The University of Chicago

DeLorean or De-Lithium? Back to the Future:

The Projective Securitization of Critical Minerals for Clean Energy Technologies

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I.   Abstract

In this paper, I explore the questions: Has the securitization of critical minerals succeeded? If yes, what is the character of this securitization? Specifically, I focus on minerals such as lithium and cobalt, which I argue have been securitized in terms of both China's dominance over the supply chain and their use in clean energy technologies to address climate change. I use this case study of critical mineral extraction to argue for a new temporal element to securitization. While most of the securitization literature posits that governments securitize *before* an extraordinary measure has been implemented in order to justify that measure to their domestic publics, I argue that in the process of *projective securitization*, securitization can occur *after* an extraordinary measure has already existed for some time. I demonstrate that critical mineral exploitation in the Global South—which I consider an 'extraordinary measure'—has occurred since at least the 1970s, during which these minerals were not securitized to nearly the same extent as they are today. Through process tracing and a discourse analysis of U.S. government and advocacy group outputs on critical minerals, I demonstrate that as crisis points emerged in which advocacy groups started to call public attention to this exploitation, the U.S. government ramped up its securitizing attempts. I then demonstrate how advocacy groups subsequently changed the character of their critical mineral discourse, accepting the U.S. government's securitizing language. These findings demonstrate that further research should be done on the different temporal elements of securitization.

II.   Introduction:

In June of 2023, Argentinian police violently repressed a peaceful demonstration of indigenous communities protesting the non-consensual appropriation of their traditional lands for

lithium extraction (Barber). The use of rubber bullets, tear gas, and threats of intimidation against these peaceful protestors demonstrates that somehow, lithium has become a security issue: Something particular about lithium succeeded at mobilizing exceptional measures to ensure access to the mineral (Barber). What is striking, however, is that underneath the visibility of this sudden violence lies a more invisible, pervasive form of exploitation that has been ongoing for decades: the exploitation of the Global South to provide raw materials and cheap labor for the Global North. In this paper, I argue that the exploitation of the Global South has become entangled with security discourses, specifically in the critical mineral issue-domain.

This paper seeks to answer the question: Has the securitization of critical minerals succeeded? If yes, *how* have these minerals been securitized, and what is the character of this securitization? Securitization is the process by which actors use specific language and narratives to construct an issue as a threat: If the intended audience accepts the threat-construction as legitimate, the speakers of security can elevate the issue and responses to it above the realm of normal politics (Oels 185). In this paper, I investigate attempts by U.S. actors to construct their lack of access to critical minerals as a threat. The Energy Act of 2020, for example, defines a 'critical mineral' as a mineral essential to the economic or national security of the United States, helping to constitute the disruption of critical mineral supply chains as a threat to U.S. economic and national security ("What Are Critical Materials and Critical Minerals?"). While the term 'critical minerals' has historically been used to refer to a variety of materials deemed necessary for different purposes, I specifically focus on the increasing use of the term to refer to elements, such as lithium and cobalt, that form essential components of clean energy technologies ("Critical Minerals").

In the last few years, critical minerals have become a prominent area of focus for governments and intergovernmental organizations. Lithium and cobalt, for example, have become especially salient as crucial components of electric vehicle batteries (Talens Peiró et al. 986). Current mining is unable to meet demand, which is expected to soar as Western countries push a clean energy transition to limit global temperature rise ("Critical Minerals").

Despite this interest from governments, a scholarly literature on critical mineral securitization has yet to take shape. However, my analysis of critical minerals can make significant contributions to the existing literature on securitization theory. For one, my analysis of critical minerals can help to settle debates in the literature about what constitutes a successful securitization. In this paper, I introduce a new temporal element to securitization: the idea that an extraordinary measure can exist *before* a securitizing attempt has been made. In a process I term *projective securitization*, governments make securitizing moves to prevent already-existing measures from becoming questioned and viewed as extraordinary by their domestic publics. The measures *should* be viewed as extraordinary but are not due to the obscuring effect of the securitizing moves, which helps to explain a puzzle in the literature about why extraordinary measures do not always follow audience acceptance of a threat. This understanding of securitization enables outcomes for securitization that have not been hypothesized in the literature before. While many securitization scholars focus on how successful securitization *elevates* the political salience of an issue, my exploration of projective securitization demonstrates how securitizing moves can *demote* the political salience of an issue, removing it from the realm of political discussion.

Furthermore, understanding the outcomes of successful critical mineral securitization can assist in answering a question central to the climate securitization literature: The moral question

of whether climate change *should* be securitized. This stems from a debate in the broader securitization literature about whether securitization is morally desirable, and if so, in what cases. For example, in her work *The Morality of Security*, Rita Floyd seeks to answer the question of when issues should be securitized, and in what circumstances securitization is morally defensible (McDonald, "The Morality of Security"). Drawing on the increasing scholarly interest on the relationship between security and ethics, Floyd puts forth a framework of "just securitization," ultimately suggesting that contexts do exist in which the extraordinary measures that securitization leads to are morally defensible (McDonald, "The Morality of Security"). In the case of climate change, some scholars believe that a successful securitization would result in climate threats being tackled by military responses, excessive force and surveillance, or punitive sanctions (Oels, Brzoska, Arias, S. Scott). Others believe that a successful securitization would result in greatly increased global cooperation on sustainable development, marshalling more attention and funding to limit global temperature rise (Peters and Mayhew, Warner and Boas, Kurtz, Sahu). Attempting to navigate these moral questions requires understanding more about the *effects* of securitization in the world, not just the securitizing rhetoric itself. These same moral questions can be applied to the securitization of critical minerals, which has the unique effect of *depoliticizing* critical minerals extraction.

To get to the root of these questions, my paper will contain two main parts. First, I will engage with both the broader securitization literature and the climate securitization literature to lay out my framework for securitization, explaining how my theory diverges from both classic and more recent scholarship in terms of understanding possible intended outcomes for securitization. I propose a typology of securitization based on a temporal element that has not been studied in the literature: whether a government has decided to make a securitizing move

before or after an extraordinary measure has already been enacted. Second, I will test the plausibility of my projective securitization theory via process tracing and discourse analysis. My case study will contain three throughlines: critical mineral exploitation in the Global South, NGO responses to the exploitation, and U.S. government securitizing moves around critical minerals. I argue that securitization has succeeded in the critical mineral-issue domain, concluding that my securitization theory warrants further testing and that my temporal typology of securitization should be applied to other issue-areas.

III.   Theory:

I argue that access to critical minerals for clean energy technologies has been successfully securitized. To do so, I draw on the existing climate securitization literature to construct a distinct framework for what counts as a successful securitization. What I consider evidence for a successful securitization is 1) actors' use of security and threat discourses to discuss an issue and 2) the target audience's acceptance of the issue as a security-threat, which 3) enables the implementation of an extraordinary measure in response to that issue. Typically, securitization occurs in that order: security language, audience-acceptance, and measure-enablement, such that the outcome of a successful securitization appears to be an 'extraordinary response.' However, in what I term *projective securitization*, securitization can occur as a response to an *already-existing* extraordinary measure. Under this framework, a securitizing move succeeds when it continues to obscure the extraordinary nature of an already-existing measure, preventing domestic publics from reaching a 'tipping point' in which they question the measure and begin to view it as extraordinary. Thus, the outcome of a successful projective securitization would appear like the

continuation of the status quo, rather than what scholars would perceive as an extraordinary response.

In order to develop this framework, I first explain why my conceptualization of a successful securitization necessarily involves the justification of some measure or policy response, as opposed to traditional securitization theory, which only requires audience acceptance of the threat to consider a securitizing move as having succeeded. Once I establish why the response aspect is necessary, I challenge the climate securitization literature's current over-reliance on an *extraordinary* response as evidence that a securitizing move has succeeded. Contrary to what many scholars in the climate securitization field believe, I argue that an *ordinary* response—what appears to be a failure to elevate and politicize the issue—does not necessarily mean that a securitizing move has failed.

I then highlight that an approach which broadens the temporal aspect of securitization allows scholars to hypothesize categories and outcomes of securitization that have not been hypothesized in the literature before, including my framework for *projective securitization*. This conceptualization of securitization, analyzed in the context of critical minerals access, can help to explain a puzzle often encountered in the climate securitization literature: why sometimes, even when domestic publics accept climate change as a threat, extraordinary government measures to combat climate change seem to fail to materialize.

A. Challenging Traditional Frameworks for Securitization:

To start with, my conception of securitization diverges from classic securitization theory, in which there does not need to be any kind of policy response for something to be considered a successful securitization: the only condition required is audience acceptance of the issue as a

threat (Buzan et al. 26). The securitizing move is conceived as a speech-act, meaning that with the shared understanding of the audience, the words spoken constitute a new reality of an issue as a threat (Buzan et al. 26). Thus, no emergency measure need be adopted in order for a securitizing move to have succeeded and become a speech-act (Buzan et al. 25). Traditional securitization scholars are more interested in the *how* of the securitization process than the *why*, focusing on how rhetoric enables security speakers to convince an audience of a threat, rather than what sort of policy response or outcome the securitization enables.

Unlike these scholars, I argue that securitization is only legible when the securitizing move is understood as an attempt to justify some sort of policy response or measure. My reasoning is that a securitizing move is widely understood in the literature as an *intentional* act, and no intentional act can occur without a motivation behind it. While it is possible for someone to unintentionally or accidentally convince another person that an issue poses a threat, such a case would not be comprehensible as securitization, which must have an intentional component and motivation. The motivation and the intended end of an action are not entirely synonymous, but the motivation for an intentional act always includes accomplishing an end in the service of which that action was undertaken.

Thus, the motivation for which someone undertakes an act often has great influence on how that act takes shape. In the same vein, the motivation for which an actor attempts to securitize—the outcome or measure the actor desires—affects how the securitizing move itself takes form. One's understanding of a securitizing move and an audience's subsequent reaction would thus be incomplete without understanding the outcome or measure the security speaker was attempting to facilitate. One way in which the ends matter is that the particular measure the security speaker seeks to justify can motivate or explain why the speaker has chosen to frame an

issue in security terms. When actors speak, they choose between different sets of framings, and security and threat language does particular rhetorical work in the world that differs from other framings of an issue. Understanding the ends of a securitizing move sheds light on how and in what ways particular situations might be more conducive to security framings than others.

Additionally, an understanding of securitization as an attempt to justify a measure is analytically useful because it helps to answer one of the most salient questions in the securitization literature: whether securitization is morally good or valuable (Floyd). In the case of climate change, for example, many scholars argue that securitization would be morally good, since it would marshall greater attention, urgency, funding, and cooperative action to limit global temperature rise (Oels, Brzoska, Arias, S. Scott). Other scholars, however, argue that securitizing climate change would be harmful and morally wrong, as it could lead to military force, excessive surveillance, or punitive sanctions in the name of reducing carbon emissions (Peters and Mayhew, Warner and Boas, Kurtz, Sahu). Tackling these moral queries around securitization requires an understanding of its *effects*: not just the rhetoric of the securitizing move itself, but also whether the securitization creates practical and physical changes in the world. This framing also allows for the exploration of another ethical complication with securitization: whether outcomes match up with intentions, such as whether the positive intentions of security speakers lead to positive or harmful outcomes.

B. **Over-reliance on Extraordinary Responses:**

More recent securitization scholars, including in the climate securitization literature, share my focus on understanding the response aspect of the securitization process, viewing the response to the constructed threat as integral to the question of whether the securitizing move has

succeeded, as opposed to only focusing on audience acceptance of the threat (McDonald, "The Failed Securitization"). However, I assert that in the climate securitization literature, there has been an over-emphasis on an *extraordinary* response following a securitization as evidence that a securitizing move has succeeded (Nyman, Wilhelmsen, Baysal). In the literature, an extraordinary response to a threat is often seen as evidence that an audience has accepted the securitizing move, used as a proxy for audience acceptance of the threat (McDonald, "The Failed Securitization"). It seems logical that people who accept an issue as a threat—and thus fear the threat—would accept forceful government action to deal with that threat. Governments have often used securitizing moves to justify measures that would otherwise receive backlash from domestic publics, such as a militarized response or putting a significant amount of funding towards an issue. Many scholars thus understand securitization as elevating the political importance of an issue, since threat language invokes a sense of danger, urgency, and fear that can get at people's feeling of personal safety, or even inspire patriotism by putting at stake the physical and cultural integrity of a nation. An issue conceived as a threat becomes more politically important than issues not conceived as threats, justifying attention and funding being diverted from other issues and put towards the threat-issue.

However, what many scholars neglect is that elevating the political salience of an issue is only one of the many motivations for why actors might attempt to securitize the issue. Expecting a securitizing move to result in an extraordinary response would be selecting on the dependent variable, and to study the full range of cases, one must understand actors' alternate motivations for securitization. Ultimately, seeking to maintain the status quo—seeking no change in how an audience views an issue and justifying the current measures the government has taken in response to that issue—is its own valid motivation for a securitizing attempt. *No change*, or what

seems like an *ordinary response*, should be considered a possible desired outcome of securitization or a measure that securitization seeks to justify. Understanding the audience of securitizing moves as dynamic is important for explaining why maintaining the status quo could be a desired outcome of securitization. What audiences consider an "extraordinary response" is subjective and dynamically and socially constructed, subject to contestation and recontestation: Thus, a securitizing move can be intended to prevent an audience from reconceptualizing what it perceives to be an ordinary measure into an extraordinary measure. With this understanding, a successful securitization can be conceived as a securitization that provokes its intended outcome, and if the actor intends no change, then securitization can be considered as having succeeded if there is no change in how the audience views the issue. The security speaker would be using the securitizing move to justify maintaining the current, and thus 'ordinary,' policy response rather than justifying a new, 'extraordinary' policy response.

C. A *Projective* Framework for Securitization:

To make sense of these alternate motivations for securitizing moves, I argue that it is possible for an extraordinary response to an issue to be in place *before* a securitizing move has been attempted. Thus, I introduce a new temporal dimension to securitization theory that has not been previously hypothesized. Using the example of critical minerals access, I argue that an extraordinary measure existed but was not viewed as extraordinary by domestic publics. However, the measure started to become questioned as crisis moments arose, threatening to bring about a tipping point in which the audience reconceptualizes or 'uncovers' the measure as being extraordinary. These crisis moments motivate a securitizing move in order to return the measure

to the realm of not being questioned and thus maintain the audience's perception of the measure as ordinary. I call this process *projective securitization*.

Based on the different temporal aspects of securitization, it would be analytically useful to categorize securitization into three types: Prospective securitization, retrospective securitization, and finally, projective securitization. Prospective securitization describes how most scholars in the climate securitization literature would conceptualize securitization as a whole: Speakers of security seek to justify extraordinary measures they hope to undertake in the short-term or long-term *future*. For example, before tightening border control restrictions, a government might put out rhetoric about the threat of terrorists entering through the border.

Retrospective securitization, on the other hand, would seek to justify a measure undertaken by the security speaker in the *past*. A state that took an extreme action in the past might seek to convince its domestic public that the measure was necessary to combat a threat, attempting to improve its reputation among the current domestic public rather than take full accountability for its past actions. For example, a state that annexed land to increase its territory in the past, when faced with disapproval from the current public, might retrospectively securitize the issue by claiming that the annexation was essential to protect against the existential threat of non-existence.

Projective securitization looks towards both the past and the future: A state would be seeking to prevent a measure that has been unquestioned in the past from becoming questioned in the future. A measure already exists, and the security speaker is projecting past public opinion trends about the measure into the future because it plans on *continuing to undertake* that measure, a key difference from retrospective securitization. I have provided a diagram of each stage of the projective securitization process below, along with diagrams of the other two

categories in this typology for comparison:

Prospective Securitization:
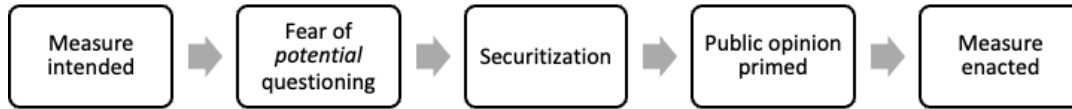
Retrospective Securitization:
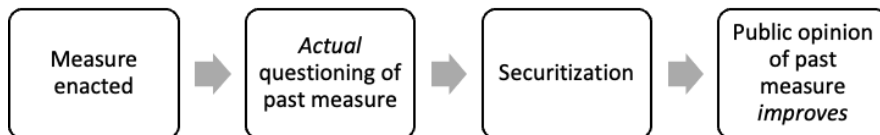
Projective Securitization:

This temporal broadening of securitization—the idea that states might seek to prevent something previously unquestioned from becoming questioned and viewed as extraordinary—yields a unique result compared to other types of securitization, allowing scholars to hypothesize an outcome of securitization that has not yet been discussed in the literature. While most examples of successful securitization in the literature are described as *elevating* the political salience of an issue, a successful projective securitization *demotes* the political salience of an issue, depoliticizing the issue by removing it from the realm of political discussion. The result is that some measures that governments are currently undertaking *should*

be considered extraordinary and excessive, but are not: The extraordinary nature of the measure has been obscured by securitizing moves.

As I have noted before, my proposed temporal dimension of securitization has not been studied in the literature thus far. Salter hints at a temporal element to securitization in his work "Securitization and desecuritization: a dramaturgical analysis of the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority." However, the temporal elements Salter suggests be incorporated into securitization theory are the *duration* of the securitization and the "entropy of the public imagination," or the idea that as a threat seems less pressing to publics over time, they assume that exceptional measures associated with that threat have "lapsed" (324-25). Neither of these temporal elements investigate at what stage a security speaker *decides* to securitize a measure, nor propose the idea that an extraordinary measure can exist *before* a securitizing move has been made (Salter). In her text "Securitsation of Space and Time," Sari Nauman discusses investigating another temporal quality of securitization: how borders are "temporary fictions," and how sovereignty and state are temporal concepts that need "to be maintained and protected through time" (19-21). However, she only discusses how securitization can deal with *potential* threats, or what governments fear will occur, given their uncertainty about the future (Nauman 24). While her theory of securitization is solely future-oriented, my typology of securitization incorporates past and already-existing extraordinary measures, inclusive of what governments might consider to be *actual*, rather than just *potential* threats, as well as *actual*, rather than just *potential*, public questioning about extraordinary measures. Finally, in his 2020 review of the securitization literature, Baysal does point to a potential limitation of securitization theory: the difficulty of determining what practices scholars consider "normal" as opposed to exceptional in their analyses (8-9). However, he claims that the addition of "contextual and audience analysis

to the securitization by Balzacq and other second-generation securitization scholars" has mostly resolved this limitation, making no mention of any temporal dimensions to securitization (Baysal 8-9). He also makes no discussion of when measures *should* morally be considered extraordinary, but are not (Baysal).

Thus, no scholar thus far has suggested studying securitization using this temporal, three-pronged typology. While I have provided brief examples of prospective and retrospective securitization, I explore projective securitization in much greater detail via my analysis of critical minerals exploitation as a case study.

D. Projective Securitization and Critical Minerals:

My assertion that some measures should be considered extraordinary but are not is especially topical in the discussion of critical minerals. The securitization of critical minerals justifies the continued implicit allowance of child labor, exploitation of indigenous people, violation of communities' sovereignty, and conditions of domination in the Global South. These practices of exploitation and domination associated with raw material extraction, while having existed for centuries, should be viewed with moral outrage and seen as 'extraordinary.' However, the Global North has framed disruptions to critical mineral access as a threat, dooming the fight against global warming. The language of speed and urgency associated with meeting critical mineral demand justifies the idea that only professionals and global markets can safely ensure critical mineral supply, removing the issue from political discussion and thus from receiving input from domestic publics and electorates.

The exploitation and domination of the Global South for raw materials extraction has existed for centuries under colonial and imperial world systems, but part of the reason why these

extraordinary measures previously went unquestioned is because a 'global public' had yet to emerge. The emergence of a more global community of states was necessary to constitute a meaningful audience for securitization: Prior to World War I, there existed fewer democracies and fewer citizens were tuned into global events, so fewer reasons existed for governments to securitize threats and justify measures to their domestic audiences. Once a global public began to emerge, states began to use security language to prevent this public from 'uncovering' the true exploitative nature of mining practices. For example, the U.S. government drew up its first list of critical minerals during World War I, asserting that elements such as platinum, nickel, and tin were crucial for the war effort (Nichols). In recent years, the risk of audiences questioning exploitative mining practices has become much more salient due to technologies such as the internet and social media, which have allowed people to become more aware of physically distant issues across borders, contributing to the formation of transnational advocacy networks. The possibility that domestic publics will conceptualize exploitative mining practices as extraordinary and immoral has become even greater in the last decade, as young people have become more tuned into and outspoken about climate change.

In my empirical section, I demonstrate that as crisis points have emerged in which domestic publics and transnational advocacy groups started to question exploitative mining practices, members of the global community of states—especially those of the Global North—began to deploy moves to securitize critical minerals access in terms of climate change. These securitizing moves halted global publics from conceiving of the exploitation of the Global South for critical minerals as extraordinary, given the more prominent weight given to climate change as a security threat.

IV.   **Operationalization of the Theory:**

To support my hypothesis that critical minerals access has been successfully securitized, my empirical analysis must fulfill two conditions:

1) Identify that security speakers (such as state governments and intergovernmental organizations) use discourses of security and threat to discuss critical minerals access

2) Demonstrate audience acceptance of the lack of critical minerals access as a security threat

A. **Identifying Security Discourses:**

To fulfill the first condition, I searched documents for three 'types' of threat and security language related to critical minerals: National security talk, human security talk, and the logic of risk-management. I am not arguing that one type of securitization is more true or correct than the others: Rather, I am claiming that in the issue domain of critical minerals access, actors can express the threat not only in national security terms, but also as couched in the language of human security and of risk management. Since these discourses are all characteristic of securitization in this issue domain, I searched for the presence of all three types in the critical minerals rhetoric of state governments and intergovernmental organizations in order to more fully capture and understand these actors' attempts to securitize critical minerals access.

National Security Talk:

I consider national security talk to consist of security discourses that emphasize threats to a state or a community of states' territorial, cultural, or economic integrity (Oels 191). National

security talk can look like a state framing climate change as a threat because the associated sea level rise risks engulfing the state and ending its very existence, as in the case of Small Island Developing States. Recurrent large-scale natural disasters, such as hurricanes, can also threaten the integrity of a state by destroying its infrastructure and impoverishing it. Alternatively, national security talk can be constituted in the terms of a state's geopolitical enemies. The U.S., for example, can construct China's control over the majority of the critical minerals supply chain as a threat to its national, economic, and energy security (Graham et al. 10).

Human Security Talk:

I consider human security talk to consist of security discourses that couch threats in the terms of people and communities' safety, wellbeing, and livelihoods (Oels 185). States and intergovernmental organizations, for example, can frame an issue as a threat by claiming that it endangers individual people's sense of personal safety, belonging, and fulfillment. In the climate space, these human security discourses often draw on the idea that natural hazards exacerbated by climate change put at stake a community's sustainable development and stability, sometimes leading to violence against individuals, malnutrition, or extreme poverty, any of which might cause individuals to migrate from the affected area.

Risk-Management Logics:

Finally, I consider risk-management logics to consist of security discourses that emphasize threats to the global circulation of capital and commodities: Interruptions to trade and the movement of goods, money, people, technologies, and ideas around the world can be framed as threats. Maintaining an efficient system of circulation minimizes the risk that a disaster will

cut off access to resources deemed necessary and manages the risk that if a disaster does occur, the system can recover quickly. I draw heavily on the sociological security scholars Chris Methmann and Delf Rothe to identify these risk-management discourses as characteristic of securitization, especially in relation to climate change. Domestic publics often view climate change as apocalyptic, unavoidable, and impossible to solve, in part because its potential effects are not fully knowable to humans (Methmann and Rothe 330). Thus, some government actors end up 'managing' climate change not through pre-emption, in which one would pro-actively take large-scale measures to bring about a desired future, but rather through precaution and preparedness (Methmann and Rothe 331). Practices of precaution identify a tipping point for climate change that must be prevented, allowing harms up to that point that must be mitigated (Methmann and Rothe 331). Practices of preparedness do not try to avoid climate disasters, but rather ensure people are resilient and able to cope if they do happen (Methmann and Rothe 331). The maintenance of good global circulation ensures that when government actors operate under the modes of precaution and preparedness, the negative impacts of climate change can be mitigated through the transfer of goods, technology, and know-how to those affected.

Risk-management logics are important to my theory of projective securitization because many scholars assume that securitization can only occur via the *pre-emption* of threats such as climate change, which limits the temporal element of securitization to the future (Nauman). In contrast, the deployment of risk-management logics allows securitization to occur via *preparedness* and *precaution* against threats, both of which allow threats to exist in the space of the present and the past, and which expand the temporal element of securitization to encompass already-existing extraordinary measures.

Another reason I include risk-management logics as characteristic of securitization in this issue domain is because critical minerals have a particular existence as a *commodity*. The minerals undergo several steps in the commodity chain, from extraction, to processing, and to being manufactured into end-products such as electric vehicle batteries and the vehicles themselves. Thus, security speakers often discuss critical minerals in terms of the circulation of investments and the physical movement of the minerals and the products derived from them.

<u>Diagram of the Various 'Expressions' of Securitization</u>

Type	National Security Talk	Human Security Talk	Risk-Management Logics
Definition	Expresses security in terms of threats to a state's territorial, cultural, or economic integrity. Can also apply to a global community of states.	Expresses security in terms of threats to people and communities' safety, wellbeing, and livelihoods. Emphasizes effects on individuals within or across states.	Expresses security in terms of threats to the global flow of capital and commodities. Proper flow allows for faster recovery from economic, social, and natural disasters.
Examples	Small island states describing sea level rise as an existential threat. Europe describing its reliance on Russian natural gas for energy as a security threat. U.S. viewing China's control over critical minerals processing as a geopolitical threat.	Natural hazards can destroy people's homes, forcing them to migrate. Droughts and floods can lead to malnutrition for people who rely on subsistence farming. Competition for scarce resources can increase intra-community violence.	Western countries creating special security zones around ports. Essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic asked to keep supplying goods and services. Making poor business environments in the Global South 'safe' for foreign investment.

B. Determining Audience Acceptance:

The presence of these types of threat and security discourses is necessary but not sufficient evidence to determine whether critical mineral access has been *successfully* securitized: It would only show that securitizing *attempts* have been made. In order to support my claim that the securitization has been successful, I must also fulfill my second condition, demonstrating audience acceptance that the lack of critical minerals access is a threat. The question of audience acceptance poses epistemological challenges because an audience accepting an issue as a threat does not necessarily mean that some change in behavior or policy can be observed. Also, my argument is that securitizing attempts have *obscured* the extraordinary nature of critical minerals exploitation, and an audience is less likely to react to a measure it views as ordinary and unproblematic. Additionally, few, if any, public opinion polls have been conducted on this topic, given that the rise in demand for critical minerals has occurred within the last few years, and much of the general public, at least in the U.S., is not yet aware of the finer details of what critical minerals entail. Thus, in the absence of public opinion polls, I demonstrate audience acceptance by analyzing the discourses of nongovernmental organizations and advocacy groups. These groups serve as a proxy for the security speakers' ultimate target audiences in all types of securitization: domestic publics in the global community of states.

However, I go one step further and argue that in the projective securitization process specifically, NGOs are often not just a useful proxy for audience acceptance, but are also actually part of a *two-tiered* target audience. This is because the projective securitization process involves the justification of an *already-existing* extraordinary measure, and often, the reason that the measure had not been 'questioned' by domestic publics earlier is because it was not initially *visible* to those publics. In the case of critical minerals, for example, the exploitation has been

physically and culturally distant to the U.S. public, occurring mostly in other countries. However, advocacy groups are more likely than other organizations to become agitated and active about instances of exploitation, and due to their informational advantages and networks, they often become aware of humanitarian issues, especially those occurring in other countries, before the general public. Thus, advocacy groups comprise the *first tier* of governments' target audience for securitization because they are poised to make extraordinary measures *visible* and thus politically salient to domestic publics, who comprise the second and final tier of the target audience.

Advocacy groups' role in increasing the visibility of extraordinary measures is salient to government actors because domestic publics perceive advocacy groups to have both expert and moral authority, which means that the general public tends to listen to and respect the opinions voiced by these groups. In other words, advocacy groups tend to be the first movers on issues of exploitation, and their opinions about what is immoral and wrong often trickle down to ordinary publics. Often, advocacy groups actively use attention-raising as a strategy to mobilize domestic publics to pressure their governments on certain issues. Thus, it makes sense for securitizing actors—such as the community of states in the Global North—to also target advocacy groups, and not just their domestic publics, with securitzing moves. Convincing advocacy groups that the lack of critical minerals access is a threat would stop the 'trickling down' process at the source, precluding a tipping point in which domestic publics begin to perceive the exploitation and domination involved in securing access to these minerals as extraordinary measures. In other words, if the second tier of the audience—the domestic public—is not yet aware of the extraordinary measure, then governments' securitizing moves should target the first tier of the audience, advocacy groups. Otherwise, targeting securitizing moves towards the second tier

would only produce more work for security speakers by bringing an issue to the forefront of the domestic public consciousness that was previously obscured and invisible to the domestic public. Doing so would contradict the intended outcome of projected securitization, which is to *demote* the political salience of an issue. When invisibility is a factor in the projective securitization process, I argue that this 'demotion' or continued obfuscation occurs via NGO appeasement.

My approach to determine whether advocacy groups have accepted the lack of access to critical minerals as a threat was two-fold. First, I analyzed whether these advocacy groups used threat and security language when they discuss critical minerals—whether they adopted much of the same national security talk, human security talk, and risk management logic that Global North governments use. Since advocacy groups are not traditional speakers of security, their adoption of security language when they discuss critical minerals would indicate that they have accepted the securitization and view the lack of access to critical minerals as a threat. Finding evidence of security language in the critical minerals rhetoric of both governments and advocacy groups served as the first step to supporting my claim that the securitization of critical minerals has succeeded.

The second step to supporting this hypothesis involved using historical process tracing to establish a stronger temporal link between the securitizing moves and the advocacy groups' acceptance of the threat-construction. I analyzed cases in which crisis points emerged that led advocacy groups to start criticizing the exploitative nature of mineral extraction in the Global South. I then demonstrated how government actors started to proliferate a climate discourse that positioned critical minerals as essential to a clean energy transition, attempting to construct the disruption of critical mineral access as a threat which would doom the fight against the climate

crisis. Subsequently, I showed how after these climate discourses began proliferating, the organizations that had been starting to criticize exploitative minerals extraction lowered the extent of their criticism and even began to adopt the securitizing language themselves. Tracing this process both bolsters my claim that critical minerals have been successfully securitized and provide strong evidence for my theory about how projective securitization plays out.

V.   Research Design:

Since I am putting forth a new, untested theory for how securitization occurs, my case study will consist of a plausibility probe, which will determine whether my theory warrants further and more intensive testing. Rather than following the throughline of a single historical event, I construct a 'hybrid' case study that combines discussion of three main historical trends: exploitation in the South American and Sub-Saharan African critical mineral industries, NGO responses to that exploitation, and U.S. government securitizing moves vis-à-vis both China and climate change. The focus of my case study is therefore on the U.S. role in the critical mineral exploitation of the Global South, as opposed to any critical mineral exploitation occurring within the country. Due to the importance of temporal elements in my projective securitization theory, this plausibility probe will consist primarily of historical process tracing, with time periods corresponding to the stages of projective securitization. Factors such as the extent of securitization and the extent of NGO agitation on critical minerals vary throughout different stages of the historical process tracing. Thus, this process tracing will posit potential causal mechanisms for explaining both critical mineral securitization and the lack of U.S. public unrest on critical mineral exploitation in the Global South.

Additionally, given the importance of speech in the securitization process, my research design also contains discourse analysis embedded into the process tracing. I analyze documents produced during what I consider key moments or turning points in the process tracing. This discourse analysis serves in part to demonstrate that my two conditions for a successful securitization have been met. First, to identify that security speakers use discourses of security and threat to discuss critical minerals access, I analyze public-facing U.S. government outputs that discuss critical minerals, focusing mainly on presidential executive orders, but also including congressional and White House press releases and federal agency publications and websites. I emphasize U.S. presidential outputs because securitization is a public-facing process, and U.S. presidents have high visibility compared to members of Congress or government bureaucrats, giving them the ability to communicate to national and even international audiences if they so choose. Second, to demonstrate audience acceptance of the lack of critical minerals access as a security threat, I analyze NGO outputs about critical mineral exploitation. I focus mainly on Amnesty International, which I consider emblematic of advocacy groups that would become agitated about exploitative mining practices, as it is one of the largest and most well-known NGOs in the human rights space. However, since I set out to demonstrate that *projective* securitization has occurred, and not just that securitization in general has succeeded, my discourse analysis also has a temporal dimension. My research design compares both *pre-securitization* and *post-securiziation* NGO discourses on critical minerals. Focusing on Amnesty International, I demonstrate how the same organization produced very different outputs on critical mineral exploitation before and after the U.S. government deployed securitizing moves around the topic.

I identified relevant public-facing documents through an internet search and by searching U.S. government archives, including the Federal Register and the White House archives. Additionally, I allowed my sample to snowball: When documents I identified referenced other documents or publications, I incorporated those into my analysis, given that the documents build on and 'respond' to each other both historically and in my historical process tracing. Once I identified this set of documents, I began with deductive coding, searching the documents for the presence of certain words, phrases, and themes which I deem relevant to different expressions of security. For example, I identified national security talk through mentions of geopolitics or allusions to China, demonstrated in phrases such as "diversifying supply chains" or "race to the bottom," which reflect U.S. concern about Chinese companies' majority control over processing of critical minerals. For human security talk, I looked for phrases referring to climate harms to individuals and communities, such as "climate refugees," "vulnerable populations," "leaving no one behind," and "resilience, adaptation, and mitigation measures." For the risk-management characteristics of securitization, I searched for phrases similar to "reducing risk," "ensuring reliable supplies," and "ensuring flow of investments," along with key terms such as "price volatility," "trade restrictions," and "supply disruptions" in relation to critical minerals. As I perused documents, I also allowed room for inductive coding, such as by adding to my list or shifting my configurations of categories as I was exposed to new discourses and rhetoric. Additionally, I noticed 'absences' or 'silences' in the discourse, attempting to uncover what was not explicitly being said.

My approach to this project is consciously interpretivist: Rather than attempting to discern an objective 'truth,' my analysis of critical mineral securitization seeks to suggest an

interpretation of this political phenomenon that can generate greater understanding of it. Additionally, I acknowledge that my reading of these documents may be influenced by my positionality. While others may read these documents and historical throughlines differently than I do, my hope is that my exploratory analysis can provide a convincing basis for further testing, during which other researchers can contribute their perspectives and analysis on both the critical mineral issue-domain and my proposed temporal framework for securitization.

VI.   Interpretive Analysis:

A. The Absence and Insufficiency of Public Opinion Polls

While much of the securitization literature relies on public opinion polls as a measure of audience acceptance, this method would be inadequate to address my area of focus due to a lack of available data. After an extensive search on the internet and respected polling organizations such as Pew Research Center, I have found that public opinion polls about critical minerals are limited to mines located within the respondents' own communities or the countries in which they live, and no polls seem to currently exist on the morality of critical mineral exploitation *in other countries*. For example, in 2017, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) surveyed Australians about their attitudes on "how mining takes place in Australia," asking no questions about citizens' opinion on mining exploitation taking place *outside* the country ("Australian Attitudes Toward Mining"). Similarly, a 2023 poll conducted by the Maru Public Opinion finds that 62% of U.S. constituents would encourage "more domestic mining for minerals . . . as a means to decrease . . . reliance on foreign countries" ("Before State of the Union"). Despite the mention of foreign countries, this poll also asks no questions about

the exploitation of the Global South to secure U.S. access to critical minerals, focusing only on attitudes about domestic mining ("Before State of the Union").

Some U.S. and Canadian polls do provide support for public acceptance of mining exploitation *within* each country. For one, a Mining Association of Canada (MAC) poll produced in 2022 finds that 78% of Canadians feel positively towards Canadian mining entities, demonstrating an "increased understanding on the role Canada's mining industry must play in producing the green technologies essential to a low carbon future" ("New Poll Shows Unprecedented Support"). In the U.S., a 2023 academic study involved a poll on public support for a proposed lithium mine in Thacker Pass, Nevada (Uji et al. 1). The study found that while the mine "faces strong opposition from native nations and environmental groups," respondents living closer to the area were actually more likely to support the mine due to the economic development benefits it would attract (Uji et al. 1). However, the authors also found that framing the need for a domestic lithium source as a national security issue, given China's control over the global lithium trade, actually increased public support for the proposed mine, including for respondents located further from the site (Uji et al. 4). These polls help to support my claim that securitization plays a role in shaping public opinion on mining issues, since both the Canadian and U.S. surveys found increased public support for domestic mining when it was framed as key for addressing either climate change or national security issues. Unfortunately, however, none of these polls tackle Western publics' attitudes about critical mineral exploitation in the Global South: The Global South issue is invisible, never put on the table in any way. Visibility has an important role in the critical minerals projective securitization process: Mining exploitation in the Global South has been invisible to Western publics due to physical and cultural distance, but NGO agitation risks making that issue visible to Western publics.

Thus, the lack of public opinion polls on critical mineral exploitation in foreign countries supports my theory that governments have motives to target securitizing moves towards advocacy groups—the actors most likely to become agitated and spread public awareness about a humanitarian issue—to avert a 'tipping point' in which domestic publics begin to largely view the exploitation as an extraordinary response. If the tipping point had already been reached or were closer to being reached, more—if any—public opinion polls on the morality of critical mineral exploitation in foreign countries would exist. My historical process tracing will further bolster my claim that this tipping point has been averted.

B. Historical Process Tracing: Counterfactual and Anticipated Outcomes

I structure my historical process tracing along the lines of two main counterfactuals. The first counterfactual is a potential foil to my argument: the idea that access to critical minerals may have been securitized all along, from the time the minerals first started being mined in the Global South. This claim would call into question the temporal element of my projective securitization theory, since projective securitization relies on securitzing moves emerging *after* an extraordinary measure already exists. However, in my process tracing, I show that critical minerals were not in fact securitized to nearly the same extent, if at all, before the emergence of indigenous and rural rights discourses in the early 2000s. I demonstrate how during the 1990s, even while mining exploitation was occurring, critical minerals were not securitized under the Clinton administration vis-à-vis China. However, securitizing moves emerged under the Obama administration, subsequent to landmark indigenous rights wins that risked bringing mining exploitation to the forefront of the public consciousness. Finally, I will illustrate how securitization of the minerals vis-à-vis China ramped up during the Trump and Biden

administrations, following the peak of NGO agitation around critical mineral exploitation in 2016. Demonstrating how the minerals were *not* securitized from the start, unlike what this counterfactual posits, will support both the temporal and motivational elements of my projective securitization theory.

While this first counterfactual bolsters the temporal element of my securitization framework, the second counterfactual I employ supports the 'audience-acceptance' aspect of my argument. This second counterfactual draws on the idea of securitization as causing a diversion from a status quo trajectory. I argue that if NGO discourse about critical mineral exploitation had been left unchanged, it would have proceeded towards direct appeals to the public, such as for changes in consumer lifestyles or boycotts of companies complicit in the exploitation. However, securitization shifted the trajectory, flattening it to prevent the expected path towards more public unrest about critical mineral exploitation. NGO acceptance of critical mineral securitization prevented these public-oriented calls to action from emerging, keeping NGO agitation limited to appeals for companies and governments to 'do better.' Furthermore, another aspect of this counterfactual is that if the U.S. government had not employed securitizing moves around critical minerals, the expected trajectory would have been for transnational advocacy organizations to grow ever-more critical of the 'essentiality' of these minerals.

In contrast to this second counterfactual, my projective securitization theory predicts that post-securitization, advocacy groups that had once questioned the 'essentiality' of critical minerals would change their attitudes and no longer question the need for minerals such as lithium. What I will show in my process tracing is that in the aftermath of the U.S. government's securitizing moves, advocacy groups not only stopped questioning the need for the critical

minerals themselves, but they also stopped using harsh language against U.S. corporations complicit in the mining exploitation, demonstrating that they 'took up' the securitization.

C. The 'Process' of Critical Minerals Securitization

I organize my analysis into four parts, based roughly on four time periods corresponding to the stages of projective securitization.

The first section will cover the first stage of the projective securitization process, in which a government actor has enacted a measure but has not yet securitized it, since during this time period, the measure has not yet drawn attention from domestic publics. In this section, I will demonstrate that from the 1970s to around 2007, exploitative mining practices in the Global South were occurring—comprising an already-existing extraordinary measure—but the U.S. government had not yet made major moves to securitize critical minerals, especially not vis-à-vis China.

The second section of the process tracing will primarily cover the 'questioning' stage of the projective securitization process, in which 'crisis points' arise that increase visibility of the already-existing measure, risking a tipping point in which domestic publics reconceptualize the already-existing measure as 'extraordinary' and politically salient. This section, covering the time period from around 2007 to 2016, will discuss how early-2000s indigenous and rural rights movements, a 2010 mining accident in Chile, and the eruption of NGO agitation around critical mineral exploitation in 2016 threatened to bring about a domestic 'tipping point.'

Next, the third section of the process tracing, covering around 2017 to the present, will depict the actual 'securitization' stage of the projective securitization framework. I will argue that the U.S. government, motivated to keep its complicity in critical mineral exploitation

unquestioned and ongoing, sought to resolve the 'crisis of questioning' by deploying moves to securitize critical minerals, especially vis-à-vis the threats of China and anthropogenic climate change. This third section of my process tracing will also demonstrate that the first condition for a successful securitization has been met: that security speakers, U.S. government agents in particular, have used discourses of security and threat to discuss critical minerals access.

Finally, the fourth stage of my process tracing will both cover the 'stabilization' stage of projective securitization and illustrate how the second condition for a successful securitization—audience acceptance of the threat construction—has been met. In this section, I analyze NGO outputs from 2019 to 2023 to demonstrate how following the U.S. government's securitizing moves, the advocacy groups that had been most critical about mining exploitation started to adopt language about the essentiality of critical minerals to address climate change. Additionally, the language that humanitarian organizations used to discuss companies complicit in the exploitation became much less severe following the U.S. government's securitizing moves. In arguing that public opinion has 'stabilized' via NGO appeasement, I make the case that this example of projective securitization has succeeded, and that without the securitization, there would currently be much more U.S. public unrest about critical mineral exploitation.

1) A 'Sturdy' Status Quo, 1970s—2007

To start with, this first section of my process tracing has two objectives. First, it will use the Lithium Triangle as a case study to illustrate that the exploitation of the Global South for critical minerals, the 'extraordinary measure' in this example of projective securitization, has existed for decades. Second, to bolster the temporal element of my projective securitization theory, this section of the analysis will address the counterfactual idea that critical minerals have

been securitized all along, demonstrating, in contrast, that the Clinton administration did not securitize critical minerals vis-à-vis China during this time period. Overall, this section will establish the baseline critical minerals discourse that existed from the 1970s to around 2010, when it would become disrupted by NGO agitation and securitizing attempts.

A) Exploitation during the Status Quo

First, I will demonstrate how exploitation in the Latin American critical minerals industry has existed since the industry first emerged around the 1970s: In other words, as in the framework for projective securitization, the 'extraordinary measure' existed *before* Western governments started to deploy securitizing moves.

For one, mining exploitation already existed when critical minerals were more heavily mined in the U.S. During the 1970s, the U.S. began to offshore its mining sector precisely due to public anger about the pollution of communities that neighbored mines (Bazilian and Lomax). Once this exploitation was exported to other countries, it lost its visibility to the majority of the U.S. public, allowing the exploitation of the Global South to occur mostly unquestioned during this time period. In South America specifically, most lithium mining has been concentrated within the Lithium Triangle, a region spanning salt flats in Chile, Argentina, and Bolivia which contains over half of the world's lithium reserves (Giglio 48). In Chile, lithium exploration began in 1969 with a survey of the Salar de Atacama, the country's largest salt flat, from which large-scale lithium production began in 1984 (Cabello 1). Argentina initiated large-scale lithium production soon after Chile, during the 1990s (Voskoboynik and Andreucci 794). Within the Lithium Triangle, lithium ions are located in brines, bodies of water with high salt concentrations due to groundwater evaporation (Talens Peiró et al. 987). Extracting the lithium requires

pumping the brine fluid upward "from underneath the salt crust" into evaporation pools, in which the sun evaporates away the water and leaves behind a sludge of elements to be processed into lithium carbonate (Barandiarán 382).

This entire process is incredibly damaging to the indigenous communities who view water as sacred and life-giving and rely on the brines for sustenance (Jerez et al. 9). For example, because the Chilean government legally recognizes brines as "static mineral deposits" rather than fluid bodies of water, mining companies are not required to report how much saline water they use up during the lithium extraction process (Jerez et al. 6). Requiring mining companies to report only their fresh water expenses obscures the "real water impact of lithium extraction:" For example, in 2021, lithium companies were extracting over two million liters of fresh and saline water a day from the Salar de Atacama (Jerez et al. 6-7). Removing large amounts of brine fluid risks "lowering the groundwater level" and causing this region's wetlands and lagoons to disappear, since it is groundwater, and not rain, that sustains them (Anlauf 172). The reduction of the wetlands is disastrous for many indigenous communities in the Lithium Triangle, since they rely on the water ecosystem for traditional agricultural and pastoral activities that they have been practicing for thousands of years and that they view as crucial to their sovereignty and identities (Anlauf 172). Even after the Lithium Triangle countries have granted ancestral territorial rights to their indigenous communities, lithium projects often continue to violate the sovereignty and consent of indigenous communities, with many companies failing to do proper consultation before mining projects or failing to share the results of their assessment reports on how the projects might impact communities' livelihoods and environment (Liu and Agusdinata 10).

While these issues continue to exist today, the start of lithium exploration in Potosí, Bolivia provides a clear example of how this type of exploitation—the extraordinary measure

which I argue would later require obfuscation and justification through securitizing moves—existed during the 1990s, *before* Western governments deployed moves to securitize critical minerals. Prior to the start of lithium extraction, communities in Potosí—the poorest department in Bolivia—would remove the salt crust from the Uyuni salt flat to produce a substance called ulexite, which they sold for use in glass, ceramics, and fertilizers as a key source of income (Sanchez-Lopez 1329). However, in 1990, the Bolivian government provided the Lithium Corporation of America (Lithco), a U.S. company, "exclusive rights of access and management" to the salt flat (Sanchez-Lopez 1329-30). This move led to pushback from community members over their loss of land, the pollution of their environment, and the disruption of their cooperative, locally-organized sources of income (Sanchez-Lopez 1334). While Lithco planned to invest $46 million in the Salar de Uyuni, "hunger strikes and massive protests forced the company out" (Lerner).

Despite Lithco and the Bolivian government attempting a clear violation of indigenous sovereignty, there seems to have been little response from international nongovernmental organizations or transnational advocacy groups. A New York Times article from May 1990 describes these events but makes no mention of any transnational advocacy groups supporting the protests (Christian). Additionally, Ann Chaplin's work on "the development of social organization in Bolivia" at no point mentions transnational advocacy groups as supporting, whether through fundraising or attention-raising, the indigenous and rural organizations within Bolivia whose social movements led to the country's first indigenous president being elected in 2006 (Chaplin 346). Thus, this overview of the start of lithium mining in South America, with Bolivia in particular as an illustrative example, helps to establish that although critical minerals exploitation—the 'extraordinary measure' I seek to understand—was occuring from the 1970s to

the early 2000s, it did not evoke global public outrage at the time. This mining exploitation in South America was less visible to U.S. publics because it was occuring outside the U.S., and the exploitation drew little if any agitation from transnational advocacy groups that might have risked bringing awareness of the issue to U.S. publics.

A) Absence of Securitization during the Status Quo

I have demonstrated that the extraordinary measure in my projective securitization case study—mining exploitation—has existed since the critical minerals industry began in South America. In this section, I will now show that during the time period of around 1970-2007, despite the existence of this exploitation, critical minerals access was *not* securitized. Thus, I will illustrate how in the process of projective securitization that I describe, the extraordinary measure exists *before* actors attempt to make securitizing moves. This section bolsters my theory by countering the claim that critical minerals were securitized from the start, or in other words, that critical minerals were securitized before or during the emergence of the extraordinary measure, rather than afterwards. Unlike what this counterfactual posits, I will show that critical mineral securitization, especially in regards to China, did not occur prior to the emergence of the extraordinary measure, strengthening my claim that a temporal dimension is analytically useful for understanding different types of securitization.

To start with, I will acknowledge a minor potential caveat in my process tracing: During this time period, critical minerals may have faced some securitizing attempts in relation to South Africa. For example, in 1989, President George H.W. Bush responded to public discontent about U.S. reliance on South African minerals with language that somewhat resembled securitization.

In a June 1989 Statement of Administration Policy, Bush states that his administration opposes

the enactment of a bill that would provide $30 million for a research program on critical minerals

because it would duplicate work the Department of the Interior was already doing, including

"analyzing U.S. dependency on critical materials from South Africa," as required by the

"Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act" (Bush thing). Highlighting U.S. "dependency" on another

country for critical minerals appears similar to the national security talk through which actors

often convey securitizing moves. However, what the U.S. public brought into question that led to

this 'dependency' talk was not any sort of *mining* exploitation, but South Africa's apartheid

political system, which does not have to do with the physical activity of the mining itself.

Starting in the 1950s, transnational anti-apartheid activists "promoted sanctions in almost every

international organization and state," and by the mid-1980s, they succeeded in getting the U.S.

public to adopt the cause and pressure the U.S. government to support racial equality in South

Africa (Klotz 458-59). This focus on apartheid poses a contrast to how later on, transnational

advocacy groups began to agitate about the mining exploitation itself, rather than what political

systems or racial inequalities producer countries have, which are unrelated to the mining process.

Additionally, it is important to clarify that framing critical minerals as important to U.S. strategic

interests is relatively weak compared to framing the lack of access to these minerals as an actual

threat to national security: The U.S. government does not perceive South Africa as a national

security threat to nearly the same extent as China. Therefore, despite this potential small caveat

in my process tracing, I can still demonstrate how during this time period, critical minerals were

for the most part *not yet* securitized, bolstering my claim that in projective securitization, the

securitizing move occurs *after* the extraordinary measure has already emerged, not before.

Now that I have acknowledged the South Africa caveat, I will describe how following the Bush administration, the Clinton administration notably did not securitize critical minerals access vis-à-vis China, posing a major contrast to the pervasive national security talk surrounding critical minerals that has been occurring in more recent years. While recent administrations have focused on diverting critical mineral supply chains away from China, during the 1990s, the Clinton administration took actions that allowed China to obtain greater control over the critical minerals supply chain: Thus, the U.S. government did not take opportunities to securitize critical mineral in national security terms at this time. For example, in 1995, a consortium called the Sextant Group, containing companies owned in part by the Chinese government, sought to purchase a General Motors subsidiary called Magnequench (Golomb). At the time, Magnequench refined rare earth elements (REEs), a type of critical mineral, into permanent magnets used in a variety of U.S. industries and consumer electronics (Golomb). The Clinton administration could have chosen to prevent the sale under a 1988 federal law, which grants the president the power to block transactions between foreign-owned and American companies if "'there is credible evidence that . . . . the foreign interest exercising control might take action that threatens to impair national security'" (Golomb). The Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, a federal agency under the Clinton's administration's control, did not find such evidence, allowing the sale to go through in 1995 (Golomb). Interestingly, while China already had ample domestic access to raw REEs at this point, it did not yet have the "technical expertise" to process or refine them into permanent magnets, which control over Magnequench could provide to the Chinese government (Golomb). The Clinton Administration's lack of national security talk at this point is thus striking, especially in comparison to the securitizing moves that later administrations would make regarding Chinese control over critical minerals.

While the Clinton administration may have had its own motivations for increasing trade with China, it is significant that at the same time that it allowed China entry into the permanent magnet market, the administration also enabled U.S. access to REEs to decrease. In 1995, the Clinton administration shut down the U.S. Bureau of Mines, "which had been the leading global player in the research and development" of REEs (Golomb). That same year, the Clinton administration remained silent as Sexton shut down Magnequench operations in Indiana and transferred them to a factory located within China (Golomb). Additionally, in 1998, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), under Clinton, began seeking legal action against the Mountain Pass California Mine (MPCM) because its existence threatened an endangered species (Golomb). MPCM, which contained an enormous quantity of REEs, was forced to shut down its operations "after spending millions of dollars attempting to comply with BLM's demands" (Golomb). This caused the U.S. to lose further access to critical minerals supply at the same time that China was establishing its monopoly (Golomb). The Clinton administration's lack of action to prevent China from attaining an REE monopoly is a strong signal that it did not use securitizing language around China and critical minerals at this time, in contrast to the Trump and Biden administrations in more recent years.

The Clinton administration's lack of securitizing language surrounding China during this time period is notable in part because U.S. officials had ample opportunity to securitize critical minerals if they had wanted to. For example, although clean energy technologies were not well-developed at the time, lithium was still a crucial component of lithium-ion batteries, which were launched during the 1990s and incorporated into the majority of consumer electronics (Voskoboynik and Andreucci 793). Due to lithium's energy-dense and highly conducive internal

chemistry, batteries containing lithium in their cathodes are faster and more efficient at recharging electricity than those using other metals, and demand for lithium-ion batteries increased greatly during the 1990s (Voskoboynik and Andreucci 793). Thus, U.S. officials could have securitized lithium and other critical minerals along economic lines, framing these minerals as essential to the technologies that keep the U.S. economy running, especially in competition with China's growing economy. However, U.S. officials did not take the opportunity to securitize lithium or other critical minerals because they did not need to: They could simply obtain the minerals from elsewhere, such as from the Lithium Triangle, in which production had already begun by the mid 1990s. Additionally, U.S. officials did not need to securitize critical minerals because the domestic public did not take notice of mining-related exploitation or environmental injustices in Latin America at the time, in large part because these injustices were not made visible to them by transnational advocacy groups. Transnational anti-apartheid activists chose to make racial injustices visible to the U.S. public —which is a noble and worthy goal—but no activist groups at this point in time chose to take up the cause of mining injustices.

Evidently, a *motivational* factor is important for explaining why actors securitize the same issue in some instances and not others. In the case of projective securitization, I argue that the motivational factor is the emergence of crisis moments which could lead domestic publics to start questioning the previously unquestioned exploitation, risking that they uncover the 'ordinary' measure as being in reality an extraordinary measure and moral issue.

2) 'Cracks' Start to Form: 2007-2016

In the previous section, I demonstrated how during the 1970s to the early 2000s, mining exploitation was occurring but received little attention from transnational advocacy groups; additionally, the critical minerals issue-domain had not been securitized, especially not in

relation to China. I make the argument that Western actors did not attempt to securitize critical minerals at this time precisely because there existed little risk that transnational advocacy groups would bring mining exploitation to the public attention. However, in this section of my process tracing, I will demonstrate how leading up to 2010 and peaking in 2016, crisis points started to emerge in which advocacy groups did become agitated about critical minerals exploitation, risking that they would amplify and make visible the exploitation to Western publics. This section thus illustrates a key part of my projective securitization framework: the questioning stage, which motivates actors to securitize an issue because they fear that public questioning of a measure will lead to a tipping point in which audiences reconceptualize that previously 'ordinary,' 'unknown,' or 'unquestioned' measure into an extraordinary and immoral measure.

A) Emerging Global Public Awareness

I argue that in the critical minerals issue-domain, the questioning stage in the projective securitization process arose during the early 2000s, when global public awareness about indigenous and rural issues began to increase, providing a basis through which Western domestic publics could become more informed about mining-related issues.

To start with, a series of wins for indigenous and rural communities, alongside increased participation in obtaining these wins by transnational advocacy groups, threatened to bring mining issues to the forefront of the global public consciousness. For one, in 2007, the UN General Assembly adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), a resolution which emphasized "a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of indigenous peoples" ("Indigenous Peoples"). Additionally, in 2008, an international farmers' organization called La Via Campesina presented

their "Declaration of Rights of Peasants – Women and Men" to the United Nations Human Rights Council, calling for the rights of peasants and rural workers to "land, seeds, biodiversity, local markets," and social justice, such as improved livelihoods and food sovereignty ("UN Human Rights Council"). The final text—the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (UNDROP), would be adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2018 ("UN Human Rights Council"). Importantly, the negotiations, alongside La Via Campesina's initial proposal to the Human Rights Council, occurred "with the support of civil society groups like CETIM and FIAN International," following "several rounds of international consultation" ("UN Human Rights Council"). This example helps to illustrate how transnational advocacy organizations are key to amplifying social justice issues to the global public: Landmark wins for indigenous and rural issues in key international forums such as the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly were made possible because transnational advocacy organizations started to take up more local indigenous and rural causes, bringing them to the international sphere. For example, as the Chaplin article demonstrates, prior to 2006, there seems to have been little transnational advocacy group involvement in Bolivia: Social and political movements during the 1980s and 1990s comprised primarily "localized expressions of . . . . indigenous and *campesino* dissent" (Chaplin 352). However, in 2008, the negotiations on the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants with the UNHCR were actually led by the Bolivian government in collaboration with La Via Campesina, demonstrating that transnational advocacy groups had started bringing these subnational issues to international visibility ("The Rights of Peasants"). These early 2000's indigenous and rural wins were not directly motivated by or related to exploitation in the critical minerals industry. However, since mining issues tend to disproportionately affect indigenous, rural, and other traditionally marginalized communities, I argue that these indigenous and rural

victories increased the risk that Western publics would start to become aware of and question the morality of critical mineral exploitation.

A more direct example of a rise in global awareness around mining exploitation in specific, as opposed to other types of indigenous or rural issues, emerged in Chile in 2010. That year, a mine collapse trapped 33 Chilean miners inside a mountain for 69 days, and the subsequent rescue mission drew widespread international attention (Barrionuevo). This incident drew attention from ordinary publics, not just political elites or organized advocacy groups. For example, following their rescue, the miners became "international celebrities," receiving free iPod touches from Apple, offers from Manchester United and Real Madrid to visit their stadiums, and invitations to visit Graceland and vacation in Greece and Disney World: publicity stunts which would have brought the mine collapse to the attention of ordinary citizens (Barrionuevo). Additionally, a few years later, in 2015, a film about the incident—starring Antonio Banderas—was released in U.S. theaters (A. Scott). Although this international attention resulting from this crisis did not coalesce around critical mineral exploitation in particular, the miners were extracting copper, a critical mineral, in the Atacama region of Chile, which is also where the country's lithium-rich salt flats lie (Barrionuevo). Additionally, the mine collapse signaled incredibly unsafe labor conditions in Chilean mines to a global public, making an issue that was physically distant and once invisible to Global North publics suddenly visible. This new visibility of labor conditions increased the risk that international audiences or transnational advocacy groups would turn their attention to other mining-related exploitation, including the environmental degradation and the violation of indigenous sovereignty that had existed, previously unquestioned, since critical mineral exploitation began in the Lithium Triangle. I

argue that this risk or fear of public 'questioning'—the second stage in the projective securitization process—helps to explain the subsequent rise of securitizing attempts around critical minerals made by the U.S. government.

B) First Steps Toward Securitization

Following this emerging public awareness around indigenous and mining issues in the period leading up to 2010, the U.S. government made its first steps towards critical mineral securitization vis-à-vis China. These securitizing attempts did not occur with nearly the same intensity as the securitizing moves that would follow the peak of NGO agitation in 2016, which I discuss in the next section my princess tracing. However, I argue that it is crucial to understand these initial securitizing attempts both in the context of rising global awareness about mining conditions and as juxtaposed to the absence of critical mineral securitization under the Clinton Administration.

Securitizing attempts around Chinese influence in the critical minerals space began during Obama's first term. In December 2010, under the Obama administration, the Department of Energy released its first *Critical Materials Strategy* report, which "examines the role of rare earth metals and other materials in the clean energy economy" (Bauer 6). This report represents a key shift forward in U.S. government attempts to securitize critical minerals: It notes that "more than 95% of current production capacity for rare earth metals is currently in China," asserting that the concentration of production in one or a few supplier countries such as China could create "risks for global markets" or "geopolitical dynamics" that might affect other U.S. strategic interests (Bauer 12). Here, the report employs risk-management logics such as "supply-demand mismatches" to securitize critical minerals vis-à-vis China, a key contrast from the Clinton

administration's earlier lack of securitizing attempts concerning Chinese access to critical minerals (Bauer 12).

In 2012, only a couple years after this DOE report was released, the House passed the National Strategic and Critical Minerals Production Act, which a Natural Resources Committee press release describes as a bill to "allow the U.S. to more efficiently develop our Nation's strategic and critical minerals" ("House Passes"). The release defines these minerals as vital to U.S. "economic competitiveness and national security," describing the U.S. as dependent on foreign countries such as China for the minerals, including 100% of its REE supply ("House Passes"). National security talk and risk-management logics are both present in the publicity surrounding the bill: The release claims that without critical minerals, entire sectors of the U.S. economy, including medical care and national defense, will be put at risk, "jeopardizing . . . [U.S.] . . . national security" ("House Passes").

Additionally, in August of 2014, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy released a request for information (RFI) "soliciting feedback from industry and other stakeholders" to help inform "anticipated future demand for critical materials" (Wadia). A White House blog announcing the RFI contains instances of securitizing language, mostly appearing as risk-management logics. For one, the announcement describes critical minerals as essential for U.S. economic security, using the specific term "safeguard"—which evokes the idea of precautionary defense from a potential threat—when it states that greater data on expected demand for these minerals is key for "safeguarding . . . the American economy for the future" (Wadia). Additionally, the release asserts that the "rapid expansion of materials-intensive industries," such as the clean energy industry, puts critical minerals "at risk of unpredictable moments of short supply" (Wadia). This terminology, "unpredictable moments of short supply,"

helps to frame the lack of access to critical minerals as a security threat to the U.S. economy (Wadia). Furthermore, the announcement explains that in response to this 'threat,' the White House is developing an "early warning" system to provide policymakers with "earlier awareness" about which minerals U.S. industries view as necessary for the economy (Wadia). This early warning system, characteristic of risk-management logics, would bolster policymakers' "ability to plan for the future and to ensure continued growth," or in other words, help maintain the flow of capital and commodities viewed as necessary to sustain U.S. national security (Wadia).

While these early to mid-2010's securitizing moves concerning critical minerals pose a significant contrast to the absence of securitization during the Clinton years, they would ramp up and become more intense, especially in relation to China, following the peak of NGO agitation in 2016. This increased agitation by transnational advocacy organizations, which I discuss next, ties back to and exacerbates the risk of 'questioning' that emerged during the early 2000's indigenous and rural movements.

C) The Rise of NGO Agitation

Earlier indigenous and rural rights movements did not call into question mining exploitation as a specific and discrete topic. In contrast, in the mid-2010's, transnational advocacy groups did begin pointing to mining exploitation in particular as a key humanitarian issue. I argue that this phenomenon comprised a more intense 'crisis of questioning' for Western governments, which feared that if NGOs were to bring awareness of mining exploitation to their domestic publics, these governments would be unable to continue practicing the extraordinary measure—implicit allowance of indigenous exploitation, for example—that had existed

unquestioned in the past. Within the projective securitization process, it is the emergence of crisis points around an extraordinary measure which *had already existed* that I argue motivates the securitizing move. Later on, this securitizing language would get 'taken up' by advocacy groups and significantly change the character of their outputs regarding critical mineral exploitation. First, however, I will describe the NGO discourse around mining exploitation that emerged in 2016.

A key turning point which brought NGO attention towards critical mineral exploitation occurred in January of 2016, when Amnesty International and African Resources Watch (Afrewatch) released a watershed report on human rights abuses occurring in the cobalt mining industry of the Democratic Republic of the Congo ("Democratic Republic of Congo"). The report details how the cobalt, which is also used in lithium-ion batteries for consumer electronics, is extracted by "artisanal miners, including thousands of children," who work in hand-dug, poorly-ventilated underground tunnels at a high-risk for accidents ("Democratic Republic of Congo"). These exploitative mining practices began during the 1990s, but even in 2016, artisanal miners and children lacked basic protective equipment, thus facing the risk of "potentially fatal health effects" such as lung or skin diseases due to prolonged cobalt exposure ("Democratic Republic of Congo").

Importantly, the report names and shames specific companies, including Sony, Samsung, Microsoft, and Apple, for failing to ensure that their products do not use cobalt mined via child labor under these harmful conditions ("Exposed: Child Labour"). It uses justifiably harsh language to discuss the companies involved, asserting that these multinationals, "failing to do basic checks," have not done their "due diligence" to investigate the conditions under which the

cobalt they use is extracted ("Exposed: Child Labour"). Additionally, the report urges these companies to "take corrective measures" in order "to remediate the harm suffered by the people affected" ("Democratic Republic of Congo"). Comments that Amnesty International representatives have made about the report also reflect a harsh tone: For example, Amnesty researcher Mark Dummett depicts companies as hypocritical when he asserts that "the glamourous shop displays and marketing of state of the art technologies are a stark contrast to the children carrying bags of rocks" ("Exposed: Child Labour"). Not only does he accuse these companies of benefitting from human rights abuses and profiting "from misery," but he also calls into question their credibility, challenging their empty claims about having zero tolerance for child labor as "not worth the paper" they are written on and stating that "companies whose global profits total $125 billion cannot credibly claim that they are unable to check where key minerals in their productions come from" ("Exposed: Child Labour"). This language poses a major contrast to the much friendlier tone that Amnesty would take towards multinationals in its 2019 and 2021 campaigns, which I will analyze in section four of my process tracing. Additionally, it is worth noting that at no point does the 2016 report refer to cobalt as a 'critical' mineral, nor does it refer to cobalt as essential for combatting any sort of security issue ("Exposed: Child Labour"). This aspect also poses a key contrast to the Amnesty outputs I will analyze in the last section of my process tracing, which I will argue do adopt securitizing language around critical minerals, unlike this 2016 report.

Another notable aspect of this watershed Amnesty report is that it led other nongovernmental organizations to start taking notice of critical mineral exploitation. Although the Washington Post is not an advocacy group, following the report's release in January of 2016,

the media organization published stories about critical mineral exploitation near the end of that year. First, the Washington Post released an article on cobalt mining exploitation in the DRC in September of 2016, detailing many of the same human rights abuses mentioned in the Amnesty International and Afrewatch Report (Frankel). A few months later, in December of 2016, it published a story detailing the land exploitation and water shortage risk associated with critical mineral extraction in the Lithium Triangle, asserting that the tech world has left indigenous people poor by taking "lithium from under their feet" (Frankel and Whoriskey). These Washington Post articles demonstrate that agitation about critical mineral exploitation sparked by advocacy groups began spreading into more mainstream media, which can reach a greater number and variety of U.S. constituents compared to traditional advocacy groups alone.

Ultimately, I argue that this rise of NGO 'questioning' and their investigations into cobalt and lithium exploitation, which implicated U.S. companies, served as a crisis point for the U.S. government: Given that transnational advocacy groups often achieve their aims by raising awareness among domestic publics, which can then pressure their respective governments, this 'ramping up' of NGO agitation around 2016 led to greater fear of reaching a 'tipping point' in which U.S. publics reconceptualize a measure once obscured or considered ordinary as extraordinary. In the next section of my process tracing, I will demonstrate how following these crisis points, the U.S. government ramped up securitizing narratives around critical minerals in order to enable the continuation of the status quo: U.S. complicity in the exploitation and domination of the Global South for minerals. Ultimately, these securitizing moves—the third step of the projective securitization framework—serve the end goal of the projective

securitization process: enabling the already-existing extraordinary measure to *continue* to be enacted into the future.

3) A 'Refined,' Ramped-Up Response: 2017-Present

In this section, I demonstrate how subsequent to the eruption of NGO agitation around critical mineral exploitation in 2016, the U.S. government began to ramp up its mid-2010's securitizing attempts that had followed the growing public consciousness of indigenous and rural movements. I stake the claim that the U.S. government's securitizing moves should be read as an attempt to resolve the 'questioning crisis' by preventing NGO agitation from spreading to the general public, precluding a tipping point at which critical mineral exploitation becomes politically salient to ordinary U.S. constituents. In other words, I claim that the U.S. employed the securitization of critical minerals to enable its continued, unquestioned complicity in critical mineral exploitation: the already-existing extraordinary measure it seeks to continue to enact via securitization.

I will demonstrate empirical evidence that the projective securitization attempts originating under the Obama administration continued under the Trump and Biden administrations. It is not surprising that these securitizing attempts continued across administrations with different ideologies, as national security language tends to appeal to constituents regardless of ideology, making up part of the reason why governments choose a 'security' framing of issues over other potential framings of issues. Another reason it makes sense for projective securitization to continue across administrations, regardless of political leaning, is that the threat construction is used to *remove* an issue from political discussion: in this case, precluding critical minerals from becoming politically salient to U.S. constituents. This

demotion of political salience benefits government elites no matter their ideology by shielding them from public pressure to change their behaviors.

In order to accomplish this shielding, the Trump and Biden administrations, similar to the Obama administration, have based the majority of their securitizing narratives around China, constructing U.S. dependence on Chinese supply chains for critical minerals access as a national security threat. I will demonstrate how this threat-construction poses a stark contrast to the absence of securitizing moves regarding Chinese access to critical minerals under the Clinton administration, which was in place *before* critical mineral exploitation started to come into question by transnational advocacy groups.

A) The Trump Administration

Following the eruption of NGO agitation in 2016, securitizing narratives around critical minerals ramped up under the Trump administration. First, in December of 2017, Trump ordered the Departments of Commerce, Defense, Agriculture, Energy, and the Interior to create a federal "strategy to reduce the Nation's reliance on critical minerals" (Trump, Executive Order 13817). In this executive order, Trump asserts that U.S. dependence on "foreign sources" for its critical minerals "creates a strategic vulnerability for both its economy and military to adverse foreign government action," as well as vulnerability to other events such as natural disasters that could "disrupt supply" of the minerals (Trump, Executive Order 13817). The direct mention of potential *adverse* action by foreign governments is much stronger, more threat-evoking language than the previous lack of securitization during the Clinton administration and even the national security talk found under the Obama administration, which was phrased in softer terms such as 'reliance' and 'geopolitical dynamics' rather than directly referencing adverse action.

Additionally, another mention of national security talk in this executive order is its assertion that

the U.S. Armed Forces "are among the Nation's most significant consumers of critical minerals,"

justifying the executive order's claim that securing access to these minerals is necessary not only

to improve the balance of trade, but also U.S. national security (Trump, Executive Order 13817).

This evidence of more intense and threat-evoking security language than under the Obama

administration, including direct mentions to 'adverse action' and the U.S. Armed Forces, helps to

bolster my claim that the securitization of critical minerals ramped up following the rise of NGO

agitation.

Continuing this trend, in June of 2019, federal agencies issued their report on a strategy

for critical minerals supply that Trump had ordered in 2017. The U.S. Department of Commerce

executive summary of this strategy contains several instances of securitizing language in the

form of both national security talk and risk-management logics. For one, the executive summary

explicitly states that "the assured supply of critical minerals" is "essential to the . . . national

defense of the United States" ("A Federal Strategy"). The Commerce summary describes the

need for "mitigating" potential "vulnerability" from the disruption of critical mineral supply

chains to the U.S. economy and *military*, referencing language from the U.S. National Defense

Strategy and National Security Strategy about the U.S. aim to "preserve peace through strength"

("A Federal Strategy"). Additionally, the federal strategy calls for "robust enforcement of U.S.

trade laws . . . that help address adverse impacts of market-distorting foreign trade conduct" ("A

Federal Strategy"). Once again, "adverse impacts" is a key contrast from previous lack of

security speech surrounding Chinese access to critical minerals under the Clinton administration.

A Department of the Interior news release, which also discusses the 2019 federal critical

minerals strategy, uses even stronger security language: The release quotes then-Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt as commending the Trump administration's dedication to ensuring that the U.S. is never "held hostage to foreign powers" for the minerals "critical to . . . [U.S.] . . . national security and economic growth" (Trump Administration Announces Strategy"). 'Held hostage' is a strongly-worded phrase which implies that the U.S. could be seized and ransomed by another country, very clearly conveying a national security threat and posing another example of the Trump administration's increased intensity regarding Chinese access to critical minerals compared to the Obama administration's securitization and the Clinton administration's lack of securitization on the issue.

Finally, in September of 2020, Trump issued Executive Order 13953, which unlike the administration's previous outputs, *directly* called out China when using securitizing language around critical minerals. Strikingly, the executive order declares a *national emergency* in order to deal with the "unusual and extraordinary threat" constituted by the United States' "undue reliance on critical minerals . . . from foreign adversaries" (Trump, Executive Order 13953). In order to address this "national emergency," the Trump Administration called for federal agencies to prepare a report investigating U.S. dependence on foreign adversaries for critical minerals access and recommending executive action in response, including "the imposition of tariffs or quotas . . . . against China and and other non-market adversaries whose economic practices threaten to undermine the health, growth, and resiliency of the United States" (Trump, Executive Order 13953). Trump specifically calls out dependence on Chinese minerals as a threat, accusing China of using "aggressive economic practices" to cement its dominance in the critical minerals space, leading to what Trump terms the 'destruction' of "vital mining and manufacturing jobs in

the United States" (Trump, Executive Order 13953). A White House fact sheet about this executive order also depicts the Trump administration as protecting domestic critical mineral supply chains from "predatory Chinese action" and "predatory foreign competition from China" ("President Donald J. Trump"). The term 'predatory,' like the term 'hostage,' evokes intense threat, danger, and fear, but also poses a key contrast to the Clinton administration's *willingness* to give China greater access to critical minerals. I stake the claim that among the many motivations behind the Clinton administration's greater willingness to allow Chinese access to these minerals, one of the factors was that at the time, the U.S. had an unimpeded opportunity to access critical minerals through other countries, such as Chile. I read the Trump administration's (and the subsequent Biden administration's) portrayal of China as a threat *in the critical minerals space* as motivated in part because NGO agitation and questioning threatened to bring visibility of mining exploitation to U.S. publics, which would *impede* U.S. ability to access critical minerals through exploitation of the Global South.

Interestingly, Trump's 2020 executive order on critical minerals does make minor references to exploitation, the ongoing extraordinary measure that I argue the projective securitization seeks to simultaneously justify, obscure, and remove from public political discussion. In the text of the executive order, Trump asserts that increasing domestic production of critical minerals would reduce U.S. and global reliance on minerals produced in countries that lack "responsible mining standards," "leading to human rights violations, forced and child labor, violent conflict, and health and environmental damage" (Trump, Executive Order 13953). I read these references to exploitation as evidence that the Trump administration did take notice of and perhaps respond, albeit indirectly, to the NGO agitations and investigations around critical

minerals exploitation that started in 2016. This phrasing—which mentions the child labor and health issues related to mining that the NGO investigations brought international attention to—helps to bolster my argument that securitizing actors target advocacy groups, and not just their domestic publics, with securitizing moves, since awareness of humanitarian or social justice issues often 'trickles down' from well-resourced NGOs to less-resourced, less-organized domestic publics.

Importantly, however, the Trump administration's minor acknowledgement of exploitation in this executive order *does not constitute acknowledgement of U.S. role in the exploitation*. The executive order defers blame for the exploitation to other countries—to the producer countries it conveys as lacking "responsible mining standards"—which allows U.S. actors' role in the exploitation and in creating the issues which contribute to the exploitation to remain obscured (Trump, Executive Order 13953). Additionally, the Trump administration's construction of Chinese access to these minerals as a security threat, especially through the declaration of a *national emergency*, greatly outweighs these minor allusions to exploitation: I argue that this allows the administration to somewhat appease transnational advocacy groups while still obscuring exploitative practices from the U.S. public by directing greater attention and urgency to China as a threat (Trump, Executive Order 13953).

B) The Biden Administration

The U.S. government's intensified securitizing moves regarding Chinese access to critical minerals could be reduced to Trump's 'America first' approach to foreign policy. However, I argue that this is not the case, since there exists empirical evidence that the intensified securitization of critical minerals has continued under the Biden administration. This continuity

across administrations subsequent to the rise of NGO agitation is expected by my theory, given that critical minerals exploitation constitutes a *long occurring*, *ongoing* extraordinary measure that government elites across ideologies have motivation to continue enabling. Security language enables the continuation of the status quo by stabilizing public opinion to previously unquestioned levels—in this case by precluding a tipping point that could be brought about by NGO agitation—since national security language tends to appeal to domestic publics regardless of ideology. Thus, in order to shield elite government action from judgment and discussion by ordinary constituents, Biden used (and continues using) a similar approach to securitization as the Trump administration.

To start with, in a February 2021 executive order, Biden made the assertion that the U.S. requires "resilient, diverse, and secure supply chains" to preserve its "economic prosperity and national security" (Executive Order 14017). This document uses the same risk-management logic as the Trump administration executive orders, stating that "close cooperation on resilient supply chains . . . will . . . strengthen the capacity to respond to international disasters and emergencies" (Biden, Executive Order 14017). Biden's use of "emergency preparedness" terminology "in the event of any . . . contingencies" is especially characteristic of the modes of precaution and preparedness associated with risk-management logics (Executive Order 14017). Additionally, one of the potential policy recommendations the executive order points to is identifying "alternative supply chains" through cooperation with "allies and partners" (Biden, Executive Order 14017). Importantly, this call for "diverse" and "alternative" supply chains with "allies" implies the threat of China: The unspoken subtext is that these new supply chains would be an alternative to Chinese-dominated supply chains (Biden, Executive Order 14017).

A February 2022 White House fact sheet on securing critical mineral supply chains, which references Executive Order 14017, makes this connection between China and critical minerals more explicit. According to the fact sheet, a report that the Biden administration ordered found that "U.S. over-reliance on foreign sources and adversarial nations for critical minerals . . . posed national and economic security threats" ("Fact Sheet: Securing"). The fact sheet directly names China as controlling the majority of critical mineral processing, including for cobalt, lithium, and REEs ("Fact Sheet: Securing"). Thus, similar to the Trump administration, the Biden administration's invocation of China to securitize critical minerals access once again contrasts the Clinton administration's lack of securitizing language vis-à-vis China in this issue-domain.

However, unlike the Trump administration, the Biden administration extended the importance of critical minerals to the national security threat posed by climate change, not just by China. For example, the February 2021 executive order states that improving supply chain resilience will "advance the fight against climate change," ordering the Department of Energy to submit a report on supply chain risks for electric-vehicle batteries (Biden, Executive Order 14017). Additionally, the February 2022 White House fact sheet describes critical minerals as "key inputs in clean energy technologies," including electric vehicles, solar panels, and wind turbines, stating that demand for these minerals is "set to skyrocket" as countries pursue clean energy transitions ("Fact Sheet: Securing").

Biden's move towards climate change constituted a different securitization tactic than that pursued by Trump—who actively denied climate science—but both tactics were intended to

accomplish the same goal: construct the lack of access to critical minerals as a security threat (Wise). I read the turn towards a critical mineral securitizing strategy based on climate change as driven in part by growing U.S. public awareness and belief in climate science, especially among younger generations, Democrats and Biden voters, and, importantly, transnational organizations advocating for social justice and humanitarian causes (Kennedy). Thus, this shift in strategy could also be read as an attempt to mask national security talk in human security terms, such as by emphasizing the potential climate impacts on vulnerable and marginalized communities. For example, in his executive order on refugees, released only twenty days before his February 2021 executive order on critical minerals, Biden expresses U.S. commitment to "address the global refugee crisis" and orders federal agencies to submit a report on "climate change and its impact on migration, including forced migration" (Executive Order 14013). References to forced migration conjure images of individuals and communities being harmed, thus couching a national security threat in terms of its impacts to individuals and communities. However, the connection between this human security talk and national security is clear, as Biden also orders the report to include "discussion of the international security implications of climate-related migration" (Executive Order 14013). Overall, I argue that governments use human security talk rather than or alongside national security talk in part to facilitate the likelihood that NGOs 'take up' and internalize both climate securitization and critical minerals securitization. Such emphasis on a climate emergency, however, risks narrowing "'the policy gaze to the restrictive logic of equating human well-being with reduced carbon emissions,'" which I argue allows for the outweighing and obfuscation of critical mineral exploitation (Albert 539).

While the climate emphasis constitutes a difference from the Trump administration, Biden, like Trump, does make minor references to mining exploitation: In his February 2021 executive order on critical minerals, Biden lists "human-rights or forced-labor risks" as issues that could "disrupt, strain, compromise, or eliminate the supply chain" include (Executive Order 14017). This brief acknowledgement of human rights exploitation associated with mining, buried in Section 4 of the executive order, does not connote that the exploitation is a major concern that the Biden administration seeks to call elevated attention to: Rather, the phrasing implies that human rights and forced labor are salient issues *when they disrupt the supply chain*, as opposed to salient issues for their own sake. This phrasing thus 'takes up' some of the NGO agitation around critical minerals while allowing the exploitation to continue mostly unnoticed by the U.S. public. The White House fact sheet on critical minerals also uses language that could connote mining exploitation, explaining that the Biden administration would prioritize critical mineral production in ways "consistent with our strong environmental, social and labor principles" ("Fact Sheet: Securing"). Here, what remains unsaid is that these U.S. principles are an alternative to the Chinese government's alleged corrupt practices and lack of proper environmental, social, and governance standards in the critical minerals industry. This unspoken 'other' constitutes yet another instance of blame deference, allowing the U.S. role in critical minerals exploitation to remain unnoticed even following the eruption of NGO agitation around 2016.

Similar securitizing and obfuscating strategies can be seen in State Department publications on the Minerals Security Partnership, which the State Department founded under the Biden administration in June 2022 to facilitate "financial and diplomatic support," alongside information-sharing between partner countries, for critical mineral projects and investment opportunities "along the value chain" ("Minerals Security Partnership"). Like the White House

fact sheet on critical mineral supply chains, the Department of State also uses climate-based

securitization strategies when describing the MSP, asserting that secure critical mineral supply

chains "are vital to deploying" clean energy technologies at the "speed and scale necessary to

combat the climate crisis" ("Minerals Security Partnership"). Here, the language of speed and

urgency associated with securitization is clear, but counterintuitively, elevating the political

salience of climate change helps to remove critical minerals from public discussion, making

access to them an unquestioned need to combat the 'climate crisis' and giving responsibility for

managing that access to political elites. The State Department's explanation of the MSP not only

directly mentions the threat of climate change, but also *alludes* to the threat of China: One of the

MSP main principles is "diversifying" global critical mineral supply chains, which is code for

supporting supply chains that link to U.S. allies as opposed to China ("Minerals Security

Partnership"). The list of MSP partner countries helps to reveal this subtext around an

unmentioned but omnipresent China, given that the majority of the partner countries with which

the U.S. has decided to share information about critical mineral investment opportunities

comprise Western allies such as the United Kingdom and the European Union (Minerals Security

Partnership").

What the choice of MSP partner countries reflects is not only the unspoken security threat

of Chinese access to critical minerals, but also the obfuscation of critical mineral exploitation.

The MSP framework does address some humanitarian concerns: One of its principles is to

promote "high environmental, social, and governance standards," also known as ESGs, in the

mining sector ("Minerals Security Partnership"). Additionally, the Department of State claims

that the MSP commits to supporting only projects that "meet high, internationally recognized

ESG standards . . . and uplift communities" so that "all countries can benefit from the global

clean energy transition" ("Minerals Security Partnership"). However, in stark contrast to these

claims, none of the MSP founding countries were Global South countries, despite the fact that

the majority of critical mineral reserves exist in the Global South: Rather, they were all wealthy,

'developed,' Western countries, including "Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Japan,"

and South Korea ("Minerals Security Partnership"). So far, after nearly three years, the only

Global South country to have joined the partnership is India ("Minerals Security Partnership").

The MSP framework also lacks any explanation for *how* Global South producer countries that

lack capital or capacity to invest in critical mineral projects can become involved in the

partnership ("Minerals Security Partnership"). I argue that what the subtext reveals is a lack of

U.S. genuine concern about alleviating neither poor conditions in producer countries nor the

domination of the Global South to the Global North: References to these issues should be read as

instrumental to stabilizing U.S. access to critical minerals in light of NGO 'questioning'

("Minerals Security Partnership").

Ultimately, what this third section of my process tracing demonstrates is that, as I

describe in my framework for projective securitization, the *motivation* for securitization can be

for government actors to maintain the status quo, preventing an issue from becoming politically

salient for domestic publics. Thus, in my projective securitization theory, securitzing moves

emerge *after* a measure already exists in order to justify that already-existing measure,

subsequent to a 'questioning' crisis point that provokes fear that domestic publics might uncover

the true extraordinary nature of that measure. I have demonstrated that while the Clinton

administration did not make securitizing moves around critical minerals at a time when

exploitation was ongoing, securitizing moves by the Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations did emerge *after* the rise of NGO agitation about the exploitation. Now that I have shown that securitizing *attempts* were made, however, in the next section, I will show that these attempts were *successful* by demonstrating that much of the securitizing language was 'taken up' by NGOs. In other words, I will demonstrate that my 'audience acceptance' criterion for a successful securitization was met by describing how after this "ramping up" of securitizing moves in the late 2010's, NGOs profoundly changed the character of their advocacy surrounding mining exploitation.

Importantly, the third and fourth sections of my process tracing are not neatly chronological and contain some overlap in the time periods they cover. This aligns with my projective securitization theory, in which to keep enabling the status quo and prevent an ordinary measure from becoming reconceptualized as extraordinary, the securitization needs to remain *ongoing*. Understanding the target audience for securitizing moves as *dynamic* and capable of change is key: If governments stop making securitizing moves that demote the political salience and obscure the immorality of a practice, then they risk domestic publics passing the 'tipping point' of questioning and awareness and deciding to reconceptualize that practice as extraordinary and immoral.

4) NGOs 'Pipe' Down: 2019-Present

The previous section of my process tracing demonstrated that government actors—mainly, agents of the executive branch during the Trump and Biden administrations—used discourses of security and threat to discuss critical minerals access,

fulfilling the first condition for what I consider to be a successful securitization. In this final section of my process tracing, I will show that the second necessary condition for a successful securitization, the target audience's acceptance of the lack of critical minerals access as a security threat, has also been met. This period in which audience acceptance is achieved comprises the fourth stage of my projective securitization process: the stabilization of public opinion. In the critical mineral issue domain, governments have temporarily achieved the stabilization of public opinion via the appeasement of transnational advocacy organizations that are poised to bring mining exploitation to the forefront of the domestic public consciousness. Without the influence of the U.S. government's securitzing moves, a natural trajectory for NGO agitation regarding critical mineral exploitation would have gone from naming and shaming U.S. companies, which did occur in 2016, to recognizing U.S. government complicity in the exploitation, calling for public protests and mass boycotts, and questioning the very need for the minerals itself. However, projective securitization shifted the nature and trajectory of NGO agitation around critical minerals.

In particular, I describe three main changes in the character of NGO discourses around critical mineral exploitation. First, NGOs began to adopt human security talk around climate change when discussing mining exploitation, which was not present during the rise of the initial 2016 agitation. Second, even while discussing critical mineral exploitation, NGOs started to use language conveying critical minerals as *essential* for addressing security threats—especially climate change—rather than following the expected trajectory of questioning the demand for the minerals themselves. Lastly, the NGOs not only directed their agitation towards companies and governments rather than domestic publics, unlike the expected trajectory I posit, but they also started addressing companies complicit in the exploitation in a less critical tone compared to the

initial 2016 agitation. I argue that these changes should be read as evidence that the projective securitization process has been, at least until this point, successful at preventing the NGO agitation around critical minerals from 'trickling down' down to domestic publics as a politically salient issue, therefore enabling the mining exploitation to continue.

A) The Amnesty International Ethical Battery Campaign

I focus my analysis of the 'stabilization' stage of the projective securitization process primarily on Amnesty International's discourse around critical minerals, allowing me to illustrate how the same organization produced drastically different outputs on mining exploitation before and after the U.S. government deployed major attempts to securitize critical minerals access.

In March of 2019, three years after its watershed report on cobalt mining in the DRC, Amnesty International launched an ethical battery campaign that challenged EV industry leaders "to make the world's first completely ethical battery within five years," a battery which, throughout its entire lifestyle, does not commit harm to the environment or human rights ("Amnesty Challenges Industry Leaders").

Within the announcement of this campaign, Amnesty did reference the exploitative practices in the critical minerals industry it had uncovered in 2016, explaining, for example, that the lithium-ion batteries used for electric vehicles are linked to "child labour in the Democratic Republic of the Congo" ("Amnesty Challenges Industry Leaders"). However, in this announcement, Amnesty's language was much less critical towards companies compared to its 2016 report. For one, rather than accusing companies of having failed to do their due diligence or even basic checks regarding human rights, the campaign announcement instead simply asserts that EV companies "have a responsibility" to make sure "their products do not contribute to . . .

human rights abuses" ("Amnesty Challenges Industry Leaders"). The NGO does not take a completely uncritical approach: For example, Amnesty describes companies who seek to 'green' their energy sources, while "overlooking" human rights concerns, as "presenting their customers with a false choice; people or planet" ("Amnesty Challenges Industry Leaders"). Additionally, in the campaign announcement, Amnesty asks "industry leaders to think hard about what kind of future they want to build" ("Amnesty Challenges Industry Leaders"). However, these comments, while not completely uncritical towards companies, take on much less of a harsh tone than the earlier discourse accusing companies of valuing profit over human rights and actively benefiting from human misery ("Exposed: Child Labour"). Furthermore, Amnesty's presentation of its battery campaign in the form of a 'challenge' provided companies the opportunity to heroically meet the challenge, a much friendlier approach compared to the naming and shaming Amnesty performed in 2016, especially when considering that a natural trajectory in response to corporate abuses would be for advocacy groups to call for boycotts. I argue that this shift in language surrounding corporations should be read as a response to Western governments' securitizing moves. What has changed is not that the companies complicit in exploitation no longer seek to profit from it, but rather that the companies' profit-motivation now aligns with a 'greater goal': combating climate change, which human rights advocacy groups consider to be a humanitarian issue, and which I will argue they have taken up as a security issue as well.

In relation to climate change, another noteworthy aspect of this 'challenge' announcement is that Amnesty never questions the need for the lithium-ion batteries themselves. Amnesty's belief in the "imperative" need to find "effective solutions to the climate crisis" is not surprising, given that climate change has been associated with a variety of humanitarian and social justice issues that fall under Amnesty's purview as a transnational advocacy organization

("Amnesty Challenges Industry Leaders"). What is surprising, however, is that Amnesty has uncritically accepted the claim by Western governments that "electric cars have an important role to play" in combating the "climate crisis," and that they are "essential for shifting away from fossil fuels and reducing greenhouse gas emissions" ("Amnesty Challenges Industry Leaders"). The trajectory I posit one should normally expect from NGOs who claim to advocate for these humanitarian issues is calling for a *reduction* in the demand for electric vehicles through an expansion of public mass transit, a decrease in suburbanization, an increase in more localized living and more walkable neighborhoods, and a decrease in the mass consumption lifestyles of the Global North (Edwards). These alternatives to electric vehicle use would constitute deep rather than shallow societal change that would lessen the burden of raw material extraction in Global South countries. However, Amnesty's battery challenge constitutes 'buy-in' to the idea that electric vehicles are the solution to climate change, demonstrating that Amnesty has taken up and internalized Western securitizing narratives around the critical minerals that make up the components of those vehicles.

B) Amnesty's Principles for Critical Mineral Extraction

This internalization of securitizing narratives becomes even more evident when analyzing Amnesty's February 2021 publication *Powering Change: Principles for Businesses and Governments in the Battery Value Chain*, which lays out the principles it believes businesses and governments should adopt to ensure that critical mineral extraction for lithium-ion batteries does not contribute to environmental degradation or human rights abuses ("Amnesty Urges Bold Action"). While Amnesty is the primary 'author' of this document, it reflects the opinions of multiple NGOs: Amnesty International Australia reports that 51 organizations across the globe,

including a wide variety of environmental and human rights-focused advocacy groups, assisted in jointly establishing these principles ("Amnesty Urges Bold Action"). Thus, this analysis of *Powering Change* helps to bolster my claim that Amnesty International can be considered representative of the wider, mainstream opinion of humanitarian organizations.

In the text, Amnesty demonstrates that it has accepted Western governments' framing of climate change as a threat in *human security* terms: For one, it asserts that "climate change is . . . the great environmental emergency of our time," which "threatens . . . the rights to water, to health, and to life itself" (*Powering Change* 1). Water, health, and life all constitute basic elements of human and community wellbeing, characteristic of human security talk. Additionally, the publication notes that marginalized people and communities in the Global South are "disproportionately vulnerable to the effects of climate change" (*Powering Change* 1). This human security talk thus reflects how the Biden administration constructed climate change as a security threat through references to refugees and forced migration: Amnesty is utilizing the same language through which Western governments have couched threats to national security in terms of their impacts on individuals and communities (Executive Order 14013). Additionally, like the U.S. government, Amnesty employs language referring to "the urgency of the climate crisis," which Amnesty claims justifies "bold action from all sectors" (*Powering Change* 1). This climate 'emergency' and 'urgency' language was not present in Amnesty's 2016 report on critical mineral exploitation, which contained no talk of 'bold action' directed in a positive way towards companies. I argue that this shift from 2016 to 2021 can be read in part as a response to Western governments' adoption of human security talk to refer to climate change.

Furthermore, not only does Amnesty accept the human security talk around climate change, but I argue that it also accepts the lack of access to critical minerals as a threat because it has uncritically internalized critical minerals as the *solution* to climate change. This view is evident when Amnesty describes lithium-ion batteries used in electric vehicles as "essential for tackling climate change" ("Amnesty Urges Bold Action"). The use of the word *essential* is noteworthy given the variety of means available beyond electric vehicle adoption to address climate change. Unlike in its 2019 battery challenge announcement, in this case, Amnesty does acknowledge some of the alternative ways to tackle climate change. For example, it calls for governments to support policies that "reduce reliance on car travel and the number of cars on the road," including by establishing more accessible public transit (*Powering Change* 11). However, these recommendations are vague and brief compared to the amount of time Amnesty dedicates to discussing the principles for critical mineral extraction. Additionally, Amnesty does not describe any of these measures as desirable specifically to *reduce* the demand for critical minerals and protect indigenous ways of life and sovereignty, another way in which it does not question the need for the minerals themselves. Importantly, this acceptance of the *essentiality* of critical minerals for addressing climate change, alongside the acceptance of climate change as a threat to individuals and communities, entails that Amnesty International has accepted Western governments' construction of the lack of access to critical minerals as a threat.

I stake the claim that due to Amnesty's acceptance of this threat, this Amnesty report, like the 2019 battery challenge announcement, holds a friendlier attitude towards companies than the organization's 2016 report on exploitation in the cobalt industry. For one, rather than accusing companies of making empty claims and profiting from misery, as it did in its 2016 report,

Amnesty instead states that they "cut corners" or "turn a blind eye," phrases which imply less direct moral responsibility for abuses (*Powering Change* 3). Additionally, rather than calling out companies for valuing profit over morals as it once did, Amnesty instead characterizes them as "having a single-minded focus on rapid expansion" (*Powering Change* 3). The key word that the organization has added to its discourse on corporations is *expansion*, as opposed to using the word *profit*: The difference between these terms is that while profit is associated with only a company's private benefit, the term expansion in this case implies a greater good and public benefit, since the expansion of the clean energy industry is often viewed as necessary to address climate. In fact, the very language of emergency and urgency associated with securitization helps to justify this "rapid expansion" of the clean energy industry (*Powering Change* 3).

Finally, in this 2021 publication, like in its 2019 battery campaign, Amnesty once again frames companies as having the possibility to become heroes, "calling on businesses at all stages of the battery supply chain to do their bit to ensure they are truly powering change" ("Amnesty Urges Bold Action"). This language goes even further than the 2019 battery campaign, which 'challenged' companies to do better: In contrast, *Powering Change* presents principles for the battery supply chain as a 'gift' to corporations and governments, or Amnesty's way of assisting them in doing better. The way in which Amnesty continued to direct its agitation about mining exploitation to companies and governments, as opposed to domestic publics, contrasts the expected trajectory for NGOs that I put forth. Interestingly, Amnesty calls for neither boycotts of complicit companies nor consumer lifestyle changes, such as disengaging from mass consumption and throwaway culture by replacing electronics less often. Amnesty's continued emphasis on speaking to companies and governments directly, as opposed to encouraging

domestic publics to pressure their governments, reinforces my argument that the 'tipping point'

of public awareness of critical mineral exploitation has been averted for now.

C) Global Witness Report on Sub-Saharan Africa

More recent outputs by NGOs continue to illustrate this point. For example, in November

of 2023, Global Witness issued a report on lithium mining in Zimbabwe, Namibia, and the

Democratic Republic of the Congo ("A Rush for Lithium"). While the report is critical of mining

exploitation in these countries, it also retains differences from earlier NGO agitations. For one,

like Amnesty International's battery principles publication, the Global Witness report accepts

climate change as a threat, stating that "efforts to address the global climate emergency are

leading to an increased demand for renewable energy technology, particularly in the Global

North, including electric vehicles and the batteries required to power them " ("A Rush for

Lithium"). Alongside using the language of *emergency*, this report also does not call into

question the need for electric vehicles to address climate change, nor the Global North's demand

for them, thus failing to question "green extractivism:" climate change mitigation efforts which

transfer the environmental and social costs of Global North countries' luxurious, "'zero-carbon

lifestyles' . . . " to the ecologies of the Global South" (Jerez et al. 3). None of these NGO

publications about critical mineral exploitation question the global division between

"'exporting'" and "'consuming'" countries, with the Global South characterized as an 'exporter'

of raw materials, unable to enjoy the clean energy benefits of its own resources and labor

(Barandiarán 389). This lack of NGO agitation around the domination and dispossession of the

Global South enables the continued treatment of indigenous and rural communities, especially

those in the Global South, as "green sacrifice zones" (Albert 539). Rather than asking the Global

North to make sacrifices and reduce its mass consumption lifestyle to address both climate

change and mining exploitation, the Global Witness report instead adopts risk-management

logics which uphold 'green extractivism.' It asserts, for example, that governments and

companies in critical mineral consumer countries "must ensure that battery mineral supply chains

are rigorously screened for corruption and other ESG risks" ("A Rush for Lithium"). The idea of

screening for corruption not only comprises risk-management logics because it enables the

uninterrupted flow of global goods and capital, but it also uses the same phrasing of

environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards seen in the State Department's Mineral

Security Partnership. This adoption of ESG language bolsters my argument that transnational

advocacy organizations comprise part of the target audience for governments' securitizing

narratives and have taken up these narratives via the deployment of human security talk.

Along with this climate emergency talk, Global Witness also seems to have taken up the

idea, emphasized heavily by the Trump and Biden administrations, that China is the main culprit

behind critical mineral exploitation. For example, it details how Chinese-owned companies have

acquired lithium mines "through bribery," have treated workers poorly, and have failed to

conduct proper assessments of environmental impact ("A Rush for Lithium"). While Chinese

companies may indeed be undertaking these harmful actions, drawing attention only to China as

a culprit obscures the role of Western governments and companies in critical mineral

exploitation. Additionally, the Global Witness investigation focuses solely on the raw lithium

part of the battery supply chain, posing a major contrast to Amnesty International's 2016

report—the report which first sparked NGO agitation around critical mineral

exploitation—which critiques the later stages of the supply chain. While the 2016 Amnesty

report performed naming and shaming on U.S. companies such as Apple and Microsoft that use

lithium in their consumer electronics, the Global Witness report makes no mention of any U.S.

entities ("A Rush for Lithium"). I read the turn to China, as opposed to the prior naming and

shaming of U.S. companies, as inadvertently helping to avert a tipping point in which U.S.

publics adopt critical mineral exploitation as a politically salient issue ("A Rush for Lithium").

Overall, in this last section of my process tracing, I have demonstrated how the second

and final condition in my framework for a successful securitization—audience acceptance of the

threat-construction—has been met. Pre-securitization, Amnesty International, which I consider

representative of NGOs in this issue-area, discussed critical mineral exploitation via the naming

and shaming of U.S. corporations, with reference neither to China as a culprit nor to the alleged

essentiality of critical minerals for addressing climate change. I posit that the trajectory of NGO

agitation, without the influence of securitization, would have culminated in NGOs calling for

public protests, mass boycotting of complicit companies, or consumer lifestyle changes, drawing

attention to the U.S. and Western role in the exploitation. However, securitization shifted this

trajectory: I have demonstrated how post-securitization, Amnesty International and Global

Witness adopted much of the same 'climate emergency' talk that the U.S. government has put

forth, resulting in a friendlier approach to complicit corporations rather than calls for boycotts.

Thus, I not only demonstrate how the 'audience acceptance' condition has been met, but I also

illustrate the final stage in the projective securitization process: the stabilization of public

opinion. In this case, the U.S. government achieved the stabilization of public opinion via the

appeasement of NGOs, averting the trickle-down process in which NGOs could heighten public

awareness of mining exploitation as an extraordinary measure. In other words, the U.S.

government resolved the 'crisis of questioning' that arose in the mid-2010's. I stake the claim that it is in part due to this appeasement of NGOs that there is still little, if any, U.S. public unrest about critical mineral exploitation, despite the long, ongoing history of this exploitation. Given the growing awareness of younger generations about social issues, I argue that the U.S. would be experiencing much more public unrest about the exploitation of the Global South for critical minerals if the government's projective securitization moves had not succeeded.

VII. Conclusion

A) Future Research on Critical Minerals

Why should one care about the moral desirability of critical minerals extraction? For one, Global South countries have been prevented from being able to use their critical mineral resources as a bargaining chip to gain concessions and greater economic self-sufficiency from the Global North. This trend of the Global North's exploitation and domination of the Global South politically, economically, and culturally will only worsen—remaining unquestioned in the critical minerals issue domain—if people do not begin to recognize how securitizing moves have succeeded at obscuring the true extraordinary and immoral nature of these conditions. Thus, future research conducted on critical mineral securitization should have a normative goal in mind: How can people concerned about the wellbeing of the Global South raise public awareness and turn the tide, reaching the tipping point in which Western domestic publics pressure their governments to cease exploitative practices? Understanding how to improve conditions in the Global South requires a deeper understanding of the ways in which complicit actors obscure or justify these conditions, including via securitization.

While my probability probe, using an interpretivist approach, provides an initial basis of support for my hypothesis on critical mineral securitization, future research can strengthen the causal claim. For example, analyzing declassified government documents on critical minerals, as opposed to only public-facing documents, could shed light on leaders' private motivations, which could support my claim that leaders' securitizing moves were motivated by NGO agitation and 'crises of questioning.' Declassified documents could also provide insight on whether government leaders do view NGOs as having the function of raising public awareness and as therefore worthy of targeting with securitizing moves, which would support my discussion of a two-tiered audience for securitization in cases involving 'invisibility.' Furthermore, it would be beneficial to interview NGO employees, such as Amnesty International employees, to understand why NGOs adopted different discourses on critical minerals pre- and post-securitization. These interviews could involve asking, for example, whether employees track or have been exposed to executive orders and other government outputs regarding critical minerals. Additionally, to determine whether domestic publics have an understanding of critical mineral exploitation, it would be fruitful to conduct nationally representative public opinion polls about the exploitation of other countries for minerals and to see what framings—economic development, national security, or climate change—would most affect support for such exploitative practices.

This type of research would also assist in unpacking the role of visibility versus invisibility in my securitization theory. While I am interested mainly in the Global South, mining exploitation also occurs within the U.S. and other Western countries such as Australia and Canada—especially in terms of harm to indigenous or aboriginal communities—revealing how issues can be made invisible to a large proportion of the population *within* a country. For

example, it is unclear whether the average U.S. citizen who does not live near a proposed mine site is aware of what critical minerals are, what they are used for, or what their role is in the clean energy transition, much less what types of exploitation often accompany lithium and cobalt mining. Additionally, to better understand the *global* discourse on critical minerals, it would be fruitful to analyze the ways in which Global South producer countries have reacted to critical mineral securitization: For example, have Global South governments attempted to de-securitize the critical minerals issue-domain, or have they enacted their own securitizing moves, especially when the exploitative issues affect their own publics? Understanding the critical minerals discourse as dynamic and containing multiple competing impulses, including from Global South countries themselves, would contribute to another interesting avenue for research on this topic: securitizing actors' ability to adapt to change over longer time horizons. Specifically, while I argue that the projective securitization of critical minerals has succeeded at preventing a 'tipping point' for now, for how long can these securitizing moves continue to be successful, and in what conditions? Furthermore, how might government strategies to justify and obscure critical mineral exploitation change in the future if NGOs stop adopting the securitizing language, or if the public gains awareness of the exploitation through means other than NGO attention-raising, such as through grassroots organizing? Answering these questions is key to mobilizing a response against the continued obfuscation and justification of critical mineral exploitation.

B) Broader Insights for Securitization Theory

This 'time-horizon' avenue for research would not only contribute to scholarly understanding of the critical mineral issue-domain, but would also provide useful insights for the broader literature on securitization theory. My plausibility probe using critical mineral

exploitation as a case study has demonstrated that the securitization theory I propose is viable and warrants further investigation, which should entail attempting to apply the theory to other issues. Two issue-areas for which projective securitization could apply include the War on Drugs and the War on Terror. In both cases, Western countries had been enacting exploitative practices in certain countries or on certain populations *before* they marshaled language about drugs and terrorism to attempt to justify those practices. Discourse around border control issues in general could shed light on how projective securitization might play out differently from other types of securitization. The case of U.S. border control, for example, could be used to compare how 'visibility' versus 'invisibility' affects the securitization process: While both the U.S.-Mexico territorial border and the U.S. maritime border constitute referent-objects of securitizing moves, one is visible and politically salient to the public, while the other—a network of dispersed ports—is not. Additionally, while my paper does not delve into the category of retrospective securitization that I propose, another avenue of research could involve identifying measures that governments once undertook which, based on current patterns and trajectories of public opinion, one might expect governments to retrospectively securitize in the future.

Furthermore, scholars could compare the different types of securitization—prospective, retrospective, and projective—on the same issue, such as by investigating whether they have different conditions for or rates of success. In light of the temporal differences between these types of securitization, another key aspect for future research involves understanding why governments decide to enact a measure either *before* or *after* securitizing it. The visibility/invisibility of certain issues likely plays a role, but another potential explanation is that alternate framings of issues, as opposed to security framings, were effective in the past until

those narratives became disrupted or questioned. Another question related to the *motivations* behind securitizing moves is: what makes governments decide whether to stop or continue implementing an extraordinary measure after the measure starts becoming questioned by domestic publics? If a cost-benefit analysis is involved, understanding this process of governmental risk calculation could help to explain why different temporal modes of securitization emerge.

Overall, this temporal typology of securitization is not only analytically useful for understanding the different ways in which securitization occurs, but it also better enables scholars to address a key debate in the literature: whether securitization is morally desirable or not. However, this project seeks to move even further beyond this normative question to inspire a follow-up question: If an instance of securitization is *not* morally desirable, what should scholars be prepared to do about it?

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