THE 'WAR' ON COVID-19 AND THE GLOBAL IMPACT ON HUMAN SECURITY

Bridging the Gap Between Securitization and Desecuritization

By: Veronika Ruskova

Department of International Relations Central European University

"In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts/Sciences"

Supervised by Dr. Paul Roe

Central European University,

Vienna, Austria

2022

ABSTRACT

Does COVID-19 fall under the scope of international security? Based on theories of securitization, this paper argues that the recent efforts to formulate the global response to COVID-19 in international security language have been presented with a complex normative dilemma. With the goal of securitizing COVID-19 to control the effects of the virus and strengthening international initiatives through the increase of attention and resources, increasing awareness and funds, language of security simultaneously takes control of the disease from civil society and places it in the hands of military and intelligence agencies that can override the rights of citizens in the affected countries. Naturally, a "threat-defence" logic is brought into play in the security framework, which in return weakens the international efforts used to combat the COVID-19 initially. With the securitization of COVID-19—rather than being motivated by altruism—it can be seen that such efforts are motivated by narrow national interests. Further, the depiction of COVID-19 as an overwhelming 'threat' is counterproductive to the ongoing efforts to normalize the social perceptions of the disease. Consequently, the combination of these neglected dangers presents an ethical quandary as to whether or not the global spread of COVID-19 should be treated as a security threat. The theoretical questions once posed concerning the effects and ramifications of securitizing an international public health issue will be now analyzed both qualitatively through the theory of securitization, as well as quantitatively. Due to these dangers, the case will be made for accurate and prompt desecuritization as soon as conditions permit. As a result of the paper's findings, securitization theory cannot resolve the complex issue, but bringing it to the attention of scholars, activists, and policymakers, may empower them to identify connections between COVID-19 and 'security' in such a way which could hopefully reduce the dangers of some of these risks, today, and in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"TOO OFTEN WE ENJOY THE COMFORT OF OPINION WITHOUT THE DISCOMFORT OF THOUGHT."

- John F. Kennedy

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INTRODUCTION

For the first time in the modern era, a public health issue was politically 'securitized' on a global scale. Over the past two years, COVID-19 has challenged one of the most pressing issues of our time: human security. Since 2020, different levels of government, from local to international, in conjunction with various different sectors, have tried to control and mitigate the effects of COVID-19 around the world. Due to the lack of preparation and experience, and conventional theories of securitization utilized by national governments, the international political arena had difficulty coping with the declared crisis. In effect, this triggered states to enact such strict restrictions that have never been seen before. Globally, the COVID-19 outbreak has had a profound impact on the lives of individuals in most countries and set a new precedent regarding the way governments have responded to public health issues. As a result of the pandemic's prolonged duration and the reported multiple waves and mutations, the global health response has been securitised, and human rights, along with other civil liberties, have been subject to numerous short- and long-term restrictions. The impact of the pandemic on human rights has been global and far-reaching, from the significant curtailment of rights during the first wave, often demanded by populations themselves.

The theoretical questions once posed by many securitization theory scholars including Waever, Elbe and Floyd, concerning the effects and ramifications of securitizing non-traditional threats, which include international public health issues, will now be possible to be analyzed both theoretically and empirically, as a result of the spread and securitization of COVID-19. Based on these second-generation securitization theories, this paper will argue that the recent efforts to formulate the global response to COVID-19 in international security language have been presented with a complex normative dilemma; the more states try to securitize public health

issues, the more militarized the threat becomes, which inherently leads to a logic which in return weakens the international efforts used to combat the COVID-19 initially. By securitizing COVID-19, it can be seen that such efforts are motivated by narrow national interests rather than altruistic motives. Moreover, the depiction of COVID-19 as an overwhelming 'threat' is counterproductive to the ongoing efforts to normalize the social perceptions of the disease. Consequently, the combination of these neglected dangers presents an ethical quandary as to whether or not the global spread of COVID-19 should be treated as a security threat. The theoretical questions once posed concerning the effects and ramifications of securitizing an international public health issue will be now analyzed both qualitatively through the theory of securitization, as well as quantitatively. Due to these dangers, the case will be made for accurate and prompt desecuritization as soon as conditions permit. Ultimately, this paper will view human security and human rights through the normative lens of the securitarian paradigm. As a result of the paper's findings, securitization theory cannot resolve the complex issue, but bringing it to the attention of scholars, activists, and policymakers, may empower them to identify connections between COVID-19 and 'security' in such a way which could hopefully reduce the dangers of some of these risks, today, and in the future.

SECURITY STUDIES THEORY

SECURITY STUDIES BACKGROUND

Security studies, since its emergence, has been a key part of the field of International Relations (IR), dealing primarily with issues regarding war and peace. The term 'Security Studies' has become synonymous with 'Strategic Studies' in the years following the Second World War, although with a strong emphasis on security issues within a military context. In spite of this, the traditional view of security as its essence, had become too narrow over the decades with the

growing complexity of the international relations agenda, including the rise of environmental and economic challenges, the rise of new international players, the development of threats and risks, resulting in a complex picture which can no longer paint the sole concept of security as it has traditionally been understood. To be able to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the problem, the concept of security needs to be clarified. Likewise, the issue of the concept's essential characteristics is of logical importance since it would be impossible to conduct empirical observations and analysis of security phenomena without a clarified definition of the concepts' scope and substance. While Barry Buzan's definition, which states that "security is freedom from threats," shows that the actual implication of this concept remains unclear.[1]

The concept of security has the potential to be "dangerously ambiguous" if incorrectly interpreted, and is not applied with sufficient detail, or additional specifications.[2] Arguably, in the most explicit way, Steven Walt's definition of security studies conveys the traditional understanding of the issue. As Walt (1991) explains, "Security studies are concerned with the threat of, use of, and control of military force."[3] The approach presented here offers a clear ontological standpoint which is based on the evidence that social truth is largely formed by material influences, which is to say, "the social relations as well as security threats are the result of material factors and that they exist "objectively."[4] In addition to this, these theories have a second fundamental premise regarding how knowledge of some social truths is acquired (epistemological assumptions.) These theories are based on a positivist approach. In order to understand social facts, positivists begin by relating them to things, as they are in the field of natural sciences. By describing and arranging perceptible facts one can gain an understanding of

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[1] Barry Buzan, "New Patterns of Global Security in the Twenty-First Century," International Affairs 67, no. 3 (July 1991): 431–51, https://doi.org/10.2307/2621945.
[2] Arnold Wolfers, "'National Security' as an Ambiguous Symbol," Political Science Quarterly 67, no. 4 (1952): 481–502, https://doi.org/10.2307/2145138.
[3] Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).
[4] Filip Ejdus, "Dangerous Liaisons: Securitization Theory and Schmittian Legacy," Western Balkans Security Observer, 2019.

causal relationships and laws that operate in social systems. In this case, this is an example of observing and analyzing the subject and the object separately.

The security studies agenda, both horizontally and vertically, has been further broadened and deepened by the other school of thought; the Copenhagen School, the "wideners," led by Barry Buzan. According to the 'wideners', horizontally speaking, the concept of security is no longer exclusive to the military and has now expanded to economic, political, social, and environmental dimensions. Vertically speaking, the altered concept of security must also extend to 'referent objects' (object (or ideal) under threat and in need of protection); outside the state for identification and protection (e.g. societal groups, individual people, general humanity).[5] In a traditional critical security standpoint, the ontology posits that "social relations and security threats are actually the result of an intersubjective ideational social construction and that they do not exist objectively, independently,"[6] which is the theoretical strand used in this paper.

A NEW APPROACH TO SECURITY STUDIES—SECOND-GENERATION SECURITIZATION

In the final years of the Cold War, the security studies field underwent significant developments that led to the concept of securitization. In the backdrop of the Cold War, the academic community began looking for ways to redefine a field dominated by Soviet Studies, nuclear strategy, and realist approaches. State governments began expanding their security agendas following the end of the Cold War. As a result of these expanding agendas, securitization was developed.[7] The newer second-generation securitization theory has emerged as a response to the critiques of the pre-existing securitization theory, providing new insights and

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[5] Oxford University Press, "Securitization," obo, accessed May 25, 2022, https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199743292/obo-9780199743292-0091.xml.
[6] Filip Ejdus, "Dangerous Liaisons: Securitization Theory and Schmittian Legacy," Western Balkans Security Observer, 2019.
[7] Jef Huysmans, "Revisiting Copenhagen," *European Journal of International Relations* 4, no. 4 (December 1998): 479–505.

addressing critiques. Presented further will be an application of the Second-Generation

Securitization Theory (Copenhagen School of Securitisation) to the global COVID-19 response.

Security is conceptualized at the Copenhagen School of Security Studies as a particular

etiology of threats with the need for securitization by securitizing actors (primarily the political

elite), an actor who authorises the declaration of specific matters as urgent threats to the

reference object's survival (e.g., COVID-19), as well as audience acceptance (e.g., public),

authorizes the use of extraordinary and extreme measures to be taken place to neutralize the

threat. "Security is the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and

frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics."[8] This is known as the

'securitizing move', the phrase theorists of the Copenhagen School use to describe the move

mentioned in the previous sentence, which is also known more plainly as 'securitization.' The

term 'Securitization' was officially coined in 1993 by the Dane, Ole Waever, and since, has gained

acceptance among the study of international relations constructivists and more broadly in the

Critical Security Studies field.[9]

It should be noted that such a security perspective is derived from a social constructivist

framework wherein the assumption is made that threats to security cannot be separated from the

discourse that defines them as such. Since it is language itself that expresses ideas which form

our realities, is a point that needs to be considered, showing why language and ideas precede, and

subsequently form security. Accordingly, to the theory of securitization, security is considered to

be an act of speech. As Waever (1995) explains, "In this usage, security is not of interest as a sign

that refers to something more real; the utterance itself is the act. By saying the words, something

is done."[10] As a result, security cannot be understood as a subjective perception that implies

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[8] Jef Huysmans, "Revisiting Copenhagen," *European Journal of International Relations* 4, no. 4 (December 1998): 479–505.

[9] Walt, Stephen M. "The Coronavirus Is Putting Globalization in the Intensive Care Unit." *Foreign Policy*, March 9, 2020. https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/09/coronavirus-economy-globalization-virus-icu-realism/.

[10] Ole Waever, "Securitization and Desecuritization," ed. Ronnie Lipschutz, On Security Chapter 3 (1995).

something more solid, external existing, as if it were independent of the perception; therefore, speech acts only refer to themselves. In simple terms, if a problem is verbally classified as a security threat, it is deemed to be one. In this respect, the speech act can be viewed as referring to itself, as it is self-referential in nature. The definition of security can then be divided into objective and subjective definitions based on this dichotomy, which further highlights the dangers.

Stephan Elbe (2006) applied this 'speech act' to the securitization of HIV/AIDS, and noted this issues framing it as a security issue. The securitization of COVID-19 can be related to the securitization of HIV/AIDS, which was explained by Elbe; "This is precisely what has happened to the issue years, where arguments have shifted from humanitarian a officials in international organizations, governments, and organizations (securitizing actors) increasingly arguing that beyond considerations, the survival of communities, states, and militia now being undermined (existentially threatened), unless drastic measures are undertaken by national and international act global pandemic."[11]

Elbe (2006) further explains that there is always a political choice involved when it comes to deciding whether or not to treat a threat as a security issue, and then also how to treat the issue politically,[12] as has been seen with COVID-19. Therefore, it is clear that one single person cannot have the authority to construct the security issue through the speech act. In such a scenario, the subjective perception and interpretation of the security threat would be the same as the speech act, maintaining largely the dichotomy between objective/subjective notions of security. Additionally, the Copenhagen School contends that security should not be idealized contrary to the normative viewpoint assumed by most security theoreticians. It should be viewed

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[11] Stefan Elbe, "Should HIV/AIDS Be Securitized? The Ethical Dilemmas of Linking HIV/AIDS and Security," International Studies Quarterly ([International Studies Association, Wiley], 2006), http://www.jstor.org/stable/3693554.
[12] Stefan Elbe, "Should HIV/AIDS Be Securitized? The Ethical Dilemmas of Linking HIV/AIDS and Security," International Studies Quarterly ([International Studies Association, Wiley], 2006); Ole Wæver, "The EU as a Security Actor, Reflections from a Pessimistic Constructivist on Post-Sovereign Security Orders," in International Relations Theory and the Politics of European Integration (Routledge, 2000), 250–94.

as a necessary evil and as a negative occurrence when a certain issue is securitized as it destroys the normal political and liberal democratic processes. It is due to these dangers that critics of securitization highlights the importance of "desecuritization." In order to achieve maximum long-term benefits, they propose the opposing strategy – suggesting that the most effective way to deal with urgent and extraordinary issues is to desecuritize, which would return them to the regular sphere of politics.

Rita Floyd, another critic posits that desecuritization is an appropriate normative strategy.[13] It is part of Floyd's Just Securitization Theory, states that for 'just securitization' to occur it needs: just cause, right intention, proportionality, reasonable chance of success. These four, also need to be complimented by three more criteria for 'just conduct': (1) security must be targeted to threats, 2) the least harmful measures must be taken, and 3) securitisation implementers are constrained by the rights of suspects and threateners, must be taken.[14] Floyd stresses the importance that there also needs to be a just termination of securitization. This includes the timing (duration) of the securitization as well as the actions and especially the long-term goal of desecuritization.[15] Regarding the securitization of COVID-19, it is clear to not only to various scholars, activists, government officials, but also to the public, that many of these criteria are no longer valid, or may have never even been met.

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[13] Rita Floyd, "Can Securitization Theory Be Used in Normative Analysis? Towards a Just Securitization Theory," *Security Dialogue* 42, no. 4/5 (2011): 427–39, https://doi.org/10.2307/26301799.
[14] Mitja Sardoc, "The Ethics of Securitisation: An Interview with Rita Floyd," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 14, no. 1 (January 2, 2021): 139–48, https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2021.1886506.
[15] Mitja Sardoc, "The Ethics of Securitisation: An Interview with Rita Floyd," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 14, no. 1 (January 2, 2021): 139–48, https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2021.1886506.

HOW DO WE KNOW SECURITIZATION WHEN WE SEE IT?

FRAMING THE HEALTH SECURITY ANALYSIS; THE THEORETICAL-EMPIRICAL AXIS BETWEEN SECURITY AND GLOBAL HEALTH

Traditionally, security has been understood as connected to nation-states and power accumulation. Realist approaches, which often follow this narrow traditionalist definition, largely ignore global health crises like COVID-19.[16] Today, security can be defined with a broader perspective through a broader definition of constructivism, where roots of the Copenhagen School of Security Studies can be found.[17] Both theories emphasise social process, and that is one of the key connections between Constructivism and Securitization Theory. As Shahin Malik (2015) explains, "The fundamental essence of Constructivism is that it sees international relations as being socially constructed by identity, meanings, the assumptions of actors themselves, and indeed by the analysts' linguistic interpretations of social phenomena."[18]

It was in this context that securitization was defined by Waever as a linguistic process resulting in a particular issue being seen as an existential threat leading to a 'speech act'.[19] Thus, language plays a crucial role in becoming a discursive and political practice when it comes to security. The concept of security can be seen as a construct of society, which views security in ways that open the door to the possibility of security that transcends conventional rules[20] by providing justification and authorization for the use of "extraordinary measures" for an

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[16] Rita Floyd, "Can Securitization Theory Be Used in Normative Analysis? Towards a Just Securitization Theory," *Security Dialogue* 42, no. 4/5 (2011): 427–39, https://doi.org/10.2307/26301799.
[17] Peter Hough et al., *International Security Studies*, 2nd ed. (New York.: Routledge, 2020).
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).

existential threat.[21] Broadly speaking, the connections between health and security are apparent from a language perspective, as Elbe (2006) argues. [22] Over the course of history, medical discourse has tended to rely heavily on military metaphors, resulting in the perception that medical treatments are viewed as 'weapons' against disease.[23] With the utilization of terms such as "elimination, defense, containment, and frontlines," there is a vocabulary that is shared between discourses on health and security.[24] There is an inherent connection between health and security due to these linguistic connections.

Further, the COVID-19 pandemic may be analyzed in light of the historical backdrop of health security, globally. The symbiotic and homologous nature of modern warfare and medicine is well acknowledged, with many in academia maintaining that health and security are intertwined.[25] There has been a historical trajectory of communicable diseases as security threats along which the current pandemic can be seen as a continuation. History has demonstrated the securitization of previous global health crises, including the Avian flu, HIV/AIDS, SARS-CoV-2, set precedents in the security discourse which enabled policymakers to successfully position COVID-19 as a problem of security.[26] However, the magnitude of COVID-19 and the unpreparedness of governments, and lack of biosecurity, have even caused some states to over-securitize and now desecuritize the issue. Politicians have attempted to securitize COVID-19 by the public health issue by portraying it as a threat to humankind. A major threat on this scale is being described as COVID-19, and national leaders are being pressured into urgent and

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[21] Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).
[22] Stefan Elbe, "Should HIV/AIDS Be Securitized? The Ethical Dilemmas of Linking HIV/AIDS and Security," International Studies Quarterly ([International Studies Association, Wiley], 2006), http://www.jstor.org/stable/3693554.
[23] Jing-Bao Nie et al., "Healing Without Waging War: Beyond Military Metaphors in Medicine and HIV Cure Research," *The American Journal of Bioethics* 16, no. 10 (September 21, 2016): 3–11.
[24] Alison Howell, "The Global Politics of Medicine: Beyond Global Health, against Securitisation Theory," *Review of International Studies* 40, no. 5 (2014): 961–87.
[25] Alison Howell, "The Global Politics of Medicine: Beyond Global Health, against Securitisation Theory," *Review of International Studies* 40, no. 5 (2014): 961–87.
[26] Stefan Elbe, "Pandemics on the Radar Screen: Health Security, Infectious Disease and the Medicalisation of Insecurity," Political Studies 59, no. 4 (November 7, 2011): 848–66.

extraordinary responses. The impact of COVID-19 is so large, that securitizations of this magnitude are even classified as 'macrosecuritizations' in the Copenhagen School literature (securitizations that work at the global level to control and order smaller securitizations below them.)[27]

WAR-TIME LEADERSHIP? SECURITY IN TIMES OF COVID-19

From simply identifying COVID-19 as a threat to declaring war, there are various methods for labeling the virus as a security issue. On the international level of global organizations, the World Health Organization, which have engaged earlier in securitizing actions, which include the use of security logic to frame infectious diseases, as was done in the case with COVID-19. As part of a press conference, Tedros Adhanom, the Director-General of the WHO, made reference to a variety of terms, including 'operational tools' as well as 'efforts on many fronts,' highlighting the fact that in difficult times, we should encourage international solidarity.[28] Furthermore, Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General, emphasized in a Tweet that the risk that COVID-19 poses is comprehensive and knows no borders by stating we all "face a common threat."[29] These examples of speech acts in which international institutions leaders referred to COVID-19 as a security threat to the international community illustrate how COVID-19 has been positioned within a discourse of security. Adding to this is the persistent rhetoric of war that has been used to describe responses to COVID-19 and has been promoted primarily by nation's leaders. Moreover, the former President of the United States of America, Donald Trump, who at the beginning of the pandemic "addressed the United States people as a

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[27] Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, "Macrosecuritisation and Security Constellations: Reconsidering Scale in Securitisation Theory," *Review of International Studies* 35, no. 2 (April 2009): 253–76.

[28] World Health Organization, "WHO Director-General's Opening Remarks at the Media Briefing on COVID-19," May 15, 2020, https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---15-may-2020.

[29] Antonio Guterres, "Twitter Post," March 14, 2020, https://twitter.com/antonioguterres/status/1238751723354610945.

self-styled 'wartime president'," in the fight against COVID-19.[30] In analyzing the French

president's national address to citizens in March 2020, the French leader had some of the most

evident wartime language stating "We are at war".[31] Xi Jinping also declared a 'people's war'

against COVID-19 in the face of the widespread pandemic in China.[32] These instances are a clear

indication that actors in state leadership were speaking about security in this manner, and as a

result securitized COVID-19.

In countries around the world, like in Austria, governments instituted 'war like' policies

to fight the threat. In July 2020, the Austrian government announced that, for the first time in

the history, "Zivildienst," the mandatory alternative service in Austria, has drafted men to assist

in the healthcare system as part of "Special Alternative Civilian Service."[33] Also for the first time,

in support of healthcare and security, the military reserve, "Militia", of the Austrian Armed

Forces had been activated.[34] In Vienna, parking enforcement officers of the "Vienna Parking

Enforcement Authority", were deployed to police federal parks (Bundesgärten), to enforce the

public compliance of restrictions.[35]

There is no doubt that COVID-19 is not an enemy in the traditional sense; where the

health crisis cannot be explained as conflict and war are in terms of states and militaries as in the

traditional rational-actor model. By contrast, leaders have positioned it within a security

discourse in which the pandemic has been portrayed as an existential threat. The Copenhagen

School contributes to this argument, as there is a growing acceptance among the relevant public

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[30] Francesca Panzeri, Simona Di Paola, and Filippo Domaneschi, "Does the COVID-19 War Metaphor Influence Reasoning?," PLOS ONE 16, no. 4 (April 28, 2021): e0250651; Simon Tisdall, "Lay off Those War Metaphors, World Leaders. You Could Be the Next Casualty," The Guardian, March 21, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/21/donald-trump-boris-johnson-coronavirus.
[31] Rym Momtaz, "Emmanuel Macron on Coronavirus: 'We'Re at War,'" *POLITICO*, March 16, 2020, https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-on-coronavirus-were-at-war/.
[32] News, VOA. "China's Xi Declares 'People's War' on Coronavirus." *China's Xi Declares "People's War" on Coronavirus*, February 6, 2020. https://www.voanews.com/a/science-health_coronavirus-outbreak_chinas-xi-declares-peoples-war-coronavirus/6183824.html.
[33] ORF.at, "Außerordentlicher Zivildienereinsatz Großteils Beendet," *ORF.At*, July 1, 2020, https://orf.at/stories/3171800/.
[34] Bundesheer, "Einsatzpräsenzdienst Für Miliz Ist Beendet," bundesheer.at, July 20, 2020, https://www.bundesheer.at/miliz/einsatz/artikel.php?id=5751.
[35] ORF, "Parksheriffs Unterstützen Polizei," *ORF.At*, April 12, 2020, https://wien.orf.at/stories/3043747/.

that these existential threats exist, allowing extraordinary measures to be taken and COVID-19 to be securitized. The restriction of human mobility within and between borders provides an excellent example of these measures. A large number of states restricted travel by enacting legislation through closing borders, which included the E.U., Canada, the U.S., China and Australia. Further, in some of these states' governments mandated the closure of even the internal borders on the grounds of protecting citizens. The enforcement of social distancing laws has been spurred by isolation and quarantine measures in many states, as well as fines imposed for violations of such laws. Citizens have indicated their support of new regulations that governments have implemented as a result of COVID-19 by adhering to the policies adopted. The acceptance of these extraordinary measures may be demonstrated, for example, that people have curbed their social interactions in order to help 'flatten the curve' and reduce community transmissions.

The Copenhagen school highlights that successful securitization entails emergency measures.[36] There is no question that the application of emergency measures instituted by governments since 2020—which were largely accepted by the public—show that COVID-19 had indeed been securitized. Empirical evidence is also available that suggests securitization occurred globally. The *Oxford COVID-19 Government Tracker* (OxCGRT) is a unique tool that was launched in March 2020 by a group of researchers at the Blavatnik School of Government at the University of Oxford.[37] The goal of this information was to enable researchers and decision makers to evaluate policies and calibrate their responses based on hard evidence. It tracks the policy measures introduced by governments across over 180 countries and a number of sub-national jurisdictions.[38] Our World Data notes how the Stringency Index is calculated:

[36] Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).
[37] "COVID-19 Government Response Tracker," Blavatnik School of Government, accessed May 28, 2022, https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/research-projects/covid-19-government-response-tracker.
[38] Ibid.

OxCGRT collects publicly available information on indicators of government response. These indicators take policies such as school closures, travel bans, etc. and record them on an ordinal scale; the remainder are financial indicators such as fiscal or monetary measures… OxCGRT measures the variation in governments' responses using its 'COVID-19 Government Response Stringency Index (Stringency Index)'. This composite measure is a simple additive score of nine indicators measured on an ordinal scale, rescaled to vary from 0 to 100[39]… Please note that this measure is for comparative purposes only, and should not necessarily be interpreted as a rating of the appropriateness or effectiveness of a country's response… The Stringency Index records the number and strictness of government policies.[40]

The way the Stringency Index is calculated—as the strictness of COVID-19 government policies— is a valuable indicator to determine the securitization of COVID-19 by states. A highly securitized approach was seen in countries with high amounts of emergency measures instituted to restrict citizens in order to curb the effects of the virus. The data in the figures begins in 2022, as that is when it was updated to include the variation of restrictions between the vaccinated and non-vaccinated, which is an important variable to consider with regards to rights. The process is still underway to apply the differentiation to the whole dataset (from March 2020).[41]

In Figure 1, it is evident that all countries did not only put emergency policies and restrictions in place, but had highly securitized responses to COVID-19, as they all scored values

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[39] "COVID-19 Data Explorer: Stringency Index—By Country," Our World in Data, accessed May 28, 2022, https://ourworldindata.org/explorers/coronavirus-data-explorer?tab=table&hideControls=true&Metric=Stringency+index&Interval=7-day+rolling+average&Relative+to+Population=true&Color+by+test+positivity=false&country=USA~ITA~CAN~DEU~GBR~FRA~CHN~AUT~HUN.

[40] Hannah Ritchie et al., "COVID-19: Stringency Index," Our World in Data, accessed May 28, 2022, https://ourworldindata.org/covid-stringency-index.

[41] "COVID-19 Government Response Tracker," Blavatnik School of Government, accessed May 28, 2022, https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/research-projects/covid-19-government-response-tracker.

of 50 or higher (100 meaning complete restriction of the population.) The dataset's methodology for calculating indices can be found [here](#).[42]
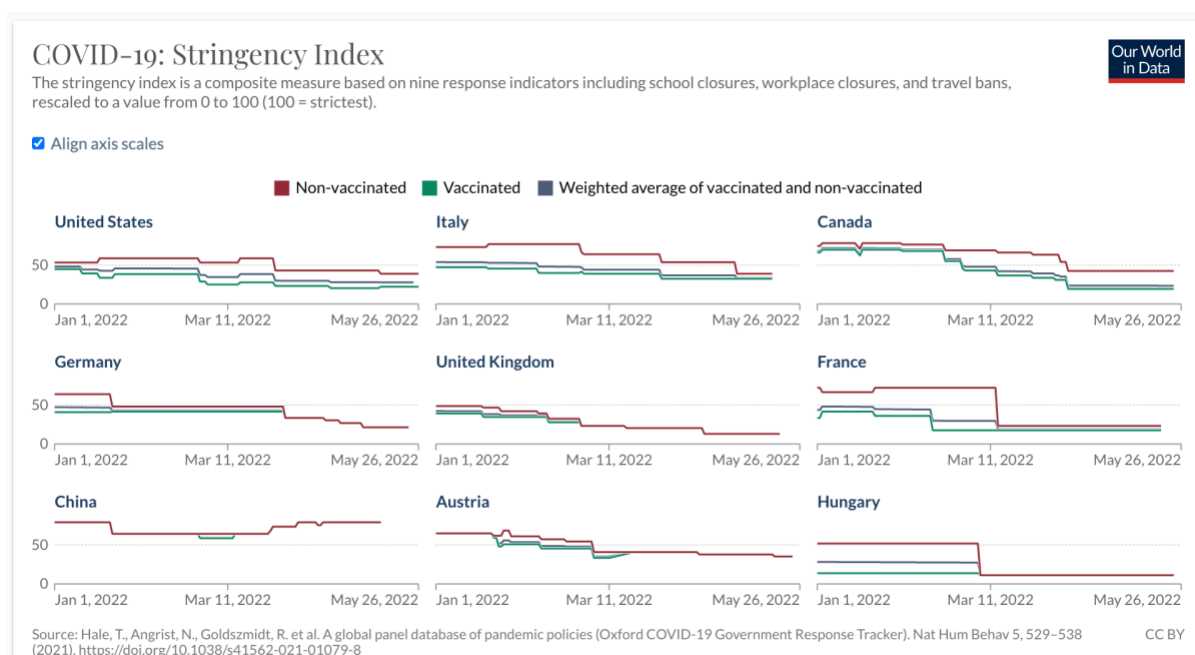

Figure 1. *OxCGRT Stringency Index—By Country.*[43]

Further, in Figure 1, it is evident that there are patterns of the easing of policies and restrictions as of the spring of 2022, with the introduction of the less potent Omicron variant of COVID-19. Looking more closely at the Stringency Index of Canada and Austria in Figure 2 below, it can be seen how the two countries securitized COVID-19 in different ways, with Canada holding a stricter regime, especially for the non-vaccinated throughout the whole time span of the graph. Austria held a more cohesive response with restrictions, singling out the non-vaccinated for a short time frame, and eased restrictions earlier.

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[42] OxCGRT, "Covid-Policy-Tracker/Index_methodology.Md at Master · OxCGRT/Covid-Policy-Tracker," GitHub, accessed May 28, 2022, https://github.com/OxCGRT/covid-policy-tracker/blob/master/documentation/index_methodology.md.
[43] "COVID-19 Data Explorer: Stringency Index—By Country," Our World in Data, accessed May 28, 2022, https://ourworldindata.org/explorers/coronavirus-data-explorer?tab=table&hideControls=true&Metric=Stringency+index&Interval=7-day+rolling+average&Relative+to+Population=true&Color+by+test+positivity=false&country=USA~ITA~CAN~DEU~GBR~FRA~CHN~AUT~HUN.
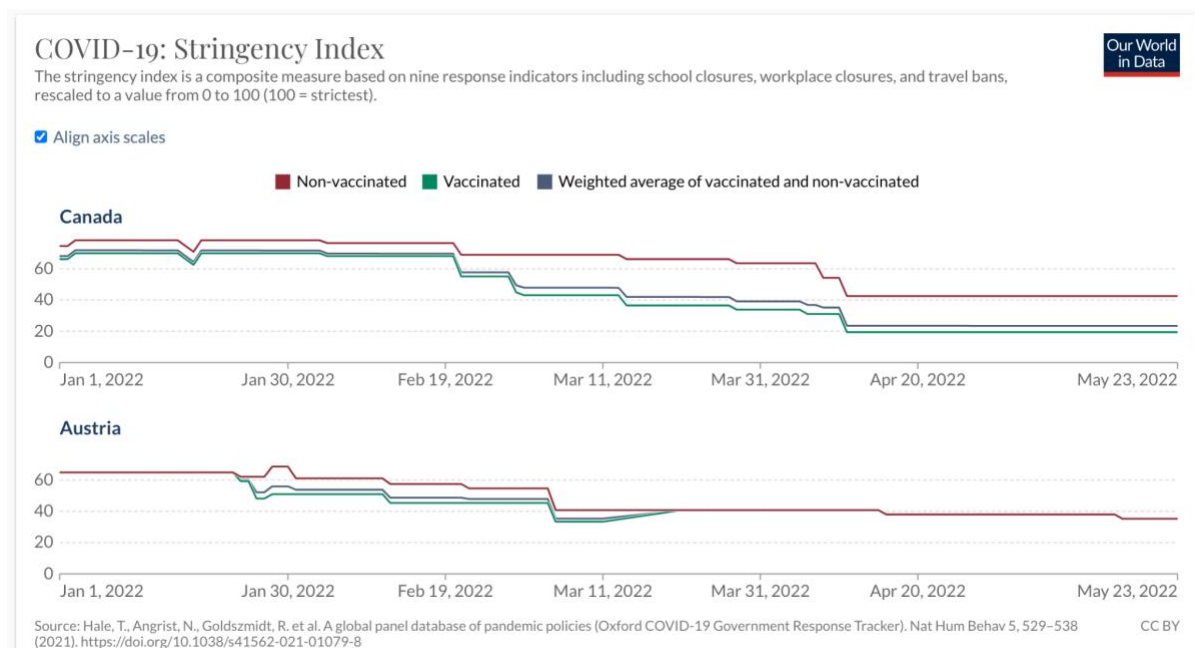
COVID-19: Stringency Index

The stringency index is a composite measure based on nine response indicators including school closures, workplace closures, and travel bans, rescaled to a value from 0 to 100 (100 = strictest).

☑ Align axis scales

■ Non-vaccinated   ■ Vaccinated   ■ Weighted average of vaccinated and non-vaccinated

Source: Hale, T., Angrist, N., Goldszmidt, R. et al. A global panel database of pandemic policies (Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker). Nat Hum Behav 5, 529–538 (2021). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-021-01079-8   CC BY

Figure 2. *OxCGRT Stringency Index—Canada vs. Austria.* [44]

France, seen in Figure 3, a country which had some of the strictest mandates, especially for the non-vaccinated, can be seen to drop almost all restrictions in March 2022, in hopes of getting the country back to normal. Canada on the other hand, which has one of the highest vaccination rates in the world, and lowest infection and death rates, is seen to sustain the restrictions, which have a value almost twice as high for the non-vaccinated.

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[44] "COVID-19 Data Explorer," Our World in Data: Canada vs. Austria Stringency Index, accessed May 30, 2022, https://ourworldindata.org/explorers/coronavirus-data-explorer?uniformYAxis=0&hideControls=true&Metric=Stringency+index&Interval=7-day+rolling+average&Relative+to+Population=true&Color+by+test+positivity=false&country=AUT~CAN.
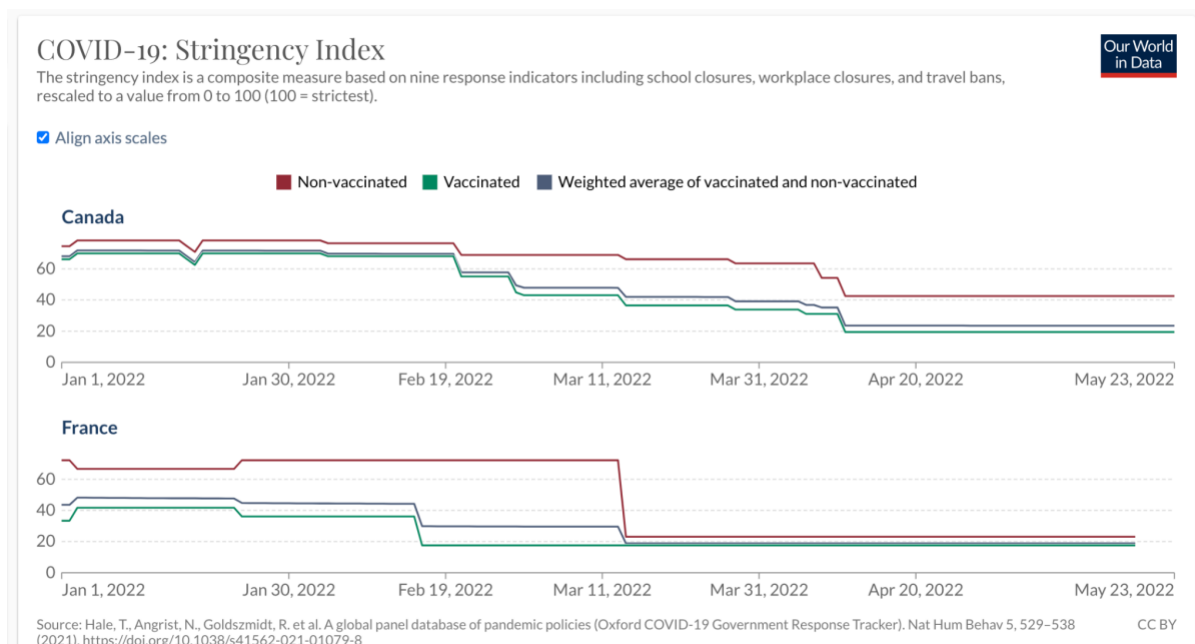
Figure 3. *OxCGRT Stringency Index: Canada vs. France.* [45]

China, where the virus originated, has to date the strictest mandates due to the country's

Zero COVID policy. This is represented in the OxCGRT Stringency Index, with only a small

deviation between the vaccinated and non-vaccinated. The values of vaccinated, non-vaccinated

and their weighted average sit at a value of 79.17, which as of May 11, 2022 has the highest

stringency index world-wide.[46] With the virus today having the lowest fatality rates since March

2020, the Zero-COVID response in a country such as China can be seen as the most extreme

example of securitization, causing the most disproportional harm to its citizens.

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[45] "COVID-19 Data Explorer: Canada vs. France Stringency Index," Our World in Data, accessed May 30, 2022, https://ourworldindata.org/explorers/coronavirus-data-explorer?uniformYAxis=0&hideControls=true&Interval=7-day+rolling+average&Relative+to+Population=true&Color+by+test+positivity=false&country=CAN~FRA&Metric=Stringency+index.

[46] "COVID-19 Data Explorer: China Stringency Index," Our World in Data, accessed May 30, 2022, https://ourworldindata.org/explorers/coronavirus-data-explorer?uniformYAxis=0&hideControls=true&Interval=7-day+rolling+average&Relative+to+Population=true&Color+by+test+positivity=false&country=~CHN&Metric=Stringency+index.
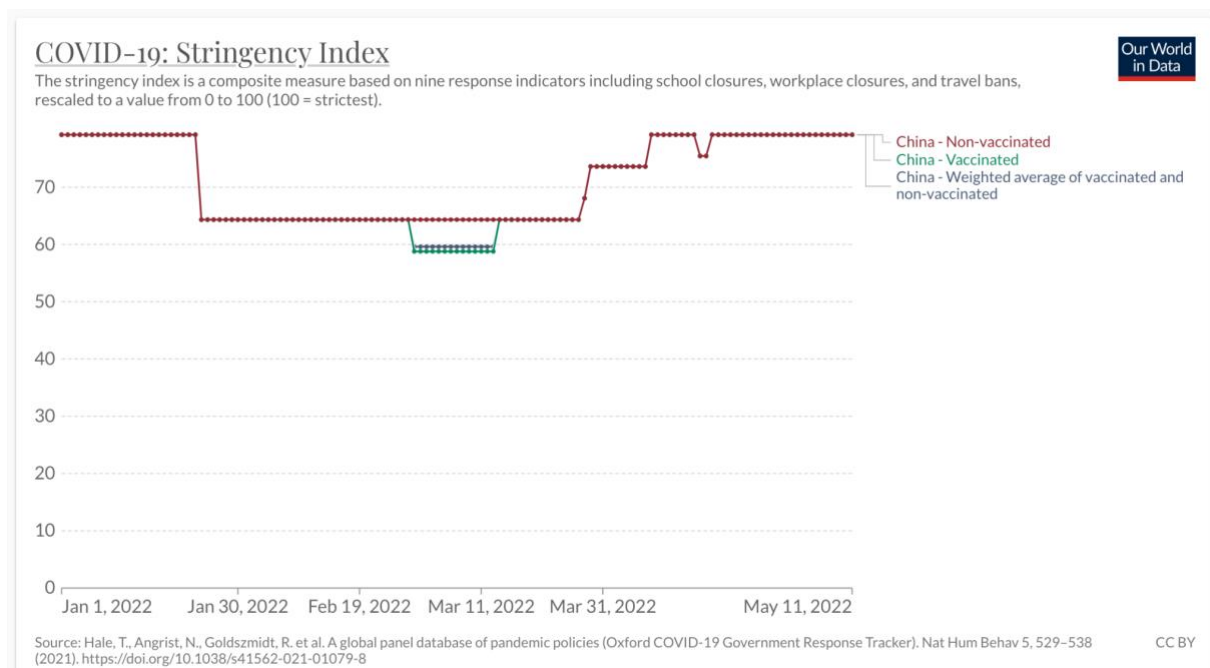
Figure 4. *OxCGRT Stringency Index: China.* [47]

Concerns regarding human rights and civil liberties are brought to light in especially this circumstance as the harms of restrictions outweigh the severity of the virus. Looking at the two graphs below, the Omicron variant in Figure 5, cross-referenced with Figure 6, shows that the variant is exponentially less deadly than the previous strains, which should in effect lead to a natural decrease of restrictions on a national basis to reduce the harms posed by extended restrictions. This is not seen in the case with China, as the securitization by the national government holds a Zero COVID policy, placing greater importance on eradicating COVID, than civil liberties and freedoms. (China is not included in Figure 5 there is no data submitted.)

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[47] "COVID-19 Data Explorer: China Stringency Index," Our World in Data, accessed May 30, 2022, https://ourworldindata.org/explorers/coronavirus-data-explorer?uniformYAxis=0&hideControls=true&Interval=7-day+rolling+average&Relative+to+Population=true&Color+by+test+positivity=false&country=~CHN&Metric=Stringency+index.
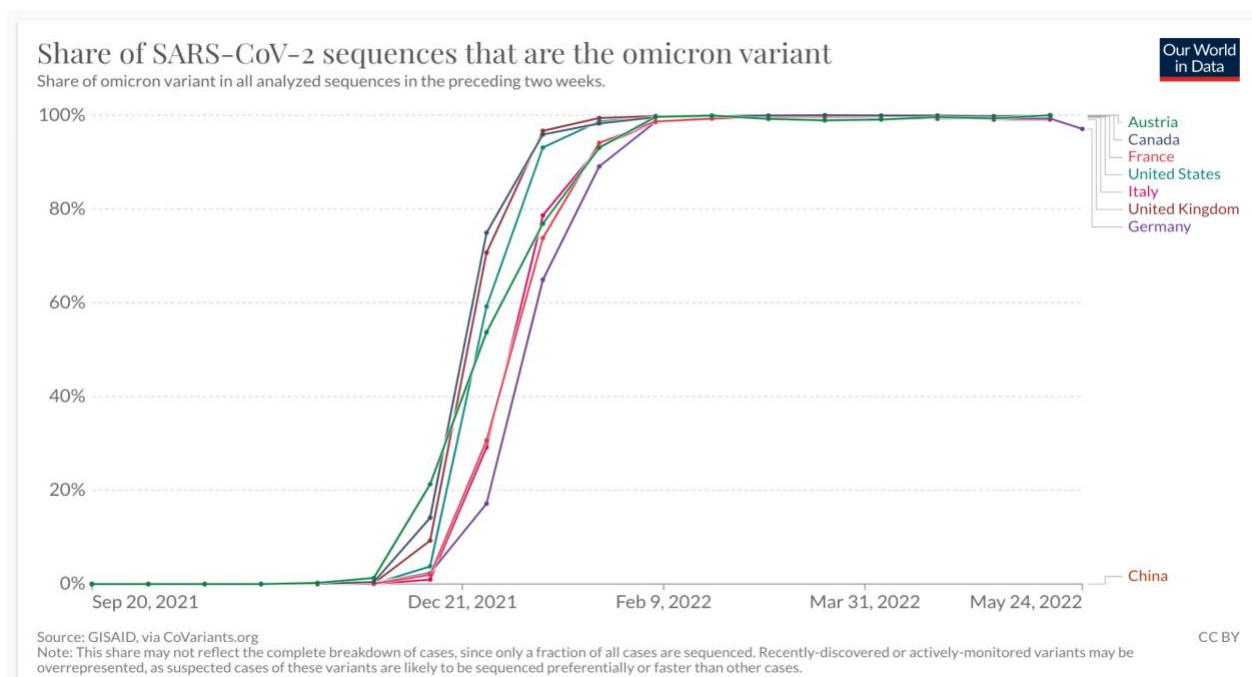
Figure 5. *Share of SARS-CoV-2 sequences that are the omicron variant.*[48]
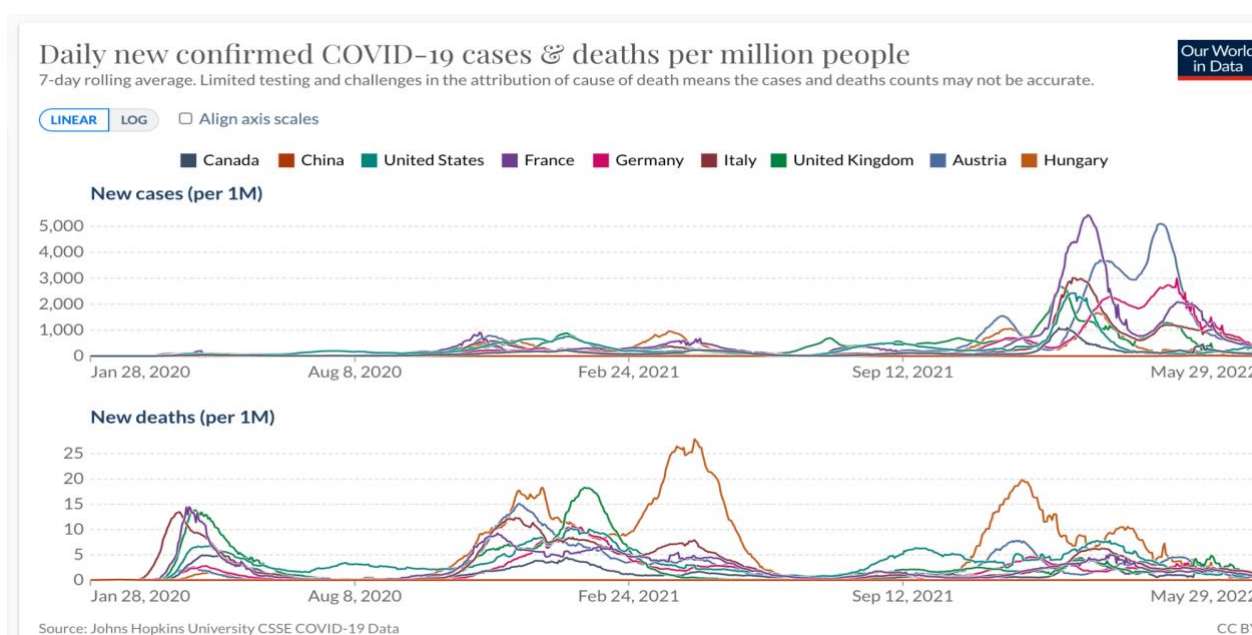
Figure 6. *Daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases & deaths per million people.*[49]

[48] "COVID-19 Data Explorer: Share of SARS-CoV-2 Sequences That Are the Omicron Variant," Our World in Data, accessed May 30, 2022, https://ourworldindata.org/explorers/coronavirus-data-explorer?facet=none&uniformYAxis=0&hideControls=true&Metric=Omicron+variant+%28share%29&Interval=7-day+rolling+average&Relative+to+Population=true&Color+by+test+positivity=false&country=AUT~CHN~FRA~USA~GBR~CAN~DEU~ITA~HUN.

[49] "COVID-19 Data Explorer: Daily New Confirmed COVID-19 Cases & Deaths per Million People.," Our World in Data, accessed May 30, 2022, https://ourworldindata.org/explorers/coronavirus-data-

The observation of the data indicates that the COVID-19 securitization requirement has been met, with the introduction of extraordinary or emergency measures by national governments.

Further, there were a wide range of measures taken at the international level that deviated from traditional political behavior. The pandemic has postponed several key international meetings and treaties, including the review of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, the Glasgow Climate Change Conference, various other UN meetings planned globally, as well as the World Bank and IMF which delayed events and rescheduled virtually.[50] Therefore, citizens have not only accepted extraordinary measures implemented by states, but it is also the states themselves which have adapted their usual inter-state relations to the securitization of COVID-19. Resultantly, defining COVID-19 as a security threat demonstrates that securitization is a discursive process. There are also a number of studies which have revealed that security is a political process which can occur accompanied by a break from states' traditional practices. Discussed in more detail will be the political consequences of invoking securitization by political leaders. Today, rather than debating whether or not COVID-19 was securitized, the question rather lies whether the policies enacted were too strict (bringing disproportionate harm to citizens) or were still not enough.

THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF SECURITIZING THE PANDEMIC AS A 'WAR'

Security usually has been equated with military operations in the traditionalist view. Securitizing COVID-19 therefore imparts a certain amount of political baggage in response to

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explorer?uniformYAxis=0&hideControls=true&Metric=Cases+and+deaths&Interval=7-day+rolling+average&Relative+to+Population=true&Color+by+test+positivity=false&country=AUT~CHN~FRA~USA~GBR~CAN~DEU~ITA~HUN.
[50] IISD's SDG Knowledge Hub, "COVID-19 Pandemic Disrupts UN Meeting Plans Around the World," IISD, March 19, 2020, https://sdg.iisd.org/news/covid-19-pandemic-disrupts-un-meeting-plans-around-the-world/.

the disease. Comparing COVID-19 to previous global health crises that have been similarly securitized, there are major trends that emerge concerning the political effects of referring to COVID-19 as a war. The initial impact was that the virus was considered a priority issue, which has resulted in an increased amount of attention and resources available. Securitizing public health issues means they are endowed with a higher priority than non-security issues and therefore receive more attention and resources due to appealing to the self-interest of states, explains Jeremy Youde (2008), as proven in the case of the H5N1 Avian Flu in the past.[51] Securitizing global health crises has therefore been demonstrated as having a significant political advantage. COVID-19 responses illustrate this dynamic. On national levels, governments have made significant investments on COVID-19 relief packages, which in 2021, ranked the highest countries as a share of their GDP in descending order; Japan (54%), Germany (35%), Italy (31%), Canada, (20%).[52]

Looking further into international institutions, a total of $157 billion has been committed by the Bank Group since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis.[53] A variety of support has been provided by the World Bank Group, especially to countries in need since the onset of the pandemic, including aid in strengthening health systems, assisting businesses, protecting the poor and vulnerable, creation of jobs, and in the jump-starting of an inclusive, green, and resilient recovery.[54] Framing of the COVID-19 pandemic as a threat to security is advantageous due to the fact that global leaders can then attribute heightened vigilance and urgency to the threat. States, as well as the international community, can develop faster and more effective responses

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[51] "WHO Director-General's Opening Remarks at the Media Briefing on COVID-19," WHO, May 15, 2020, https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---15-may-2020.
[52] M. Szmigiera, "COVID-19 Stimulus Package by Country," Statista, May 2021, https://www.statista.com/statistics/1107572/covid-19-value-g20-stimulus-packages-share-gdp/.
[53] World Bank Group, "World Bank Group's $157 Billion Pandemic Surge Is Largest Crisis Response in Its History," *World Bank Group*, August 5, 2021, https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/07/19/world-bank-group-s-157-billion-pandemic-surge-is-largest-crisis-response-in-its-history.
[54] World Bank Group, "World Bank Group's $157 Billion Pandemic Surge Is Largest Crisis Response in Its History," *World Bank Group*, August 5, 2021, https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/07/19/world-bank-group-s-157-billion-pandemic-surge-is-largest-crisis-response-in-its-history.

by increasing resources available to tackle the crisis. However, on the other hand, there is evidence that even though securitization has increased the mobilization of resources, the pandemic has also been the subject of ineffective responses.

In the state's response to COVID-19, police have been utilized to maintain the compliance of emergency measures. States around the world were seen to have enacted policies that went against human rights protocols; including in Kenya, Paraguay, India, Philippines, and Hungary, where citizens faced unprecedented COVID-19 restrictions. In Nairobi, police moved through a neighbourhood in the midst of enforcing a Coronavirus curfew when they shot and killed a 13-year-old boy on his balcony.[55] The boy's father, Hussein Moyo, explained the violence from police stating, "They come in screaming and beating us like cows, and we are law-abiding citizens."[56]

There have consequently been increasing concerns about the use of gruelling and humiliating methods by police forces throughout the world to enforce restrictions on the most vulnerable and poorest populations. The most devastating for mass amounts of individuals in developing countries such as Kenya where millions live at poverty levels and face the prospect of starvation if they don't defy lockdowns and seek employment.[57] In a world overflowing with smartphones, there is barely a moment when something goes unrecorded. In India, footage shows migrant workers being doused with sodium hypochlorite, a toxic chemical used for bleaching, from a distance as they crouched beside the roadside.[58] This technique was presumably intended to keep them healthy before entering their province of residence. The Paraguayan police have used similarly humiliating tactics, such as performing 'star jumps' in

[55] Rebecca Ratcliffe, "Teargas, Beatings and Bleach: The Most Extreme Covid-19 Lockdown Controls around the World," *The Guardian*, April 1, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/01/extreme-coronavirus-lockdown-controls-raise-fears-for-worlds-poorest.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Rebecca Ratcliffe, "Teargas, Beatings and Bleach: The Most Extreme Covid-19 Lockdown Controls around the World," *The Guardian*, April 1, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/01/extreme-coronavirus-lockdown-controls-raise-fears-for-worlds-poorest.
[58] Ibid.

public to discipline people who violate quarantine rules while threatening them with tasers.[59] While lying face down on the ground, some of the other individuals were forced to repeat the phrase "I won't leave my house again, officer," all on film, which was then disseminated by the officers themselves.[60] In similar essence, local officials and police in the Philippines forced people to sit in the midday sun as a form of punishment after curfew violators were trapped in dog cages.[61] It has been reported that over 17,000 arrests have taken place in the Philippines for violations of the lockdown imposed on Coronavirus, resulting in overcrowding in detention centers, a high risk as Human Rights Watch has pointed out.[62] Even in Canada, a 21 year old man was tackled and arrested at a frozen outdoor pond as his skating "was going against the health regulation in Alberta," according to the police officer on scene.[63]

It has to be acknowledged that the overbearing tactics pushed by state governments and their enforcing bodies (the police) risk not only fueling fear and panic, but in many cases raises the risk of the virus being spread. Highlighting their concerns, human rights experts from the United Nations have urged countries not to engage in unproportionate, ineffective and discriminatory measures to deal with the current outbreak.[64] Further fears of government overreach, potentially eliminating critical voices by enacting sweeping legislation, have also been raised. Like in Hungary, the parliament approved a series of measures, including the imposition

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[59] Rebecca Ratcliffe, "Teargas, Beatings and Bleach: The Most Extreme Covid-19 Lockdown Controls around the World," *The Guardian*, April 1, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/01/extreme-coronavirus-lockdown-controls-raise-fears-for-worlds-poorest.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Joel Dryden, "Police Arrest 21-Year-Old at Skating Rink after Bylaw Officers Say Crowd Violated COVID-19 Regulations," CBC, December 20, 2020, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/calgary-skating-rink-arrest-1.5848904.

[64] "COVID-19 Restrictions Should Not Stop Freedom of Assembly and Association, Says UN Expert," OHCHR, April 14, 2020, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2020/04/covid-19-restrictions-should-not-stop-freedom-assembly-and-association-says?LangID=E&NewsID=25792.

of jail terms for spreading misinformation and the declaration of an unspecified state of emergency by the country's nationalist prime minister.[65]

Even in countries like Canada, a state which is oftentimes seen as the epitome of democracy, has seen abuses of constitutional power, in the name of securitization. Recently, Brian Peckford, "the last living drafter and signatory of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which is the highest law of the land, is suing the Canadian federal government over its travel ban for the unvaccinated."[66] This is due to the fact that no non-vaccinated Canadian can board on a plane, train or boat anywhere in Canada, nor to fly anywhere domestically or internationally. For a non-vaccinated Canadian to leave Canada, the only way right now is to 'escape'. Peckford, the former premier stated, "It is becoming more obvious that being vaccinated does not stop people from getting Covid and does not stop them from spreading it… The government has not shown that the policy makes flying safer—it simply discriminates."[67] Activists fear that this could be misused and abused by officials in various countries. International human rights organization, Human Rights Watch, has stated in a recent report that governments should safeguard freedom of access to information and freedom of expression.[68] The group called for transparency and the "respect for human dignity" even though some restrictions on rights could be justified.[69]

Another case against the government was brought forward after the enactment of the Emergencies Act during the Freedom Convoy protests on Parliament Hill, which both the

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[65] Rebecca Ratcliffe, "Teargas, Beatings and Bleach: The Most Extreme Covid-19 Lockdown Controls around the World," *The Guardian*, April 1, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/01/extreme-coronavirus-lockdown-controls-raise-fears-for-worlds-poorest.
[66] Jon Brown, "Last Living Signer of Canadian Constitutional Charter of Rights Sues Government over COVID Travel Ban," *New York Post*, January 27, 2022, https://nypost.com/2022/01/27/last-living-signer-of-canadian-constitutional-charter-of-rights-sues-government-over-covid-travel-ban/.
[67] Jon Brown, "Last Living Signer of Canadian Constitutional Charter of Rights Sues Government over COVID Travel Ban," *New York Post*, January 27, 2022, https://nypost.com/2022/01/27/last-living-signer-of-canadian-constitutional-charter-of-rights-sues-government-over-covid-travel-ban/.
[68] Human RIghts Watch, "Human Rights Dimensions of COVID-19 Response," March 19, 2020, https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/19/human-rights-dimensions-covid-19-response#_Toc35446578.
[69] Ibid.

Canadian Center for Constitutional Freedoms and Ontario Civil Liberties Association

denounced. As part of a wave of global protests against COVID-19 mandates, thousands of

Canadians drove from all corners of the country to the capital city of Ottawa—from Truckers, to

families, Indigenous peoples, people of colour, and Trudeau's 'fringe' of society—gathered at

border crossings and in front of the Ottawa government buildings, clogging up the city for

weeks as a form of demonstration that was ultimately publicized by the Liberal Party, NDPs, and

the Canadian media, as extremist.[70] This negative and antidemocratic portrayal of protestors

garnered international condemnation. As a result of the situation, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

invoked the Emergencies Act, which was used for the first time since the act was created in

1988, it was seen by many as a failure of governance, drawing criticism from politicians on all

sides, civil liberties groups, and even garnered global attention, even shocking condemnation

from China.[71] Experts have communicated that it was unnecessary to invoke the law, as Abby

Deshman of the Criminal Justice Program at the Canadian Civil Liberties Association explained;

"We continue to express necessary concerns about the use of this legislation as well as the

constitutionality of the orders that the government put in place."[72] During a visit by Trudeau to

the EU Parliament on March 23rd , after Trudeau's speech addressing mounting populism

globally, German MEP Christine Anderson expressed the opinion that Trudeau was a "disgrace

for any democracy" and asked him if he would spare them his presence, in relation to his

government's handling of the Freedom Convoy protests.[73] Normative measures of the effects of

securitization include human rights, along with the evaluation of civic activism, mobilisations,

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[70] Brett Forester, "Why Some Indigenous People Support the Trucker Convoy—and Why Others Watch It with Dismay," Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, February 3, 2022, https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/why-some-indigenous-people-support-convoy-protest/.

[71] ANI, "China Accuses Trudeau Govt of Double Standards in Depiction of Protests," *Business Standard*, February 23, 2022, https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/china-accuses-trudeau-govt-of-double-standards-in-depiction-of-protests-122022300164_1.html.

[72] Patrick Egwu, "Canada's Emergencies Act Use Against Trucker Protest Raises Tough Questions," Foreign Policy, March 2, 2022, https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/02/canada-protests-emergencies/.

[73] Sarah Turnbull, "European MPs Blast PM Trudeau for Handling of Freedom Convoy after Brussels Speech," CTV News, March 24, 2022, https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/european-mps-blast-pm-trudeau-for-handling-of-freedom-convoy-after-brussels-speech-1.5833652.

and popular protest, in order to produce alternative discourses and mobilise resistance in a democratic society.

It is all too common for governments around the world to overlook the importance of human rights during emergencies, treating them as irrelevant, ineffective, or even as a hindrance to being able to respond quickly and efficiently, at worst. The current COVID-19 crisis certainly illustrates this point in many ways. The government of Canada had to make quick decisions in the midst of enormous challenges. As has been seen, the significant health risk to public health has had a massive corresponding economic impact on Canada. In general, the overwhelming fear that the public was experiencing, as well as the overabundance of information, made it less likely that citizens will pass judgement on government decisions and the likelihood of citizens accepting policies and measures that restricted rights increased. It is clear that, when health crises such as COVID-19 are referred to as a security issue and with war metaphors applied, militaristic responses are inevitable. The risk of creating insecurities among citizens, first by the virus and then by strict enforcement of laws, was realized when millions of protesters took to the streets around the world to protest these aggressive restrictions and mandates imposed by states.

Furthermore, the Copenhagen School also proposes that 'security traps' can also be a result of securitization. This idea is based on the fact that, as actors look to obtain security by securitizing the issues on hand, that it may instead reproduce an increase in insecurity.[74] There are some emergency measures that, instead of reassuring the population, appear to cause panic. Securitization caused anxiety in regards to the H5N1 Avian Flu and SARS crises in China, where the state put additional restrictions in place that resulted in panic purchases and mass social instability, with which COVID-19 shares clear parallels when the pandemic was securitized in

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[74] Tine Hanrieder and Christian Kreuder-Sonnen, "WHO Decides on the Exception? Securitization and Emergency Governance in Global Health," *Security Dialogue* 45, no. 4 (June 10, 2014): 331–48.

two years ago.[75] The restrictions imposed on mobility resulted in panic buying all around the globe, from Europe to Australia, individuals overstocked on essentials, including toilet paper and sanitizer. Around the world, but most notably in the EU, the epicenter of the first wave, stay at home orders ensued, making it 'illegal' to be out for a non-essential reason. International trains, buses, and borders closed. If you were in Bratislava on March 16th, 2020 and needed to fly outside of the Schengen to get back home, you would have to take a taxi to the border, cross on foot, and take another taxi to Vienna's Flughafen Airport, where flights were being cancelled by the minute.[76] Under circumstances such as these, citizens have not felt more secure but rather have become anxious as a result of securitizing the pandemic. A divisive blame game has also emerged between states as a result of securitization of COVID-19, which has persisted for years.

The Copenhagen school, which rejects the militarist, state-centric, and narrow approach of one-dimensional positivist approaches, like Realism, confirms that the COVID-19 pandemic, as a public health crisis, was securitized. Many, thanks to former U.S. President Donald Trump, referred to the virus as the "Chinese Virus", symbolically highlighting that it is a foreign security threat that Americans need protecting against.[77] Trump's comments came after China claimed that the COVID-19 outbreak came from the U.S. military.[78] This kind of blame-game shifts the discourse on security into a nationalistic direction, where states such as the U.S. securitize against the external threat of China, as it was the country that produced the actual threat at hand, the virus. It is at this point that states have begun positioning other states as enemies, instead of simply viewing the virus as the sole threat.

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[75] E. Wishnick, "Dilemmas of Securitization and Health Risk Management in the People's Republic of China: The Cases of SARS and Avian Influenza," *Health Policy and Planning* 25, no. 6 (October 20, 2010): 454–66.

[76] Andrew Rettman, "Nine EU States Close Borders Due to Virus," EUobserver, March 16, 2020, https://euobserver.com/coronavirus/147742.

[77] Maria Papageorgiou and Daniella da Silva Nogueira de Melo, "China as a Responsible Power Amid the COVID-19 Crisis: Perceptions of Partners and Adversaries on Twitter," *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 15, no. 2 (February 25, 2022): 159–88, https://doi.org/10.1007/s40647-022-00344-y.

[78] Steven Lee Myers, "China Spins Tale That the U.S. Army Started the Coronavirus Epidemic," The New York Times, March 13, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/13/world/asia/coronavirus-china-conspiracy-theory.html.

Securitization may seem to promote an increase in awareness and resources as a response to the pandemic, its political consequences can be considered to outweigh the benefits, when public health issues like COVID-19 are securitized for extended periods of time. Many examples were previously mentioned, as in their efforts to address the impact of such events, some states were prone to taking inappropriate responses such as militarism, creating panic and further dividing states, in addition to perpetuating inequalities between states in their ability to provide assistance to vulnerable populations in their respective countries. There is a political and medical purpose to establishing the virus as a security issue; however, this judgment frames debates around global health in a way that can be counterproductive to the end goal of international cooperation and security. Referring to COVID-19 as a war—which goes hand in hand with identifying enemies and inspires the use of violence and coercive measures to keep the public compliant—as the World Health Organization did in 2020— which in effect is contradictory to the WHO's call for solidarity between and within countries in the time of crisis.[79] It is in these cases, Ole Waever, the original proponent of desecuritization explained that, " …work aimed at de-securitizing politics which, I suspect, would be more effective than securitizing problems."[80]

ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY AND DESECURITIZATION

In academia, the concept of 'desecuritization' is increasingly gaining traction. As a result of its conviction that securitizations are a negative development, the Copenhagen School believes that desecuritizations is a better approach. The term refers to deconstruction of a threat to the point that it is no longer perceived as a security concern. There seems to be some diametric opposition between the act of securitizing and the act of desecuritizing. As a whole,

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[79] World Health Organization, "WHO Director-General's Opening Remarks at the Media Briefing on COVID-19," May 15, 2020, https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---15-may-2020.

[80] Ole Waever, "Securitization and Desecuritization," ed. Ronnie Lipschutz, On Security Chapter 3 (1995).

the conditions for securitizing appear to be reversed to the process of desecuritizing. An individual engaged in a speech act will emphasize the fact that the issue is not an existential threat, and normal processes of government can resolve the issue. Desecuritization seems to be more beneficial than securitization from this perspective. However, to clarify, in some circumstances not securing (or desecuritizing) is not always a viable option when real and sufficiently harmful threats exist. Consequently, politics that are viewed as 'exceptional', tend to be much less democratic than normal everyday politics. Securitization is often thought to be much too compliant to traditional security paradigms, given the fact that it is responsible for identifying existence-threatening threats in the first place. In that regard, critiques of Securitization theory contend that it isn't critical enough, that while it broadens the scope of security outward to include non-traditional issues, still privileging the state, which is a perspective heavily criticized.

The issue of securitization failing to provide normative objectives is closely related to this. The point is particularly evident considering the possibility that securitization may be characterized as a failure in conventional or 'normal' politics, specifically the sphere in which rule-based and democratic norms reside. Analysts have turned to desecuritization as a more critical approach to security considering the Copenhagen School's portrayal of securitization in a negative light. A challenge with a majority of critical securitization approaches is that they still remain still undertheorized, however, they still allow us to explain phenomena and to figure out how to bring about change. Despite the fact that the theory of desecuritization is still in the process of being fully developed, it still provides an excellent foundation for mitigating the negative effects found when addressing non-traditional security threats, such as human security.

There are many issues with the securitization of COVID-19, which many politicians overlook in the name of 'containment.' When securitized, health crises are conceptualized as external threats which must be eliminated rather than understood as mutual issues that must be

addressed. Securitization tends to ignore the human, psychological and numerous other aspects of the disease and focus merely on risk and danger of the disease. Further, securitization lifts the issue out of the regular political regime in order to access extraordinary measures, a result of security governance. While, it is through desecuritization, that resumes the usual level of debate in the area of politics on the securitized issue. It is of utmost importance for states to manage securitization to avoid a chaotic situation by instituting mechanisms to reduce the need for emergency politics. This includes a need for increased preparedness by states and stronger institutions that can better serve citizens in similar future situations.

An example of the dangers of securitization can be seen with the differences in desecuritization of COVID-19 by states around the world. As mentioned previously, as of early 2022, most of the COVID-19 cases were of the less potent Omicron variant. This led most countries to begin easing up on various policies and restrictions in order to help life and the economy return to normal as quickly as possible. A few countries, such as Canada, the USA and Australia, opted not to reduce restrictions significantly, most notably regarding the non-vaccinated population, with Australia continually instituting the strictest mandates, as seen below in Figure 7.
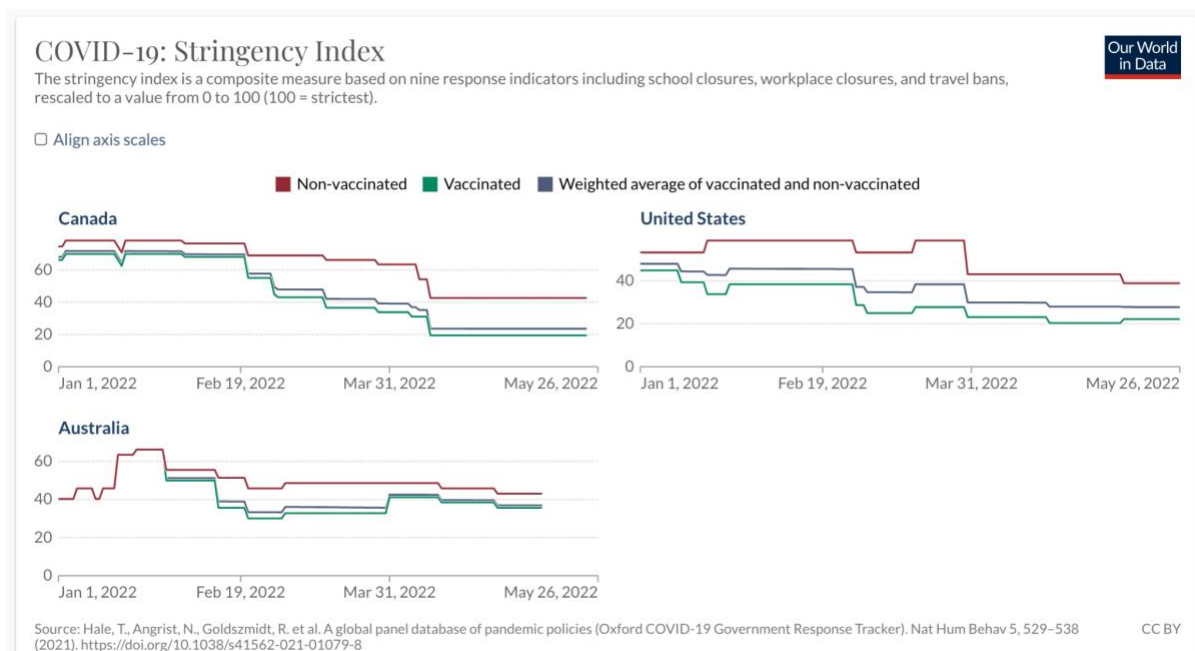
Figure 7. *Stringency Index: Canada, USA, Australia.*[81]

In Canada, to this day, the government prohibits people without vaccinations from boarding all planes, trains, and boats, violating Canada's constitutional right to freedom of movement, both domestically and internationally. At present, Canada is the only country in the world that still prohibits non-vaccinated citizens from traveling domestically. Most countries around the world, including Australia and New Zealand—which had the most restrictive COVID-19 mandates during the peak of the pandemic—let their non-vaccinated citizens travel internationally.

Canadian opposition MP Melissa Lantsman noted that the sitting Liberal government "…still has not shared any justification for their outdated and out-of-step restrictions,"[82] citing the travel ban as "cruel, unusual, vindictive."[83] In a country as geographically large as Canada,

[81] "COVID-19 Data Explorer," Our World in Data: Stringency Index: Canada, USA, Australia, accessed May 30, 2022, https://ourworldindata.org/explorers/coronavirus-data-explorer?uniformYAxis=0&hideControls=true&Metric=Stringency+index&Interval=7-day+rolling+average&Relative+to+Population=true&Color+by+test+positivity=false&country=CAN~USA~AUS
[82] Ty Jadah, "Opposition Motion to Remove Travel Restrictions Denied in House of Commons," *Daily Hive*, May 30, 2022, https://dailyhive.com/vancouver/house-commons-denies-canada-travel-restrictions.
[83] Rebel News, "'Cruel, Unusual, Vindictive': Conservative MP Melissa Lantsman on Federal Vaccine Mandate for Travel," Video, *YouTube*, May 9, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlHOugvwZSo.

with a large immigrant population, this ban has been causing disproportionate harm to the 6 million Canadians who cannot travel as the rest of the world reopens. Lantsman lobbied for the alleviation of travel restrictions, arguing that the mandate is "outdated, unscientific, and only hurt Canadians and businesses…" and asking Trudeau to "follow the science, get in line with our allies, and end the extreme delays."[84] For months, the opposition has been calling on the government to, at the least, put in place a plan to bring back regular constitutional policies. To date, the Trudeau government has not provided the scientific nor epidemiological reasoning why such restrictive measures still need to be instituted.

With cases and deaths down in the country for months, Canada, which is usually seen as an ultra-democratic state, this represents an example of how governments can continue to utilize emergency measures that should have been desecuritized by now, a danger that Ole Waever highlighted when arguing for desecuritization and goes against Rita Floyd's Just Securitization Theory (JST). In a critique of the more traditional securitization theory, Floyd's second-generation theory was in 2019 with the hopes of mitigating the negative effects of securitization, as well as the over-securitization of issues.[85] A main part of her theory explains the need for desecuritization, after securitization has taken place.

Floyd draws heavily on JST from the just war tradition (JWT), according to which states are obliged to follow certain ethical principles both during war and in the after-effects of war.[86] In her view, actors who perform in the role of securitizing have the moral obligation to follow specific ethical principles when securitizing (linking security with a problem) or desecuritizing (separating security from an issue), all while remembering to protect the fundamental human needs. Therefore, Floyd conceptualizes the protection of human needs as an ethical duty, in turn

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[84] Ty Jadah, "Opposition Motion to Remove Travel Restrictions Denied in House of Commons," *Daily Hive*, May 30, 2022, https://dailyhive.com/vancouver/house-commons-denies-canada-travel-restrictions.
[85] Rita Floyd, *The Morality of Security: A Theory of Just Securitization* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).
[86] "Just War Theory," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed May 31, 2022, https://iep.utm.edu/justwar/.

invites actors that securitize the referent object, all while complying with the ethical principles of such.

Security and ethics are interconnected by JST's three fundamental principles: the just initiation, just conduct, and finally, just termination of securitization. Just securitization is derived from these three principles. As well as compelling securitizing actors to be more honest and accountable in addressing ethical security issues, the principles emphasize the importance of safeguarding individuals' human rights and basic needs. Floyd puts great emphasis on the fact that once a threat has been securitized and averted by actors, it is imperative that the issue is then desecuritized, in order to prevent the continued securitization by returning the issue back to normal democratic politics. That desecuritization move needs to correspond with meeting the basic needs of human beings- in particular, their health and autonomy, which contribute to their inclusion in a democratic society. In view of this, Floyd notes that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a document that combines needs-based with rights-based views.[87]

Furthermore, just securitization assumes that actors attempt to securitize where the probability of success is greater and where maximization or reciprocal benefit, or greater good, can be obtained. As Floyd highlights, "the expected good gained from securitization must be greater than the expected harm from securitization."[88] However, there is a caveat with looking for the 'greater good', as the principle in practice can be dangerous and contested because states can then be tempted to justify an unjust form of securitization both outside and within the nation-state. A state may also use the greater good principle to evict, implicate, or disregard minority groups (based on race, ethnicity, religion) in hopes of protecting the majority of citizens. As remediation, Floyd recommends that individuals who have been harmed by unjust practices of securitization—whether the harm was deliberate or unintentional—be compensated

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[87] Rita Floyd, *The Morality of Security: A Theory of Just Securitization* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).
[88] Ibid.

through payment, apologies, or punishment of the officials involved in the formulation of the policies.[89] A form of this practice can be seen today with citizens taking their governments to court, however the issue is that the onus is falling on the vulnerable populations, rather than on the governments which have enacted the securitization themselves. Therefore, who will ensure the victims receive justice? Despite the mentioned shortcomings, Floyd has significantly contributed to a reviving debate regarding how ethics and securitization interrelate, particularly in relation to humanitarian challenges (e.g. ensuring the rights and needs of individuals), all while calling on desecuritization as the final goal.

Last year, when asked in an interview if COVID-19 has been morally securitised, Floyd responded with, "This is a very difficult question; in part because Covid-19 is not as indiscriminately lethal as other previously securitized virus diseases, notably Ebola."[90] Based on the JST criteria, in short, Floyd notes that there is no doubt that governments intended to secure citizens from the disease initially, but questions the continuation of mandates and restrictions in many countries still today. When considering the macro proportionality of securitizing COVID-19, Floyd notes that the harm caused by securitization needs to be compared to the harm prevented. It can be argued that in some countries, the harm caused during the introduction of restrictions during the first wave, was comparatively minor, depending on perspective (not being able to socialize.) Some states opted for total lockdowns in hopes of preventing mass casualties, which is still minor when enacted for a short period of time. But as Floyd emphasizes, it is important to realize that this is dependent on how long the emergency measures persist, stating, "Each day the harm to the economy and the harm to people with other health conditions (delayed cancer treatments, in the UK over the course of the pandemic amounting to 44,000 cases (March 2021) who were not seen by the NHS increases. This shows that we need to assess

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[89] Rita Floyd, *The Morality of Security: A Theory of Just Securitization* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).
[90] "Interview – Rita Floyd," E-International Relations, May 2, 2021, https://www.e-ir.info/2021/05/02/interview-rita-floyd/.

proportionality continually throughout the securitization of COVID….but generally speaking once the harm to the economy was too great and the effects of long Covid clear as relatively benign."[91] The fact of the matter is that if securitization is deemed necessary to address a threat, the just cause for securitization must be greater than alternatives that pose lesser risks (such as voluntary shielding rather than national lockdowns.) Floyd highlights that Sweden chose this less destructive alternative.[92] However, ex ante, it can be argued that total lockdowns have been better for curbing excess mortality, making government's decisions to lock down morally permissible.

Floyd tries to further clarify the situation, explaining that governments, however, were not morally obligated to lock down countries.[93] Admittedly, the external pressure forced on politicians, by the media, public, and other states, may have felt compelled to act in such a manner, while in reality, state governments had the right to try alternative less restrictive political and medical solutions first such as voluntary/mandatory shielding. Only once these failed, would the moral obligation opt for lockdowns and the securitization of COVID-19, which the majority of states did not do. Many countries have also dragged their feet in desecuritizing COVID-19, as mentioned previously, causing further harm to the economy and individual rights, all while COVID-19's lethality continues to fall daily. This innovative approach provides scholars with the ability to normatively evaluate COVID-19's securitization retrospectively and currently. It further equips professionals with the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions in relevant situations and provides the public with information about how key actors assess security, and they are empowered to hold them accountable.

[91]"Interview – Rita Floyd," E-International Relations, May 2, 2021, https://www.e-ir.info/2021/05/02/interview-rita-floyd/.
[92] Ibid.
[93]"Interview – Rita Floyd," E-International Relations, May 2, 2021, https://www.e-ir.info/2021/05/02/interview-rita-floyd/.

Managing securitization is possible to do through desecuritization. There is a need for good governance through formal and informal regimes, as well as institutionalized policies and programs that review situation development and revise national security policies as frequently as possible. An example of re-examining the securitized measures implemented as soon as possible was seen in Austria where restrictions and mandates fluctuated based on the epidemiological situation and were re-evaluated weekly. On the contrary, while many countries in early 2022 got rid of most mandates, Canada took a different route, keeping many of the restrictions which are still in place today. In the end, it is our collective experience that will ensure that security governance can be improved.

FUTURE RESEARCH AND THE ROAD FORWARD

Looking forward, there is no doubt that as more time passes and more empirical evidence is produced, future research will examine the impact of COVID-19 on human security in more depth. Hopefully, policymakers will look to JST as normative guidance when developing policy on state security in the future. As a result, scholars should pay close attention to just initiation, just conduct, and just desecuritization, which constitute the valuable perspective, in order to advance research in this loosely developed field. It would be more comprehensive if current securitization studies could explain the consequences when different actors are involved, especially if their intentions are conflicting, as this was certainly the case with COVID-19's immense impact on the international system. In modern times, democratic governments have never held such power, often accused of intruding and over-regulating citizens, in various aspects of life. Resultantly, this can naturally lead individuals to question whether their governments have their best interests in mind.

There have been concerns voiced about the emergency measures which were put in place to curb COVID-19 has set the precedent of a 'new normal.' Instead of renewing the emergency measures on a basis of necessity after the scientific evaluation of the epidemiological situation, there have been signs of governments only 'temporarily suspending' the emergency measures instead. Many European countries are citing the removal of COVID-19 restrictions only till the end of the summer.[94] In Austria, for example, starting June 2022, the government is 'suspending' the mask mandate for 3 months.[95] Considering the language used by governments regarding the institution of emergency measures, it can be argued that the status of 'emergency politics' has become the new norm, suspending emergency laws only when deemed fit. This type of securitization of non-traditional threats is exactly the danger cited by scholars of desecuritization.

Further, Belgium is the first country to introduce quarantine for the new monkeypox virus, causing concerns that every virus discovered from now on will be securitized, highlighting another danger posed by the permanent securitization of the public health sector.[96] There is great cause for concern that there has been a paradigm shift that occurred with the securitization of COVID-19, that from now on when a new virus comes along, governments will institute restrictions on a scale that has not been seen prior to 2020. Looking further, various countries, including in the Global South—which have been largely forgotten in the western-centric chaos—have also responded to COVID-19 by repressing, controlling, or surveilling individuals. As OHCHR's report titled "COVID-19: Exceptional measures should not be cover for human rights abuses and violations" highlights the dire situation, emphasizing the over-securitized measures instituted; "Shooting, detaining, or abusing someone for breaking a curfew because they are desperately searching for food is clearly an unacceptable and unlawful response. So is

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[94] Deutsche Welle, "COVID: Germany to Relax Entry Restrictions for Summer," DW.COM, accessed June 1, 2022, https://www.dw.com/en/covid-germany-to-relax-entry-restrictions-for-summer/a-61932146.

[95] Tagesschau, "Corona-Pandemie: Österreich Setzt Maskenpflicht Vorläufig Aus," *Tagesschau.De*, May 24, 2022, https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/europa/oesterreich-maskenpflicht-105.html.

[96] Karen Gilchrist, "Belgium Becomes First Country to Introduce Mandatory Monkeypox Quarantine as Global Cases Rise," *CNBC*, May 23, 2022, https://www.cnbc.com/2022/05/23/belgium-introduces-mandatory-monkeypox-quarantine-as-global-cases-rise.html.

making it difficult or dangerous for a woman to get to hospital to give birth. In some cases, people are dying because of the inappropriate application of measures that have been supposedly put in place to save them."[97] An analysis of human security through a critical lens reveals how our perceptions of 'emergencies' are conditioned by racial and class differences in global perspective, would be worth examining. Since public health emergencies such as COVID-19 are associated with lower-income societies in the Global South, they are not generally viewed as 'global emergencies', even though they have an equally—or far more— devastating impact on human welfare and livelihoods. An issue only becomes an emergency if it directly threatens powerful, industrialized societies; this reflects the underlying exceptionalism of prevailing international security attitudes.

The area of securitization and desecuritization has strong axiological roots, which scholars can spend a great deal of time analyzing the specific criteria and will continue to do so for a very long time as more non-traditional threats like COVID-19 are securitized. Challenges arise from the fact that just securitizations can be interpreted in multiple and contradictory ways. Universal criteria is still lacking, however scholars could focus on retrospective merits of methods rather than on the reflective equilibrium. Additionally, the more scholars who examine securitisation and the ethics surrounding the policies, the greater the chances of meaningful and positive policy changes in the future. I believe we have the moral duty to emphasize and advocate for ethical securitisation in order to ensure a safer and better world for future generations.

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[97] STATEMENT OF THE OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, "COVID-19: Exceptional Measures Should Not Be Cover for Human Rights Abuses and Violations – Bachelet," OHCHR, April 27, 2020, https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2020/04/covid-19-exceptional-measures-should-not-be-cover-human-rights-abuses-and.

CONCLUSION

For years to come, a great deal of academic research will be conducted on COVID-19 and its impact. Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that second-generation ideas offer high value ideas regarding COVID-19 securitizations in a wide variety of political cultures, opening up new research opportunities. These various avenues should be pursued once a sufficient period of time has passed to permit a comprehensive analysis of how different countries handled the threat that COVID-19 posed.

In order to mitigate the immediate danger of COVID-19, we have faced challenges in our economic, healthcare, and legal systems. The reality is that even as restrictions began to tighten rapidly across the globe, severely curtailing most of what we consider to be traditional freedoms, the potential human rights implications of the response were kept in the background, instead of the foreground of the pandemic response. There has been a continuous fluctuation of restriction levels from relaxed to more rigorous, indicating the potential of a long-term securitization of the public health sector.

Returning to the debate, considering what the empirical inquiry has revealed, state governments have indeed securitized COVID-19 in the process of trying to ensure human security. Many countries have also over-securitized the virus, encroaching and violating human rights in the process, and causing disproportionate harm to citizens, therefore not meeting the just securitization criteria. It is clear that due to these dangers, the case for accurate and prompt desecuritization as soon as conditions permit stands in order to mitigate the negatives effects on human populations.

The purpose of this paper was to demonstrate that while the initial response to COVID-19 has been in compliance with derogations allowed under human rights laws that matches the permitted human rights exceptions, it stresses the dangers and long-term consequences that

could interfere permanently with rights of citizens if kept in place for prolonged periods of time. In the contemporary world, health is not the first non-traditional area to be securitized, however, it has the potential to play a significant role in legitimising a wide range of exceptions to the rule of law, justifying the trade-off of rights. In terms of accepting fluctuating limitations on rights and new forms of surveillance, the long-lasting pandemic has begun to shift the norm of what is considered 'normal' and necessary. COVID-19 was unforeseeable and only now are the real effects beginning to be recognized, as the consequences were slowly emerging. Despite not being a new phenomenon, securitisation of the health sector is experiencing rapid progress because of an increased sense of danger. Consequently, it could extend securitization in similar ways to other areas– allowing for greater acceptance of limitations that otherwise might have been considered problematic. As a result of the paper's findings, securitization theory cannot resolve the complex issue, but bringing it to the attention of scholars, activists, and policymakers, may empower them to identify connections between COVID-19 and 'security' in such a way which could hopefully reduce the dangers of some of these risks, today, and in the future.

In closing remarks, while Buzan, Waver, a Wilde[98]—along with Floyd[99] and other Securitization Theory critics—have a general preference for resisting securitization process they also grant that "although in the abstract desecuritization is the ideal, in specific situations one can choose securitization, only one should not believe this is innocent reflection of the issue being a security threat; it is always a political choice to securitize or to accept a securitization."[100] At its core, the securitization of COVID-19 entangles the issue in the security politics' political quagmire, and over two years since the first cases were detected, we have yet to know how it will all end.

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[98] Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).

[99] Rita Floyd, *The Morality of Security: A Theory of Just Securitization* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[100] Stefan Elbe, "Should HIV/AIDS Be Securitized? The Ethical Dilemmas of Linking HIV/AIDS and Security," *International Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (2006): 119–44.

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