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Securitization in East Asia

How did the securitization discourse of the South China Sea disputes in high-level state communication of the Philippines and Vietnam evolve from 2009 to 2024?

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List of Abbreviations

ADI – ASEAN Direct Communications Infrastructure

ADMM – ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting

AMM – ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Meeting

ARF – ASEAN Regional Forum

ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations

ASO – Annual Security Outlook

BCM – China-Philippines Bilateral Consultation Mechanism on the South China Sea

CAQDAS – Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software

COC – Code of Conduct in the South China Sea

CS – Copenhagen School of Security Studies

CSS – Critical Security Studies

CUES – Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea

DOC – 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea

EEZ – Exclusive Economic Zone

MOU – Memorandum of Understanding

RSC – Regional Security Complex

SCS – South China Sea

ST – Securitization Theory

UNCLOS – 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

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1 Theoretical Part

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Topic and Research Question

This thesis aims to answer the research question: “How did the securitization discourse of the South China Sea disputes in high-level state communication of the Philippines and Vietnam evolve from 2009 to 2024?”. It examines and compares the high-level discourse about the South China Sea (SCS) disputes of the two – besides China – most involved countries among all claimant states. The analysis is rooted in securitization theory (ST), which is a constructivist framework developed by the Copenhagen School of security studies (CS) and argues that security is not a material reality but rather a continuous construction shaped through discourse. The selected diverse cases of the Philippines and Vietnam are ideal for a comparison of the securitization discourse. On the one hand, they are typical for claimant states in the SCS disputes and are dedicated members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). On the other hand, they have very different historical backgrounds, political systems and strategies for managing the SCS disputes. It has been noted that “the Philippines’ policy on the SCS depends on who is in power” (Kipgen 2020, 61), whereas Vietnam has traditionally been torn between having to maintain good trade relations with China (Hong Hiep 2023, 123) while simultaneously building up its own military capacities to counter China’s ambitions in its adjacent neighborhood (Kipgen 2020, 62). The studied discourse is defined as both countries’ individual contributions to the publicly available ASEAN Regional Forum Annual Security Outlooks (ARF ASO), which are composed of voluntary evaluations regarding various security issues in their region. The observations are limited to the years from 2009 to 2024, which explores the developments in discourse since the most recent intensification of the disputes in 2009 up until the most recently available data at the time of writing. The securitization discourse is methodologically studied through an empirical quantitative and qualitative content analysis.

The SCS disputes are one of East Asia’s security hotspots of the 21st century due to the region’s vital importance for global maritime trade and as a potential venue for great power confrontation between China and the US. The territorial disputes consist of several maritime areas with seven involved claimant states: Brunei, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam. The drawing of maritime borders in the SCS has for long mostly been about claiming sovereignty over territory for the sake of state completion, which is linked to gaining exclusive rights to eco-

conomic resources, such as fishing rights and control over hydrocarbons (Schofield 2015, 27, 29–31). Since the 1990s however, China has been showing an increasing military-strategic interest in its vast claims over major parts of the SCS via its U-shaped nine-dash line, which it argues to be rooted in “historic rights” (Zou and Ye 2021, 140). In November 2002, ASEAN and China signed a “Declaration on the Conduct of Parties” regarding the SCS, which led to some rather uneventful years (Tønnesson 2021, 38). The year 2009 marked the end of this relatively calm period, when China defined the SCS – along with Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang – as one of its “core interests” under the premise of “national territorialisation” to absorb its maritime frontier into national territory (Buszynski and Roberts 2015, 14). Developments towards an increased militarization during the 2010s have consequently led to the observation, that “the South China Sea has transformed from a storm in the teacup into one of the main arenas of geostrategic rivalry of the present time” (Buszynski and Do 2020, 238).

The overlapping territorial claims in the SCS are a widely acknowledged security issue of global importance. There is however little empirical research regarding the underlying discursive aspects of the security dynamics in the SCS, despite observations that “SCS claimants have clearly and significantly ‘securitised’ the SCS dilemma” (Odeyemi 2015, 299) and that particularly “China has effectively become securitized by key littoral states surrounding the SCS” (Garcia and Breslin 2016, 276). The securitization framework of the CS provides an analytical approach for how a regular political matter is discursively transformed into a matter of security with the use of speech acts by government officials, which subsequently allows for the mobilization of resources and the implementation of extraordinary measures that would have otherwise not been possible. In its essence, it analyzes “who securitizes, on what issues (threats), for whom (referent objects), why, with what results, and, not least, under what conditions” (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 32).

1.1.2 Relevance of the Research Question

Although findings from security studies are generally relevant to a wide range of actors, the results of this thesis are particularly useful to three groups of stakeholders. Firstly, ASEAN and the ARF, which play a mediating role as regional institutions in the SCS, will benefit from insights into how two prominent claimants perceive the disputes as a security issue and how they intend to address them. Secondly, the governments of China and the US, as the main great power rivals in the Indo-Pacific, can utilize this more comprehensive understanding of recent developments in the regional security landscape to inform their foreign policy. Lastly, the academic community will benefit by addressing different research gaps, especially due to the empirical application of ST. Besides this

broad relevance of the overarching topic about the securitization discourse of the SCS disputes, the research question is also relevant because of the chosen country cases and the selected time frame.

Regarding the relevance of the case selection, the Philippines and Vietnam are crucial actors in the SCS disputes. They particularly distinguish themselves from other claimant states due to their outspoken assertiveness towards the extensive claims of China (Kipgen 2020, 71). Both countries also already experienced several direct incidents on sea with China in their respectively claimed maritime territories and have to manage a clearly asymmetric distribution of power (Gerstl 2022, 193). This significant involvement in the disputes makes them ideal cases for a case comparison concerning the SCS disputes. An additional benefit of comparing the two countries' discourse in detail lies in securitization's rather holistic framework, which broadens the traditionally narrow definition of security by including the different sectors of economic, environmental, military, political and societal security (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 7–8). This includes an analysis of what actor or activity is specifically seen as threatening, who or what is actually being threatened and how the threat should ideally be addressed. ST argues that these aspects are intentionally employed elements of the securitization discourse, noting that “it is always a political choice to securitize or to accept a securitization” (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 29). The results of such a comparison would therefore reveal similarities and differences in how the two countries perceive and actively frame the disputes as a security problem and what potential counter measures they deem fit in response. Preventing any escalation of the disputes is clearly necessary due to the otherwise global economic consequences of any disruptions in maritime trade, which is of strategic interests to both directly concerned claimants and external actors (Buszynski and Roberts 2015, 16–17). Although there have already been several attempts to settle the disputes in the past, a satisfying solution to all parties is not yet in sight. While the existing 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) is non-binding (Schofield 2015, 37), the negotiations towards a more conclusive Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) have already been going on for many years and its finalization still remains elusive (Buszynski and Do 2020, 232–33). Since both countries are not only heavily involved in the disputes, but also dedicated and engaged members of ASEAN and the ARF, the thesis' results have the potential to inspire better tailored measures for further cooperation and possibly hint at options towards a peaceful settlement (Vuković 2020, 161). While preventive diplomacy and confidence-building regarding the disputes are listed by the ARF as measures to improve the regional security landscape (ARF 2013b, 59, 61, 2023b, 8, 10), ASEAN itself is confronted by internal division among its members on how to engage with China and sees the eventual conclusion

of a COC as “a means of maintaining unity and demonstrating autonomy” as a relevant actor in the region (Buszynski and Do 2020, 7).

The relevance for the specific time frame of the years 2009 to 2024 is given by the period’s duration, its particular start and end, as well as key developments during said period. Concerning its length, the studied period of 16 years is extensive enough to allow a rather long-term analysis of “fundamental policy reorientations [which] may be the result of long-term processes that develop over many years”, instead of focusing on short episodic changes that might be “connected to a single decision” (Brummer 2024, 50). As such, the discourse of the chosen period naturally includes the high-level communication of several different governments for each country. The year 2009 is furthermore a fitting starting point, because it is described as the beginning of the still ongoing “eighth crisis” of the SCS disputes (Tønnesson 2020, 10). China’s foreign policy before 2009 was characterized as being a “status quo actor, practising proactive, skillful and successful diplomacy” (Khoo 2015, 51). Following the global financial crisis in late 2008, however, China has become increasingly assertive concerning its extensive claims in the SCS, which has been described as “a major and arguably long-term strategic shift” (J. Zhang 2015, 61), which materialized in “the absorption of what was historically a maritime frontier into national territory” (Buszynski and Roberts 2015, 14). This development was further supported by the rise of domestic nationalism and the election of Xi Jinping as general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party in 2012 (Hu 2015, 205). From 2009 onward, the US’s “Pivot to Asia” under the Obama administration added an additional geopolitical element to the regional disputes (Amer and Li 2021, 362). Some key events of the studied period are the 2012 Scarborough Shoal incident between China and the Philippines, the 2014 Haiyang oil rig incident between China and Vietnam and – possibly the event with the most international coverage and interest – the 2016 SCS Arbitration Award of the Philippines (Nguyen 2020, 28–29). More recent observations also note the employment of gray-zone tactics in the form of “multiple coercive sub-war influence operations” by China’s Maritime Militia and Coast Guard in the disputed areas (Jenner 2021, 478). The year 2024 as endpoint of the studied time span is pragmatically chosen to include all available data of the last full calendar year at the time of writing. A longitudinal analysis for the years 2009 to 2024 therefore covers the most relevant period to understand the status quo of the disputes and their potential development in the near future. Since ST conceptualizes the security agenda as a continuous “intersubjective process” (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 30), studying the securitization discourse of the chosen time frame can reveal long-term developments and thematic patterns. This allows for an analysis of the employed existential threats, referent objects and security measures. Any differences and continuities in their intensity

and in their specific sectoral focus could consequently hint at promising areas for cooperation, as well as potential avenues for a peaceful settlement of the disputes. The most recent developments are also particularly relevant to the national strategies of China and the US regarding the SCS. A more comprehensive understanding of the disputes enables China to develop more effective diplomatic counter strategies to legitimize its own claims, such as in the form of keeping ASEAN internally divided and challenging US and Japanese support for a united Southeast Asia (Lynch 2015, 252). Conversely, the relevance of the studied period for the US lies in its strategic shift towards the Asia-Pacific since 2009, which is motivated in upholding international law, and particularly the principle of freedom of navigation in the region, coupled with an interest in increased cooperation with regional partners (Buszynski and Do 2020, 5).

The relevance of the research question for academia largely aligns with the contributions of constructivism to international relations and to security studies. Based on Miles' approach of classifying research gaps among a total of seven different types (Miles 2017, 5), three research gaps were identified that this thesis intends to contribute to: a knowledge gap, a methodological gap and a population gap.

A knowledge gap exists, because the specific knowledge about the securitization of the SCS disputes by the Philippines and Vietnam is insufficient. More concretely, while current research generally acknowledges that the territorial disputes in the SCS have continuously been transformed from regular political issues into matters of national security (Buszynski and Do 2020, 5, 7, 230) or even a regional "crisis" (Taylor 2015, 173–77), it is not well documented how the involved claimant states influenced this change of perception through non-materialistic behavior such as discourse. Answering the research question will therefore generate and contribute new knowledge for the cases of the Philippines and Vietnam regarding their securitization discourse surrounding the territorial disputes in the SCS.

The methodological gap exists, because mainstream security studies heavily rely on the different rationalist branches of realism (Elman 2008, 15, 27; Wohlforth 2010, 9), whereas the comparatively recent constructivist and critical approaches – such as proposed by the CS with its securitization framework – are focusing on the continuous social construction of security. The chosen theoretical approach for this thesis not only allows for a deeper and more complete understanding of how security is socially and politically constructed and shaped through discourse over time, but it also expands the traditionally narrow scope of security as a purely military and material issue, by complementing it with economic, environmental, political and societal aspects of security (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 7–8). Additionally, the chosen methodology of an empirically guided content

analysis addresses the significant preference in securitization research for purely theoretical expansions of the framework (Baele and Jalea 2023, 377). Findings from the quantitative and qualitative application of the securitization framework will therefore contribute new insights thanks to its alternative research approach.

Lastly, a population gap exists, because the research in international relations often exhibits a “big-power bias” (Han and Saez 2015, 124), which manifests in the SCS commonly being interpreted from the global perspective of great power competition between China and the US, with the perspectives of other smaller actors often being overlooked. The SCS disputes can, however, also be investigated from a regional point of view with sovereign local middle powers, since they form a distinct regional security complex (RSC) with security dynamics on its own (Buzan and Waever 2003, 27–30, 141). Furthermore, ST is often criticized for being too Eurocentric, particularly due to the many applications of securitization to the topic of national identity and migration in Europe (Balzacq, Léonard, and Ruzicka 2016, 507–11). This thesis will therefore not only expand the securitization framework’s application to territorial conflicts – which is a rather traditional and less typical object of study in constructivist security studies – but it will also further expand the geographical scope of constructivist security studies to the region of East Asia.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Overview

This literature review will provide the theoretical foundation in order to develop an appropriate analytical framework to the research question: “How did the securitization discourse of the South China Sea disputes in high-level state communication of the Philippines and Vietnam evolve from 2009 to 2024?”. The research question consists of several essential parts: the securitization discourse as the central object of study, the SCS disputes as security issue, the Philippines and Vietnam as country cases and the years from 2009 to 2024 as specified time frame. The relevance of the latter three elements is already laid out in the previous subchapter, which leaves the concept of the securitization discourse still to be properly examined in this literature review.

The literature review consists of three parts. It begins with a theoretical part about the elements of securitization, its concept of sectoral security and criticism that inspired modifications to the original conception of securitization. This aims to lay the foundation for defining the different elements that make up a securitization discourse. The second part contrasts different research methods that can be used to study securitization, which includes content analysis, discourse analysis, ethno-

graphic research, experiments and process-tracing. This part discusses the different possibilities for applying ST to identify and measure the securitization discourse and its evolution over time. The third and final part focuses on the application of ST in research on the SCS and demonstrates the relevance of certain elements for this thesis.

1.2.2 Securitization

1.2.2.1 Securitization Theory

ST is the most central development of the CS and is defined as the discursive process of “who securitizes, on what issues (threats), for whom (referent objects), why, with what results, and, not least, under what conditions (i.e., what explains when securitization is successful)” (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 32). Securitization does not take security as an objective and material reality, but as a discursive construction where a formerly regular political matter is elevated to a security issue. This move from the regular political agenda to the more urgent security agenda is marked by framing an existential threat to a referent object. This framing necessitates applying urgent counter measures with extraordinarily mobilized resources (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 23–24). Such an alternative conceptualization of security as a discursive practice allows both for a broader and deeper definition of security by incorporating additional menaces to human life – besides military threats – and by including more diverse actors – besides the state – in order to further advance the study of security (Buzan and Hansen 2009, 32–34, 189). This constructivist turn away from the dominance of realism in security studies is insofar relevant, because “the security environments in which states are embedded are in important part cultural and institutional, rather than just material” (Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein 1996, 33).

Distinction from politicization and risk

At first, securitization might appear similar to the concepts of politicization and risk. It is therefore important to distinguish them from one another. The distinction among these approaches is most clearly illustrated by the different nuances in how they define the nature of the threat, their response to the threat and their relationship to regular politics. For securitization, the threat is existential in nature, which requires an urgent response in the form of extraordinary emergency measures. This can only be achieved by breaking the established rules and regular political practices, making securitization an extreme form of politicization (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 23). Regarding politicization, the threat is any ordinary issue or problem within the normal public debate that can be addressed through the established decision-making processes of regular politics. Contrary to se-

curitization, politicization works within the existing political framework (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 23). Concerning risk, the threat is about the “conditions of possibility for harm” (Floyd 2016, 681). The ideal response consequently demands a risk assessment to determine which anticipatory and preventive measures can minimize the chances of the threat from occurring. This seeming necessity to establish precautionary bureaucratic routines against a potential future risk instead of addressing an already existing danger can however lead to the depoliticization of the threat by circumventing the “slow procedures of law” in democracies (Aradau and Van Munster 2007, 107).

Key elements

The key elements and actors of securitization include the intentional use of speech acts by a “securitizing actor” who declares a “referent object” as “existentially threatened”. This declaration calls for extraordinary measures to address the threat and may also involve a “functioning actor” who is neither the securitizing actor nor the referent object (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 36).

Besides the different actors, the speech act is the most essential element in the process of securitization, which is a combination of “language and society” whose success is determined by external and internal factors (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 32). The utterance of the speech act has a performative power rooted in the external authority of the securitizing actor and follows an internal “grammar of security [...] that includes existential threat, point of no return, and a possible way out” (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 33). It is therefore not necessary to declare something explicitly an issue of security, as long as the urgency of addressing a threat is clear to both the securitizing actor and the audience (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 27). Instances of securitization can consequently be identified by a discourse that fulfills these criteria. The speech act is argued to be powerful enough to shape and define a certain political issue into a matter of security because “it is the utterance itself that is the act. By saying the words, something is done” (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 28). Consequently, the use of speech acts leads to an intersubjective process of constructing security between the securitizing actor, the referent object, the existential threat and other potential functional actors (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 29–31).

Although not strictly defined, the securitizing actor is most typically a high-ranking politician or an influential institution – such as a head of state or a ministry – with the moral authority to credibly frame a regular issue as a security problem. Securitization’s discursive nature enables it to widen and deepen the traditionally rather narrow and shallow definition of the referent object as the military safety of a state. The widening proposed by the CS is based on the classification of security across five thematic sectors: economic, environmental, military, political and societal security. As a

consequence, the range of potential referent objects also deepens and includes actors both below and above the state level, such as local minorities or regional institutions. In line with the broader and deeper approach to security, the range of potential functional actors also increases significantly. At its core, the most important functioning actor is the one declared to be carrying out the threat against the referent object. The range of functional actors also includes any other actors who affect the security dynamics, while being neither the securitizing actor nor the referent object, such as facilitating actors and any other indirectly involved units.

Successful securitization

It is important to highlight that a securitizing actor's speech act of declaring an existential threat to a referent object is only the initial step of securitization, called the "securitizing move". This move alone is not sufficient for a successful securitization. The CS lists three criteria to identify a successful securitization: "existential threats, emergency action, and effects on interunit relations by breaking free of rules" (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 26). An attempt to securitize is therefore only successful if the declaration of an urgent threat to the survival of a referent object – the securitizing move – is followed up by the adoption of extraordinary measures and the mobilization of resources, which would otherwise – without first referencing a critical threat with a subsequent call to action – not have been possible. This success of an initial securitizing move depends on the acceptance of it among the target audience, another relevant actor that has to agree on breaching established rules for the sake of addressing the declared threat (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 25). The audience was originally not explicitly defined beyond "those the securitizing act attempts to convince to accept exceptional procedures because of the specific security nature of some issue" (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 41). However, in democracies the audience is most likely to be the electorate or parliamentarians, whereas in autocracies it can consist of party members and other influential groups among the state's elite.

Desecuritization

The rule-breaking following the audience's acceptance of the securitizing move signifies that the issue at hand becomes securitized, which can be described as "a further intensification of politicization" (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 29) and eventually affects other actors and their relations among them. Although the CS lacks its own ethical framework to evaluate the moral value of instances of securitization, it sees this circumvention of established rules and the construction of a friend-enemy distinction as inherently problematic. For these reasons, the CS explicitly prefers and

advocates “desecuritization” as “the optimal long-range option” (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 29).

Desecuritization can occur in four different ways: 1. stabilization, 2. replacement, 3. rearticulation, and 4. silencing (Hansen 2012, 539–45). Stabilization is the original form of desecuritization and occurs when a securitized issue slowly shifts into the background of the security discourse and loses its sense of emergency. The issue then returns to the regular political agenda as a politicized topic, which can be dealt with more pragmatically and within the established rules and practices. Replacement occurs when a currently securitized issue is being replaced by securitizing another one. Rearticulation occurs when a securitized issue is actively being removed from the security agenda by framing it as a regular political issue. Silencing a securitized issue causes it to disappear entirely from discourse. It is then no longer represented on the security or political agendas. Desecuritization is therefore not only an important element in ethical considerations of securitization, but it is also relevant to this thesis, because certain aspects of the SCS disputes could have become desecuritized in different ways with different motivations.

1.2.2.2 Sectors of Security

The CS’s sectoral approach of analyzing security is a direct result of its more open discursive definition of security. It broadens the definition of security beyond military aspects through its categorization into five thematic sectors: economic, environmental, military, political and societal security. As the sectors come with a variety of potential referent objects, the concept of security is simultaneously deepened beyond the state. There is however still a clear preference for “collectivities” over individuals, arguing that “much of social life is understandable only when collectivities are seen as more than the sum of their ‘members’” (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 40). The general analytical utility of security sectors lies therefore in providing a holistic approach to security, in which the seemingly same issue can be securitized differently over time, by different actors, with varying intensity and with various overarching themes. The CS specifically points out that many security issues and the involved actors are multi-layered and intertwined: “Sectors are not ontologically separate realms [...] Some units, particularly the state, appear in several or all of the sectors” (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 168). Security sectors are consequently argued to be a viable theoretical lens to analyze traditional and non-traditional types of security alike and also reflect the dynamic thinking of security policy makers in practice: “The possible number and type of sectors is thus left hostage to how the discourses of security unfold. There are no criteria for specifying sectors other than what becomes established usage in these discourses” (Albert and Buzan 2011, 415). As such, it

builds on sectoral expansions that have already been proposed by the peace research agenda, such as human development and the role of identity, while still including the military sector in order to account for the state-centric and military focus of national security as in strategic studies (Buzan and Hansen 2009, 213). While this theoretically limitless flexibility of security sectors is criticized for its potential imprecision (Sjöstedt 2020, 28), it can also be seen as an important strength of ST, because it allows the theory to dynamically adapt to changes in actual discourse. For the sake of clarity, Table 1 shows a summary of each security sector's potential referent objects and the associated key terms related to its securitization at the end of this subchapter.

Economic security

The economic sector is at its core about “relationships of trade, production and finance” (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 7) and “concerns generated by limited or unequal access to economic resources (including financial capital and markets) needed to sustain an acceptable level of social welfare” (Butler 2020, 14). Potential referent objects can range “from individuals through classes and states to the abstract and complex system of the global market itself” (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 100). Despite this variety of referent objects in the economic sector, “the most important seem to be the state and the LIEO [Liberal International Economic Order]” (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 103). At the unit level, the state appears to be a more significant actor than both individuals and classes, whereas formal and informal international institutions are dominant on the subsystemic and systemic level of economic security. Although a very prominent actor in the economy on several levels, companies are in most cases not treated as referent objects, except when they are essential to the stability of a specific market. Their success and failure is the result of the – at least in the liberal perspective – desired economic competition and therefore relative uncertainty in the free market. Although the most dominant economic approach over the past decades has clearly been liberalism, (neo)mercantilism and socialism provide alternative interpretations to economic security by favoring “economic nationalism”. While liberalism argues for the removal of barriers in order to increase the mobility of economic factors, economic nationalism strives to reduce insecurities in the market by active state intervention (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 95–96). Seemingly reasonable outcomes for economic nationalism such as monopolies and protectionism are in contrast against the liberal logic of a free market with optimal economic outcomes supported by liberal institutions. Despite these different approaches to the proper role of the state, the most common concerns of economic security stay the same and include the issues of maintaining a state's capabilities for independent (particularly military) production and supply against the potential abuse of eco-

conomic dependencies, as well as a general crisis of the international economy (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 98, 116–17).

Environmental security

The environmental sector is at its core about “relationships between human activity and the planetary biosphere” (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 7) and “concerns prompted by threats to the local, regional, or global ecosystem and the natural resource base on which human life depends” (Butler 2020, 14). The most obvious referent object is the environment itself or specific parts of it. However, the referent object behind safeguarding the environment can also be seen as the preservation of an existing level of civilization, which itself depends on a sustainable ecosystem (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 75). Environmental security is therefore concerned with the “maintenance of the local and the planetary biosphere as the essential support system on which all other human enterprises depend” (Buzan 2016, 38). Although certain existential threats to civilization posed by the environment – such as earthquakes – will always occur naturally without human intervention, the environmental securitization discourse focuses instead on the environmental changes caused by specific human activities, such as climate change due to the emission of greenhouse gases (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 79–80). These threats are rooted in the environmental sector, but most likely affect essential aspects in other sectors, for example by causing economic problems as a result of depleted resources. The origins and consequences of environmental problems can be found at different levels and in different regions, but the global systemic and the local unit level seem to be the most dominant (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 85, 91). As such, the environmental security agenda can be defined broadly and includes several overlapping issues: the disruption of ecosystems, energy problems, population problems, food problems, economic problems and civil strife (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 74–75). However, the problem most exclusive to environmental security is the disruption of ecosystems, which includes most notably climate change, loss of biodiversity and pollution.

Military security

The military sector is at its core about “relationships of forceful coercion” (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 7) and “concerns produced by the reciprocal interaction of the armed offensive and defensive capabilities and/or perceptions of states and their leaders” (Butler 2020, 14). It is also the traditional subject of strategic studies. Just as in traditional security studies, states are the most prominent referent object in the military sector, as they usually uphold their exclusive right of sovereignty over their territory and population by military means (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde

1998, 52). There are, however, significant sub-state groups within established states that can also be threatened militarily, such as tribes, clans, nations and other potential would-be states (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 52–54). This is particularly noticeable in civil wars and failed states. On a higher level, international alliances are subsystemic or even systemic actors that might be threatened militarily. While these military threats can simply be aimed at the entirety of the alliance's member states, they might also be targeted at the larger-scale “civilization” a certain alliance commonly represents, for example NATO, which is widely associated with “the West” (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 54–55). Even general principles of international relations such as the balance of power or the nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction could be considered as potential referent objects (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 55). Despite this wide variety of referent objects in the military sector, military securitization occurs most often on the regional level between states and to a lesser extent on the local domestic level within states due to the importance of shared geography and history (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 70). The logic behind military securitization is based on the interplay of: 1. the actual offensive and defensive capabilities of states, and 2. the perception of each other's military capabilities and intentions, usually along a spectrum ranging from amity to enmity (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 51, 58).

Political security

The political sector is at its core about “relationships of authority, governing status, and recognition” (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 7) and “concerns produced in relation to the organization stability (or instability) of states, governing systems, and ideologies” (Butler 2020, 14). Its referent objects are political units, which on their own are “a collectivity that has gained a separate existence distinct from its subjects” (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 143). Today's most dominant form of a political unit is the territorial state. Other potential political units – and therefore referent objects – are emerging quasi-super states, politically self-organized stateless groups and transnational movements (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 145–46). Examples include the EU as supranational political union, stateless minorities with granted autonomy rights such as Canada's province Quebec and, at least historically, major world religions, particularly the Catholic Church and Islam. Political security itself is difficult to separate from the other sectors, because politics plays a part in all of them. Its specific threats are therefore distinct in that they are not employing any economic, environmental, military or societal (“identificational”) means (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 142). These political threats are concerned with “the legitimacy or recognition either of political units or of the essential patterns (structures, processes or institutions) among them” and target both the political unit's internal legitimacy and its external recognition (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde

1998, 144). The threats to legitimacy and recognition can manifest in different ways and on different levels (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 155–59). On the local intrastate level, political threats are based on the commonly imperfect match between the state and its governed nation, which can lead to separatist movements. Ideological differences between states may lead to political threats on the unit level, as can be noticed on the Korean Peninsula. On the regional level, increasing regional integration might be securitized as a political threat, because member states of an organization are required to cede some of their national political sovereignty, whereas the opposition to do so can lead to internal fragmentation of the international institution itself. Systemically, threats to established principles based on the ideas of international society, order and law can be seen as threats to international stability. While political securitization can be conceivable on all these different levels, it is most likely to occur on the local unit level, rather than on the intrastate or regional level (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 159).

Societal security

The societal sector is at its core about “relationships of collective identity” (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 7) and “concerns triggered by either excessive adherence or real/perceived threats to traditional patterns of language, culture, religious and national identity, custom” (Butler 2020, 14). The potential referent objects of societal security are any kind of “large, self-sustaining identity groups” (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 119), whose “we”-identity can be threatened, which includes civilizations, clans, ethnicities, minorities, nations, races, religions and tribes (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 123). The societal sector is specifically about the collective identity of a society instead of the perceptions of single individuals. It is also important to point out that “society” is often not necessarily equal to a state’s entire population, which usually consists of several different collectives instead of being an ideal version of the homogeneous nation state (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 120). This discrepancy distinguishes the societal sector most clearly from the political sector. The societal security agenda consists of four main threats: migration, depopulation, horizontal competition and vertical competition (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 121). In the former two cases, identity is threatened by changes to the collective’s population, whereas in the latter two cases it is directly in competition with another identity. Migration threatens identity by changing the composition of the collective’s population, whereas depopulation leads to a lack of the necessary means to sustain the identity, because there are fewer “carriers” of the identity (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 121–22). Horizontal competition is concerned with threats posed by cultural influences from the outside, which then change the particular way of life of the collective, whereas vertical competition leads to people abandoning their original identity in favor

of a new integrating or secessionist identity (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 121–22). The particular vulnerability of each society depends heavily on how it constructs its collective identity (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 124–26). Migration and depopulation are more threatening to societies that define themselves by their separateness from others or who are competing for state control with other collectives. Horizontal and vertical competition, on the other hand, are more threatening to societies whose identity is based on culture, language, multinationalism, diversity or their corresponding state. The different types of societal threats occur on different levels (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 125–26). Migration is primarily a regional dynamic, whereas depopulation is a locally concentrated phenomenon. Horizontal competition can be present at every level and vertical competition is mostly about intra-state fragmentation and regional integration.

Summary

The presented sectoral study of security not only has its merits for the general analytical utility of approaching security in a wider and deeper sense, but it is also relevant to this thesis. It breaks down the complex interplay of different security dynamics as found in the SCS disputes into several smaller, but more coherent parts. Even without studying any actual security discourse, one can make an initial assessment that different elements of the disputes offer the possibility for securitizations among all five sectors. Economically, the disputes could limit some states' access to resources and trade. Environmentally, the unregulated competition for natural resources could affect the sustainable existence of those resources. Militarily, the disputes inherently challenge several states' territorial sovereignty. Politically, the disputes delegitimize established international laws. Societally, the disputes could encourage a loss of local identities and their traditions. This potential diversity of how the SCS disputes are securitized warrants further study into their precise nature.

Table 1: Summarized overview of security sectors, their potential referent objects and the most commonly associated keywords

Security Sector	Potential Referent Objects	Associated Key Terms
Economical	classes, global market, individuals, LIEO, states	access, capital, dependency, economy, finance, markets, monopoly, production, protectionism, resources, supply, trade, welfare
Environmental	environment, human civilization	biodiversity, biosphere, climate, ecosystem, environment, human activity, natural resource base, pollution, preservation, sustainability

Military	alliances, clans, nations, principles of international relations, states, tribes	armed, capabilities, coercion, defensive, force, military, offensive, population, sovereignty, territory
Political	states, stateless groups, supranational institutions, transnational movements	authority, fragmentation, governing status, governing system, ideology, (in)stability, institutions, integration, international society, irredentism, law, legitimacy, order, organization, politics, processes, recognition, secessionism, separatism, sovereignty, structures
Societal	civilizations, clans, ethnicities, minorities, nations, races, religions, tribes	collective, culture, customs, depopulation, diversity, fragmentation, identity, integration, language, migration, nationalism, population, secessionism, society, tradition

Sources: Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998, 7, 38, 52–55, 75, 79–80, 95–96, 100, 103, 116–17, 119, 121–26, 144–46, 155–59) and Butler (2020, 14)

1.2.2.3 Criticisms and Modifications

Like any theory, ST is not without its critiques and proposed modifications inspired by them. The main criticisms against ST are regarding the exact nature of the speech act, the lack of accounting for non-verbal communication, reservations concerning the criteria for successful securitizations, criticism of ST not being critical enough and ethical considerations.

Speech act

The most central critique against ST is possibly aimed at the role of the speech act. It is argued to be too reductionist, as it reduces security to a fixed and formal discursive practice instead of treating the speech act as one part of a wider interaction between different actors (Balzacq 2005, 172). In this sense, the original conception of the speech act puts too much emphasis on its inherent power to shape security discourse independently, without sufficiently accounting for the audience and context surrounding it. In a similar way, the speech act's precise nature is sometimes defined contradictorily as being both "illocutionary" and "perlocutionary" (Balzacq 2005, 177). At times, ST takes the speech act as illocutionary – meaning to merely declare something as a threat to a referent object –

whereas at other times it is treated as perlocutionary – meaning to actually convince an audience to accept the securitizing move and to consequently accomplish securitization. In French, Balzacq distinguishes between “sécuritisation” for the discursive construction of a security threat and “sécurisation” as the subsequent mobilization of resources to address the security issue (Balzacq 2003, 39–40). A notable modification to overcome this theoretical contradiction can be found in Floyd’s proposal of taking securitization as a two-step process: 1. the securitizing move, and 2. security practice (Floyd 2010, 53). The securitizing move is the illocutionary speech act, in which a securitizing actor declares a referent object to be existentially threatened. The successful securitization is then, however, no longer dependent on the audience’s acceptance and is instead achieved “only if the warning/promise made in the speech act is followed up by a change in relevant behaviour by a relevant agent” (Floyd 2011, 428). This focus on observable security practice makes both the theoretical concept of the audience and the empirically difficult to measure criteria of audience acceptance largely negligible. Another modification to address issues regarding the speech act’s double role as illocutionary and perlocutionary was proposed by Balzacq in his “sociological approach” to securitization (Balzacq 2011, 1–2). This modification emphasizes the importance of understanding the perlocutionary aspects behind the speech act and argues for the necessity to study thoroughly the context and interaction between the securitizing actor and the audience, including “practices other than words: bureaucratic procedures and practices, technologies, norms of a given profession, and so forth” (Balzacq 2011, 41). Examining the “mutual constitution of securitizing actors and audiences” (Balzacq 2011, 2) justifies the use of research methods beyond traditional discourse analysis, such as content analysis, ethnographic research and process-tracing. The sociological approach’s focus on the role of power relations between different actors and the analysis of the underlying bureaucratic processes seems, however, to be more concerned with the examination of governmental techniques than the study of speech acts, as originally intended by the CS.

Non-verbal communication

The centrality of the speech act as exclusively linguistic communication led to additional criticism for its inability to account for non-verbal practices, such as the increasingly important role of electronic media and the use of images in political communication (Williams 2003, 525). Incorporating visuals appropriately into ST remains challenging, particularly due to their ambiguous meaning and the intentions behind them (McDonald 2008, 569). However, this does not necessarily rule out non-verbal communication from being studied through the lens of securitization. A promising approach to studying images in securitization might be in conducting psychological experiments, rather than political discourse analysis (Baele and Thomson 2017, 654).

Successful securitizations

Critique against the nature of the speech act is often related to criticism regarding the criteria for measuring successful instances of securitization. Originally, the CS defined a successful securitization by achieving three steps: “[1. the audience accepting the securitizing actor’s presentation of] existential threats, [2. adopting] emergency action, and [3. subsequently causing] effects on interunit relations by breaking free of rules” (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 26). Modifications made to the role of the speech act, therefore, also change the criteria for successful securitization. As already presented above, Floyd introduced the idea of replacing the role of the audience by the concept of security practice (Floyd 2010, 54). On the one hand, this raises the bar for the simple existence of securitization from the audience’s acceptance of the initial securitizing move to a significant behavioral change of a relevant actor. On the other hand, it lowers the bar for fully successful instances of securitization from the original three-step procedure to the already mentioned change in behavior of a relevant actor. In this understanding, a successful securitization is equivalent to its mere existence (Floyd 2010, 5). Balzacq’s sociological approach focuses instead on the interactions between securitizing actor and audience, including the context of these interactions. He defines securitization as “successful when the securitizing agent and the audience reach a common structured perception of an ominous development” (Balzacq 2005, 181). Instead of making the securitization’s success dependent on the original three-part process, it is already successful when both sides of the security interaction agree on a perceived threat.

Critical objections

Although CS is clearly challenging several principles of mainstream security studies, it has nonetheless been criticized by proponents of critical security studies (CSS) for not being “critical enough” (Nyman 2013, 60) because of its continued use of certain traditional ideas. This criticism against ST manifests particularly in three elements: 1. focus on state-centric military concerns, 2. conflating security as survival, and 3. defining identity in a rather fixed than dynamic way. Although CS significantly expanded the variety of potentially involved actors in security, it still primarily relies on the state and particularly state elites when identifying instances of securitization (Booth 2007, 164). This risks overestimating the importance of a state’s military security and therefore neglect security issues of marginalized groups that “are constrained in their ability to speak security [and] are therefore prevented from becoming subjects worthy of consideration and protection” (Hansen 2000, 285). CS was, however, already accounting for this critique when developing ST and argued that the contemporary dominance of the state is simply a reflection of its being the most common actor in the current international security landscape. This state-dominance in reality is explicitly not to be

confused with an intentional bias towards state-centrality (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 37). In this sense, the securitization framework is flexible enough to integrate other relevant actors and issues besides the state and military security due to its sectoral approach to security. ST's discursive definition of equating security with survival might also be seen as a "serious mistake" (Booth 2007, 106). The focus on existential threats to survival risks neglecting other threats that might not cause lethal harm, while still considerably worsening people's lives. Alternative understandings of security such as the CSS's "Survival Plus" (Booth 2007, 39) or the inclusion of human security in securitization (Song 2015, 52–53) offer the possibility of accounting for such threats. It might, however, still be reasonable to keep the attribute of "existential" in order to distinguish the security issues of people's survival from other "merely political" affairs (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 195), such as the quality of people's survival. Tied to this necessity of differentiating security issues from political ones is the adoption of exceptional measures. Although required by the original definition of securitization, it is a problematic aspect insofar as the breaking of rules is commonly characterized by the use of illegitimate and undemocratic practices (Charrett 2009, 15). It also ignores that some issues could be dealt with through regular politics and therefore without rule-breaking or emergency measures. An example would be the application of a preemptively established institutionalized framework for persistent threats (Qadri 2020, 56), such as provided by a military alliance. Similar to the justification of existential threats, however, emergency measures might be seen as another required factor to properly distinguish the two realms of security and politics. Lastly, ST makes extensive use of the concept of identities, which are defined as independent variables that are relatively constant over time. Although societal security – which is basically "identity security" (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 120) – is defined as being about a collective's identity without any political elements, a society's identity is not independent of the state's existence and its politics (McSweeney 1996, 85). Additionally, a relatively stable identity – which would be required to properly examine societal security over a period of time – is contradictory to its nature as an ever-changing and "fluid" social construction (McSweeney 1996, 90). ST argues that while identities are indeed developing continuously, they nonetheless "can petrify and become relatively constant elements to be reckoned with" (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 205). It is reasonable to assume that under certain circumstances, identity can be stable enough for a limited amount of time to study societal security, while still acknowledging its constructive nature and dynamic evolution over longer periods and in different contexts.

Ethical concerns

Ethical criticism against ST is particularly aimed at the so-called “normative dilemma of speaking and writing about security” (Charrett 2009, 10) and the general lack of an ethical framework to evaluate the moral value of different instances of securitization normatively. The normative dilemma of security is concerned with researchers inadvertently promoting negative consequences stemming from the use of the term “security” in politics, because they justify and replicate potentially “oppressive or undemocratic acts as well as processes of social and political exclusion” (Charrett 2009, 15) by writing about security without examining the underlying motives and outcomes. ST’s lack of an ethical framework to critically question instances of securitization could therefore involuntarily promote political action that might be undertaken in the name of security, which – intentionally or unintentionally – harms certain vulnerable groups. For example, the securitization of HIV as a security threat instead of a health issue could lead to the unintended outcome of defaming infected people as part of the threat, instead of mobilizing resources to support them (Sjöstedt 2020, 37–38). The CS always countered ethical criticism by strictly favoring desecuritization over securitization, arguing that any issues should rather be solved through the regular political agenda than by resorting to the “panic politics” of securitization (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 34). Desecuritization can roughly be evaluated as being either positive or negative (Floyd 2007, 342–43). If the securitized issue becomes politicized, it is a positive kind of desecuritization. If the issue disappears, however, from discourse entirely and is neither securitized nor politicized, it is a negative type of desecuritization. A more proactive approach to the dilemma would be to evaluate securitizations normatively. Floyd also proposed an ethical framework, which distinguishes between “agent benefiting” and “referent object benefiting” instances of securitization (Floyd 2010, 6). A securitization is considered referent object benefiting, if the securitizing actor’s intentions of defending the referent object are serious and if the initial securitizing move is consequently followed by a security practice that is coherent with the aim of addressing the threat (Floyd 2010, 55–56). However, if the securitizing agent’s security practice is not aligned with the threat justification of the securitizing move, then it is a case of agent benefiting securitization.

1.2.3 Methods for Securitization

Although largely relying on the “obvious method” (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 176) of discourse analysis, securitization can also be studied through other research methods. Besides discourse analysis, this includes content analysis, ethnographic research, experiments and process-trac-

ing. The discussion of each method is illustrated with examples of research that uses the specific method for studying securitization.

Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is a qualitative method that is based on the idea that language plays an active role in the construction of security and in the interaction between different actors. It is concerned with the study of the social aspects of texts, rather than taking the employed language as inherently neutral (Alzahrani et al. 2024, 64–65) and aims “to establish the meaning of texts shaped by distinct contexts” (Balzacq 2011, 40). Concerning its practical applications in securitization, two distinct variants of discourse analysis are used: a linguistic and a sociological approach (Balzacq 2011, 40–41). The linguistic – or sometimes also called philosophical – approach to discourse analysis focuses only on the text itself, while having the disadvantage of overlooking patterns and interactions between different contexts and actors. This is the type of discourse analysis that has been originally proposed by the CS for studying securitization. The sociological approach is based on critical discourse analysis and consequently also encompasses non-textual aspects of discourse, such as the associated social practices. Both approaches start with the selection of appropriate data, which requires the inclusion of texts that are essential to the securitization discourse while ensuring that the amount of data is manageable. Linguistic discourse analysis is straightforward: “Read, looking for arguments that take the rhetorical and logical form defined here as security” (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 177). The encountered security arguments are afterwards linked to their context, referent object, threat and potential connections to other security sectors (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 178). Sociological discourse analysis appears to be more comprehensive but also unfolds in two steps (Balzacq 2011, 43). In a first intratextual analysis, it examines the desired action of the text, the meanings behind it and the interactions generated by it. The second step of intertextual analysis aims to uncover patterns that emerge from the relationships between the selected texts, creating a “storyline” (Balzacq 2011, 43). The advantages of discourse analysis lie in its capacity to reveal the existence of securitization in discourses (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 177) and how the underlying patterns emerge through an intersubjective process (Qadri 2020, 67). Its disadvantages are its limitation of providing causal explanations regarding why and when securitization occurs (Balzacq 2011, 47), a potential data bias due to its reliance on political elite communication (Collective 2006, 466) and the method’s general issue of its inability to measure discourse empirically and objectively (Qadri 2020, 36).

In the original linguistic discourse analysis as proposed by the CS, securitization is identified through a rhetoric structure that contains the designation of a threat, the specification of a referent

object that is threatened and a claim for the necessity of emergency measures (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 5). Following this initial securitizing move, a successful instance of securitization is determined by the audience's acceptance of the securitizing move, allowing the implementation of extraordinary measures (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 25). In the authors' case study of the EU, they highlight how nationalism, transnational crime and free-market principles were securitized as threats to Europe, which led to further European integration across various sectors as emergency measures (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 179–89). Advantages of this approach are its clarity in distinguishing security issues from other political problems and its ability to illustrate the performative power of discourse to construct a perception of security in all of its sectors. Its disadvantages are the vague concept of the audience and a selection bias due to only examining successful securitizations. This bias also leads to a focus on the state and its elites and to the theory being applied rather than tested.

A sociological approach can be found in Hansen's examination of identity in the Bosnian war (2006). She identified securitization by examining competing discourses in the political debate that construct different identities, which in turn justify different foreign policies (Hansen 2006, xiv). Her discourse analysis is based on a research design consisting of four pillars of the Western debate on the Bosnian war: 1. the number of selves, 2. the intertextual models, 3. the number of events, and 4. the temporal perspective (Hansen 2006, 79). The West is the only self. The intertextual models are official discourses, the wider political debate and academia. The Bosnian war is the only event and the temporal perspective is divided into seven periods. In her analysis, she highlights the opposing "Balkan discourse" and "Genocide discourse" (Hansen 2006, 97, 101). The initially dominant Balkan discourse popularized an identity of the region as a place of violence that is still defined by an "ancient hatred" (Hansen 2006, 147), which justified the "Western policy of inaction" during the early stages of the war (Hansen 2006, 96). Following the genocide in Srebrenica, however, the dominant discourse changed towards the Genocide discourse, which challenged the West's self-perception as the defender of liberal values and led to a policy change to active intervention in the war (Hansen 2006, 26). This illustrates how the evolution of securitization can be traced by creating a timeline with key events and changes in the dominance of the competing discourses. A certain discourse is here deemed as dominant when it is reproduced by different actors and in different types of media. This approach's main advantage lies in its intertextual study of different discourses, which can reveal significant changes in the competing discourses and their context. A clear disadvantage is the requirement of a deep knowledge of the chosen case and its context, along with the inability to prove causal connections between different elements of the securitization.

Content analysis

Content analysis is both a qualitative and quantitative method based on identifying patterns and themes of words within a text. In direct contrast to discourse analysis, it therefore studies the text as independent of its social context. A quantitative content analysis is concerned with the numerical characteristics of texts, such as word counts, and particularly benefits research questions that ask “what” (Friedrichs 2022, 307). A qualitative content analysis is more interpretive and focuses on overarching themes and patterns of texts and particularly benefits research questions asking “how” and “why” (Friedrichs 2022, 307). Due to its rather positivist approach, content analysis – as well as process-tracing – appears to be significantly less used in the study of securitization than other methods (Balzacq 2011, 50–51). Besides the essential steps of defining the research objective and selecting the appropriate data, content analysis includes three steps (Alzahrani et al. 2024, 71–72). Its analysis requires the development of an appropriate coding plan to categorize the media content based on the stated research goals. Following this coding scheme – also called “coding system” or “codebook” – the content of the selected data is manually categorized. The coded data can be further analyzed with both qualitative and quantitative techniques, before interpreting the findings. Particularly the coding plan is the most essential part of this method, because “the ideal for content analysis rests on the quality of the coding plan” (Balzacq 2011, 52). However, there are also occasions, in which the development of coding categories in advance is not necessary and can be done while reading the texts (Gerstl 2017, 193–94). The advantages of content analysis are its objective and systematic approach, which guarantees a certain level of reliability and replicability (Alzahrani et al. 2024, 74), its ability to handle large datasets through the use of computer software (Breuning 2022, 194) and the possibility to study different forms of media besides texts (Alzahrani et al. 2024, 74). Its disadvantages are the remaining subjectivity in developing and applying the coding scheme (Vignoli 2022, 539), the limited inclusion of context besides the studied content (Alzahrani et al. 2024, 74) and the inability to provide causal explanations (Friedrichs 2022, 316).

Baele and Sterck conducted an automated quantitative content analysis of the securitization of the EU’s immigration legislation (2015). Their identification of securitization is based on a “security lexicon” that contains common terms in security studies and can be applied to the selected texts (Baele and Sterck 2015, 1128). In combination with specialized software, a security ratio of the texts can be automatically calculated. Because this defines securitization as the ratio of how often words from the lexicon match words from the texts, securitization is understood as a continuum instead of a binary outcome. By comparing the security ratios of the EU’s immigration legislation texts with its legislation on security policy and a control sample of general legislation texts, the au-

thors demonstrate that immigration is “not fully treated like a security issue. Conversely, one cannot claim that immigration is not securitised at the EU level” (Baele and Sterck 2015, 1130). Although this research is focused on a single point in time, the authors explicitly note that the method can also be used to study the evolution of securitization over time (Baele and Sterck 2015, 1133). The advantages of such a content analysis lie in its transparent method and the fact that it takes securitization as a continuum, which more closely resembles the nuances of the political reality and allows for the comparison of different intensities of securitization. On the other hand, the automated approach neglects the audience and context and requires a considerable effort in developing a sound security lexicon for the chosen case.

In a more thematically oriented research, Vultee conducted a manual content analysis regarding the securitization framing of the “war on terror” in three US newspapers from 2001 to 2006 (2010). He argues that the securitization of the war on terror is constructed through three indicators in the media’s coverage: 1. voice, 2. status, and 3. location (Vultee 2010, 38). If the newspaper reports on the issue using its own voice, describes the status of the war on terror as an established term and keeps its location general and vague, the more established is the securitization. Conversely, if the media reports from an outside source, refers to the war on terror as a contested term in quotation marks and designates a specific location of it, then the securitization is not established. By measuring the evolution of each indicator’s frequency in the different newspapers, Vultee demonstrated that the securitization of the war on terror increased in the newspaper that favored the Bush administration, whereas it declined in the other more critical newspapers (Vultee 2010, 41). The advantages of this manual analysis are in its ability to account for context and journalistic nuances and in the clear operationalizing of securitization’s indicators. However, the manual coding is labor-intensive, limits the size of the data samples and has the potential for human errors.

Ethnographic research

Ethnographic research is a qualitative method that studies the perspective of involved actors from the inside, either through participant observation or semi-structured interviews (Balzacq 2011, 44). Participant observation aims to uncover “processes of securitization that are obscured from the view of outsiders” (Balzacq 2011, 45) and – as implied by its name – observes the behavior of securitizing actors and audiences to understand hidden dynamics of the chosen context. Semi-structured interviews are a more engaging approach for revealing perspectives from within the securitization process by using questionnaires that consist of fixed core questions and more open-ended, flexible ones. Ethnographic research’s advantages are in its more nuanced understanding of security (Cai Wilkinson 2013, 139), its use of local knowledge and context (C. Wilkinson 2011, 99) and its ability

to make hidden perspectives visible to outsiders (Balzacq 2011, 45). Its disadvantages lie in the time and resources required (Cai Wilkinson 2013, 143), potential biases of the researcher (Neumann 2022, 43) and ethical concerns of writing on behalf of other people (Wheatley and Hartmann 2013, 148).

Wilkinson's ethnographic approach to protests in Kyrgyzstan employed participant observation and semi-structured interviews to identify securitization by examining the experiences and understandings of security among the involved people (C. Wilkinson 2011; Cai Wilkinson 2013). In strong contrast to most other methods in securitization, ethnographic research is concerned with "how security means" rather than "what security means" (C. Wilkinson 2011, 9). Securitization was identified through the observation of protests, the recording of events and semi-structured interviews with various groups. Based on this diverse set of data, securitization is measured by tracing changes in the security understanding of the involved people, which results in a "thick description" of the situation (Cai Wilkinson 2013, 132). This contextualized thick description illustrates how the motivation behind the protests changed from initially supportive toward a specific politician, to opposing the government's response to those protests and eventually led to demonstrations against the perceived criminalization of the state (C. Wilkinson 2011, 114). The major advantage of ethnographic research is that it provides a deep and nuanced context, which also accounts for non-verbal aspects of securitization and includes the subjective impressions of involved people. Conversely, because of this highly specific context, the results might not be generalizable to other cases and the analysis is highly dependent on the researcher's interpretation of the collected data.

Experiments

Experiments are a recently used quantitative method in securitization and enable the researcher to control the values of variables, while randomly assigning them to the participants (Lupton and Webb 2022, 338). In the context of securitization, experiments allow the study of factors that lead to the failure or success of securitizing moves and the effects different types of media and communication styles have on an audience (Baele and Thomson 2017, 648, 652–54). Experiments have the advantage of being the "gold standard of causal inference" (Lupton and Webb 2022, 341), reducing biases (Baele and Thomson 2017, 648) and testing "the very assumptions and axioms on which theories are based" (Baele and Thomson 2017, 649). The disadvantages are the availability of large enough samples (Baele and Thomson 2017, 658), the inability to grasp long-term processes (Baele and Thomson 2017, 650) and that experimental findings might not be generalizable to the real world (Lupton and Webb 2022, 339).

Although experimental applications of securitization are rare, the combined quantitative and qualitative approach of Karyotis and Patrikios regarding the connection between religiosity and the securitization of migration in Greece can be considered as experimental (2010). In a first step, the authors found through a qualitative discourse analysis that the political discourse initially securitized immigration in the 1990s using “offensive language” toward immigrants, but started to desecuritize them in the 2000s (Karyotis and Patrikios 2010, 46). The religious discourse from the Orthodox Church, however, continued the securitization discourse, which led to a discrepancy between the political and the religious discourse (Karyotis and Patrikios 2010, 47). In a second step, public opinion surveys were conducted to measure the influence of both discourses on people’s sentiments, by measuring how often they watch political news on television and how frequently they attend church as proxies for the exposure to the discourses (Karyotis and Patrikios 2010, 49, 51). The results indicate that religiosity is one of the strongest indicators for anti-immigration sentiments, highlighting that the religious securitizing discourse appears to be more successful than the political desecuritizing discourse (Karyotis and Patrikios 2010, 52–54). This research successfully bridges the commonly criticized gap between the securitizing actor and the audience’s acceptance of a securitizing move. It also highlights the role of other influential actors in addition to the political elite. Regarding potential shortcomings, the results are highly specific to the dominant role of the Orthodox Church in Greek society and the chosen proxies for discourse exposure might not accurately reflect the actual exposure to the discourses.

Process-tracing

Process-tracing is a qualitative method for studying causal chains of events and mechanisms that link an initial securitizing move through a sequence of processes to its outcome of success or failure (Balzacq 2011, 46–47). It is conducted by using the two techniques of condition-seeking and design strategy (Balzacq 2011, 47). Condition-seeking determines limiting conditions that do not lead to a certain outcome, whereas design strategy identifies conditions that lead to result that would not otherwise occur. Together, they uncover a causal chain of conditions and social processes that lead to a specific outcome. The advantages of process-tracing are in its ability to causally explain why and when specific outcomes occur and its capacity to mitigate many biases by requiring the testing of assumptions against the data (Balzacq 2011, 47). Its disadvantages are the high data and time demands (van Meegdenburg 2022, 406) and its need to account for “equifinality”, which occurs when different paths can lead to the same outcome (Balzacq 2011, 50).

Sjöstedt used process-tracing to study how HIV/AIDS was constructed as a threat to national security in the US (Sjöstedt 2011). Methodically, she distinguishes three interconnected contexts: 1. in-

ternational, 2. domestic political, and 3. domestic societal (Sjöstedt 2011, 152). The analysis focuses on how the issue of HIV/AIDS was framed in each of these contexts, by which actors and what expressions they used. By examining the evolution of this discourse, the author demonstrates how it transformed from an initial emphasis on domestic health, caused by supposed immorality, during the 1980s into an issue of international security in the 1990s. This eventually led to the declaration of HIV/AIDS as a national security threat to the US by the Clinton administration in 2000 (Sjöstedt 2011, 168). The advantages of this research are its comprehensive causal explanation among different contexts and their elements over time, which include the dynamics of political and societal actors alike. Its disadvantages are the difficulty of reliably proving the direct causal chain and a potential selection bias of only including texts that advocated for securitizing HIV/AIDS.

Salter employed process-tracing to examine the failed securitization of proposed counter-terrorism programs (Salter 2011). He proposed a threshold model to identify attempts to securitize and measure their success or failure based on four criteria: 1. politics, 2. threat, 3. solution, and 4. power. For an issue to successfully securitize, it must already be politicized as part of the political debate, the evoked threat must be accepted and the proposed solution of new emergency powers must be granted to an authority (Salter 2011, 120). The studied counter-terrorism programs were supported by technocratic bureaucrats, but their proposed solutions were rejected by the public and no new powers were ultimately granted. Concerning the longitudinal development of securitization, Salter notes that because of the “entropy” of security issues, they tend to develop towards politicization – and therefore desecuritization – if their securitization is not actively being maintained (Salter 2011). Advantages of this approach are in its ability to address securitization’s “confirmation bias” by focusing consciously on failed instances of securitizing moves and in its clear division of the securitization process into distinct components. However, it is still focused on state-centric governmental processes and a certain level of subjectivity remains when evaluating the criteria of the threshold model.

CAQDAS

Central to conducting many of the above-mentioned research methods is the use of Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) to code the selected data and perform further analysis on the data. Popular CAQDAS include ATLAS.ti, MAXQDA, NVivo and QDA Miner (Hassan 2013, 178). While these are all proprietary software packages, there are free and open source alternatives available such as QualCoder and Taguette, with QualCoder appearing to be the more versatile option (Brailas, Tragou, and Papachristopoulos 2023, 27). It is important to note that – despite the attribute of “qualitative” in their name – most modern CAQDAS also offer quantita-

tive features or at least provide the coded data in a format that can be exported and used in more specialized software.

1.2.4 Securitization in the South China Sea

As mentioned in the relevance subchapter of the introduction, ST is criticized for being Eurocentric and particularly focused on the topic of migration. Nonetheless, some research exists on specific aspects of the SCS disputes, that is useful for this thesis. The examined literature can be roughly divided into: assessing ASEAN's role in securitizing the SCS disputes, justifying securitization as a fitting concept to study territorial disputes, presenting the measures undertaken by claimant states in the SCS and advocating for desecuritizing the disputes.

The research that is potentially the most similar and relevant to the intended approach of this thesis has been conducted by Gerstl (2017), who compared the different perspectives of ASEAN, the ARF and the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting (AMM) of the SCS disputes from 1992 to 2015. He studied the public statements of those institutions considering their "inevitably diplomatic wording" (Gerstl 2017, 193), which requires a more generous reading of the criteria of an existential threat within the texts. The focus on this communications of high-level politicians, rather than other domestic actors, is justified because in "Southeast Asia most regimes are (semi-) authoritarian and therefore already enjoy a political and discursive dominance" (Gerstl 2017, 192). The statements of ASEAN – which "only cautiously started to securitize the dispute" (Gerstl 2017, 212) – differ significantly from those of the ARF and the AMM. There is, nonetheless, a clear distinction between the ARF, which "has not securitized the dispute" (Gerstl 2017, 213), and the AMM, which is "in the process of securitizing the conflict in a stronger manner" (Gerstl 2017, 199).

Danner (2014) used the securitization framework to research on the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, which are located in the East China Sea and disputed between Japan and China. Although not directly about the SCS, it is, nonetheless, an application of securitization to a territorial dispute in East Asia. Danner does not present an empirical approach that could be adopted to other territorial disputes, but he highlights why securitization can be an appropriate theoretical foundation to study them. Firstly, Danner notes that territorial disputes are not only of military relevance, but affect other aspects of security as well (2014, 223). This supports the utility of a sectoral approach to security. Secondly, the intensity of the framing of the disputes of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands as a matter of security has fluctuated over time, which is fitting for the concepts of securitization and desecuritization as proposed by ST (Danner 2014, 224). Thirdly, the emphasis of naming the islands differently as either "Senkaku" in Japanese or "Diaoyu" in Chinese illustrates how language is a central factor

in justifying territorial claims and constructing them as a security issue (Danner 2014, 224). This resembles the distinct names employed for the SCS by different claimant states, with the Philippines referring to it as the “West Philippine Sea” (Thompson and Batalla 2018, 5), whereas Vietnam calls it the “East Sea” (Kerkvliet 2023, 67).

Misalucha-Willoughby and Medillo studied the Philippines’ securitization strategy as an example of the struggle for small powers struggle to find a long-term solution to the SCS disputes (2020). They highlight that the Philippines’ securitization process aims to internationalize the disputes through various actions at the state, regional and international level. On the bilateral state level, the Philippines simultaneously engage with China diplomatically and cooperate with the US militarily (Misalucha-Willoughby and Medillo 2020, 12). This matches the description of a “hedging strategy” employed by many claimant states, which is characterized by an approach between balancing and bandwagoning with great powers (Gerstl 2022, 192). On the regional level, the Philippines actively use ASEAN as a platform to present the disputes as a regional issue. ASEAN is, however, constrained by the internal division among its members and its own insistence on the “ASEAN Way”, which emphasizes “sovereignty, non-interference, consultation, and consensus” (Misalucha-Willoughby and Medillo 2020, 14). Consequently, ASEAN is interested in desecuritizing the disputes instead (Misalucha-Willoughby and Medillo 2020, 15). On the international level, the Philippines started an arbitration procedure in 2013 to determine the legality of China’s claims and activities in the SCS. In 2016, the arbitration ruled in favor of the Philippines, noting that “China’s actions were found to have violated the Philippines’ sovereign rights” (Misalucha-Willoughby and Medillo 2020, 16). At the latest with this Arbitration Award have the Philippines successfully securitized the disputes. Once achieved, however, the securitization must be maintained, which requires a significant effort for small powers, leaving them with less room to maneuver. The authors refer to this dilemma as “the tragedy of small power politics” (Misalucha-Willoughby and Medillo 2020, 18). In a very similar research of Vietnam, Trinh studied the securitization of China’s assertiveness in the SCS through various primary and secondary sources (2025, 2). Contrary to the common notion that ST has a “democratic bias” due to the limited political role of the audience in authoritarian states, he argues it “is still applicable in a one-party state like Vietnam as securitization is a means through which Vietnam promotes its political legitimacy” (Trinh 2025, 7). Trinh notes that Vietnam’s securitization of China’s claims in the SCS marks a policy shift to “naming and shaming”, which is supported by nationalism and anti-China sentiments (2025, 24). The identified exceptional measures employed by Vietnam are upgrades in naval power, the defense of the SCS territory it currently controls, the advancement of its maritime cooperation with the US and the use of ASEAN as

a platform to internationalize the disputes (Trinh 2025, 14–20). With a broader focus, Garcia and Breslin argue that the securitization of China’s assertiveness regarding its claims seems to have facilitated efforts of Japan and South Korea for capacity building among littoral states of the SCS (Garcia and Breslin 2016, 271). Based on their analysis of public opinion polls, the authors note that Japan remains to some extent securitized in Northeast Asia, but has mostly been desecuritized in Southeast Asia (Garcia and Breslin 2016, 278). Conversely, South Korea was never securitized in either region (Garcia and Breslin 2016, 279). They note that “despite a lack of cooperation and coordination, Japan and South Korea have largely followed similar policies in Southeast Asia” (Garcia and Breslin 2016, 286).

Zhang and Bateman (2017) examined the securitization of fishery and China’s Fishing Militia in the SCS disputes. They note that securitization in practice can either be strategic or tactical. Strategic securitization links a resource with a potential conflict, whereas tactical securitization links a low-level issue with a higher-level political issue (H. Zhang and Bateman 2017, 302). Because the securitization of fishery is tactical in nature, the authors argue that desecuritizing the low-level issue of fishery could have a positive effect on cooperation for associated high-level issues, such as territorial sovereignty in the SCS (H. Zhang and Bateman 2017, 306). Odeyemi argues similarly in favor of desecuritizing the disputes, noting that while the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is “one of the most important international legal tools” (Odeyemi 2015, 293), the “heightened “securitisation” of SCS disputes has constrained the effectiveness of UNCLOS as a resolution mechanism” (Odeyemi 2015, 299). UNCLOS’s legal framework to settle maritime disputes was not designed to account for national security matters and therefore requires the desecuritization of those disputes for it to function effectively. Furthermore, Ramli argues that the SCS disputes need to be desecuritized and that they should be treated as a “political-economic matter” rather than a “political-security matter” (Ramli in Pieterse, Embong, and Tham 2017, 303).

1.3 Analytical Framework

1.3.1 Overview

This analytical framework outlines the empirical and analytical approach of the thesis to answer the research question: “How did the securitization discourse of the South China Sea disputes in high-level state communication of the Philippines and Vietnam evolve from 2009 to 2024?”. It starts by confirming the case selection of the Philippines and Vietnam for the time period from 2009 to 2024, continues with an explanation of the data collection of relevant discourse and ends with the devel-

opment of an appropriate codebook and a detailed presentation of the specific steps and criteria of the chosen methodology, which is based on a quantitative and qualitative content analysis.

1.3.2 Case Selection

The case selection is two-dimensional: the Philippines and Vietnam as countries and the years between 2009 and 2024 as the time frame.

The two country cases are typical of claimant states that are involved in disputed territorial conflicts in the SCS. Both claim a relatively large amount of territory and are facing an asymmetric confrontation with China. Additionally, both have a similar population size and economic strength. Despite these similarities, the logic of the case selection is diverse. The two states differ geographically, because the Philippines as an archipelagic state are composed of many islands, whereas Vietnam mostly consists of continental mainland with several land borders in Southeast Asia. Both have a different historical background, with the Philippines first having been a Spanish and later an American colony, whereas Vietnam was colonized by France. The perhaps most important differences are found in their political systems, as the Philippines are a democracy and Vietnam is a one-party state. Related to this, the Philippines' foreign policy usually changes depending on the government in charge and "its unpredictable political system" (Tønnesson 2020, 14), whereas Vietnam displays a more consistent policy due to its continuous one-party rule (Hong Hiep 2023, 127).

The selected time frame is feasible given the scope of this thesis, while including relevant data. The year 2009 marked a return of increased international tensions in the SCS after a relatively calm period that followed the signing of the DOC between ASEAN and China in 2002 (Tønnesson 2021, 38). Limiting the observations to the years between 2009 and 2024 therefore includes the most recent developments in the SCS up until the most current available data.

1.3.3 Data Collection

The most important data when studying securitization is discourse. As pointed out in the literature review, the political discourse in Southeast Asian countries is primarily dominated by each state's elite (Gerstl 2017, 192) and it is therefore logical to focus on high-level communication. For this thesis, the securitization discourse is defined as the Philippines' and Vietnam's submissions to the ARF ASOs for several reasons. Firstly, the ASOs are explicitly about different countries' assessments of the regional security in Asia. They are therefore a relevant element of the securitization discourse surrounding the SCS disputes. Secondly, the ASOs of both countries follow a similar structure and appear in the same context. This ensures an appropriate level of comparability be-

tween two countries that might otherwise have very different approaches to public communication due to differences in their domestic political systems. Thirdly, both countries are proactive ASEAN members, but ASEAN and its extended formats usually only publish joint statements that have been agreed upon by consensus. The ASOs are, however, one of the few document series that highlight individual perspectives of the participating states in a detailed manner. A final, pragmatic reason for this selection is the straightforward availability of most ASOs in the online archives of the ARF (ARF n.d.).

Despite these advantages of using the ASOs, their main disadvantage is that contributions to them are voluntary. This can lead to gaps in the data for some countries during certain years. The Philippines did not submit any assessment for the year 2009, whereas Vietnam did not share its perspective in 2011 and 2013. Additionally, the entire 2012 edition of the ASO is not publicly available and my direct inquiry to the ARF Unit of the ASEAN Secretariat for the document was unsuccessful¹. From all the available ASOs (ARF 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013a, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023a, 2024), the submissions of both cases will be manually collected into separate text files for each country and each year. After correcting any formatting issues, the texts are ready to be further processed and analyzed using CAQDAS, as will be outlined in the following methodology section.

1.3.4 Methodology

This methodological section consists of three parts: the development of an appropriate codebook, a description of the coding process using QualCoder and a presentation of the quantitative and qualitative content analysis of the coded data.

Given the research question, some of the methods discussed in the literature review seem more suitable than others. Particularly ethnographic research and experiments are not suited with the objective of studying high-level discourse, while also requiring considerable resources that are beyond the scope of this thesis. This leaves content analysis, discourse analysis and process-tracing available. This thesis opts for content analysis for two major reasons. Firstly, quantitative research is considerably underrepresented in securitization (Baele and Jalea 2023, 381). Content analysis can address this imbalance and still allow for a complementary qualitative analysis of the same data. Secondly, content analysis provides a foundational understanding of the data itself. Any future re-

1 The 2012 ASO should nonetheless exist, because it is explicitly mentioned in the 2012 Chairman's Statement of the 19th ASEAN Regional Forum: "The Ministers welcomed the 2012 ARF Annual Security Outlook (ARF ASO), presented by Cambodia, which has applied the Simplified Standardized Format of the ARF ASO" (ARF 2012, 9).

search can then more easily study its social aspects by means of a more extensive discourse analysis or investigate any underlying causal mechanisms through process-tracing.

Since empirical research in general and content analysis in particular are relatively neglected approaches in securitization (Baele and Jalea 2023, 380; Balzacq 2011, 50–51), this thesis cannot rely on many practical applications. The chosen methodology builds on the fundamental task of content analysis: coding relevant text segments for their representation of certain concepts (Alzahrani et al. 2024, 72), which produces a refined dataset that can be further analyzed. The intention is therefore to code the different elements of securitization found within the texts, as they indicate how securitization takes place in the high-level discourse of the Philippines and Vietnam. By analyzing the changes in each code's numerical occurrences and literal content over time, this thesis can compare the securitization discourse of both countries and answer the research question.

Codebook

Most central to content analysis is the codebook and its quality (Balzacq 2011, 52). The codebook is the system by which relevant parts of each text are marked as an indicator of the element of securitization that the code represents. It therefore resembles the security lexicon used by Baele and Sterck (2015, 1128). The coded texts can then be analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively to assess the evolution of the securitization discourse over time. All coded text segments must explicitly relate to the SCS disputes and not to other security or maritime issues. This excludes other matters of security that might occur in the SCS, but are not connected to the territorial disputes, such as transnational crime, for example. Before coding the individual elements of securitization in the text, the first step will be to code all paragraphs that refer to the SCS disputes as a security issue. This will then allow for the measurement of the significance of the disputes in the overall security discourse.

Securitization's central components are the securitizing actor, the referent object, the existential threat, any other functional actors and the audience. The securitizing actor is defined as the agent who declares something to be threatened (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 36) and is already largely predetermined by the selected high-level contributions of the Philippines and Vietnam to the ARF ASOs, despite the fact that they do not explicitly state a specific creator of the statements. Because each year's highest-level meeting of the ARF – the ARF Ministerial Meeting – is consistently attended by the Foreign Ministers of the participating countries, it is reasonable to equate the securitizing actor with the respective countries' Ministry of Foreign Affairs and not with the entire countries as a whole. Regardless of the exact governmental agency behind each country's ASO, given that there is only one securitizing actor per country, there is no need to code it in the text. Instead,

each text file can be assigned to its respective country as overarching “case”, which allows for the coded data to be filtered more easily during the analysis. Assigning the texts to different cases has therefore no influence on coding the data. The referent object designates who or what is existentially threatened (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 36). Guided by the summary of potential referent objects in Table 1 in the literature review, the referent object is coded according to its corresponding security sector. As the original five sectors – economic, environmental, military, political and societal – do not necessarily include all potential security issues (Albert and Buzan 2011, 145), a sixth “other” sector is added to code referents that do not fit into the established classification. This allows for the inclusion of unexpected elements that might occur in the discourse. Functional actors are actors that influence the dynamics of a security issue in addition to the aforementioned securitizing actor and the referent object (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 36). Because the existential threat is a specific type of functional actor, it will be coded separately from other functional actors and will also be categorized by its corresponding security sector, which is inspired by the associated key terms in Table 1. Similar to the referent object, a sixth sector for threats that do not fit into the five established sectors is included. Due to the potential ambiguity of other functional actors, they are coded based solely on their mention in the texts without being further classified into sectors. The exact role and importance of the audience in the securitization process is controversial. While it is traditionally argued that the audience must accept a securitizing actor’s initial securitizing move for securitization to eventually occur (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 25), audience acceptance remains a vague concept. For this reason, the thesis adopts Floyd’s approach of replacing audience acceptance with the more pragmatic criterion of security practice, which is defined as a relevant change in the behavior of a relevant actor, most commonly the securitizing actor (Floyd 2010, 53–54). Security practice is not only a better reflection of how securitization develops in reality, but it also enables the exploration of the chosen texts for references to any significant behavioral changes. The concept of security practice is equated with mentions of measures that address the identified threat. The measures will be coded based on whether they have thus far only been proposed or demanded – therefore hinting at potential future changes in behavior due to the intention to do so – or whether they have already been initiated or concluded – which is an indicator of an accomplished change in behavior. The full codebook with all cases, categories, codes and the corresponding indicator and criteria is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Codebook with cases, categories, codes and indicators/criteria for each code

Case	Category	Code	Indicator / Criteria
Philippines	N/A	South China Sea	reference to the SCS disputes
	Referent Object	Economic Referent	classes, global market, individuals, LIEO, states
		Environmental Referent	environment, human civilization
		Military Referent	alliances, clans, nations, principles of international relations, states, tribes
		Political Referent	states, stateless groups, supranational institutions, transnational movements
		Societal Referent	civilizations, clans, ethnicities, minorities, nations, races, religions, tribes
		Other Referent	any referent not fitting to another sector
	Existential Threat	Economic Threat	access, capital, dependency, economy, finance, markets, monopoly, production, protectionism, resources, supply, trade, welfare
Vietnam		Environmental Threat	biodiversity, biosphere, climate, ecosystem, environment, human activity, natural resource base, pollution, preservation, sustainability
		Military Threat	armed, capabilities, coercion, defensive, force, military, offensive, population, sovereignty, territory

		Political Threat	authority, fragmentation, governing status, governing system, ideology, (in)stability, institutions, integration, international society, irredentism, law, legitimacy, order, organization, politics, processes, recognition, secessionism, separatism, sovereignty, structures
		Societal Threat	collective, culture, customs, depopulation, diversity, fragmentation, identity, integration, language, migration, nationalism, population, secessionism, society, tradition
		Other Threat	any threat not fitting to another sector
	Other Functional Actor	Functional Actor	any other actor affecting the security dynamics besides the securitizing actor, the referent object and the existential threat
	Security Practice	Intended Measure	reference to how a threat is proposed or demanded to be addressed
		Performed Measure	reference to how a threat is being or has been addressed

Sources: Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998, 7, 38, 52–55, 75, 79–80, 95–96, 100, 103, 116–17, 119, 121–26, 144–46, 155–59) and Butler (2020, 14)

Coding process

Working with CAQDAS is the most efficient way to code text. The requirements for a CAQDAS to use in this thesis include the ability to code text, to perform basic analysis and to export the coded

data in a format that is suitable for deeper analysis in another software. A preferred solution would also have a straightforward interface and be provided at low or no cost. This last point effectively eliminates any commercial products. QualCoder (Curtain and Dröge 2024) seems to be one of the most powerful free and open source CAQDAS currently available (Brailas, Tragou, and Papachristopoulos 2023, 27), making it the chosen software for this thesis².

The collected individual text files are first imported into a QualCoder project and assigned to their respective cases, which are their corresponding country. Guided by the indicators and criteria of the codebook, I will read through all texts and manually “code whilst browsing” (Hassan 2013, 177), while being mindful of subtle phrasings due to the “inevitably diplomatic wording of the ASEAN documents” (Gerstl 2017, 193). The smallest linguistic unit to code is at least a single word, but no upper limit will be defined, as some announcements and expressions might be relatively elaborate and encompass entire sentences. After a first cycle of coding, the coded sections will be reviewed for any inconsistencies. This is followed by computer-aided text searches, which are inspired by the key terms of the codebook’s indicators and criteria. These searches ensure the completeness of the coding process.

Quantitative and qualitative analysis

Once all texts are coded, the quantitative and qualitative analysis will begin. While QualCoder offers some basic analysis and visualization features, more specific calculations must be conducted externally. This additional analysis will be conducted in a spreadsheet application, using the exported coded data in a CSV file. The analysis of the coded data is guided by the research question: “How did the securitization discourse of the South China Sea disputes in high-level state communication of the Philippines and Vietnam evolve from 2009 to 2024?”. The securitization discourse will first be analyzed for each country individually. These preliminary results will then be compared to investigate the similarities and differences between the cases, in order to answer the research question. Table 3 summarizes the criteria for the analysis and their operationalization.

The quantitative part of the content analysis focuses on the numerical aspects of the securitization discourse. After coding, the number of occurrences, the absolute change of occurrences and the relative change of occurrences for each category and code per year will be assessed for both countries individually. These raw numerical values will be summarized and presented in tables and will also be visualized in charts for a more comprehensive overview of the data. To further evaluate the consistency of each category’s and code’s usage, a normalized volatility ratio is calculated by dividing

2 The version of QualCoder used throughout the thesis is 3.6.

the standard deviation of the absolute changes of occurrences by the mean of the total amount of occurrences. A lower value indicates a more continuous and stable usage of the category or code, whereas a comparatively higher value represents greater volatility and inconsistency. Calculating this normalized ratio to measure volatility is necessary for two major reasons. Firstly, the standard deviation of the absolute changes of occurrences alone does not accurately account for relative differences because of the varying total amount of occurrences across categories, codes and countries. Secondly, the average relative change of occurrences over the entire period cannot be calculated due to data gaps in certain years, which would lead to a division by zero error or an undefined “relative growth from nothing” in the subsequent years. The year-on-year relative changes of occurrences can, however, complement the volatility ratio’s focus on the entire period by providing annual values for specific comparisons. This quantitative analysis will reveal differences in the frequency and stability with which a certain category or code has been evoked in each country’s securitization discourse over time. The evolution of the “intensity” of each sector’s securitization can then be traced based on the number of its occurrences in the discourse (Baele and Sterck 2015, 1128–29).

The qualitative part of the content analysis is conducted in a similar manner, but focuses on the specific linguistic expressions within the coded texts. The analysis of the overarching categories focuses only on the most frequent expressions to highlight dominant themes, whereas the examination of each code covers every expression. These literal expressions for each category and code will be summarized in tables, along with their yearly occurrences. Since the coded text segments are representative of the concept behind each category and code, the evolution of these expressions over time will reveal the development of thematic discursive patterns.

The case comparison builds on the individual quantitative and qualitative analyses of the Philippines’ and Vietnam’s discourses, thereby answering the research question by highlighting similarities and differences between the two countries. The quantitative comparison contrasts the total number of occurrences and the trend of occurrences for each category and code over the studied period. Codes concerning the subdivisions of referent objects, existential threats and security practices are also ranked within each category to compare the relative weight of each security sector (for referents and threats) and each type of measure (for security practices). Comparing the volatility ratios of every category also illustrates how consistently they were used by each country. Because the codes for SCS references and other functional actors have no further subdivision, their comparison is based on summary statistics. For the SCS, this includes the lowest, highest, average and median share of the disputes in each ASO and the volatility ratio of this proportion, analyzed alongside the shortest, longest, average and median length of the ASOs. For other functional actors, this includes

their total, lowest, highest, average and median amount in addition to the volatility of their occurrences. Together, this reveals the evolution of each category's and code's numerical occurrences. The qualitative comparison looks for similarities and differences in the thematic expressions used for each category and code, which reveals shared thematic long-term patterns and recent trends.

Table 3: List of criteria for the content analysis and their operationalization

Content Analysis	Criteria	Operationalization
Quantitative	Significance of SCS disputes in security discourse	Proportion of each year's ASO explicitly dedicated to security issues of the SCS disputes
	Category and code occurrences	Total amount of the annual occurrences per category and code
	Evolution of category and code occurrences	Absolute and relative changes of the annual occurrences and volatility ratio per category and code
Qualitative	Category and code expressions	Expressions used annually per category and code
	Evolution of category and code expressions	Changes of the annual expressions per category and code

2 Empirical Part

2.1 Securitization by the Philippines

2.1.1 Quantitative Analysis

Significance of SCS disputes in security discourse

Regarding the completeness of the collected data, there are a few remarks to make. For the 2009 edition of the ASO, the Philippines did not submit any contributions. In the 2011 ASO, the Philippines contributed an assessment, but did not mention the SCS disputes explicitly. Lastly, the entire 2012 edition of the ASO is not publicly available, despite my inquiry to the ARF Unit of the ASEAN Secretariat. The underlying data for this section about the significance of the SCS disputes in the Philippines' ASOs is summarized in Table 4. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 1. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

The shortest ASO contribution of the Philippines is from 2010 and consists of 19,414 characters, with the longest contribution from 2024 measuring 70,875 characters. The average length of the Philippines' contributions is 45,915.57 characters per ASO, with a median of 44,326.5 characters, which is the mean of the values from 2017 and 2018.

The smallest proportion explicitly dedicated to the SCS disputes was in 2011, when no such mention was made. Besides this special case, the smallest share the disputes made up was 4.93% in 2010. The largest proportion dedicated to the disputes was in 2022 with 13.0%. The average proportion for the studied time period is 8.02% per ASO, with a median of 8.13%, which is the mean of the values from 2017 and 2023.

The most negative absolute change of the SCS proportion took place from 2010 to 2011 with a decline of 4.93 percentage points. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2011 to 2013 with an increase of 7.11 percentage points. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 0.54 percentage points per ASO, with a median increase of 0.25 percentage points, which is the value from 2016. Based on a standard deviation of 3.72 for the absolute change of the SCS proportion, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 0.46. The most negative relative change took place from 2010 to 2011 with a 100% decline since the Philippines did not explicitly mention the disputes in their contribution to the 2011 ASO. The second-largest reduction was from 2022 to 2023 with a decline of 33.92%. The largest relative change was observed from 2014 to 2015 with a growth of 99.25%.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the overall length of contributions to the ASOs has been steadily increasing over the studied period and has more than tripled between 2010 and 2024. There is a clear distinction between the first seven ASOs until 2017, where the values are all below the average and median length, and the subsequent seven ASOs with all values being above the mean and median. The proportion of the ASOs dedicated to the SCS disputes has also increased over time, but neither as consistently nor as strongly as the overall length of the ASOs. Despite a general upward trend of the proportion the SCS disputes amount to in the ASOs, the absolute and relative changes between years are prone to considerable fluctuations in both directions. These developments indicate that the SCS disputes have generally become a larger part in the Philippines' high-level state communication about international security during the observed time frame.

Table 4: Length of each year's ASO contribution of the Philippines, proportion of it dedicated to the SCS disputes and evolution of the proportion

Year of ASO	Length of ASO contribution in total amount of characters	Proportion of SCS disputes in %	Absolute change of the proportion of SCS disputes to the previous ASO	Relative change of the proportion of SCS disputes to the previous ASO in %
2010	19,414	4.93	N/A	N/A
2011	28,035	0	-4.93	-100.00
2013	27,924	7.11	7.11	N/A
2014	37,561	5.36	-1.75	-24.61
2015	24,885	10.68	5.32	99.25
2016	32,469	10.93	0.25	2.34
2017	41,414	7.67	-3.26	-29.83
2018	47,239	9.78	2.11	27.51
2019	50,438	6.66	-3.12	-31.90
2020	67,629	6.69	0.03	0.45
2021	64,061	8.93	2.24	33.48
2022	69,129	13.0	4.07	45.58
2023	61,745	8.59	-4.41	-33.92
2024	70,875	11.95	3.36	39.12

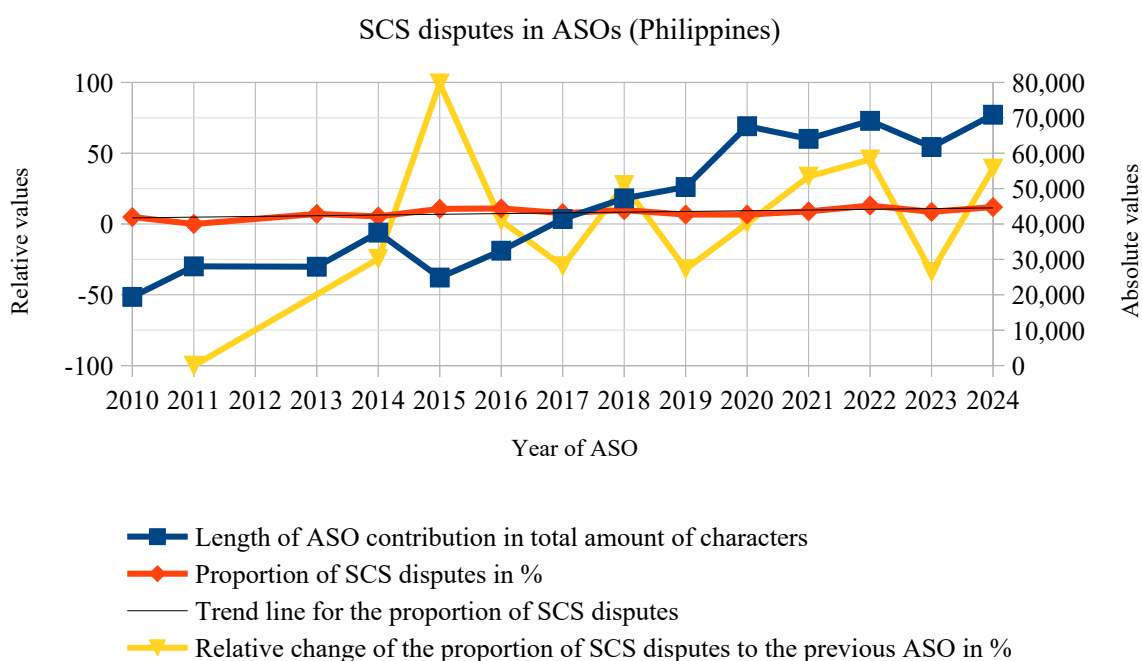


Figure 1: Visualization of SCS disputes in ASOs (Philippines)

Referent Object

The underlying data for this section about the referent objects in the Philippines' ASOs is summarized in Table 5. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 2. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Referent objects were evoked 197 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of referent objects in the Philippines' ASOs were observed in 2011 with 0 mentions, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2022 and 2024 with 31 appearances in these instances. The average occurrence is 14.07 mentions per ASO, with a median of 11.5 appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2016 and 2017 or 2018, the latter two years having identical values.

The most negative absolute change of referent objects took place from 2013 to 2014 with a decline of 10 occurrences. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2011 to 2013 with an increase of 14 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 1.92 occurrences per ASO, with a median increase of 3 appearances, which is the value from 2015 and 2021. Based on a standard deviation of 6.94 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 0.49. The most negative relative change of referent objects took place from 2010 to 2011 with a 100% decline of occurrences since the Philippines did not explicitly mention the disputes in their contribution to the 2011 ASO. The second-largest relative reduction was from 2013 to 2014 with a decline of 71.43%. The most positive relative change was observed from 2014 to 2015 with a 75% increase of occurrences.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of referent object occurrences follows an upward trend over the studied period, reaching its highest number of 31 appearances in 2022 and 2024. The absolute and relative changes of referent object occurrences were more distinct in earlier and recent years than in the middle of the time span. These developments indicate that referent objects have generally become a larger part in the Philippines' securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 5: Total amount of referent object occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Total amount of referent object occurrences	Absolute change of referent object occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of referent object occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2010	6	N/A	N/A
2011	0	-6	-100.00
2013	14	14	N/A

2014	4	-10	-71.43
2015	7	3	75.00
2016	12	5	71.43
2017	11	-1	-8.33
2018	11	0	0.00
2019	10	-1	-9.09
2020	17	7	70.00
2021	20	3	17.65
2022	31	11	55.00
2023	23	-8	-25.81
2024	31	8	34.78

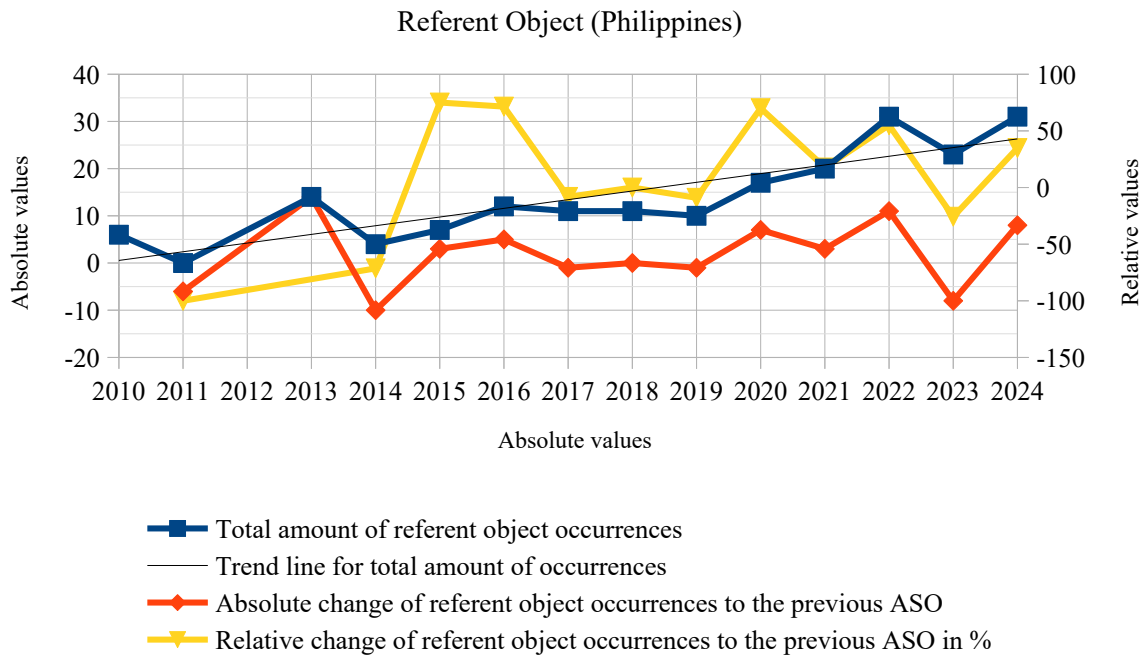


Figure 2: Visualization of referent object occurrences (Philippines)

Economic Referent

The underlying data for this section about the economic referents in the Philippines' ASOs is summarized in Table 6. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 3. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Economic referents were evoked 17 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of economic referents in the Philippines' ASOs were observed in 2010, 2011, 2015 and 2017 with 0

mentions each, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2024 with 4 appearances. The average occurrence is 1.21 mentions per ASO, with a median of 1 appearance, which is the mean of the values from 2014, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2021 and 2023.

The most negative absolute change of economic referents took place from 2022 to 2023 with a decline of 2 occurrences. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2023 to 2024 with an increase of 3 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 0.31 occurrences per ASO, with a median of no absolute change of appearances, which is the value from 2011 and 2019. Based on a standard deviation of 1.43 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 1.18. The most negative relative changes of economic referents took place from 2014 to 2015 and from 2016 to 2017 with a 100% decline of occurrences in these instances. The most positive relative change was observed from 2023 to 2024 with a 300% increase of occurrences.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of economic referent occurrences follows an upward trend over the studied period. Economic referents occurred however at an overall low level, reaching their highest number of 4 occurrences in 2024. The absolute and relative changes of economic referent occurrences show a trend of increasingly strong fluctuations in recent years. These developments indicate that economic referents have generally not played a dominant role among the overarching category of referent objects, but have nonetheless become a larger part in the Philippines' securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 6: Total amount of economic referent occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Total amount of economic referent occurrences	Absolute change of economic referent occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of economic referent occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2010	0	N/A	N/A
2011	0	0	N/A
2013	2	2	N/A
2014	1	-1	-50.00
2015	0	-1	-100.00
2016	1	1	N/A
2017	0	-1	-100.00
2018	1	1	N/A
2019	1	0	0.00
2020	2	1	100.00

2021	1	-1	-50.00
2022	3	2	200.00
2023	1	-2	-66.67
2024	4	3	300.00

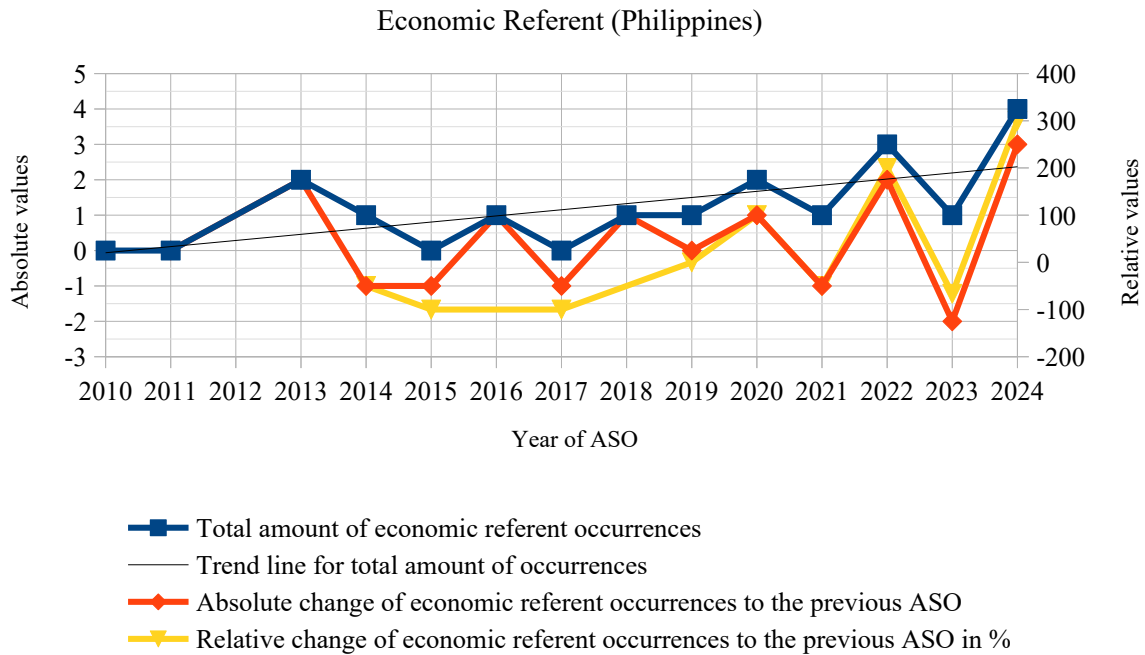


Figure 3: Visualization of economic referent occurrences (Philippines)

Environmental Referent

The underlying data for this section about the environmental referents in the Philippines' ASOs is summarized in Table 7. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 4. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Environmental referents were evoked 15 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of environmental referents in the Philippines' ASOs were observed in 2010, 2011, 2013, 2016, 2017 and 2019 with 0 mentions, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2024 with 3 appearances. The average occurrence is 1.07 mentions per ASO, with a median of 1 appearance, which is the mean of the values from 2014 and 2018.

The most negative absolute change of environmental referents took place from 2015 to 2016 with a decline of 2 occurrences. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2019 to 2020 with an increase of 2 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of

0.23 occurrences per ASO, with a median of no absolute change of appearances, which is the value from 2011, 2013, 2017, 2021, 2022 and 2023. Based on a standard deviation of 0.97 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 0.91. The most negative relative changes of environmental referents took place from 2015 to 2016 and from 2018 to 2019 with a 100% decline of occurrences in these instances. The most positive relative change was observed from 2014 to 2015 with a 100% increase of occurrences.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of environmental referent occurrences follows an upward trend over the studied period. Environmental referents occurred however at an overall low level, reaching their highest number of 3 occurrences in 2024. The absolute and relative changes of environmental referent occurrences have initially shown considerable fluctuation during the late 2010s, but became more consistent in recent years. These developments indicate that environmental referents have generally not played a dominant role among the overarching category of referent objects, but have nonetheless become a larger part in the Philippines' securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 7: Total amount of environmental referent occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Total amount of environmental referent occurrences	Absolute change of environmental referent occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of environmental referent occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2010	0	N/A	N/A
2011	0	0	N/A
2013	0	0	N/A
2014	1	1	N/A
2015	2	1	100.00
2016	0	-2	-100.00
2017	0	0	N/A
2018	1	1	N/A
2019	0	-1	-100.00
2020	2	2	N/A
2021	2	0	0.00
2022	2	0	0.00
2023	2	0	0.00
2024	3	1	50.00

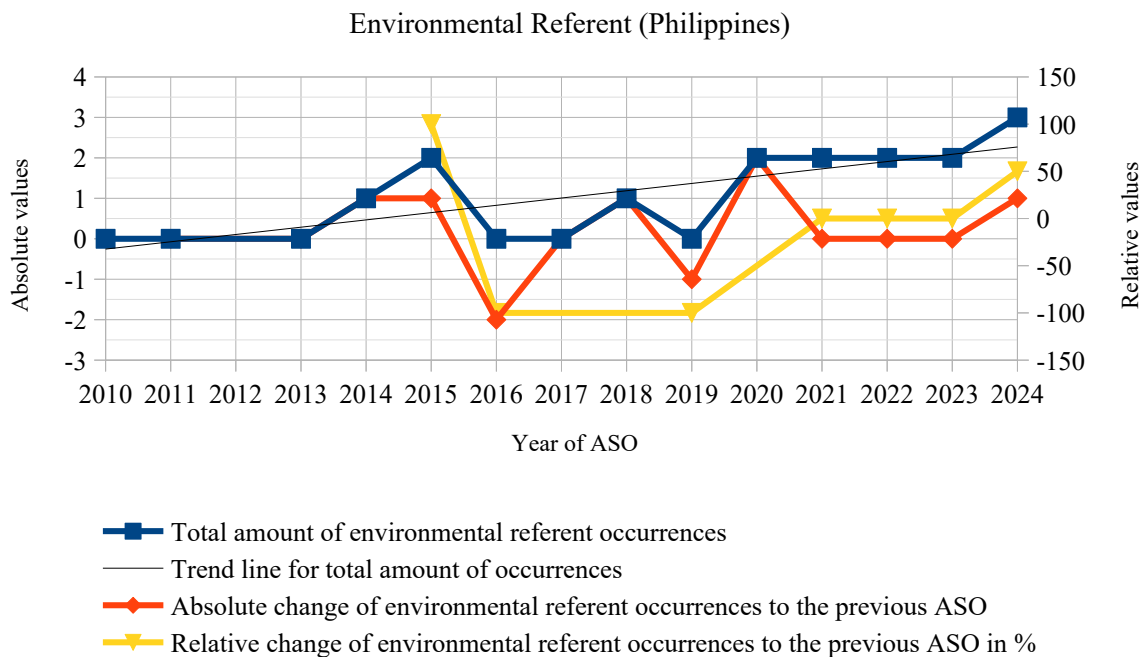


Figure 4: Visualization of environmental referent occurrences (Philippines)

Military Referent

The underlying data for this section about the military referents in the Philippines' ASOs is summarized in Table 8. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 5. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Military referents were evoked 61 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of military referents in the Philippines' ASOs were observed in 2011 and 2014 with 0 mentions, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2024 with 11 appearances. The average occurrence is 4.36 mentions per ASO, with a median of 4 appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2010, 2016, 2018 and 2020.

The most negative absolute change of military referents took place from 2013 to 2014 with a decline of 6 occurrences. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2011 to 2013 with an increase of 6 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 0.54 occurrences per ASO, with a median increase of 1 appearance, which is the value from 2016 and 2017. Based on a standard deviation of 3.13 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 0.72. The most negative relative changes of military referents took place from 2010 to 2011 and from 2013 to 2014 with a 100% decline of occurrences in these in-

stances. The most positive relative changes were observed from 2019 to 2020 and from 2021 to 2022 with a 100% increase in each instance.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of military referent occurrences follows an upward trend over the studied period, reaching its highest number of 11 appearances in 2024. The absolute and relative changes of military referent occurrences show a relatively consistent development, despite noticeable fluctuations in the early 2010s and again in the early 2020s. These developments indicate that military referents have generally played a dominant role among the overarching category of referent objects and have become a larger part in the Philippines' securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 8: Total amount of military referent occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Total amount of military referent occurrences	Absolute change of military referent occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of military referent occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2010	4	N/A	N/A
2011	0	-4	-100.00
2013	6	6	N/A
2014	0	-6	-100.00
2015	3	3	N/A
2016	4	1	33.33
2017	5	1	25.00
2018	4	-1	-20.00
2019	2	-2	-50.00
2020	4	2	100.00
2021	3	-1	-25.00
2022	6	3	100.00
2023	9	3	50.00
2024	11	2	22.22

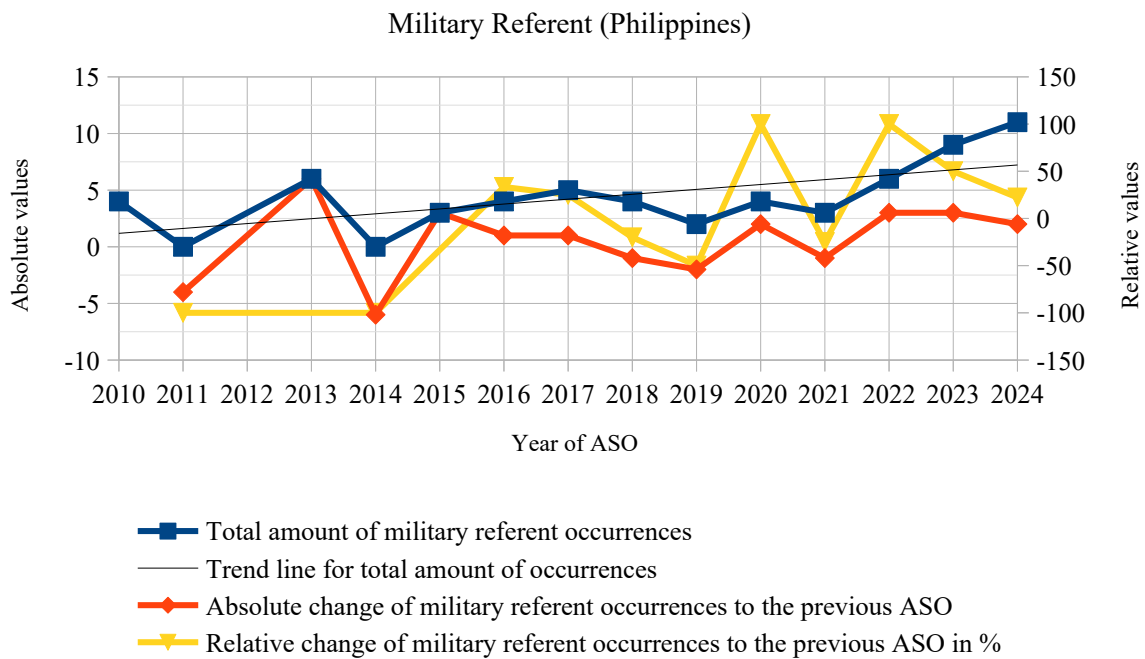


Figure 5: Visualization of military referent occurrences (Philippines)

Political Referent

The underlying data for this section about the political referents in the Philippines' ASOs is summarized in Table 9. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 6. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Political referents were evoked 90 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of political referents in the Philippines' ASOs were observed in 2011 with 0 mentions, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2022 with 19 appearances. The average occurrence is 6.43 mentions per ASO, with a median of 5.5 appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2013 and 2017 or 2019, the latter two years having identical values.

The most negative absolute change of political referents took place from 2022 to 2023 with a decline of 8 occurrences. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2021 to 2022 with an increase of 6 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 0.69 occurrences per ASO, with a median increase of 2 appearances, which is the value from 2016, 2019 and 2020. Based on a standard deviation of 3.81 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 0.59. The most negative relative change of political referents took

place from 2010 to 2011 with a 100% decline of occurrences. The most positive relative change was observed from 2015 to 2016 with a 200% increase of occurrences.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of political referent occurrences follows an upward trend over the studied period, reaching its highest number of 19 appearances in 2022. The absolute and relative changes of political referent occurrences show a relatively consistent development, despite noticeable fluctuations in 2016 and again in recent years. These developments indicate that political referents have generally played a dominant role within the overarching category of referent objects and have become a larger part in the Philippines' securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 9: Total amount of political referent occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Total amount of political referent occurrences	Absolute change of political referent occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of political referent occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2010	2	N/A	N/A
2011	0	-2	-100.00
2013	5	5	N/A
2014	1	-4	-80.00
2015	1	0	0.00
2016	3	2	200.00
2017	6	3	100.00
2018	4	-2	-33.33
2019	6	2	50.00
2020	8	2	33.33
2021	13	5	62.50
2022	19	6	46.15
2023	11	-8	-42.11
2024	11	0	0.00

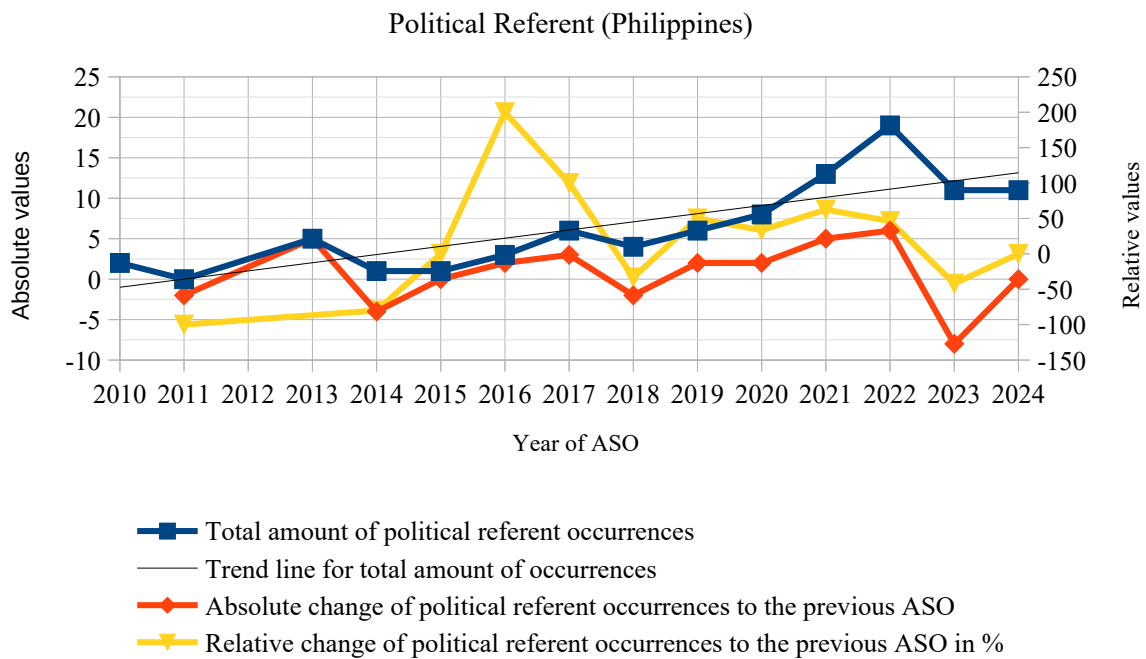


Figure 6: Visualization of political referent occurrences (Philippines)

Societal Referent

The underlying data for this section about the societal referents in the Philippines' ASOs is summarized in Table 10. Societal referents were not mentioned in the ASOs during the studied period. There are consequently no absolute changes in occurrences and neither a volatility ratio nor relative changes in occurrences can be calculated.

This data indicates that societal referents have not played a role in the Philippines' securitization discourse of the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 10: Total amount of societal referent occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Total amount of societal referent occurrences	Absolute change of societal referent occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of societal referent occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2010	0	N/A	N/A
2011	0	0	N/A
2013	0	0	N/A
2014	0	0	N/A
2015	0	0	N/A

2016	0	0	N/A
2017	0	0	N/A
2018	0	0	N/A
2019	0	0	N/A
2020	0	0	N/A
2021	0	0	N/A
2022	0	0	N/A
2023	0	0	N/A
2024	0	0	N/A

Other Referent

The underlying data for this section about other referents in the Philippines' ASOs is summarized in Table 11. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 7. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Other referents were evoked 14 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of other referents in the Philippines' ASOs were observed in 2010, 2011, 2017 and 2023 with 0 mentions, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2016 with 4 appearances. The average occurrence is 1 mention per ASO, with a median of 1 appearance, which is the mean of the values from 2013, 2014, 2015, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022.

The most negative absolute change of other referents took place from 2016 to 2017 with a decline of 4 occurrences. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2015 to 2016 with an increase of 3 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 0.15 occurrences per ASO, with a median of no absolute change of appearances, which is the value from 2011, 2014, 2015, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022. Based on a standard deviation of 1.56 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 1.56. The most negative relative changes of other referents took place from 2016 to 2017 and from 2022 to 2023 with a 100% decline of occurrences in these instances. The most positive relative change was observed from 2015 to 2016 with a 300% increase of occurrences.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of other referent occurrences follows a relatively stable trend over the studied period. They occur however at an overall low level, reaching their highest number of 4 appearances in 2016. The absolute and relative changes of other referent occurrences show a relatively consistent development following this peak. These develop-

ments indicate that other referents have generally not played a dominant role among the overarching category of referent objects and have remained a small, but consistent part in the Philippines' securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 11: Total amount of other referent occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Total amount of other referent occurrences	Absolute change of other referent occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of other referent occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2010	0	N/A	N/A
2011	0	0	N/A
2013	1	1	N/A
2014	1	0	0.00
2015	1	0	0.00
2016	4	3	300.00
2017	0	-4	-100.00
2018	1	1	N/A
2019	1	0	0.00
2020	1	0	0.00
2021	1	0	0.00
2022	1	0	0.00
2023	0	-1	-100.00
2024	2	2	N/A

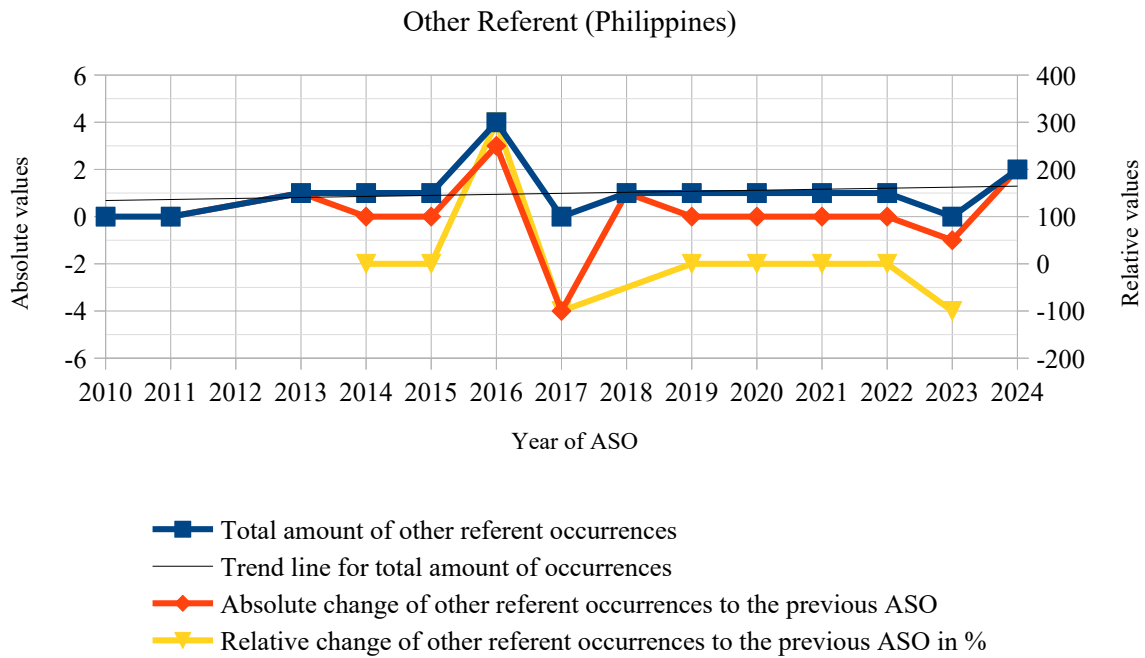


Figure 7: Visualization of other referent occurrences (Philippines)

Existential Threat

The underlying data for this section about the existential threats in the Philippines' ASOs is summarized in Table 12. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 8. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Existential threats were evoked 192 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of existential threats in the Philippines' ASOs were observed in 2011 with 0 mentions, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2024 with 31 appearances. The average occurrence is 13.71 mentions per ASO, with a median of 15 appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2015 and 2016, the latter two years having identical values.

The most negative absolute change of existential threats took place from 2017 to 2018 with a decline of 10 occurrences. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2020 to 2021 with an increase of 11 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 2.23 occurrences per ASO, with a median increase of 2 appearances, which is the value from 2016. Based on a standard deviation of 6.24 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 0.46. The most negative relative change of existential threats took place from 2010 to 2011 with a 100% decline of occurrences since the Philippines did not explicitly mention the disputes in their contribution to the 2011 ASO. The second-largest relative reduction was from

2017 to 2018 with a decline of 52.63%. The most positive relative change was observed from 2020 to 2021 with a 157.14% increase of occurrences.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of existential threat occurrences follows an upward over the studied period, reaching its highest number of 31 occurrences in 2024. The absolute and relative changes of existential threat occurrences show a relatively consistent development, despite noticeable fluctuations in 2014 and again in recent years. These developments indicate that existential threats have generally become a larger part in the Philippines' securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 12: Total amount of existential threat occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Total amount of existential threat occurrences	Absolute change of existential threat occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of existential threat occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2010	2	N/A	N/A
2011	0	-2	-100.00
2013	7	7	N/A
2014	16	9	128.57
2015	14	-2	-12.50
2016	16	2	14.29
2017	19	3	18.75
2018	9	-10	-52.63
2019	6	-3	-33.33
2020	7	1	16.67
2021	18	11	157.14
2022	26	8	44.44
2023	21	-5	-19.23
2024	31	10	47.62

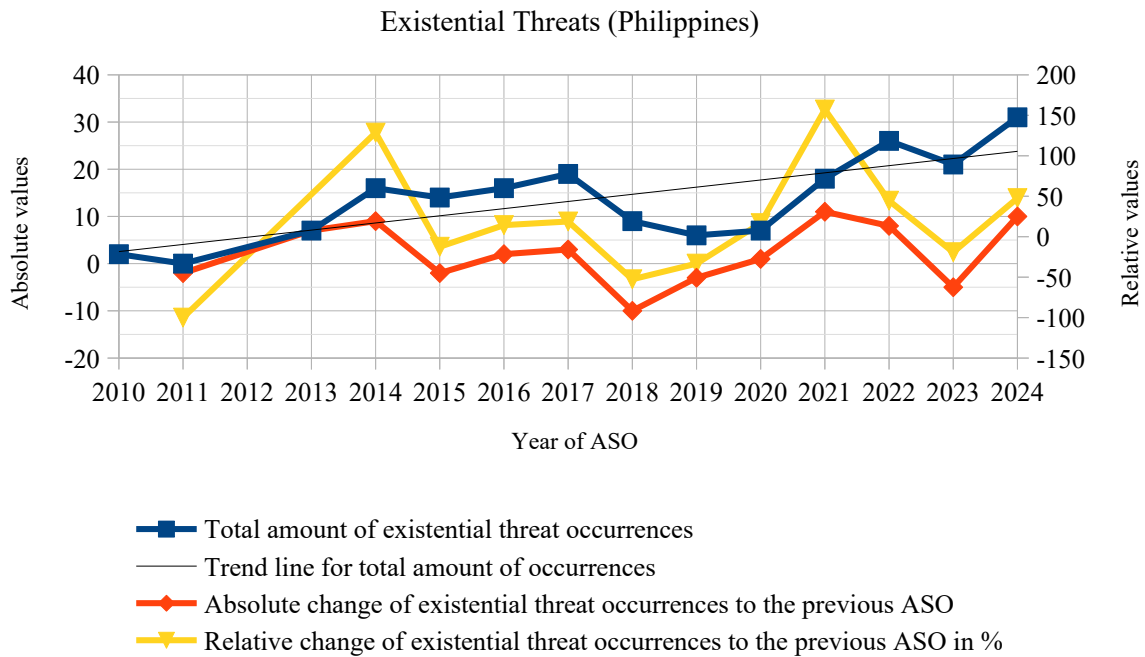


Figure 8: Visualization of existential threat occurrences (Philippines)

Economic Threat

The underlying data for this section about the economic threats in the Philippines' ASOs is summarized in Table 13. Economic threats were not mentioned in the ASOs during the studied period. There are consequently no absolute changes in occurrences and neither a volatility ratio nor relative changes in occurrences can be calculated.

This data indicates that economic threats have not played a role in the Philippines' securitization discourse of the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 13: Total amount of economic threat occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Total amount of economic threat occurrences	Absolute change of economic threat occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of economic threat occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2010	0	N/A	N/A
2011	0	0	N/A
2013	0	0	N/A
2014	0	0	N/A
2015	0	0	N/A

2016	0	0	N/A
2017	0	0	N/A
2018	0	0	N/A
2019	0	0	N/A
2020	0	0	N/A
2021	0	0	N/A
2022	0	0	N/A
2023	0	0	N/A
2024	0	0	N/A

Environmental Threat

The underlying data for this section about the environmental threats in the Philippines' ASOs is summarized in Table 14. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Environmental threats were mentioned only in the 2024 ASO, where they occurred once. The average occurrence is 0.07 mentions per ASO, with a median of 0 appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2010 to 2023.

The lowest absolute changes took place between all years from 2010 to 2023 with no changes in occurrences. The highest absolute change was observed from 2023 to 2024 with an increase of 1 occurrence. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 0.08 occurrences per ASO, with a median of no absolute change of appearances, which is the value for all years from 2011 to 2023. Based on a standard deviation of 0.27 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 3.73. Since there have neither been occurrences nor absolute changes of occurrences for the years from 2010 to 2023, no relative changes of occurrences can be calculated.

This data indicates that environmental threats have not played a role in the Philippines' securitization discourse of the SCS disputes until very recently.

Table 14: Total amount of environmental threat occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Total amount of environmental threat occurrences	Absolute change of environmental threat occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of environmental threat occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2010	0	N/A	N/A
2011	0	0	N/A
2013	0	0	N/A
2014	0	0	N/A
2015	0	0	N/A
2016	0	0	N/A
2017	0	0	N/A
2018	0	0	N/A
2019	0	0	N/A
2020	0	0	N/A
2021	0	0	N/A
2022	0	0	N/A
2023	0	0	N/A
2024	1	1	N/A

Military Threat

The underlying data for this section about the military threats in the Philippines' ASOs is summarized in Table 15. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 9. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Military threats were evoked 99 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of military threats in the Philippines' ASOs were observed in 2010 and 2011 with 0 mentions in these instances, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2024 with 18 appearances. The average occurrence is 7.07 mentions per ASO, with a median of 8 appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2021 and 2022.

The most negative absolute change of military threats took place from 2017 to 2018 with a decline of 13 occurrences. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2023 to 2024 with an increase of 9 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 1.38 occurrences per ASO, with a median increase of 2 appearances, which is the value from 2016.

Based on a standard deviation of 5.08 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 0.72. The most negative relative change of military threats took place from 2017 to 2018 with a 92.86% decline of occurrences. The most positive relative change was observed from 2013 to 2014 with a 266.67% increase of occurrences.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of military threat occurrences follows an upward trend over the studied period, reaching its highest number of 18 in 2024. The absolute and relative changes of military threat occurrences fluctuated considerably during the 2010s, but became comparatively more consistent in the recent years. These developments indicate that military threats have generally played a dominant role in among the overarching category of existential threats and have become a larger part in the Philippines' securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 15: Total amount of military threat occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Total amount of military threat occurrences	Absolute change of military threat occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of military threat occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2010	0	N/A	N/A
2011	0	0	N/A
2013	3	3	N/A
2014	11	8	266.67
2015	9	-2	-18.18
2016	11	2	22.22
2017	14	3	27.27
2018	1	-13	-92.86
2019	2	1	100.00
2020	5	3	150.00
2021	8	3	60.00
2022	8	0	0.00
2023	9	1	12.50
2024	18	9	100.00

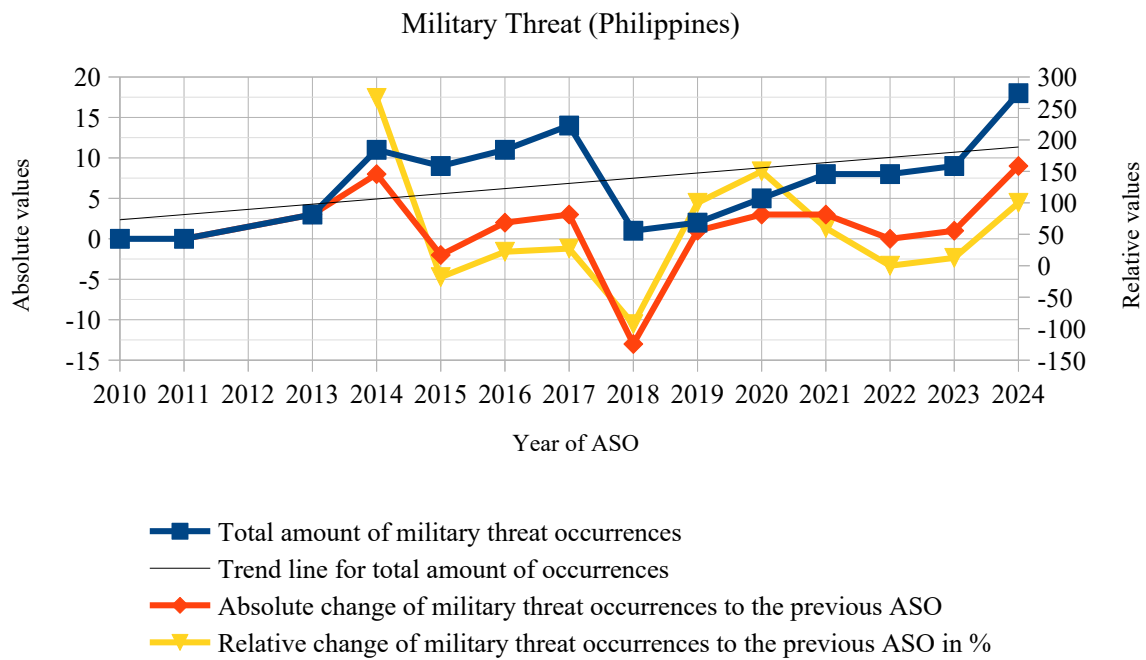


Figure 9: Visualization of military threat occurrences (Philippines)

Political Threat

The underlying data for this section about the political threats in the Philippines' ASOs is summarized in Table 16. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 10. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Political threats were evoked 8 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of political threats in the Philippines' ASOs were observed in the years from 2010 to 2017 and in 2024 with 0 mentions, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2022 and 2023 with 2 appearances. The average occurrence is 0.57 mentions per ASO, with a median of 0 appearances, which is the mean of the values from the years 2010 to 2017 and 2024.

The most negative absolute change of political threats took place from 2023 to 2024 with a decline of 2 occurrences. The most positive absolute changes were observed from 2017 to 2018 and from 2021 to 2022 with an increase of 1 occurrence in these instances. The average absolute change for the studied period is no absolute change of occurrences per ASO, with a median of no absolute change of appearances, which is the value from 2011, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2023. Based on a standard deviation of 0.68 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 1.19. The most negative relative change of political threats

took place from 2023 to 2024 with a 100% decline of occurrences. The most positive relative change was observed from 2021 to 2022 with a 100% increase of occurrences.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of political threats occurrences follows an upward over the studied period. Political threats occur however at an overall low level, reaching their highest number of 2 appearances in 2022 and 2023. The absolute and relative changes of political threat occurrences show a relatively consistent development, despite noticeable fluctuations in recent years. These developments indicate that political threats have generally not played a dominant role among the overarching category of existential threats, but have nonetheless become a larger part in the Philippines' securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 16: Total amount of political threat occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Total amount of political threat occurrences	Absolute change of political threat occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of political threat occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2010	0	N/A	N/A
2011	0	0	N/A
2013	0	0	N/A
2014	0	0	N/A
2015	0	0	N/A
2016	0	0	N/A
2017	0	0	N/A
2018	1	1	N/A
2019	1	0	0.00
2020	1	0	0.00
2021	1	0	0.00
2022	2	1	100.00
2023	2	0	0.00
2024	0	-2	-100.00

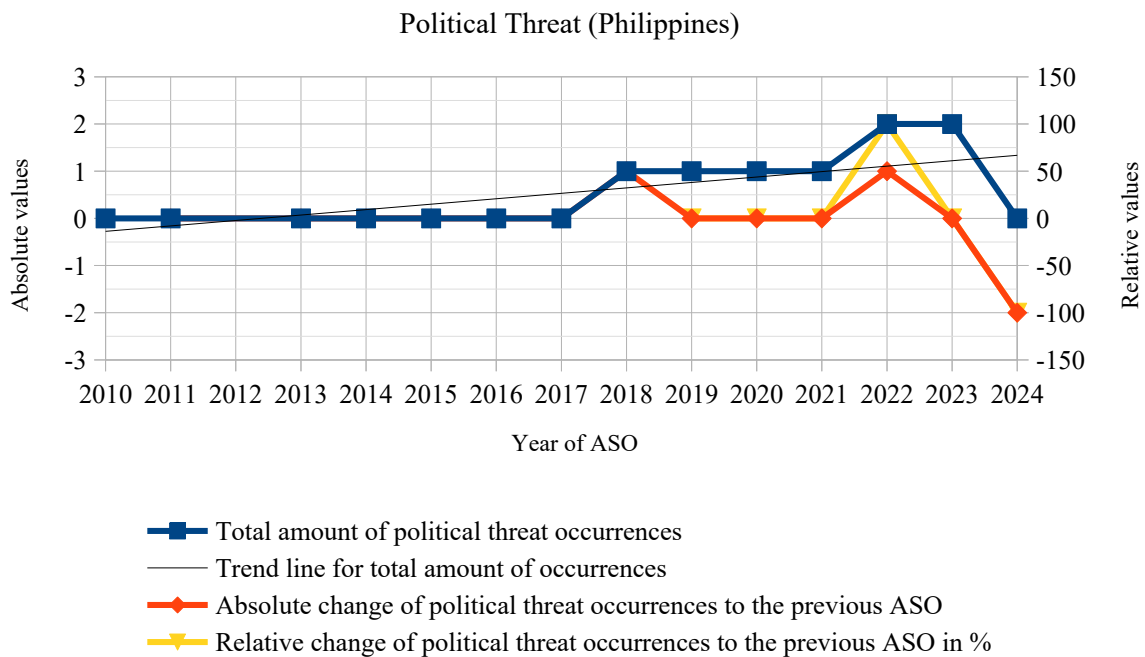


Figure 10: Visualization of political threat occurrences (Philippines)

Societal Threat

The underlying data for this section about the societal threats in the Philippines' ASOs is summarized in Table 17. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Societal threats were mentioned only in the 2017 ASO, where they occurred once. The average occurrence is 0.07 mentions per ASO, with a median of 0 appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2010 to 2016 and from 2018 to 2024.

The most negative absolute change took place from 2017 to 2018 with a decline of 1 occurrence. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2016 to 2017 with an increase of 1 occurrence. The average absolute change for the studied period is no absolute change of occurrences per ASO, with the median also being no absolute change of appearances, which is the value for all years from 2011 to 2016 and from 2019 to 2024. Based on a standard deviation of 0.39 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 5.49. The only relative change of occurrences that can be calculated is the 100% increase of occurrences from 2017 to 2018.

This data indicates that societal threats have not played a role in the Philippines' securitization discourse of the SCS disputes, except for a short appearance in 2017.

Table 17: Total amount of societal threat occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Total amount of societal threat occurrences	Absolute change of societal threat occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of societal threat occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2010	0	N/A	N/A
2011	0	0	N/A
2013	0	0	N/A
2014	0	0	N/A
2015	0	0	N/A
2016	0	0	N/A
2017	1	1	N/A
2018	0	-1	-100.00
2019	0	0	N/A
2020	0	0	N/A
2021	0	0	N/A
2022	0	0	N/A
2023	0	0	N/A
2024	0	0	N/A

Other Threat

The underlying data for this section about other threats in the Philippines' ASOs is summarized in Table 18. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 11. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Other threats were evoked 83 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of other threats in the Philippines' ASOs were observed in 2011 with 0 mentions, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2022 with 16 appearances. The average occurrence is 5.93 mentions per ASO, with a median of 5 appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2014, 2015 and 2016.

The most negative absolute change of other threats took place from 2022 to 2023 with a decline of 6 occurrences. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2020 to 2021 with an increase of 8 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 0.77 occurrences per ASO, with a median of no absolute change of appearances, which is the value from 2015 and 2016. Based on a standard deviation of 3.89 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 0.66. The most negative relative change of other threats took place

from 2010 to 2011 with a 100% decline of occurrences. The most positive relative change was observed from 2020 to 2021 with an 800% increase of occurrences.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of other threat occurrences follows an upward trend over the studied period, reaching its highest number of 16 in 2022. The absolute and relative changes of other threat occurrences have initially shown a relatively consistent development, with considerably stronger fluctuations in recent years. These developments indicate that other threats have generally played a dominant role among the overarching category of existential threats and have become a larger part in the Philippines' securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 18: Total amount of other threat occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Total amount of other threat occurrences	Absolute change of other threat occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of other threat occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2010	2	N/A	N/A
2011	0	-2	-100.00
2013	4	4	N/A
2014	5	1	25.00
2015	5	0	0.00
2016	5	0	0.00
2017	4	-1	-20.00
2018	7	3	75.00
2019	3	-4	-57.14
2020	1	-2	-66.67
2021	9	8	800.00
2022	16	7	77.78
2023	10	-6	-37.50
2024	12	2	20.00

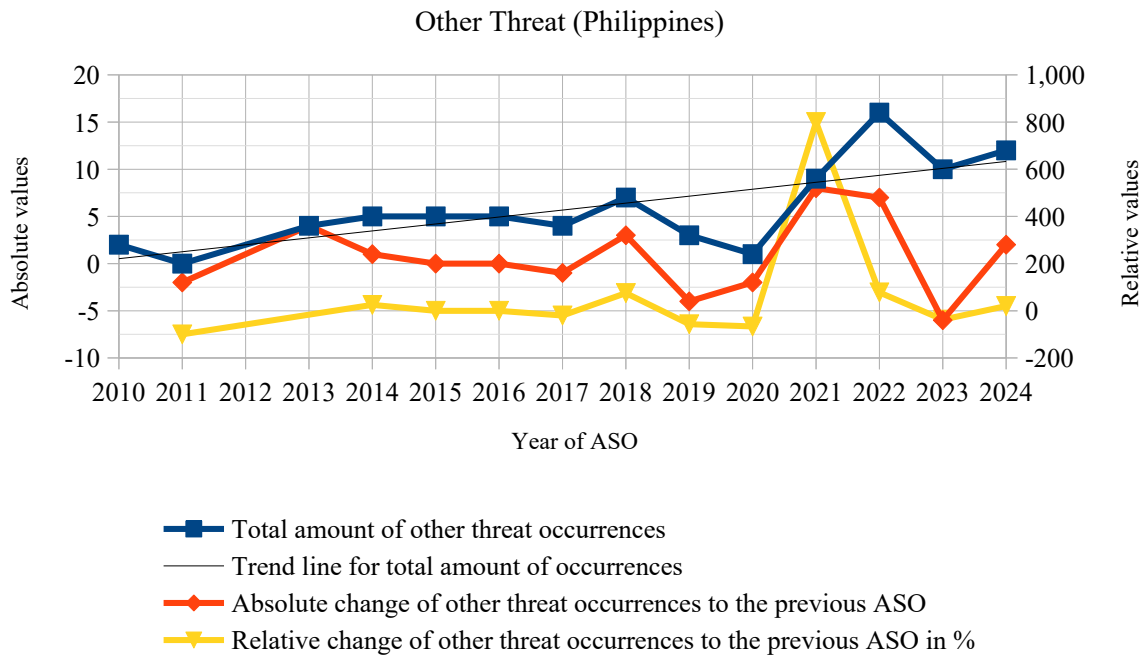


Figure 11: Visualization of other threat occurrences (Philippines)

Other Functional Actor

The underlying data for this section about other functional actors in the Philippines' ASOs is summarized in Table 19. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 12. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Other functional actors were evoked 493 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of other functional actors in the Philippines' ASOs were observed in 2011 with 0 mentions, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2022 with 91 appearances. The average occurrence is 35.21 mentions per ASO, with a median of 28.5 appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2019 and 2015 or 2016, the latter two years having identical values.

The most negative absolute change of other functional actors took place from 2022 to 2023 with a decline of 34 occurrences. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2021 to 2022 with an increase of 35 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 2.77 occurrences per ASO, with a median of no absolute change of appearances, which is the value from 2016. Based on a standard deviation of 16.79 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 0.48. The most negative relative change of other functional actors took place from 2010 to 2011 with a 100% decline of occurrences since the Philippines did

not explicitly mention the disputes in their contribution to the 2011 ASO. The second-largest relative reduction was from 2022 to 2023 with a decline of 37.36%. The most positive relative change was observed from 2017 to 2018 with a 77.27% increase of occurrences.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of other functional actor occurrences follows an upward trend over the studied period, reaching its highest number of 91 appearances in 2022. The absolute and relative changes of other functional actor occurrences show a trend of increasingly strong fluctuations in recent years. These developments indicate that other functional actors have generally become a larger part in the Philippines' securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 19: Total amount of other functional actor occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Total amount of other functional actor occurrences	Absolute change of other functional actor occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of other § occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2010	14	N/A	N/A
2011	0	-14	-100.00
2013	20	20	N/A
2014	16	-4	-20.00
2015	25	9	56.25
2016	25	0	0.00
2017	22	-3	-12.00
2018	39	17	77.27
2019	32	-7	-17.95
2020	46	14	43.75
2021	56	10	21.74
2022	91	35	62.50
2023	57	-34	-37.36
2024	50	-7	-12.28

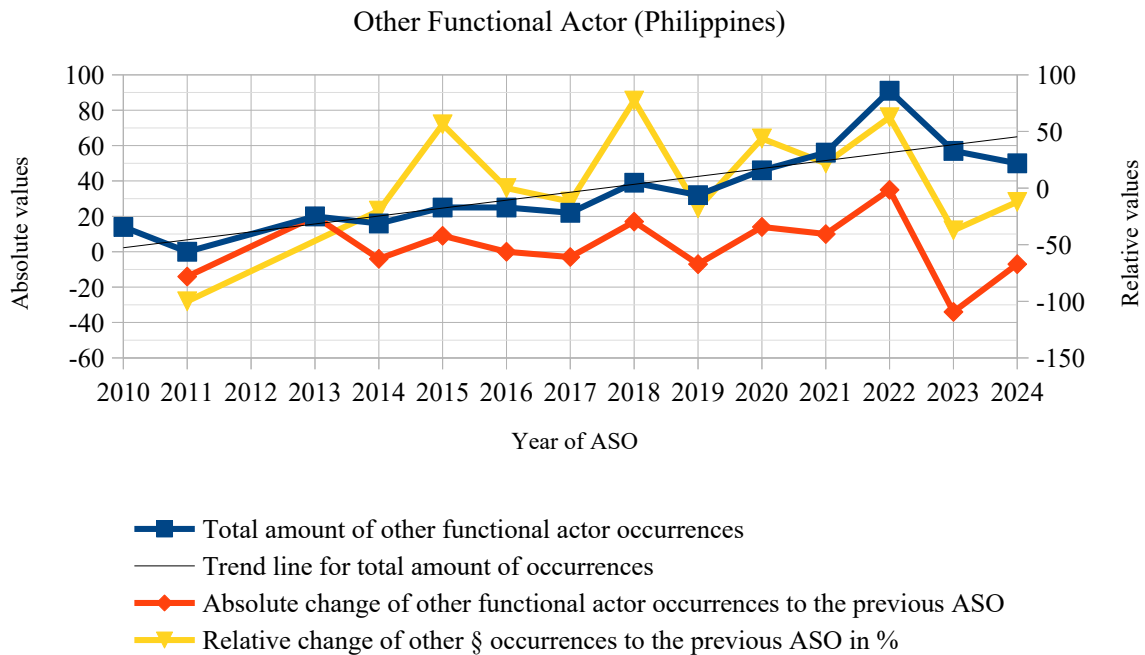


Figure 12: Visualization of other functional actor occurrences (Philippines)

Security Practice

The underlying data for this section about security practices in the Philippines' ASOs is summarized in Table 20. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 13. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Security practices were evoked 240 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of security practices in the Philippines' ASOs were observed in 2011 with 0 mentions, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2022 with 37 appearances. The average occurrence is 17.14 mentions per ASO, with a median of 16 appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019, the former two years and the latter two years having identical values.

The most negative absolute change of security practices took place from 2022 to 2023 with a decline of 7 occurrences. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2021 to 2022 with an increase of 17 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 2.46 occurrences per ASO, with a median increase of 1 appearance, which is the value from 2016. Based on a standard deviation of 6.64 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 0.39. The most negative relative change of security practices took place from 2010 to 2011 with a 100% decline of occurrences since the Philippines did not explicitly mention

the disputes in their contribution to the 2011 ASO. The second-largest relative reduction was from 2013 to 2014 with a decline of 60%. The most positive relative change was observed from 2014 to 2015 with a 200% increase of occurrences.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of security practice occurrences follows an upward trend over the studied period, reaching its highest number of 37 appearances in 2022. The absolute and relative changes of security practice occurrences show a relatively consistent development, despite noticeable fluctuations in 2015 and again in recent years. These developments indicate that security practices have generally become a larger part in the Philippines' securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 20: Total amount of security practice occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Total amount of security practice occurrences	Absolute change of security practice occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of security practice occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2010	4	N/A	N/A
2011	0	-4	-100.00
2013	10	10	N/A
2014	4	-6	-60.00
2015	12	8	200.00
2016	13	1	8.33
2017	13	0	0.00
2018	19	6	46.15
2019	19	0	0.00
2020	23	4	21.05
2021	20	-3	-13.04
2022	37	17	85.00
2023	30	-7	-18.92
2024	36	6	20.00

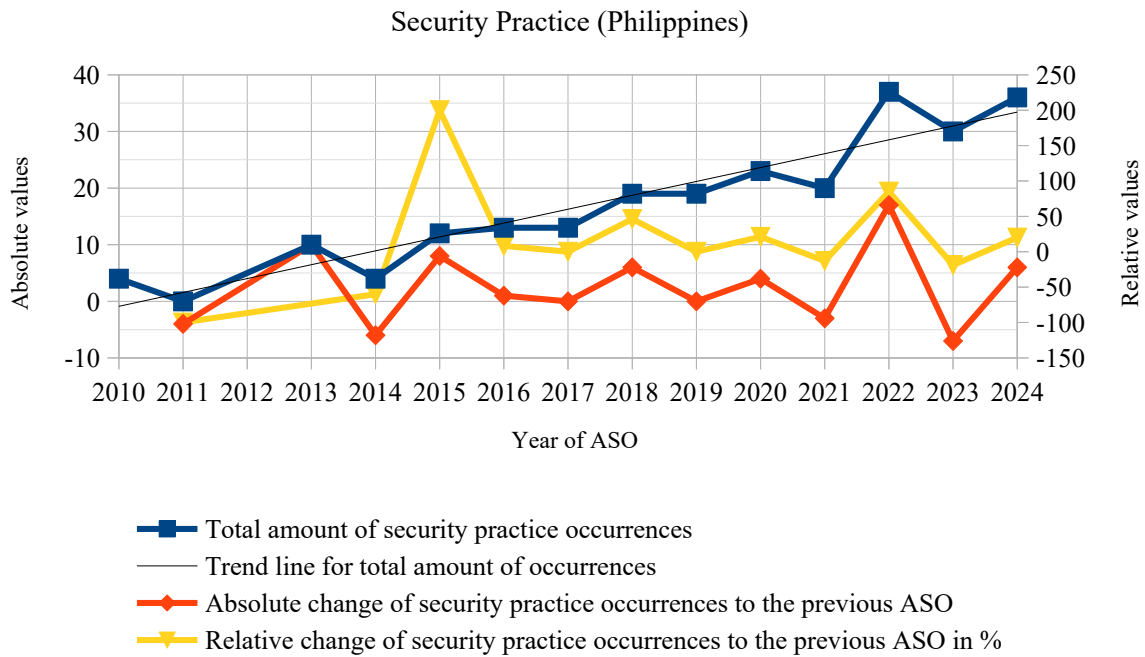


Figure 13: Visualization of security practice occurrences (Philippines)

Intended Measure

The underlying data for this section about intended measures in the Philippines' ASOs is summarized in Table 21. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 14. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Intended measures were evoked 105 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of intended measures in the Philippines' ASOs were observed in 2010 and 2011 with 0 mentions in these instances, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2023 with 17 appearances. The average occurrence is 7.5 mentions per ASO, with a median of 8 appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2017 and 2019.

The most negative absolute change of intended measures took place from 2023 to 2024 with a decline of 7 occurrences. The most positive absolute changes were observed from 2011 to 2013 and from 2021 to 2022 with an increase of 5 occurrences in these instances. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 0.77 occurrences per ASO, with a median increase of 1 appearance, which is the value from 2018. Based on a standard deviation of 3.33 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 0.44. The most negative relative change of intended measures took place from 2023 to 2024 with a 41.18% decline of occurrences.

The most positive relative change was observed from 2014 to 2015 with a 66.67% increase of occurrences.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of intended measure occurrences follows an upward trend over the studied period, reaching its highest number of 17 appearances in 2023. The absolute and relative changes of intended measure occurrences fluctuate considerably from year to year. These developments indicate that intended measures have generally become a larger part in the Philippines' securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 21: Total amount of intended measure occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Total amount of intended measure occurrences	Absolute change of intended measure occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of intended measure occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2010	0	N/A	N/A
2011	0	0	N/A
2013	5	5	N/A
2014	3	-2	-40.00
2015	5	2	66.67
2016	5	0	0.00
2017	8	3	60.00
2018	9	1	12.50
2019	8	-1	-11.11
2020	12	4	50.00
2021	9	-3	-25.00
2022	14	5	55.56
2023	17	3	21.43
2024	10	-7	-41.18

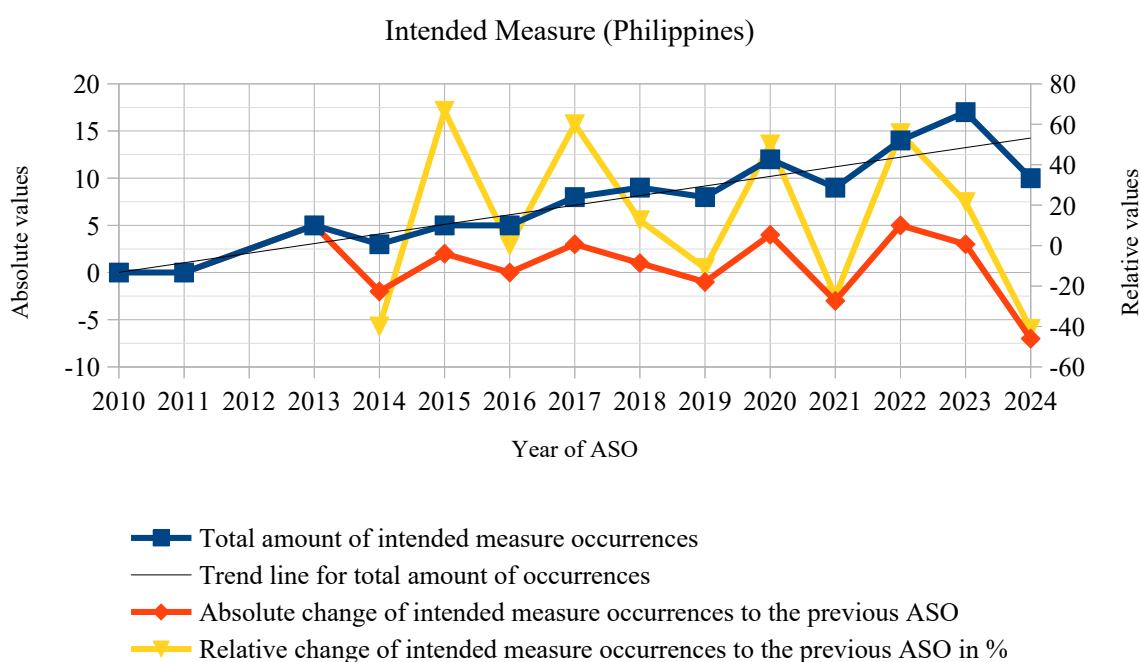


Figure 14: Visualization of intended measure occurrences (Philippines)

Performed Measure

The underlying data for this section about performed measures in the Philippines' ASOs is summarized in Table 22. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 15. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Performed measures were evoked 135 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of performed measures in the Philippines' ASOs were observed in 2011 with 0 mentions, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2024 with 26 appearances. The average occurrence is 9.64 mentions per ASO, with a median of 9 appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2016 and 2018.

The most negative absolute change of performed measures took place from 2022 to 2023 with a decline of 10 occurrences. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2023 to 2024 with an increase of 13 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 1.69 occurrences per ASO, with a median increase of 1 appearance, which is the value from 2016 and 2019. Based on a standard deviation of 6.23 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 0.65. The most negative relative change of performed measures

took place from 2010 to 2011 with a 100% decline of occurrences. The most positive relative change was observed from 2014 to 2015 with a 600% increase of occurrences.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of performed measure occurrences follows an upward trend over the studied period, reaching its highest number of 26 appearances in 2024. The absolute and relative changes of performed measure occurrences show a relatively consistent development, despite noticeable fluctuations in 2015 and again in recent years. These developments indicate that performed measures have generally become a larger part in the Philippines' securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 22: Total amount of performed measure occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Total amount of performed measure occurrences	Absolute change of performed measure occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of performed measure occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2010	4	N/A	N/A
2011	0	-4	-100.00
2013	5	5	N/A
2014	1	-4	-80.00
2015	7	6	600.00
2016	8	1	14.29
2017	5	-3	-37.50
2018	10	5	100.00
2019	11	1	10.00
2020	11	0	0.00
2021	11	0	0.00
2022	23	12	109.09
2023	13	-10	-43.48
2024	26	13	100.00

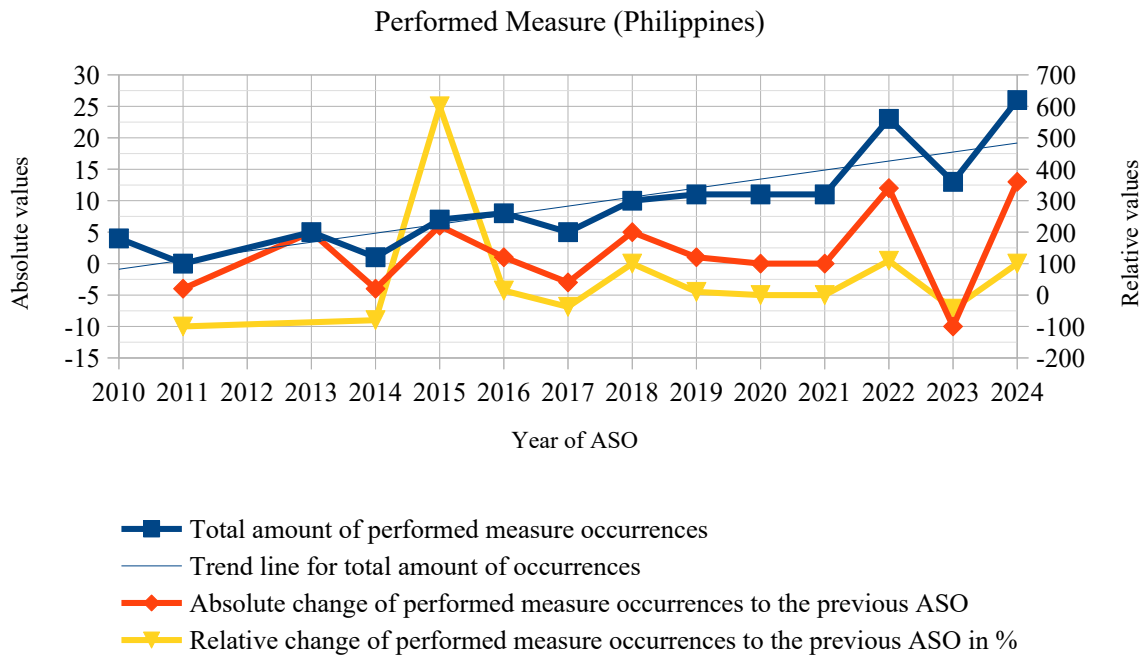


Figure 15: Visualization of performed measure occurrences (Philippines)

2.1.2 Qualitative Analysis

In contrast to the quantitative analysis about the purely numerical occurrences of the individual elements of securitization, the qualitative analysis examines the textual content behind each category and code. The qualitative analysis of the coded texts is specifically about the most common thematic expressions employed for each category and code. Continuities and differences in the use of these expressions over time can reveal thematic patterns in the Philippines' securitization discourse concerning the SCS disputes during the studied time period from 2009 to 2024.

Just as in the quantitative part, each category and code is analyzed in its own section. The underlying data is summarized in individual tables, listing the up to five most common thematic expressions per year. Any years in which a specific code was not used are generally omitted from the tables to provide a clearer overview of the actually occurring expressions. The overarching categories of referent object, existential threat and security practice only focus on expressions that were used at least twice in the same year.

As noted in the quantitative analysis, there are certain elements of securitization that the Philippines have either never or only once employed regarding the SCS disputes. Societal referents and economic threats did not occur and can consequently not be analyzed for their thematic content. Envi-

ronmental threats and societal threats have only been evoked on one occasion each. Although an examination of thematic patterns over time is therefore not feasible, their content will nonetheless be situated in the textual context of their appearances.

Referent Object

Table 23 lists the most common thematic expressions for referent objects that have been evoked more than once in the corresponding year. Referents that were not used multiple times in the same year are omitted for clarity. They are nonetheless listed in the individual tables of each specific sectoral referent. Among all potential referent objects, only economic, military and political referents have expressions that were used multiple times in certain years. Of all years in which the Philippines explicitly mentioned the SCS disputes, there have been no multiple uses of any referents in the years 2014, 2015 and 2017.

There are two observations of general nature to be made. Firstly, the variety of different referent objects has increased noticeably over time from three different expressions during most years of the 2010s to seven different referents in 2022. Secondly, the precise total amount of the most common referent has increased from two appearances during most of the 2010s to up to five mentions in 2024, with other referents also being evoked more than twice.

More specifically, there is a consistent long-term pattern of peace, the rule of law and stability as repeatedly occurring referents during most of the years. A more recent trend with the potential to become an additional long-term pattern is the referents of confidence, rights and trust.

Table 23: Most common thematic expressions used for referent objects per year (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2010	• 2x each: Cooperation, Peace, Stability
2013	• 2x each: Peace, Rule of law, Stability
2016	• 3x: Rule of law • 2x each: Peace, Stability
2018	• 2x each: Peace, Stability
2019	• 2x each: Confidence, Trust
2020	• 2x each: Freedom of international commerce, Freedom of navigation, Peace
2021	• 2x each: COC, Confidence, Rule of law, Trust
2022	• 4x each: Confidence, Trust • 3x: Rights • 2x each: COC, International law, Security, Stability

2023	• 3x each: Peace, Stability • 2x each: Rights, Security, Trust
2024	• 5x: Peace • 3x each: Prosperity, Stability • 2x: International order, Rule of law, Security

Economic Referent

Table 24 lists the most common thematic expressions used by the Philippines for economic referents in the country's ASOs during the studied period.

Generally, the diversity of economic referents per year has remained relatively stable over time. Looking into the specific thematic expressions, there exists a long-term pattern and a more recent trend. The long-term pattern shows a consistent focus on international commerce as economic referent, although it has not been evoked since 2021. That year also marked a shift towards the more general theme of prosperity, which has so far been continuously used in all following years. This aligns with a general increase of evoking economic referents more often per year.

Table 24: Most common thematic expressions used for economic referents per year (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2013	• 1x each: Development, Growth
2014	• 1x: Unimpeded commerce
2016	• 1x: Growth
2018	• 1x: Freedom of international commerce
2019	• 1x: Freedom of international commerce
2020	• 2x: Freedom of international commerce
2021	• 1x: Freedom of international commerce
2022	• 1x each: Exploitation of marine resources, Exploration of marine resources, Prosperity
2023	• 1x: Prosperity
2024	• 3x: Prosperity

Environmental Referent

Table 25 lists the most common thematic expressions used by the Philippines for environmental referents in the country's ASOs during the studied period.

Generally, the diversity of environmental referents per year has remained relatively stable over time. Particularly in the 2020s, coastal and marine ecosystems have become a thematic pattern for environmental referents. Most recently in 2024, coral reefs and seabeds have also been evoked as particular environmental referents in addition to the more general theme of ecosystems or the environment.

Table 25: Most common thematic expressions used for environmental referents per year (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2014	• 1x: Marine biodiversity
2015	• 1x each: Marine ecology, Marine environment
2018	• 1x: Marine environmental protection
2020	• 1x each: Coastal ecosystems, Marine ecosystems
2021	• 1x each: Coastal ecosystems, Marine ecosystems
2022	• 1x each: Coastal ecosystems, Marine ecosystems
2023	• 1x each: Coastal ecosystems, Marine ecosystems
2024	• 1x each: Coral reefs, Marine environment, Seabeds

Military Referent

Table 26 lists the most common thematic expressions used by the Philippines for military referents in the country's ASOs during the studied period.

Generally, the diversity of military referents per year has remained relatively stable over time. Looking into the specific thematic expressions, there exists a long-term pattern and a more recent trend. The long-term patterns is a combination of peace, security and stability as the dominant theme throughout the years. More recently, sovereignty has also consistently been evoked as an additional military referent.

Table 26: Most common thematic expressions used for military referents per year (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2010	• 2x each: Peace, Stability
2013	• 2x each: Peace, Stability • 1x each: Maritime entitlements, Security
2015	• 1x each: Peace, Security, Stability
2016	• 2x each: Peace, Stability

2017	• 1x each: Land features, Maritime entitlements, Peace, Security, Stability
2018	• 2x each: Peace, Stability
2019	• 1x each: Peace, Stability
2020	• 2x: Peace • 1x each: Non-militarization, Stability
2021	• 1x each: Peace, Sovereignty, Stability
2022	• 2x each: Security, Stability • 1x each: Peace, Sovereignty
2023	• 3x each: Peace, Stability • 2x: Security • 1x: Sovereignty
2024	• 5x: Peace • 3x: Stability • 2x: Security • 1x: Sovereignty

Political Referent

Table 27 lists the most common thematic expressions used by the Philippines for political referents in the country's ASOs during the studied period.

Generally, the diversity of political referents per year has increased over time. Looking into the specific thematic expressions, there exist two long-term patterns and a more recent trend. One long-term theme is about principles of international law, particularly freedom of navigation and the rule of law. The second long-term pattern consists of elements for state-to-state relations, including confidence, cooperation and trust. More recently, additional aspects of international law have been evoked as political referents, such as a rules-based international order, (sovereign) rights of states and efforts towards the finalization of a COC.

Table 27: Most common thematic expressions used for political referents per year (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2010	• 2x: Cooperation
2013	• 2x: Rule of law • 1x each: Confidence, Freedom of navigation, Trust
2014	• 1x: Freedom of navigation
2015	• 1x: Freedom of navigation
2016	• 3x: Rule of law

2017	• 1x each: Confidence, Diplomacy, Freedom of navigation, International law, Rights, Trust
2018	• 1x each: Confidence, Cooperation, Freedom of navigation, Trust
2019	• 2x each: Confidence, Trust • 1x each: Freedom of navigation, Mutual understanding
2020	• 2x: Freedom of navigation • 1x each: Confidence, Cooperation, International law, International order, Rule of law, Trust
2021	• 2x each: COC, Confidence, Rule of law, Trust • 1x each: Cooperation, Freedom of navigation, International law, International order, Rights
2022	• 4x each: Confidence, Trust • 3x each: Rights • 2x each: COC, International law • 1x each: DOC, Freedom of navigation, Jurisdiction, Rule of law
2023	• 2x each: Rights, Trust • 1x each: COC, Confidence, DOC, Jurisdiction, Legitimate interests, Rule of law, UNCLOS
2024	• 2x each: International order, Rule of law • 1x each: COC, Collaboration, DOC, Legitimate interests, Stewardship, Trust, UNCLOS

Societal Referent

As noted in the quantitative analysis, the Philippines did not evoke any societal referents in their contributions to the ASOs during the studied period. There are consequently no qualitative aspects to analyze.

Other Referent

Table 28 lists the most common thematic expressions used by the Philippines for other referents in the country's ASOs during the studied period.

Generally, the diversity of other referents per year has remained relatively stable over time. Looking into the specific thematic expressions, there exists only a vague long-term pattern. The general theme of these other referents is about lawful and peaceful uses of the sea, without any further specification about the precise nature of these uses.

Table 28: Most common thematic expressions used for other referents per year (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2013	• 1x: Maritime security
2014	• 1x: Sea lines of communication
2015	• 1x: Region
2016	• 1x: Interests
2018	• 1x: Peaceful uses of the seas
2019	• 1x: Peaceful uses of the seas
2020	• 1x: Peaceful uses of the seas
2021	• 1x: Lawful uses of the seas
2022	• 1x: Lawful uses of the sea
2024	• 1x each: Interests, Maritime routes

Existential Threat

Table 29 lists the most common thematic expressions for existential threats that have been evoked more than once in the corresponding year. Threats that were not used multiple times in the same year are omitted for clarity. They are nonetheless listed in the individual tables of each specific sectoral threat. Among all potential existential threats, only military and other threats have expressions that were used multiple times in certain years. Of all years in which the Philippines explicitly mentioned the SCS disputes, there was every year at least one expression used several times.

There are two observations of general nature to be made. Firstly, the variety of different existential threats has slightly increased over time from two different expressions during most years of the 2010s to four different threats in 2024. Secondly, the precise total amount of the most common threat has increased from seven or fewer during most of the 2010s to up to nine mentions in 2024, with other threats also being evoked more often.

For most of the years, existential threats tend to be rather vague and general. There is however a consistent long-term pattern of disputes as the most commonly occurring threat. More recently, the expressions of issues and tensions have also been evoked as repeatedly occurring threats. The most recent thematic addition has occurred in 2024 with the specific designation of foreign-flagged vessels and China's Maritime Militia as existential threats.

Table 29: Most common thematic expressions used for existential threats per year (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2010	• 2x: Situation
2013	• 2x each: Challenges, Disputes, Tensions
2014	• 7x: Disputes • 2x: Concerns
2015	• 6x: Disputes • 2x: Tensions
2016	• 5x: Disputes • 2x: Developments
2017	• 5x: Disputes • 2x: Claims
2018	• 2x: Escalations
2019	• 2x: Disputes
2020	• 4x: Disputes
2021	• 5x: Disputes • 4x: Tensions
2022	• 5x: Disputes • 4x: Tensions • 3x: Issues
2023	• 5x: Disputes • 3x: Issues • 2x: Tensions
2024	• 9x: Disputes • 4x: Presence of foreign-flagged vessels • 3x: Tensions • 2x: Maritime Militia

Economic Threat

As noted in the quantitative analysis, the Philippines did not evoke any economic threats in their contributions to the ASOs of the studied period. There are consequently no qualitative aspects to analyze.

Environmental Threat

The Philippines only evoked an environmental threat on a single occasion in their contribution to the 2024 ASO. The environmental threat was described as the “deliberate damage caused by illegal and destructive fishing activities of the Chinese Maritime Militia in Rozul (Iroquois) Reef and Escoda (Sabina) Shoal” (ARF 2024, 232).

Military Threat

Table 30 lists the most common thematic expressions used by the Philippines for military threats in the country's ASOs during the studied period.

Generally, the diversity of military threats per year has increased over time. Looking into the specific thematic expressions, there are two long-term patterns, as well as a more recent trend. The clearest long-term theme is the dominance of disputes as a general military threat. These are on certain occasions further specified as territorial and/or maritime disputes. A second long-term pattern is about a diverse set of activities, which includes coercive actions, the deployment of military equipment, land reclamation, various military activities and the presence of Chinese Maritime Militia vessels. Most recently, the Philippines also started to designate specific actors as military threats in addition to the mere activities of those actors. This includes China's Coast Guard, Maritime Militia and military vessels.

Table 30: Most common thematic expressions used for military threats per year (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2013	• 2x: Disputes • 1x: Altering the status quo
2014	• 7x: Disputes • 1x each: Enforcing claims, Military means, Potential conflict, Sovereignty issues
2015	• 6x: Disputes • 1x each: Competing claims, Potential military flashpoints, Reclamation activities
2016	• 5x: Disputes • 1x each: Deployment of missiles, Island building, Landing of commercial and military aircraft, Military hardware, Risks of confrontation, Scrambling of jets
2017	• 5x: Disputes • 2x: Claims • 1x each: Changing power dynamics, Geopolitical hotspots, Major power competition, Military modernization, Projection, Security challenges, Strategic distrust
2018	• 1x: Disputes
2019	• 2x: Disputes
2020	• 4x: Disputes • 1x: Conflict

2021	• 5x: Disputes • 1x each: Coercive actions, Continuing militarization in reclaimed islands, Presence of Chinese Maritime Militia vessels
2022	• 5x: Disputes • 1x: Coercive actions, Continuing militarization, Presence of Chinese Maritime Militia vessels
2023	• 5x: Disputes • 1x each: Coercive actions, Gray-zone tactic, Militarization of strategic waters, Swarming of Chinese Maritime Militia vessels
2024	• 9x: Disputes • 2x: Maritime Militia • 1x each: Chinese Coast Guard, Coast Guard vessels, Escalation of hostilities, Militarization of the area, Military vessels, Threat to use force, Use of force

Political Threat

Table 31 lists the most common thematic expressions used by the Philippines for political threats in the country's ASOs during the studied period.

Generally, the diversity of political threats per year has slightly increased over time. Looking into the specific thematic expressions, there are no noticeable long-term patterns, but a general change of the overarching themes can nonetheless be distinguished. Initially, the dominating – and only – political threat evoked were the jurisdictional disputes. This referent has been absent since 2021 and the lack of a finalized COC itself seems to have become the new predominant political threat instead.

Table 31: Most common thematic expressions used for political threats per year (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2018	• 1x: Jurisdictional disputes
2019	• 1x: Jurisdictional disputes
2020	• 1x: Jurisdictional disputes
2021	• 1x: Distrust
2022	• 1x each: Distrust, Lack of COC
2023	• 1x each: Destabilizing actions that violate the international rule of law, Lack of COC

Societal Threat

The Philippines only evoked a societal threat on a single occasion in their contribution to the 2017 ASO. The societal threat was described as a consequence of the disputes, which will “stir strong nationalistic sentiments” (ARF 2017, 144).

Other Threat

Table 32 lists the most common thematic expressions used by the Philippines for other threats in the country’s ASOs during the studied period.

Generally, the diversity of other threats per year has increased over time. Looking into the specific thematic expressions, there are two noticeable long-term patterns. There is a general theme of an unspecified threat throughout the studied period, which includes the expressions of challenges, concerns, developments, issues, situation and tensions. Additionally since the late 2010s, a set of general activities is also evoked as threat in that they might complicate and destabilize the status quo, which consequentially could intimidate or provoke actors and lead to miscalculations and misunderstandings.

Table 32: Most common thematic expressions used for other threats per year (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2010	• 2x: Situation
2013	• 2x each: Challenges, Tensions
2014	• 2x: Concerns • 1x each: Issues, Developments, Situation
2015	• 2x: Tensions • 1x each: Concerns, Developments, Incidents
2016	• 2x: Developments • 1x each: Challenges, Concerns, Situation
2017	• 1x each: Actions that complicate the situation, Activities, Challenges, Tensions
2018	• 2x: Escalations • 1x each: Activities that complicate the situation, Developments, Incidents, Miscalculations, Misunderstandings
2019	• 1x each: Activities that complicate the situation, Incidents, Issues
2020	• 1x: Unilateral activities that complicate the situation
2021	• 4x: Tensions • 1x each: Incidents, Intimidation, Issues, Provocations, Unilateral activities that complicate the situation

2022	• 4x: Tensions • 3x: Issues • 1x each: Complicating the situation, Concerns, Destabilizing actions, Developments, Intimidation, Miscalculation, Misunderstandings, Provocation, Risk of accidents
2023	• 3x: Issues • 2x: Tensions • 1x: Concerns, Destabilizing actions, Developments, Intimidation, Provocations
2024	• 4x: Presence of foreign-flagged vessels • 3x: Tensions • 1x each: Concerns, Incidents, Intimidation, Provocative and dangerous behavior, Unjustified, illegal and threatening actions

Other Functional Actor

Table 33 lists the most common thematic expressions used by the Philippines for other functional actors in the country's ASOs during the studied period. Generally, the diversity of other functional actors per year has remained relatively stable over time. Additionally, the precise total amount of the most common other functional actor has increased from 3 appearances during the early 2010s to up to 27 mentions in 2022, with different other functional actors also being evoked more than twice.

Looking into the specific thematic expressions, there are some noticeable long-term patterns. There is a general theme of the Philippines referring to themselves as the most common other functional actor, with China being the second-most common country. Other claimant states were more explicitly evoked in earlier years, but institutions, frameworks and other mechanisms have later become more frequently used other functional actors. The most commonly mentioned institutions are the 2016 South China Sea Arbitration Award, ASEAN, the China-Philippines Bilateral Consultation Mechanism on the South China Sea (BCM), the COC, the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES), the DOC, the Philippines-China Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Oil and Gas Development and UNCLOS. Particularly the Arbitration Award warrants a closer examination, because it is one of the most central developments concerning a multilateral solution to the SCS disputes in recent years. It was first mentioned in 2013, when the procedure was officially initiated and later again in 2016 in anticipation of the final ruling later in the same year. Afterwards, it only appears again in 2020, which marks a notable absence of three years for such a seemingly important element to the disputes. Since then, it has however always been evoked in the Philippines' contributions to the ASOs.

Table 33: Most common thematic expressions used for other functional actors per year (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2010	• 3x each: ASEAN, China, Concerned parties, DOC • 2x: Philippines
2013	• 4x: Philippines • 3x each: ASEAN, COC • 2x each: Arbitration procedure, DOC • 1x each: ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM), ASEAN members, China, Concerned parties, Countries in the region, UNCLOS
2014	• 3x: UNCLOS • 2x each: Non-claimant countries, Philippines • 1x each: All parties, Brunei, China, Claimant countries, Malaysia, Regional states, States, Taiwan, Vietnam
2015	• 6x: Philippines • 4x: UNCLOS • 2x each: Claimants, Littoral states, Non-claimants • 1x each: All parties, Brunei, China, COC, DOC, CUES, DOC, Malaysia, Taiwan, Vietnam
2016	• 7x: Philippines • 4x: Arbitral tribunal • 3x: UNCLOS • 2x each: DOC, International community, Littoral states • 1x each: ASEAN, China, COC, Countries in the region and beyond, States
2017	• 5x: Philippines • 4x: China • 3x: COC • 2x: ASEAN • 1x each: ASEAN-led processes, ASEAN members, Brunei, CUES, DOC, Malaysia, States, Vietnam
2018	• 9x: Philippines • 6x each: ASEAN, COC • 5x: China • 2x each: ASEAN Direct Communications Infrastructure (ADI), CUES, DOC • 1x each: ADMM, All parties, ASEAN members, Brunei, Concerned states, Parties, UNCLOS
2019	• 9x: Philippines • 6x: China • 4x each: ASEAN members, COC • 2x each: BCM, Parties • 1x each: Concerned states, CUES, DOC, MOU on Oil and Gas Development, UNCLOS

2020	• 15: Philippines • 5x each: All parties, China • 4x: Arbitration Award • 3x each: ASEAN members, COC, UNCLOS • 1x each: BCM, Concerned states, CUES, Declaration for a Decade of Coastal and Marine Environment Protection in the South China Sea, DOC, MOU on Oil and Gas Development, Nations, Neighbors
2021	• 17x: Philippines • 6x: COC • 5x: China • 4x: UNCLOS • 3x each: All parties, ASEAN members
2022	• 27x: Philippines • 8x: UNCLOS • 7x: COC • 4x each: ASEAN, BCM, China, DOC • 3x each: All parties, ASEAN members, ASEAN-led mechanisms
2023	• 16x: Philippines • 8x: COC • 7x: UNCLOS • 4x: Arbitration Award • 3x each: China, DOC
2024	• 15x: Philippines • 10x: Arbitration Award • 8x: UNCLOS • 3x: China • 2x each: BCM, Parties

Security Practice

Table 34 lists the most common thematic expressions for security practices that have been evoked more than once in the corresponding year. Measures that were not used multiple times in the same year are omitted for clarity. They are nonetheless listed in the individual tables of each specific type of measure. Of all years in which the Philippines explicitly mentioned the SCS disputes, there have been no multiple uses of any measures in the years 2014 and 2015.

There are two observations of general nature to be made. Firstly, the variety of different security practices has increased significantly over time from three different measures during most years of the 2010s to nine different measures in 2024. Secondly, the precise total amount of the most common measures has increased from three or fewer during most of the 2010s to up to seven mentions in 2023, with other measures also being evoked more often.

In addition, there are also more specific themes noticeable. These are three long-term patterns and a rather recent development. Firstly, there is a continuous emphasis on developing a peaceful resolution to the SCS disputes, which shall be rooted in existing international laws in general and in UNCLOS in particular. Secondly, the call for a finalized COC has changed from an intended measure to a partly performed measure since the start of negotiations in 2018. Thirdly, the China-Philippines BCM is a continuously ongoing measure to provide a framework for dialogue between both countries. More recently, additional emphasis has been placed on other bilateral maritime dialogues with external partners, such as Australia, the EU, Japan, the UK and the US.

Table 34: Most common thematic expressions used for security practices per year (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2010	• 3x: COC (intended) • 2x each: DOC, Peaceful resolution
2013	• 2x: DOC
2016	• 2x: DOC
2017	• 2x: COC (intended)
2018	• 4x: COC negotiations (performed) • 3x: Peaceful resolution rooted in international law and UNCLOS • 2x: DOC
2019	• 3x each: COC negotiations (performed), Peaceful resolution rooted in international law and UNCLOS • 2x: BCM
2020	• 5x: Peaceful resolution rooted in international law and UNCLOS • 2x each: BCM, COC negotiations (performed), Early harvest measures, MOU on Oil and Gas Development
2021	• 4x each: COC negotiations (performed), Peaceful resolution rooted in international law, UN Charter, UNCLOS, Manila Declaration on the Peaceful Settlement of International Disputes and Arbitration Award • 2x: BCM
2022	• 6x each: Bilateral maritime dialogues with external partners, COC negotiations (performed) • 5x: Peaceful resolution rooted in international law, UN Charter and Manila Declaration • 2x each: ASEAN, ASEAN-led mechanisms, Avoid unilateral actions, BCM, COC (intended)

2023	• 7x: Peaceful resolution rooted in international law and UNCLOS • 5x: BCM • 4x: COC (intended) • 3x: Explore maritime cooperation • 2x each: COC negotiations (performed), Non-use or threat of force, Upholding international law, UN Charter, Manila Declaration, UNCLOS and Arbitration Award
2024	• 5x each: Maritime cooperation under the Philippines-European Union Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, Upholding international law, UN Charter, UNCLOS, Manila Declaration and Arbitration Award • 4x each: Bilateral maritime dialogues with external partners, Peaceful resolution • 3x: National Maritime Center initiatives for reporting and sharing information • 2x each: BCM, Maritime Zones Act, Underwater surveys, Websites as central resource for official information and positions

Intended Measure

Table 35 lists the most common thematic expressions used by the Philippines for intended measures in the country's ASOs during the studied period.

Generally, the diversity of intended measures per year has remained relatively stable over time. Looking into the specific thematic expressions, there are several noticeable long-term patterns. There is a constant emphasis on aiming to find a peaceful resolution to the disputes that is rooted in international law and particularly UNCLOS. This gets in later ASOs further complemented by also referring to the Manila Declaration on the Peaceful Settlement of International Disputes from 1982, the Arbitration Award from 2016 and the UN Charter from 1945. Another theme is the call for conscious individual behavior, which includes the avoidance of unilateral actions, the non-use or threat of force and exercising general self-restraint. Lastly, there is a continuous call to work towards a finalized and binding COC, which would replace the already existing but less strict DOC from 2002.

Table 35: Most common thematic expressions used for intended measures per year (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2013	• 3x: COC • 2x: Peaceful resolution
2014	• 1x each: Non-use or threat of force, Peaceful resolution rooted in international law and UNCLOS, Self-restraint
2015	• 1x each: COC, Multilateral efforts to address incidents at sea, Non-use or threat of force, Peaceful resolution rooted in international law and UNCLOS, Self-restraint

2016	• 1x each: Clarify aspects of disputes, Non-use or threat of force, Respect the arbitration ruling, Self-restraint, Strengthen military dialogue and cooperation
2017	• 2x: COC • 1x each: Avoid actions that complicate the situation, Commitment to ASEAN-led processes, CUES, Early harvest measures, Peaceful resolution without use or threat of force, Self-restraint
2018	• 3x: Peaceful resolution rooted in international law and UNCLOS • 1x each: COC, CUES, Early harvest measures, Framework for maritime interaction among ASEAN's defense and maritime agencies, Non-use or threat of force, Self-restraint
2019	• 3x: Peaceful resolution rooted in international law and UNCLOS • 1x each: COC, Enhance maritime dialogue and cooperation, Non-use or threat of force, Prevent incidents at sea, Self-restraint
2020	• 5x: Peaceful resolution rooted in international law and UNCLOS • 2x: Early harvest measures • 1x each: COC, Explore maritime cooperation, Fulfill UNCLOS obligations, Non-use or threat of force, Self-restraint
2021	• 4x: Peaceful resolution rooted in international law, UN Charter, UNCLOS, Manila Declaration and Arbitration Award • 1x each: COC, Explore maritime cooperation, Non-militarization, Non-use or threat of force, Self-restraint
2022	• 5x: Peaceful resolution rooted in international law, UN Charter and Manila Declaration • 2x: Avoid unilateral actions, COC • 1x each: Enhance scientific cooperation, Explore maritime cooperation, Non-militarization, Non-use or threat of force, Self-restraint
2023	• 7x: Peaceful resolution rooted in international law and UNCLOS • 4x: COC • 3x: Explore maritime cooperation • 2x: Non-use or threat of force • 1x: Enhance confidence-building measures
2024	• 4x: Peaceful resolution • 1x each: Arbitration Award, Avoid escalation, Enhance communication between foreign ministries and coast guards, Explore academic exchanges on marine research, Handle incidents diplomatically, Non-coercion

Performed Measure

Table 36 lists the most common thematic expressions used by the Philippines for performed measures in the country's ASOs during the studied period.

Generally, the diversity of performed measures per year has increased over time. Looking into the specific thematic expressions, there are several noticeable long-term patterns. There is a constant

emphasis on upholding and adhering to already existing elements of international law, including the Arbitration Award, the DOC, the Manila Declaration and UNCLOS. A COC is not yet part of this, but it also occurs consistently over time due to the ongoing negotiations and the completion of certain steps towards its finalization. Concerning cooperation, there is a variety of activities in the maritime domain, including environmental protection, scientific research, naval exercises and plans for joint oil and gas exploitation. Other regularly evoked performed measures are the China-Philippines BCM and the establishment of Guidelines for Hotline Communications between the foreign ministries of ASEAN members and China in 2016. Most recently, the Philippines also started to highlight domestic initiatives, which include underwater surveys by their Coast Guard and the creation of resource database for sharing information and official positions regarding the SCS disputes. Another recent trend is the start of bilateral maritime dialogues with external partners.

Table 36: Most common thematic expressions used for performed measures per year (Philippines)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2010	• 2x: DOC • 1x each: ASEAN-China cooperation, Joint development efforts
2013	• 2x: DOC • 1x each: ADMM declaration on enhancing Unity for a Harmonized and Secure Community, Reaffirmed ASEAN centrality, Started UNCLOS arbitration procedure
2014	• 1x: UNCLOS
2015	• 1x each: ASEAN Working Group on Coastal and Maritime Environment, Compliance with international law and UNCLOS, CUES, DOC, Emphasized maritime domain in defense and security policies, Naval upgrades, UNCLOS
2016	• 2x: DOC • 1x each: Arbitration process, COC support, Compliance with international law and UNCLOS, Emphasized maritime domain in defense and security policies, Naval upgrades, UNCLOS
2017	• 1x each: COC framework, DOC, Early harvest measures, Guidelines for hotline communications, Peaceful dispute management through dialogue
2018	• 4x: COC negotiations • 2x: DOC • 1x each: Concept Paper on Guidelines for Maritime Interaction, Early harvest measure, Guidelines for hotline communications, Launch of ADI
2019	• 3x: COC negotiations • 2x: BCM • 1x each: ASEAN-China Maritime Exercise, CUES, DOC, Early harvest measures, Guidelines for hotline communications, MOU on Oil and Gas Development

2020	• 2x each: BCM, COC negotiations, MOU on Oil and Gas Development • 1x each: Arbitration Award, CUES, Declaration for a Decade of Coastal and Marine Environment Protection, DOC, Guidelines for hotline communications
2021	• 4x: COC negotiations • 2x: BCM • 1x each: CUES, Declaration for a Decade of Coastal and Marine Environment Protection, DOC, Guidelines for hotline communications, MOU on Oil and Gas Development
2022	• 6x each: Bilateral maritime dialogues with external partners, COC negotiations • 2x each: ASEAN and ASEAN-led mechanisms, BCM • 1x each: Adherence to ASEAN's Indo-Pacific Outlook, Arbitration Award, Declaration for a Decade of Coastal and Marine Environment Protection, DOC, MOU on Oil and Gas Development, Philippines-Vietnam Joint Oceanographic and Marine Scientific Research Expedition, Philippines-Vietnam Joint Permanent Working Group on Maritime and Ocean Concerns
2023	• 5x: BCM • 2x each: COC negotiations, Upholding international law, UN Charter, Manila Declaration, UNCLOS and Arbitration Award • 1x each: ASEAN centrality, Bilateral cooperation with other claimants, Declaration for a Decade of Coastal and Marine Environment Protection, Philippines-Vietnam Joint Permanent Working Group on Maritime and Ocean Concerns
2024	• 5x each: Maritime cooperation under the Philippines-European Union Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, Upholding international law, UN Charter, UNCLOS, Manila Declaration and Arbitration Award • 4x: Bilateral maritime dialogues with external partners • 3x: National Maritime Center initiatives for reporting and sharing information • 2x each: BCM, Maritime Zones Act, Underwater surveys, Websites as central resource for official information and positions • 1x: Declaration for a Decade of Coastal and Marine Environment Protection

2.2 Securitization by Vietnam

2.2.1 Quantitative Analysis

Significance of SCS disputes in security discourse

Similar to the Philippines, the collected data for Vietnam does not cover all years between 2009 and 2024. For the 2011 and the 2013 editions of the ASO, Vietnam did not make any contributions,

whereas the entire 2012 edition of the ASO is not publicly available. Contrary to the Philippines however, Vietnam always mentioned the SCS disputes in its contributions to the ASOs. The underlying data for this section about the significance of the SCS disputes in Vietnam's ASOs is summarized in Table 37. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 16. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

The shortest ASO contribution of Vietnam is from 2016 and consists of 4,606 characters, with the longest contribution from 2024 measuring 34,045 characters. The average length of Vietnam's contributions is 18,980 characters per ASO, with a median of 18,429 characters, which corresponds to the value from 2009.

The smallest proportion explicitly dedicated to the SCS disputes was in 2019 with 3.53%. The largest proportion dedicated to the disputes was in 2015 with 28.79%. The average proportion for the studied time period is 11.36% per ASO, with a median of 9.7%, which corresponds to the value from 2020.

The most negative absolute change of the SCS proportion took place from 2015 to 2016 with a decline of 18.63 percentage points. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2014 to 2015 with an increase of 12.81 percentage points. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 0.41 percentage points per ASO, with a median increase of 1.47 percentage points, which is the mean of the values from 2017 and 2022. Based on a standard deviation of 8.34 for the absolute change of the SCS proportion, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 0.73. The most negative relative change took place from 2018 to 2019 with a 78.1% decline. The largest relative change was observed from 2019 to 2020 with a growth of 174.79%.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the overall length of contributions to the ASOs fell to a considerably low level for most of the 2010s, but has afterwards reached its five highest values in the ASOs from 2020 to 2024. The proportion of the ASOs dedicated to the SCS disputes appears to have developed almost counter-cyclically to the general length of the ASOs, having reached its highest levels during the 2010s, followed by some of its lowest levels and a recent rise again in 2024. The absolute and relative changes of the proportion the SCS disputes amount to in the ASOs show considerable fluctuations in both directions between years. These developments indicate that the SCS disputes have – after an initial peak in the 2010s – generally become a smaller part in Vietnam's high-level state communication about international security during the observed time frame.

Table 37: Length of each year's ASO contribution of Vietnam, proportion of it dedicated to the SCS disputes and evolution of the proportion

Year of ASO	Length of ASO contribution in total amount of characters	Proportion of SCS disputes in %	Absolute change of the proportion of SCS disputes to the previous ASO	Relative change of the proportion of SCS disputes to the previous ASO in %
2009	18,429	8.56	N/A	N/A
2010	24,712	8.41	-0.15	-1.75
2014	7,314	15.98	7.57	90.01
2015	7,805	28.79	12.81	80.16
2016	4,606	10.16	-18.63	-64.71
2017	17,834	11.65	1.49	14.67
2018	5,559	16.12	4.47	38.37
2019	11,340	3.53	-12.59	-78.10
2020	26,635	9.7	6.17	174.79
2021	30,256	6.18	-3.52	-36.29
2022	27,628	7.62	1.44	23.30
2023	30,574	7.56	-0.06	-0.79
2024	34,045	13.48	5.92	78.31

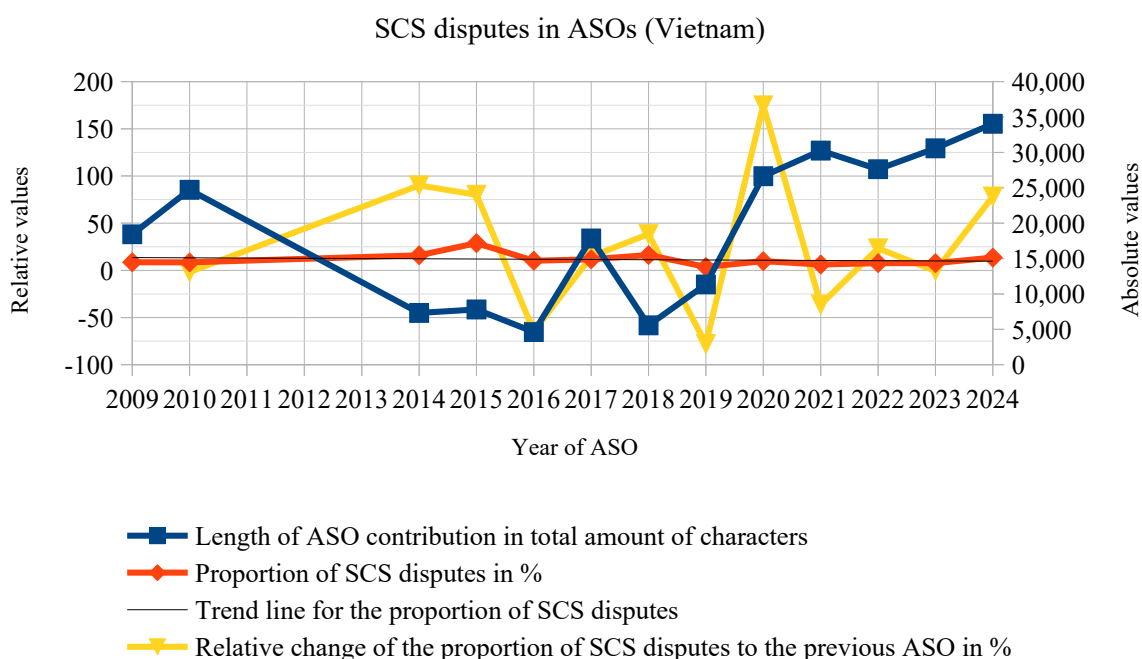


Figure 16: Visualization of SCS disputes in ASOs (Vietnam)

Referent Object

The underlying data for this section about the referent objects in Vietnam's ASOs is summarized in Table 38. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 17. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Referent objects were evoked 189 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of referent objects in Vietnam's ASOs were observed in 2018 with 0 mentions, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2024 with 50 appearances. The average occurrence is 14.54 mentions per ASO, with a median of 12 appearances, which is the value from 2009 and 2021.

The most negative absolute change of referent objects took place from 2017 to 2018 with a decline of 20 occurrences. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2023 to 2024 with an increase of 35 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 3.17 occurrences per ASO, with a median increase of 3.5 appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2014 and 2019 or 2022, the latter two years having identical values. Based on a standard deviation of 13.84 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 0.95. The most negative relative change of referent objects took place from 2017 to 2018 with a 100% decline of occurrences. The most positive relative change was observed from 2019 to 2020 with a 360% increase of occurrences.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of referent object occurrences follows an upward trend over the studied period, reaching its highest number of 50 appearances in 2024. The absolute and relative changes of referent object occurrences fluctuate considerably from year to year. These developments indicate that referent objects have generally become a larger part in Vietnam's securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 38: Total amount of referent object occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Total amount of referent object occurrences	Absolute change of referent object occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of referent object occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2009	12	N/A	N/A
2010	6	-6	-50.00
2014	8	2	33.33
2015	14	6	75.00
2016	7	-7	-50.00
2017	20	13	185.71

2018	0	-20	-100.00
2019	5	5	N/A
2020	23	18	360.00
2021	12	-11	-47.83
2022	17	5	41.67
2023	15	-2	-11.76
2024	50	35	233.33

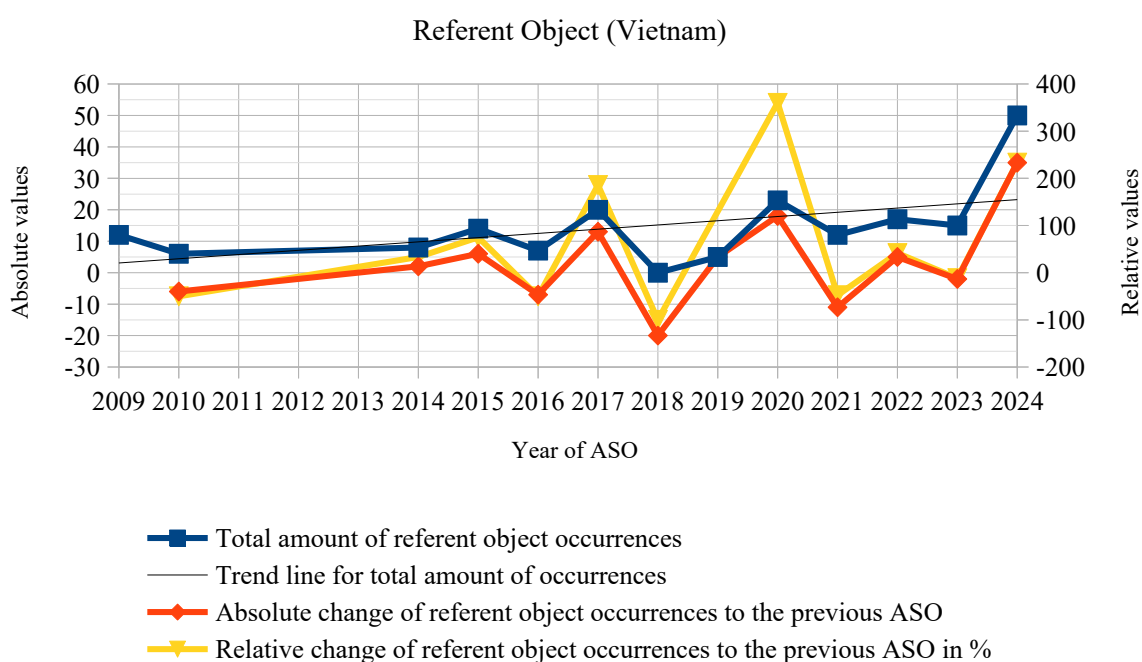


Figure 17: Visualization of referent object occurrences (Vietnam)

Economic Referent

The underlying data for this section about the economic referents in Vietnam's ASOs is summarized in Table 39. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 18. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Economic referents were evoked 12 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of economic referents in Vietnam's ASOs were observed in the years from 2016 to 2023 with 0 mentions in these instances, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2024 with 4 appearances. The average occurrence is 0.92 mention per ASO, with a median of 0 appearances, which is the value of the years from 2016 to 2023.

The most negative absolute change of economic referents took place from 2015 to 2016 with a decline of 2 occurrences. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2023 to 2024 with an increase of 4 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 0.17 occurrences per ASO, with a median of no absolute change of appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2010, 2014, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023. Based on a standard deviation of 1.28 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 1.39. The most negative relative change of economic referents took place from 2015 to 2016 with a 100% decline of occurrences. The highest relative changes were observed from 2009 to 2010, from 2010 to 2014 and from 2014 to 2015 with 0% in these instances.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of economic referent occurrences follows a downward trend over the studied period. Economic referents occur however at an overall low level, reaching their highest number of 4 appearances in 2024. The absolute and relative changes of economic referent occurrences show a relatively consistent development. These developments indicate that economic referents have generally not played a dominant role among the overarching category of referent objects and have even become a smaller part in Vietnam's securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 39: Total amount of economic referent occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Total amount of economic referent occurrences	Absolute change of economic referent occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of economic referent occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2009	2	N/A	N/A
2010	2	0	0.00
2014	2	0	0.00
2015	2	0	0.00
2016	0	-2	-100.00
2017	0	0	N/A
2018	0	0	N/A
2019	0	0	N/A
2020	0	0	N/A
2021	0	0	N/A
2022	0	0	N/A
2023	0	0	N/A
2024	4	4	N/A

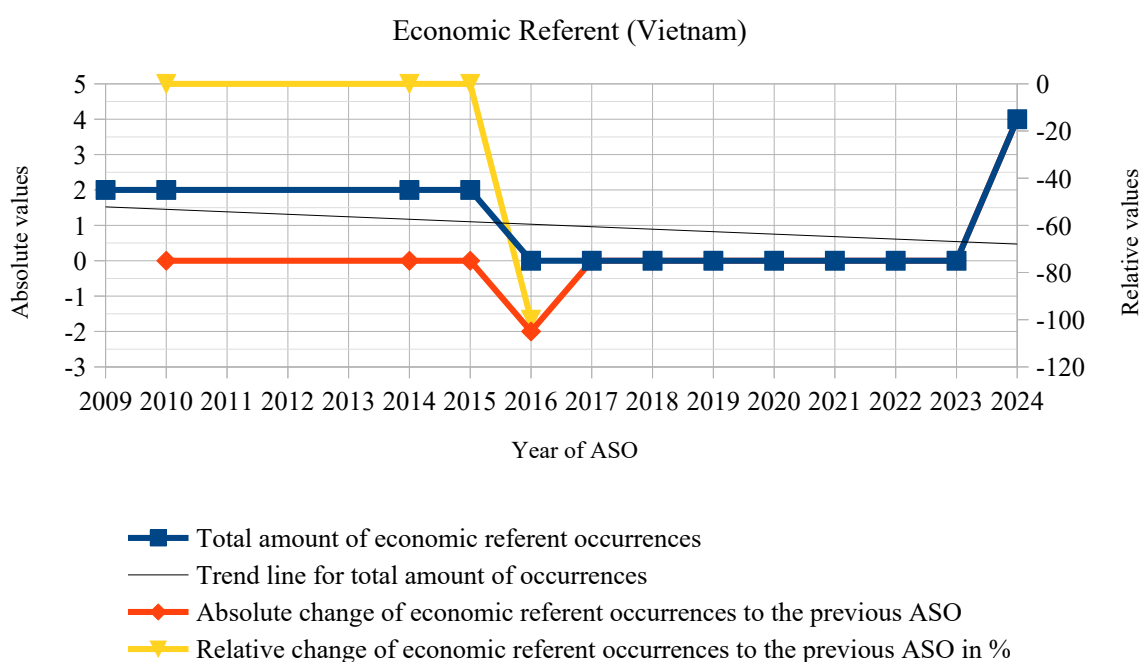


Figure 18: Visualization of economic referent occurrences (Vietnam)

Environmental Referent

The underlying data for this section about the environmental referents in Vietnam's ASOs is summarized in Table 40. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 19. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Environmental referents were evoked 7 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of environmental referents in Vietnam's ASOs were observed in the years from 2009 to 2016 and from 2018 to 2021 with 0 mentions in these instances, whereas the most occurrences were observed in the years from 2022 to 2024 with 2 appearances each. The average occurrence is 0.54 mentions per ASO, with a median of 0 appearances, which is the value from the years 2009 to 2016 and 2018 to 2021.

The most negative absolute change of environmental referents took place from 2017 to 2018 with a decline of 1 occurrence. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2021 to 2022 with an increase of 2 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 0.17 occurrences per ASO, with a median of no absolute change of appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2010, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2023 and 2024. Based on a standard deviation of 0.69 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is

1.28. The most negative relative change of environmental referents took place from 2017 to 2018 with a 100% decline of occurrences. The highest relative changes were observed from 2022 to 2023 and from 2023 to 2024 with 0% in these instances.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of environmental referent occurrences follows an upward trend over the studied period. Environmental referents occur however at an overall low level, reaching their highest number of 2 appearances in 2022, 2023 and 2024. The absolute and relative changes of environmental referent occurrences show a relatively consistent development. These developments indicate that environmental referents have generally not played a dominant role among the overarching category of referent objects, but have nonetheless become a larger part in Vietnam's securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 40: Total amount of environmental referent occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Total amount of environmental referent occurrences	Absolute change of environmental referent occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of environmental referent occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2009	0	N/A	N/A
2010	0	0	N/A
2014	0	0	N/A
2015	0	0	N/A
2016	0	0	N/A
2017	1	1	N/A
2018	0	-1	-100.00
2019	0	0	N/A
2020	0	0	N/A
2021	0	0	N/A
2022	2	2	N/A
2023	2	0	0.00
2024	2	0	0.00

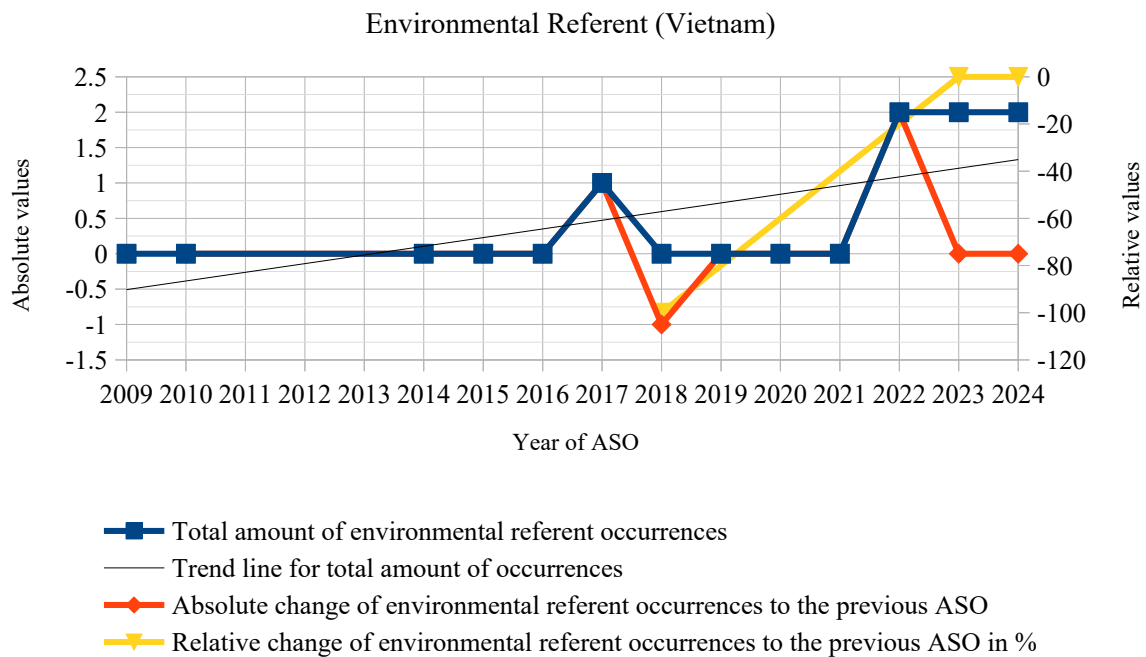


Figure 19: Visualization of environmental referent occurrences (Vietnam)

Military Referent

The underlying data for this section about the military referents in Vietnam's ASOs is summarized in Table 41. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 20. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Military referents were evoked 81 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of military referents in Vietnam's ASOs were observed in 2018 with 0 mentions, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2024 with 25 appearances. The average occurrence is 6.23 mentions per ASO, with the median also being at 6 appearances, which is the value from 2015 and 2021.

The most negative absolute change of military referents took place from 2017 to 2018 with a decline of 7 occurrences. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2023 to 2024 with an increase of 18 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 1.5 occurrences per ASO, with a median increase of 0.5 appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2022 and 2023. Based on a standard deviation of 6.13 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 0.98. The most negative relative change of military referents took place from 2017 to 2018 with a 100% decline of occurrences. The most positive relative change was observed from 2023 to 2024 with a 257.14% increase of occurrences.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of military referent occurrences follows an upward trend over the studied period, reaching its highest number of 25 appearances in 2024. The absolute and relative changes of military referent occurrences fluctuate considerably from year to year. These developments indicate that military referents have generally played a dominant role among the overarching category of referent objects and have become a larger part in Vietnam's securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 41: Total amount of military referent occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Total amount of military referent occurrences	Absolute change of military referent occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of military referent occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2009	7	N/A	N/A
2010	3	-4	-57.14
2014	2	-1	-33.33
2015	6	4	200.00
2016	2	-4	-66.67
2017	7	5	250.00
2018	0	-7	-100.00
2019	2	2	N/A
2020	7	5	250.00
2021	6	-1	-14.29
2022	7	1	16.67
2023	7	0	0.00
2024	25	18	257.14

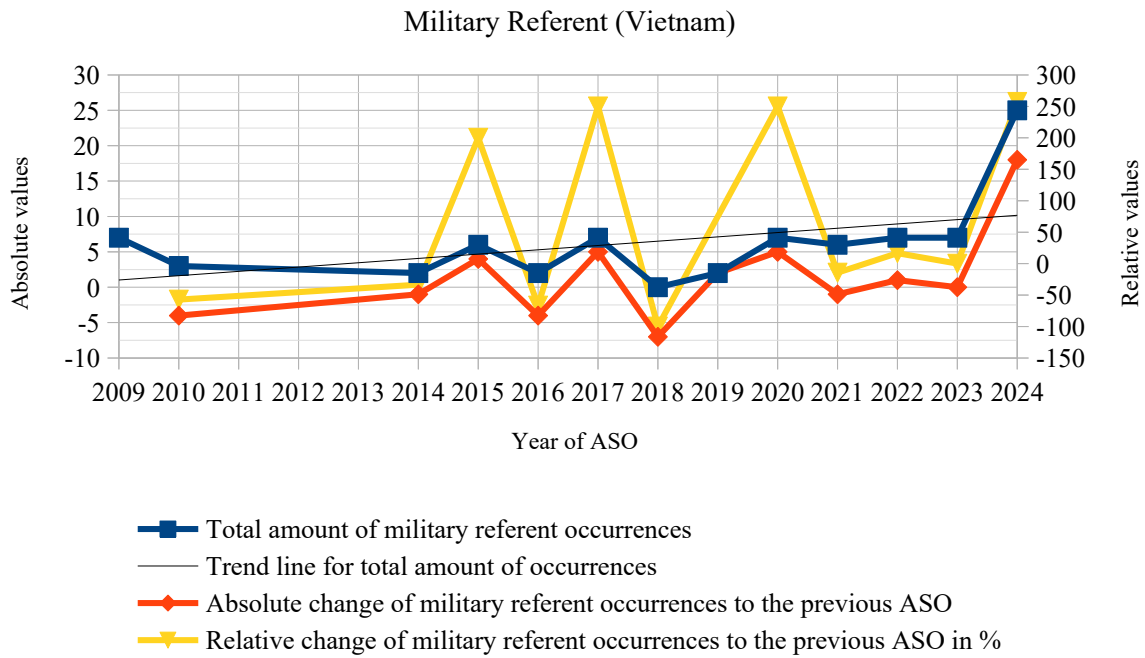


Figure 20: Visualization of military referent occurrences (Vietnam)

Political Referent

The underlying data for this section about the political referents in Vietnam's ASOs is summarized in Table 42. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 21. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Political referents were evoked 64 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of political referents in Vietnam's ASOs were observed in 2018 with 0 mentions, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2024 with 14 appearances. The average occurrence is 4.92 mentions per ASO, with a median of 3 appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2009 and 2015.

The most negative absolute changes of political referents took place from 2017 to 2018 and from 2020 to 2021 with a decline of 9 occurrences. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2019 to 2020 with an increase of 12 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 0.92 occurrences per ASO, with a median increase of 1 appearance, which is the mean of the values from 2014, 2015 and 2019. Based on a standard deviation of 6.10 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 1.24. The most negative relative change of political referents took place from 2017 to 2018 with a 100% decline of occurrences. The most positive relative change was observed from 2019 to 2020 with a 1,200% increase of occurrences.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of political referent occurrences follows an upward trend over the studied period, reaching its highest number of 14 appearances in 2024. The absolute and relative changes of political referent occurrences fluctuate considerably from year to year. These developments indicate that political referents have generally played a dominant role among the overarching category of referent objects and have become a larger part in Vietnam's securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 42: Total amount of political referent occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Total amount of political referent occurrences	Absolute change of political referent occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of political referent occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2009	3	N/A	N/A
2010	1	-2	-66.67
2014	2	1	100.00
2015	3	1	50.00
2016	2	-1	-33.33
2017	9	7	350.00
2018	0	-9	-100.00
2019	1	1	N/A
2020	13	12	1,200.00
2021	4	-9	-69.23
2022	7	3	75.00
2023	5	-2	-28.57
2024	14	9	180.00

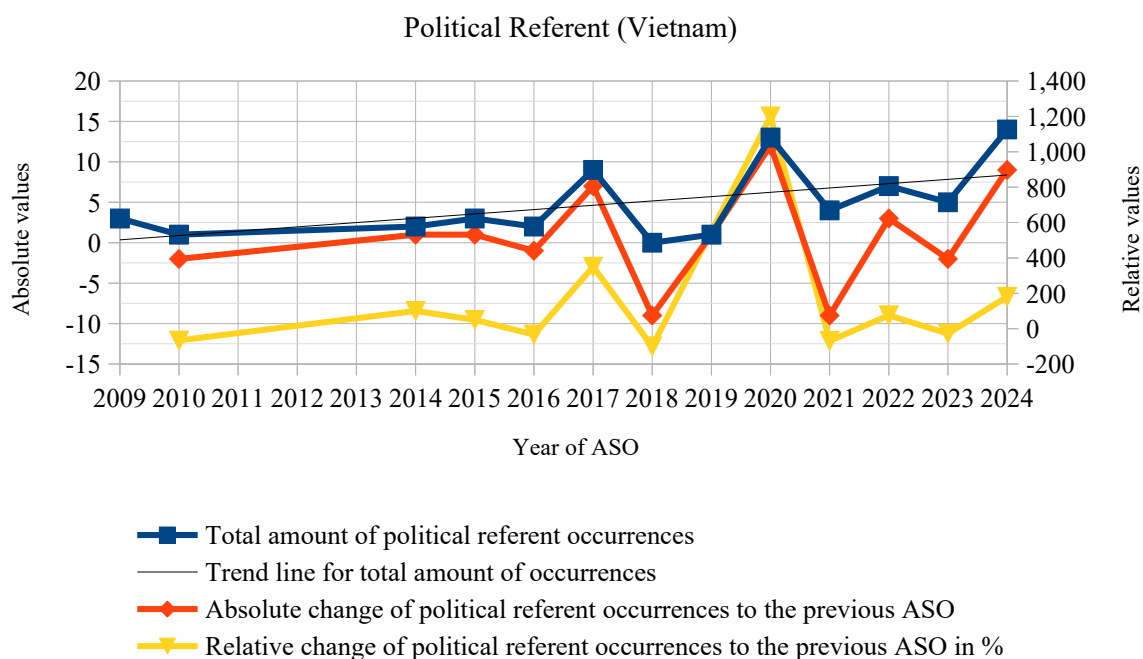


Figure 21: Visualization of political referent occurrences (Vietnam)

Societal Referent

The underlying data for this section about the societal referents in Vietnam's ASOs is summarized in Table 43. Societal referents were not mentioned in the ASOs during the studied period. There are consequently no absolute changes in occurrences and neither a volatility ratio nor relative changes in occurrences can be calculated.

This data indicates that societal referents have not played a role in Vietnam's securitization discourse of the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 43: Total amount of societal referent occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Total amount of societal referent occurrences	Absolute change of societal referent occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of societal referent occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2009	0	N/A	N/A
2010	0	0	N/A
2014	0	0	N/A
2015	0	0	N/A
2016	0	0	N/A
2017	0	0	N/A

2018	0	0	N/A
2019	0	0	N/A
2020	0	0	N/A
2021	0	0	N/A
2022	0	0	N/A
2023	0	0	N/A
2024	0	0	N/A

Other Referent

The underlying data for this section about other referents in Vietnam's ASOs is summarized in Table 44. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 22. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Other referents were evoked 25 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of other referents in Vietnam's ASOs were observed in 2009, 2010 and 2018 with 0 mentions in these instances, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2024 with 5 appearances. The average occurrence is 1.92 mentions per ASO, with a median of 2 appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2014, 2019 and 2021.

The most negative absolute change of other referents took place from 2017 to 2018 with a decline of 3 occurrences. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2023 to 2024 with an increase of 4 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 0.42 occurrences per ASO, with a median of no absolute change of appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2016, 2017 and 2023. Based on a standard deviation of 1.71 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 0.89. The most negative relative change of other referents took place from 2017 to 2018 with a 100% decline of occurrences. The most positive relative change was observed from 2023 to 2024 with a 400% increase of occurrences.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of other referent occurrences follows an upward trend over the studied period, reaching its highest number of 5 appearances in 2024. The absolute and relative changes of other referent occurrences show a relatively consistent development, despite noticeable fluctuations in the late 2010s and again in 2024. These developments indicate that other referents have generally not played a dominant role among the overarching category of referent objects, but have nonetheless become a larger part in Vietnam's securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 44: Total amount of other referent occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Total amount of other referent occurrences	Absolute change of other referent occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of other referent occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2009	0	N/A	N/A
2010	0	0	N/A
2014	2	2	N/A
2015	3	1	50.00
2016	3	0	0.00
2017	3	0	0.00
2018	0	-3	-100.00
2019	2	2	N/A
2020	3	1	50.00
2021	2	-1	-33.33
2022	1	-1	-50.00
2023	1	0	0.00
2024	5	4	400.00

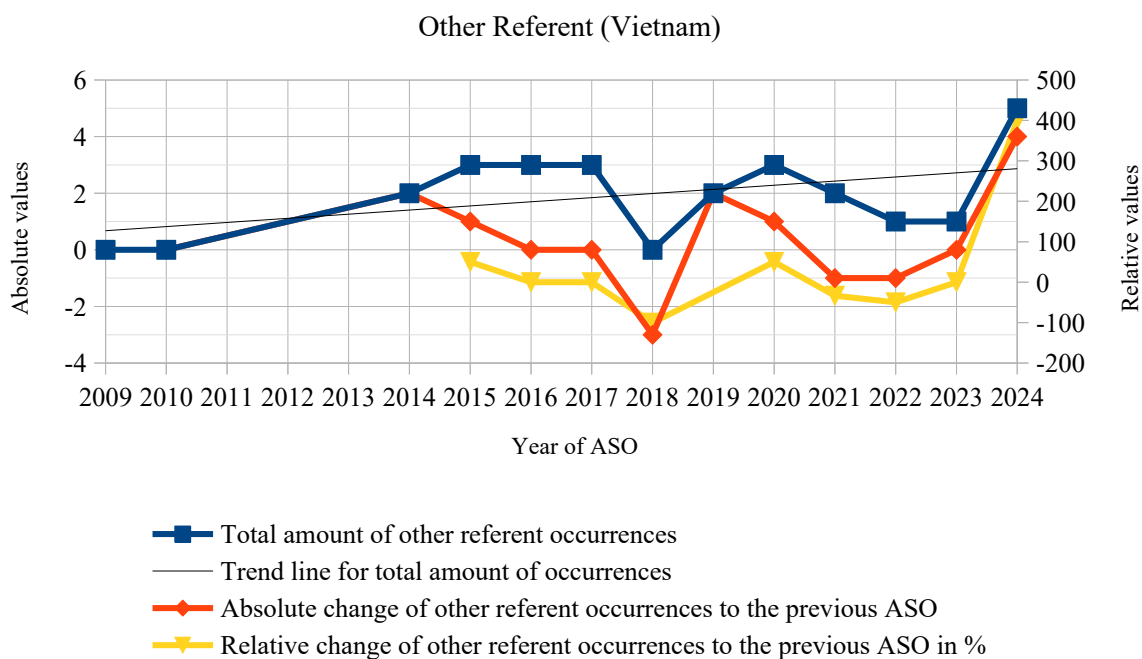


Figure 22: Visualization of other referent occurrences (Vietnam)

Existential Threat

The underlying data for this section about the existential threats in Vietnam's ASOs is summarized in Table 45. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 23. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Existential threats were evoked 116 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of existential threats in Vietnam's ASOs were observed in 2018 and 2019 with 3 mentions, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2024 with 19 appearances. The average occurrence is 8.92 mentions per ASO, with a median of 9 appearances, which is the value from 2016 and 2023.

The most negative absolute change of existential threats took place from 2017 to 2018 with a decline of 9 occurrences. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2023 to 2024 with an increase of 10 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 1 occurrence per ASO, with a median of no absolute change of appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2010 and 2019. Based on a standard deviation of 5.46 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 0.61. The most negative relative change of existential threats took place from 2017 to 2018 with a 75% decline of occurrences. The most positive relative change was observed from 2019 to 2020 with a 266.67% increase of occurrences.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of existential threat occurrences follows an upward trend over the studied period, reaching its highest number of 19 appearances in 2024. The absolute and relative changes of existential threat occurrences show considerable fluctuations over time. These developments indicate that existential threats have generally become a larger part in Vietnam's securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 45: Total amount of existential threat occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Total amount of existential threat occurrences	Absolute change of existential threat occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of existential threat occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2009	7	N/A	N/A
2010	7	0	0.00
2014	4	-3	-42.86
2015	12	8	200.00
2016	9	-3	-25.00
2017	12	3	33.33
2018	3	-9	-75.00

2019	3	0	0.00
2020	11	8	266.67
2021	8	-3	-27.27
2022	12	4	50.00
2023	9	-3	-25.00
2024	19	10	111.11

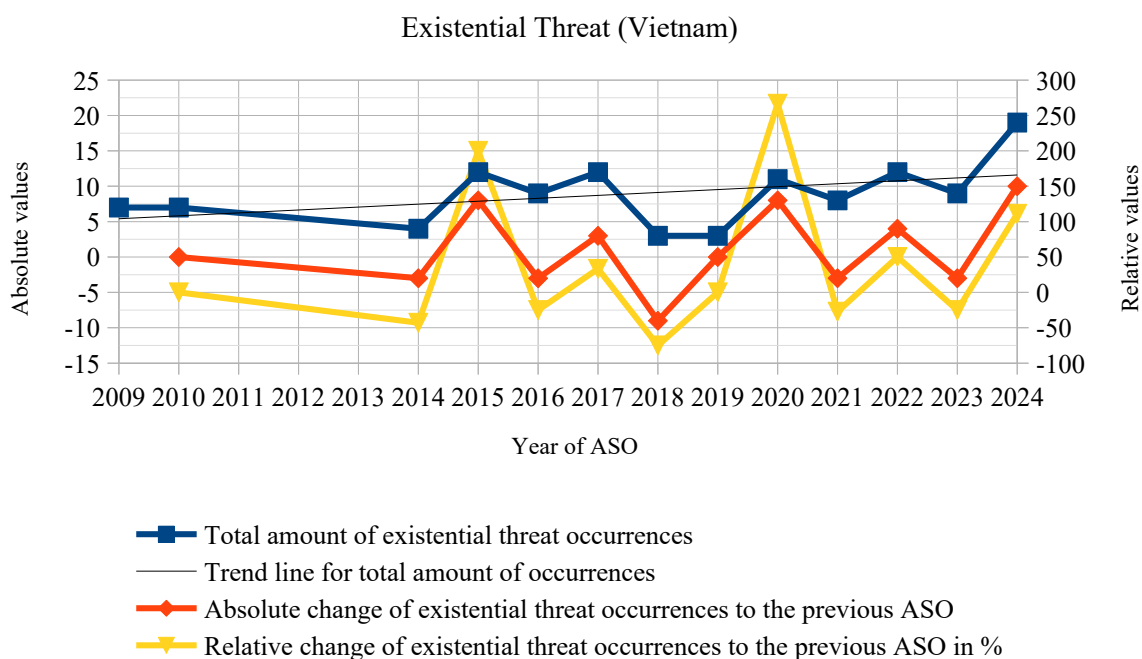


Figure 23: Visualization of existential threat occurrences (Vietnam)

Economic Threat

The underlying data for this section about the economic threats in Vietnam's ASOs is summarized in Table 46. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Economic threats were mentioned only in the 2024 ASO, where they occurred once. The average occurrence is 0.08 mentions per ASO, with a median of 0 appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2009 to 2023.

The lowest absolute changes took place between all years from 2009 to 2023 with no changes in occurrences. The highest absolute change was observed from 2023 to 2024 with an increase of 1 occurrence. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 0.08 occurrences per ASO, with a median of no absolute change of appearances, which is the value for all years from

2010 to 2023. Based on a standard deviation of 0.28 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 3.59. Since there have neither been occurrences nor absolute changes of occurrences for the years from 2009 to 2023, no relative changes of occurrences can be calculated.

This data indicates that economic threats have not played a role in Vietnam's securitization discourse of the SCS disputes until very recently.

Table 46: Total amount of economic threat occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Total amount of economic threat occurrences	Absolute change of economic threat occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of economic threat occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2009	0	N/A	N/A
2010	0	0	N/A
2014	0	0	N/A
2015	0	0	N/A
2016	0	0	N/A
2017	0	0	N/A
2018	0	0	N/A
2019	0	0	N/A
2020	0	0	N/A
2021	0	0	N/A
2022	0	0	N/A
2023	0	0	N/A
2024	1	1	N/A

Environmental Threat

The underlying data for this section about the environmental threats in Vietnam's ASOs is summarized in Table 47. Environmental threats were not mentioned in the ASOs during the studied period. There are consequently no absolute changes in occurrences and neither a volatility ratio nor relative changes in occurrences can be calculated.

This data indicates that environmental threats have not played a role in Vietnam's securitization discourse of the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 47: Total amount of environmental threat occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Total amount of environmental threat occurrences	Absolute change of environmental threat occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of environmental threat occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2009	0	N/A	N/A
2010	0	0	N/A
2014	0	0	N/A
2015	0	0	N/A
2016	0	0	N/A
2017	0	0	N/A
2018	0	0	N/A
2019	0	0	N/A
2020	0	0	N/A
2021	0	0	N/A
2022	0	0	N/A
2023	0	0	N/A
2024	0	0	N/A

Military Threat

The underlying data for this section about the military threats in Vietnam's ASOs is summarized in Table 48. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 24. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Military threats were evoked 57 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of military threats in Vietnam's ASOs were observed in 2019 with 1 mention, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2015 with 8 appearances. The average occurrence is 4.38 mentions per ASO, with a median of 4 appearances, which is the value from 2009, 2010, 2020 and 2021.

The most negative absolute change of military threats took place from 2017 to 2018 with a decline of 4 occurrences. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2014 to 2015 with an increase of 5 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 0.17 occurrences per ASO, with a median of no absolute change of appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2010 and 2021. Based on a standard deviation of 2.61 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 0.59. The most negative relative change of

military threats took place from 2018 to 2019 with a 66.67% decline of occurrences. The most positive relative change was observed from 2019 to 2020 with a 300% increase of occurrences.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of military threat occurrences follows a downward trend over the studied period, reaching its highest number of 8 appearances in 2015. The absolute and relative changes of military threat occurrences show considerable fluctuations over time. These developments indicate that military threats have generally played a dominant role among the overarching category of existential threats, but have nonetheless become a smaller part in Vietnam's securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 48: Total amount of military threat occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Total amount of military threat occurrences	Absolute change of military threat occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of military threat occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2009	4	N/A	N/A
2010	4	0	0.00
2014	3	-1	-25.00
2015	8	5	166.67
2016	5	-3	-37.50
2017	7	2	40.00
2018	3	-4	-57.14
2019	1	-2	-66.67
2020	4	3	300.00
2021	4	0	0.00
2022	5	1	25.00
2023	3	-2	-40.00
2024	6	3	100.00

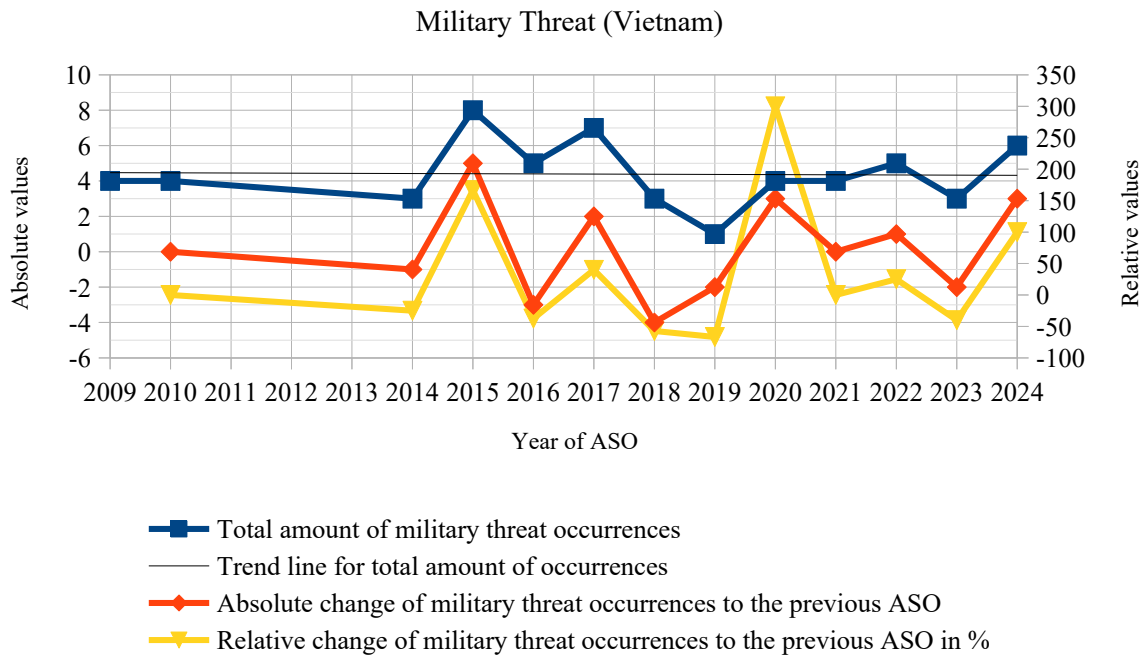


Figure 24: Visualization of military threat occurrences (Vietnam)

Political Threat

The underlying data for this section about the political threats in Vietnam's ASOs is summarized in Table 49. Political threats were not mentioned in the ASOs during the studied period. There are consequently no absolute changes in occurrences and neither a volatility ratio nor relative changes in occurrences can be calculated.

This data indicates that political threats have not played a role in Vietnam's securitization discourse of the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 49: Total amount of political threat occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Total amount of political threat occurrences	Absolute change of political threat occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of political threat occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2009	0	N/A	N/A
2010	0	0	N/A
2014	0	0	N/A
2015	0	0	N/A
2016	0	0	N/A

2017	0	0	N/A
2018	0	0	N/A
2019	0	0	N/A
2020	0	0	N/A
2021	0	0	N/A
2022	0	0	N/A
2023	0	0	N/A
2024	0	0	N/A

Societal Threat

The underlying data for this section about the societal threats in Vietnam's ASOs is summarized in Table 50. Societal threats were not mentioned in the ASOs during the studied period. There are consequently no absolute changes in occurrences and neither a volatility ratio nor relative changes in occurrences can be calculated.

This data indicates that societal threats have not played a role in Vietnam's securitization discourse of the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 50: Total amount of societal threat occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Total amount of societal threat occurrences	Absolute change of societal threat occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of societal threat occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2009	0	N/A	N/A
2010	0	0	N/A
2014	0	0	N/A
2015	0	0	N/A
2016	0	0	N/A
2017	0	0	N/A
2018	0	0	N/A
2019	0	0	N/A
2020	0	0	N/A
2021	0	0	N/A
2022	0	0	N/A
2023	0	0	N/A
2024	0	0	N/A

Other Threat

The underlying data for this section about other threats in Vietnam's ASOs is summarized in Table 51. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 25. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Other threats were evoked 58 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of other threats in Vietnam's ASOs were observed in 2018 with 0 mentions, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2024 with 12 appearances. The average occurrence is 4.46 mentions per ASO, with a median of 4 appearances, which is the value from 2015, 2016 and 2021.

The most negative absolute change of other threats took place from 2017 to 2018 with a decline of 5 occurrences. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2023 to 2024 with an increase of 6 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 0.75 occurrences per ASO, with a median increase of 0.5 appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2017 and 2010 or 2016, the latter two years having identical values. Based on a standard deviation of 3.11 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 0.70. The most negative relative change of other threats took place from 2017 to 2018 with a 100% decline of occurrences. The most positive relative change was observed from 2014 to 2015 with a 300% increase of occurrences.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of other threat occurrences follows an upward trend over the studied period, reaching its highest number of 12 appearances in 2024. The absolute and relative changes of other threat occurrences fluctuate considerably over time. These developments indicate that other threats have generally played a dominant role among the overarching category of existential threats and have become a larger part in Vietnam's securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 51: Total amount of other threat occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Total amount of other threat occurrences	Absolute change of other threat occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of other threat occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2009	3	N/A	N/A
2010	3	0	0.00
2014	1	-2	-66.67
2015	4	3	300.00
2016	4	0	0.00
2017	5	1	25.00

2018	0	-5	-100.00
2019	2	2	N/A
2020	7	5	250.00
2021	4	-3	-42.86
2022	7	3	75.00
2023	6	-1	-14.29
2024	12	6	100.00

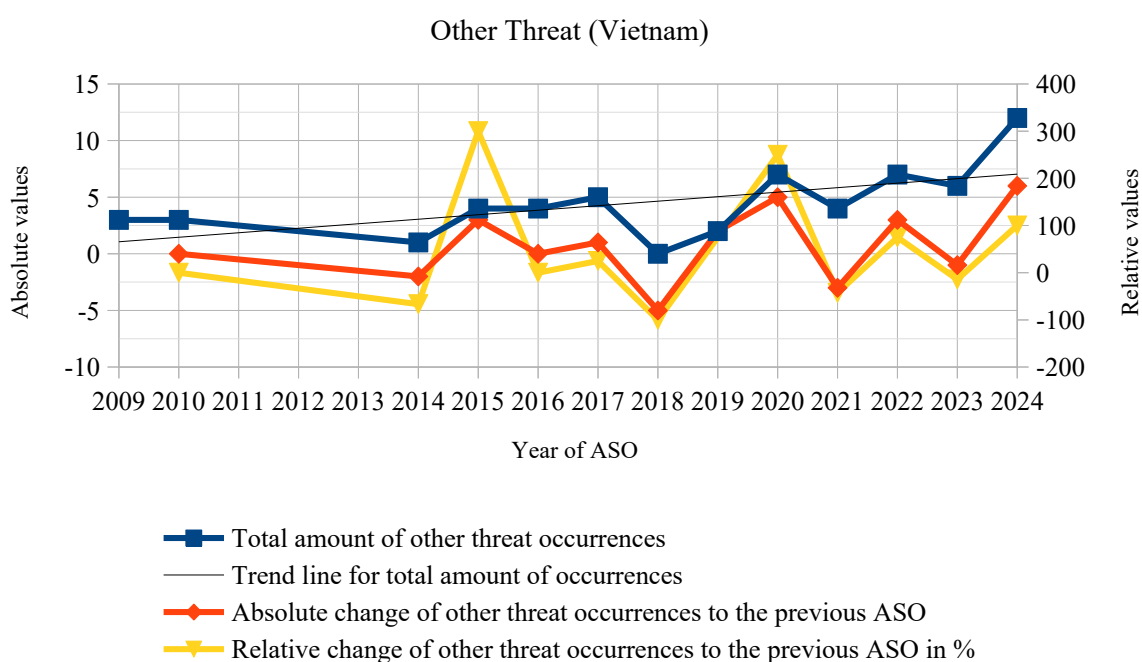


Figure 25: Visualization of other threat occurrences (Vietnam)

Other Functional Actor

The underlying data for this section about other functional actors in Vietnam's ASOs is summarized in Table 52. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 26. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Other functional actors were evoked 192 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of other functional actors in Vietnam's ASOs were observed in 2016 with 1 mention, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2024 with 39 appearances. The average occurrence is 14.77 mentions per ASO, with a median of 15 appearances, which is the value from 2015.

The most negative absolute change of other functional actors took place from 2015 to 2016 with a decline of 14 occurrences. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2019 to 2020 with an increase of 20 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 1.92 occurrences per ASO, with a median increase of 0.5 appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2019 and 2022. Based on a standard deviation of 9.88 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 0.67. The most negative relative change of other functional actors took place from 2015 to 2016 with a 93.33% decline of occurrences. The most positive relative change was observed from 2016 to 2017 with a 900% increase of occurrences.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of other functional actor occurrences follows an upward trend over the studied period, reaching its highest number of 39 appearances in 2024. The absolute and relative changes of other functional actor occurrences fluctuated considerably in the late 2010s, with a more consistent development in recent years. These developments indicate that other functional actors have generally become a larger part in Vietnam's securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 52: Total amount of other functional actor occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Total amount of other functional actor occurrences	Absolute change of other functional actor occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of other functional actor occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2009	16	N/A	N/A
2010	14	-2	-12.50
2014	7	-7	-50.00
2015	15	8	114.29
2016	1	-14	-93.33
2017	10	9	900.00
2018	5	-5	-50.00
2019	5	0	0.00
2020	25	20	400.00
2021	16	-9	-36.00
2022	17	1	6.25
2023	22	5	29.41
2024	39	17	77.27

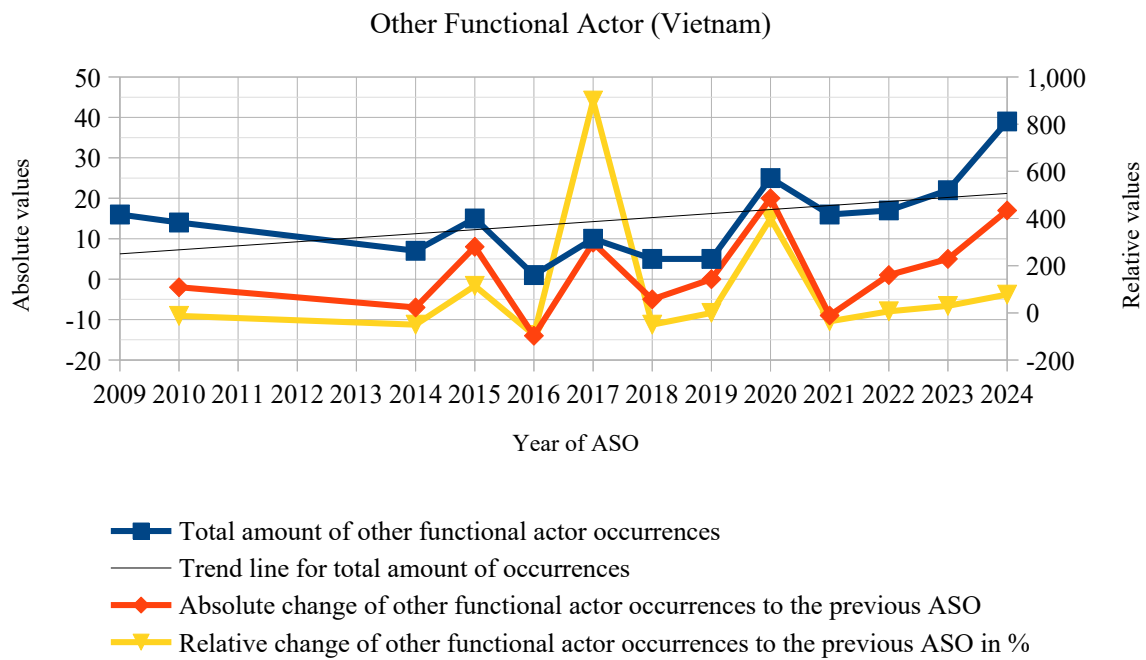


Figure 26: Visualization of other functional actor occurrences (Vietnam)

Security Practice

The underlying data for this section about security practices in Vietnam's ASOs is summarized in Table 53. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 27. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Security practices were evoked 98 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of security practices in Vietnam's ASOs were observed in 2016 with 0 mentions, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2024 with 15 appearances. The average occurrence is 7.54 mentions per ASO, with a median of 9 appearances, which is the value from 2010, 2021 and 2022.

The most negative absolute change of security practices took place from 2015 to 2016 with a decline of 14 occurrences. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2014 to 2015 with an increase of 9 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 0.58 occurrences per ASO, with a median increase of 0.5 appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2010, 2018 and 2022, the latter two years having identical values. Based on a standard deviation of 5.66 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 0.75. The most negative relative change of security practices took place from 2015 to 2016 with a 100% decline of occurrences. The most positive relative change was observed from 2019 to 2020 with a 400% increase of occurrences.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of security practice occurrences follows an upward trend over the studied period, reaching its highest number of 15 appearances in 2024. The absolute and relative changes of security practice occurrences show a relatively consistent development, despite noticeable fluctuations in 2015 and again in 2020. These developments indicate that security practices have generally become a larger part in Vietnam's securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 53: Total amount of security practice occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Total amount of security practice occurrences	Absolute change of security practice occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of security practice occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2009	8	N/A	N/A
2010	9	1	12.50
2014	5	-4	-44.44
2015	14	9	180.00
2016	0	-14	-100.00
2017	3	3	N/A
2018	3	0	0.00
2019	2	-1	-33.33
2020	10	8	400.00
2021	9	-1	-10.00
2022	9	0	0.00
2023	11	2	22.22
2024	15	4	36.36

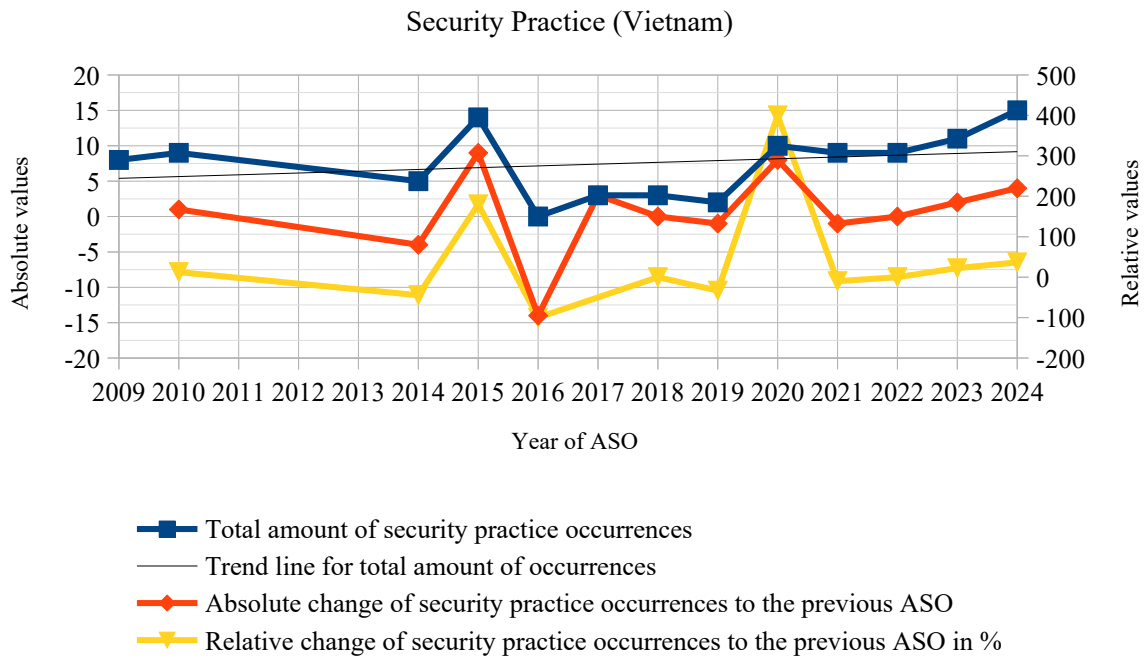


Figure 27: Visualization of security practice occurrences (Vietnam)

Intended Measure

The underlying data for this section about intended measures in Vietnam’s ASOs is summarized in Table 54. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 28. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Intended measures were evoked 57 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of intended measures in Vietnam’s ASOs were observed in 2016 and 2019 with 0 mentions in these instances, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2024 with 10 appearances. The average occurrence is 4.38 mentions per ASO, with a median of 5 appearances, which is the value from 2009 and 2010.

The most negative absolute change of intended measures took place from 2015 to 2016 with a decline of 9 occurrences. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2023 to 2024 with an increase of 7 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 0.42 occurrences per ASO, with a median of no absolute change of appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2010, 2021 and 2022. Based on a standard deviation of 4.13 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 0.94. The most negative relative change of intended measures took place from 2018 to 2019 with a 100% decline of occurrences. The most positive relative change was observed from 2023 to 2024 with a 233.33% increase of occurrences.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of intended measure occurrences follows a slight upward trend over the studied period, reaching its highest number of 10 appearances in 2024. The absolute and relative changes of intended measure occurrences fluctuate considerably over time. These developments indicate that intended measures have generally become a slightly larger part in Vietnam's securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 54: Total amount of intended measure occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Total amount of intended measure occurrences	Absolute change of intended measure occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of intended measure occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2009	5	N/A	N/A
2010	5	0	0.00
2014	4	-1	-20.00
2015	9	5	125.00
2016	0	-9	-100.00
2017	2	2	N/A
2018	1	-1	-50.00
2019	0	-1	-100.00
2020	6	6	N/A
2021	6	0	0.00
2022	6	0	0.00
2023	3	-3	-50.00
2024	10	7	233.33

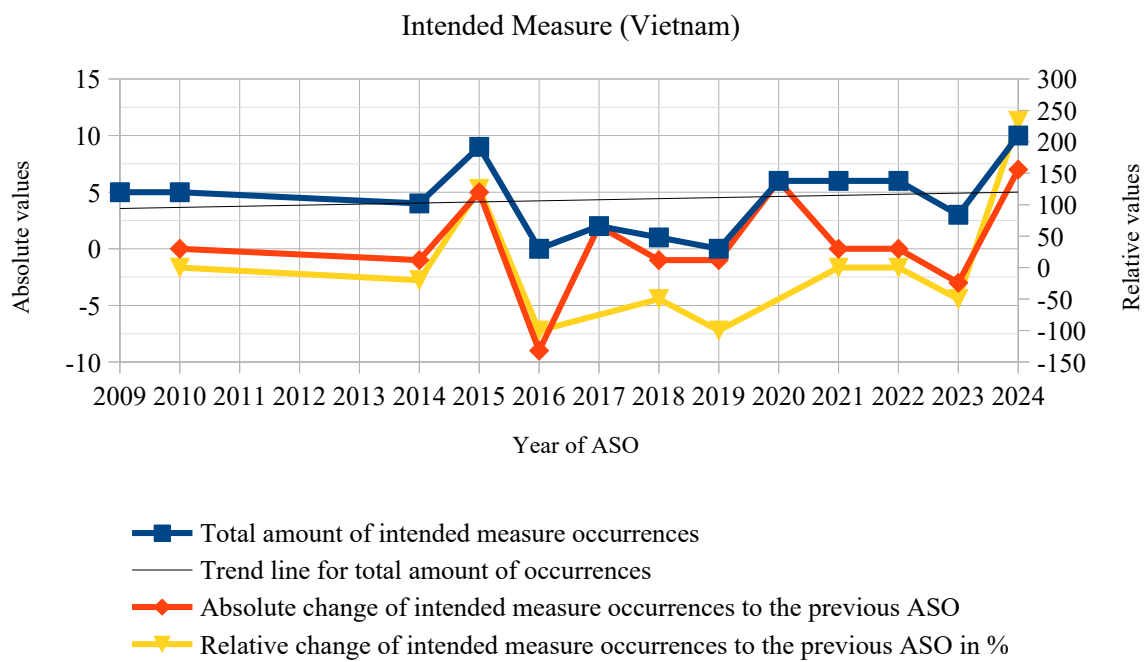


Figure 28: Visualization of intended measure occurrences (Vietnam)

Performed Measure

The underlying data for this section about performed measures in Vietnam's ASOs is summarized in Table 55. These values are additionally visualized in Figure 29. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Performed measures were evoked 41 times during the entire studied period. The fewest occurrences of performed measures in Vietnam's ASOs were observed in 2016 with 0 mentions, whereas the most occurrences were observed in 2023 with 8 appearances. The average occurrence is 3.15 mentions per ASO, with a median of 3 appearances, which is the value from 2009, 2021 and 2022.

The most negative absolute change of performed measures took place from 2015 to 2016 with a decline of 5 occurrences. The most positive absolute change was observed from 2022 to 2023 with an increase of 5 occurrences. The average absolute change for the studied period is an increase of 0.17 occurrences per ASO, with a median increase of 0.5 appearances, which is the mean of the values from 2010 or 2017 or 2018 and 2019 or 2022, the first three years and the last two years having identical values. Based on a standard deviation of 2.76 for the absolute change of occurrences, the volatility ratio for the studied period is 0.88. The most negative relative change of performed measures took place from 2015 to 2016 with a 100% decline of occurrences. The most positive relative change was observed from 2014 to 2015 with a 400% increase of occurrences.

As an intermediate result, it can be observed that the total amount of performed measure occurrences follows an upward trend over the studied period, reaching its highest number of 8 appearances in 2023. The absolute and relative changes of performed measure occurrences fluctuate considerably over time. These developments indicate that performed measures have generally become a larger part in Vietnam's securitization discourse about the SCS disputes during the observed time frame.

Table 55: Total amount of performed measure occurrences and evolution of occurrences (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Total amount of performed measure occurrences	Absolute change of performed measure occurrences to the previous ASO	Relative change of performed measure occurrences to the previous ASO in %
2009	3	N/A	N/A
2010	4	1	33.33
2014	1	-3	-75.00
2015	5	4	400.00
2016	0	-5	-100.00
2017	1	1	N/A
2018	2	1	100.00
2019	2	0	0.00
2020	4	2	100.00
2021	3	-1	-25.00
2022	3	0	0.00
2023	8	5	166.67
2024	5	-3	-37.50

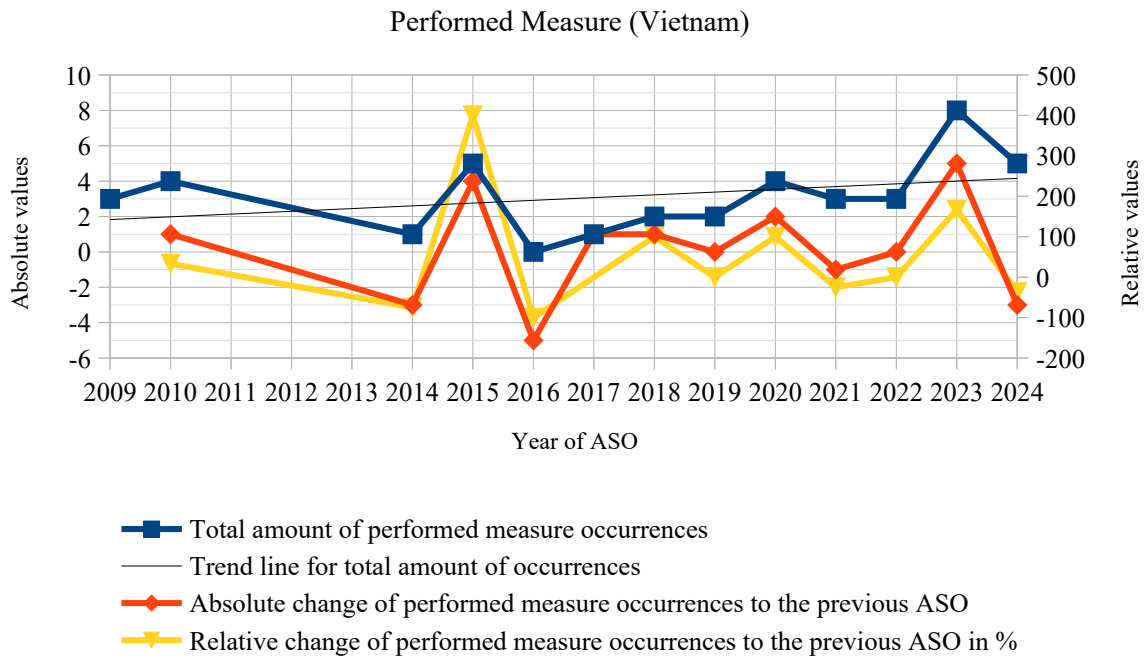


Figure 29: Visualization of performed measure occurrences (Vietnam)

2.2.2 Qualitative Analysis

As previously outlined in the subchapter of the Philippines, the qualitative analysis examines the textual content behind each category and code to identify the most commonly evoked expressions for any thematic patterns in Vietnam's securitization discourse regarding the SCS disputes during the studied time period from 2009 to 2024.

Just as in the quantitative part, each category and code is analyzed in its own section. The underlying data is summarized in individual tables, listing the up to five most common thematic expressions per year. Any years in which a specific code was not used are generally omitted from the tables to provide a clearer overview of the expressions. The overarching categories of referent object, existential threat and security practice only focus on expressions that were used at least twice in the same year.

There are certain elements of securitization that Vietnam has either never or only once employed regarding the SCS disputes. Societal referents, environmental threats, economic threats and societal threats did not occur and can consequently not be analyzed for their thematic content. Economic threats have only been evoked on one occasion. Although an examination of thematic patterns over time is therefore not feasible, its content will nonetheless be situated in the textual context of its appearance.

Referent Object

Table 56 lists the most common thematic expressions for referent objects that have been evoked more than once in the corresponding year. Referents that were not used multiple times in the same year are omitted for clarity. They are nonetheless listed in the individual tables of each specific sectoral referent. Among all potential referent objects, only societal referents have no expressions that were used multiple times in certain years. There have been no multiple uses of any referents in the years 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2019.

There are two observations of general nature to be made. Firstly, the variety of different referent objects has generally increased over time from only a single expression during the first years to ten different referents in 2024. Secondly, the precise total amount of the most common referent has increased from two appearances during most of the years to up to nine mentions in 2024, with other referents also being evoked more than twice.

More specifically, there is a consistent long-term pattern of peace and stability as repeatedly occurring referents during most of the years. A more recent trend with the potential to become an additional long-term pattern are the referents of confidence, rights, security and trust.

Table 56: Most common thematic expressions used for referent objects per year (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2009	• 3x: Peace
2010	• 2x: Sovereignty
2015	• 2x each: Freedom of navigation, Peace
2017	• 2x each: Jurisdiction, Peace, Rights Stability
2020	• 2x each: Confidence, Jurisdiction, Peace, Rights, Stability, Trust
2021	• 2x each: Peace, Stability
2022	• 2x each: Marine environment, Peace, Security, Stability
2023	• 2x each: Marine environment, Peace, Security, Stability
2024	• 9x each: Peace, Stability • 6x: Security • 3x: Safety • 2x each: Confidence, Cooperation, Development, Freedom of navigation, Interests, Rights, Trust

Economic Referent

Table 57 lists the most common thematic expressions used by Vietnam for economic referents in the country's ASOs during the studied period.

Generally, the diversity of economic referents per year has remained relatively stable over time. Looking into the specific thematic expressions, there is a clear shift in the overarching theme for economic referents. Up to the mid-2010s, the most common expressions focused on development and natural resources. This was followed by a period without any economic referents being mentioned. Most recently, development has again appeared as referent, but the formerly common reference to natural resources is now absent in favor of evoking the economy and maritime trade instead.

Table 57: Most common thematic expressions used for economic referents per year (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2009	• 1x each: Development, Exploitation of natural resources
2010	• 1x each: Development, Exploitation of natural resources
2014	• 1x each: Development, Natural resources
2015	• 1x each: Development, Exploitation of natural resources
2024	• 2x: Development • 1x each: Economy, Maritime trade

Environmental Referent

Table 58 lists the most common thematic expressions used by Vietnam for environmental referents in the country's ASOs during the studied period.

The diversity of environmental referents per year remained unchanged. The only thematic expression that has been evoked as referent is the marine environment, which is notably more often mentioned in recent years.

Table 58: Most common thematic expressions used for environmental referents per year (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2017	• 1x: Marine environment
2022	• 2x: Marine environment
2023	• 2x: Marine environment
2024	• 2x: Marine environment

Military Referent

Table 59 lists the most common thematic expressions used by Vietnam for military referents in the country's ASOs during the studied period.

Generally, the diversity of military referents per year has remained relatively stable over time. Looking into the specific thematic expressions, there is a noticeable long-term pattern, as well as a recent trend. The long-term theme emphasizes peace, security, sovereignty and stability as the most common military referents. More recently, strategic trust has also become a frequently evoked referent.

Table 59: Most common thematic expressions used for military referents per year (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2009	• 2x: Peace • 1x each: Control over international sea lanes, Security, Sovereignty, Stability
2010	• 2x: Sovereignty • 1x: Peace
2014	• 1x each: Peace, Territory
2015	• 2x: Peace • 1x each: Security, Sovereignty, Stability, Territory
2016	• 1x each: Peace, Stability
2017	• 2x each: Peace, Stability • 1x each: Continental shelves, EEZ, Territorial integrity
2019	• 1x each: Peace, Stability
2020	• 2x each: Peace, Stability • 1x each: Maritime entitlements, Security, Sovereignty
2021	• 2x each: Peace, Stability • 1x each: Security, Strategic trust
2022	• 2x each: Peace, Security, Stability • 1x: Strategic trust
2023	• 2x each: Peace, Security, Stability • 1x: Strategic trust
2024	• 9x each: Peace, Stability • 6x: Security • 1x: Sovereignty

Political Referent

Table 60 lists the most common thematic expressions used by Vietnam for political referents in the country's ASOs during the studied period.

Generally, the diversity of political referents per year has increased over time. Looking into the specific thematic expressions, there are two long-term patterns, as well as a recent trend. There is a consistent theme of evoking confidence, freedom of navigation and trust as political referents throughout the studied period. Additionally, the initial specific references to the COC, DOC and UNCLOS appear to have been replaced by the overarching term of international law. In recent years, a rules-based maritime order has also become a more frequently used referent.

Table 60: Most common thematic expressions used for political referents per year (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2009	• 1x each: Equality, Friendly neighbors, Respect
2010	• 1x: Friendship
2014	• 1x each: Freedom of navigation, Friendship
2015	• 2x: Freedom of navigation • 1x: Friendship
2016	• 1x each: Confidence, Trust
2017	• 2x each: Jurisdiction, Rights • 1x each: DOC, Freedom of navigation, Relations among countries, Trust, UNCLOS
2019	• 1x: COC
2020	• 2x each: Confidence, Jurisdiction, Rights, Trust • 1x each: COC, Freedom of navigation, Legitimate interests, Rules-based maritime order, UNCLOS
2021	• 1x each: Freedom of navigation, International law, Rules-based maritime order, Trust
2022	• 1x each: Confidence, Freedom of navigation, International law, Jurisdiction, Rights, Rules-based maritime order, Trust
2023	• 1x each: Confidence, Freedom of navigation, International law, Rules-based maritime order, Trust
2024	• 2x each: Confidence, Cooperation, Freedom of navigation, Rights, Trust • 1x each: Integrity, International law, Jurisdiction, Rules-based regional maritime order

Societal Referent

As noted in the quantitative analysis, Vietnam did not evoke any societal referents in its contributions to the ASOs of the studied period. There are consequently no qualitative aspects to analyze.

Other Referent

Table 61 lists the most common thematic expressions used by Vietnam for other referents in the country's ASOs during the studied period.

Generally, the diversity of other referents per year has decreased over time. Looking into the specific thematic expressions, there is a noticeable long-term pattern. The two most common referents are maritime security and safety. Particularly safety has, however, been more predominantly evoked in recent years.

Table 61: Most common thematic expressions used for other referents per year (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2014	• 1x each: Maritime security, Special interests
2015	• 1x each: Common interests, Maritime security, Safety
2016	• 1x each: Airspace security, Maritime security, Safety
2017	• 1x each: Maritime security, Safety, Status quo
2019	• 1x each: Maritime security, Safety
2020	• 1x each: Common interests, Maritime security, Safety
2021	• 1x each: Maritime security, Safety
2022	• 1x: Safety
2023	• 1x: Safety
2024	• 3x: Safety • 2x: Interests

Existential Threat

Table 62 lists the most common thematic expressions for existential threats that have been evoked more than once in the corresponding year. Threats that were not used multiple times in the same year are omitted for clarity. They are nonetheless listed in the individual tables of each specific sectoral threat. Among all potential existential threats, only military and other threats have expressions that were used multiple times in certain years. There have been no multiple uses of any threats in the years 2016 and 2019.

There are two observations of general nature to be made. Firstly, the variety of different existential has generally increased over time from only a single expression during most of the 2010s to five different threats in 2024. Secondly, the precise total amount of the most common threat has remained relatively stable during most of the years.

For most of the years, existential threats tend to be rather vague and general. There is however a consistent long-term pattern of disputes as the most commonly occurring threat. More recently, the expressions of (unilateral) actions, developments and tensions have also regularly been evoked as threats.

Table 62: Most common thematic expressions used for existential threats per year (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2009	• 3x: Disputes
2010	• 4x: Disputes • 3x: Issues
2014	• 3x: Disputes
2015	• 6x: Disputes
2017	• 2x each: Activities, Disputes
2018	• 2x: Disputes
2020	• 3x: Developments • 2x: Disputes
2021	• 2x each: Disputes, Unilateral actions
2022	• 2x each: Disputes, Tensions
2023	• 2x: Disputes
2024	• 4x: Disputes • 2x each: Actions, Activities, Developments, Incidents

Economic Threat

Vietnam only evoked an economic threat on a single occasion in its contribution to the 2024 ASO. The economic threat was described as "any disruption to maritime trade in this region could result in significant economic consequences for all countries" (ARF 2024, 329) with regard to the SCS as an important shipping route.

Environmental Threat

As noted in the quantitative analysis, Vietnam did not evoke any environmental threats in its contributions to the ASOs of the studied period. There are consequently no qualitative aspects to analyze.

Military Threat

Table 63 lists the most common thematic expressions used by Vietnam for military threats in the country's ASOs during the studied period.

Generally, the diversity of military threats per year has remained relatively stable over time. Looking into the specific thematic expressions, there are two noticeable long-term patterns. Firstly, there is a clear theme of consistently evoking disputes, land reclamation and militarization as the most common military threats. Additionally, the term “flashpoint” is a recurring threat.

Table 63: Most common thematic expressions used for military threats per year (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2009	• 3x: Disputes • 1x: Flashpoint
2010	• 4x: Disputes
2014	• 3x: Disputes
2015	• 6x: Disputes • 1x each: Instability, Reclamation of geographical features
2016	• 1x each: Control, Militarization, Military exercises, Patrols, Reinforcing claims, Patrols
2017	• 2x: Disputes • 1x each: Claims, Flashpoint, Land reclamation, Militarization, Risks of conflict
2018	• 2x: Disputes • 1x: Hotspot
2019	• 1x: Militarization
2020	• 2x: Disputes • 1x each: Flashpoint, Militarization
2021	• 2x: Disputes • 1x each: Land reclamation, Militarization
2022	• 2x: Disputes • 1x each: Flashpoint, Land reclamation, Militarization
2023	• 2x: Disputes • 1x: Militarization
2024	• 4x: Disputes • 1x each: Conflict, Flashpoint

Political Threat

As noted in the quantitative analysis, Vietnam did not evoke any political threats in its contributions to the ASOs of the studied period. There are consequently no qualitative aspects to analyze.

Societal Threat

As noted in the quantitative analysis, Vietnam did not evoke any societal threats in its contributions to the ASOs of the studied period. There are consequently no qualitative aspects to analyze.

Other Threat

Table 64 lists the most common thematic expressions used by Vietnam for other threats in the country's ASOs during the studied period.

Generally, the diversity of other threats per year has increased over time. Looking into the specific thematic expressions, there is a noticeable long-term pattern, as well as a recent trend. The observable long-term theme concerns relatively vague threats and includes (unilateral) actions, activities, developments, issues and tensions. More recently, the term “situation” has also become a more frequently evoked threat.

Table 64: Most common thematic expressions used for other threats per year (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2009	• 1x each: Activities, Issues, Tensions
2010	• 3x: Issues
2014	• 1x: Issues
2015	• 1x each: Developments, Issues, Tensions, Unilateral actions
2016	• 1x each: Building-up, Concerns, Developments, Reconstructions
2017	• 2x: Activities • 1x each: Developments, Issues, Situation
2019	• 1x each: Developments, Issues
2020	• 3x: Developments • 1x each: Actions, Activities, Incidents, Tensions
2021	• 2x: Unilateral actions • 1x each: Situation, Tensions
2022	• 2x: Tensions • 1x each: Actions, Activities, Developments, Incidents, Situation
2023	• 1x each: Activities, Concerns, Developments, Incidents, Situation, Tensions

2024	• 2x each: Actions, Activities, Developments, Incidents • 1x each: Concerns, Disruption, Situation, Tensions
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Other Functional Actor

Table 65 lists the most common thematic expressions used by Vietnam for other functional actors in the country's ASOs during the studied period. Generally, the diversity of other functional actors per year has increased over time. Additionally, the precise total amount of the most common other functional actor has increased from 4 appearances during the early 2010s to up to 10 mentions in 2024, with different other functional actors also being evoked more than twice.

Looking into the specific thematic expressions, there are two noticeable long-term patterns, as well as a recent trend. Firstly, there is a long-term theme about different elements of international law. This includes the consistent evocation of the COC, DOC and UNCLOS. The second long-term pattern involves state actors, of which only Vietnam and China are explicitly mentioned. Other countries are referred to by more general terms such as claimants, countries, parties and states. A recent trend is the more consistent reference of ASEAN as another functional actor.

Table 65: Most common thematic expressions used for other functional actors per year (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2009	• 4x: Vietnam • 2x each: Claimants, COC, Concerned parties, DOC, UNCLOS • 1x each: ASEAN members, China
2010	• 4x: Vietnam • 3x: Concerned parties • 2x: All parties, COC, DOC • 1x: UNCLOS
2014	• 2x: Vietnam • 1x each: COC, Concerned parties, Countries within and outside the region, DOC, UNCLOS
2015	• 5x: Vietnam • 3x: Countries inside and outside the region • 2x each: COC, DOC, UNCLOS • 1x: All parties
2016	• 1x: Other countries
2017	• 2x each: DOC, UNCLOS, Vietnam • 1x each: Coastal states, COC, Countries in the region, Other countries
2018	• 2x: COC • 1x each: ASEAN, China, UNCLOS

2019	• 3x: COC • 1x each: ASEAN, China
2020	• 7x: UNCLOS • 4x each: COC, Vietnam • 3x: All countries • 2x: DOC • 1x each: All parties, ASEAN, China, Coastal states, Other ASEAN members
2021	• 5x: UNCLOS • 3x: COC • 2x each: Countries, DOC • 1x each: ASEAN, China, Concerned parties, Vietnam
2022	• 5x: UNCLOS • 3x: COC • 2x each: Countries, DOC • 1x: ASEAN, China, Coastal states, Concerned parties, Vietnam
2023	• 5x each: DOC, UNCLOS • 4x: COC • 2x each: Concerned parties, Countries, Vietnam • 1x each: ASEAN, China
2024	• 10x: UNCLOS • 8x: Vietnam • 6x: All countries • 3x: COC, International community • 2x each: ASEAN, DOC, External partners, Regional countries

Security Practice

Table 66 lists the most common thematic expressions for security practices that have been evoked more than once in the corresponding year. Measures that were not used multiple times in the same year are omitted for clarity. They are nonetheless listed in the individual tables of each specific type of measure. There have been no multiple uses of any measures in the years 2009, 2014, 2016 and 2017.

There are two observations of general nature to be made. Firstly, the variety of different security practices has remained relatively stable over time. Secondly, the precise total amount of the most common measures has increased from two appearances during most of the years to up to five mentions in 2023.

In addition, there are also two specific themes noticeable. Firstly, there is a continuous emphasis on reaching a peaceful resolution to the SCS disputes, which should be rooted in existing international

laws in general and in UNCLOS in particular. Secondly, the already established DOC and the ongoing negotiations for a finalized COC are also consistently evoked as important security measures.

Table 66: Most common thematic expressions used for security practices per year (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2010	• 2x each: DOC, Long-term solution
2015	• 2x each: COC (intended) DOC, Policy of peaceful dispute resolution rooted in international law and UNCLOS, Self-restraint
2018	• 2x: COC negotiations (performed)
2019	• 2x: COC negotiations (performed)
2020	• 2x each: DOC, Resolution rooted in international law and UNCLOS
2021	• 2x: DOC, Resolution rooted in international law and UNCLOS
2022	• 2x: DOC, Resolution rooted in international law and UNCLOS
2023	• 5x: DOC • 3x: COC negotiations (performed) • 2x: Resolution rooted in international law and UNCLOS
2024	• 3x: Resolution rooted in international law and UNCLOS • 2x: COC negotiations (performed), Compliance with international law and UNCLOS, DOC, Self-restraint

Intended Measure

Table 67 lists the most common thematic expressions used by Vietnam for intended measures in the country's ASOs during the studied period.

Generally, the diversity of intended measures per year has remained relatively stable over time. Looking into the specific thematic expressions, there are two long-term patterns. The most common theme is the consistent emphasis for negotiations and dispute resolution, which should be based on international law in general and in the DOC and UNCLOS in particular. This is thematically related to the continuous call for the finalization of a binding COC. Another pattern is about a specific set of activities that actors should follow. This includes the non-use or threat of force, exercising self-restraint and avoiding unilateral acts.

Table 67: Most common thematic expressions used for intended measures per year (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2009	• 1x each: Appropriate solutions, COC, Negotiations rooted in international law, UNCLOS and DOC, Non-use or threat of force, Self-restraint
2010	• 2x: Long-term solution • 1x each: COC, Negotiations rooted in UNCLOS, Self-restraint
2014	• 1x each: COC, Long-term solution, Negotiations rooted in international law and UNCLOS, Self-restraint
2015	• 2x each: COC, Self-restraint • 1x each: Avoid unilateral actions, Bilateral solutions for bilateral disputes, Long-term solution, Multilateral solutions for multilateral disputes, Non-use or threat of force
2017	• 1x each: COC, Resolution rooted in international law and UNCLOS
2018	• 1x: Resolution rooted in international law and UNCLOS
2020	• 2x: Resolution rooted in international law and UNCLOS • 1x each: Avoid actions that complicate the situation, COC, Non-use or threat of force, Self-restraint
2021	• 2x: Resolution rooted in international law and UNCLOS • 1x each: Avoid actions that complicate the situation, COC, Self-restraint, Non-use or threat of force, Self-restraint
2022	• 2x: Resolution rooted in international law and UNCLOS • 1x each: Avoid actions that complicate the situation, COC, Non-use or threat of force, Self-restraint
2023	• 2x: Resolution rooted in international law and UNCLOS • 1x: Self-restraint
2024	• 3x: Resolution rooted in international law and UNCLOS • 2x: Self-restraint • 1x each: Avoid actions that complicate the situation, COC, Non-use or threat of force, Respect ASEAN's position in SCS, Work together in good faith

Performed Measure

Table 68 lists the most common thematic expressions used by Vietnam for performed measures in the country's ASOs during the studied period.

Generally, the diversity of performed measures per year has remained relatively stable over time. Looking into the specific thematic expressions, there is a noticeable long-term pattern. Both the already established DOC and the ongoing negotiations towards the finalization of a COC are clearly the most common and consistently evoked performed measure.

Table 68: Most common thematic expressions used for performed measures per year (Vietnam)

Year of ASO	Thematic expressions and their occurrence
2009	• 1x each: Conduct in accordance with UNCLOS, DOC, Peaceful and non-violent measures
2010	• 2x: DOC • 1x each: COC negotiations, Policy of peaceful dispute resolution
2014	• 1x: DOC
2015	• 2x each: DOC, Policy of peaceful dispute resolution rooted in international law and UNCLOS • 1x: Compliance with international law and UNCLOS
2017	• 1x: DOC
2018	• 2x: COC negotiations
2019	• 2x: COC negotiations
2020	• 2x: DOC • 1x each: COC negotiations, UNCLOS
2021	• 2x: DOC • 1x: COC negotiations
2022	• 2x: DOC • 1x: COC negotiations
2023	• 5x: DOC • 3x: COC negotiations
2024	• 2x each: COC negotiations, Compliance with international law and UNCLOS, DOC

3 Analytical Part

3.1 Case Comparison

3.1.1 Revisiting the Research Question

This thesis explores the securitization of the SCS disputes and is guided by the research question: “How did the securitization discourse of the South China Sea disputes in high-level state communication of the Philippines and Vietnam evolve from 2009 to 2024?”. The preceding empirical part consisted of a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of the Philippines’ and Vietnam’s securitization discourse concerning the SCS disputes. Discourse was defined as both countries’ contributions to the ARF ASOs from 2009 to 2024. Guided by the developed codebook, any relevant elements of securitization within these texts were manually coded using QualCoder. The numerical oc-

currences and the textual contents of each code were subsequently analyzed in spreadsheet software for each country individually. Based on this empirical data, the following subchapters will compare the two cases to highlight similarities and differences between the Philippines and Vietnam, thereby answering the research question.

3.1.2 Quantitative Comparison

Significance of SCS disputes in security discourse

The significance of the SCS disputes in the overall security discourse was assessed based on their proportion in each ASO and the volatility of this proportion throughout the studied period. Data for the Philippines is lacking for 2009 and 2012, and the country did not explicitly refer to the SCS disputes in 2011, despite contributing to that year's ASO. For Vietnam, data is unavailable for 2011, 2012 and 2013, but the country consistently referred to the SCS disputes in all other available assessments. Table 69 summarizes the most important statistical values for the length of the ASOs, the share of the SCS disputes in them and the volatility ratio of the absolute changes of the SCS proportion. The special case of the Philippines not mentioning the disputes in the 2011 ASO is omitted.

Regarding the general nature of the ASOs, their length measured in characters of both countries' contributions increased considerably over time. The length of the Philippines' ASOs increased relatively evenly and more than tripled during the observed time. Vietnam's ASOs almost doubled in length during the studied period, but there has been a temporary decrease during the 2010s, which was followed by a strong increase during the 2020s. The Philippines' ASOs have ranged from 19,414 to 70,875 characters in length with an average of 45,915.57 and a median of 44,326.5, making them considerably longer than those of Vietnam, which ranged from 4,606 to 34,045 characters in length with an average of 18,980 and a median of 18,429.

The proportion of the SCS disputes within each country's ASOs represents the general importance of the disputes in the overall security discourse. For the Philippines, the share of the SCS disputes increased over time, but neither as consistently nor as strongly as the overall ASO length. Concerning Vietnam, the share of the SCS disputes developed counter-cyclically to the length of its ASOs and was more prominent in shorter contributions and less dominant in longer editions. In concrete numbers, the share of the SCS disputes in the Philippines' ASOs ranged from 4.93% to 13.0% with an average of 8.02% and a median of 8.13%, whereas they ranged from 3.53% to 28.79% with an average of 11.36% and a median of 9.70% in Vietnam's assessments. Additionally, Vietnam's higher volatility ratio of the absolute changes of the disputes' proportion in its ASOs with 0.73 contrasts

with the Philippines' 0.46, which indicates stronger fluctuations of the disputes' importance in Vietnam's security discourse.

Overall, the SCS disputes have over time become a more dominant part in the Philippines' high-level security discourse, while for Vietnam they have been most significant during the 2010s and have become less prominent since. Besides this difference in the evolutionary trend, the higher average share of the SCS disputes in Vietnam's ASOs across the entire studied period implies a generally larger role of the disputes in the country's security considerations, than in the Philippines'.

Table 69: Summary statistics concerning the length of each country's ASOs in characters, the share of the SCS disputes in them and the volatility ratio of the absolute changes of the SCS proportion

Summary Statistic	Philippines	Vietnam
Shortest ASO	19,414 (2010)	4,606 (2016)
Longest ASO	70,875 (2024)	34,045 (2024)
Average ASO	45,915.57	18,980
Median ASO	44,326.5	18,429
Smallest SCS share	4.93% (2010)	3.53% (2019)
Largest SCS share	13.0% (2022)	28.79% (2015)
Average SCS share	8.02%	11.36%
Median SCS share	8.13%	9.70%
Volatility ratio of the SCS proportion	0.46	0.73

Referent Object

The evoked referent objects within the ASOs represent the units being threatened by various aspects of the SCS disputes. The total amount of referent objects, the trend of occurrences and the volatility ratio of the absolute changes of occurrences are summarized in Table 70. Although both countries mentioned referent objects a similar number of times – 197 mentions by the Philippines and 189 by Vietnam – there are noticeable differences regarding the sectoral distribution of the most common referents. The referent objects employed by the Philippines, in order of frequency, are: 1. political (90), 2. military (61), 3. economic (17), 4. environmental (15), 5. other (14), and 6. societal (0). For Vietnam, the order is: 1. military (81), 2. political (64), 3. other (25), 4. economic (12), 5. environmental (7), and 6. societal (0).

The occurrences of each sector evolved differently during the studied time period. For the Philippines, the overall amount of referent objects increased, a trend mirrored by economic, environmen-

tal, military and political referents. Other referents remained relatively stable at a low level and societal referents did not occur. For Vietnam, the overall amount of referent objects also increased, driven by growth in environmental, military, political and other referents. The amount of economic referents decreased, while societal referents did not occur. Additionally, Vietnam's higher volatility ratio of the absolute changes of referent object occurrences in its ASOs with 0.95 contrasts with the Philippines' 0.49, which indicates stronger fluctuations of the referent occurrences in Vietnam's discourse. This tendency also applies to all subcategories of referents, except for the Philippines' comparatively more volatile use of other referents.

Overall, referent objects have over time become a more common element in the high-level securitization discourse of both countries, aligning with the general increase of the SCS disputes in these studied discourses. Furthermore, the Philippines and Vietnam are similar in that military and political referents are clearly the two most dominant referent objects. Economic, environmental and other referents are significantly less often evoked, while societal referents have not been used. Differences are primarily found in the evolution of each sector, although both countries coincide in most aspects. The discourse of the Philippines features the only stable sector with other referents occurring at a relatively similar level throughout the studied period. Vietnam, on the other hand, presents the only sector with a downward trend in the occurrences of economic referents.

Table 70: Total amount of occurrences, trend of occurrences and volatility ratio of the absolute changes of referent objects

Indicator	Philippines	Vietnam
Total amount of referent objects	197	189
Trend of referent objects	Increasing	Increasing
Total amount of economic referents	17	12
Trend of economic referents	Increasing	Decreasing
Total amount of environmental referents	15	7
Trend of environmental referents	Increasing	Increasing
Total amount of military referents	61	81
Trend of military referents	Increasing	Increasing
Total amount of political referents	90	64
Trend of political referents	Increasing	Increasing

Total amount of societal referents	0	0
Trend of societal referents	N/A	N/A
Total amount of other referents	14	25
Trend of other referents	Stable	Increasing
Volatility ratio of referent objects	0.49	0.95

Existential Threat

The declared existential threats within the ASOs represent the aspects of the SCS disputes that threaten the aforementioned referent objects. The total amount of existential threats, the trend of occurrences and the volatility ratio of the absolute changes of occurrences are summarized in Table 71. There are considerable differences between both countries regarding the frequency with which they evoked existential threats – 192 mentions by the Philippines compared to 116 by Vietnam – as well as the exact sectoral distribution of the most common threats. The existential threats employed by the Philippines, in order of frequency, are: 1. military (99), 2. other (83), 3. political (8), 4. environmental and societal (1 each), and 5. economic (0). For Vietnam, the order is: 1. other (58), 2. military (57), 3. economic (1), and 4. environmental, political and societal (0 each).

The occurrences of each sector evolved differently during the studied time period. For the Philippines, there was an increase in the overall amount of existential threats, as well as in military, political and other threats. Environmental and societal threats each occurred only once and economic threats were absent entirely. There was no decrease in any sector. For Vietnam, there was an increase in the overall amount of existential threats, as well as in other threats. The amount of military threats decreased. Economic threats occurred only once and environmental, political and societal threats were entirely absent. Additionally, Vietnam's higher volatility ratio of the absolute changes of existential threat occurrences in its ASOs with 0.61 contrasts with the Philippines' 0.46, which indicates stronger fluctuations of the threat occurrences in Vietnam's discourse. This tendency also applies to all subcategories of threats, except for the Philippines' comparatively more volatile use of military threats.

Overall, existential threats have over time become a more common element in the high-level securitization discourse of both countries, aligning with the general increase of the SCS disputes in these studied discourses. Furthermore, the Philippines and Vietnam are similar in that military and other threats are clearly the two most dominant existential threats. The remaining sectors are all virtually

nonexistent in both discourses, with the exception of political threats, which are sporadically used by the Philippines. Differences are primarily found in the evolution of each sector. In the Philippines' discourse, the three most used sectors of military, political and other threats have all been increasing in occurrences. Vietnam, on the other hand, exhibits the only downward trend, with military threats decreasing, which is accompanied by an increase in other threats. Notably, neither country exhibits a sector with a stable trend.

Table 71: Total amount of occurrences, trend of occurrences and volatility ratio of the absolute changes of existential threats

Indicator	Philippines	Vietnam
Total amount of existential threats	192	116
Trend of existential threats	Increasing	Increasing
Total amount of economic threats	0	1
Trend of economic threats	N/A	N/A
Total amount of environmental threats	1	0
Trend of environmental threats	N/A	N/A
Total amount of military threats	99	57
Trend of military threats	Increasing	Decreasing
Total amount of political threats	8	0
Trend of political threats	Increasing	N/A
Total amount of societal threats	1	0
Trend of societal threats	N/A	N/A
Total amount of other threats	83	58
Trend of other threats	Increasing	Increasing
Volatility ratio of existential threats	0.46	0.61

Other Functional Actor

The employed functional actors within the ASOs represent units that affect the security dynamics of the SCS disputes, but are neither the securitizing actor nor a referent object. Existential threats – a specific type of functional actor – are excluded from this analysis as they were covered in the previous section on threats. Table 72 summarizes the most important statistical values for the occurrences of other functional actors.

Regarding the occurrences of other functional actors, the Philippines generally mentioned them considerably more often than Vietnam, totaling 493 occurrences during the studied period. The yearly amount ranges from 0 mentions in 2011 to 91 mentions in 2022, with an average of 35.21 and a median of 28.5 mentions per ASO. In contrast, Vietnam's total amount of other functional actors is 192 occurrences. The yearly amount ranges from 1 mention in 2016 to 39 mentions in 2024, with an average of 14.77 and a median of 15 mentions per ASO.

Despite the differences in total occurrences, both countries are similar in that they share an upward trend of occurrences over time and have experienced increased year-to-year fluctuations. However, Vietnam's higher volatility ratio of the absolute changes of other functional actor occurrences in its ASOs with 0.67 contrasts with the Philippines' 0.48, which indicates stronger fluctuations of other functional actor occurrences in Vietnam's discourse.

Overall, other functional actors have over time become a more dominant element in both countries' high-level securitization discourse. However, the overall larger amount of other functional actors within the Philippines' ASOs for the studied period implies a larger role for them in the country's security considerations than in the case of Vietnam.

Table 72: Summary statistics concerning the amount of other functional actor occurrences within each country's ASOs and the volatility ratio of the absolute changes of occurrences

Summary Statistic	Philippines	Vietnam
Total amount of other functional actors	493	192
Lowest amount of other functional actors	0 (2011)	1 (2016)
Highest amount of other functional actors	91 (2022)	39 (2024)
Average amount of other functional actors	35.21	14.77
Median amount of other functional actors	28.5	15
Volatility ratio of other functional actors	0.48	0.67

Security Practice

The highlighted security practices within the ASOs represent measures that address threats stemming from the SCS disputes. Intended measures hint at potential future changes in behavior,

whereas performed measures indicate successful instances of securitization due to the accomplished change in behavior by a relevant actor. The total amount of security practices, the trend of occurrences and the volatility ratio of the absolute changes of occurrences are summarized in Table 73.

Regarding the total amount of security practice occurrences, the Philippines generally mentioned them considerably more often than Vietnam, totaling 240 occurrences during the studied period, of which 105 are intended and 135 are performed measures. In contrast, Vietnam's total amount is 98 occurrences, of which 57 are intended and 41 are performed measures. The two countries are similar in that they both show an upward trend of occurrences over time for each type of measure. Nonetheless, this increasing trend is much stronger in the Philippines' case. A key difference lies in the inverted ratio of measure types. While the Philippines evoked more performed than intended measures, Vietnam used more intended than performed measures. Additionally, Vietnam's higher volatility ratio of the absolute changes of security practice occurrences in its ASOs with 0.75 contrasts with the Philippines' 0.39, which indicates stronger fluctuations of the security practice occurrences in Vietnam's discourse. This tendency also applies to both subcategories of security measures.

Overall, security practices have over time become a more dominant part in both countries' high-level securitization discourse. However, the overall larger amount and stronger increase of security practices within the Philippines' ASOs for the studied period imply a larger role for security practices in the country's security considerations than in the case of Vietnam. The inverted ratio in the usage of intended and performed measures represents another key difference.

Table 73: Total amount of occurrences, trend of occurrences and volatility ratio of the absolute changes of security practices

Indicator	Philippines	Vietnam
Total amount of security practices	240	98
Trend of security practices	Increasing	Increasing
Total amount of intended measures	105	57
Trend of intended measures	Increasing	Increasing
Total amount of performed measures	135	41
Trend of performed measures	Increasing	Increasing
Volatility ratio of security practices	0.39	0.75

3.1.3 Qualitative Comparison

Referent Object

Concerning the general use of referent objects, the Philippines and Vietnam exhibit similar developments. There has been an increase in the overall variety of different themes over time, coupled with an increase in the yearly frequency of the most common expressions. Both countries also concur on most of their major themes, sharing the long-term patterns of peace and stability, as well as the recent trends of confidence, rights and trust. The Philippines additionally feature a long-term pattern involving the rule of law, whereas Vietnam employed security in an additional recent trend. The long-term patterns and recent trends of referent objects for each sector and country are summarized in Table 74.

Regarding economic referents, both countries exhibit a relatively stable variety of themes in their discourse. The Philippines feature a long-term pattern of using international commerce as an economic referent, with a recent trend of also employing prosperity. Vietnam, conversely, does not have a clear long-term pattern, but it recently began employing development as an economic referent.

Regarding environmental referents, both countries exhibit a relatively stable variety of themes in their discourse. Neither country features a long-term pattern, but both recently began referring to similar concepts. Specifically, the Philippines referred to coastal and marine ecosystems, while Vietnam referred to the marine environment.

Regarding military referents, both countries exhibit a relatively stable variety of themes in their discourse. They share the long-term patterns of peace, security and stability being portrayed as threatened. Sovereignty is an additional long-term pattern for Vietnam, whereas it is only a recent trend for the Philippines. Vietnam's only recent trend is strategic trust.

Regarding political referents, both countries exhibit an increasing variety of themes in their discourse over time. They share the long-term patterns of confidence, freedom of navigation and trust being portrayed as threatened. Cooperation and the rule of law are additional long-term patterns for the Philippines. They also share a recent trend for the similar concepts of a rules-based international order and a rules-based maritime order. The Philippines recently focused on additional threatened aspects of international law, such as the sovereign rights of states and efforts towards the finalization of a COC. Vietnam, on the other hand, began referring more frequently to the general umbrella term of international law instead of using its specific elements.

As already noted before, societal referents were not mentioned by either country and there are consequently no long-term patterns or recent trends to be analyzed.

Regarding other referents, both countries diverge in the evolution of thematic variety over time. The diversity of expressions is relatively stable in the Philippines' discourse, but it has decreased in Vietnam's case. They also differ concerning their long-term thematic patterns. The Philippines referred to the lawful and peaceful uses of the sea, whereas Vietnam portrayed maritime security and safety as threatened.

Table 74: Long-term patterns and recent trends of thematic expressions used for referent objects by each sector and country

Indicator	Philippines	Vietnam
General long-term patterns	Peace, Rule of law, Stability	Peace, Stability
General recent trends	Confidence, Rights, Trust	Confidence, Rights, Security, Trust
Economic long-term patterns	International commerce	N/A
Economic recent trends	Prosperity	Development
Environmental long-term patterns	N/A	N/A
Environmental recent trends	Coastal ecosystems, Marine ecosystems	Marine environment
Military long-term patterns	Peace, Security, Stability	Peace, Security, Sovereignty, Stability
Military recent trends	Sovereignty	Strategic trust
Political long-term patterns	Confidence, Cooperation, Freedom of navigation, Rule of law, Trust	Confidence, Freedom of navigation, Trust
Political recent trends	COC, International order, Rights	International law, Rules-based maritime order
Societal long-term patterns	N/A	N/A
Societal recent trends	N/A	N/A
Other long-term patterns	Lawful and peaceful uses of the sea	Maritime security, Safety
Other recent trends	N/A	N/A

Existential Threat

Concerning the general use of existential threats, the Philippines and Vietnam share a similar development of an increase in the overall variety of themes over time. They differ, however, regarding

the yearly frequency of the most common expressions. While the Philippines show an increase in the amount of occurrences of the most prevalent expressions, the occurrences of Vietnam's dominant expressions are relatively stable. Thematically, both countries concur on their major long-term pattern consisting of disputes and the recent trend of tensions as most common existential threats. As additional recent trends, Vietnam also referred to (unilateral) actions and developments as threats. The long-term patterns and recent trends of existential threats for each sector and country are summarized in Table 75.

Regarding economic threats, both countries exhibit a relatively similar development. The Philippines did not refer to any economic threat, while Vietnam only mentioned one such threat in the most recent ASO of 2024. Consequently, there are no long-term patterns or recent trends for either country to be analyzed.

Regarding environmental threats, both countries exhibit a relatively similar development. The Philippines only referred to one environmental threat in the most recent ASO of 2024, while Vietnam did not refer to any such threat. Consequently, there are no long-term patterns or recent trends for either country to be analyzed.

Regarding military threats, both countries diverge in the evolution of thematic variety over time. The diversity of expressions has increased in the Philippines' discourse but is relatively stable in Vietnam's case. They share the long-term patterns of portraying the disputes themselves and land reclamation as threatening. The Philippines additionally focused on a diverse set of specific activities as military threats, including coercive actions, the deployment of military equipment, military activities and the presence of Chinese Maritime Militia vessels. In more recent trends, the Philippines also designated specific actors as military threats, such as the Chinese Coast Guard, Chinese Maritime Militia and military vessels. Vietnam's distinct long-term patterns, on the other hand, referred to the more general terms of militarization and flashpoint as threats. Furthermore, it exhibits no recent trends.

Regarding political threats, both countries diverge significantly. The diversity of expressions has increased in the Philippines' discourse over time, whereas Vietnam did not mention any political threats. While there is no consistent long-term pattern in the Philippines' ASOs, a recent trend emphasizes the lack of a finalized COC as a threat.

Regarding societal threats, both countries exhibit a relatively similar development. The Philippines referred to only one societal threat in the ASO of 2017, while Vietnam did not refer to any such

threat. Consequently, there are no long-term patterns or recent trends for either country to be analyzed.

Regarding other threats, both countries exhibit an increasing variety of themes in their discourse over time. They share the long-term patterns of developments, issues and tensions as threats. Additionally, the Philippines consistently referred to challenges, concerns and the general situation, with the general situation also emerging as a recent trend in Vietnam's case. Vietnam's additional long-term patterns of (unilateral) actions and activities conceptually match the Philippines' recent trend of (unilateral) activities.

Table 75: Long-term patterns and recent trends of thematic expressions used for existential threats by each sector and country

Indicator	Philippines	Vietnam
General long-term patterns	Disputes	Disputes
General recent trends	Issues, Tensions	Actions, Development, Tensions
Economic long-term patterns	N/A	N/A
Economic recent trends	N/A	N/A
Environmental long-term patterns	N/A	N/A
Environmental recent trends	N/A	N/A
Military long-term patterns	Coercive actions, Deployment of military equipment, Disputes, Land reclamation, Military activities, Presence of Chinese Maritime Militia vessels	Disputes, Flashpoint, Land reclamation, Militarization
Military recent trends	Chinese Coast Guard, Chinese Maritime Militia, Military vessels	N/A
Political long-term patterns	N/A	N/A
Political recent trends	Lack of COC	N/A
Societal long-term patterns	N/A	N/A
Societal recent trends	N/A	N/A
Other long-term patterns	Challenges, Concerns, Developments, Issues, Situation, Tensions	Actions, Activities, Developments, Issues, Tensions
Other recent trends	Activities	Situation

Other Functional Actor

Concerning other functional actors, the Philippines and Vietnam diverge regarding the evolution of thematic variety over time. The diversity of expressions is relatively stable in the Philippines' discourse but has increased in Vietnam's case. They nonetheless share a similar development in the increasing yearly frequency of the most common expressions. The long-term patterns and recent trends of other functional actors for each country are summarized in Table 76.

Thematically, both countries concur with their major long-term patterns. The most commonly mentioned countries are references to themselves and to China, with other countries usually being grouped together in less specific terms. They consistently referred to institutions of international law, particularly the COC, DOC and UNCLOS. The Philippines mentioned many additional frameworks, including the Arbitration Award, ASEAN, the China-Philippines BCM, the CUES and the Philippines-China MOU on Oil and Gas Development. ASEAN is also highlighted by Vietnam, but as a recent trend. The Philippines, conversely, do not exhibit any recent trends.

Table 76: Long-term patterns and recent trends of thematic expressions used for other functional actors by country

Indicator	Philippines	Vietnam
Other functional actors long-term patterns	Arbitration Award, ASEAN, BCM, China, COC, CUES, DOC, MOU on Oil and Gas Development, Philippines, UNCLOS.	China, Claimants, COC, Countries, DOC, Parties, States, UNCLOS, Vietnam
Other functional actors recent trends	N/A	ASEAN

Security Practice

Concerning the general use of security practices, the Philippines and Vietnam diverge regarding the evolution of thematic variety over time. The diversity of expressions has increased in the Philippines' discourse but is relatively stable in Vietnam's case. They nonetheless share a similar development in the increasing yearly frequency of the most common expressions. Thematically, both countries concur on major long-term patterns concerning a peaceful resolution rooted in international law and the COC. This includes both the intended measure of developing the COC and the performed measure of ongoing negotiations towards the COC's finalization. Additionally, the Philippines persistently referred to the China-Philippines BCM as an ongoing measure, whereas Vietnam consistently mentioned the existing DOC. The Philippines also exhibit a recent trend in the form of

bilateral maritime dialogues with external partners. Vietnam does not exhibit any recent trends. The long-term patterns and recent trends of security practices for each type of measure and country are summarized in Table 77.

Regarding intended measures, both countries exhibit a relatively stable variety of different themes in their discourse over time. They share the long-term patterns of a peaceful resolution rooted in international law, the finalization of a COC and the call for mindful behavior by all involved parties. This mindful behavior includes the avoidance of unilateral actions, the non-use or threat of force and the exercise of self-restraint. Neither country has any recent trends.

Regarding performed measures, both countries diverge regarding the evolution of thematic variety over time. The diversity of expressions has increased in the Philippines' discourse but is relatively stable in Vietnam's case. They also differ in most long-term patterns. The only common themes are references to the established DOC and progress in the ongoing COC negotiations. Additionally, the Philippines consistently highlighted cooperation in various maritime activities, the maintenance of the China-Philippines BCM, the establishment of guidelines for hotline communications and the regular reaffirmation of their adherence to international law. More recently, the Philippines emphasized different domestic initiatives related to the SCS disputes and the conduct of bilateral maritime dialogues with external partners. Vietnam does not exhibit any recent trends.

Table 77: Long-term patterns and recent trends of thematic expressions used for security practices by each type of measure and country

Indicator	Philippines	Vietnam
General long-term patterns	BCM, COC (intended), COC negotiations, Peaceful resolution	COC (intended), COC negotiations, DOC, Peaceful resolution
General recent trends	Bilateral maritime dialogues with external partners	N/A
Intended measures long-term patterns	Avoid unilateral actions, COC (intended), Non-use or threat of force, Peaceful resolution, Self-restraint	Avoid unilateral actions, COC (intended), Non-use or threat of force, Peaceful resolution, Self-restraint
Intended measures recent trends	N/A	N/A
Performed measures long-term patterns	BCM, COC negotiations, Cooperation in maritime activities, DOC, Guidelines for hotline communications, Upholding international law	COC negotiations, DOC

Performed measures recent trends	Bilateral maritime dialogues with external partners, Domestic initiatives	N/A
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3.2 Answering the Research Question

Following the individual empirical analyses and the case comparison of the Philippines and Vietnam, this section addresses the research question: “How did the securitization discourse of the South China Sea disputes in high-level state communication of the Philippines and Vietnam evolve from 2009 to 2024?”.

Based on the data, the SCS disputes as a whole have become a more prominent element in both countries’ high-level security discourse. It is noteworthy that while the Philippines’ ASOs are generally longer than Vietnam’s, the disputes consistently make up a larger proportion of Vietnam’s security assessments. Additionally, the normalized volatility ratios of all overarching categories and of the vast majority of codes are higher in Vietnam’s case.

Concerning referent objects, the traditional military and political sectors clearly predominate in both countries. Economic, environmental and other referents are present at a considerably lower level and societal referents are entirely absent. Referent object occurrences are increasing across most sectors, with exceptions being the relatively stable amount of other referents employed by the Philippines and the decreasing amount of economic referents used by Vietnam. The amount and increasing variety of different thematic expressions used for referent objects are similar between both countries. They share the long-term thematic patterns of peace and stability, as well as the recent trends of confidence, rights and trust, all of which are military or political referents. The remaining patterns and trends are relatively different, with the exceptions of their environmental trend of ecosystems and the environment, their political pattern of freedom of navigation and their political trend of a rules-based international maritime order.

Concerning existential threats, there is an overwhelming dominance of military and other threats in both countries. The remaining sectors are virtually nonexistent with only one or fewer mentions each, the only exception being political threats with eight mentions by the Philippines. In these common sectors, existential threat occurrences are increasing, with the notable exception of a decreasing amount of military threats used by Vietnam. While the Philippines used a larger amount of thematic expressions for threats, both countries show a similar increase in the variety of different themes over time. They share the long-term thematic pattern of disputes, as well as the recent trend

of tensions. The remaining patterns and trends are relatively different. Notably, the Philippines pointed out specific activities and actors more directly as threatening than Vietnam did.

Concerning other functional actors, there is a general increase in their occurrences. The Philippines maintained a relatively stable but larger variety of thematic expressions, whereas the diversity of themes used by Vietnam increased over time. They share the long-term thematic patterns of referencing themselves, China, the COC, the DOC and UNCLOS, but there is no matching recent trend.

Concerning security practices, there is a general increase in their occurrences. A key difference is the inverted ratio of measure types. The Philippines favored performed measures over intended ones, whereas this ratio is inverted in Vietnam's case. The Philippines used a larger amount of thematic expressions and increased this variety, whereas the diversity of themes used by Vietnam was relatively stable over time. They share the long-term thematic pattern of peaceful resolution, but there is no similar recent trend. Crucially, while their most common intended measures match thematically, the Philippines mentioned considerably more performed measures overall.

To summarize these findings, the SCS disputes have become an increasingly central element in both countries' security considerations, although they constitute a proportionately greater part of Vietnam's discourse than of the Philippines'. This securitization discourse has also become increasingly complex in both cases, showing a growing variety of thematic patterns and trends for most securitization elements. Vietnam's use of the major elements of securitization was substantially more volatile than that of the Philippines'. Referent objects were mainly dominated by the traditional military and political sectors with significantly fewer economic, environmental and other referents. In turn, the referents were almost exclusively threatened by military and other threats. The existential threats themselves were considerably more explicitly pointed out as specific activities and actors by the Philippines than by Vietnam. Both countries share similarities in the referenced other functional actors, which serve as important contextual elements for the regional security dynamics. Finally, the Philippines noticeably emphasized more performed security measures, whereas Vietnam hinted more often at intended future security practices.

3.3 Discussion

3.3.1 Discussion of the Results

Findings

The descriptive content analysis used in this thesis rests on the premise that the SCS disputes are already securitized. This empirical approach studied all essential elements of the securitization discourse over the chosen period using a replicable method, focusing specifically on the discourse's evolution in the most recent years for two key claimant states. While this descriptive approach provides a comprehensive understanding of what elements were part of the securitization discourse and how it evolved, it is inherently limited in revealing the underlying intentions and motivations that explain why the discourse developed this specific way. Furthermore, despite analyzing long-term thematic patterns and current trends, the exclusion of the broader social context, and particularly domestic political processes, restricts the ability to make predictions about the discourse's future development to mostly high-level, traditional security considerations.

Besides these general implications due to the chosen theoretical and methodological approach of the thesis, there are also specific findings from the comparative analysis. Considerable differences in the volatility of each element's absolute changes indicate a more consistent discourse strategy for the Philippines, whereas Vietnam's approach was more unstable. The discourses of the Philippines and Vietnam overlap significantly regarding the dominance of traditional military and political referent objects, which are almost exclusively threatened by military and other existential threats. The matching thematic patterns of evoking basic elements of international security – such as peace and stability – and cooperative norms – such as confidence, rights and trust – form a common normative framework of endangered referents. This dominance is further complemented by the shared absence of several securitization elements, notably societal referents, economic threats, environmental threats, political threats and societal threats. An important distinction lies in the themes used for threats. The Philippines more explicitly stated specific activities and actors as existential threats, whereas Vietnam's designation of threats was rather vague. This difference also corresponds to the Philippines' stronger emphasis on already performed security measures, while Vietnam focused on intended future measures. Finally, the similarities regarding other functional actors directly reflect the shared regional context and interconnected security dynamics of both countries.

Reliability

The reliability of the presented findings can be discussed concerning the quality and quantity of the selected data and the quality of the developed analytical framework.

The raw data was manually collected from the Philippines' and Vietnam's contributions to the ARF ASOs, covering the entire studied period from 2009 to 2024. Nonetheless, there are missing years either due to voluntary non-contribution by a country or unavailability of the document. Specifically, the Philippines did not provide an assessment in 2009 and Vietnam did not contribute in 2011 and 2013. Furthermore, the 2012 ASO edition is entirely missing as it is not publicly available and direct inquiries to the ARF Unit of the ASEAN Secretariat were unsuccessful. Regarding data quality, the texts belong to the same document series, ensuring a uniform format and similar context for both countries. As part of both states' high-level security discourse, the ASOs are highly relevant to securitization and thus well-suited for a direct case comparison. The selection to only include ASOs can however lead to an unwanted elitist bias, because particularly domestic discourses are not accounted for.

The analytical framework built on the collected ASO data, a codebook based on the essential elements of ST, a manual coding process of the data, a quantitative analysis of occurrences and a qualitative analysis of thematic expressions. The codebook is based on ST's main units and elements – including referent objects, existential threats, other functional actors and security practices – and incorporates the CS's sectoral understanding of security, which accurately reflects securitization's main theoretical concept of discursively constructed security issues. Strict reliance on ST's major works and the general nature of the coding indicators reduced the risk of introducing unwanted theoretical biases. The rigorous manual coding produced a refined dataset. Acknowledging the potential for human errors and unintentional biases, the texts were reread several times and coded segments were revisited to ensure the codebook's consistent application. While minor disagreements between different coders can never be ruled out, the transparent framework ensures a high level of replicability. The repeated reviews also fostered a deeper understanding of the discourse, which particularly supported the qualitative analysis. The content analysis synthesized quantitative occurrences with qualitative thematic expressions for a comprehensive approach. Potential human error in interpreting the empirical data was mitigated by the transparent presentation of all intermediate results in tables and graphs. The quantitative analysis could be more extensive – for example by analyzing co-occurrences or textual proximities of codes – but doing so would require more data to reliably establish statistically significant results. Ultimately, the conducted content analysis successfully analyzed what elements were present in the studied discourse and how they evolved over time.

However, it is inherently restricted in explaining the exact reasons behind the decision to securitize an issue and has a limited ability to predict potential future developments due to its lack of considering the broader social context in which the discourse took place.

Despite recognized limitations in the data and analytical framework, the findings can be deemed reliable. Although some texts are missing, meaning that the data does not cover the entire period, these gaps are confined to the earlier years of the time frame. Using the ASOs provides a high degree of comparability due to the similar format and context of the assessments. The texts are an important part of both countries' high-level security discourse and are therefore highly relevant for analyzing securitization. Content analysis is the appropriate method to empirically study the what and how of securitization, while being limited when confronted with questions about intentions or when making predictions about future developments. Although human errors and biases are always possible, the mindful development of the analytical framework, repeated reviews of its application and transparent presentation of results significantly minimized such mistakes, ensuring a high level of replicability across all research steps.

3.3.2 Discussion of the Relevance

Expectations

The findings of this thesis mostly differ from the expectations I initially developed while working on the literature review and the analytical framework.

What was confirmed is the increasing intensity and thematic complexity of the SCS disputes in both countries' discourse. I also expected the consistent dominance of the traditional military and political sectors for referent objects, since the territorial disputes are by their nature a rather classical security issue.

Although some non-traditional sectors are present at times, I expected them to play a more important role overall. Specifically, given the economic importance of the SCS for global trade and local industries, I anticipated a higher share of economic referents and threats than what was eventually found. Surprising was also the rather vague evocation of existential threats, especially since academic literature clearly points out the direct implications of China's geopolitical ambitions in the region, as illustrated by specific events and clashes. Regarding the Philippines' Arbitration Award of 2016, I expected the award to be a major, immediate element of the country's securitization strategy, but it was not evoked in the first three years following the final ruling. Remarkably, Vietnam's comparatively higher volatility ratios of each category's absolute changes did not match my expecta-

tions. Although it is often claimed that Vietnam's one-party system results in a more consistent foreign policy, the data suggests otherwise. Conversely, the regular changes in government in the Philippines due to its democratic system should have resulted in more frequent discourse changes than have been observed. On a more theoretical note, I assumed that the amount of sectoral referents would roughly match the amount of sectoral threats based on the ideal-typical premise that a referent in a specific sector is endangered by a matching threat of the same sector. This incongruity partly exists because of the considerable amount of unspecific other threats that do not fit into ST's original sectoral classification.

Relevance for ASEAN and the ARF

The relevance of this thesis for ASEAN and the ARF is rooted in the SCS disputes' potential to cause further division among ASEAN members, thereby challenging the effectiveness of the organization's mechanisms and frameworks. Since both the Philippines and Vietnam are among the most involved claimant states, insights into their specific securitization perspectives are crucial for future cooperation and the potential resolution of the disputes. Any division among two of ASEAN's most committed members further affects the organization's internal unity and erodes its authority as a relevant regional institution.

The Philippines and Vietnam share a similar perception regarding the most endangered military and political referents, the most common military and other threats and the presence of other functional actors. These common features suggest no substantial disagreement in both countries' general assessments of the SCS disputes' status quo. However, considerable differences exist. The Philippines portray threatening activities and actors more explicitly and put a stronger emphasis on performed measures, whereas Vietnam employed rather vague threats and hinted more frequently at future intended measures. This contrast between a more assertive and a rather cautious discourse strategy indicates a different approach when pursuing action towards dispute settlement. The ultimate goals for both parties remain nonetheless a peaceful resolution of the disputes and the conclusion of a binding COC. Based on this shared perception of the status quo and their intention to finalize the COC negotiations, ASEAN and the ARF should continue their efforts in mediating between the individual claimants while being aware of their particularities.

Relevance for China and the US

The relevance of this thesis for China and the US is based on both countries' increasing strategic engagement in the region, which causes geopolitical tensions. Through the pursuit of a hedging strategy, the Philippines and Vietnam leverage their comparatively weaker position against both great

powers. Insights derived from the study of their securitization discourse can therefore support strategic adjustments in the existing diplomatic strategies of China and the US towards these claimant states, potentially increasing the influence of both great powers in the region.

The majority of long-term patterns and recent trends show an increasing securitization of the SCS disputes in numerical intensity and thematic complexity. While China itself was not explicitly framed as a direct threat by either country, the Philippines recently made explicit references to China's Coast Guard and Maritime Militia. Vietnam, conversely, referred to general militarization and land reclamation without direct attribution. Assuming China seeks to deescalate the disputes and prove goodwill, it must restrict any activities that could be perceived as threatening. Continuing such activities could incentivize claimant states to resort to stronger engagement with the US and other external partners. The US's support for major principles of international law closely matches with the consistently evoked political referents of freedom of navigation and a rules-based international maritime order. Based on the security practices, the Philippines are willing to cooperate in various fields with many different partners, whereas Vietnam remains generally more reluctant to engage with other countries. It is consequently in the US's interest to maintain its support for common concerns among claimants to sustain and expand its strategic ties to the region.

Relevance for academia

The relevance of this thesis for academia is based on its contributions to closing a knowledge gap, a methodological gap and a population gap.

The knowledge gap has been addressed by generating specific knowledge regarding the high-level securitization discourse of the SCS disputes by the Philippines and Vietnam between 2009 and 2024. Using discourse from the ARF ASOs, the results include quantitative and qualitative data for each country, along with a comparative analysis of similarities and differences. This new knowledge primarily covers what elements were securitized and how their occurrences and thematic expressions evolved, which provides a foundation for future research to examine the underlying intentions and motivations behind the studied discourses.

The methodological gap has been addressed by the empirical application of ST in a quantitative and qualitative content analysis. Based on a codebook that covers all essential elements of securitization and distinguishes between different security sectors, the results revealed long-term patterns and current trends showing the SCS disputes are perceived as an increasingly complex and nuanced security issue. The developed analytical framework offers a replicable method that can be transferred and applied to other security hotspots, country cases, time frames and sources of discourse. With re-

gard to East Asia, for example, the framework could be applied to the Taiwan Strait or the Korean Peninsula, include other SCS claimants, cover longer time horizons or incorporate domestic political discourse.

The population gap has been addressed through the case selection of the Philippines and Vietnam, the application of ST to the SCS disputes and the expansion of constructivist security studies to East Asia. The study of discourse of two regional middle powers revealed quantitative and qualitative similarities and differences, which is vital for understanding their hedging strategies and complements the prevailing dominance of studying great powers. Due to their nature as territorial disputes, the SCS disputes are a fundamentally traditional security issue. On the one hand, this matches the observed dominance of traditional military and political referents. On the other hand, the presence of economic, environmental and other referents, alongside the near-exclusive attribution of existential threats to the military and other sector, highlights subtleties in the sectoral categorization. Conceptualizing security as a discursive construction is therefore not limited to the study of non-traditional security issues, but can also reveal nuances of a fundamentally traditional security matter. This flexibility allows ST to adapt to different contexts and to expand constructivist security studies to the region of East Asia, proving its applicability beyond its European origin.

Explanations

Given China's increasing assertiveness in presenting its extensive territorial claims as an accomplished fact, it is not surprising that other claimants perceive such unilateral developments as increasingly dangerous to their security and react accordingly by increasing their securitization efforts. This strategy of gathering international support through discourse could be rooted in a more confident stance of legitimizing and defending one's own territorial claims. However, it could also be a sign of frustration or desperation, given that past efforts towards a peaceful management of the disputes have not prevented an increase in tensions.

The differences in volatility ratios of the employed securitization elements were unexpected because the results did not align with the assumptions based on each country's political system. Although the Philippines experience frequent political change through democratic elections, their historic ties and military alliance with the US might influence foreign policy decisions more than presumed, regardless of which government is in power. Conversely, although Vietnam's one-party system experiences less domestic political change, the country's "Four No's" policy allows for and requires more strategic flexibility. This pursuit of a high level of sovereignty may influence foreign policy decisions even more than the domestic political continuity.

Regarding common long-term patterns and recent trends, the Philippines and Vietnam share a normative foundation for their most used referent objects, suggesting a similar understanding of the mostly military and political consequences of the SCS disputes. These dominant referents include essential elements of international security – such as peace and stability – and cooperative norms – such as confidence, rights and trust. The absence of societal referents and the rare use of economic, environmental, political and societal threats indicate that the disputes are still predominantly considered a traditional, high-level security issue. Non-traditional security sectors, and particularly societal security, might not have been employed as frequently because their affiliation with mostly non-elite issues could cause domestic political unrest and pressure governments to pursue a more assertive foreign policy. The similarities in other functional actors reflect both countries' shared regional security dynamics as an intersubjective process. This regional context aligns with the CS's assumption of a Southeast Asian subcomplex within the larger East Asian RSC and the Asian super-complex (Buzan and Waever 2003, 97, 99).

Differences in the securitization strategies of the Philippines and Vietnam are most distinct regarding the thematic expressions used for existential threats and the preference for a specific type of security practice. The Philippines' threat designation has long referred to a set of activities as threatening and recently started to emphasize specific actors. This relative outspokenness matches the country's preference for performed measures over intended measures. Especially the pursuit of the SCS Arbitration Award is exemplary for an increasingly assertive internationalization strategy. Conversely, Vietnam's evocation of threats was rather subtle and it employed more intended than performed measures. This ambiguity likely represents a purposeful choice to retain diplomatic flexibility in its foreign policy strategy.

Despite the overall increased securitization of the SCS disputes, the incongruity between specific sectoral referents and sectoral threats hints at intentional restraint regarding the evocation of existential threats. Specifically, the use of ambiguous other threats instead of more explicitly rebuking actors and their activities could be a deliberate rhetorical choice. It may be more diplomatically advantageous for the claimants to be transparent about the affected referent objects, while remaining vague about the source and nature of the existential threats posed to them.

Future developments

The long-term patterns and recent trends of an increasingly intense and complex securitization of the SCS disputes strongly suggest that this development will continue for the foreseeable future. This makes any attempts towards desecuritization unlikely to succeed in the coming years. As ex-

emplified by the long span between the DOC's conclusion in 2002 and the start of the COC negotiations in 2018, reaching intermediate steps towards dispute settlement is a protracted endeavor. It remains uncertain whether the involved parties can reach an agreement to conclude the COC in a timely manner. Despite the progress in managing the disputes relatively peacefully, a major uncertainty remains concerning China's long-term willingness to adhere to multilateral agreements. Although China ratified UNCLOS, its refusal to participate in the SCS arbitration and to recognize the final ruling suggests a similar strategy could be applied whenever a future COC element restricts its individual policy discretion, which would significantly undermine the authority of the entire institutional solution.

Recommendations

Any violent escalation of the disputes in the SCS would not only be devastating to the directly involved regional parties, but it would also have unpredictable global repercussions. Although it is unlikely to succeed in the near future, achieving the desecuritization of the disputes is not merely wishful thinking, but a rational necessity for global stability.

Drawing on Hansen (2012, 539–45), the four possibilities for desecuritization are: stabilization, replacement, rearticulation and silencing. Based on the results of this thesis, neither replacement nor silencing are likely, given the increasing share of the SCS disputes in both countries' security discourse and the overall increasing intensity of securitization. Stabilization and rearticulation are consequently the most promising options. While stabilization could prevent any further escalation by preserving the status quo, the more preferable choice is the rearticulation of the disputes as a political issue that can be dealt with more pragmatically. This rearticulation would qualify as a "positive" kind of desecuritization according to Floyd (2007, 342–43), as the disputes would remain politicized rather than being fully removed from the political sphere. The speedy conclusion of a binding COC between all involved claimants would certainly be a significant improvement in managing the disputes peacefully through stabilization and could eventually create opportunities for dispute settlement through rearticulation, which would benefit everyone.

I conclude this thesis with the hope that it contributes new insights and a more comprehensive understanding of the complex security dynamics of the SCS disputes. Furthermore, I hope it inspires other researchers to continue studying this fascinating and complex topic and potentially contribute to its solution. ST provides a powerful yet flexible framework based on a broader and deeper conception of security. Future research should use its theoretical assets through empirical application to further develop securitization as a valuable and versatile tool within international security studies.

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Annex 1: Abstract

English Version

This thesis studies securitization in East Asia by addressing the research question: “How did the securitization discourse of the South China Sea disputes in high-level state communication of the Philippines and Vietnam evolve from 2009 to 2024?”. The theoretical framework is derived from the Copenhagen School’s securitization theory, a constructivist approach arguing that security is a continuous discursive construction. The empirical application of this framework addresses the underrepresentation of replicable approaches in securitization and aims to analyze the intentionally employed discursive elements of two key claimant states during a period of increased regional tensions and militarization. The analysis focuses on referent objects (who or what is threatened), existential threats (what threatens them), other functional actors and security practices (intended or performed measures). Referents and threats were categorized using the Copenhagen School’s broadened definition of security across five thematic sectors: economic, environmental, military, political and societal, plus an additional "other" category for elements that do not fit into any other sector. Discourse data was collected from the individual contributions to the ASEAN Regional Forum Annual Security Outlooks and manually coded using a developed codebook and QualCoder. The subsequent quantitative and qualitative content analysis revealed long-term patterns and current trends in the numerical and thematic aspects of the discourse. The disputes have become a larger and more complex part of both countries’ discourse, whereby they accounted for a larger proportion in the case of Vietnam. Vietnam’s use of securitization elements was also substantially more volatile than the Philippines’. While referents predominantly belong to the military and political sector, threats almost exclusively stem from the military and other sector. Similarities in functional actors reflect the shared regional context. However, the Philippines exhibited a more assertive strategy, using more performed measures and explicitly identifying threatening activities and actors. Conversely, Vietnam employed more intended measures and was rather vague when portraying threats.

Keywords: Content Analysis, Copenhagen School, East Asia, Philippines, Securitization, South China Sea, Vietnam

German Version

Diese Arbeit befasst sich mit der Versicherheitlichung in Ostasien und widmet sich der Forschungsfrage: „Wie hat sich der Versicherheitlichungsdiskurs über die Territorialkonflikte im Südchinesischen Meer in der hochrangigen staatlichen Kommunikation der Philippinen und Vietnams von 2009 bis 2024 entwickelt?“. Der theoretische Rahmen basiert auf der Versicherheitlichungstheorie der Kopenhagener Schule, einem konstruktivistischen Ansatz, der davon ausgeht, dass Sicherheit eine fortlaufende diskursive Konstruktion ist. Die empirische Anwendung dieses theoretischen Rahmens zielt darauf ab, die Unterrepräsentation reproduzierbarer Ansätze bezüglich der Versicherheitlichung anzugehen und die bewusst eingesetzten diskursiven Elemente zweier wichtiger Anspruchsteller während einer Phase zunehmender regionaler Spannungen und Militarisierung zu analysieren. Die Analyse konzentriert sich auf Referenzobjekte (wer oder was bedroht ist), existenzielle Bedrohungen (was sie bedroht), andere funktionale Akteure und Sicherheitspraktiken (beabsichtigte oder durchgeführte Massnahmen). Referenten und Bedrohungen wurden anhand der erweiterten Sicherheitsdefinition der Kopenhagener Schule in fünf thematische Bereiche unterteilt: Wirtschaft, Umwelt, Militär, Politik und Gesellschaft, sowie eine zusätzliche Kategorie „Sonstiges“ für Elemente, die in keinen anderen Bereich passen. Die Daten zum Diskurs wurden aus den einzelnen Beiträgen zu den ASEAN Regional Forum Annual Security Outlooks gesammelt und mithilfe eines entwickelten Codebuchs und QualCoder manuell kodiert. Die anschliessende quantitative und qualitative Inhaltsanalyse offenbarte langfristige Muster und derzeitige Trends in den numerischen und thematischen Aspekten des Diskurses. Die Konflikte sind zu einem immer grösseren und komplexeren Teil des Diskurses beider Länder geworden, wobei sie im Falle Vietnams einen grösseren Anteil ausmachten. Die Verwendung von Versicherheitlichungselementen durch Vietnam war zudem wesentlich volatiler als die der Philippinen. Während die Referenten überwiegend aus dem militärischen und politischen Bereich stammen, gehen die Bedrohungen fast ausschliesslich vom militärischen und sonstigen Bereich aus. Ähnlichkeiten bei den funktionalen Akteuren spiegeln den gemeinsamen regionalen Kontext wider. Die Philippinen verfolgten jedoch eine entschiedenere Strategie, indem sie mehr durchgeführte Massnahmen erwähnten und bedrohliche Aktivitäten und Akteure ausdrücklicher benannten. Vietnam hingegen nannte häufiger beabsichtigte Massnahmen und war bei der Schilderung von Bedrohungen eher vage.

Schlagwörter: Kopenhagener Schule, Inhaltsanalyse, Ostasien, Philippinen, Südchinesisches Meer, Versicherheitlichung, Vietnam

French Version

Cette thèse examine la sécurisation en Asie de l'Est en abordant la question de recherche suivante : « Comment le discours sur la sécurisation du conflit en mer de Chine méridionale a-t-il évolué dans les communications officielles des Philippines et du Vietnam entre 2009 et 2024 ? ». Le cadre théorique s'inspire de la théorie de la sécurisation de l'école de Copenhague, une approche constructiviste qui considère la sécurité comme une construction discursive continue. L'application empirique de ce cadre aborde la sous-représentation des approches reproductibles concernant la sécurisation et vise à analyser les éléments discursifs intentionnellement utilisés par deux revendicateurs principaux pendant une période de tensions régionales accrues et de militarisation. L'analyse se concentre sur les objets référents (qui ou quoi est menacé), les menaces existentielles (ce qui les menace), les autres acteurs fonctionnels et les pratiques de sécurité (mesures visées ou mises en œuvre). Les référents et les menaces ont été classés selon la définition élargie de la sécurité proposée par l'école de Copenhague à travers cinq secteurs thématiques : économique, environnemental, militaire, politique et sociétal, auxquels s'ajoute une catégorie « autre » pour les éléments qui ne correspondent à aucun autre secteur. Les données discursives ont été extraites des contributions individuelles aux ASEAN Regional Forum Annual Security Outlooks et ont été codées manuellement à l'aide d'un codebook conçu à cet effet et du logiciel QualCoder. L'analyse quantitative et qualitative du contenu a révélé des tendances à long terme et actuelles dans les aspects numériques et thématiques du discours. Le conflit occupe une place de plus en plus importante et complexe dans le discours des deux pays, avec une proportion plus élevée dans le cas du Vietnam. Par ailleurs, l'utilisation des éléments de sécurisation par le Vietnam a été considérablement plus volatile que celle des Philippines. Alors que les référents appartiennent principalement au secteur militaire et politique, les menaces proviennent presque exclusivement du secteur militaire et du secteur autre. Les similitudes entre les acteurs fonctionnels reflètent le contexte régional commun. Cependant, les Philippines ont montré une stratégie plus affirmée, en utilisant davantage de mesures réalisées et en désignant plus explicitement les activités et les acteurs menaçants. À l'inverse, le Vietnam a utilisé davantage de mesures visées et a décrit les menaces de manière plus vague.

Mots-clés: Analyse de contenu, Asie de l'Est, École de Copenhague, Mer de Chine méridionale, Philippines, Sécurisation, Vietnam