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Intersecting Geopolitics, Energy Security, and Climate Change Adaptation Policies: Norway's Oil and Gas Dilemma

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This paper explores intersections between geopolitics, energy security, and climate change adaptation policies in Norway by addressing the following research question: does securitizing the oil and gas industry due to geopolitical shifts impact adaptation policies? Recently, events like the war in Ukraine and the sabotage of the Nord Stream pipeline have reshaped the geopolitical landscape in Europe and influenced Norway as an energy supplier. The paper delves into the meaning of securitization within the context of Norway's oil and gas industry, which has become a matter of societal safety and security, a process that can skew policy priorities, potentially slowing down the implementation of adaptation measures. For instance, financial resources may be diverted toward increasing the security of the oil and gas sector, while political decisions may undervalue adaptation achievements. By examining these dynamics through exploratory scenarios, the paper aims to provide trade-offs between the oil and gas industry and adaptation. The paper's goal is to shed light on Norway's significant dilemma: how to reconcile its ambitious commitment to becoming a low-emission society by 2050 with its substantially increased role as an oil and gas producer and supplier since the war in Ukraine started.

Keywords: Climate change adaptation, energy policy, energy state, European gas market, geopolitics, oil and gas sector, securitization

1. Introduction

This paper examines to what extent securitizing a key sector related to Norwegian energy policy, such as the oil and gas industry, influences Norwegian climate change adaptation policy. This examination is twofold: it addresses how recent geopolitical developments have raised security concerns for the Norwegian oil and gas industry. At the same time, it explores how these concerns may have a negative impact on the climate change adaptation policy.

The paper contends that geopolitical shifts caused by the war in Ukraine, the sabotage of the Nord Stream pipeline, Chinese-Taiwan tensions, and Chinese and Russian neo-colonialism in Africa are dramatically reshaping the political and economic landscape in Europe. In Norway, the oil and gas industry is an example of a capitalistic global enterprise that has recently been securitized as a result of geopolitical changes. Due to the economic significance of oil and gas and the increased energy demands of Europe, the paper argues that the securitization of the oil and gas industry could potentially slow down the implementation of adaptation measures in Norway and skew policy priorities to fight climate change through adaptation responses. For instance, financial resources may be diverted toward increasing the security of the oil and gas sector, and political decisions may undervalue adaptation achievements. This paper contributes to shed light on a salient dilemma for Norway: how to reconcile its ambitious commitment to becoming a low-emission society by 2050 with its increasingly substantial role as an oil and gas producer and supplier, especially since the war in Ukraine started.

This paper is conceived and developed as a conceptual and preliminary study that links geopolitics, energy security, and adaptation, attempting to deepen and problematize linkages in a second stage by including either other theoretical perspectives or other countries for a comparative study. The paper presents the main

theoretical lens - securitization - and what it implies for the analysis of energy and adaptation policies in Norway in section 2. Section 3 offers a short overview of the oil and gas sector and adaptation. The discussion in section 4 provides the connections between geopolitics, the Norwegian oil and gas industry, and adaptation by depicting three exploratory scenarios carrying relevant trade-offs for Norwegian policymakers. A short conclusion summarizes the main points from the discussion and proposes further lines of inquiry.

2. Energy Securitization

Securitization theory explores how political issues are framed as security issues, leading to the implementation of extraordinary measures. The theory has evolved significantly since its initial focus on speech acts performed by certain actors prompting a securitization move (Buzan et al. 1998), integrating broader perspectives such as governmentality (von Lucke 2020), practices (Bigo 2002), and the sociopolitical context (Balzacq et al. 2016), all of which influence securitization processes. Today, the evolution of securitization theory combines constructivist insights with pragmatic considerations, emphasizing how language, power dynamics, practices, and institutional frameworks shape perceptions of security and consequent actions toward a salient issue.

The vast scholarly literature applying securitization theory in diverse areas like migration, environment, climate change, and health (e.g., Trombetta 2023; Vogler 2023; Léonard and Kaunert 2022; Bengtsson and Rhinard 2019) shows how framing certain issues as existential threats entails significant political and societal ramifications. Case studies in these areas underscore the variability of securitization outcomes depending on audience engagement, contextual factors, and the balance of power among actors.

Especially since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, energy securitization has captured the interest of several scholars (e.g., Meyer 2025; Sivonen and Kivimaa 2024; Siddi 2023; Kuzemko et al. 2022). In general, their analyses provide the conditions under which energy policy and sectors are elevated to matters of national and international security. Further, they describe the securitization process by which energy issues are constructed as national security concerns, thereby justifying extraordinary policy measures. For instance, Sivonen and Kivimaa (2024) study how zero-carbon energy transitions are securitized in countries like Estonia, Finland, and Norway, highlighting the role of political discourse in framing energy policies as security imperatives.

While few studies on energy securitization have referred specifically to Norway between 2020 and 2025, Austvik (2025) and Antonsen and Hansen (2024) offer timely and relevant insights on this topic with their focus on the oil and gas industry. Both studies examine Norway's pivotal role in global energy geopolitics, particularly its petroleum exports and their strategic implications for Europe's energy security.

Norway's energy governance has increasingly shifted from a primarily commercial focus to recognizing energy-related infrastructure as a critical component of national defense. This transition became particularly evident following the 2022 Nord Stream pipeline explosion, which exposed vulnerabilities in Europe's energy supply infrastructure. In response, Norway revised its Security Act in 2023 (Ministry of Justice and Emergency Preparedness 2018) to address such risks, clarifying the division of responsibilities between companies, which are tasked with ensuring safety, and the state, which is responsible for security. The updated Security Act underscores the growing role of private companies in managing security risks traditionally overseen by the state while also acknowledging the increasing involvement of international actors such as NATO in protecting critical energy infrastructure.

The securitization of energy reflects a broader trend of treating energy infrastructure not only as economic assets but also as strategic resources essential to national and regional stability, necessitating both economic oversight and defense-oriented strategies. In this regard, Austvik (2025) posits that energy securitization reflects the complex interplay of economic interests, security concerns, and geopolitical strategies. In Norway, these dynamics require a comprehensive approach that integrates defense, foreign policy, national security, societal security, and energy governance. According to Austvik (2025), Norway's reliance on European markets for its natural gas exports creates a dependency that mirrors Europe's reliance on Norwegian

supplies. This interdependence necessitates a balance between maintaining market stability and addressing geopolitical vulnerabilities. For example, Norway must navigate the EU's regulatory frameworks, which often prioritize market liberalization over national sovereignty, while simultaneously safeguarding its energy infrastructure against threats.

Antonsen and Hansen (2024) highlight the inadequacy of traditional politics in managing complex risks that span multiple levels - international, national, and organizational, involve diverse actors with distinct priorities and professional cultures, and blur the lines between domains that remain siloed in both research and practice. They propose integrating safety and security governance on more equal terms, leveraging insights from organizational sociology, political science, and security studies to build new tools that address cross-sectoral, multi-actor, and multi-level risk governance challenges. This approach is essential for understanding how the national energy infrastructure, with elements provided by the oil and gas industry, can become the focus of securitization, particularly in the context of rising geopolitical tensions.

In this regard, Lund Petersen (2023) reaches the same conclusions as Antonsen and Hansen by analyzing how the role assumed in security matters by private actors challenges traditional security frameworks since it forges new connections between markets and security, where commercial interests intersect with strategic public security imperatives. According to Lund Petersen (2023), these developments have resulted in a more decentralized security policy, while the boundaries of responsibility between public and private actors have become blurred. This evolution poses a profound challenge to democratic governance and the traditional functions of the state, underscoring the increasingly intricate and dynamic relationship between markets and security policy. Nowadays, we can conclude that security policy concerns a diffuse landscape where responsibility is shared among states, corporations, and civil society, making it increasingly difficult to pinpoint where the ultimate decision-making authority resides.

3. Climate Change Adaptation from a Securitization Perspective

A considerable literature on climate change as a threat to human, national, and international security or as a threat multiplier that exacerbates existing risks and threats has emerged in the last two decades (e.g., Gemenne et al. 2014; McDonald 2018). Scholars have sought to frame climate change through a securitization lens by elevating the urgency and importance of climate change in the political and public discourse. This approach is often used to justify extraordinary measures and mobilize resources, such as more immediate and robust actions like military involvement in disaster responses, increased funding for climate resilience and climate change adaptation, and stronger international cooperation on climate change adaptation and mitigation. The securitization of climate change could be expected to enhance global mitigation and adaptation efforts through a sense of urgency, thereby giving impetus to greater commitment and just prioritization. However, despite the climate security rhetoric promoted by international organizations like the UN and the EU and the "apocalyptic discourses" (Warner and Boas 2019: 1483) around climate change conveyed by environmental movements like Extinction Rebellion, the urgency of climate action remains challenged by the lack of political engagement, as the latest United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP) in Baku has shown (Gavin and Schonhardt 2024).

In the research project *RISKSEC2.0 – Local climate change adaptation: from risk governance to securitization strategies?*, we assumed that securitization processes concern not only climate change per se but also climate change adaptation policies that define adaptation measures as critical to national and global climate security. We wondered whether the same sense of urgency and crisis described by scholars about climate change concerns adaptation as well. Is adaptation, as a response to climate change threats, following a securitization process that elevates it beyond normal politics? This assumption emphasizes the urgent need to prepare for and adapt to the impacts of climate risks to protect societies from potential climate threats. The project detected securitization in adaptation policies at the national level (Rhinard et al. 2024) in three European countries (Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands), while the harvested empirical evidence at the municipal level (Barquet

et al. 2024) revealed that adaptation policies and measures were mainly driven by technocratic processes, such as risk and vulnerability analyses, and the use of digital tools to detect and cope with climate risks. In our view, the dominance of this approach could impede the emergence of innovative strategies needed to address adaptation challenges and could hinder public participation in the development of such policy and practice.

More generally, the findings at the local level allowed us to conclude that there is little research on the securitization of adaptation policies, and, at the same time, adaptation is not invested by geopolitical reflections. The project revealed that complementary international, national, and local adaptation efforts are pursued less than we had supposed. In addition, shared understandings and coherent actions concerning adaptation between governance levels were characterized by dynamics related to how the issue of climate change was framed. At the international level, climate change was mainly described as a threat, while at the national and even more at the local level, the consequences of climate change were considered among several risks a municipality must cope with at the local level.

4. Relevance of Oil, Gas, and Adaptation in Norway

The Norwegian oil and gas industry is a cornerstone of Norwegian energy policy, contributing significantly to the economy, GDP, government revenues, and state exports. Norwegian climate policy consists of mitigation and adaptation measures and actions to address climate change challenges, such as increased extreme weather events, sea level rise, and greenhouse gas emissions.

4.1. *Oil and Gas Industry*

The Norwegian oil and gas industry is characterized by a high degree of state involvement, with key players like Equinor, which manages the State's Direct Financial Interest (SDFI), ensuring public ownership of resources. The oil and gas industry operates primarily in the North Sea, Norwegian Sea, and Barents Sea, with exploration, production, and transportation governed by a strict regulatory framework designed to ensure resource sustainability and environmental protection. Norway's licensing system attracts international and domestic companies while upholding rigorous safety and operational standards. Revenues from the sector are channeled into the Government Pension Fund Global (GPFG), a sovereign wealth fund aimed at preserving wealth for future generations. While the industry remains a major global supplier of oil and natural gas, Norway is also focusing on reducing its carbon footprint investing in innovative solutions like the electrification of offshore oil and gas platforms, carbon capture and storage (CCS), and renewable energy development projects, including offshore wind and hydrogen technologies. These initiatives have positioned Norway as a leader in sustainable energy practices. The country has demonstrated a strong commitment to the Paris Agreement, aiming to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels and achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. The government is actively integrating these targets into national policies, focusing on reducing emissions in key sectors such as transportation, energy production, and manufacturing.

4.2. *Climate Change Adaptation*

In Norway, the Ministry of Environment is most responsible for climate change policy. In the last decade, non-state actors such as the oil and gas industry, NGOs, and environmental movements have taken stances in this policy domain. As noted above, the oil and gas industry seeks to promote sustainable energy practices. However, environmental movements have accused the Norwegian government of making choices that undermine its commitment to the Paris Agreement, also through demonstrations like seeking to occupy the premises of the Ministry of Energy (NRK 2021). One of the most recently criticized decisions has been deep-sea mining on the Norwegian continental shelf (Det kongelige Olje- og energidepartementet 2023).

While a series of Norwegian governments have mainly worked to reduce emissions through mitigation practices to fulfill international commitments, adaptation has always been considered more a local issue, with the municipalities as front runners. In general, we can conclude that adaptation has received less attention than mitigation in the national climate policy (Neby et al. 2023). However, the past

decade has coincided with a clearer focus on adaptation through relevant policy documents that testify to an increased national commitment to shaping and guiding a policy that was until recently left to the goodwill and capacities of local actors. In particular, two government White Papers are relevant: Meld. St. 33 (2012-2013) *Climate change adaptation in Norway* (Norwegian Ministry of Climate and Environment 2013) and Meld. St. 26 (2022-2023) *A changing climate - united for a climate-resilient society* (Norwegian Ministry of Climate and Environment 2023).

Three key messages in the first White Paper are worth mentioning here: firstly, adaptation is closely linked to community planning and, as such, to the work of municipalities, whose role is reinforced by the national Planning and Building Act. Secondly, adaptation concerns handling climate risks such as landslides, floods, and stormwater, which may lead to other types of risks, whether financial, societal, or infrastructure-related. As such, risk and vulnerability assessments are essential to gather knowledge of these risks. Thirdly, the precautionary principle should guide decisions around adaptation.

The more recent White Paper points out that the management efforts related to adaptation need to be strengthened through national guidelines and government support. The Ministry of Climate and Environment and the Norwegian Environment Agency are vested with the overall responsibility for coordination, but, at the same time, adaptation is considered the shared responsibility of several ministries.

4.3. *The Relationship between Oil and Gas and Adaptation in Norway*

The relationship of the oil and gas industry to adaptation has become more intertwined as climate risks, such as more extreme weather and sea level rise, pose significant threats to the oil and gas infrastructure. In this regard, adaptation can play a role in how Norway can integrate adaptation measures into the oil and gas sector.

Through adaptation measures, Norway addresses the direct impacts of a warming climate, such as rising sea levels, increased flooding, and more frequent extreme weather events. These impacts pose significant risks to critical infrastructures, including hydropower facilities, oil platforms in vulnerable regions, such as the Norwegian Sea or the Barents Sea, and Arctic installations. Adaptation measures are concerned not only with strengthening dams or improving disaster preparedness and recovery planning but also with ensuring resilience in energy production systems by upgrading their infrastructure to withstand extreme weather events. Alternative energy sources may be prioritized to reduce dependence on such vulnerable systems. Consequently, adaptation becomes an essential policy for protecting the nation's economy, ecosystems, and citizens from the adverse effects of climate change.

Recent developments have seen the securitization of renewable energy projects in Norway. In February 2025, the Norwegian Parliament approved the development of hydropower plants in previously protected rivers, citing the need for enhanced flood and landslide protection while strengthening national energy security (Stortinget 2025). Additionally, Norway's ambitious goal to develop 30 GW of offshore wind energy by 2040 underscores the dual strategy of reducing fossil fuel dependency while reinforcing renewable energy independence. These developments highlight how Norway integrates energy policy with national security, addressing geopolitical risks and the evolving role of energy as a strategic asset.

If we add securitization processes to this relationship, we may not find this linkage straightforward. On the one hand, securitization may drive positive change by encouraging investments in sustainable energy technologies and reducing dependence on fossil fuels, which are major contributors to climate change. On the other hand, it may result in short-term policies that prioritize energy security over long-term adaptation, such as an increased reliance on coal, oil, and gas, all of which carry environmental risks and exacerbate climate change impacts.

5. Discussion

Due to its dual role as a key energy supplier and an actor dealing with climate change consequences, Norway faces a profound dilemma at the intersection of geopolitics, energy security, and climate change adaptation. The country is at a crossroads - striving to balance security

concerns about its oil and gas industry with long-term sustainability goals through adaptation measures in an unstable geopolitical realm.

We propose three possible exploratory scenarios in how the Norwegian oil and gas sector and adaptation policies influence each other in a securitized context due to recent geopolitical events.

First scenario: **Short-term vs. long-term focus on oil and gas exploitation.** The geopolitical situation has brought oil and gas back as a central energy source, making Norway a key supplier in the European energy market. Geopolitics and the securitization of the Norwegian oil and gas industry are mutually reinforcing, leading to a fortified investment in this industry, i.e., an increased search for new oil and gas fields and a policy focus on opening new areas. The opening up of more oil and gas licenses in the North Sea and evidence of a relative de-prioritization of climate change versus security goals goes in this direction (Staalesen 2024; Solsvik 2022).

This process may justify continued fossil fuel production to ensure European energy security in the context of unresolved geopolitical tensions. While securitization can drive immediate action, there is a danger of focusing too much on the short-term exploitation of resources solely based on the current geopolitical situation, overlooking longer-term environmental sustainability that would result from adaptation measures. This challenge is particularly evident in the continued use of fossil fuels for energy security purposes, even though these will contribute to exacerbate climate change consequences that will, in turn, threaten energy systems.

Second scenario: **Diversion of resource allocation**. The Norwegian Defense Commission's report (NOU 2023) emphasizes that the Norwegian oil and gas sector plays a critical role in both national and European security. As one of Europe's most important gas suppliers, the Norwegian oil and gas infrastructure has become a strategic target for cyberattacks, sabotage, and hybrid warfare. Vulnerabilities related to pipelines, platforms, and export terminals require increased surveillance and protection in close cooperation with NATO and the EU. Additionally, climate change impacts defense and security policy by altering geopolitical dynamics and creating a need for new energy solutions within the armed forces. The Commission, therefore, recommends strengthening the defense of critical infrastructures, closer international cooperation, and enhanced preparedness to address both traditional and hybrid threats against the oil and gas industry.

Following this trend, the Norwegian government may prioritize military or defense-driven investments to protect its oil and gas infrastructure, potentially sidelining other crucial aspects of climate change adaptation. It may also divert investments from one sector to another, as in the case of deep-sea mining on the Norwegian continental shelf. For instance, climate adaptation strategies may need to address water scarcity, agricultural resilience, or coastal protection, but a securitized oil and gas sector may divert attention and funding away from these broader adaptation needs.

Third scenario: **Global cooperation vs. Norwegian interests**. Energy security and climate change are global challenges that require international cooperation. Norway, a stable and reliable supplier, contrasts sharply with actors like Russia, which has historically employed energy as a geopolitical weapon. Norway avoids using energy resources as tools to exert economic and political pressure. In fighting climate change, Norway has traditionally been a strong promoter of mitigation and adaptation policies in international fora, such as the various COPs. However, the increased significance of the Norwegian oil and gas sector may lead to weaker engagement in promoting adaptation at the global level. In addition, the securitization of the oil and gas sector may lead to competition between Norway and other countries for resources or technology, potentially undermining global climate agreements and cooperation. In the case of climate change adaptation, securing resources may involve geopolitical considerations, leading to conflicting interests in international agreements.

These three scenarios mainly pinpoint trade-offs between adaptation and securitization processes concerning the oil and gas industry and underline the following challenge for Norway: balancing its economic reliance on fossil fuels, its geopolitical responsibilities, and its climate leadership ambitions. While seeking to attain all

three goals may appear contradictory, their achievement is not inherently irreconcilable. For instance, by integrating adaptation measures into its securitization strategies within the oil and gas industry and leveraging its energy expertise for a sustainable transition, Norway can address this challenge and chart a path that aligns national and global priorities.

However, doing so would require a radical shift in Norwegian political culture, as Hansen and Antonsen (2024) highlight. Further, recent geopolitical developments - the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Nord Stream pipeline sabotage - have elevated risks to a new and unknown level and necessitate a shift in traditional governance frameworks.

6. Conclusion

This paper has sought to shed light on interfaces between geopolitics, energy security, and climate change adaptation, considering a key energy sector such as the oil and gas industry. We envisaged three exploratory scenarios that show the trade-offs Norway faces in seeking to balance its role as an energy state and supplier of the European energy market with its profile as a frontrunner in climate policy in a shifting geopolitical context.

The first trade-off is between short-term energy security and long-term climate resilience, where increased fossil fuel investment secures European energy needs but may exacerbate climate change. The second trade-off is the diversion of resources, as securitizing critical energy infrastructures may shift funding away from broader climate adaptation efforts, such as water management and coastal protection. The third trade-off lies in balancing global cooperation with national interests, as Norway's growing energy role could weaken its leadership in international climate initiatives. While these trade-offs seem contradictory, they can be reconciled by integrating adaptation plans into security strategies concerning the oil and gas industry and leveraging energy expertise for a sustainable transition. However, this requires a fundamental shift in governance, as recent geopolitical developments have intensified security risks, making the path forward increasingly complex.

Energy securitization, particularly of a crucial sector such as the oil and gas industry, is an essential but complex aspect of contemporary governance vis-à-vis the recent geopolitical shifts. Policymakers must carefully ensure that short-term drives for energy security do not undermine long-term adaptation strategies. As a small state with outsized influence in energy markets, policymakers' ability to navigate these challenges will be critical to Norway's continued role as a reliable supplier and strategic actor in the evolving geopolitics of energy.

Researchers can contribute by providing recommendations and up-to-date analyses on the trade-offs between political choices with different temporal scales, between ensuring energy security and climate security, and between the ongoing exploitation of natural resources and sustainability.

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