example of authoritarian environmentalism (Gverdtsiteli 2023).

Initially, civil society input and participation was critical for developing its ambitious climate change plans. The authorities permitted activists at the time to express grievances and even organize some peaceful demonstrations.

However, ahead of the COP26 Summit and as the environmentalist movement gained momentum, the government clamped down on civil society. The so-called 'Vietnam Four', a group of environmental activists, were prosecuted under vague tax evasion charges and sentenced to prison in a closed-door hearing. The case attracted international attention and eventually, the government released one of the activists but soon after, arrested another environmental defender.

The story of the 'Vietnam Four' highlights the complexities of climate finance and partnerships and their uneven impacts on civic space (Herbertson 2022). On the one hand, they may open up space for civil society participation in the development of climate policies and projects, as they did in the run-up to Vietnam's energy transition partnership. On the other hand, once climate finance is secured, there are incentives for governments to implement projects without civil society scrutiny and participation. This is how environmental activists who help to develop the government's climate change strategy may end up being marginalized and arrested. The risks here are both about the effectiveness of climate change projects, which may be compromised, and about the potential of climate finance, which is urgently needed by recipient countries, to contribute to closing civic space.

While climate finance and partnerships are likely to shape the future of civic space in many parts of the world, the reverse is also the case. Civic space is likely to be a key factor in determining whether or not climate finance exacerbates governance challenges, such as corruption and repression, as well as whether it is able to achieve its objectives in tackling climate change and building resilience.

3.6 Desecuritization or Normalization?

An issue is considered to be desecuritized when it is moved from exceptional politics to normal politics. This means that the issue is no longer framed as an existential threat which requires exceptional emergency responses that may breach established rules and procedures. However, what appears as desecuritization may in fact be the normalization of the securitized norms and practices. Over time, they become so accepted and embedded that they no longer need to be justified as exceptional measures in response to an emergency.

The war on terror shows how that kind of normalization can occur. Although the rhetoric of the war on terror has subsided and an end to the 'forever wars' declared after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, many of the signature tactics and methods of the war – mass surveillance, targeted killings, use of drones and special forces – persist. For example, as figure 4 illustrates, the Obama administration oversaw an unprecedented expansion of the drone campaign initiated after 9/11. Since then, drone warfare has been firmly established as an integral part of the US national security toolkit under Presidents Trump and Biden, with little public outcry or scrutiny. This shows how counterterrorism norms and practices are able to reproduce themselves successfully even if the securitizing rhetoric is largely silenced. What was once considered exceptional is normalized, and the unacceptable becomes acceptable.

Another example of the normalization of emergency measures that are initially considered exceptional in character is national counterterrorism legislation. France is a case in point. After a series of coordinated terrorist attacks that killed more than 130 people in Paris in 2015, the French government declared a state of emergency and expanded its emergency powers to conduct searches, impose house arrest, and seize property without a judicial warrant (Human Rights Watch, 2015). The state of emergency was subsequently extended five times, until November 2017, and many of these emergency powers were codified and incorporated into ordinary law. In effect, temporary measures such as the right to shut down mosques by executive decree or to ban people from leaving

their towns without judicial authorization have become permanent. In addition to the systematic targeting of Muslims, these kinds of measures have been used against environment activists, trade unionists, refugee solidarity groups, and other civil society actors (Kilpatrick 2020).

Figure 4: The Normalization of Drone Warfare

Source: Vincent 2019.

Implications for the Climate Crisis: Eco-Authoritarianism

A key lesson from the war on terror is the need to be cautious and sceptical about securitized responses that are framed as temporary and exceptional in character because they may become normalized. Once they are embedded in powerful institutions, norms and practices, they are very difficult to roll back, with lasting impacts on human rights and civic space.

This lesson is relevant to the growing debate about climate change, democracy and authoritarianism. Some actors disillusioned with the failure of democracies to address the climate emergency rapidly and decisively, including some leading environmentalists, argue that we may need to put democracy 'on hold' for a while and instead turn to some form of eco-authoritarianism (Lovelock in Hickman 2010). One can imagine how in the future, other actors may also pivot to this approach; for instance, reactionary and populist groups that currently oppose climate action.

The idea that emergency responses to the climate crisis are temporary and can subsequently be reversed, as the issue is returned to the realm of normal politics, may in fact serve to legitimate and normalize authoritarian practices (Willis 2021). Analysts have pointed out that climate emergency declarations, for example, may be used to justify intrusive state surveillance and coercion to ensure mitigation targets are met and there would be 'no guarantee that a state of normal democracy would return' after the end of the transition period (Delina & Diesendorf 2013, p. 378).

Moreover, from a civic space perspective there are questions whether eco-authoritarianism can provide an answer to climate change. If effective climate action depends on a degree of public participation and support, eco-authoritarian measures that close down civic space may backfire.

4

Conclusions and Recommendations

Securitization of the climate crisis is already underway and we have identified different pathways for its future trajectory. The prioritization pathway is currently advanced mainly by progressive, pro-climate actors and narratives. However, their efforts lend themselves to co-option and subversion by powerful forces and interests in advancing militarization and/or authoritarianization. In addition, there is a risk that securitization may shift attention and resources away from addressing the structural causes and drivers of climate change towards dealing with the fallout of the climate crisis through militarized and/or authoritarian responses.

Recommendation 1: Raising Awareness
Raise awareness about the risks of securitizing climate change among progressive, pro-climate actors who are currently the dominant ones employing securitization narratives to elevate the issue and mobilize resources to address it.

Recommendation 2: Raising Awareness
Raise awareness about the risks of securitizing climate change among those actors (e.g., climate funders, practitioners, activists and progressive security thinkers and strategists) whose primary concern is developing effective strategies for climate change adaptation and mitigation.

The relationship between climate change and security and the meaning of 'climate security' are still unsettled and yet to be determined. Various actors are currently seeking to shape its meaning and adapt it to their needs. Even within the same government or organization, some actors understand climate security in terms of human/environmental security whereas others see it as a national security issue. Moreover, many of the rules and tools for climate action (from climate finance to climate governance through 'soft law' norms and standards) are yet to be articulated and developed fully. There is a window of opportunity to address the risks of securitizing climate change by elevating and developing alternative frames, discourses and practices with the engagement of civil society and other key stakeholders.

Recommendation 3: Mapping and catalyzing the ecosystem to disrupt and develop alternatives
Map and catalyze the ecosystem of actors, ideas and practices that can push back on militarized and authoritarian responses to the climate crisis and develop alternatives. That must also include fostering understanding of the actors, agendas and interests driving authoritarianization and militarization through opposition research and strategic communications.

Recommendation 4: Shaping the meaning of 'climate security'
Identify, support and connect those actors and approaches that are already advancing understandings of 'climate security' aligned with human/environmental security and marginalizing national security frames, discourses and practices, or that can do so effectively in the future.

Recommendation 5: Embedding civic participation and human rights
Embed human rights considerations and meaningful participation of civil society and affected communities in the evolving architecture for climate change adaptation and mitigation, across the cycle of developing, implementing and monitoring climate policies and projects.

Pursuing sustained, strategic action to implement these recommendations is important beyond the defense of human rights and civic space. There is a risk that militarized and authoritarian responses may divert attention and resources away from climate mitigation and climate justice, and that prioritization narratives and efforts may be co-opted and subverted. In other words, the risk is that securitizing the climate crisis may become a substitute rather than a catalyst for addressing it. There is a real window of opportunity right now to prevent that from happening and to advance viable alternatives.

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