Fluctuation–Resilience Synthesis: An Integrative Framework for Security in International Relations

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ABSTRACT

In the context of twenty-first-century security, traditional state-centric paradigms in International Relations, grounded in power politics and territorial sovereignty, prove increasingly inadequate for addressing hybrid and transboundary threats. The study argues that effective security requires a synthesis of state-centric protection and resilience-oriented adaptation, conceptualised through the Fluctuation–Resilience Synthesis framework. The study examines how security frameworks can integrate defence and resilience logics, and how this synthesis manifests in fragile state contexts. Using Nepal as a case study, the research employs a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design combining surveys (n=152), key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. Data were analysed through thematic coding and descriptive statistics. Findings indicate that although state-centric approaches remain prominent, 72% of respondents highlighted the growing importance of human, environmental, and technological security. While military preparedness continues to shape policy, resilience operates as the integrative capacity enabling adaptation to complex, fluctuating risks. The findings reveal a cyclical coexistence of traditional and human-focused logics, confirming the practical and conceptual validity of the FRS model. These findings underscore the necessity of adaptive, context-sensitive security frameworks. By theorising the temporal fluctuation and layered coexistence of conventional and resilience-based logics, the study advances an integrative paradigm of security governance and offers policy-relevant insights for fragile states confronting multidimensional threats. Unlike existing hybrid security models, FRS does not merely combine domains of security but conceptualises their temporal fluctuation and layered coexistence, with resilience functioning as a stabilising meta-capacity rather than a standalone policy tool.

Introduction

This article argues that neither traditional state-centric theories nor contemporary resilience-oriented approaches, when treated in isolation, adequately capture the complexity of twenty-first-century security. Classical Realism and Neorealism prioritise sovereignty, territorial integrity, and military power, while newer perspectives—such as Human Security,

Environmental Security, Cybersecurity, and Critical Security Studies—shift attention toward individuals, ecological systems, and technological infrastructures. Although these approaches have significantly broadened the scope of International Relations (IR), they remain analytically fragmented. As a result, contemporary security debates often oscillate between competing paradigms rather than explaining how different security logics coexist, interact, and fluctuate over time.

To address this gap, the article advances Fluctuation–Resilience Synthesis (FRS) as an integrative analytical framework. FRS does not replace existing theories, nor does it merely aggregate traditional and non-traditional security domains. Instead, it conceptualises security as a dynamic process in which state-centric and resilience-oriented logics coexist and fluctuate in response to shifting threats, crises, and structural constraints. In this framework, "fluctuation" refers to the changing dominance of security paradigms across time and context, while "resilience" is understood as a meta-capacity that stabilises security systems by enabling adaptation without systemic breakdown. Resilience is thus treated neither as a policy slogan nor as a governance instrument alone, but as an integrative capacity mediating between defence imperatives and adaptive responses.

This clarification distinguishes FRS from existing hybrid or comprehensive security models. Hybrid security frameworks typically combine multiple domains—military, economic, environmental, and human—without theorising their temporal interaction or relative dominance. By contrast, FRS explicitly theorises how and why security paradigms rise, recede, and overlap, and how resilience operates across these shifts to maintain systemic continuity. The contribution of FRS therefore lies not in introducing new security sectors, but in offering a second-order framework capable of analysing paradigm interaction, coexistence, and transition within complex security environments.

Nepal provides a particularly relevant case for examining this synthesis. Geopolitically situated between India and China, Nepal faces persistent concerns related to sovereignty, border management, and regional power asymmetries. At the same time, it is highly vulnerable to non-traditional threats, including climate-induced disasters, landslides, floods, glacial lake outburst floods, pandemics, and emerging cyber risks. The 2015 earthquake revealed significant institutional and infrastructural limitations, while simultaneously demonstrating strong community-based coping mechanisms. More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the limits of military-centric responses and highlighted the importance of governance capacity, public health resilience, and social protection. These experiences illustrate how security in Nepal is neither purely state-centric nor exclusively human-centric, but shaped by their continuous interaction.

Since the end of the Cold War (1945–1991), security studies in IR have undergone substantial transformation. During the Cold War, security was largely framed through military rivalry, deterrence, and alliance politics, as articulated by Realist and Neorealist scholars who viewed state survival as the primary objective of international politics. While these approaches remain influential, their explanatory power has diminished in the face of transboundary and non-military threats that cannot be addressed through force alone. Climate change, pandemics,

cyber intrusions, forced migration, and economic shocks increasingly shape insecurity in ways that transcend territorial borders and challenge the adequacy of purely state-centric frameworks.

In response, IR scholarship has expanded to include Human Security, Environmental Security, cybersecurity, and securitisation theory, each highlighting different dimensions of contemporary insecurity. However, these approaches often operate in parallel rather than in dialogue, resulting in conceptual fragmentation. The Fluctuation–Resilience Synthesis seeks to address this limitation by offering a framework that captures the coexistence and interaction of security paradigms, rather than treating them as mutually exclusive alternatives. By situating Nepal's security experience within this broader theoretical context, the article demonstrates how FRS provides a context-sensitive and analytically coherent approach to understanding security in fragile and mid-level states confronting multidimensional threats.

Literature Review and Research Gap

Security studies in International Relations have evolved through cumulative theoretical expansion rather than linear paradigm replacement. Classical and Neorealist traditions, from Morgenthau (1948) to Waltz (1979), conceptualised security primarily in terms of state sovereignty, power, deterrence, and alliance formation. These approaches provided a robust framework for analysing interstate rivalry during the Cold War and continue to inform assessments of military strategy and defence expenditure. However, their state-centric orientation offers limited explanatory capacity for transboundary and non-military threats that increasingly shape contemporary insecurity.

Critical Security Studies (CSS) emerged in response to these limitations by challenging the ontological and normative assumptions of traditional security thinking. Scholars such as Booth (2007) and Wyn Jones (1999) argue that security is socially and politically constructed and frequently articulated in ways that marginalise vulnerable groups. Rather than rejecting the state outright, CSS reframes security as an emancipatory project, interrogating whose security is prioritised and at what cost. While this shift broadened the referent object of security, it also introduced conceptual breadth that is not always matched by analytical integration or operational clarity.

Parallel developments further diversified the field. Human Security, advanced by the United Nations Development Programme (1994), redirected attention toward individuals and communities, emphasising freedom from fear and want. Environmental Security highlighted the security implications of ecological degradation, climate change, and resource scarcity, particularly in fragile regions (Homer-Dixon, 1999; Barnett & Adger, 2007). Cybersecurity scholarship exposed vulnerabilities within digital infrastructures capable of disrupting governance and social trust without direct military confrontation (Hansen & Nissenbaum, 2009; Rid, 2013). Securitisation theory, developed by the Copenhagen School, demonstrated how political actors construct issues as existential threats through discursive practices, thereby legitimising extraordinary measures (Buzan, Waver, & de Wilde, 1998).

While these approaches significantly expanded the analytical scope of security studies, they have also contributed to increasing fragmentation. Issue-specific frameworks tend to examine military, environmental, technological, or human dimensions in relative isolation.

Hybrid or comprehensive models attempt to bridge these domains but often rely on aggregation rather than theoretical integration, offering limited tools for explaining how security logics coexist, compete, or fluctuate across time and context.

In response to systemic uncertainty and complexity, resilience has emerged as an influential concept in security governance and critical theory. Resilience shifts attention from threat elimination toward adaptive capacity, institutional flexibility, and recovery under stress (Joseph, 2013; Chandler, 2014). Its wide application has enhanced policy relevance but also generated conceptual ambiguity, as resilience is variously treated as adaptive capacity, governance rationality, or policy orientation.

To address this ambiguity, the present study adopts analytically specific understanding of resilience. Drawing on Walker and Cooper (2011) and Folke (2016), resilience is conceptualised as a system-level capacity encompassing both adaptive resilience—the maintenance of core functions under stress—and transformative resilience—the ability to reconfigure structures in response to prolonged crises. This distinction allows resilience to function not as a substitute for state-centric security, but as an integrative capacity mediating between defensive and adaptive logics.

Despite the richness of existing scholarship, a persistent gap remains in studies of fragile and mid-level states in the Global South. Traditional frameworks explain power asymmetries and military dynamics but underplay societal, environmental, and technological vulnerabilities. Human and critical approaches foreground these vulnerabilities yet often lack mechanisms for analysing their interaction with enduring state-centric imperatives. South Asian contexts such as Nepal, characterised by geopolitical constraints, environmental exposure, and institutional fragility, exemplify this unresolved tension.

The Fluctuation–Resilience Synthesis (FRS) framework is proposed to address this gap. Rather than introducing an additional security sector, FRS offers an integrative analytical lens for examining how state-centric and resilience-oriented logics coexist, fluctuate, and stabilise security systems across time and context. By positioning resilience as a mediating capacity within this dynamic interaction, FRS enhances conceptual coherence and analytical applicability, particularly in contexts where neither traditional nor human-centric paradigms alone are sufficient.

Methodology

The study adopts an interpretivist, abductive approach, treating security as a socially constructed and context-dependent phenomenon. The research employs a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, in which qualitative and quantitative data were collected concurrently, analysed independently, and subsequently integrated to enhance analytical depth and contextual understanding (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). This design was selected to support theory development rather than hypothesis testing. While quantitative components provide descriptive insights into prevailing security perceptions, qualitative evidence enables interpretive analysis of how and why state-centric and resilience-oriented logics interact in practice. The approach thus prioritises theoretical generalisability over statistical representativeness, consistent with interpretivist and abductive research traditions.
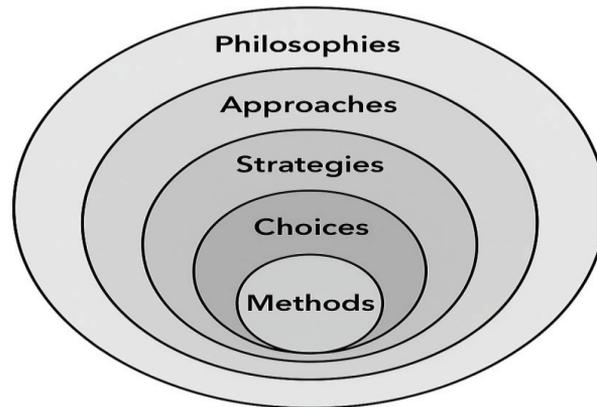
Conceptual framework for research

Figure 1. Research methodology adapted from Saunders' Research Onion model

Note. Adapted from *Research Methods for Business Students* (4th ed., pp. 45–46), by M. Saunders, P. Lewis, & A. Thornhill, 2007, Pearson Education. Copyright 2007 by Pearson Education.

Qualitative data were generated through 12 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). These methods were chosen to capture expert interpretations of security dynamics, institutional constraints, and emerging hybrid threats. KIIs included senior security practitioners, policymakers, and scholars with sustained engagement in Nepal's security sector, while FGDs brought together postgraduate students and early-career officers to capture generational perspectives and emerging epistemic shifts. Insights from these qualitative engagements directly informed the design of the survey instrument, ensuring conceptual alignment between theory, context, and empirical inquiry.

The quantitative component consisted of a structured survey administered to 152 respondents drawn from the Nepali Army, Armed Police Force Nepal, Nepal Police, intelligence agencies, and postgraduate MPhil/PhD cohorts. Purposive and convenience sampling, supplemented by limited snowballing, were employed to access respondents with relevant expertise and exposure to security debates. While this sampling strategy does not permit population-level generalisation, it is appropriate for exploratory and theory-building research that seeks informed perspectives rather than mass opinion. The study explicitly acknowledges that the findings reflect elite and semi-elite security discourses, rather than the lived experiences of all social groups, and therefore does not claim representational inclusivity.

Survey questions were thematically structured around four clusters:

(a)   perceptions of traditional state-centric security,

(b)   evaluation of non-traditional and emerging threats,

(c)   attitudes toward resilience and adaptation, and

(d)   future policy priorities.

Likert-scale items were employed to capture variations in perceived importance and relevance, reflecting the non-binary nature of security paradigms in International Relations. The survey focused on identifying patterns of convergence and divergence in security thinking rather than establishing causal relationships.

Data analysis followed a mixed approach. Qualitative data from KIIs and FGDs were transcribed and thematically coded in NVivo using Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. Coding integrated deductive categories from security theory with inductively derived themes. Although intercoder reliability was not tested due to single-coder analysis, consistency was ensured through reflexive transparency and iterative coding.Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics to highlight dominant trends in security perceptions. These results were triangulated with qualitative findings and relevant literature during interpretation.

Ethical standards were maintained through informed consent, voluntary participation, and by ensuring anonymity. Limitations related to non-probability sampling and researcher positionality were addressed through triangulation and transparent reporting. Overall, the methodology supports the development of the Fluctuation–Resilience Synthesis (FRS) framework by combining interpretive depth with empirical grounding to analyse shifting security paradigms in contexts such as Nepal.

Theoretical Framework: Fluctuation–Resilience Synthesis

The Fluctuation–Resilience Synthesis (FRS) is a dynamic analytical framework that conceptualises security as the coexistence and cyclical adjustment between state-centric protection and resilience-based adaptation (see Figure 2). Classical Realism and Neorealism emphasise sovereignty, military power, and interstate rivalry, while Human and Environmental Security approaches prioritise individual well-being, ecological stability, and societal vulnerability. Rather than treating these perspectives as competing or mutually exclusive, FRS integrates insights from Critical Security Studies and Resilience Studies to explain how multiple security logics operate simultaneously and fluctuate in relative dominance across time and context. In this sense, FRS represents an evolution of existing security debates rather than a radical theoretical departure.

The framework is anchored in four interrelated propositions. First, cyclical fluctuation captures how security priorities shift in response to changing threat environments, such as geopolitical tensions, natural disasters, or public health emergencies. Second, layered coexistence recognises that state-centric and human-centric approaches frequently operate in parallel rather than replacing one another. Third, resilience as an integrator positions adaptive capacity as a mediating mechanism that stabilises security systems during periods of stress without negating traditional defence imperatives. Fourth, contextual and regional variation highlights how geography, institutional capacity, and historical experience shape the salience of different security paradigms. Together, these propositions allow FRS to account for both continuity and transformation in security practices.

Within the FRS framework, resilience is operationalised as a system-level analytical capacity, rather than a normative policy objective. It is examined through three empirically observable dimensions: institutional adaptability, societal coping capacity, and policy

recalibration under stress. Institutional adaptability refers to the ability of governance institutions to adjust mandates, coordination mechanisms, and resource allocation in response to emerging or non-traditional threats. Societal coping capacity captures the role of communities, civil society, and informal networks in absorbing shocks and sustaining essential functions during crises. Policy recalibration under stress reflects shifts in security priorities following disruptive events, such as the incorporation of disaster risk reduction, public health preparedness, or climate adaptation alongside conventional defence concerns.

This operationalisation enables resilience to function analytically as an integrative mechanism linking state-centric and adaptive security logics. Within FRS, resilience neither replaces sovereignty-based security nor operates independently. Instead, it mediates fluctuation, enabling systems to absorb shocks, adapt to new threat configurations, and avoid systemic breakdown. Analytically, FRS explains how security paradigms coexist and fluctuate; normatively, it underscores the importance of balancing defensive priorities with adaptive capacity. This framework provides a tool for analysing complex security dynamics in contexts like Nepal, where hybrid threats require both defensive and adaptive responses. .
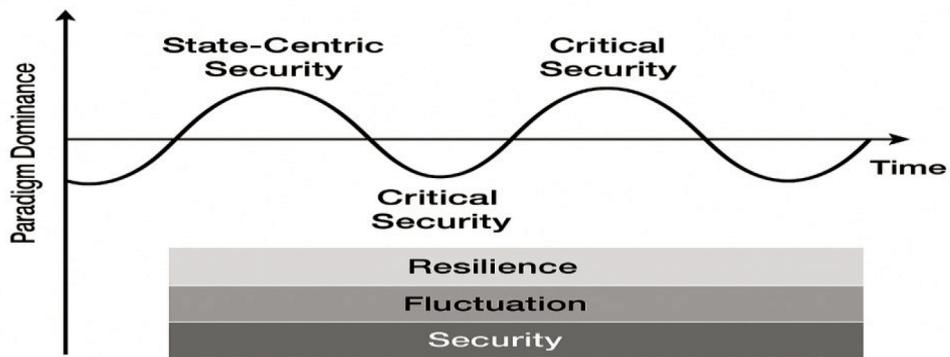

Figure 2. The Fluctuation–Resilience Synthesis (FRS) model illustrating oscillating paradigm dominance and layered coexistence over time

Note. Author (2025)

Applied to Nepal, FRS illuminates how concerns related to border security, sovereignty, and regional power asymmetry intersect with climate vulnerability, disaster risk, and human security challenges. Nepal's security experience demonstrates how defensive imperatives and adaptive capacities are negotiated simultaneously rather than sequentially, underscoring the practical relevance of the framework. The following section examines how the four FRS propositions are reflected empirically in security perceptions and practices among institutional and professional actors.

Results, Analysis and Findings

The results presented in this section should be interpreted within the scope of the study's exploratory and theory-building design. The survey sample, drawn through purposive, convenience, and limited snowball sampling, is intentionally elite- and semi-elite–focused,

comprising security professionals, policymakers, and postgraduate researchers. This sampling strategy prioritises informed security perceptions over population-level representativeness and therefore does not claim statistical generalisability. Instead, the findings aim to illuminate patterns of paradigm interaction relevant to the Fluctuation–Resilience Synthesis framework.

Survey items were designed to capture relative prioritisation and perceived relevance of security domains rather than to test causal relationships. Likert-scale questions were structured to avoid binary framing and to reflect gradational security thinking common in International Relations research. While descriptive statistics (percentages and frequency distributions) are employed to demonstrate dominant trends, deeper statistical inference was not pursued, as the study's objective is analytical integration rather than prediction. Quantitative results are therefore interpreted alongside qualitative findings to enhance contextual depth and theoretical coherence.

Changing Referent Objects of Security: Among 152 participants, 86.2% affirmed the continued relevance of realist approaches (see Figure 3). This aligns with the perspectives of Morgenthau (1948), Waltz (1979), and Mearsheimer (2001), and is supported by the historical analysis of Buzan and Hansen (2009). The finding underscores the central role of state survival in an anarchic international system, where power projection, deterrence, and strategic alliances remain critical. Although frameworks such as Human Security and Critical Security Studies emphasize non-state actors, state-centric thinking remains dominant in both theory and practice. A minority of respondents (13.2%) remained neutral, indicating openness to alternative approaches. Overall, these findings reveal the persistence of realism in contemporary scholarship, even as non-traditional threats gain visibility, particularly for smaller states
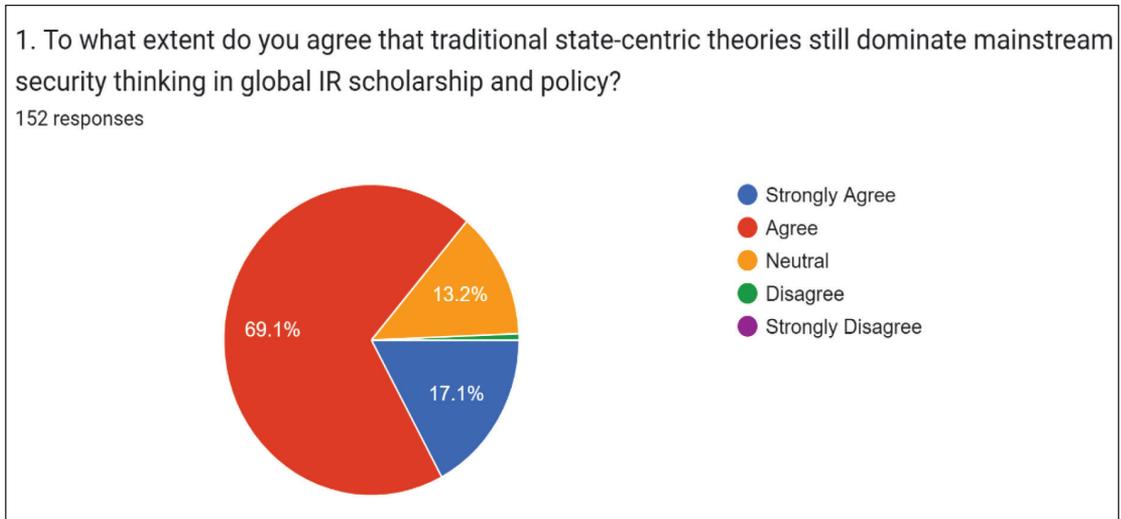
Figure 3. Survey responses on the continuing relevance of state-centric theories in IR scholarship

Note. Author's survey data,2025 (n = 152)

Evolving Nature of Threats

Survey responses reveal increasing support for non-traditional security frameworks (see Figure 4). Human Security (57.2%) and Cybersecurity (55.9%) were most frequently endorsed, highlighting concern with human vulnerabilities and technological risks. Environmental Security garnered moderate support (38.2%), whereas Neo-Realism (19.7%) and Classical Realism (14.5%) were less frequently selected. Critical Security Studies (13.2%) and resilience-based perspectives (12.5%) showed limited uptake. Constructivism received minimal endorsement (0.7%), reflecting perceptions of restricted applicability. Taken together, these results imply that while traditional paradigms remain conceptually significant, scholars and practitioners increasingly prioritise frameworks capable of addressing multidimensional, non-state-centric threats.
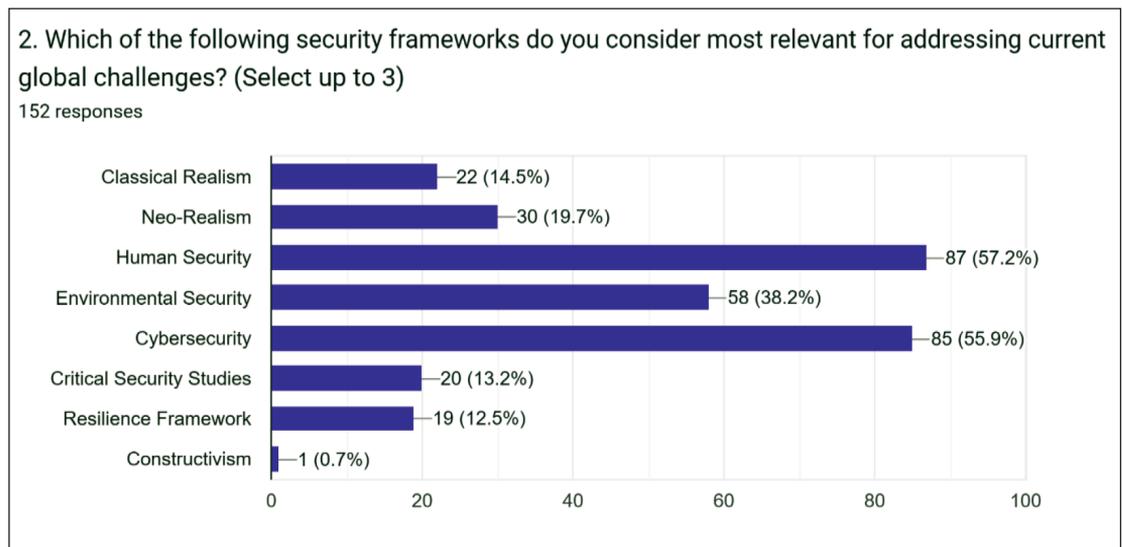

2. Which of the following security frameworks do you consider most relevant for addressing current global challenges? (Select up to 3)

152 responses

Figure 4. Survey responses on the relevance of different security frameworks for current global challenges

Note. Author's survey data,2025 (n = 152)

Global Security spending trends

Traditional security theories continue to provide explanatory value for global defence spending trends (see Figure 5). Over half of respondents (50.7%) rated these theories as explaining defence spending "well." Another 19.7% rated them "very well," particularly regarding major powers such as the United States, China, and India. However, 28.3% considered these theories only "somewhat effective," indicating limitations in capturing the complexity of contemporary security dynamics, while 0.7% rated them poorly. These findings suggest that while traditional theories remain relevant, they are increasingly insufficient to explain the layered nature of modern security challenges.
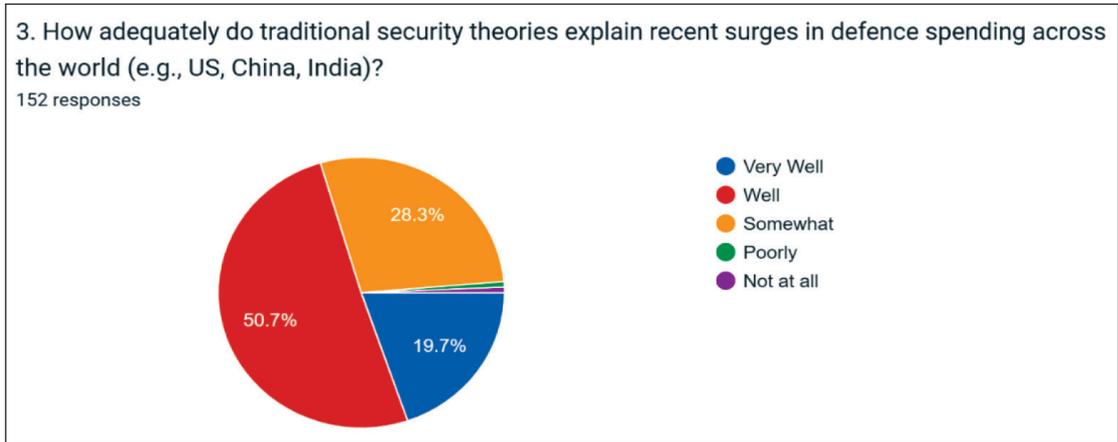
3. How adequately do traditional security theories explain recent surges in defence spending across the world (e.g., US, China, India)?
152 responses

- Very Well
- Well
- Somewhat
- Poorly
- Not at all

28.3%
50.7%
19.7%

Figure 5. Survey data showing assessment of traditional security theories versus defence spending
Note. Author's survey data,2025 (n = 152)

Analytical Coding and Interpretation Strategy

Qualitative findings were analysed using a thematic coding strategy aligned with the FRS framework. An initial deductive codebook was developed based on four theoretical categories: state-centric security, non-traditional threats, resilience, and paradigm interaction. This was complemented by inductive sub-codes emerging from interview and focus group data, particularly relating to disaster governance, institutional coordination, and adaptive practices. NVivo was used to manage and refine coding through iterative cycles This allowed themes to be reviewed for internal consistency and theoretical relevance. Resilience-related findings were interpreted through the three operational dimensions outlined in the theoretical framework—institutional adaptability, societal coping capacity, and policy recalibration under stress—ensuring coherence between theory, methodology, and results.

Focus Group Discussion

FGDs with postgraduate students at Tribhuvan University's Centre for Peace and Development Studies (CPDS) and trainees at the Armed Police Force Staff College provided detailed insights into perceptions of security. While participants recognized the continued dominance of Realist paradigms, they emphasized the growing significance of resilience in addressing emerging threats, including natural disasters, AI-driven risks, and vulnerabilities among marginalized populations. Students highlighted that classical paradigms alone are insufficient for addressing hybrid threats. These observations support the Fluctuation–Resilience Synthesis (FRS) framework, which conceptualizes security as a multilayered system in which resilience mediates interactions among state-centric, human-centric, and critical-security approaches.

Key Informant Interview (KII) Findings

Key informant interviews corroborated and expanded the FGD findings, providing additional empirical support for the FRS framework (see Table 1). Respondents confirmed the continued relevance of traditional paradigms for understanding state-level power dynamics. They also

emphasized that non-traditional threats—such as cybercrime, pandemics, and climate-related vulnerabilities—require resilience, adaptive capacity, and institutional reform (Acharya, 2014; Paris, 2001; Waltz, 2001). Respondents consistently highlighted Nepal's need to balance sovereignty with human security, illustrating how hybrid approaches are increasingly viewed as essential to effective security governance.

Table 1: *Empirical Validation of FRS Theory (KIIs & FGDs)*

Respondent	Key Insight	Hybrid Approaches	Resilience Role	Contextual Note
CPDS Students	Realism dominant but challenged	State, human, critical	Disaster/AI focus	Nepal-specific priorities
Maj. Gen. P. B. Silwal	Interstate conflicts renewed	Non-traditional overlap	Intelligence failures	South Asian impact
Mr. Narayan Adhikari	Realism insufficient	Multi-layered	Institutional barriers	Globalization & climate
Brig. Gen. S. R. Sharma	Hegemony sustains state logic	Non-traditional rooted in the state	Weak governance	Small states' asymmetry
Maj. Gen. T. P. Bhatt	Tech reshapes conflict	Territorial + climate	Unity & innovation	Nepal's geography
Maj. Gen. B. R. Shrestha	Paradigm priorities differ	Hybrid security	Minimum deterrence + resilience	Nepal-focused

Source: Summary of major extracts of KIIs of all scholar, security professional and practiceners
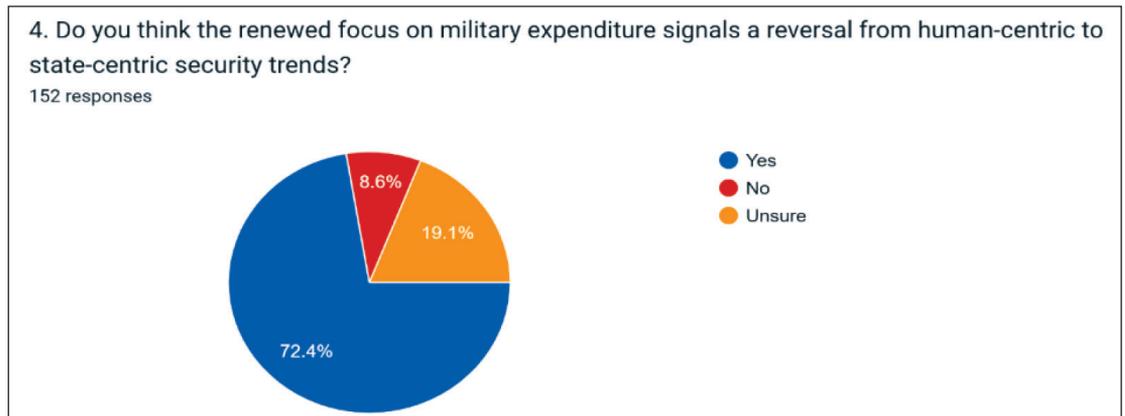
Survey Findings

Figure 6. Perceived shift from human-centric to state-centric security priorities
Note. Author's survey data, 2025 (n = 152)

Figure 6 presents respondents' perceptions regarding whether increased military expenditure signals a shift from human-centric to state-centric security priorities. The majority (72.4%) indicated no such shift. Despite rising defence spending, security concerns remain predominantly human-centric, emphasizing societal well-being, resilience, and non-military threats. A smaller portion (19.1%) viewed the trend as a return to traditional state-focused paradigms, reflecting the continued relevance of state sovereignty and defence priorities for a minority. The remaining 8.6% were uncertain, highlighting ongoing debate over security priorities in a complex global context. These results indicate that rising military expenditure does not necessarily undermine a multidimensional understanding of security.
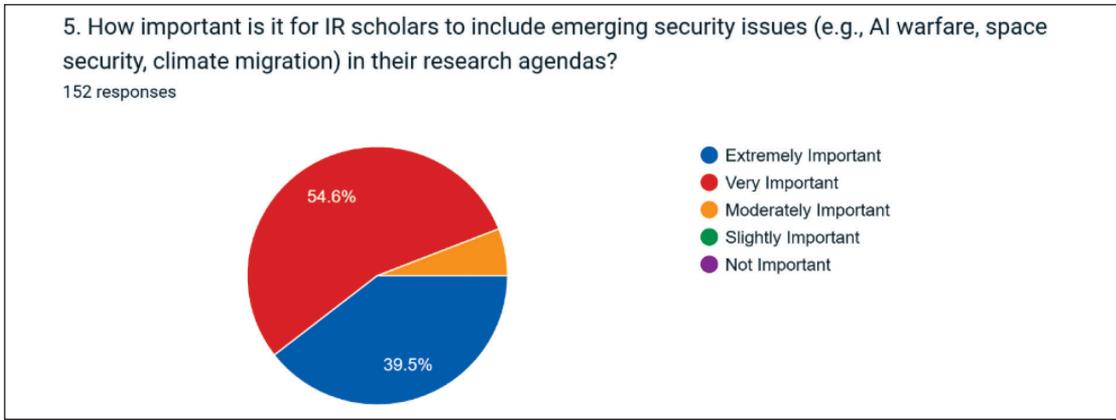
Figure 7. Importance of inclusion of emerging security issues in their research agencies.
Note. Author's survey data, 2025 (n = 152)

The survey results (Figure 7) reveal an overwhelming consensus on the necessity of incorporating emerging security issues into international relations scholarship. A combined 94.1% of respondents rated this inclusion as either extremely important (39.5%) or very important (54.6%). This highlights recognition that traditional paradigms must adapt to rapidly evolving global challenges such as artificial intelligence warfare, space security, and climate-induced migration. Only 5.9% considered it moderately important, and no respondents regarded it as slightly or not important, indicating virtually no resistance to this shift. These findings suggest that scholars and practitioners perceive the integration of emerging security domains as essential for the relevance and rigor of IR research. The absence of outright dismissal further underscores a shared understanding that neglecting these issues risks rendering security studies obsolete in addressing 21st-century realities.

As shown in Figure 8, participants highlighted several underrepresented areas in South Asian and global security research. The most frequently identified gaps were climate-induced displacement (53.9%), AI and autonomous weapons (52.6%), economic fragility (52%), and cyber sovereignty (48.7%). Public health received moderate prioritisation (42.8%), while gender-based violence (23.7%) attracted comparatively lower attention. These findings suggest that, despite strong attention to technological and environmental concerns, health security and gender-based violence remain underexplored areas in security research.
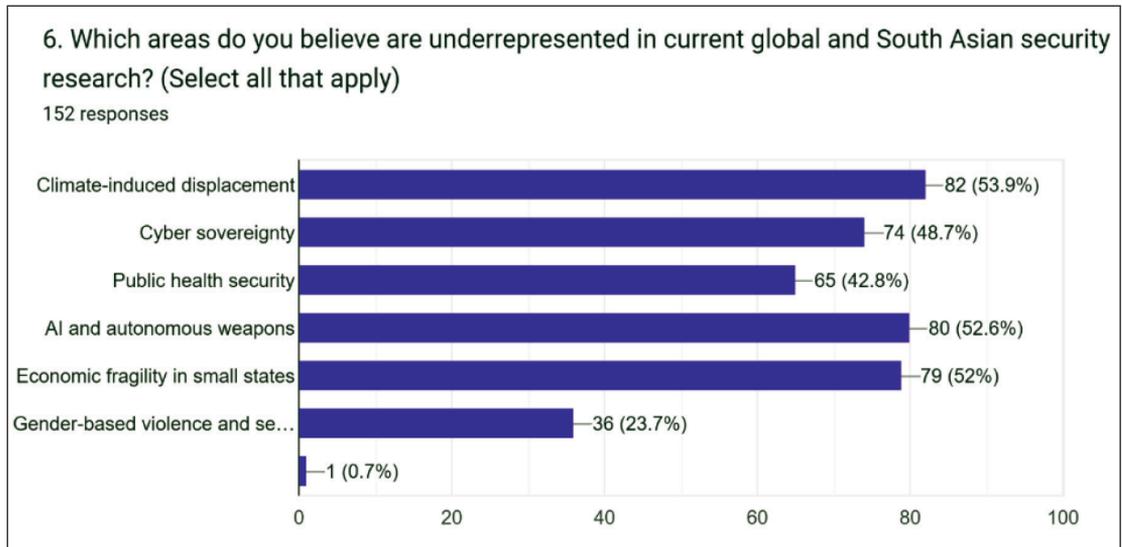
Figure 8. Areas underrepresented in current global and South Asian Security research.
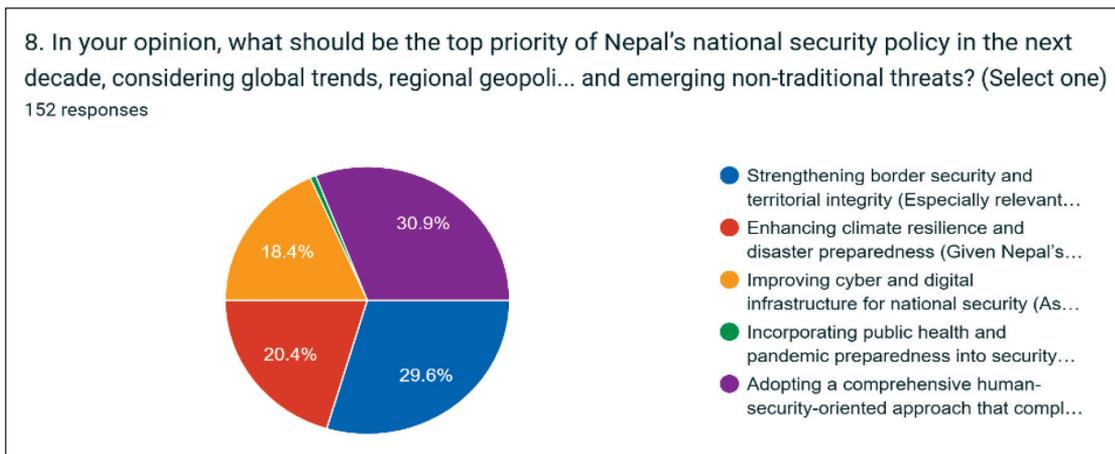*Note. Author's survey data (n = 152)*

Contextualising Empirical Findings in Nepal's Security Environment

The empirical findings are grounded in Nepal's specific security context, characterised by geopolitical sensitivity, environmental vulnerability, and evolving non-traditional threats. Respondents frequently referenced climate-induced displacement following floods, landslides, and glacial lake outburst floods, particularly in hill and mountain regions. These events were described as a growing security concern affecting livelihoods and internal migration. Cyber-related risks were discussed primarily in relation to misinformation, data vulnerability, and institutional capacity gaps rather than large-scale cyber warfare, reflecting Nepal's current threat exposure. Perceptions of military expenditure and border security were framed less in terms of force projection and more in relation to deterrence, disaster response capability, and regional balance. These contextual references anchor the findings empirically rather than rhetorically, situating Nepal's security challenges within the broader FRS analytical lens.

Figure 9 reflects respondents' evaluations of Nepal's current security strategy in addressing non-traditional threats such as climate change, cyber risks, and health crises. Among 152 participants, only 6.6% rated the strategy as "very well," while 32.9% considered it adequate. A notable 25% were neutral, and 31.6% judged it poorly, with 3.9% rating it very poorly, indicating mixed perceptions about its effectiveness. Policy priorities for the next decade show strong support for a more integrative approach: 31.5% emphasized human security, 28.1% territorial integrity, 20.5% climate resilience, and 19.2% cyber infrastructure, while public health received minimal attention (0.7%). Collectively, these results highlight a clear demand for hybrid strategies that combine state-centric logic with human, environmental, and technological considerations.
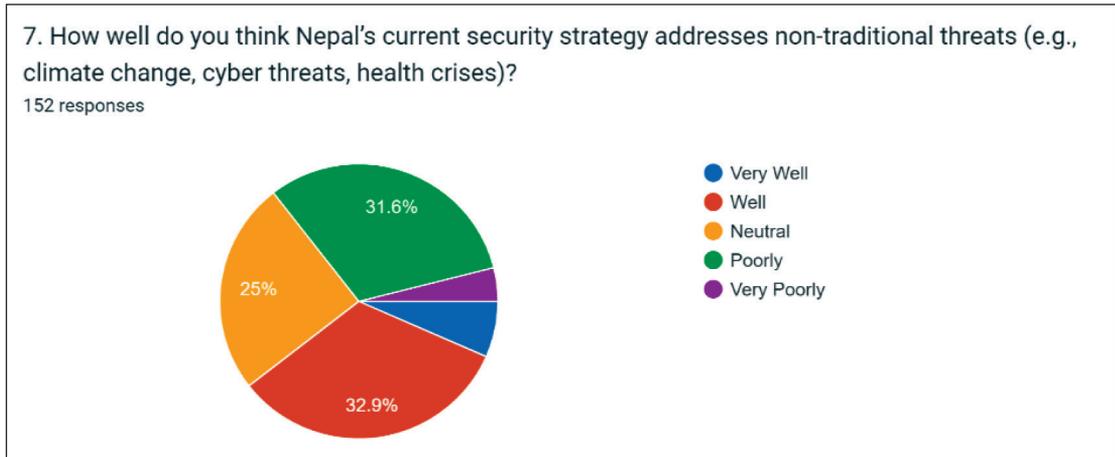
Figure 9. Status of Nepal's current security strategy address.
Note. Author's survey data,2025 (n = 152)

Figure 10. Priorities for Nepal's national security policy over the next decade
Note. Author's survey data,2025 (n = 152)

Figure 10 presents Nepalese respondents' national security priorities over the next decade, highlighting a trend toward integrative approaches. Among 152 participants, 30.9% favoured a human-security framework alongside traditional state security, while 29.6% prioritized border security and territorial integrity. Climate resilience and disaster preparedness were identified by 20.4%, and cyber infrastructure by 18.4%; public health and pandemic preparedness received minimal attention (0.7%). These results suggest a preference for balanced strategies that integrate state-centric, human-centric, environmental, and technological considerations. They also reflect broader regional gaps in areas such as climate-induced displacement, AI and autonomous weapons, economic fragility, and cyber sovereignty (Budhathoki, 2025).

While the survey instrument was designed to align with the FRS framework, it is acknowledged that certain items may reflect overlapping thematic emphasis, particularly where state-centric and resilience-oriented concerns intersect. This overlap is analytically consistent with the framework's emphasis on layered coexistence rather than strict conceptual separation. To mitigate potential leading effects, survey results are interpreted comparatively and triangulated with qualitative evidence, ensuring that conclusions are not derived from single-item responses but from converging patterns across data sources.

Taken together, the empirical findings validate the four core propositions of the Fluctuation–Resilience Synthesis. First, cyclical fluctuation is evident in the continued dominance of realist frameworks during acute crises alongside growing prioritisation of non-traditional threats. Second, layered coexistence is reflected in the simultaneous emphasis on border security, human security, climate resilience, and cyber governance. Third, resilience emerges as a mediating capacity linking state-centric defence and adaptive governance, particularly in perceptions of disaster response and institutional preparedness. Finally, contextual variation is evident in Nepal's geopolitical positioning and environmental vulnerability, which shape the specific configuration of security priorities.

Discussion

The findings reveal both convergence and divergence across survey, FGD, and KII data. Convergence appears in the recognition that contemporary threats are hybrid, integrating state-centric, human-centric, and environmental dimensions. Divergence arises in emphasis: CPDS students acknowledged the dominance of Realism but stressed its inadequacy in capturing hybrid threats, instead highlighting resilience in response to disasters, AI risks, and vulnerabilities affecting marginalized populations. Practitioners, conversely, confirmed the continued relevance of traditional paradigms for state power dynamics while stressing the rising importance of non-traditional threats such as cybercrime, pandemics, and climate vulnerabilities. They further observed that deterrence alone is inadequate, with resilience anchored in adaptive capacity, technological innovation, and institutional reform emerging as a stabilizing force in complex security systems.

The data support the FRS model. Table 4.1 shows how traditional and non-traditional security approaches fluctuate over time, coexist, and are shaped by resilience and regional context in Nepal and South Asia. This synthesis conceptualizes security as a dynamic equilibrium, shaped by overlapping paradigms stabilized through adaptive capacities.

Policy implications are substantial. Nepal must institutionalize an integrated framework that balances sovereignty and territorial defence with human security and climate resilience. While global security continues to be shaped by realist imperatives of deterrence and military modernization, survey evidence shows strong academic and policy demand for frameworks that address hybrid threats such as AI warfare, cyber disinformation, and climate-induced migration. Traditional theories whether Realism's state-centric focus or Human Security's normative breadth, remain partial and incomplete.

While this study focuses on Nepal, the FRS framework can be applied to other regions and globally. For instance, the fluctuation between state-centric and human-centric paradigms

is visible in South Asia's responses to climate change, where military securitisation coexists with community-based resilience initiatives in Bangladesh and the Maldives (Islam & Nur, 2021). Similarly, in Europe, NATO's strategic resilience agenda reflects a synthesis between traditional defence logics and civilian infrastructures (Chandler, 2014). These Cross regional parallels demonstrate that the FRS framework is not confined to Nepal but holds broader explanatory power.

Fluctuation-Resilience Framework: Alternative Paradigm on Security in International Relations

The Fluctuation Resilience Synthesis (FRS) presents an alternative security paradigm by conceptualizing security as dynamic, layered, and responsive. It emphasizes the interplay between conventional defence priorities and emerging non-traditional concerns, with resilience acting as the stabilizing force that harmonizes these shifts. FRS also accounts for regional variation, demonstrating how geopolitical dependencies, environmental vulnerabilities, and demographic pressures influence security outcomes. This multidimensional approach is exemplified in Nepal, where border security intersects with human and climate-related challenges, and in movements such as the Gen Z uprising, where digital activism, unemployment, and climate justice converge with broader state concerns. By incorporating temporal cycles, institutional and fiscal trade-offs, and technological diffusion, FRS offers both analytical depth and actionable guidance for policymakers. Moving beyond linear and static models, it provides a flexible, context-sensitive framework within International Relations for understanding and managing complex, hybrid threats. Consequently, FRS is positioned as a theoretically rigorous, empirically grounded, and globally relevant contribution to the study of security (see Figure 11).
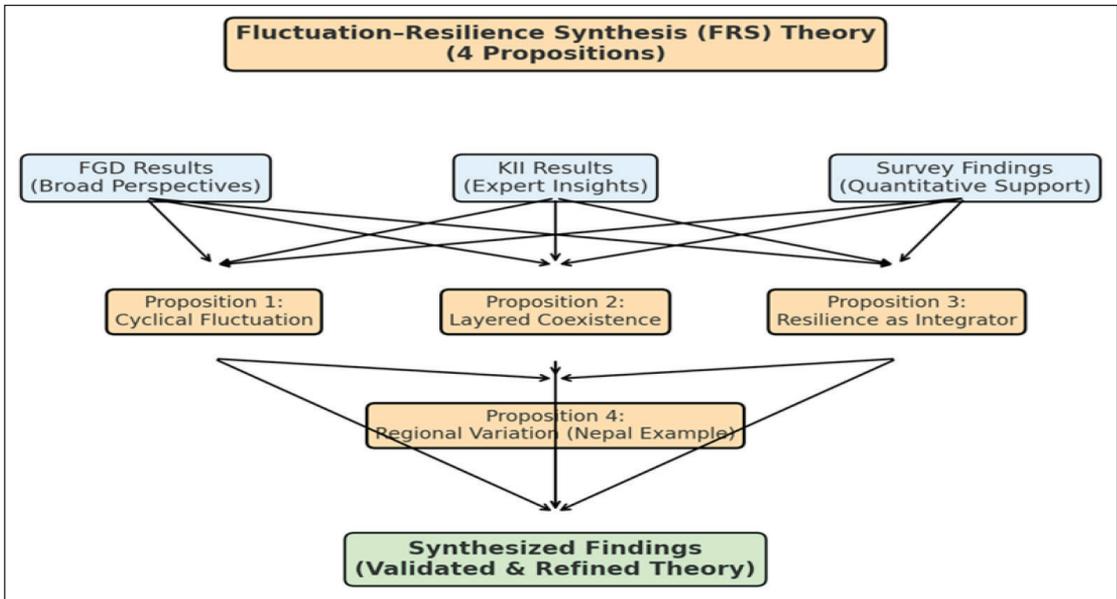

Figure 11. Theoretical proposition flowchart of the Fluctuation–Resilience Synthesis (FRS) Theory.
Note. Author's proposition flow chart based on analysis (2025)

Synthesis of Key Findings

Nepal's security landscape reflects a dynamic interplay between enduring state-centric traditions and the growing influence of non-traditional perspectives. Survey results indicate that 87% of respondents continue to view realism and neorealism as valuable for interpreting state behaviour and defence expenditure. However, interviews and focus group discussions reveal increasing support for human, critical, and cyber security approaches, with nearly two-thirds of participants favouring their inclusion in national security discourse. This pattern suggests that security paradigms do not evolve linearly but fluctuate in prominence in response to context and crisis, with resilience emerging as a key adaptive anchor.

Resilience featured prominently across both quantitative and qualitative findings. Over 90% of respondents identified emerging challenges—such as AI-enabled warfare, climate-induced migration, and cyber sovereignty—as pressing security concerns. Participants emphasised that small states like Nepal are particularly vulnerable to transboundary risks, including displacement, autonomous technologies, and economic fragility. Despite broad recognition of resilience and adaptability as essential, only 42% of respondents assessed Nepal's existing strategies as effective, citing deficiencies in climate preparedness and cyber governance.

Taken together, these findings indicate an increasingly hybrid security paradigm. Border management, human security, and climate resilience were viewed as interdependent priorities, linking sovereignty with long-term development. While realist approaches remain dominant during acute crises, ecological and societal concerns increasingly shape strategic planning. This pattern empirically supports the Fluctuation–Resilience Synthesis (FRS), demonstrating how security logics coexist, fluctuate, and are integrated through resilience. The Nepal case thus grounds FRS empirically while confirming its relevance for fragile and mid-level states confronting hybrid and non-traditional risks.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that neither traditional state-centric paradigms nor human-centric approaches alone can adequately explain contemporary security dynamics. While realism and neorealism remain useful for understanding sovereignty and military competition, they are insufficient in addressing climate stress, cyber vulnerabilities, and transboundary risks. Conversely, human security and resilience frameworks foreground vulnerability and adaptation but may understate the continuing importance of state institutions. The Nepalese case illustrates these limitations in practice, underscoring the need for a more integrative framework.

The Fluctuation–Resilience Synthesis (FRS) responds to this gap by conceptualizing security as cyclical, layered, and adaptive. It shows how state-centric and human-centric logics fluctuate in prominence under systemic shocks, with resilience functioning as the stabilizing capacity that enables continuity and recovery. In Nepal, resilience is a practical imperative linking sovereignty, disaster preparedness, climate adaptation, and community protection. More broadly, FRS contributes to International Relations theory by offering an analytically robust and policy-relevant framework for small and vulnerable states facing hybrid and non-traditional threats.

Theory-building is inherently contextual. A Global South perspective foregrounds the lived realities of fragile states and enriches dominant security debates. Future research should operationalize FRS through measurable indicators—such as budgetary priorities, resilience policies, and community preparedness—to enable empirical testing. By integrating protection with adaptability, FRS offers a balanced paradigm for navigating twenty-first-century security challenges.

Recommendations

The FRS framework underscores the need for adaptive, inclusive, and resilience-oriented security strategies. For Nepal and similarly positioned states, this entails embedding human security within national policy and strengthening participatory platforms linking government, academia, and civil society. Resilience should be mainstreamed through measurable indicators aligned with the Sendai Framework and the Sustainable Development Goals, alongside enhanced cybersecurity capacity. Institutional reforms—such as independent oversight mechanisms and updated academic curricula incorporating integrative frameworks like FRS—can strengthen accountability and expertise. Regionally, collaborative mechanisms addressing climate, hybrid, and transboundary threats are essential. Establishing a dedicated research institute on security and resilience would further bridge theory and practice.

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