

Who Securitizes? Climate Change Discourse in the United Nations

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Abstract

When and why do states reframe issues as security problems? Which states advocate for these shifts? While securitization theory predicts that states that are existentially threatened by a problem are most likely to attempt to securitize it, I argue that accounting for the dynamics of institutional agendas can better explain this phenomenon. States that stand to gain agenda control as a result of securitization are likely to rhetorically attempt to securitize, while those that are materially interested in the issue are less likely to do so. I test this theory in the case of the climate change in the UN, leveraging data on speeches in the General Assembly. I provide the first quantitative test of the securitization of climate politics, finding that P5 states securitize to expand their agenda control, while Small Island Developing States do not securitize, contra previous expectations. I further find that the overall climate discourse cannot be characterized as securitized. These findings imply that the Security Council is unlikely to be significantly involved in climate change policy, and also demonstrate the importance of rhetoric for political outcomes and for the distribution of state power within international organizations.

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Introduction

Why are some issues in international politics discussed as security matters, while others are not? When and why do states make the political decision to frame issues as security concerns? The outcomes of these strategic discursive moves by states have substantial implications for the nature of policy responses by international organizations, and determine who are the key decision-makers involved in crafting such policies. In the United Nations (UN), the context of an issue determines whether it is addressed by the universally representative General Assembly (UNGA), or by the small group of states on the Security Council (UNSC). Once an issue is framed as a security problem, it shifts from the responsibility of the UNGA to that of the UNSC. This shift can have specific policy consequences: compared to UNGA, the UNSC can deliver more resources and raise the salience of an issue. However, these matters may become conceived of more narrowly within a security framework, and states that are not members of the UNSC lose their voice in the decision-making process. Do states securitize issues in international organizations to obtain funding and attention for that issue, or to control the venue in which the matter is discussed? The implications of securitization benefit some states, at a cost to others.

Previous work on issue securitization has demonstrated that securitization is an effective means of increasing international attention for a given issue (e.g. [Buzan et al., 1998](#); [Elbe, 2006](#)), implying that actors who care more deeply about that issue will typically support securitization as a means of garnering salience. Yet, anecdotally, countries that do not have obvious material interests in particular issues have engaged in securitizing those matters, while countries that do possess such interests have not. The case of climate change is one such example. Climate change has not been taken as seriously by international organizations as many states would like, and securitizing the issue would be a way for these states to attract increased attention to the problem. Securitization theory would predict that Small Island Developing States (SIDS), the states most intensely threatened by the effects of climate change ([IPCC, 2018](#)), should be the states that care most about climate change action, and thus the most likely to make securitizing

moves, while countries like the United Kingdom, which are not as severely threatened by climate change, would be less likely to do so. In fact, I show that SIDS are *less* likely than other states to securitize climate change, while all of the P5 states, including the United Kingdom, are *more* likely to do so.¹

How can we explain this pattern? Securitization theory has focused on the attention-enhancing results of securitization, which can increase the awareness, speed, and resources dedicated to an issue, but has largely ignored the implications of securitizing moves on agenda control and power. While securitization may increase the salience of an issue, it also influences the forum and manner in which an issue is addressed. Drawing on studies on the politics of international organizations, I argue that securitization is a tool of agenda control within these fora. While these theoretical expectations should hold in many multi-issue institutions, I examine them in the UN as a crucial case. Issues taken up by the UNGA are commonly addressed by consensus, in a multidimensional approach that accounts for human rights, social, political, and economic considerations. Issues taken up by the UNSC, on the other hand, are addressed narrowly as security problems, and only the members of the UNSC are empowered to shape the response. This implies that if forum-shifting increases their control over the issue at hand, states that would be otherwise less materially-motivated to address an issue (i.e. the P5) have incentives to act as securitizing actors, while highly materially-motivated states would oppose securitization. I argue that securitization not only has policy-relevant implications, which have already been highlighted by classical securitization theory, but also has implications for institutional power, which I draw new attention to. By accounting for intra-institutional agenda dynamics as well as for the role of discourse, generally overlooked by rationalist theories, we can better understand when issues are securitized within international organizations, as well as what this implies for the distribution for state power within these institutions and for the type of policies that they produce.

I examine these agenda control dynamics in the case of climate change, an area of interest to securitization scholars (e.g. [Trombetta, 2008](#); [Conca, 2019](#)) and a topic of

¹The Permanent 5 (P5) members of the UNSC are the United Kingdom, United States of America, Russia, France, and China.

tremendous substantive import that must be better understood by international relations scholars (Green & Hale, 2017). Previous work has examined the potential positive and negative policy implications of securitizing climate change in the UN, such as sanctioning non-compliance with climate agreements and sidelining scientific experts (e.g. Scott, 2015; Diez et al., 2016; Conca, 2019). While previous research asserts that climate change has been or is becoming securitized, it has not examined UNGA discourse directly, which is the key place to look for evidence of securitization in international politics. I remedy this gap and present the first statistical test of climate securitization in an international political context, employing a topic model on a corpus of speeches given by states at the UNGA General Debate from 1949-2014 (Baturu et al., 2017) to measure securitization. Leveraging this new approach, I find that the climate discourse in the UNGA is *not* securitized, and that each of the P5 members are more likely to make securitizing moves on climate change than are other states, while SIDS are less likely to make securitizing moves than others. I control for alternative explanations, including power, domestic politics, and geophysical vulnerability to climate change. These findings shed light on the interaction between issue forums, institutional structure, and state power in the international policymaking process, and the importance of rhetorical shifts in this process.

Securitization and International Politics

Securitization theory has been an highly influential framework for security studies. Nevertheless, theoretical and empirical applications of securitization theory have largely focused on the attention-enhancing results of securitization, without incorporating the implications of securitizing moves on agenda control and power in international politics. To account for these dynamics, I bring in insights from research on the politics, agenda dynamics, and discourses of international organizations.

Securitization theory ('The Copenhagen School') derives principally from the work of Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver. Their approach defines securitization as "the discursive process through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and

to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat,” (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, 491). Securitization occurs through a rhetorical process, in which a ‘securitizing actor’ frames a problem using the language of existential threat, emphasizing the security dimensions of a topic to the exclusion of other dimensions (Chong & Druckman, 2007). This performative speech act is the ‘securitizing move.’ If the other actors in the political community accept this move, then the issue is considered ‘securitized.’ Importantly, an issue may be successfully securitized through discourse and still may not be addressed by adopting emergency measures. It is the intersubjective understanding of security – not an objective feature of the topic – that makes an issue a security issue and marks successful securitization. The decision to securitize is a strategic political choice made by the securitizing actor – an individual, state, or group – to change the way the issue should be handled (Elbe, 2006; Floyd, 2010).

As a result of being securitized, special powers and means can be deployed to address the issue outside the rules of traditional politics (Buzan et al., 1998, 21-42). This can increase the level of attention, awareness, speed, and resources dedicated to the issue (Buzan et al., 1998; Elbe, 2006; Balzacq, 2011), and can also be used for self-serving purposes (Wæver, 1997, 221; Trombetta, 2008, 589; Floyd, 2010, 54-56, 117-121; McDonald, 2011, 18). Though the material realities of the issue at hand may not influence its likelihood of being securitized, the material incentives of the *securitizing actors* do matter: if the securitizing actor expects to benefit from securitization, they would be expected to make securitizing moves, whereas if they expected to be harmed, they would not be expected to do so. These considerations are particularly salient given that the scope for securitization is limited – not every issue can be characterized as an urgent, existential threat (Balzacq, 2011, 116-7; McDonald, 2011, 35).

As political decisions made by potential securitizing actors, the choice of whether or not to securitize is a rational calculation. As Wæver et. al describe, “When considering securitizing moves...one has to weigh the always problematic side effects of applying a mind-set of security against the possible advantages of focus, attention, and mobilization.... In specific situations one can choose securitization – only one should not believe

this is an innocent reflection of the issue *being* a security threat; it is always a political choice to securitize or to accept a securitization,” (Buzan et al., 1998, 29). Correspondingly, we should expect that the actors that would most benefit from securitizing an issue – and from the resultant increases in attention and resources – would be most likely to make and support securitizing moves. Generalized to the level of states as actors, states that are existentially threatened by a problem should securitize it to unlock these special policy tools and attention because they stand to benefit as a result (Buzan et al., 1998). Yet, as discussed in the previous section, these expectations do not hold in the case of the climate discourse in the UNGA, where based on this logic, SIDS should securitize, but do not. To develop a theory to better explain these dynamics, I integrate classical securitization theory with existing work on the politics of international organizations.

International organizations present a logical domain to apply securitization theory. The role of persuasive deliberation and consensus building in international politics has been extensively studied (e.g. Habermas, 1984; Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Keck et al., 1998; Risse, 2000). Securitization fits neatly within this framework as a discursive tool that states can employ to construct a new intersubjective understanding of a topic. In the context of international organizations, additional considerations outside the traditional scope of securitization theory – namely agenda control – also must be taken into account to develop an understanding of who securitizes and why. Positive agenda control is the ability to put an issue onto the list of items for active consideration by an institutional decision-making body (Elder, 1975, 14), and negative agenda control is the ability to block an issue for such consideration (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962).

Agenda control – both positive and negative – is a source of power that allows actors to influence what issues are addressed by an institution and how they are addressed (Romer & Rosenthal, 1978; Kingdon, 1984), including in the context of international organizations (Pollack, 1997; Joachim, 2007; Avant et al., 2010; Carpenter, 2010; Schneider, 2018). By exerting influence over the agendas of international institutions, states are able to obtain more favorable outcomes and a greater share of institutional power (e.g. Steinberg, 2002; Stone, 2011). Agenda control in international organizations has important

strategic and material benefits for states. It follows, then, that states would support outcomes that *increase* their agenda control relative to others, and *oppose* outcomes that reduce their relative agenda control. I argue that securitization has such effects on agenda control, and these implications will help to explain when and why states securitize.

Securitization and Agenda Control in the UN

In applying classical securitization theory in different settings, the concepts must be contextualized (e.g. Balzacq, 2011; Diez et al., 2016). Accordingly, I extend the classical concepts of securitizing moves and securitization to reflect the unique contextual features of international organizations like the UN. I define **securitizing actors** as member states of the international organization, who speak through their diplomatic representation. I define a **securitizing move** in two parts, as a rhetorical move that: (A) emphasizes the security dimensions of an issue, specifically the language of existential threat; and (B) directly indicates UNSC jurisdiction over an issue. Part A represents the definition of a securitizing move in classical securitization theory, while Part B extends this definition to apply specifically to the context of the UN. Since securitization implies treating an issue as a security problem with all the special status, rules, and tools that this entails, within the UN system, securitization must enable or call for the issue to be on the agenda of the UNSC. Part B of the definition is operationally satisfied by one of two criteria. First, and most simply, a securitizing move can directly argue or assert that the UNSC should act on the issue. Second, a securitizing move can describe an issue that the UNSC has clear institutional authority to address, argue that this is the case, or associate an issue with issues under UNSC authority. Successfully reframing a non-traditional security issue as a security matter requiring UNSC intervention must involve either directly arguing for UNSC jurisdiction or associating with issues that clearly involve UNSC jurisdiction. Through this re-association, the issue is moved conceptually closer to traditional security issues.

I follow classical securitization theory in defining **securitization** as the acceptance of the securitizing move by the relevant community, which in the context of international organizations like the UN comprises the set of member states. Empirical evidence of secu-

ritization is the adoption of the language of securitization by a majority of member states, indicative of general acceptance of the legitimacy of the securitizing move. While many works characterize discourses as securitized when there is a large or increasing amount of security language used (e.g. Diez et al., 2016; Schäfer et al., 2016) or characterize a discourse generally rather than quantitatively (e.g. Trombetta, 2008), I specify a more direct measure of acceptance of the securitizing move in which the threshold indicating securitization is measured not by the *amount* of security language being employed but by the *number of actors* employing such language. Examining only the amount of security language being employed could result in a misleading characterization of a discourse as being securitized if only a few actors are deploying such language and the majority of the community has not accepted such conceptualization as valid. The broad usage of security language across actors indicates an acceptance by the community that this type of language is valid and accurate in characterizing the issue, and that the community accepts a conception of the issue as a security problem.

In addition to contextualizing the concepts of securitization theory to apply to international organizations, I also contextualize the theoretical expectations. Securitization theory in its classical form expects that actors with the greatest material interest in addressing an issue should be more likely to securitize (or at least to support securitization) to increase the salience of an issue and the likelihood of a strong policy response (see previous section). However, while securitizing can increase the salience and resources an issue receives, it also influences agenda control. The dynamics of agenda control can better explain securitization in international organizations than can variation in material interest in an issue. I posit an *agenda control theory of securitization* to explain how, when, and why issues are securitized (or not) by state actors within international organizations. This is a rational theory of rhetoric, in which states strategically try to control the institutional agenda to maximize strategic and material benefits.

I focus on securitization dynamics in the UN as a crucial and normatively important case. In the UN, shifting issues from the agenda of the UNGA to the UNSC has clear and obvious implications for the distribution of power and the policy response because of

the unique institutional arrangement of the UN. The 15 member UNSC represents only a small subset of the 193 member UNGA, limiting the number of states with a decision-making role. Unique policy tools are available to the UNSC that the UNGA cannot employ, from sanctions to the use of force. Only UNSC decisions have binding authority, compelling specific actions from member states. Formally, the agendas of the UNGA and UNSC are mutually exclusive – the UNGA is precluded from addressing topics that are concurrently on the UNSC’s agenda (UN, 1945). Agendas in the UN are very ‘sticky,’ and once an issue is added to the UNSC’s agenda, it is rarely removed (Hurd, 2008). For all these reasons, agenda control between UNSC and non-UNSC members is likely to be highly contested and make it unlikely that securitizing moves would be ‘cheap talk.’

Extending securitization theory, I contend that discursively securitizing an issue in the UN has direct implications for agenda control: it is through discursive practices that an issue is framed as a security matter (or not) within the institutional community. While non-securitized issues are within the remit of the UNGA, securitized issues move from the agenda of the UNGA to that of the UNSC. I argue that because of the agenda control implications of securitization, states have different preferences over whether an issue becomes securitized, and a securitizing move is expected to be contested. The member states that are expected to make securitizing moves are those for whom this agenda-shift results in increased agenda control: the members of the UNSC. As a result of the securitization agenda-shift, UNSC members increase the share of the UN’s overall agenda over which they are the decision-makers. In addition to controlling a larger proportion of the UN’s agenda collectively as the UNSC, each individual member of the UNSC increases their influence over the agenda. States are more powerful when they vote in the UNSC than the UNGA because of the smaller forum size – a state’s likelihood of being the pivotal voter is greater in a forum of 15 than in one of 193.

The institutional power benefits of securitization particularly accrue to the P5 members of the UNSC. For non-permanent members of the UNSC, the expected gains in institutional benefits that would result from broadening the UNSC’s agenda are much less than they are for the P5. Non-permanent members would only obtain these benefits

for the duration of their term, while the P5 would gain them indefinitely. The P5 have the most powerful votes in the UNSC, and with their veto power can expect to be pivotal voters more frequently than non-permanent members (Vreeland & Dreher, 2014). The institutional power benefits of securitization hold for each P5 member, even assuming heterogenous preferences. A P5 member seeking to block an activist coalition in the UNGA could more easily do so by deploying a veto in the UNSC. Alternatively, a P5 member seeking to take more activist measures could more easily assemble a coalition of the necessary size in the UNSC than in the UNGA, and would be able to call for more policy tools. Even with heterogenous preferences, the P5 members could be uniformly expected to prefer broadening the UNSC's agenda through securitization to accrue institutional benefits. Based on this logic of incentives to securitize, the P5 are more likely to securitize than other states.

Member states who stand to lose agenda control from securitization – those states that are not members of the UNSC – are less likely to make securitizing moves, and would be likely to *oppose* such moves. For these states, securitizing would take decision-making power out of their hands. The potential costs of securitization are even greater when the issue is of particular material importance to a member state. In this case, the state not only loses institutional power in its reduced agenda control on an issue selected at random, but also loses agency to shape the policy outcome on an issue of great importance, and the loss is more salient. On issues of the highest importance, states have the strongest preference to be involved and influential in the decision-making process. This expectation – that states for whom an issue is *the most* materially important are *the least* likely to support securitization – directly contrasts the expectations that would be derived from a classical interpretation of securitization theory.

In addition to explaining why states would or would not be expected to securitize, this theory of agenda control securitization implies clear expectations about when and where to look for issue securitization. Securitization would take place in the representative, general-purpose UNGA. Per the UN Charter, “The General Assembly may call the attention of the Security Council to situations which are likely to endanger international

peace and security,” (UN, 1945). Because membership in the UNGA is universal, the key criterion of securitization – intersubjective understanding – is most likely to develop in this forum (Buzan et al., 1998, 25). In the restricted membership of the UNSC, general acceptance of a securitizing move by definition cannot take place, and thus successful securitization cannot occur in that body. The result of successful securitization – defined as the acceptance of the securitizing move – moves an issue from the agenda of the UNGA to that of the UNSC.

Institutional constraints create scope conditions for the expectations of agenda control securitization. Institutional agendas are constrained by limited space and resources (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). The P5 may also be constrained in making securitizing moves by concerns about the erosion of legitimacy within the UN (Hurd, 2008; Binder & Heupel, 2015; Nevitt, 2021).² In particular, non-UNSC members are wary of UNSC power concentration, lack of accountability, precedents set by increasing the scope of the UNSC mandate, undermining of other UN organs, and shifting the locus of power to security experts (Binder & Heupel, 2015; Conca, 2019; Fasulo, 2021). These limitations discourage UNSC members from attempting to securitize across every issue area. Rather, they are expected to selectively make securitizing moves on issues when they are important to them in some way.

In some cases, a securitizing move could be accepted by non-P5 states. As noted above, states are generally wary of increasing the authority of the UNSC. However, members must consider the tradeoffs: shifting an issue to the UNSC can result in benefits such as additional funding allocations and attention, but potentially sacrifice the more holistic consideration of the economic and human rights dimensions of a problem that would be afforded in the UNGA. The unique features of a given issue area, particularly how important are the economic and human rights dimensions of the issue, are crucial to consider in predicting how likely non-P5 states are to accept a securitizing move, and thus how likely successful securitization is to occur. In some contexts, material concerns (i.e. those addressed under classical securitization theory) *would* predict the securitizing

²Legitimacy is defined as “the normative belief by an actor that a rule or institution ought to be obeyed,” (Hurd, 2008, 34).

actors better than the expectations of agenda control securitization. This would specifically be the case when the non-security dimensions of an issue are of lesser concern – that is, states are less concerned with addressing the human rights, social, or economic aspects of a problem, and would be willing to cede control over the matter in order to obtain material benefit. These tradeoffs are illustrated in the example of the securitization of HIV/AIDS.

After the UNSC took up the issue of HIV/AIDS – led by the United States, a P5 member – in July 2000 from the UNGA’s agenda, dramatic and rapid increases in global attention and funding occurred (McInnes, 2006). Key policy-makers in the United States, including Richard Holbrooke and Al Gore, staked out the issue as a national foreign policy priority, and were willing to expend political capital to advance the securitizing moves. The director of UNAIDS observed that the “Security Council debate brought AIDS to the forefront of the global political agenda,” (Knight, 2008, 106). Other prevalent and deadly diseases such as Ebola, malaria, and tuberculosis did not receive the attention of the UNSC, and did not observe the same rate of increased international attention and funding as did HIV/AIDs in the early 2000s (Poku, 2013). While resources and attention increased as a result of securitizing HIV/AIDS, economic and human rights dimensions were sidelined, with military and intelligence organizations empowered over civil society advocates of issues (Elbe, 2006, 119).

Why would other states – particularly those acutely affected by HIV/AIDS – accept the securitizing move led by the United States, which moved the issue over to the UNSC and reduced their own agenda control, and precluded attention to other, non-security dimensions of the issue? Most likely, states accepted the securitizing move because they were not concerned with maintaining agenda control over other dimensions of the HIV/AIDS discourse. The development, public health, and human rights aspects of the issue were already being addressed under Millennium Development Goal initiative, and the UNSC’s attention to HIV/AIDS had narrowed from the widely ranging debate in January 2001 to focusing specifically on the relationship between HIV/AIDS and UN peacekeeping missions by the time the UNSC resolution on HIV/AIDS was adopted in

July (Rushton, 2010, 498-500). Because their concerns about agenda control were largely assuaged by these developments, member states were willing to accept the (narrow) securitizing moves of HIV/AIDS by the P5.

To summarize the proposed theory of agenda control securitization in broad terms, securitizing moves are expected to take place in the UNGA discourse. When an issue is successfully securitized, it moves from the agenda of the UNGA to the UNSC. Members of the UNSC, particularly the P5 members, are most likely to make securitizing moves, as they stand to gain agenda control as a result. Non-UNSC states are less likely to support securitization, as this would imply loss of agenda control for them. States with strong material interest in the matter at hand are expected to be the least likely to securitize of all, because the loss of agenda control is highly salient. To test the expectations of this theory, I apply it in the case of climate politics in the UNGA, deriving specific hypotheses in this context. I examine whether climate change discourse in the UNGA has been securitized, and which states are potentially driving securitization.

Climate Change and Securitization

The security relevance of climate change is increasing over time, although debates on the security implications of climate change are hardly new (Deudney, 1990; Homer-Dixon, 1991).³ Some of the important security dimensions of climate change include direct territorial threats, impacts on extraterritorial strategic interests, pressures resulting from migration, diminished household resilience, and exacerbation of existing conflicts (e.g. Barnett, 2003; Hunter et al., 2015; Koubi et al., 2018; Ide et al., 2020; Uexkull et al., 2020). Many works assert that climate change is securitized or becoming securitized (e.g. Buzan et al., 1998; Barnett, 2003; Floyd, 2010; Trombetta, 2008; McDonald, 2011). In the UN, securitizing climate change would empower the UNSC to address the topic with its greater menu of policy options than those available to the UNGA. The potential policy implications of a UNSC-led response to climate change are broad and are already well-studied, including imposing economic sanctions on states in violation of interna-

³For an overview of the development of the discourse on climate change and its security implications over time, see Trombetta (2008) and Floyd (2008).

tional climate treaties, making peacekeeping sustainable, and developing early warning systems, but also potential negative consequences such as sidelining scientific experts and narrowing the understanding of the issue and de-emphasizing topics like financing for sustainable development (e.g. Scott, 2015; Diez et al., 2016; Conca, 2019). Unlike the UNGA, decisions undertaken by the UNSC are binding on member states, and thus have greater opportunity to affect rapid change, potentially increasing compliance. On the other hand, securitization can amplify the voices of military and intelligence communities over experts like climate scientists. In the case of climate change, this can result in a shift of resources away from adaptation and mitigation towards emergency response.

Previous researchers have argued that because of the growing understanding of the security implications of climate change, state actors may be making securitizing moves in the UNGA debate by employing the language of existential threat in discussing climate change. However, as the theory of agenda control securitization describes, most UN member states are wary of increasing the agenda control of the UNSC, which would be the result of securitizing climate change. Securitization would only be expected if multi-dimensional concerns were minimal, which is not the case in the context of climate change (discussed below). Thus, in contrast to the claims made in previous work, I expect that climate change is not securitized in the UN. This would empirically imply that securitizing moves on climate change are not broadly accepted, and this language is not employed by a majority of UN members.

*H1: Climate change is **not** securitized in the UN.*

But which states *are* expected to act as securitizing actors? I argue, per the theory of agenda control securitization outlined above, that states that would gain agenda control from securitizing would be more likely to make securitizing moves, while states that would lose agenda control would be less likely to make securitizing moves. Members of the UNSC, particularly the P5 states, stand to gain agenda control, while non-UNSC states stand to lose. These expectations are constant across issue areas. However, the theory also predicts that states for whom the issue is extremely materially important – for whom it may represent an existential threat – are even less likely to securitize, and

this depends on the issue at hand. Thus, understanding state preferences on the specific topic of climate change is crucial.

On the issue of climate change, states that are the most materially interested are those most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, and most in need of mitigation and adaptation support. Developing states and states in geographically vulnerable regions are the most vulnerable to the effects of climate changes (IPCC, 2018). Of all developing states, climate change is a particularly great threat to SIDS. For some of these states, the effects of climate change, and especially sea-level rise, pose an existential threat. While climate change poses an existential threat, SIDS are also greatly concerned with other dimensions of climate change besides security- notably, matters relating to the oceans, migration, legal questions of sovereignty, sustainable development, and climate financing (IPCC, 2014, 2018). Such topics would likely be ignored or minimized under a security approach to climate change, but would likely be addressed under a UNGA approach to climate change. Preferences over these multi-dimensional aspects of climate change outweigh the potential policy benefits that SIDS could obtain from securitization of climate change. This explanation supports claims that developing countries, including SIDS, have been key “antipreneurs” against the securitization of climate change (Bloomfield & Scott, 2017; Peters, 2018; Warner & Boas, 2019). Because climate change is a particularly important issue to SIDS, the loss of agenda control on the topic would be highly salient. SIDS, who have been leaders on climate change policy development in the UN, are wary of giving up their voice and allowing the P5 to shape the UN’s response to climate change. Thus, the theory predicts that SIDS would be *less likely* than others to make securitizing moves on climate change, while the P5 would be *more likely* to do so.⁴ While all developing and vulnerable states are expected to be less likely to make securitizing moves than others, these expectations are the strongest for SIDS, who should be the *least likely* of all to attempt to securitize.⁵

⁴Though my theory also predicts that SIDS would be more likely to *oppose* securitizing moves on climate change than would other states, testing this expectation is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁵Securitization by developing states is also explored in later sections.

The positions of the P5 and other member states on climate change in recent years are helpfully outlined by Scott and Ku (2018). Among the P5, France and the United Kingdom are most supportive of expanding UN efforts to address climate change, while Russia and China are more frequently opposed to such steps, favoring state level responses (Scott & Ku, 2018, 209). The position of the United States has varied by administration, though not necessarily by party. Under the leadership of Barack Obama, the United States was generally favorable towards expanding international efforts to address climate change. Despite heterogeneity in preferences over the nature of international climate change policy, we should expect each of the P5 to act as securitizing actors. Regardless of their issue preferences, all P5 members stand to obtain institutional benefits of agenda control as a result securitization. France and the United Kingdom face an easier prospect whipping a majority of the small UNSC than the large UNGA, while China and Russia are better able to block efforts with a veto in the UNSC than trying to strong-arm the large caucus of developing states in the UNGA.⁶

While the P5 are more likely to securitize than other states *on any given* issue because of the increase in agenda control, concerns about institutional legitimacy also preclude the P5 from securitizing *every* issue, as discussed in the previous section – the P5 are expected to selectively make securitizing moves on issues of importance to them. In the case of climate change, the scale of the issue and its potential policy import make it an important one to the P5 (e.g. Peters, 2018; Trombetta, 2019). A UNSC response to climate change would also preclude a broader approach to climate policy that would be less amenable to P5 preferences, addressing issues such as migration, reparations, sea-level rise, and statehood, and imposing higher costs on developed states (including the P5) as high carbon emitters. The high stakes associated with climate change make it an issue on which the P5 would be willing to risk political capital and the legitimacy of the UNSC by making a securitizing move. Regardless of preferences, each member of the P5 has a greater likelihood of influencing the voting outcome on an important matter in the UNSC than they do in the UNGA. Non-P5 states would be expected to be less likely

⁶I do not disregard that second order beliefs might come into play in strategic considerations of agenda control, but focus on first order beliefs for analytical simplicity.

to support securitization, as their ability to impact the outcome would be diminished if climate change moved from the agenda of the UNGA to that of the UNSC.

*H2: The P5 states are **more** likely than other states to act as securitizing actors on climate change in the UN.*

*H3: SIDS are **less** likely than other states to act as securitizing actors on climate change in the UN.*

Looking for Climate Securitization

Given the potential import of climate securitization, scholarly attention to the matter has been increasing. However, I contend that this research has been looking for securitization in the wrong place. In line with the theory I describe above, evidence for securitization in the UN should uniquely be found in the UNGA discourse. While a growing number of scholars argue that climate change is securitized or becoming securitized (e.g. Buzan et al., 1998; Barnett, 2003; Floyd, 2010; Trombetta, 2008; McDonald, 2011), none have examined UNGA discourses for evidence of these trends. Other works have noted the particular relevance of the UNSC in climate securitization, exploring normative questions relating to the scope of the UNSC and whether climate change is an legitimate topic for its attention (e.g. Detraz & Betsill, 2009; Scott, 2015; Scott & Ku, 2018; Conca, 2019; Nevitt, 2021), but also fail to provide compelling evidence of securitization in the discourse of the general UN membership. Rather, these works observe that in 2009 the UNGA formally invited a potential relocation of the issue of climate change into the UNSC, calling unanimously in A-RES-63-281 for “relevant organs of the United Nations, as appropriate and within their respective mandates, to intensify their efforts in considering and addressing climate change, including its possible security implications,” (UNGA, 2009). This resolution does not show us a *discursive* shift: only by examining patterns in discourse can we find compelling evidence of securitization.

Only a small amount of research on the securitization of climate change has actually looked at the UN discourse, and that which has has focused on three special ad-hoc

sessions of the UNSC called in 2007, 2011, and 2017 discussing climate change.⁷ The occurrence of these ad-hoc sessions and the debates that took place therein are pointed to as evidence that the issue has been adopted into the security domain (Detraz & Betsill, 2009; Scott & Ku, 2018). However, these limited debates cannot demonstrate broader discursive shifts. Climate debates in the UNSC itself cannot be reflective of securitization, because securitization would require acceptance by the broader membership in the UNGA. The exploratory sessions also have not had substantial substantive effects on the policy response, as there has been no UNSC resolution adopted on climate change, nor a move to feature climate change as a regularly occurring agenda item. My theory readily explains this lack of policy output, as does a careful interpretation of the definition of securitization. For an issue to be securitized, there must be acceptance of the securitizing move. To examine this process, we must examine rhetoric – not resolutions – in the UNGA – not the UNSC. While discourse analysis is an important tool in investigating international politics (Carta & Narminio, 2021) and climate discourses (Hardt, 2017), previous qualitative approaches have not been able to explore macro-level trends in UNGA discourse over time.⁸ By leveraging data on speeches given by high-level state representatives in the General Debate of the UNGA, I shed light on macro-level trends in the securitization of climate change in the key locale of the international political discourse.

UNGA Discourse on Climate

To test these hypotheses, I deploy new data to look for securitization in a more likely and conceptually appropriate setting – the UNGA – than has previously been examined. I examine whether securitization has occurred, then test my theoretical predictions that P5 states but not SIDS act as securitizing actors on climate change.

UN General Debate

⁷A fourth special session was held on February 23, 2021, which has not yet been subject to scholarly examination.

⁸Schäfer et al. (2016) conduct a large-N analysis on the securitization of climate change in media coverage, but trends in political discourse cannot be assumed to mirror those in mass media.

I utilize the data collected by Baturu, Dasandi, and Mikhalylov (2017), which consists of all speeches given by state representatives in the General Debate from 1970-2014. Not only are speeches good indicators of country preferences and priorities, by securitizing issues, they also perform an agenda-setting function.⁹ Each year at the opening of the UNGA in September, the General Debate gives the opportunity for each state to speak in a largely unconstrained setting (Smith, 2006). Because General Debate speeches are not linked to particular resolutions or votes, which are traditionally used by researchers to measure state preferences, they are more informative about a country’s underlying priorities and positions. Every country has equal opportunity to speak, affording small states a “rare moment for seizing the spotlight and putting a point of view that might otherwise be ignored,” (Nicholas, 1971, 108). The audiences for these speeches include domestic and foreign publics, bureaucrats at the UN, and members of other state delegations. States take the General Debate seriously: each year, nearly all countries who are can do so choose to give speeches in the UNGA plenary session. States send high-level representatives to the session, with 44.3% represented by heads of state or government, 49.3% by vice-presidents, deputy prime ministers, and foreign ministers, and only 6.4% by country representatives to the UN (Baturu et al., 2017, 3). An institutional norm restricts speech-time to 15 minutes. While some countries ignore the limitation on length, speech-length has indeed declined over time. We may thus consider speech-time as a limited resource – countries are simply unable to address every issue in a given speech because of time considerations. Allocating the scarce resource of speech-time to discuss a given issue is a signal that a country considers it to be of great importance.

One may worry that the speeches delivered in the General Debate are not independent observations, that is, the order in which the speeches are given may have effects on their substantive contents, or speeches may be influenced by previous years’ contents. Strategic coordination and political sources of influence are widespread in state voting records in the UN (Voeten, 2013), but procedural constraints of the General Debate make this an unlikely concern in this speech data. Speeches are uniquely crafted each year to

⁹Interviews with officials from state Permanent Missions to the UN inform and support the claims made in this section.

reflect current events and themes highlighted by the Secretary-General. The speeches are then submitted in advance of the General Debate to allow for translation into the official languages of the UN, and to circulate the text to the press and the other delegates of the UNGA. As such, speech content is determined in advance of the General Debate rather than crafted in response to statements by earlier speakers. Further, because states consider the General Debate a consequential platform, many people are involved in the speechwriting process from country missions and governments, and therefore the content is determined well in advance of the General Debate.

The process in which the order of speakers is determined also weighs against a strategic selection process in which the order of speeches may affect their contents. Per tradition, Brazil and the United States always give the first speeches of the General Debate. Subsequently, the order of countries is determined by the importance of the delegation's speaker, with heads of state prioritized. Only after these factors are used in ordering are other factors taken into consideration in setting the speech order, including individual country preferences for speaking order and geographical balance. Based on variation in these factors, the order of speakers and the speech content varies from year to year.

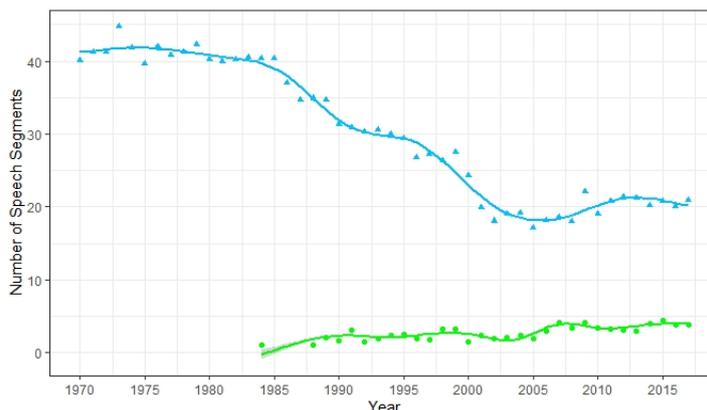
Measuring Climate Securitization

I examine state speeches from the General Debate from 1970-2014 and estimate dynamic topic models on this data. This data comprises 7,897 speeches and 205,913 distinct speech segments, which are analogous to paragraphs (Hearst, 1997). In a given year, there are an average of 32 segments per speech. I filter this full corpus of speeches based on a set of key terms to obtain only the segments that discuss climate change. This procedure results in a subset of 4,525 relevant speech segments drawn from 1,987 speeches.¹⁰ The earliest speech on climate change occurs in 1984, so this year is used as the beginning point for the remainder of the analysis.

¹⁰A description of the procedure used to segment the speeches, the list of key words used for filtering, and descriptive statistics of the General Debate speech data can be found in the Appendix.

For speeches that discuss climate change to any extent, on average 20% of the speech’s segments are about climate change. There is high variation in this proportion, ranging from 1% to 73% of a speech’s segments. On average, each country dedicates 23 segments to the discussion of climate change. In addition to comprising a substantial proportion of discussion at the country-speech level, climate change has been an important topic of the General Debate broadly. Across years, an average of 126 and a maximum of 169 out of 193 countries speak about climate change, with an increasing share over time.¹¹ While overall speech length declines, the proportion of speech segments dedicated to climate change increases, indicating that states take this issue seriously, as they allocate an increasingly scarce resource of speech-time towards its discussion, as seen in Figure 1. SIDS discuss climate change at higher rates than other states, with nearly double the average number of segments discussing climate change (51) and a higher proportion of speech segments. However, SIDS are not necessarily early adopters, picking up the climate discourse at the same time as other states. The P5 discuss climate change at roughly the same rate as the average state, devoting on average 22 segments to the matter.

Figure 1: Over time, length of General Debate speeches declines, while attention to climate change increases



Note: Blue triangles are total number of speech segments in a given year, green dots are number of speech segments that discuss climate change. Trend lines are Loess smoothed.

¹¹States that do not speak on climate change at all, states that do not exist after 1984, and speeches that do not represent a specific state are dropped from the analysis – this includes speeches given on behalf of the European Union, the European Community, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Democratic Yemen, and the German Democratic Republic. All other states are included.

To prepare this speech data for text analysis, I conduct additional pre-processing and estimate a Structural Topic Model (STM), a variant of Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), which is a Bayesian generative model of language. I estimate the STM with speech segments as the unit of analysis. The STM first assumes a vocabulary $\{1, \dots, V\}$ of words, and topics k , which are probability mass functions of words, allowing topic proportions and topic prevalence to vary over by covariates of the data, in this case, over time (Roberts et al., 2019).¹² Because this speech corpus is already filtered to one topic – climate change – the topics uncovered by STM can be thought of as different and coherent ways of speaking about the same topic, or in other words, topical frames (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Ultimately, this procedure represents every topic k as a unique vector of word probabilities β . The word probabilities are used to calculate segment-level topic proportions, which are the share of the words in each document (speech segment) that are most highly identified with each topic, representing each segment as a mixture of different topics summing to 1. The final model is selected to maximize semantic coherence and exclusivity at the topic level, and minimize correlations between the topics.

One of the key benefits of topic modeling is its inductive nature, reducing the impact of the *ex ante* beliefs of the researcher. Rather than pre-specifying the words that I expect to be associated with securitization, as in a dictionary-based approach, I allow the model to identify the words associated with securitization. However, topic modeling can be sensitive to the specifications of the model, so I take several steps to ensure robustness. I validate the results of the topic model by varying the parameters in the model specification, conducting a supervised analysis of the speeches for securitizing moves in their content, and crowdsourcing the topic labeling to ensure reliability. I also conduct a placebo test, comparing the results on climate change corpus to a placebo STM estimated with the same specifications on the full General Debate corpus, as well as a robustness test, estimating the model on a corpus excluding developing states. Additional details on these procedures can be found in the Appendix.

I find that coherent topics cluster around general types of parliamentary and insti-

¹²Details on the topic model pre-processing, estimation of the topic model, topic correlations, and robustness and placebo tests can be found in the Appendix.

Table 1: Climate Discourse Topics

Topic	Top Words	Topic Proportion
General	active education civil agencies organizations relations reform society organization taiwan	0.130
Oceans	solomon forum marine pacific low-lying declaration conservation barbados islands management	0.072
UN Institution	mr secretary-general thank president commend congratulate theme leadership election ki-moon	0.110
GHG	gases carbon per cent sources atmosphere greenhouse clean renewable forests	0.110
Treaties	protocol kyoto instrument parties 21 ratification ratified soon step early	0.120
Finance	transfer responsibilities differentiated principle technology technologies common measures responsibility strategies	0.138
Sea-Level	sea-level low-lying rise floods caused existence damage devastating sea coastal	0.165
Conflict & Security	weapons nuclear problems destruction crime war mass threats hunger conflict	0.156

Notes: Highest probability words defined as the 10 words within each topic with the highest topic-word probability, β . Topic proportions represent the share of the corpus made up of words most commonly associated with the topic. The topic of interest, Conflict & Security, is shaded.

tutional language, oceans, institutional language relevant to the UN, greenhouse gases, international treaties (in particular the Kyoto protocol), finance and development, rising sea levels, and language describing conflict and security. The words most characteristic of each topic and the share of the corpus represented by each topic can be seen in [Table 1](#). The conflict and security topic makes up the second most prevalent way of discussing climate change, after the sea level topic.

Do any of these topics constitute securitizing moves? To recall, the definition of a securitizing move requires (A) invoking the language of existential threat; and (B) directly indicating UNSC jurisdiction over an issue. The sea-level rise topic describes rising tides and increased extreme weather events as threats to states, and in particular to SIDS. The most frequent rhetorical strategy employed in the conflict and security topic is to associate climate change with other traditional hard security issues like terrorism and nuclear weapons, describing climate changes as similar to these concerns, seen in the examples below. This shows a strategy of framing climate change as a broad threat to international peace and security, and related to issues that are unambiguously under the jurisdiction of the UNSC.

“Nobody can protect themselves from climate change unless we protect each other by building a global basis for climate security....Our climate presents

us with an ever-growing threat to international security,” (United Kingdom, 2006).

“Today the greatest threats to our security often come not from other functioning sovereign States, but from terrorist organizations, from failing States and from man-made shocks to our environment like climate change, which can exacerbate State failure and breed internal instability,” (United Kingdom, 2004).

“Besides the economic crisis the first large-scale crisis of the era of globalization global development as a whole continues to be threatened by regional and local conflicts, terrorism, cross-border crime, food shortages and climate change,” (Russia, 2009).

Both of these topics clearly satisfy the first part of the definition of a securitizing move, employing the language of existential threat. However, only the conflict and security topic directly indicates UNSC jurisdiction over climate change. The sea-level topic, on the other hand, does not make a clear call for the UNSC to engage with the issue of climate change, nor does it draw associations with other issues under UNSC jurisdiction. Extreme weather and sea-level rise do not necessarily involve violence or conflict between or within states, and do not obviously fall within the remit of the UNSC. If such connections were featured as part of the rhetoric, this topic could theoretically constitute a securitizing move, however, empirically this is not the case in this data. Thus, while the conflict and security topic can be considered a securitizing move, the sea-level rise topic cannot.

But has climate change been securitized? I predict in Hypothesis 1 that this is not the case, and the data supports this claim. To recall, I argue that empirical evidence of securitization is the adoption of the language securitizing moves by many member states, indicative of general acceptance of the legitimacy of the securitizing move. To test this hypothesis, I examine the share of countries employing the conflict and security topic and find that while the language of conflict and security is relatively common in the discourse, it is not employed by a majority of member states.

For a given speech segment on climate change, the mean use of the conflict and security topic is 15.6% (sea level rise, the most commonly used topic, characterizes 16.5% of the average segment’s language, and the least commonly used topic, the general oceans topic, represents 7.2%). The conflict and security topic is used more over time, while other

topics, particularly the Kyoto Protocol topic, decrease in their use over time.¹³ However, a majority of countries are not making securitizing moves: the increasing use of the conflict and security topic is concentrated among a subset of states. Only 39 countries deployed 5 or more speech segments that were primarily about conflict and security, and only 10 countries deployed 8 or more. Countries are more likely to use the sea-level topic, and nearly as likely to use the finance and development topic. I also aggregate the document-level topic proportions to the country level to obtain the topic most commonly employed used by each country. While conflict and security is the most common modal topic (48 of 194 countries), this is less than a quarter of all members. The lack of common usage indicates that there is not a consensus among the membership that the securitizing move is legitimate. At less than 16% of the overall climate discourse, while securitizing moves are certainly present, it appears that the UNGA members have not reached an intersubjective understanding of climate change as a matter for the UNSC to take up, but rather, that the use of this language is concentrated among a subset of states.

Who Securitized?

Which states are more or less likely to make securitizing moves? I expect that P5 states are more likely to be securitizing actors, and SIDS are less likely (Hypotheses 2 and 3). For the dependent measure of securitization, I use the document-level topic proportion in the conflict and security topic estimated by the STM, described in the previous section. This is a continuous measure that can range 0:1. Bivariate examination supports both expectations, as seen in [Figure 2](#). P5 states are 5.4 percentage points more likely to make securitizing moves compared to non-P5 states, a statistically significant difference. This result holds across time, and for each of the P5 states individually, which is shown in the Appendix. P5 discourse on climate change is lead by the United Kingdom with 40 speech segments, followed by France with 26, China with 18, the United States with 14, and Russia with 11 (recalling that the average state discusses climate change for 23 segments). This finding also holds in a restricted sample of states with medium and high levels of development (see Appendix).

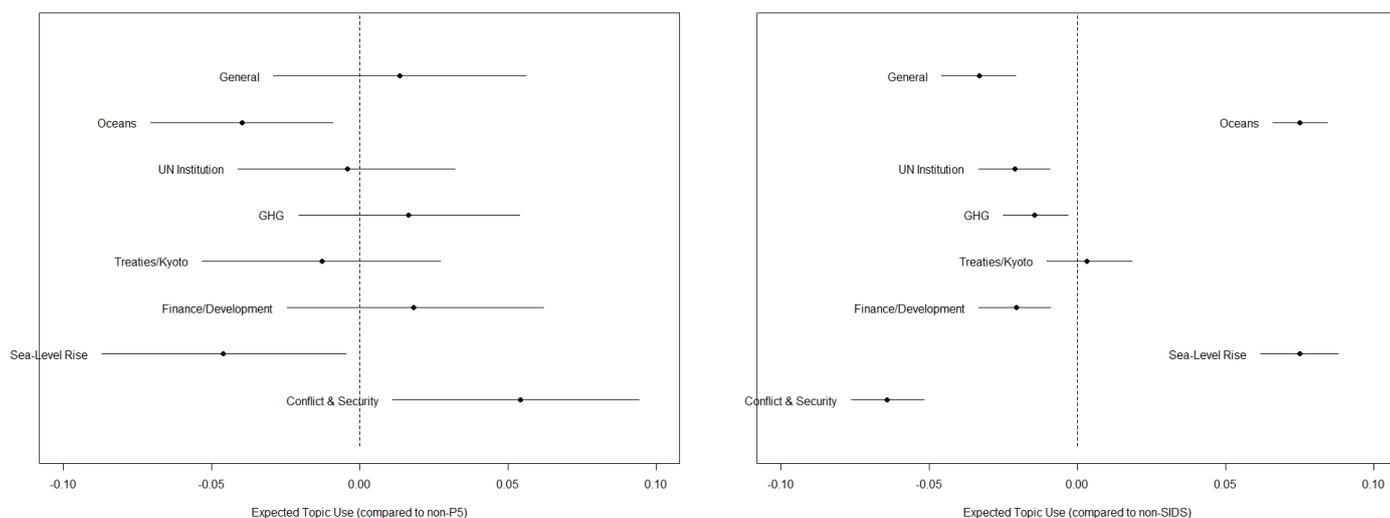
¹³Analysis of the trends in topics over time can be found in the Appendix.

These results speak to the internal validity of the securitization measure. The identified leadership by the United Kingdom comports with earlier descriptions of climate security discourse in the UN (Scott & Ku, 2018; Peters, 2018). While previous evidence for British entrepreneurship on climate securitization has generally rested on the fact that the United Kingdom convened first UNSC debate on climate change in 2007, this new evidence provides broader support for the claim that the United Kingdom is a leading securitizing actor on the topic throughout the UN. In the US case, there is a high degree of variation across administration, which also matches previous assessments (Scott & Ku, 2018, 209-210). Figure 2 also shows that SIDS are significantly less likely to securitize than non-SIDS by 6.4 percentage points, but are much more likely to use the oceans and sea-level topics (by 7.5 percentage points for both topics). In fact, these topics are predominately employed by SIDS.¹⁴ This finding comports with SIDS' great concern about the issue of climate change as an existential threat, but also their wariness for the UNSC agenda control on the matter (e.g. Bloomfield & Scott, 2017; Peters, 2018; Warner & Boas, 2019). If the P5 are more likely to make securitizing moves than other states but SIDS are not, this suggests that the patterns described in the agenda control theory of securitization hold in the case of climate change.

Could it be the case that the P5 simply try to securitize across all topic areas, and the observed securitizing moves on climate by the P5 are not a unique feature of that discourse? The theoretical model described earlier contends that because of resource and legitimacy constraints, the P5 attempt to securitize issues strategically, and would not be likely to securitize across all issues. The evidence supports this expectation. To verify that the P5 are not simply making securitizing moves across all topics, I conduct a placebo test, fitting an additional topic model with the same specifications to the full General Debate corpus. Comparing the STMs on the climate discourse and the full discourse reveals that conflict security matters comprise a distinct topic in the General Debate, and that this topic particularly focuses on 'hard' security issues such as nuclear weapons, disarmament, and terrorism. There is not evidence that the overall discourse

¹⁴By region, a similar trend is observed: Oceania is more likely to employ the oceans and sea-level topics, likely driven by the prevalence of SIDS in this region.

Figure 2: P5 make securitizing moves, SIDS do not



Note: Figures show expected speech segment proportion in the conflict and security topic estimated by STM, comparing P5 states to non-P5 states, and SIDS to non-SIDS. Uncertainty calculated from the STM by composition with 95% confidence intervals.

is securitizing: the prevalence of the conflict and security topic is declining over time, whereas the use of security language in the climate discourse specifically was increasing over time. In the overall discourse, the conflict and security topic is not used generally by many states, with only 6% of states using this as their most frequent topic, the second least common of all topics. The security language is also not prevalent across topics in the overall debate, but is confined to the particular conflict and security topic. In the general discourse, the P5 are no more likely to employ the conflict and security topic than other states. These findings support the analysis of climate discourse as a distinct case of securitization in UN discourse, and provide further evidence that the P5 are expected to securitize strategically, selecting particular issue areas where there securitization might be more likely to be accepted.

While the evidence from these bivariate tests suggests that the expectations of the agenda control securitization theory are correct, status as P5 or SIDS is far from randomly assigned, and is likely associated with many other sources of variation. Though it is impossible to rule out all potential explanatory factors in an observational context, I can more carefully test the theory against alternative explanations by leveraging addi-

tional data to control for other relevant sources of variation. This approach can help to illuminate whether P5 and SIDS status retains explanatory power for the likelihood to make securitizing moves on climate change after controlling for other factors. I conduct this analysis at the country-year level, averaging the segment-level conflict and security topic proportion estimates from the STM at the country-year level as the dependent variable. Because the dependent variable is ranges continuously from 0 to 1, I employ a linear regression framework. The independent variables to be employed in these tests are outlined below, and described in greater detail in the Appendix.

Public opinion in democratic states has been found to be more supportive of climate change action than in non-democratic states (Lewis et al., 2019), and democratic states are more likely to be responsive to public opinion than non-democratic states (Moravcsik, 1997). Domestic pressures, then, may make states more likely to securitize. As a possible domestic political explanation, I leverage variation in regime type, measured with Polity score. Countries with Polity scores greater than 6 are coded as democracies, while countries with Polity scores less than -6 are coded as autocracies. I also utilize cross-national public opinion data on public concern about climate change from a Gallup survey conducted across 106 countries in 2010. This panel included all of the P5 members except France, as well as 4 SIDS (Singapore, Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Comoros, out of 37 total SIDS). Though this is unfortunately a small proportion of SIDS, it provides much better coverage than any other cross-national survey with data on climate change attitudes conducted to date.

States that are more geographically vulnerable to the effects of climate change also may have an incentive to make securitizing moves. This expectation would be supported by classical securitization theory, which argues that states that are intensely threatened by a problem would be more likely to be securitizing actors (Buzan et al., 1998). To control for geophysical features, I incorporate a measure of actual warming as a change in national average air temperature over land since 1960 in degrees Celsius, measured by Berkeley Earth. I also construct a measure of climate disaster occurrences to capture the experienced effects of climate change across states, utilizing data from the International

Disaster Database from 1984-2018. I include data on climate-related disasters, including climatological (drought and wildfire), hydrological (flood and landslide), and meteorological (extreme temperature and storm) disasters. The disaster database captures the number of deaths, injured, affected, homeless, and costs for many of these events. To maximize data availability and reduce the effects of income-dependence, I follow Roberts and Parks (2007) and use a smoothed measure of total persons affected. I also test an indicator for developing states as an alternative measure to the SIDS indicator, as expectations with respect to the relationship between development and likelihood of securitization are mixed. Some research (e.g. Boas, 2014) suggests that developed states would be more likely to securitize. However, because they are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change, classical securitization theory would predict that *developing* states would be more likely to securitize. For a final measure of geophysical exposure to climate change, I employ the ND-GAIN composite index of vulnerability and readiness, developed by the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative. Models employing the ND-GAIN index as a robust alternative measure can be found in the Appendix.

Finally, organizational politics have been found to influence state behavior in international organizations like the UN (e.g. Voeten, 2013). To test for the influence of institutional politics on a state's likelihood of making securitizing moves, I use the measure of affinity constructed by Bailey, Strezhnev and Voeten (2017), which employs voting records in the UNGA to measure state preference similarity. To determine whether US influence is driving securitization choices in UNGA rhetoric, I include the measure of vote similarity for each country with the US. If relationships supporting the agendas of an 'important' state are driving securitization, higher levels of voting affinity would be expected to predict securitization.

In addition to these measures, I also control for general indicators of state power. These factors might reflect a higher level of overall state security concerns, which could be associated with a greater propensity to make securitizing moves. I include annual measures of country level GDP per capita (logged), population (logged), and military expenditures as a proportion of GDP, all collected by the World Bank. I also include

year and a second order polynomial on year to capture linear and nonlinear time trends in the data. I conduct 5 multiple imputations to address problems of missing data and avoid introducing potential bias from listwise deletion. This analysis includes 1,987 observations of unique country-years, covering every year from 1984-2017 and 194 distinct countries.

The results of the main model, shown in Model 1 in [Table 2](#), comport with the mean differences examined earlier. Controlling for alternative explanations, P5 status remains a significant predictor of securitization, with P5 states 5 percentage points more likely to securitize than non-P5. SIDS status is a significant predictor in the negative direction, with SIDS expected to securitize 8 percentage points less often than other states. While these predicted effects may seem substantively small, as a shift in framing choices, a small increase in securitization could have substantial effects in terms of agenda setting and influencing topic choice by other states. Further, the mean securitization level by states is 16%, so a 5 percentage point shift represents an allocation change of nearly one-third. Variables associated with the domestic politics explanation (Public Concern and Democracy) are not statistically significant predictors of securitization, nor is the international politics explanation (Agree with US).

The variables measuring geographic vulnerability to climate change are of mixed significance: while Amt. Warming and Climate Disasters are significant predictors of securitization in most models, their substantive impact is negligible (less than 0.1 percentage point influence on predicted securitization in most cases) and in the negative direction. The expected first difference of increasing the mean value of the adjusted disaster score by one standard deviation is a decrease of 1% in the use of securitizing language. This result may be explained by the increased incidence of climate disasters in SIDS, which were found to be less likely to securitize. Two of the measures of structural power (Population and GDPPC) fail to achieve statistical significance at the level of 0.05. Military Expenditure, however, has a statistically significant and substantively large effect on predicted securitization. This result comports with the theoretical expectations of agenda control securitization: like the P5, states with large military complexes would expect to obtain an increase in institutional power with the securitization of cli-

mate change, contributing military expertise and taking a more active role in the issue. Such states may even be invited to participate in UNSC discussions of climate security because of their role in the security sector, thereby gaining agenda control. Even with the large amount of predictive power of military expenditure, however, the key finding of P5 securitization remains significant.

These findings are robust to several alternative model specifications, shown in Models 2-7 in [Table 2](#), and additional specifications included in the Appendix. Overall, these findings support my argument that the P5 have an incentive to securitize the issue of climate change to increase their agenda control, while SIDS are less likely to do so. Military expenditure may capture too broad of a phenomena, as the effects of climate change are likely to be particularly acute to naval forces. As an alternative measure for military expenditure that specifically captures naval powers, I construct an indicator for countries with aircraft carriers (Model 2). I also specify models where the measure of affinity with the US is replaced for vote similarity with Brazil and with India to determine whether coalitions of developing countries are influential in setting the patterns of securitization discourse (Models 3-4). None of these alternative specifications of these variables achieve statistical significance and do not meaningfully change the predicted effects of other variables, nor does adding an interaction term between P5 status and year (Model 5).

While the P5 are specifically expected to securitize more than other UNSC members, the non-permanent members could be motivated to maximize their influence during their temporary appointment or to signal their temporary leadership in security matters. To test this argument, I replace the P5 indicator with an indicator for non-permanent membership in the UNSC (Model 6). This indicator is 1 for non-P5 countries during the years that they serve on the UNSC. This variable is not a significant predictor of securitization, indicating that the effect only holds for P5 members and not UNSC members more broadly.

The developing indicator, tested as an alternative to the SIDS indicator in Model 7, has a statistically significant effect on predicted securitization, and a predicted effect size of half the magnitude as the SIDS indicator. This finding is in line with the theoretical

Table 2: Linear regression model of securitization

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
P5	0.05*	0.06*	0.05*	0.05	0.02		0.02
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.76)		(0.30)
E10						0.02	
						(0.31)	
SIDS	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	
Developing							-0.04**
							(0.00)
Pubic Concern	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.01	0.01
	(0.88)	(0.81)	(0.89)	(0.83)	(0.87)	(0.93)	(0.84)
Democracy	0.00	-0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.94)	(0.24)	(0.85)	(0.73)	(0.94)	(0.83)	(0.83)
Climate Disasters	0.00*	0.00*	0.00*	0.00*	0.00*	0.00	0.00**
	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.10)	(0.00)
Amt. Warming	-0.01*	-0.01	-0.01*	-0.02*	-0.02*	-0.01	-0.01
	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.12)
Agree with US	-0.02	-0.02			-0.02	0.00	-0.03
	(0.50)	(0.50)			(0.51)	(0.85)	(0.22)
Agree with Brazil			0.01				
			(0.63)				
Agree with India				0.00			
				(0.99)			
Military Expenditures	0.76*		0.76*	0.76*	0.76*	0.82*	1.15**
	(0.01)		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.000)
Aircraft Carriers		0.00					
		(0.89)					
GDPPC (Log)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.01
	(0.86)	(0.66)	(0.86)	(0.94)	(0.88)	(0.58)	(0.18)
Population (Log)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00**
	(0.10)	(0.18)	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.10)	(0.23)	(0.00)
Year	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.17)	(0.31)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.19)	(0.17)	(0.08)
Year Sq	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.35)	(0.52)	(0.33)	(0.33)	(0.37)	(0.33)	(0.26)
P5*Year					0.00		
					(0.57)		
Constant	0.22***	0.22***	0.20***	0.21***	0.22***	0.19***	0.13*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.03)

Note:

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Standard errors averaged from 5 imputations of missing data. 1,987 observations in all models.

predictions of agenda control securitization laid out earlier: like SIDS, developing states should securitize less than other states. This is because the more exposed to the threat of climate change a state is, the more it is expected to care about the issue, and thus the less likely it is to be willing to give up agenda control to the UNSC. Because developing states lack the same adaptive capacity as developed states and are more likely to be located in the geographic tropics, they are more threatened by climate change. Thus, while developing states care deeply about addressing the challenges of climate change, they share in a desire to maintain agenda control over the issue. Developing states are less likely to securitize, and SIDS – as the most vulnerable subset of this group – are the *least* likely to securitize. Similar results are observed in the robustness test replacing the SIDS indicator with the ND-GAIN index, shown in the Appendix. These results, as well as the results for the military expenditure variable, also speak to the generalizability of agenda control securitization: motivation to maintain agenda control can be conceived of as continuous and varying in magnitude depending on the preferences and institutional positions of states.

Conclusion

This work provides new insight into a puzzle in the internal dynamics of international organizations: why do some matters become framed as security problems, while others do not, and which states are behind these shifts? Classical securitization theory predicts that states that care greatly about the issue, and particularly states that are existentially threatened, should be more likely to make securitizing moves. However, I show that by accounting for agenda control dynamics in international organizations, we can develop the opposite expectations: states with the greatest material interest in an issue may, in fact, be the least likely to attempt to securitize it, fearing a loss of agenda control. I demonstrate these patterns in the case of climate change in the UNGA by deploying a text analysis framework, finding that P5 states are more likely to securitize than others, even when controlling for possible confounders, while SIDS are less likely to do so. The tendency of the P5 not to securitize across all UNGA discourse may indicate a persistent concern for institutional legitimacy, which would bode well for the

continued relevance of the UN to both powerful and less powerful states. While classical securitization theory has drawn attention to the policy implications of securitization, and scholars have devoted great attention to explicating these policy implications in the case of climate change, I draw new attention to the institutional power implications raised by agenda control securitization.

I add to a growing body of research employing rhetoric in international contexts to understand nuanced phenomena of international politics, and theoretically develop the role of securitizing actors' incentives in classical securitization theory, which future work should further explore. This work also presents the first statistical test of securitization in the conceptually appropriate setting of UNGA discourse. By looking for securitization in a more relevant context, I provide new evidence that challenges prior claims that the international discourse on climate change has been securitized. We can observe that though the language of securitization is not uncommon in the climate discourse, it is not deployed by a majority of states, indicating that there is not an intersubjective understanding of climate change as a matter for the UNSC to take up. This finding has direct implications for the nature of the UN's likely response to climate change. Since it suggests that most UN members would not support a substantial role for the UNSC in addressing climate change, a policy response would be more likely to come from the UNGA or another inclusive body like the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Such a response would likely include more attention to the non-security dimensions of climate change, like financing, migration, and human rights, but it would also lack the compulsory force of a UNSC resolution, and may lose out on potential salience and resource benefits of a UNSC-led approach.

Though this paper focuses on agenda control dynamics in one institutional and issue context, the expectations are generalizable to a variety of settings, and thus contribute more broadly to our understandings of international politics and institutions. Both institutional rules and rhetoric matter in shaping institutional distributions of power and policy responses. The theory of agenda control securitization is expected to hold in any international organization with a division of labor across its sub-institutions. Many multi-

issue international organizations besides the UN – including the AU, the OAS, ASEAN, and CARICOM – have a specific sub-institutional unit tasked with addressing matters of conflict and security. In some of these organizations, including the AU, the security organ represents only a subset of member states, as in the case of the UN. To test the generalizability of agenda control securitization, future research should explore other institutional settings when the theory would likely apply, such as the AU, as well as less likely contexts when the dynamics of agenda control are less salient. This work should also seek to understand which states would be agenda control losers and winners in these different fora.

In addition to exploring *contextual* generalizability, future work should also investigate *topical* generalizability. Agenda control securitization expects securitization to be contested on issues when multi-dimensional concerns are salient and when issues are of great importance to potential agenda control losers, and for securitization to succeed when multi-dimensional concerns are less salient. On what other issue areas are these conditions likely to be present? Developing a framework to categorize issues on these dimensions – multi-dimensionality, winners and losers in agenda control, and importance to different states – would help to shed light on when securitization in international organizations is likely to be contested, and when it is likely to succeed. As one possible example, human rights-centered discussions about the right to healthcare access could indicate that the securitization of global pandemics likely to be contested. Extending the theory of agenda control securitization could also allow for the development of expectations about when states would be likely to actively block securitizing moves, and when *desecuritization* may be expected.

The findings in this paper bear not only on international politics, but also on international policy and the legitimacy of international organizations. While I do not find that securitization is taking place broadly across issue areas in the UNGA, were such a trend to develop, it could have broad implications in expanding the UNSC mandate to other issue areas outside of the traditional security realm, including food security, public health, and cyber matters. This could result in increased dominance by the more

powerful actors in international politics, as well as policy responses that de-emphasize human rights, economic, social, and political dimensions of problems in favor of their security dimensions. This pattern would not only have dramatic implications for the ability of the international system to respond to new challenges, but also to its continued legitimacy.

This work brings to light the importance of agenda control dynamics in the discourses of international organizations to help explain why some matters are framed as security problems, while others are not, and how state preferences can help explain these outcomes. As the nature of global security challenges expand and become more complex, international organizations will play a crucial role in coordinating policy responses. Examining securitization in these organizations could help to understand their ability to respond to new security challenges, and their continued legitimacy.

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