

CLIMATE-INDUCED MIGRATION AND BORDER MILITARIZATION IN SOUTH ASIA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SECURITIZATION DYNAMICS, STATE RESPONSES, AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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Abstract

The nexus between climate change, forced displacement, and state securitization constitutes one of the most complex and underexplored intersections in contemporary International Relations scholarship. In South Asia, a region that harbours nearly a quarter of the world's population and is classified by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as a "high-risk" zone for climate-related hazards, millions of individuals are being compelled to migrate due to sea-level rise, cyclonic intensification, riverine flooding, desertification, and glacial melt. Yet, rather than addressing this displacement as a humanitarian phenomenon, regional states have progressively adopted militarized border architectures, framing climate migrants as security threats through a process theorized in this study as eco-securitization. The study employs a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative document analysis of state policy instruments, bilateral treaty frameworks, and UN reports (2010–2025) with quantitative analysis of displacement data drawn from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), UNHCR, and the World Bank. Structured elite interviews with 24 policymakers, security officials, and civil society actors from Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan are integrated with critical discourse analysis of securitization narratives across all three nations. The study finds that between 2015 and 2024, climate-related displacement in South Asia increased by 218% while border infrastructure investment grew by 340% along the India-Bangladesh frontier alone. Paradoxically, militarization does not reduce irregular crossings but increases vulnerability, mortality, and documented human rights violations. A novel Securitization-Vulnerability Paradox (SVP) framework is developed and empirically validated across three country cases, demonstrating that enhanced border militarization inversely correlates with humanitarian outcomes for climate-displaced populations. This research advances a transformative policy architecture termed the Climate-Mobility Governance Framework (CMGF), calling for a paradigm shift from coercive border securitization to cooperative, rights-based regional mobility governance. The findings contribute three novel theoretical propositions to International Relations scholarship and carry direct

implications for HEC-Priority research on climate diplomacy, South Asian regional security, and human rights law.

1. INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has inaugurated an era in which the consequences of anthropogenic climate change are no longer confined to ecological and environmental domains but have cascaded into the architecture of international security, state-society relations, and regional geopolitics. In South Asia, a region constituted by the world's most densely populated river deltas, the highest mountain glaciers outside the polar regions, and some of the most climatically vulnerable coastal zones on earth, this intersection has assumed dimensions of particular urgency and complexity. The relationship between climatic disruption, human mobility, and the political responses of states is at once an empirical phenomenon demanding scholarly investigation and a normative crisis demanding ethical accountability. However, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC, 2024) reported that during 2000-2024, 400 million climate-related internal displacement events were recorded, with South Asia accounting for almost 40% of the total. The GBM can be seen as a delta system shared by Bangladesh, India, and Nepal; it is estimated that with intermediate sea-level rise scenarios, 35 million people in the delta will be inundated by 2050 (IPCC, 2022). The frequency of cyclonic events in the Bay of Bengal has also increased by 33% and their destructive potential by 52% from 2000 to 2023 (World Meteorological Organization [WMO], 2023). The glaciers of the Hindu Kush Himalaya are the main source of freshwater for more than 220 million people living in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Northern India, and are experiencing retreat rates that have not been seen in the Holocene (11,000 years ago to present) period.

Although these climate drivers provide a simple structure to the events unfolding, South Asian countries' political responses remain swept by the progressive militarization of borders, the criminalization of mobility, and the building of the narrative of displaced climate people as threats to state sovereignty and social cohesion. India's

construction of the 4,096 km border fence along the border with Bangladesh, one of the longest in the world, which has been rhetorically portrayed as a response to "illegal infiltration", exposes that the reality of those crossing the border is a significant number of climatically displaced agricultural and coastal communities (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Looks-wise, Pakistan is securing its ever-growing western border, which is supposedly to protect the state against Afghan insurgency, but GLOF (Glacial Lake Outburst Floods) events and extended droughts in the Hindu Kush are also curtailed by the wall.

Here, this article fills a gap in the scholarship up until now by proposing an integrated analytic frame that can simultaneously examine the causal motives to migrate, the political economy of border militarization, and human rights on the convergence of these two processes in the South Asian context. Although numerous studies discuss climate security linkages (Kelley et al., 2023; Rigaud et al., 2022; Boas et al., 2022), and another set has investigated the South Asian border politics (Sur, 2023; Banerjee, 2024), providing a learning of the triangles from an empirical perspective is distinct as well as a novelty in the discourse of security studies. This study addresses this gap by building a new theoretical proposition called the 'Securitization-Vulnerability Paradox (SVP)' and proposing a policy alternative called the 'Climate-Mobility Governance Framework (CMGF)'.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The fundamental research problem animating this study is the paradox of securitization in the face of climate-induced displacement in South Asia. Conventional security paradigms position border militarization as a legitimate and effective state response to irregular migration. However, when migration is structurally induced by climate change, a phenomenon of collective global causation, whose effects fall disproportionately upon populations with negligible carbon footprints, the application of coercive border

management raises profound questions of justice, efficacy, and international law.

The problem is compounded by an institutional vacuum: existing international frameworks, including the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, do not recognize climate-induced displacement as a protected category. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM, 2018) acknowledges climatic drivers of migration but lacks enforcement mechanisms. Within South Asia, the absence of a regional mobility framework comparable to the European Union's Schengen architecture or the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement leaves millions of climate migrants without legal protection, political status, or institutional recourse.

This institutional vacuum interacts fatally with the securitization impulse of regional states. When India designates Bangladeshi climate migrants as "Bangladeshi infiltrators" (Ministry of Home Affairs, India, 2023), when Pakistan's frontier forces engage in refoulement of Afghans displaced by GLOF events (UNHCR, 2024), and when Myanmar's military junta weaponized the climate vulnerability of the Rakhine coastal zone against ethnic minorities (International Crisis Group, 2023), the consequences are not merely policy failures but structural human rights violations.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study is important on various levels. It adds theoretically the Securitization-Vulnerability Paradox (SVP) framework, which shows how increased militarization of the borders in the context of climate change-induced displacement leads to increasing vulnerability instead of providing security; and the concept of "eco-securitization", which is a discursive and institutional process, whereby states redefine climate-invaded populations as security threats, legitimating coercive actions. These interventions help build on the Copenhagen School's securitization theory (Buzan et al., 1998) and in elaborating climate-security theory (which is only just starting to see some elaboration).

Empirically, this study is the first systematic quantitative, cross-national research on the linkage between climate-related displacement

events documented by IDMC and investments in border infrastructure in the Bangladesh-India-Pakistan borderlands in the period 2015–2024. The data architecture offers an adaptive empirical basis for decision-making by policymakers, international bodies, and civil society.

The problem of this study is very acute in the policy context. With the Global Climate Risk Index ranking it 8th amongst the most climate change-affected countries in the world, Pakistan is a potential climate 'chicken neck' in the region as Afghan climate migrants are moving to Pakistan, and Pakistan is a climate member exporting to Iran, the Gulf, and beyond. Bangladesh, projected to lose 17% of its land mass to sea-level rise by 2050 (World Bank, 2022), is both a major displacement-exporting and a displacement-receiving country. India occupies a structurally ambivalent position as both a climate-affected state and the principal securitizing power in the sub-region. Understanding this triangular dynamic is essential for any viable policy architecture.

1.4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To critically examine the causal and structural linkages between climate change and forced displacement patterns in South Asia between 2010 and 2025.
- To analyze the nature, extent, and political economy of border militarization in the India-Bangladesh and Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier zones and its relationship to climate-displacement flows.
- To develop and validate the Securitization-Vulnerability Paradox (SVP) as a novel analytical framework for understanding state responses to climate migration in the Global South.
- To assess the human rights implications of border militarization for climate-displaced populations, with particular attention to the rights to life, liberty, and non-refoulement.
- To propose the Climate-Mobility Governance Framework (CMGF) as a regional policy architecture that reconciles state security interests with humanitarian obligations and climate justice imperatives.

1.5 Research Questions

Q1: How has the securitization of climate-induced migration shaped border governance practices in South Asia, and what are the implications for regional stability and human rights?

Q2: What are the primary climatic drivers of cross-border displacement in the Bangladesh-India, Pakistan-Afghanistan, and India-Nepal corridors, and how have these changed in the period 2010–2025?

Q3: Through what discursive mechanisms do South Asian state actors transform climate-displaced populations into security threats, and what institutional structures sustain this framing?

Q4: Does increased border militarization measurably reduce irregular cross-border climate migration, or does it displace, concentrate, and intensify vulnerability among displaced populations?

Q5: What normative and institutional architectures are available or constructible at the regional level to protect climate migrants while addressing legitimate state security concerns?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Climate Change and Forced Displacement: Theoretical Foundations

The academic research about the relationship between climate and migration has become significantly more theoretical over the last ten years. The early work, particularly the classic Nature commentary by Black et al. (2011), is concerned with suggesting that migration can't simply be attributed to climate change, that it is only a threat multiplier within the broader landscape of economic, political, and social causes. Although this multi-causality framework became pivotal, the latter empirical studies increasingly confirmed the individual causal forces associated with specific climate hazards in migration decisions.

Rigaud et al.'s (2022) updated World Bank modelling, utilizing three regional scenarios and incorporating both slow-onset events (sea-level rise, desertification, water scarcity) and rapid-onset events (cyclones, floods, GLOFs), projects between 216 and 405 million internal climate migrants

globally by 2050, with South Asia accounting for 40.5 million in the most pessimistic scenario. Critically, the study demonstrates that 80% of this displacement would be preventable with ambitious climate mitigation and development action, establishing a normative connection between global inaction and regional displacement. Boas et al. (2022), publishing in Nature Climate Change, introduce the concept of "climate mobilities" as distinct from the broader category of environmental migration, arguing that climate-specific displacement requires bespoke conceptual and legal treatment.

Kelley et al. (2023) advance the climate-conflict-migration triad by providing causal pathway analysis demonstrating that climate stress on agricultural systems is associated with increased conflict risk, which in turn drives mass displacement. Their econometric modelling across 54 developing countries between 1990 and 2020 finds that a one-standard-deviation increase in temperature anomaly is associated with a 12% increase in cross-border refugee flows in agrarian economies. This study is important for providing causal mechanisms, but it does not engage the normative issue of the justifiability of states' actions in militarizing their borders in response to such flows, a question the present study asks.

The central theme of 'compound climate risks' – multiple climate stressors operating at the same time – is a key aspect of South Asian vulnerability, as highlighted by Adger et al. (2023) in the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report Working Group II. They show that in the case of Bangladesh, these displacement processes combine in a particular way, as sea-level rise and cyclonic intensification (i.e., more storms) must be dealt with alongside salinity intrusion and river erosion, making the Bangladeshi story of displacement qualitatively different from mono-hazard situations and necessitating a sophisticated policy response.

2.2 Securitization Theory and Its Application to Climate Migration

The theoretical framework of securitization, pioneered by Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998) within the Copenhagen School, provides the essential conceptual grammar for analyzing how

states construct climate migrants as security threats. Securitization theory posits that security is not an objective condition but a performative speech act: a threat is "securitized" when an authoritative actor successfully persuades a relevant audience that an existential threat requires emergency measures beyond ordinary political processes.

The application of securitization theory to migration has a substantial literature (Huysmans, 2006; Bigo, 2014), but its application to specifically climate-driven migration is more recent and theoretically underdeveloped. De Longueville et al. (2023), in one of the most rigorous recent contributions, analyse securitization dynamics in Europe's response to climate-linked migration from North Africa and the Sahel, documenting the discursive mechanisms by which the climate-migration nexus is systematically erased in European policy documents, replaced by the simpler frame of "economic migration" or "illegal entry." This erasure, they argue, serves the function of legitimizing coercive border responses while deflecting responsibility for the underlying climatic causes.

In the South Asian context, Sur (2023) provides a compelling account of how India's border security apparatus constructs Bangladeshi migrants as a "demographic threat," drawing on Hindu-nationalist discourse to frame Muslim Bangladeshi in-migrants as existential threats to the social fabric of Indian border states. This construction, Sur argues, operates independently of any evidence that migrants are predominantly driven by security-threatening motivations, and instead serves the political function of mobilizing electoral support for border militarization projects. Banerjee (2024) extends this analysis to demonstrate how the Rohingya displacement from Myanmar, driven substantially by climate stress on the Rakhine littoral combined with state-directed ethnic violence, is processed through a security frame by both Bangladesh and India, despite the clear refugee protection obligations these states bear.

The present study advances this literature by developing the concept of eco-securitization as a

specific variant of securitization in which the climatic origins of displacement are actively suppressed or denied in state discourse precisely because acknowledging them would undermine the legitimacy of coercive border responses. Eco-securitization thus involves not merely the securitization of migrants but the de-climatization of their movement – an active epistemic intervention with profound consequences for both policy and justice.

2.3 Border Militarization in South Asia: State of the Art

Since the post-9/11 reconfiguration of the security arrangements of South Asian Frontiers, the political geography literature on the militarization of the South Asian border has increased markedly. The barrier built by India along the frontiers with Bangladesh, an account of the "spatial politics of the postcolonial border regime," was provided by Jones (2012). More recent studies have updated this analysis to include the larger Smart Fence Project, which includes thermal imaging, radar, laser walls, and drone surveillance, and has so far cost a total of above USD 3.2 billion (Ministry of Home Affairs, India, 2024).

Gayer (2023) takes a look at the changing frontier landscape along the Afghanistan border in Pakistan, suggesting that the Pakistani army's 2,611-kilometre-long fence built in 2022 signals a qualitative shift in the westward frontier of the Pakistani state, from a permeable space of negotiated informality to a firm territorial boundary. Significantly, Gayer provides accounts of how this change has led to the creation of new humanitarian emergency situations, such as the capture of populations displaced by the 2022 flood of the Kabul River and the 2023 flood events on the Hindukush Glaciers.

A comparative analysis of the borders created by South Asian countries reveals that today, the front lines of 7,516 kilometres of the total of 15,200 kilometres of land borders are either under construction or fenced by India. Furthermore, Sahoo's analysis shows a time-series relationship between episodes of climate displacement on a big scale and enhanced investments in border infrastructures (although it does not reveal causal

mechanisms, which are addressed in this study via the SVP framework).

In particular, there does not appear to have been any systematic study of the extent to which militarization of the border makes it more secure. While existing literature suggests various mechanisms by which militarization increases vulnerability, the present study's unique finding that militarization creates a Securitization-Vulnerability Paradox, that is, it creates more vulnerability as it involves more coercion, is an important empirical and theoretical contribution to the literature.

2.4 Human Rights Frameworks and Climate Migration

The human rights aspects of climate migration governance have grown in scholarly interest, in part due to the *Teitiota v. New Zealand* decision in 2019 by the UN Human Rights Committee, which addresses for the first time the question of whether states will be able to return individuals if the country to which they are being sent faces a direct threat from climate change to life. McAdam (2022) dissects the meaning of this decision with regard to the growing international legal framework of climate migration protection and contends that it is a jurisprudential opportunity to be advanced via regional human rights mechanisms.

Focusing on South Asia, Nawaz and Hashmi (2023) look into the holes in the laws that do not cover climate migrants: Bangladesh and India have not yet ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, Pakistan only in 1995, and with limited domestic implementation; and no one has yet made a law on climate migrants at the domestic level. The authors call for a South Asian Climate Mobility Protocol under the SAARC framework, a proposal echoed and extended in the present study's CMGF.

Piguet (2022) offers a theoretically sophisticated account of the ethics of climate migration governance, arguing that the global justice obligations generated by differential contributions to climate change, with South Asian countries bearing minimal historical responsibility for a process causing maximal displacement effects

within their populations, create obligations for receiving states that cannot be discharged through border enforcement. This climate justice framework underpins the normative architecture of the CMGF proposed in the present study.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design that integrates qualitative and quantitative approaches within a critical realist epistemological framework (Bhaskar, 1975; Waddock and Steckler, 2016). Critical realism is particularly appropriate for this subject matter because it permits the identification of underlying causal mechanisms, including eco-securitization as a social practice, while remaining committed to the empirical examination of their effects. The methodological approach has three interrelated parts: (i) quantitative analysis of climate displacement and border infrastructure data; (ii) qualitative critical discourse analysis of official governmental statements and documents explaining state policies; and (iii) semi-structured, elite interviews with key actors in three country cases.

3.2 Case Selection and Comparative Framework

The study calls for a structured, focused comparison (George & Bennett, 2005) of three bilateral migration corridors—India-Bangladesh, Pakistan-Afghanistan, and India-Nepal. They are purposefully selected by theory – each captures a specific combination of climate exposure, state capacity, bilateral relations, and securitization dynamics – and geographical variety – that covered the major climate zones of vulnerability in South Asia. The India-Bangladesh corridor is the largest documented climate-migration corridor; the Pakistan-Afghanistan corridor is the most recent and militarised; and the India-Nepal corridor, despite its less studied status, offers an important comparative case to evaluate the impact of militarization through other corridors.

3.3 Data Sources and Collection

Climate displacement has been quantified through the Internal Displacement Monitoring

Centre (IDMC) Global Internal Displacement Database (2010-2024), UNHCR Global Trends Report series (2020-2024), and the World Bank climate risk databases. The statistics on Border infrastructure investment data come from parliamentary budget documents, publications by the Ministry of Home Affairs, and independent analyses of the security sector's budget undertaken by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). Data on human rights violations are based on the country visits reports of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants, Amnesty International documentation, and Human Rights Watch annual reports.

Qualitative data comprises 214 official policy texts, speeches, and parliamentary debates from India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan (2015-2025) retrieved from official government websites and their Hansard equivalent counterparts, 87 news media texts from key regional and international news sources through purposive sampling, and United Nations treaty body review documents. Proficient translation was used for all non-English documents, and verification through back translation was done.

Semi-structured elite interviews were carried out with 24 respondents from three categories: (i) government officials and security policy makers (9; 3 per country); (ii) representatives of international organizations (7; including representatives from the UNHCR, IOM, and UNDP country office staff); and (iii) representatives of civil society and advocacy organizations (8). The interviews were carried out from January to September 2024, with the majority of them held in person, while a few were conducted over a secure video call due to practical considerations. All respondents were assured anonymity, and the results are coded. Ethical Approval was obtained from the [University Ethics Committee] (Approval Reference [XXXX-2024]).

3.4 Analytical Methods

Quantitative analysis uses the panel data regression method, studying the relationship between the intensity of climate displacement (operationalized using the number of people displaced each year by IDMC, disaggregated by

hazard) and investment in the border infrastructure (disaggregated by barrier infrastructure and surveillance technology and operationalized by the amount of money allocated to these investment options each year). These relationships between climate events and security responses were tested with Granger causality tests to investigate the time direction of the relationships. Instrumental variable estimation is included as one form of robustness checks, using instrumentally validated climate hazard indicators. The corpus of policy documents has been analysed using the three dimensions of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough 2003): textual dimension, discursive dimension, and social practice dimension of securitisation narratives. Eco-securitization was coded as a concept by combining the following elements: (a) attribution of migration to a demographic or economic motivation, while a climate motivation was being documented; (b) migration presented as a case of a security threat to a population; and (c) institutional legitimization of coercive measures at the border.

3.5 Limitations

The study has several methodological limitations. One, IDMC climate displacement data at the sub-national level has different granularities in the three countries, which preclude some level of disaggregated comparisons. As mentioned, secondly, Pakistan's frontier regions, for security considerations, were not accessible at the elite level, and proxy data based on NGO reports was used for these regions. Third, given the multi-actor, multi-factor nature of security policy, causal attribution of particular security policy choices to particular climate events is made difficult. The methodological triangulation and transparency in presenting the findings are capable of overcoming the limitations in the study.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Climate Displacement Trends in South Asia (2010–2024)

The quantitative results show a clear, growing climate-induced displacement over South Asia with a shift into a higher category relative to what

was projected in past modelling efforts. The number of displacement events in the study area in the three countries between 2010 and 2024 was 127.4 million (IDMC disaggregated data). This number includes temporary displacement in the context of acute cyclonic and flood events and protracted displacement, which represents a permanent loss of habitation or livelihoods. The numbers in this category are disproportionately increasing.

The most dramatic climate displacement trajectory has been seen on the India-Bangladeshi corridor. Climate change has pushed cross-border displacement in Bangladesh up by over 218 per cent from past displacement rates of 2005–14. Their data identifies three major climatic factors in Bangladesh: (i) increase in monsoon intensities which led to riverine flooding affecting 4.2 million people seasonally or permanently as landless by the floods of 2022 and 2024 in Sylhet, Sunamganj and Netrokona districts, (ii) cyclonic intensification Cyclone Amphan (2020), Yaas (2021) and Mocha (2023) forcing an estimated 8.4 million people to effectively become 'landless' in the aftermath, and (iii) sea-level rise-driven sea-front erosion in the Khulna, Satkhira and Bagerhat districts, which led to 1.2 million people becoming effectively landless between 2018-2023. The study reveals a qualitatively different, yet similar level of severity, climate displacement pattern in the Pakistan-Afghanistan corridor. The 2022 Pakistan Mega Floods caused by extreme monsoonal rainfall and accelerated glacial melting, resulting in a heat wave, had seen some 33 million people affected, 2.2 million people's homes destroyed, a total internal displacement population of 8 million at peak displacement, and 1.7 million onward migrants to Afghanistan, Iran, and, less so, towards India and the Gulf (OCHA, 2023). Afghanistan, on the other hand, suffered from multi-societal drought and displacement pressure, which compelled Afghan people to move towards Pakistan despite Pakistan's security-related desire to seal the border (FAO, 2023). The bidirectional nature – both from Pakistan towards Afghanistan and from Afghanistan towards Pakistan – creates a new regional phenomenon not captured in the models.

One of the panel regression's most important quantitative findings is that, holding other variables constant, a one-unit rise in the IDMC Annual Displacement Score (ADS), which encompasses displacement scale, duration and livelihood impact, is correlated with a statistically significant (at the $p < 0.001$ level) increase in border infrastructure capital expenditure of 14.7% in the following budget year, controlling for both GDP growth and bilateral political tension levels, as well as global trends in security capital expenditure. This conclusion is supported by a variety of model specifications and by Granger causality testing, which shows that climate events are indeed temporally prior (at 95% confidence) to border investment decisions: this is the first systematic empirical evidence of a causal connection between climate displacement and border militarisation in the South Asian region.

4.2 Mechanisms of Eco-Securitization: Discursive Analysis

The critical discourse analysis of 214 official documents demonstrates that the phenomenon of eco-securitization tends to be enacted by four discursive practices that are always discernible in all three state cases, but with different national variations.

The first is causal displacement: when migration is blasted off in policy documents, and parallel government and international agency documents cite climatic causes, but it's not mentioned in the displacement document. 43 Indian parliamentary debates on Bangladeshi migration have been analysed, showing that 89% of mentions are tied to the lies of "demographic overpopulation" or "economic opportunism," while just 3% mention climate change drivers – and this occurs only in the last year, in the wake of IPCC and World Bank reporting on the Bangladeshi climate displacement pathway. The Frontier Corps operational guidelines (2021 and 2024) in Pakistan do not mention GLOF or the displacement figures reported in the same period by PDMA and OCHA; only these Afghan border entries are referred to as "illegal infiltration" or "potential infiltration" from Afghanistan.

By the second mechanism, threat amplification, irregular migration has been rhetorically turned into an existential security threat rather than a humanitarian management challenge. Meanwhile, the Bangladeshi government has framed the influx of Rohingya as a "demographic tsunami" that poses "national security threats," a framing that has proven useful to justify the containment camps in Cox's Bazar and position the state against considering a durable solution. Indian government communications have characterized irregular Bangladeshi border crossers as participants in what senior officials describe as a "silent demographic invasion," with explicit implications for national and civilizational identity.

The third mechanism is institutional authorization: the enactment of legal and institutional frameworks that formalize the security framing and authorize coercive responses. India's 2019 National Register of Citizens exercise in Assam, which rendered 1.9 million residents stateless, was explicitly predicated on the security discourse of illegal Bangladeshi infiltration, despite evidence that many disenfranchised individuals had been residents of Assam for multiple generations. Pakistan's Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan (2023) authorized mass deportations of Afghan nationals without individual status determination, directly contravening non-refoulement obligations under customary international law.

The fourth mechanism, novel to this study, is climate erasure: the active suppression of climatic causation in official discourse even when it is acknowledged in parallel government documents (for example, national climate adaptation plans and disaster risk reduction reports). What this selective erasure of meaning does have as a function is to structure its role at not creating obligations, which, if there were to be a recognition of climate causation, would be created under the Loss and Damage provisions of the Paris Agreement, as well as the Sendai Framework, and under the emerging refugee law. Climate erasure, thus, is a strategic ignorance that has conscious political implications.

4.3 The Securitization-Vulnerability Paradox: Empirical Validation

The Securitization-Vulnerability Paradox (SVP), the study's theoretical imperative, suggests a mechanism whereby a heightened militarization of borders does not necessarily result in a diminished overall vulnerability; instead, it changes, removes, and intensifies vulnerability. The SVP is inductively substantiated via three types of evidence.

First, mortality data. Data from Human Rights Watch (2022, 2023, 2024), Bangladeshi NGO Odhikar, and HRCP Pakistan show that between 2018 and 2024, 1,247 deaths, mostly irregular border crossers, were reported on the India-Bangladesh frontier, while eight also took place on the India-Nepal open border during this period. The deaths on the India-Bangladesh borders are a result of shoot-on-sight exercise by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) personnel (634 cases), drownings in the Padma, Jamuna, and Teesta rivers as India forced people into alternate routes (318 cases), and deaths resulting from detentions (97 cases). The temporal pattern demonstrates a direct correlation between infrastructure upgrades and the spikes in mortality, consistent with SVP prediction.

Secondly, rerouting and concentration of vulnerabilities. Interview data from civil society respondents, supplemented by NGO on-the-ground reporting, enables an assessment of the effects of upgrades, particularly via increased fencing along primary crossing points, which does not lead to a decrease in crossings but results in crossings being pushed onto more dangerous routes including deeper river crossings, highland passes and smugglers facilitated routes that pay through bondage, in documented instances forced labour or sexual exploitation. This rerouting does create vulnerability clustering at its most economically deprived climate migrants – people who do not have the funds to move lawfully or the social networks to facilitate their movement in safer ways.

Third, the evidence from the India-Nepal corridor is the counterfactual. The natural experiment is provided by the open border between India and Nepal, enshrined in the 1950 Treaty. The border

is not militarized, which has material effects on the humanitarian outcomes—decreased mortality, higher rates of economic integration, increased social resilience, and risk of trafficking and exploitation of climate displacement in India-Nepal, even though it has received a significant amount of climate migrants from the mid-hill and Terai regions of Nepal since 2022's Kosci River floods and 2023's Chamoli disaster. Most significantly, there is no negative impact on India's national security markers that can be sensibly linked to the relatively much more liberal mobility regime that could be used to justify militarization as a measure of national security in the Bangladesh context.

4.4 Human Rights Implications

The human rights analysis reveals systemic violations across five domains. First, the right to life is violated by BSF shoot-on-sight orders and by the conditions that force migrants onto dangerous routes. The UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Executions has documented that BSF killings constitute potential violations of Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which India is a party.

Second, the right to non-refoulement, arguably a *jus cogens* norm, is being violated by Pakistan's mass deportation of Afghans and India's push-backs of Rohingya who have documented climate and protection needs. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee's 2024 report on South Asia documents 127,000 push-back incidents in the calendar year 2023 alone.

Third, the rights of women and children are specifically imperiled. Women constitute approximately 47% of climate-displaced populations in the Bangladesh case (IDMC gender-disaggregated data, 2024), and are disproportionately exposed to trafficking and sexual violence at militarized frontiers. Children, including unaccompanied minors, are detained in conditions that UNICEF's 2024 Bangladesh report documents as failing to meet the minimum standards of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Fourth, the right to an adequate standard of living, including food, water, and shelter, is systematically denied in the detention facilities and informal border settlements in which climate migrants are concentrated at militarized frontiers in Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Fifth, and most structurally, the right to an effective remedy is denied by the institutional vacuum documented above: in the absence of a recognized legal category for climate migrants, individuals have no legal avenue through which to challenge push-back, detention, or deportation decisions based on their climate displacement status.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Eco-Securitization as a Governance Failure

The findings of this study demonstrate that eco-securitization as both a discursive practice and an institutional configuration constitutes a profound governance failure that is simultaneously a security failure, a humanitarian failure, and a climate justice failure. It is a security failure because, as the SVP framework demonstrates, militarized border responses to climate migration do not produce security outcomes: they do not reduce displacement pressures (which are climatically structural), they do not prevent crossings (which are rerouted rather than deterred), and they generate new security risks through the criminalization of migration and the growth of smuggling networks.

It has a humanitarian dimension for breeding a systemic context in which the rights of one of the most vulnerable groups in this world are being violated, a group whose migration has not been a result of individual decisions, but rather of a global process of carbon accumulation of which they are responsible only marginally. The SVP's conclusion that militarization makes them less rather than more secure, delegitimizes the security argument: an argument that does more harm than good, in terms of rights violations, cannot be supported with any plausible cost-benefit analysis.

It is a climate justice failure because eco-securitization's central discursive move, the erasure of climatic causation, shields from accountability both the global emitters responsible

for climate-induced displacement and the regional states responsible for coercive border responses. Bangladesh emits approximately 0.35 tonnes of CO₂ per capita (compared with 14.7 for the United States and 7.1 for India); yet Bangladeshi climate migrants bear the costs of a crisis not of their making and receive the protection of a system designed to exclude rather than shelter them.

5.2 Theoretical Implications: Extending the Copenhagen School

The eco-securitization concept developed in this study extends the Copenhagen School's securitization framework in a direction that Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998) could not have anticipated: the securitization not merely of human actors but of a structural ecological process. In classical securitization theory, the referent object (what is being protected), the securitizing actor (who performs the securitization), and the threat (what is being securitized) are analytically separable. In eco-securitization, these categories collapse in novel ways: the populations that constitute different types of referent objects for climate protection obligations are the same ones that are being constructed as a threat in the securitization narrative. It is this paradox of structures that creates the SVP.

Discussing the production of ignorance, therefore, as a securitisation resource as part of the concept of climate erasure will also extend Balzacq's (2010) constructivist understanding of securitisation practices and their institutional productions. Erasure is not a forgetting, but a technique of not-knowing that is organized and productive for certain political ends and that can be documented as part of the institutional history. This, as such, represents a fresh contribution within the field of sociology of securitisation as a practice.

More generally, the SVP framework can add to the ongoing debate in critical security studies regarding the connection between securitization and vulnerability. Securitization tends to create insecurities for its object of action, according to McSweeney (1999) and others in the Human Security tradition. In this paper, the SVP

systemizes and empirically verifies this proposition with a falsifiable theoretical claim with policy implications in the particular context of climate migration.

5.3 Regional Dynamics and Geopolitical Implications

The results showed an under-theorized regional security dilemma in border governance that takes place in South Asia. Indian Progressive militarization of its border with Bangladesh has created retaliatory postures and bilateral tensions for either side to even question the ability of the SAARC to find regional solutions. Bangladesh's behavior, formalization of informal understanding with India's BSF that legitimates the use of push-backs instead of a certain amount of investment commitment, shows how smaller states address the structural asymmetry of the securitization politics in the regional order.

Pakistan's simultaneous position as the world's most climate-affected upper-middle-income country and as a major recipient and producer of irregular migration flows creates a governance paradox with no analogue in existing regional migration governance literature. The 2022 floods, by devastating Pakistan's agricultural hinterland while Afghan drought pushed populations northward and eastward, created a displacement pressure that Pakistan's frontier militarization was entirely ill-suited to manage. The result was a humanitarian catastrophe magnified by the absence of cooperative governance mechanisms.

The India-Nepal open border counterfactual suggests that cooperative mobility governance, where politically achievable, produces better outcomes for security, development, and human rights simultaneously. The CMGF proposed in the following section draws explicitly on this positive precedent.

6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS: THE CLIMATE-MOBILITY GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

On the basis of the empirical findings and theoretical analysis presented above, this study proposes the Climate-Mobility Governance Framework (CMGF) as a transformative regional

policy architecture for South Asia. The CMGF rests on four pillars.

Pillar I: Legal Recognition of Climate Displacement

The CMGF calls for the adoption, under the auspices of SAARC and in coordination with UNHCR, of a South Asian Protocol on Climate-Related Displacement. Drawing on the Kampala Convention (2009) and the Cartagena Declaration (1984) as regional precedents, this Protocol would: (a) define climate-displaced persons as a protected category distinct from but complementary to refugee status; (b) establish a climate displacement determination procedure to be administered through a regional body; and (c) obligate signatory states to non-refoulement, temporary protection, and durable solutions for recognized climate-displaced persons.

Pillar II: Managed Mobility Corridors

The CMGF proposes the establishment of Managed Climate Mobility Corridors (MCMCs) designated bilateral zones along the India-Bangladesh and Pakistan-Afghanistan frontiers within which climate-displaced populations can be received, screened, and provisionally sheltered in humane, rights-compliant facilities pending durable solutions. MCMCs would replace shoot-on-sight border enforcement with structured reception, drawing on the operational experience of the EU's EUROSUR system (adapted for the South Asian context) and the IGAD Regional Coordination Framework in East Africa.

Pillar III: Climate Responsibility, Attribution, and Financing

The CMGF incorporates a climate justice financing mechanism, building on the Loss and Damage Fund established at COP27 and operationalized at COP28, by which historically high-emitting states contribute to the financing of climate displacement reception, integration, and return programs in South Asia. This mechanism addresses the justice gap identified above: it requires those who caused climate change to contribute to the management of its displacement

consequences, rather than externalizing those costs onto the least responsible populations.

Pillar IV: Demilitarization Incentives and Border Governance Reform

The CMGF proposes a graduated demilitarization incentive structure, whereby South Asian states that adopt rights-compliant managed mobility in place of coercive militarization receive preferential access to climate adaptation financing from multilateral development banks, capacity-building support, and enhanced diplomatic status within SAARC processes. This incentive architecture recognizes that state security concerns are legitimate but argues that they can be addressed through means that are both more effective and more just than current militarized approaches.

9. CONCLUSIONS

This study has addressed one of the most pressing intersections in contemporary International Relations: the relationship between climate-induced displacement and border militarization in South Asia. Through an innovative mixed-methods design that integrates quantitative analysis of climate and security data, critical discourse analysis of state securitization practices, and structured elite interviewing, the study has generated three significant contributions to scholarship and policy.

First, it has developed and empirically validated the Securitization-Vulnerability Paradox (SVP) as a novel theoretical framework demonstrating that enhanced border militarization in the context of climate-induced migration increases rather than decreases overall vulnerability, thereby delegitimizing the security rationale for coercive border governance. Second, it has conceptualized and empirically documented eco-securitization as a distinctive discursive-institutional practice through which states actively erase the climatic origins of displacement to authorize coercive responses and evade accountability obligations. Third, it has proposed the Climate-Mobility Governance Framework (CMGF) as a transformative regional policy architecture that reconciles legitimate state security concerns with

humanitarian protection obligations and climate justice imperatives.

9.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, this study advances the following recommendations for policymakers, regional institutions, and the international community:

R1. India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, and other SAARC members should initiate negotiations toward a South Asian Climate Displacement Protocol under the SAARC framework, with technical support from UNHCR and IOM, with a view to adoption by 2027.

R2. India should immediately suspend shoot-on-sight orders on the Bangladesh frontier and conduct an independent human rights review of BSF operational procedures, with particular attention to the documented pattern of killings of climate-displaced agricultural workers.

R3. Pakistan should implement an individualized status determination process for Afghans seeking entry across the western frontier before proceeding with any deportation or push-back measures, in compliance with customary international non-refoulement obligations.

R4. The UN Loss and Damage Fund should explicitly recognize climate-induced displacement in South Asia as a priority allocation area and establish a dedicated South Asia Climate Displacement Window with a minimum initial capitalization of USD 10 billion.

R5. Regional and international researchers should prioritize the development of gender-disaggregated, age-sensitive, and ethno-linguistically specific climate displacement data to support rights-based policy design and monitoring.

The climate-migration-security nexus will define South Asian politics for decades to come. The question is not whether climate change will continue to drive displacement – the science on this is unambiguous but whether the region's states, institutions, and international partners will respond with coercive militarism that compounds the crisis, or with cooperative governance that addresses it. This study has demonstrated that the former path generates paradoxical insecurity and

systemic rights violations; it has charted the contours of the latter. The choice, ultimately, is political.

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