



## The Power of Ideas: A Constructivist Reinterpretation of Security in International Relations

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the pivotal role of Constructivist theory in redefining both theoretical and practical approaches to international security, addressing critical gaps in traditional security paradigms. In contrast to the realist and Liberal frameworks, which interpret threats as objective and material, this study argues that security is fundamentally a social construct, shaped by collective identities, shared norms, and discursive processes. Through a descriptive-analytical methodology grounded in comprehensive library research, the analysis revealed how security policies and global governance structures were influenced not only by material power but also by normative legitimacy, intersubjective understandings, and cultural contexts. The findings demonstrated that securitization was contingent upon political legitimacy and public consensus, highlighting the central role of language and perception in framing security threats. The study advocates for greater reflexivity and theoretical pluralism within security studies, urging an inclusive approach that incorporates cultural, environmental, and societal dimensions alongside conventional state-centric perspectives. Policy-wise, it emphasizes the need for inclusive multilateral dialogue, mutual recognition among actors, and adaptive governance mechanisms to address evolving security challenges. By conceptualizing security as a dynamic, socially constructed phenomenon, this research provides a nuanced analytical tool for understanding contemporary international relations. Ultimately, it contributes to more effective strategies for fostering global stability, cooperation, and conflict resolution in an increasingly complex world.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The field of international security studies is undergoing a significant shift, driven by a growing awareness of the limitations inherent in traditional theoretical models. For many years, realism and its offshoots, such as Neorealism, have largely shaped the discourse on security by assuming that threats exist objectively within the anarchic international system. These frameworks focus on material power, survival imperatives, and strategic state behavior as

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core explanatory elements (Tripp, 2013). Rooted in the assumption that the international system is anarchic, realism views security primarily through the lens of material power, military strength, and state survival (Taliaferro, 2000). While this approach has provided valuable explanations for state behavior and power competition, it faces criticism for its narrow focus on the state as the central actor and for emphasizing material factors while neglecting broader security dimensions beyond military concerns (Dehnavi et al., 2021; Behraves, 2011).

Liberalism, while expanding the framework to highlight international institutions, economic interdependence, and individual protection, has also introduced concepts such as human security. However, it has faced critiques (Ikenberry, 2009; Moravcsik, 1997). Scholars argue that it underestimates persistent power imbalances and takes an idealistic view of institutional effectiveness. Despite these contributions, both schools maintain a core assumption that security threats are objective realities defined by tangible conditions, a position that has come under increasing scrutiny (Mahmood, 2025).

In response to these limitations, constructivism offers an important and timely theoretical alternative, one that questions the fundamental positivist assumptions regarding security and state conduct. Rather than accepting security as a material fact, Constructivism asserts that international security is deeply entwined with social processes involving the creation of meaning, identity formation, and normative frameworks (Theys, 2018; Wendt, 1992). From this standpoint, security is not simply a reflection of power balances or geopolitical facts but is actively produced through shared understandings shaped by discourse, culture, and historical circumstances (Hopf, 1998; Cho, 2009). Alexander Wendt's famous dictum, "anarchy is what states make of it" (1992), captures this departure from structural determinism.

Constructivist scholars expand the analytical focus to how states and other actors collectively create and sustain meanings around security and threat, emphasizing the roles of language, legitimacy, and intersubjective understanding (Adeniji, 2022; Barnett, 2018). This approach bridges the divide between material power and social practice, offering a more inclusive lens through which to examine security issues. Constructivism facilitates a critical reevaluation of how security policies are crafted by revealing the socially embedded nature of threat construction, as well as exposing the influence of power relations and ideological forces within security narratives (Adeniji, 2022). Such insights challenge deterministic, state-centric approaches that often marginalize alternative voices and non-traditional conceptions of security (Tsai, 2009).

Despite the growing influence of Constructivism, the existing literature reveals several important gaps. Much of the scholarship tends to dwell on broad theoretical claims or isolated case studies without systematically exploring how ideational factors influence diverse policy processes (Flockhart, 2016; Mikail & Aytakin, 2016). Securitization theory, a key Constructivist contribution, has often privileged elite discourse, underplaying the role of grassroots actors and civil society in shaping security narratives (Conteh-Morgan, 2005; Al-Rasheed & Al-

Saeedi, 2023). Furthermore, there is limited work addressing how Constructivist epistemology informs methodological innovation. Calls for more reflexive, qualitative, and interpretive research methods capable of capturing the contingent and fluid nature of security knowledge production remain insufficiently addressed (Shannon-Baker, 2023; Farrell, 2022).

In addressing these theoretical and empirical gaps, this study integrates Constructivist insights with practical policy considerations. Rather than treating identity, norms, and discourse as isolated variables, it emphasizes their intertwined and mutually reinforcing roles in shaping security understandings and actions (Aria, 2025; García Iommi, 2022). By foregrounding the normative and ethical dimensions of constructivist thought, this article challenges deterministic models and advocates for security policies that prioritize inclusivity, reflexivity, and dialogue (Tsai, 2009; Karacasulu & Uzgören, 2010).

It also responds to the need for a deeper analysis of non-traditional threats, such as environmental degradation, cybersecurity, and forced migration, which conventional theories often inadequately theorize (Ulusoy, 2003; Buzan & Hansen, 2009). Recognizing security as a fluid and socially negotiated concept, rather than a fixed category, allows for policy responses that are attuned to cultural particularities, historical legacies, and structural inequalities. This orientation is particularly crucial for addressing emergent challenges that transcend national boundaries and elude traditional state-centric solutions (Barnett, 2018).

This article examines the transformative impact of constructivist thought on international security, focusing on both its theoretical foundations and practical implications. It explores the epistemological divergence that Constructivism introduces to mainstream security scholarship, highlighting its commitment to social ontology and reflexivity in the production of knowledge (Aria, 2025). This includes analyzing the reciprocal constitution of actors and structures through ongoing social interaction, contesting conventional separations between agency and systemic constraints (Flockhart, 2016). Furthermore, it examines how Constructivist insights permeate global governance and security policymaking, particularly in areas such as post-conflict reconciliation, norm evolution, and peacebuilding efforts (Krickel-Choi, 2021).

By integrating these dimensions, the article proposes a holistic approach to security as a dynamic, socially constructed concept. It calls for a scholarship that combines analytical rigor with ethical awareness, promoting conceptual and methodological pluralism. The goal is to encourage both scholars and policymakers to reevaluate security in a way that addresses the complex and evolving challenges of global politics. The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To examine the limitations of traditional security theories in addressing contemporary security challenges.
- To explore the core theoretical foundations of Constructivism and its application to international security.
- To analyze how identity, norms, and discourse shape threat perception and security policymaking.

- To identify the practical implications of Constructivist insights for global governance, conflict resolution, and policy development.
- To propose an integrated and ethically informed framework for understanding and addressing non-traditional security threats.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research employs a descriptive-analytical approach grounded in qualitative analysis, aiming to reexamine the concept of security through the lens of Constructivist theory. The study relies solely on secondary data sources, such as peer-reviewed scholarly articles, academic monographs, and seminal works within the fields of International Relations and Security Studies. To maintain scholarly rigor and relevance, the literature review concentrated on publications that explicitly explore the ideational formation of security from a Constructivist perspective. The inclusion criteria prioritized materials offering profound theoretical discussions on how norms, identities, and discourses shape the conceptualization of security in global politics. Core references include influential and contemporary writings by prominent Constructivist theorists, such as Alexander Wendt (1992) and Ted Hopf (1998).

Sources were collected through a systematic search across respected academic databases including JSTOR, Scopus, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar. Search queries combined keywords such as “Constructivism and Security,” “Security Studies,” “Social Construction of Security,” and “International Relations Theory.” Only publications in English were considered, with an emphasis on works published in the last three decades to capture recent theoretical advancements. The initial database search identified 93 articles and book chapters. After screening for relevance, removing duplicates, and excluding empirical studies lacking substantial theoretical engagement, 41 sources were eliminated. Ultimately, 52 publications met the inclusion criteria and were incorporated into the final analysis.

The gathered literature underwent thematic evaluation and conceptual integration, aiming to extract recurring themes related to the social construction of security threats, the influence of ideas on security policymaking, and critiques of traditional materialist frameworks in security studies. This study prioritizes theoretical reinterpretation over empirical validation, seeking to deepen the understanding of security by highlighting the significance of ideational elements. Through this descriptive-analytical framework, the paper presents a thorough and critical analysis of how security is constructed and perceived within the discipline of International Relations. This method facilitates the incorporation of varied Constructivist viewpoints, ultimately enhancing theoretical discourse on security in the modern international arena.

## ***THEORITICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SECURITY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS***

Among the most influential theoretical perspectives in International Relations are Realism and Liberalism, both of which offer distinct understandings of security but also possess

notable shortcomings. These limitations have prompted the rise of alternative approaches, such as Constructivism, which focus on ideational factors shaping security (Savu, 2021).

### ***Realism: Security as Power in an Anarchic System***

Realism stands as one of the foundational theories in the study of international security. It operates on the premise that the global system is anarchic, meaning there is no overarching authority to regulate the behavior of states. In this context, states act as rational actors primarily concerned with ensuring their survival (Aria, 2025). Within realism, security is understood predominantly in terms of tangible power, military strength, and economic capabilities, which states seek to accumulate to defend themselves against threats. The theory views states as the central actors, with their sovereignty and territorial integrity as the primary concerns. This perspective posits that the struggle for power and security leads to competition, balancing, and often conflict among states (Taliaferro, 2000). Realism has deeply influenced the strategic thinking and policies of states, especially during eras marked by intense rivalries such as the Cold War. However, its focus on material power and a narrow state-centric lens has been criticized for ignoring other dimensions of security. The theory tends to overlook non-military threats and the potential for cooperation grounded in factors beyond power calculations (Dehnavi et al., 2021).

### ***Liberalism: Broadening the Security Framework***

Liberalism arose as a response to the limitations inherent in realist thought, emphasizing the role of international institutions, interdependence, and domestic factors in reducing conflict and enhancing security. Unlike realism's exclusive focus on military power, liberalism argues that economic ties, international organizations, and democratic governance structures contribute to a more peaceful and cooperative international order (Moravcsik, 1997). Security is thus expanded beyond mere survival to include stability fostered through collective mechanisms and rule-based interactions. Furthermore, liberal theorists extend the concept of security beyond the state to include the protection of individuals and communities (Ikenberry, 2009). The concept of human security encompasses this broader perspective by addressing threats such as poverty, disease, and political repression, thereby reflecting a multidimensional view of security. Nevertheless, liberalism is not without its critics. Some argue that it underestimates the persistence of power politics and may overemphasize the efficacy of international institutions, particularly in contexts where power asymmetries and competing interests undermine cooperation (Mahmood, 2025).

### ***The Shortcomings of Traditional Approaches and the Rise of Constructivism***

While Realism and Liberalism have contributed significantly to our understanding of security, they share a standard limitation: an overemphasis on material factors and an assumption that security concerns are objective and fixed. Both approaches typically regard threats as given realities defined by physical power balances or institutional arrangements (Wendt, 1992). A critical gap in these frameworks is their relative neglect of ideational elements, how ideas, identities, norms, and social interactions shape what actors perceive as security threats and

how they prioritize them. Realism's focus on material capabilities leaves little room for the social construction of interests, while Liberalism's assumptions about cooperation often fail to consider how deeply held beliefs influence state behavior (Adeniji, 2022). Moreover, both theories primarily focus on the state as the primary referent of security, often excluding non-state actors and broader social dynamics that increasingly influence international security environments. The concept of security itself is generally treated as universal and unchanging, without questioning its socially constructed nature (Behraves, 2011).

Constructivism emerged to fill these gaps by emphasizing that security is not an objective fact, but rather a product of shared understandings and social processes. This perspective posits that states and other actors construct their identities and interests through interaction, which in turn shapes their definitions of security and threat (Cho, 2009). Constructivists argue that security issues arise from how actors interpret their environment and the meanings they assign to events and behaviors. Threats are therefore context-dependent, socially constructed phenomena rather than fixed material conditions (Mikail & Aytekin, 2016). This allows Constructivism to account for the variability in security perceptions across different cultures, historical periods, and political contexts. Additionally, Constructivism challenges the notion of anarchy as a static condition, instead proposing that shared ideas and collective meanings shape the structure of the international system. Such a view opens the door for transformation in security practices through changes in norms and identities (Jung, 2019).

## **FINDINGS**

This article examines how Constructivist approaches transform traditional understandings of security by highlighting the significance of social structures, intersubjective meanings, and normative shifts. The findings are thematically organized into four core areas: (1) Constructivism and the Social Foundations of Security, (2) Reconstructing Security Practice: From Strategic Deterrence to Normative Engagement, (3) Reconstructing the Conceptual Core: Constructivist Epistemology and Security Studies, and (4) Toward Normative Reorientation: Constructivist Implications for Security Policy and Global Governance. Each theme is examined in detail below, synthesizing the key arguments and contributions derived from the literature and theoretical analysis.

### ***Constructivism and the Social Foundations of Security***

Following the critique of conventional approaches such as Realism and Liberalism, it becomes essential to delve into theoretical alternatives that offer a broader and more dynamic understanding of international security. Constructivism provides one such perspective, shifting attention away from material capabilities and institutional arrangements toward the influence of ideas, identities, and social processes in defining what constitutes a security threat (Barnett, 2018). Unlike traditional paradigms that see security as a fixed, objective condition, Constructivism emphasizes its constructed and interpretive nature, revealing how meanings and understandings of security emerge through social interaction. Constructivist theory arose in the late 20th century as a response to the perceived limitations of mainstream

IR theories (Mikail & Aytakin, 2016). Alexander Wendt, in his well-known assertion that “anarchy is what states make of it,” encapsulates the constructivist belief that shared ideas and social conventions shape the structures of international politics. From this standpoint, security threats are not objective realities but are instead constructed through intersubjective processes involving discourse, identity, and social norms (Wendt, 1992).

A defining feature of Constructivism is its rejection of the assumption that threats and national interests are pre-determined or universal. Instead, it contends that perceptions of security are deeply embedded in specific cultural, historical, and relational contexts. A danger perceived by one state may be considered inconsequential by another, depending on differing historical experiences, alliances, or identities (Adler, 1997). This means that security cannot be understood in purely material or strategic terms; it must also be analyzed through the meanings that actors assign to events and their interactions within their broader social frameworks. Among the key contributions of constructivist thought to the field of security studies is the concept of securitization, developed by the Copenhagen School. This theory explains how political actors can elevate an issue to the status of a security concern through discursive means (Conteh-Morgan, 2005). By presenting a challenge as a threat to survival, leaders can justify exceptional measures that would not be acceptable under normal political conditions. The process is not about the intrinsic nature of the issue but about how convincingly it is framed as a security matter. Topics such as terrorism, migration, or environmental degradation only become “security issues” when successfully framed as such within public and political discourse (Al-Rasheed & Al-Saeedi, 2023).

Constructivism also brings identity into focus as a fundamental variable in security dynamics. It argues that state behavior and threat perceptions are influenced not only by interests but also by how states perceive themselves and others. Identity, in this sense, is not static but evolves through interaction, shaping what actors deem threatening or friendly. For example, two countries with similar capabilities might be perceived very differently by a third state depending on past interactions, ideological alignment, or ongoing diplomatic relations (Huysmans, 2002). Thus, identity forms the basis for interpreting behavior and crafting security policy. Concurrently, Constructivists emphasize the power of norms in shaping international security behavior. Norms, understood as shared expectations of appropriate conduct, influence what kinds of actions are deemed acceptable or unacceptable (Behraves, 2011). These standards evolve and help regulate behavior by setting limits on the use of force, defining the legitimacy of interventions, or guiding disarmament efforts. For instance, the widespread condemnation of chemical weapons or the establishment of international regimes to prevent nuclear proliferation reflect the normative structure surrounding what constitutes responsible state behavior in matters of security (Checkel, 1998).

Furthermore, Constructivism challenges the state-centric bias of traditional theories by acknowledging the significant role of non-state actors in shaping security discourse. Civil society organizations, international institutions, epistemic communities, and advocacy networks all participate in defining what is understood as a threat and how responses should

be coordinated (Tsai, 2009). The emergence of global environmental movements that have framed climate change as a security issue illustrates this broader conceptualization. Their efforts have reshaped public perception and international agendas, pushing climate change into the realm of high politics and global risk. This broader approach is particularly valuable in the context of emerging and non-traditional threats. Issues such as cybersecurity, pandemics, and environmental crises demand new ways of thinking about security that go beyond territorial defense and military might (Theys, 2018). Cyber threats, for instance, involve questions of trust, legitimacy, and intentionality as much as technical vulnerabilities. Likewise, responses to global health emergencies depend not only on biomedical data but also on how governments and international bodies interpret and frame the risk. Constructivism enables scholars and practitioners to understand these evolving challenges through the lens of social construction, highlighting how new security concerns are shaped, institutionalized, and contested (Karacasulu & Uzgören, 2010).

### ***Reconstructing Security Practice: From Strategic Deterrence to Normative Engagement***

Following the critique of conventional security paradigms and the theoretical insights provided by Constructivism regarding identity and normative structures, this section examines how Constructivism reshapes the practice of security itself. Moving away from power-based deterrence and material threat assessments, Constructivism introduces a new lens for interpreting and implementing security strategies, one rooted in meaning-making, intersubjective understanding, and norm development (Farrell, 2002). This perspective has significant implications for how both state and non-state actors approach security governance. Traditional frameworks such as Realism and Neorealism perceive the international arena as a competitive, anarchic structure where states must rely on self-help strategies to survive (Kolodziej, 2005). This results in policies centered on military buildup, power balancing, and the projection of force. Constructivism, however, challenges this rigid configuration by emphasizing that threat perceptions, alliances, and even national interests are socially constructed. Consequently, security is not only pursued through physical force but also shaped through discourse, norms, and institutional interactions (Huysmans, 2002).

One significant effect of this shift is the increasing importance of international institutions, not merely as instruments of powerful states, but as social arenas where shared values and behavioral expectations emerge and evolve (Guzzini, 2000). Organizations such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) function as platforms for normative dialogue and confidence-building measures, emphasizing cooperation and transparency over confrontation. The role of such institutions is fundamentally aligned with the constructivist view that security is a product of shared understandings rather than just material capabilities (Russell, 2021).

Constructivist approaches have also paved the way for addressing a broader range of security issues, many of which traditional theories considered peripheral. Challenges such as public health crises, environmental degradation, gender-based violence, and cyber threats are now viewed through a security lens, not because they threaten state survival in the



classical sense, but because they undermine social stability and human well-being (Cho, 2012). These shifts are not the result of new objective threats alone, but rather the evolution of normative frameworks that redefine what constitutes a security issue. An illustrative example is the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which foregrounds the role of women in peace and security (Shepherd, 2008). This policy breakthrough exemplifies how norm entrepreneurship and discursive activism, central to Constructivism, can lead to significant policy transformations. Constructivist insights help explain how gender, previously excluded from mainstream security thinking, became integrated into security agendas through a process of norm diffusion and institutional uptake (Rasheed, 2023).

Simultaneously, the growing prominence of early warning mechanisms and preventive diplomacy reflects a constructivist reorientation of security practice. Rather than reacting to crises after they occur, constructivist-informed approaches aim to prevent conflict from escalating. The African Union's Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), for example, monitors a wide range of social, political, and economic indicators, not just military threats (Guzzini, 2000). This reflects an understanding of conflict as emerging from complex social dynamics, rather than simply from material asymmetries or territorial disputes. Moreover, Constructivism contributes to a broader inclusion of actors in security governance. Unlike traditional frameworks that emphasize the role of state elites and formal institutions, Constructivism recognizes the relevance of civil society, non-governmental organizations, local communities, and epistemic networks (Karacasulu & Uzgören, 2010). These actors contribute to defining, negotiating, and implementing security policies. Initiatives such as community-based peacebuilding or multi-track diplomacy underscore the importance of engaging diverse perspectives and fostering mutual recognition, core tenets of the Constructivist paradigm. Importantly, Constructivism views security not as a fixed condition but as a dynamic and continuously evolving process (Newman, 2001). This implies that policies should be adaptive and reflective of changing social contexts. For instance, in responding to violent extremism, a Constructivist approach would stress the importance of addressing underlying narratives, identity grievances, and the socio-political conditions that enable radicalization, rather than relying solely on punitive measures. By prioritizing interpretation and context, this approach offers more sustainable solutions to complex security challenges (Cho, 2009).

The rise of the human security framework further demonstrates the influence of constructivist thinking in reorienting security discourse. This model prioritizes individual safety and dignity, encompassing threats ranging from poverty and disease to political oppression and environmental disasters (Conteh-Morgan, 2005). Constructivist insights legitimize this expanded view by highlighting how international norms have evolved to include these concerns within the broader security agenda. Policies focused on development aid, access to education, healthcare, and human rights promotion are increasingly seen as essential components of security strategy (Tsai, 2009). These transformations are especially

salient in post-conflict settings and fragile states, where rebuilding trust, reconstructing collective identities, and institutionalizing inclusive governance are more effective than military solutions. Peace processes in Northern Ireland and Rwanda, for example, succeeded not through coercion but through social reconciliation, public engagement, and recognition of historical narratives, principles that align directly with Constructivist theory (Bernshausen & Bonacker, 2011).

### ***Reconstructing the Conceptual Core: Constructivist Epistemology and Security Studies***

Having examined how Constructivism reshapes practical approaches to security, this section delves deeper into the theoretical foundations that underpin such transformations. It investigates how Constructivist thinking challenges traditional epistemological and ontological assumptions in the field of international security (Farrell, 2002). Rather than accepting the world as a set of objective facts and given threats, Constructivism introduces a social ontology, suggesting that international relations are constructed through intersubjective processes. This perspective redefines how security knowledge is produced, understood, and legitimized (Huysmans, 2002).

Dominant theories, such as Realism and Neorealism, rest upon a positivist framework, emphasizing empirical observation and quantifiable metrics, including military strength, alliances, and state behavior. These perspectives assume that threats are material realities, independent of interpretation (Meibauer, 2021). Constructivism, in contrast, argues that the international system is not a pre-existing structure but a socially produced arena, where meanings, norms, and identities play a central role in shaping actions. Accordingly, security cannot be fully grasped by focusing solely on tangible indicators; it must be analyzed through the lenses of historical context, cultural meaning, and political discourse (Erbas, 2022).

The ontological assumptions of Constructivism pivot from materialist foundations to the idea of social construction. Threats are not inherently dangerous because of what they are, but rather because they are perceived and represented as such within a particular interpretive framework (Flockhart, 2016). This orientation encourages scholars to explore how security concepts are formulated, who constructs them, and for what purposes. In this view, understanding security necessitates an investigation into the processes by which specific issues are elevated to the status of 'threats,' while others are overlooked (Marilli, 2011).

One of the most distinctive contributions of Constructivism is the idea that structures and agents are mutually constituted. Unlike traditional theories that depict states as static actors reacting to an anarchic system, Constructivism maintains that both actors and systemic conditions evolve through continuous social interaction (Ogbajie et al., 2023). Interests are not fixed or innate; they are formed through identity-based engagement and shaped by prevailing norms. Thus, the formation of security policies is inseparable from the discourses and values through which states understand themselves and others (García Iommi, 2022).

This theoretical approach opens the door for critical inquiry into the discursive construction of security. An example of this is found in securitization theory, particularly developed by the Copenhagen School, which builds on Constructivist premises (Eroukhmanoff, 2018). According to this framework, an issue becomes a matter of security not because of any intrinsic characteristic, but because it is presented as an existential threat by a legitimate actor. Security, in this sense, is a product of speech acts, and the politics of representation become central to security analysis (Glover, 2011).

Constructivism also promotes reflexivity in scholarly work, pushing researchers to recognize their role in the construction of knowledge. Rather than assuming an external, value-neutral position, Constructivist scholars acknowledge their embeddedness within the intellectual and cultural contexts they study (Duffy, Fernandez, & Sène-Harper, 2020). This reflexive stance demands awareness of how research questions are framed, what assumptions are embedded in theoretical choices, and which voices are prioritized or excluded in the production of academic knowledge. Another significant implication of this paradigm is its encouragement of pluralism in the conceptualization of security (Lynch, 2008). Rather than treating the state's survival as the universal benchmark, Constructivist research has emphasized alternative security concerns rooted in identity, culture, and non-state experiences. Communities may define their sense of safety through environmental preservation, cultural autonomy, or social cohesion, dimensions that often fall outside the scope of conventional strategic analysis (Flockhart, 2016).

This inclusive approach leads naturally to methodological diversification. In contrast to the dominance of quantitative techniques in mainstream research, Constructivist scholars utilize qualitative tools such as discourse analysis, process tracing, and ethnographic studies. These methods are essential for examining how meanings are constructed and how identities influence political behavior (Shannon-Baker, 2023). By doing so, Constructivism broadens the methodological repertoire of security studies and deepens our capacity to understand context-specific realities. Importantly, this methodological and epistemological shift does not imply a rejection of rigor or clarity. Instead, Constructivism demands a more nuanced and context-aware understanding of security, one that recognizes the political and historical contingencies embedded in knowledge production (Farrell, 2022). It also draws attention to power dynamics, asking critical questions: Who gets to define what constitutes a threat? Whose experiences and narratives are legitimized in global security discourse, and whose are neglected or suppressed? (Barnett, 2018).

Ultimately, Constructivism reshapes international security by redefining how threats are understood, emphasizing the importance of meaning, identity, and discourse. It promotes ethical engagement and critical insight, offering a more inclusive framework for addressing today's complex global challenges (Mikail & Aytakin, 2016).

### ***Toward Normative Reorientation: Constructivist Implications for Security Policy and Global Governance***

Building upon the epistemological shift initiated by Constructivism in the study of international security, one arrives at a crucial question concerning the broader normative and policy ramifications of this theoretical approach. Suppose security threats are not objective realities but rather social constructs shaped by collective identities, discourse, and intersubjective understandings. In that case, the formulation of security strategies cannot be viewed as neutral or purely reactive (Tsai, 2009). Instead, security policy must be understood as a product of ideational forces, rooted in prevailing assumptions, political priorities, and societal beliefs. This insight invites a reconsideration of the normative basis upon which states and institutions approach security in the contemporary global system. Traditional realist paradigms emphasize the imperative of survival and the maximization of power, often sidelining ethical dimensions and long-term consequences (Newman, 2001). Unlike traditional views, Constructivism highlights how identity, norms, and shared meanings shape security concerns. It reveals that common threat perceptions are often based on dominant, simplistic narratives. By fostering critical reflection, Constructivism encourages a security approach rooted in dialogue, empathy, and transformation, rather than deterrence and exclusion (Karacasulu & Uzgören, 2010).

The theoretical implications of Constructivism naturally translate into practical approaches for addressing contemporary security challenges. In post-conflict societies, for example, it suggests that reconciliation processes should move beyond institutional fixes to focus on altering intergroup identities and contested historical accounts. Initiatives that foster mutual recognition, inclusive engagement, and trust-building become essential elements of sustainable peace, not secondary concerns (Bernshausen & Bonacker, 2011). Within the framework of global governance, peacebuilding, disarmament, and counter-radicalization efforts can benefit from an emphasis on the social legitimacy of norms, the symbolic meanings attached to actions, and the localized interpretations of security itself. Effectiveness in policymaking, from a Constructivist perspective, cannot be measured solely by material power or strategic calculation (Wallis & Richmond, 2017). Instead, successful security initiatives often depend on their normative resonance within specific cultural and political contexts. In multilateral negotiations, for instance, shared identities and the internalization of common values, such as the prohibition of aggression or the protection of human rights, shape the behavior of actors and limit their strategic choices. These norms are not imposed externally; they emerge and gain strength through framing processes, the efforts of norm entrepreneurs, and iterative socialization—central themes in Constructivist research (Adeniji, 2022).

This approach is particularly valuable when addressing newer, complex, and non-conventional security threats. Whereas realist and liberal frameworks may struggle to conceptualize phenomena such as environmental degradation, global health crises, or cyber threats as core security issues, Constructivism offers tools to analyze how such challenges

become constructed as existential concerns (Ulusoy, 2003). It investigates the discursive dynamics surrounding the securitization of these threats, including who has the authority to define them and what interests are served by such framings. By doing so, Constructivism not only expands the scope of what is considered a security issue but also prompts scrutiny of the political consequences that follow once a subject is securitized. The act of defining what constitutes a security threat, from a Constructivist view, is inherently political. It involves power-laden decisions about whose voices are heard and which narratives dominate (Newman, 2001). A pertinent example lies in the discourse surrounding migration, where in some countries, migrants are portrayed as a danger to national cohesion. These portrayals legitimize restrictive and often discriminatory policies, masking the structural causes of displacement, such as conflict, economic inequality, and ecological degradation. By unpacking these constructions, Constructivist analysis calls for more equitable and context-sensitive approaches that reflect the lived experiences and identities of affected populations (Cho, 2009).

International institutions are also subject to reinterpretation through a Constructivist lens. Bodies such as the United Nations, NATO, and regional organizations are not merely arenas for strategic bargaining, but also sites where norms are created, contested, and disseminated. These institutions help to construct social reality, influencing how states perceive themselves and others, and determining what behaviors are deemed legitimate or illegitimate (Haas & Haas, 2002). Understanding institutions in this way enables scholars and practitioners to grasp processes such as the internalization of rules, legitimacy crises, and the evolution of normative commitments more effectively over time. Furthermore, Constructivism draws attention to the potential for learning, adaptation, and agency in global politics (Hurd, 2009). Since interests and identities are shaped through interaction rather than being pre-given, actors are capable of reinterpreting past experiences, revising their positions, and embracing alternative security logics (Körppen, Ropers, & Giessmann, 2011). This creates opportunities for transformative change even in entrenched conflict settings. Peace agreements, reconciliation mechanisms, and disarmament programs can all be reimagined as iterative processes, where meaning and understanding evolve through social engagement (Ibid).

## **DISCUSSION**

This research highlights the profound transformation Constructivism introduces to international security studies by redefining security as a dynamic social construct influenced by identities, norms, and discursive mechanisms, rather than merely focusing on material power or institutional frameworks. In contrast to the fixed and objective threat perceptions advanced by traditional Realist and Liberal schools, Constructivism demonstrates that security concerns are contextually dependent and formed through shared meanings and social interactions (Wendt, 1992; Barnett, 2018). This shift in ontology broadens the scope of

analysis, allowing for a deeper appreciation of security issues through cultural, historical, and relational lenses (Adler, 1997).

The findings reveal how this theoretical evolution translates into tangible changes in security practice. Constructivism advocates for a shift away from deterrence-centered policies toward strategies based on normative dialogue, cooperation, and mutual understanding (Farrell, 2002; Huysmans, 2002). The enhanced role of international organizations as forums for norm development and confidence-building exemplifies this shift, emphasizing that security governance is reliant not only on tangible power but also on the legitimacy derived from shared norms and values (Guzzini, 2000; Russell, 2021). Moreover, the increasing focus on non-traditional security threats, such as gender-based violence, environmental issues, and cyber vulnerabilities, underscores the ability of Constructivism to integrate formerly marginalized concerns into mainstream security discussions (Cho, 2012; Rasheed, 2023).

From an epistemological perspective, Constructivism challenges the positivist underpinnings of dominant security theories by fostering reflexivity and encouraging methodological diversity (Farrell, 2022; Shannon-Baker, 2023). The reciprocal constitution of agents and structures underscores the ongoing interplay between identity formation and systemic constraints, prompting a critical examination of power dynamics embedded within the framing of threats (Ogbajie et al., 2023; Barnett, 2018). This reflective approach cultivates a more inclusive and ethically conscious scholarship that is aware of which voices are privileged and which are marginalized in international security debates.

On a normative level, Constructivism advocates for security policies that emphasize empathy, mutual recognition, and sensitivity to specific contexts rather than inflexible power-driven approaches (Karacasulu & Uzgören, 2010; Newman, 2001). The influence of norm entrepreneurs and framing mechanisms in shaping global policy agendas, as seen in UNSC Resolution 1325 or migration discourses, illustrates how the social construction of security can facilitate transformative peacebuilding or, conversely, justify exclusionary measures (Bernshausen & Bonacker, 2011; Cho, 2009). By framing security as a contested social process, Constructivism offers a flexible and pluralistic framework that can address the complexities of contemporary global challenges, thereby enriching both academic inquiry and practical policymaking.

## **CONCLUSION**

This article has demonstrated how Constructivism fundamentally challenges and enriches traditional understandings of international security. By shifting the focus from material power and fixed threats to socially constructed identities, norms, and discourses, Constructivism reveals security as a dynamic and contingent concept shaped by collective meaning-making processes. This epistemological reorientation not only broadens the analytical lens but also carries profound normative and policy implications. It encourages a more reflexive, inclusive, and ethically engaged approach to security that prioritizes dialogue, mutual recognition, and

the transformative potential of shared understandings. The Constructivist perspective proves particularly valuable for addressing complex contemporary challenges that elude conventional frameworks, including environmental risks, cyber threats, and migration. It highlights the political nature of threat construction, urging critical scrutiny of whose voices are amplified or marginalized in security debates.

Furthermore, Constructivism underscores the role of international institutions as sites of norm creation and socialization, which shape states' identities and behaviors. Ultimately, this approach invites policymakers and scholars alike to reconsider security policies as socially embedded and historically contingent practices. By fostering pluralism in security conceptualization and methodology, Constructivism paves the way for more adaptive, context-sensitive, and just responses to global insecurity in an increasingly interconnected world.

### **AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS**

Nawid Aria conceptualized the study, conducted the research and analysis, and wrote the manuscript. The author reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT**

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

### **DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT**

All data analyzed in this study are derived from publicly accessible secondary sources, with full citations, DOIs, and URLs provided within the manuscript.

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