



**Alternative  
Security  
Review**

# Towards More Inclusive Understandings of Security in the UK

**A literature review  
commissioned by  
Rethinking Security**

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## Introduction

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This paper provides a theoretical and methodological underpinning for an alternative approach to security issues. It incorporates academic and policy papers across four topics: the tension between state-centric ‘national security’ and people-centred ‘human security’ approaches; the plethora of human security issues; the question of who is creating the narrative on security; and what methodology can be useful for future research.

This paper has been produced as part of the inception phase of the *Alternative Security Review*, a multi-year project partnership between Rethinking Security and the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University.



## Methodology

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The search and analysis of the literature happened in a cyclical way. Taking its starting point from basic information, provided by the Rethinking Security Network Website and fellow academics<sup>1</sup>, the review utilised online databases, libraries, and relevant search engines (predominantly JSTOR, Google Scholar, and the Locate service of Coventry University; occasionally Scribd, Academia.edu and ResearchGate). The keywords contained the word ‘security’ or ‘human security’ and categories of human security issues (see the explanation below). The keyword ‘UK’ was applied occasionally to interrogate how a certain global security issue has been discussed in the United Kingdom context.

Due to the wealth of literature, the author initially decided to concentrate on papers that have been published in the period 2018-2021. This meant this review would complement *Rethinking Security: A discussion paper* produced in 2016 (The Ammerdown Group, 2016). However, in some cases, older literature was included as well (e.g. to understand the concept of Giddens’ concept of ontological security, the author benefitted from the original work published in 1984).

The result of this cyclical and selective review are the four thematic sections of this paper. The first explains the differences between two directions within security studies that exist next to each other: state-centric ‘national security’ and people-centred ‘human security’<sup>2</sup>. Their (at least partial) impenetrability causes some tensions within the field and makes it difficult to define what one understands as a security issue.

The second section digs deeper into some security issues that the human security branch of security studies has found relevant; due to the limitations of this paper, this section is extremely selective.

The third section then asks a question from the meta-level: who is telling the story of security? Literature analysed in the first and second sections of the paper point towards an understanding that state-centric security studies, on the one hand, maintain some bias (male, Western/global North), with military at the centre of the analysis. Human security studies, on the other hand, have been attractive to critical, constructivist, gender-sensitive, postcolonial perspectives, with more focus on subaltern knowledge and the human/community level. This raises the question of why the human factor is absent from the state security discourse and why the state as a possible actor is treated with suspicion in the human security discourse.

Finally, while analysing the methods and methodological frameworks of existing papers, the review asks the question of what methodology could be used to develop knowledge of an alternative security framework, which humanises the state, and makes the political work of

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<sup>2</sup> On a more detailed discussion of this terminology, see Section 1.



creating a security review that people do rather than what is done to them. This review makes the case that to reach the desired level of inclusivity of both research participants and data, a mixed methods approach is used in a fruitful way. What is meant by inclusivity is that a security review for the UK would seek the views of all people living in the UK (regardless of citizenship status) and that 'hard-to-reach' communities only become hard-to-reach if the researcher is standing in the wrong place. Therefore, a combination of quantitative surveys with arts-based research and Citizen Social Science to provide us with a broad picture of what can be considered to be security issues for/in the UK and how both government actors and citizens and others living in the country can jointly address them. A mixed methods approach will provide different kinds of data (qualitative, quantitative, arts-based) to address the dichotomous relations between state and human security, which overlap in ways that are significant yet under-researched and under-theorised.



## Part 1. A tension within Security Studies: state security and human security

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Security Studies is generally considered a sub-discipline of International Relations, a field which emerged as a reaction to the horrors of the First World War and had its ‘golden age’ during the bipolarised world of the Cold War (see Collins, 2010, p. 2; Williams & McDonald, 2018, p. 3). Due to this historical development, it has often been perceived as a field that focusses on the ‘4 S’: a scientific approach analysing strategic actions, with states as the main actors, and with the normative goal to preserve the status quo (Williams & McDonald, 2008, p. 3).

It is important to highlight that academic language, most probably inspired and influenced by this certain ‘4 S’ thinking, uses the terminology ‘state security’. In public discourse in the UK, however, ‘national security’ is a more common term. The review finds the term ‘national security’ more ambiguous in the sense that it implies ‘the nation’ (or the people) as actors, thereby seemingly making connections to ‘human’ security. However, ‘national security’ also features the state as both the main actor of the security discourse and the main implementer of security-themed regulations. For this reason, the review will stick to the terminology ‘state security’, acknowledging that in the UK context, ‘national security’ is often used interchangeably with it.

Theorists broadly agree that the two main approaches of this type of traditional security have been (the many forms of) realism on the one hand, and idealism or liberalism (depending on the terminology) on the other hand. Despite some internal sub-debates, this ‘first great debate’ within International Relations theory has essentially not challenged the idea of the ‘4 S’ as the basis for security studies. Despite the long-standing presence of civil society organisations protecting civilians in times of war (e.g. the International Committee of the Red Cross which was founded in 1863), these non-state actors have not been perceived as a focus of academic security studies.

The emerging role of constructivism in social sciences from ca. the 1980s also had an impact on security studies, albeit McDonald (2018, p. 49) warns that security is only one possible subfield within a broader ‘school’ of seeing our world as a pattern of individually and socially constructed realities. Partly on this basis, new perspectives have departed from state-centric security studies, where the definition and the agents/subjects of both ‘security’ and ‘security issues’ have been constantly challenged. This development of the field is not linear and there is no clear consensus on the matters mentioned above; it has, according to Mutimer (2010, p. 84), a “schismatic history”. 1994 marked an important year for Security Studies for two reasons. In that year, a conference was held at York University (Canada) which was the beginning of the subfield ‘Critical Security Studies’. The main goal for its theorists was not to “invoke a new orthodoxy of critical security studies or to participate in polemical recriminations, but to engage directly with issues and questions that have been taken as the subject matter of security studies” (Williams & Krause, 1997, p. viii). They based this on critical perspectives (critical theory, poststructuralism, social constructivism), which involved an engagement with both the world order of the 1990s and the positioning of the ‘self’ within the context of security issues.



Also in 1994, the annual UN Human Development Report (HDR) introduced into the policy sphere the concept of human security. It questioned the state-centredness of security studies, as well as the assumption that a security threat is equal to a military intervention and that its prevention requires actual weapons (UNDP, 1994, p. 3). By contrast, the UNDP argued, human security puts ‘people’ in the centre of the security discourse. With the introduction of this concept, the authors of the report wanted to raise attention to “worries about daily life” (UNDP, 1994, p. 3), which is the source of a subjective feeling of insecurity of people all around the world. They created seven subcategories of human security: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security (UNDP, 1994, pp. 24-25). These will be revisited in Section 2.

Soon after its first articulation, human security became the subject of academic debates from several perspectives. For instance, it has been divided into a ‘narrow’ and a ‘broad’ school (Kerr, 2010, p. 124; Gasper, 2014, p. 37). The ‘narrow’ school still aimed to focus on institution-based insecurity (e.g. political persecution or ethnic discrimination) but was reluctant to label economic or ecologic issues as security threats; the ‘broad’ school, however, argued that anything can be labelled a security issue which is “in the eye of the beholder” (Tadjbakhsh, 2014, p. 44). The ‘broad’ school has been criticised for making the concept of security vague (Kerr, 2010, p. 125), to the extent that some scholars have felt the need to defend its relevance (Tadjbakhsh, 2014, p. 45). Obviously, since it departed from the state-centred approaches, the question has also been raised as to the role of states in a human security-based model. Hoogensen Gjørsv (2018, pp. 228-229) points out, echoing the argument of the ‘narrow school’, that there are certain human security issues that cannot be overcome without structural-institutional support. States could theoretically have the potential to use their resources and power to support human security. However, it is a valid question whether we can “realistically expect those same institutions to protect the rights of people, particularly people on the margins” if the whole concept “emerged as a necessary response to the failure of the state system” (Hoogensen Gjørsv, 2018, p. 229).

Still, one can observe that even in the most contemporary debates, state-centred security studies emphasise the role of the state as a military power/actor in the international scene. A current example for this is the recent policy paper released by the UK government in March 2021, titled *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy* (hereafter the ‘Integrated Review’). Press statements had suggested the Integrated Review to be radically new and different than any other before (Reeve, 2021). However, as it turned out, the Integrated Review’s definition of security is quite narrow: “the protection of our people, territory, critical national infrastructure, democratic institutions and way of life” (Integrated Review, 2021), and it has an unchanged focus on the military power-projection capacity of the UK in the world system. This implies that the Integrated Review recreates the same bias that has been present in state security studies for the last few decades. By bringing the Department of International Development with its human security focus into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with its national security focus, the human security focus has been downgraded.

The Rethinking Security network also raises attention to how the concept of human security is used in a narrowed way by UK authorities, mostly in the context of countries where the UK has been involved in a military or peacekeeping intervention (Briefing, 2021). This echoes Hoogensen



Gjørsv's (2018, p. 219) observation that states are prone to tailor human security (as an abstract concept or a source of actual practices) to match their national interests as they define them. Also, it shows a clear gap between the UK Government's 'narrow' understanding of human security (which is "increasingly conjoined with the military application of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, including responding to sexual violence in conflict" and "used [...] interchangeably with the concept of Protection of Civilians (PoC) in armed conflict" [Briefing, 2021, pp. 2-3]) and the Rethinking Security network's 'broad' one ("an approach that puts the experience and wellbeing of the individual at the centre of security policy" [Briefing, 2021, p. 1]).

Whereas it is important to give more emphasis to the 'human' aspects of security, the dichotomisation of these two concepts can lead to the danger of having two completely different discourses on security that do not find a common ground for dialogue and joint work. Although it is acknowledged that human security can be misinterpreted or misused to serve state interests, there might be a way to find a middle way that focusses on human needs yet does not neglect the role of state bodies and authorities when tackling (in)security issues. It is important because, as Kerr (2010, p. 128) argues, just like the state-centric or the 'narrow' view on security is insufficient in itself, so is the human-centric or the 'broad' one, and both are needed together to understand security fully.

The next section deals with multiple aspects of human security issues (with their ontological, theoretical, methodological and axiological characteristics) that, as some authors (e.g. de Jonge Oudraat & Brown, 2020, p. 5) point out, are still often not considered as 'security issues' by proponents of military-centred state security studies. However, the state can and should have a role in tackling these issues, and human beings who are affiliated with state institutions on various levels (from primary school teachers or nurses to councillors or policymakers) can build a bridge between 'human' security needs (as people) and state responses (as professionals). This can lead to a dialogical process of 'humanising the state', and also encouraging people to do the political work of reviewing and shaping state policy from below, rather than having policy done to them from above.



## Part 2. Subfields of ‘human security’: examples from and beyond the UK

When looking for keywords during the literature search for this review, the above-mentioned subcategories of human security from the HDR (UNDP 1994) provide a foundation. Searching for literature on these societal issues that also includes a conscious perspective on security (not just sporadically mentions the word here and there in its narrative) was, as mentioned before, not an easy task. Yet, the literature presented is useful not only to understand these issues as important parts of the human security discourse, but also to think beyond and critically re-examine the categories coined in 1994.

Roughly speaking, the categories can be seen as belonging to different levels, which influence the discourse on them. These can be called macro level for global issues; meso level for regional, national or local issues; micro level for personal/individual issues; and as explained below, the author of this literature review created one overarching level for a certain set of categories that, partly departing from the 1994 idea, need to be treated as one unit. This is poverty, which interacts with all three levels and thereby connects them with each other, as the figure below shows.



Figure 1: Visualisation of how poverty is cross-cutting the macro, meso, and micro level security threats.



There is the macro level that affects us all and every smaller and bigger unit, including e.g. both the UK state and individual citizens of the UK, have a place in it. Global non-state actors such as the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), and multilateral state organisations such as the United Nations (UN) or the European Union (EU), have been developing policies to tackle these issues. As Rethinking Security has pointed out in its analysis (McKeon, 2018), there have been major differences between state security policies to respond to global and ‘glocal’ security threats, and the UK’s emphasis on a militarised response appears incongruous when compared with other states in a similar context.

On the **macro level**, there is environmental (in)security. Climate change is, many argue, the biggest contemporary global issue. Apart from the obvious ecological threat, it has an impact on a lot of other societal phenomena, such as migration, economy, and health<sup>3</sup>. A recent example of a critical examination of how institutions (mostly international organisations) react to the challenge of climate change is an edited volume titled *Gender, Intersectionality and Climate Institutions in Industrialised States* by Magnúsdóttir & Kronsell (2021). On the surface, this work does not seem likely to be part of security studies; however, the word ‘security’ is a recurring part of its narrative, albeit – and not surprisingly – mostly in the context of a critique of the state-centred approaches within security studies.

For instance, a chapter within this volume, written by Allwood (2021), analyses the “discourse of crisis and security” (Allwood, 2021, p. 36) within the EU external climate policy. A shortcoming of the EU external policy documents is that climate change is interpreted as an external security issue because it is a root cause of international migration (from the Global South to the EU). The reaction of the EU to climate change “serve[s] the interests of a security-focused foreign policy” (Allwood, 2021, p. 38) that depicts migration (and thereby migrants) as a threat, yet intends to maintain the current status quo within the EU (e.g. for energy production and consumption). As the author points out,

“[t]he construction of climate change as a problem which can be solved with market, technological and security solutions has, until recently, excluded a people-centred approach, which could favour a gender-sensitive policy. There are signs that this is beginning to change very slowly” (Allwood, 2021, p. 48).

Allwood’s case study on the EU is a good example for how climate change is ‘securitised’ within the EU policy narrative in a certain way. While migration is seen in this regard as an external (border control) or internal (migrant populations perceived as ‘problems’ or ‘threats’) security issue caused by climate change, this security discourse falls short of a more nuanced and more driven-from-below investigation of how environmental and economic insecurities affect people either before or after their migration.

<sup>3</sup> Already a few years before the Covid-19 global pandemic, scientists alarmed society that as climate change contributes to the thaw of arctic ice, viruses and bacteria that has been trapped there for millions of years will also thaw out and land in natural waters. Encountering them for the first time might pose a new and dangerous threat to humanity. See McKenna (2017).



Extant academic literature deals with that issue, though. For instance, Adger et al. (2021) provide a case study example from a former UK colony of how climate change can be discussed from a security perspective. This joint research by the University of Exeter and the University of Dhaka explains the connection between climate change and migration on the basis of an example of Chattogram (Bangladesh), and against the backdrop of the human security discourse. The authors create a list of dimensions of human security to support its complex measurement (see Adger et al, 2021, p. 52), which has parallels with the 1994 list (UNDP 1994, pp. 24-25). They then present the results of an empirical inquiry which shows that despite some common stereotypes, migrants do not necessarily succeed to escape from environmental threats and land in a 'better life'. The longer residents have lived in the Chattogram urban area, the lower they perceived their level of human security to be (Adger et al., 2021, pp. 61, 62).

Seeing how the global Covid-19 pandemic has been shattering life on every continent, health (in)security can also be put on the macro level. As Lal et al. (2021) argue in their Health Policy paper, countries like the UK and the US, although having had high ranking in the Global Health Security Index, still could not cope up with the Covid-19 pandemic well (Lal et al., 2021, pp. 63, 62). A reason for that is an unsatisfactory alignment between Global Health Security strategies and universal health coverage systems (Lal et al., 2021, p. 63). The authors urge for action to bring these together through a close cooperation between health and development agencies; because, as they note, new policy can enhance the quality of service "for all, especially in fragile contexts" (Lal et al., 2021, pp. 64, 65).

Bowsher et al. (2020) come to a similar conclusion when examining why the UK failed in this regard. They mention that the UK state has tried to use the same information gathering and processing tools that are used for national security threats in general; however, they were insufficient during a global pandemic (Bowsher et al, 2020, p. 436). They suggest a model of the 'intelligence cycle' which is more capable to "meet the needs of complex, national security crises" (Bowsher et al, 2020, pp. 440, 441); it could not only be useful to fight health security threats like a global pandemic but also engineered biosecurity threats (ibid. 440). Their key recommendations (see (Bowsher et al, 2020, p. 442) target intelligence services, health security experts, the government, and policymakers in general.

The label 'macro level' has been used for these two security issues because, as they are transnational or planetary threats, they are often researched from a consciously globalised perspective, with institutional structures as subjects and policy recommendations as outcomes. It is important to note at this point that the effects of these global issues affect communities and individuals differently, depending on the level of their poverty. Although the HDR (UNDP, 1994, pp. 24-25) speaks about economic and food security as separate categories, the author of this literature review believes that due to the complexity of the definition of poverty (see Curtis & Cosgrove, 2018, pp. 2 ff.), a lot of other categories could be included as well: e.g. housing security, job security, energy security, etc. For this reason, these categories have been brought together under the umbrella term of 'poverty'. Fieldwork on the community and individual level, like Adger et al. (2021) mentioned above, shows how global problems affect precarious people more.



The **meso level**, consisting of political (in)security and community (in)security, tackles heterogeneous security issues affecting smaller communities. Broadly speaking, the question of political (in)security is deeply embedded in the state-centric security discourse, as the state is still an important factor for these questions. It is closely related to securitisation, which is a theoretical framework to analyse what counts as a security issue in society. This narrative usually comes from the ruling elite within a country (see Nyman, 2018, p. 101). Securitised issues always grow out of heavily politicised issues, when the dominant narrative is that the country/region should protect itself from a ‘security threat’ (Emmers, 2010, p. 138).

The topic of external security threats was already mentioned in Section 1; when the securitisation of internal phenomena happens, a connection with community (in)security is visible. For instance, Lehr (2019, p. 2) explains how ‘a discourse of fear’ makes internal terrorism appear as a bigger security threat for Western societies than the statistical data would imply<sup>4</sup>. Related to that, migration and especially undocumented migrant smuggling is often securitised, such as e.g. drug or human trafficking (Emmers, 2010, p. 144). These discourses of securitisation are also related to the question of societal identity-building (Roe 2010: 205), which defines a common identity (e.g. national identity within a state) and security threats that endanger the life of this, to quote Anderson’s (2006) famous concept, ‘imagined community’. When tension within internal groups runs high, the result is often tragic: genocide, war, ethnic cleansing, ‘culturecide’ (Roe, 2010, p. 208).

The approach used here to analyse community (in)security draws heavily on the overall theoretical framing of securitisation. However, a significant number of papers link securitisation together with the above-mentioned cross-cutting factor: poverty. Internal marginalisation is often discussed in the context of migrants and racial/ethnic minorities. Surveys have been shown throughout the years how BAME households are visibly affected by poverty and unemployment<sup>5</sup>. While it is important to acknowledge the vulnerability of these social groups, at the same time one needs to avoid a dangerously one-sided discourse where BAME people are stereotypically associated with poverty and vice versa. Especially because, at the same time, less is written about the poor and precarious white populations of Western European countries, other than their radicalisation as a response to their marginalised situation (see e.g. Pilkington, 2016)<sup>6</sup>. However, as UK-based researcher Beider argues in several of his works (2014, 2012, 2007), this contributes to their precariousness even more, as they are just as often homogenised in public discourse as e.g. non-white minorities (2014, p. 333)<sup>7</sup>.

Beider (2014, p. 339) argues that the ‘white working class’ is a social construction that serves political and ideological purposes (similarly to Roe’s [2010, p. 55] interpretation), but the homogenised and stereotypical representation of this group and the messy definition ideas of

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<sup>4</sup> Lehr (2019, p. 3) refers to that “seen from a statistical point of view, it is still far more likely to get killed by a lightning strike, die of a heart attack or in a car accident or to drown in a bathtub, for that matter, than to become a victim of a terrorist attack”.

<sup>5</sup> See an analysis derived from the 2012 Poverty and Social Inclusion survey in Mack & Lansley (2015).

<sup>6</sup> In the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, a similar research project on four case studies (Dover, Sunderland, Chemnitz and Charlottesville) has been recently conducted under the name of Hot Periods of Anti-Minority Activism, led by Joel Busher.

<sup>7</sup> The expression ‘white trash’, which originates from the US, has been increasingly used in the UK context as well (see Harris 2007).



social class is very damaging for them (Beider, 2014, p. 334). A major security concern of this population is around housing, which is examined both in a UK and a US context (Beider, 2007: 7). It is indeed true that the white working-class population expresses “concern about the impact on finding affordable accommodation and suitable jobs” and that recently they are in a bigger competition for these due to increased migration (Beider, 2014, p. 337). But it is also true that this context does not necessarily lead to a mutual hatred between white working class and migrants, nor to far-right radicalisation, as often stereotyped (Beider, 2014, p. 338). The author himself favours the idea of social cohesion within neighbourhoods across the multi-background population – with other words, to support BAME and white communities in coming together and jointly tackling the threats that affect their life (see Beider, 2012, p. 51).

Other papers also explain certain aspects of community (in)security, closely entangled with poverty. Jensen & Orfila (2021) used publicly available datasets to map food (in)security patterns in the Leeds city region and created spatial maps to “visualise and contextualise connections between its components and the outcomes of local food production, provision and consumption” (Jensen & Orfila, 2021, p. 567). Their findings suggest that a lot of activities take place in the city to address food insecurity, but there is generally a lack of information sharing between local and national administrative levels (Jensen & Orfila, 2021, p. 567.).

Another interesting example is Bogue (2019), a relatively up-to-date study on housing insecurity in the UK. The ethnographic fieldwork, being set in the outer edge of a Midlands city (Bogue, 2019 p. 38), contains several examples for the constant reproduction of insecurity within the working-class population. As problems are never isolated, Bogue’s interviewees also suffer from energy or food insecurity (Bogue, 2019, pp. 58-60).

Arriving at the **micro level**, the question of personal security needs to be discussed. This might be the most difficult to define and the more embedded in abstract philosophical, epistemological, theoretical discourses. Due to the limitations of this paper, two directions will be outlined here shortly: legacies of the Giddens’ (1984) ontological security on the one hand, and of Sen and Nussbaum’s (1993) capabilities approach on the other hand.

In the concept of ontological security, the starting point is the individual, psychological self. Giddens (1984) explains in his work *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* that to feel secure, this self needs a certain stability that manifests both in the “autonomy of bodily control” and “predictable routines” (Giddens, 1984, p. 50). It draws on a theorisation of ‘the self’ (Giddens, 1984, p. 36) which is, as many scholars argue (see some outlines in Untalan 2020 and Steele 2008), impossible to interpret without considering ‘the other’. Although the subject of Giddens’ (1984) theory is the individual, factors of ontological (in)security concern the environment (the meso and macro level) as well. This may be the reason why the concept became popular within international relations and is used as a theoretical framework both in state/national security issues (see Steele, 2008) and human/critical/constructivist ones (see Untalan, 2020).

Questions of ontological security and insecurity emerged in research conducted by Alison Scott-Baumann, Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor and others on how Islam is lived, experienced and understood (or not) on university campuses in the UK (see Scott-Baumann et al., 2020). They



discuss the ‘politics of questioning’ that underpin interfaith exchanges on university campuses and beyond. Questions are often asked of marginalised/minoritised groups and those posing them are usually not from these groups. As this research has shown, while dialogue across faiths and cultures is always desirable, such dialogue is not always benign, and more attention needs to be paid to the social hierarchies and politics that are ubiquitously at play. When searching for bridges to be built, the approach of ontological security is a possible theoretical framework to be taken into consideration.

The capabilities approach has been introduced in *The Quality of Life* (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993) and counts as one of the most important academic foundations for the 1994 HDR and the human security idea within it. The two researchers developed it in different directions (see Sen, 2004, p. 79, Nussbaum, 2003, p. 35), but they still agree on its basics. The capabilities approach concentrates on the individual’s (lack of) opportunities to live a meaningful life of human dignity and freedom. It is not enough to stick to the macro level and e.g. check the GDP of a certain country, but the question should be asked whether its citizens qualify to a minimum requirement of such a meaningful life. Capabilities are those multi-dimensional human freedoms and/or possibilities that are, in ideal case, available for a human being to flourish and have a secure life. Examples of how influential this approach has been include contemporary researchers such as Curtis & Cosgrove (2018, pp. 4 ff.) who engage with the capabilities approach when discussing issues of poverty and security. They also acknowledge, however, that the capabilities approach has been criticised for being a “too individualistic” way of tackling social issues (Curtis & Cosgrove, 2018, p. 18).

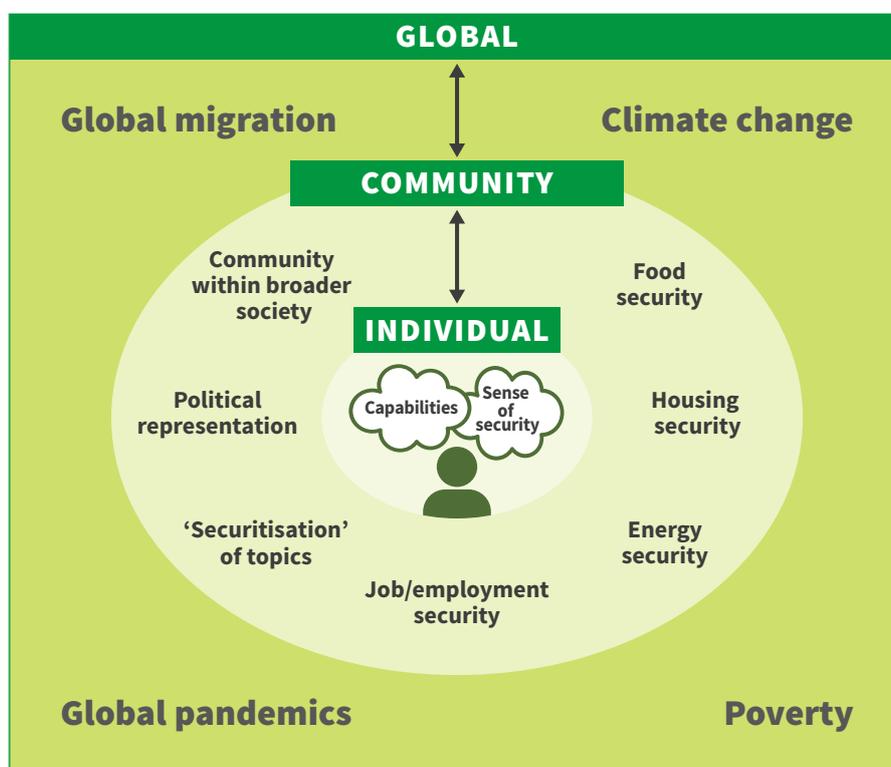


Figure 2: visualisation of the different levels. The macro level features global phenomena that are in a constant interchange with the meso level’s community issues, and communities are made up of individuals whose perception of security makes up the micro level.



### Part 3. Who is telling the story on security?

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As the previous sections implied, contemporary studies on human security issues involve critical/constructionist perspectives, theoretical frameworks, and analytical categories like postcolonialism, gender, indigenous knowledge, intersectionalism, etc. The problem is often raised in literature why studies on state security issues move slowly to adapt to other frameworks and involve more of these categories. For instance, when Hoagland et al. (2020) analysed the content of international security journals, they found that the number of female authors in the two leading journals (*Security Studies* and *International Security*) is very low and only slowly increasing, just as the percentage of women at international security organisations (Hoagland et al., 2020, p. 403, see also de Jonge Oudraat & Brown, 2020, p. 2). Also, in the same journals, the most recurring theoretical framework of the published papers is realism (Hoagland et al., 2018, p. 408). This implies that if state-centric security studies still maintain a male and white Western bias, it makes structural change of theory and praxis equally difficult.

This does not mean, of course, that security institutions completely neglect issues that go beyond the scope of white Western men. It is acknowledged from the institutional side, for instance, that “gender affects security, and security problems affect gender issues” (de Jonge Oudraat & Brown, 2020, p. 4). However, the way this principle is set into praxis raises a lot of critique within the academic discourse. Morrow (2021, p. 31) shows that institutions still use gender as a synonym for ‘women’s issues’, even though gender is a much more complex and inclusive category. Ticking the box of putting more upper-middle-class women in institutions (often as a result of a quota) does not cover a democratic representation of women’s and gender issues (see Kronsell & Magnúsdóttir, 2021).

As for queer perspectives, it is still more difficult to find papers that deal with such issues from a distinct security perspective; for instance, Edenborg (2021) discusses queer theories more like in the context of peace research, which is nevertheless strongly connected to the security discourse. As the author points out,

[a]pplying queer perspectives in feminist peace research is not the same as adding LGBTQ people to the analysis, but a means to critically examine how normativities of sexuality, sex and gender underwrite both academic approaches and material practices of peace and conflict, and where needed, to rethink some of the concepts and assumptions that inform our work (Edenborg, 2021, p. 56).

Departing from a one-dimensional view of gender/women as a single category, scholars broadly agree that an intersectional gender perspective is important (see Cosgrove, 2022, p. 148-149, de Jonge Oudraat & Brown, 2020, p. 6; Väyrynen et al., 2021, p. 5). It includes a mixture and alignment of multiple identity categories within the analysis: alongside gender there is race, age, ethnicity, class, colonialism, sexuality, capitalism, ‘rational science’, etc. (Kronsell & Magnúsdóttir, 2021, p. 2.). All of the previously mentioned authors agree that in intersectional research, the question of power and imbalanced hierarchic relations is embedded and critically examined.



An indication made above in this literature review is that in the discussion of certain human security issues, the analysis often puts an emphasis on postcolonial, indigenous, subaltern perspectives. This is how Adger et al. (2021) deal with climate change: as part of their mixed method research, they include local people's perspective with the help of the arts-based research method of photovoice. Also, there has been a philosophical attempt to bring together the Giddensian idea of ontological security (see above) with postcolonial theory (see Untalan 2020).

If other, younger perspectives are added to those of the usual generation of policy makers, priorities can shift. Militarised state-centric security discourses have been characterised by short-termism. Adopting the perspective of future generations encourages a longer-term view and shifts the focus to the macro security issues of climate and health. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015<sup>8</sup> is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. It is distinguished by its relevance not only to current but also future generations and speaks directly to young people.

The Well-being of Future Generations Act is not only future-oriented with a long term perspective, but it also recognises that all nations are inter-dependent. It aspires to be a Globally Responsible Wales: "A nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global well-being."

In the end, following upon the idea coined by Edenborg (2021, p. 56), the point of intersectionality is not only about 'including a perspective of' the often interlocking categories of gender, race, ethnicity, age, class, sexuality, religion, etc. within a maintained status quo, but to inherently change the perspective of the complete discourse. This requires inclusivity, where more and more people are consciously involved in defining what security means to them. Data collection methods therefore need to be tailored to individual/community needs. To make this possible in the academic thinking around security issues, in the next section some research methods will be suggested with innovative methodological thinking behind them. This literature review recommends using multiple combinations of them within a mixed methods framework.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/>



## Part 4. Possible alternative methods to discuss security ‘from below’

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A key finding of the previous sections is that instead of deepening the gap between the two main directions of security studies (state security and human security), a framework should be created that involves human perspectives yet also looks for ways to include the role of state institutions and the people in public services who personify the state. Thereby, it is important that: 1) the UK state should concentrate more on societal security issues that are observed on the individual and/or community level rather than merely stick to the role of the UK as a military power on the international level, and; 2) research on security issues should draw on theoretical and methodological frameworks that intend to be as inclusive as possible, and offer as many different entry points to research participants as possible.

The latter implies that to be as inclusive as possible, a mixed method approach is needed. Whereas the opportunities to include research methods and combine them as part of such a framework are potentially endless, in the following section the literature review will introduce three possible sets of methods that can be combined with each other: quantitative methods, arts-based methods, and Citizen Social Science.

Looking at the literature, many researchers argue for such an approach. For example, Curtis & Cosgrove (2018, p. 1) start their book chapter with a powerful ethnographic description, thereby providing a hook to the reader to engage with the topic of poverty. They argue for a multidisciplinary approach and encourage the use of a variety of methods (Curtis & Cosgrove, 2018, p. 19), such as participatory poverty assessment (Curtis, 2018, p. 51), or a mixed approach of qualitative and quantitative enquiries (Curtis, 2018, p. 69). The ethnographic introduction has the clear advantage that it can also emotionally and personally involve the reader; instead of simply reporting about social issues, these narratives can make readers truly care about them, based on tools which showcase how e.g. people’s poverty or discrimination is more than ‘research data’.

In their work, *Methodologies for Feminist Peace Research*, Björkdahl & Mannergren Selimovic (2021) argue that a feminist and decolonising methodology is needed to discuss security issues with the normative ambition of building peace and changing social hierarchies through emancipation and transformation (Björkdahl & Mannergren Selimovic, 2021, pp. 40, 41). Their suggestion for methods contains ethnography, discourse analysis of extant written material, analysis of visual representation (“popular culture, museums, and media”), and quantitative methods (based on a “post-positionist epistemology”, so that tensions between positivism and gendered critique can be overcome) (Björkdahl & Mannergren Selimovic, 2021, pp. 42-45). From these preferred methods, the qualitative ones have a blurred border with arts-based research, which implies that with certain research designs, they can be brought together.

Bennett et al. (2014, p. 657) claim that there is a subfield of security studies that “typically follows traditional forms of historical analysis”: qualitative data collection, small-n comparisons, within-case analyses. This approach should be brought closer to methods widely used in political science: “process tracing, pattern matching, counterfactual analysis, and Bayesian and other techniques for small- and medium-N analysis” (Bennett et al., 2014, p. 658).



It is generally acknowledged that arts-based and qualitative methods are combined with and supported by each other, but it is still relatively uncommon to mix arts-based with quantitative research. Nevertheless, this is put into practice by Adger et al. (2021) whose mixed methods contain a quantitative survey and an arts-based method: photovoice and photo elicitation techniques. While a purposively sampled larger population was cross-sectionally surveyed (Adger et al., 2021, p. 53), the study also invited a smaller group of migrants to be part of a more in-depth arts-based (and partly qualitative) data collection (Adger et al., 2021, p. 56). Migrants were encouraged to take photographs about their environment and explain climate change-related human security issues on the basis of these images. Some of these are presented in the journal article (Adger et al., 2021, pp. 57, 60, 61).

The usage of **arts-based research** as a way for participant engagement can be suggested for multiple reasons. According to one of its main theorists, “arts-based research requires a novel worldview and covers expansive terrain” (Leavy, 2018, p. 4). It departs from assumptions that our world can be understood in a positivist, objective, linear way; instead, it is based on the idea of messiness, non-linearity, and an extremely constructivist ontology and epistemology, whereas the research design itself still maintains a structured, transparent, ethical and consistent knowledge/data collection (McNiff 2018, pp. 28-29). It is a radical way of doing research, a so-called “groundless theory” (Leavy, 2018, p. 5). An advantage of this ‘groundless’ symbolism that makes it possible to express ideas in innovative, instinctive, often radically new ways; in some cases of visual and performative arts-based research, the barriers of verbal/written communication and language also disappear.

In their recommendation section, Bowsher et al. (2020, p. 442) suggest e.g. the regular use of creative, possibly gamified, exercises among policymakers of health/security intelligence institutions to engage with security threats. Similar examples can be found in Noortmann et al. (2019, pp. 12-13) where collage-making was used as an imaginative scenario planning tool among police organisations, or Cohen (2021, pp. 6-7) where an example is given of how high-ranked generals and politicians could be engaged in a storytelling activity that fuelled their engagement with peacebuilding. These examples imply that an inclusion of arts-based methods in a mixed methods framework can help to integrate macro-, meso-, and micro level thinking from powerful decision-makers to more precariously situated people and groups.

As seen in Adger et al. (2021), the mixed approach of arts-based and quantitative research can work well in a way that the former gives a glimpse on what communities and people, including those often described as ‘hard-to-reach’, perceive as security issues, whereas the statistical data involving the broader population puts this in a bigger context. Also, quantitative surveying is recommended for the sake of the above-mentioned inclusivity of the data collection. Some people might be more interested to fill out anonymous surveys than to be involved in a longer-term or deeper-going qualitative/arts-based research process. The methodology base for a quantitative survey designed for this project might be informed e.g. by the UN Survey (see United Nations, 2020).



**Quantitative research** provides data that is generalizable, which does not drill down into the details of individual experience, but which provides headline understanding from a much larger cohort of respondents. If we are to understand what matters to particular groups (for example, those under the age of 18), and to incorporate these understandings and their voices into discourses of security, a survey will be a powerful tool capable of providing representative, large-scale data to explore and compare respondents' understandings, critiques and experiences of security, and how these change with changes in intersectional identity. Quota sampling can ensure responses from equal numbers of males and females, from different ethnic, religious and non-religious groups, across different age ranges, and from different parts of the country. Statistically significant comparisons can be made between different sub-groups within the population. Following data collection, a series of weights can be applied to compensate for any enduring non-response or self-selection bias. Structurally, the questionnaire can include sections on understandings of security, their perceptions of difference between human and state security; gaps that they perceive in current security discourses and key issues that they feel need to be included (as dependant variables); and on the key demographics of religion, gender, age, ethnicity, denominational affiliation, and sense of religious commitment (as independent variables). Data will be analysed using both descriptive and inferential tools.

Survey tools were used by Stevens and Vaughan-Williams (2016) in their research into citizens' perceptions of security threats. In their online survey conducted in the summer of 2012, they investigated British citizens' perceptions of twenty-two possible "global, national, community and personal security threats" (Stevens & Vaughan-Williams, 2016, p. 158) and received 2004 responses, with Muslim citizens making up a booster sample of 251 people. Their study not only features the rather understudied empirical approach, but also makes a link between that and the breadth of the listed possible security threats, thereby addressing several research gaps. Their main finding is that "members of the British public perceive the most threats at the global level and the least at the community and personal levels, and that the kinds of threats they identify as global or national tend to differ from those they identify as community or personal" (Stevens & Vaughan-Williams, 2016, p. 169). Citizens' perceptions can be explored even more deeply through the use of two further methods outlined below: Citizen Social Science and Citizens' Assemblies.

The involvement of **Citizen Social Science** as part of the mixed methods framework is also suggested. This approach has been growing out of the tradition of Citizen Science that encourages local people to do data collection which then will subsequently be analysed by scientists. The first projects of Citizen Science were organised within natural sciences in the form of birdwatching, butterfly counting, documentation of fishes while scuba diving, etc. Although there are many resources that provide support for these (mostly on the website of the Citizen Science Association<sup>9</sup>), Citizen Social Science is still heavily under-theorised and is usually organised from the grassroots level, with researchers 'creating the rules' of the approach.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://citizenscience.org>



In the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Tom Fisher and Daniel Range have provided a practical example for a Citizen Social Science (CSS) course as part of an EU- and Urban Innovative Actions (UIA)-funded project, MiFriendly Cities. The course contained an introduction to basic theories, methodologies, and research ethics of social sciences similar to those delivered to undergraduate students. Participants were encouraged to organise their mini social science project in their communities, with a team of academics mentoring them through the choice of methods and getting engaged with their respective fields; unlike in early Citizen Science, CSS participants were also asked to do the data analysis themselves, instead of simply providing raw data to a researcher team (see Range et al., 2021).<sup>10</sup>

Although Citizen Social Science is under-theorised, an international research team involving UK members (Kythreotis et al., 2019) provides another example for the implementation of this approach. In the context of the COP26 organised in Glasgow in November 2021, where certain limitations of top-down procedures have been widely discussed<sup>11</sup>, it might be even more important than before to involve local populations in the climate-related discourse and action in a bottom-up way. Kythreotis et al. (2019) argue that Citizen Social Science should move beyond the frames of Citizen Science in the form of bringing together citizen agency and citizen action (e.g. volunteering) with a systematic way of collecting and analysing social scientific data (Kythreotis et al., 2019, pp. 3-4). The main point of Citizen Social Science is the bottom-up approach, which means that it “[c]annot be implemented as a ‘one-size-fits-all’ knowledge framework” (Kythreotis et al., 2019, p. 6), yet its strength lies exactly in the way in which it provides possibilities for local populations to reframe problems in accordance with their knowledge, and inform authorities about this in a way of providing structured and transparent data.

Furthermore, the author of this literature review recommends for projects with a larger-scale budget to include **Citizens’ Assemblies** in the research process. A Citizen Assembly “is a representative group of citizens who are selected at random from the population to learn about, deliberate upon, and make recommendations in relation to a particular issue or set of issues”<sup>12</sup>. Among its advantages is the representativity of a various and heterogeneous group of involved citizen voices, as opposed to the usually more homogeneous cohort of higher education (often law school) graduate MPs and professional politicians. The Citizens’ Assembly is a great tool to mobilise people to develop an interest, an activity, and a self-conscious voice in public matters; however, due to its high costs, it is beyond the scope of what the Alternative Security Review can aim for. It is rather recommended for e.g. the UK state itself to invest in this form of involvement of citizens in discussion and decision-making around the topic of security.

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<sup>10</sup> The section on CS and CSS is primarily based on with conversations with Tom Fisher and active participation in the CSS course as a mentor. The author thanks Tom Fisher and Dan Range for their support with this part of the literature review.

<sup>11</sup> For instance at the launch event of the Alternative Security Review project on 18. November 2021.

<sup>12</sup> <https://citizensassembly.co.uk/>



## Conclusion

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This paper outlines why it is difficult to work on contemporary security issues within a field that has gaps and tensions between different approaches and security definitions. It argues that state-centric security studies still have a narrow understanding of security issues, whereas the human security one broadens the definition so much that one might come to the realisation how literally ‘everything’ can be a security issue which is in the eye of the (constructivist, subjective) beholder. The main goal of future research should be to bring these two seemingly dichotomous ways closer to each other with the acknowledgment that the state can and should act on security issues that are of concern to the individual and communities (e.g., policing, health and social care, environmental standards, etc.), but also that these individuals and communities can and should shape and influence the state in that work.

Working at the intersection of the state and human security will require a change in culture. The experience of the legislators of the Well-being of Future Generations Wales Act “illustrates the difficulty in formulating policies that try to do different things in drastically different ways, especially within old institutional contexts and the legacy of siloed working...making groundbreaking, far-reaching culture changes to how public organisations think, make policy and deliver services is always going to take time” (Nesom & Mackillop, 2021). Nevertheless, the Act has been implemented, and Wales has set an example that has received praise from the United Nations. Multiple factors led to legislators in Wales choosing to legislate for the long-term, not least among them climate change (Messham & Sheard, 2020). The crises which diverse sectors of society in the UK are increasingly aware of in relation not only to climate change, but also the pandemic and global inequality, make this a similarly opportune time to bring about a cultural shift. Just as the Welsh legislators did, Rethinking Security will have to come up with policy solutions which are seen as practicable within the current context, and those policy solutions will also need political champions to take them forward.

Therefore, this literature review offers the following recommendations:

- 1)** The choice of the research participants should be as inclusive as possible and should be informed by an intersectional framework and a broad range of ways to engage with different groups of the population (from ‘more privileged’ to ‘more marginalised’).
- 2)** To make that possible, it is recommended to have a mixed approach involving the methodological-paradigmatic knowledge base of quantitative research, arts-based research and Citizen Social Science.
- 3)** Also, if the findings of the research are to be pitched to policy makers, they will have to be seen as practicable, offering steps from the current context towards a more secure future.

With research designed on these bases, the way security is approached on an academic-theoretical level and addressed on an applied-policy level can really be ‘rethought’, critically examined, and possibly changed for the better.



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## About the Alternative Security Review

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The Alternative Security Review is a civil society-led review of the UK's approach to security. It proceeds from principles of human and shared security that prioritise inclusion, equality, accountability and wellbeing at home, as well as a vision of shared global security and a commitment to the ecological security of our planet. Learning from past practice in the UK and other countries, it will incorporate an extensive exercise in surveying public opinion and wide consultation, in order to understand and respond to the UK public's security needs and priorities.

## About Rethinking Security

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Rethinking Security is a network of UK-based organisations, academics and activists. We work for a just and peaceful world, based on approaches that address the underlying causes of conflict and insecurity. We have a shared concern that the current approach to national security in the UK and beyond often hampers efforts for peace, justice and ecological sustainability. We are committed to building a much richer understanding of what security really means, and of what is required to build sustainable security.

## About Coventry University Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations

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Drawing on a strong track record of multidisciplinary research in integrated peacebuilding, trust and social and community relations, the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations exemplifies Coventry University's long-standing commitment to research that makes a strong impact on society and on the security and quality of life of ordinary people worldwide.



# Alternative Security Review