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From State-Centred Security to Civic Resilience: Social Stability and Civil Society in Contemporary Security Theory

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Abstract. *Contemporary security cannot be explained adequately as the defence of state territory alone. This article develops a conceptual account of the relationship among widened security, social stability, and civil society. It asks how public institutions can protect society without turning security into a justification for unlimited control. A structured qualitative review was conducted across twelve foundational works in political philosophy, security studies, human security, and civil-society theory. The sources were compared through five analytical dimensions: the referent of security, the conception of threat, the role of law, the place of civic participation, and the treatment of liberty. The analysis identifies three major shifts: from territorial defence to multidimensional human protection; from static order to adaptive social stability; and from civil society as an external critic of the state to civil society as part of society's security capacity. On this basis, the article proposes a four-link civic-resilience model consisting of protection, institutional trust, meaningful participation, and adaptive capacity. The model clarifies that coercive capability may be necessary but cannot independently produce durable stability. Legitimate law, accountable institutions, reliable public information, and autonomous civic association are mutually reinforcing conditions. The article concludes that security policy should be assessed not only by the suppression of immediate threats but also by whether it preserves rights, sustains trust, and increases society's capacity to identify and address risks.*

Keywords: *security theory, social stability, civil society, human security, civic resilience, institutional trust, rule of law*

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Dövlət mərkəzli təhlükəsizlikdən vətəndaş dayanıqlılığına: müasir təhlükəsizlik nəzəriyyəsində sosial sabitlik və vətəndaş cəmiyyəti

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Xülasə. *Müasir təhlükəsizliyi yalnız dövlət ərazisinin müdafiəsi kimi izah etmək kifayət etmir. Məqalədə genişləndirilmiş təhlükəsizlik, sosial sabitlik və vətəndaş cəmiyyəti arasındakı əlaqə konseptual şəkildə araşdırılır. Əsas sual dövlət institutlarının təhlükəsizliyi qeyri-məhdud nəzarətin əsaslandırılmasına çevirmədən cəmiyyəti necə qoruya bilməsidir. Siyasi fəlsəfə, təhlükəsizlik tədqiqatları, insan təhlükəsizliyi və vətəndaş cəmiyyəti nəzəriyyəsinə aid on iki fundamental mənbə*

strukturlaşdırılmış keyfiyyət təhlili ilə müqayisə edilmişdir. Mənbələr təhlükəsizliyin referent obyekti, təhdid anlayışı, hüququn rolu, vətəndaş iştirakı və azadlığa münasibət üzrə kodlaşdırılmışdır. Təhlil üç əsas keçidi göstərir: ərazi müdafiəsindən çoxölçülü insan müdafiəsinə, statik nizamdan adaptiv sosial sabitliyə və vətəndaş cəmiyyətinin dövlətə xarici tənqidçi kimi qəbul edilməsindən onun ictimai təhlükəsizlik qabiliyyətinin tərkib hissəsi kimi başa düşülməsinə keçid. Bu nəticələr əsasında müdafiə, institusional etimad, mənalı iştirak və uyğunlaşma qabiliyyətindən ibarət dörd həlqəli vətəndaş dayanıqlılığı modeli təklif olunur. Model göstərir ki, məcburetmə imkanları bəzi hallarda zəruri olsa da, davamlı sabitliyi təkbaşına yarada bilməz. Qanunun legitimliyi, hesabatlı institutlar, etibarlı ictimai informasiya və muxtar vətəndaş birlikləri qarşılıqlı şəkildə bir-birini gücləndirir. Nəticədə təhlükəsizlik siyasətinin yalnız təhdidlərin aradan qaldırılması ilə deyil, həm də hüquqları, etimadı və cəmiyyətin risklərə cavab vermək qabiliyyətini qoruması ilə qiymətləndirilməsi təklif edilir.

Açar sözlər: *təhlükəsizlik nəzəriyyəsi, sosial sabitlik, vətəndaş cəmiyyəti, insan təhlükəsizliyi, vətəndaş dayanıqlılığı, institusional etimad, qanunun aliliyi*

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Introduction

Security is among the most politically powerful and conceptually disputed terms in public life. It can denote protection from armed attack, confidence in institutions, freedom from deprivation, resilience to ecological or technological shocks, and the ability to exercise rights without fear. These meanings are connected, but they are not interchangeable. When every social problem is described as a security threat, extraordinary measures may appear normal and political disagreement may be treated as danger. When security is defined too narrowly, however, chronic risks to people and institutions remain analytically invisible. Contemporary theory therefore faces a double task: it must widen the agenda beyond military defence while retaining criteria that distinguish security analysis from a general catalogue of public policy concerns (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998; Paris, 2001).

The classical tradition established two enduring intuitions. First, political order is justified partly by its capacity to protect life and make cooperative activity possible. Aristotle connected the political community to the conditions of a good life rather than mere survival, while Al-Farabi treated virtuous association and ethical leadership as integral to collective flourishing (Al-Farabi, 1985; Aristotle, 1998). Second, modern social-contract reasoning placed protection at the centre of political obligation. Hobbes argued that common authority is required to escape pervasive insecurity, but his formulation also exposes a continuing tension: the power capable of providing protection can itself become a source of fear if it is not limited and made accountable (Hobbes, 1996). The problem of security is therefore inseparable from the problem of legitimate power.

Twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholarship has moved the referent of security beyond the state. The human security agenda foregrounded the everyday vulnerability of individuals and communities, including economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political insecurity (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 1994). Widened security theory likewise distinguished military, political, economic, societal, and environmental sectors, while warning that the act of naming an issue as an existential threat changes the form of politics around it (Buzan et al., 1998). These approaches make civil society relevant not merely as a beneficiary of protection but also as a producer of knowledge, trust, accountability, and collective action.

Yet the relationship among security, social stability, and civil society is frequently simplified. Stability is equated with silence or continuity, while civil society is either idealised as automatically democratic or treated as an obstacle to administrative control. Both assumptions are weak. Durable stability requires the capacity to process conflict lawfully, correct institutional error, and reorganise cooperation under pressure. Civil associations can strengthen that capacity by aggregating interests, circulating information, and creating networks of reciprocity; they can also reproduce exclusion or polarisation. The contribution of civil society is consequently conditional on legal equality, institutional openness, and the quality of civic norms (Cohen & Arato, 1992; Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1993).

This article asks: how can contemporary security theory integrate social stability and civil society without collapsing security into either coercive order or an unlimited list of human needs? Its objective is to build a conceptual model that explains the mechanisms through which protection, trust, participation, and adaptation combine to produce civic resilience. The article contributes by separating stability from immobility, by treating rights as a constitutive condition of security rather than an external constraint, and by specifying the circumstances under which civil society increases security capacity.

Methods

The study uses a structured qualitative review and conceptual synthesis. It is not an empirical evaluation of a particular country, institution, or population. Twelve foundational works were selected purposively because they represent four theoretical clusters relevant to the research question: classical and social-contract accounts of political order; widened and human-security approaches; theories of civil society and public legitimacy; and accounts of trust, social capital, and human capability. Selection favoured works with clear conceptual influence and identifiable mechanisms rather than sources that merely repeat definitions.

Each work was read through five common analytical dimensions: (1) the primary referent of security—state, society, community, or individual; (2) the type of threat recognised; (3) the role assigned to law and public institutions; (4) the mechanism attributed to civic participation; and (5) the relationship between security and liberty. A comparative matrix was then used to identify convergence, contradiction, and missing causal links. The synthesis proceeded abductively: concepts from the literature guided coding, while tensions found across traditions were used to revise the emerging model. The proposed civic-resilience model is therefore an analytical construction derived from comparison, not a statistically tested causal model.

Conceptual validity was strengthened in three ways. First, “security,” “stability,” and “civil society” were kept analytically distinct before their relationships were examined. Second, both enabling and constraining effects of security policy and civic action were considered. Third, conclusions were limited to propositions that can be traced to the reviewed traditions. No survey data, interviews, or archival claims are presented. This boundary is important because normative plausibility should not be mistaken for empirical proof.

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Results

1. Security as Protection Under Legitimate Authority

The first result is that protection and legitimacy cannot be separated without distorting the security problem. Classical accounts differ greatly, yet they share the view that political order has an ethical

and institutional purpose. Aristotle's political community aims at living well, not merely preventing death (Aristotle, 1998). Al-Farabi similarly connects a well-ordered community to knowledge, virtue, cooperation, and human flourishing (Al-Farabi, 1985). In both approaches, stability is evaluated through the quality of the order being maintained. A community may be quiet and still fail to be secure if its institutions systematically deny the conditions of dignified life.

Hobbes offers a sharper account of insecurity as a condition in which credible protection is absent. Common authority makes predictable action and social cooperation possible (Hobbes, 1996). The continuing value of this insight lies in the recognition that fragmented coercive power exposes individuals to arbitrary violence. Its limitation is that effective authority alone does not settle whether the terms of protection are legitimate. Modern constitutional and deliberative accounts add the requirement that law must be publicly justifiable and that those subject to collective rules retain channels through which they can participate in their formation (Habermas, 1996). Security capacity and accountability are thus complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

This comparison produces a practical distinction between protective capacity and securitising discretion. Protective capacity is the lawful ability to prevent, absorb, and remedy harm. Securitising discretion is the ability to label a condition existential and thereby seek exceptional authority. The former is necessary for public security; the latter requires strict justification because it can displace ordinary procedures. A sound security framework must strengthen protection while limiting the uncontrolled expansion of emergency logic.

2. From Territorial Defence to Multidimensional Human Protection

The second result is that the widening of security changes both what counts as harm and who is entitled to define it. State-centred approaches emphasise territorial integrity, political sovereignty, and organised violence. These remain essential, but they do not capture vulnerabilities that can destroy lives without crossing a border. The UNDP human-security framework placed the individual at the centre and organised risk across economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political dimensions (UNDP, 1994). Sen's capability approach supports this move by evaluating institutions according to the substantive freedoms people can exercise, not only the resources formally available to them (Sen, 1999).

Widening nevertheless creates a boundary problem. If insecurity includes every serious deprivation, security analysis loses priority-setting power. Paris (2001) identifies the vagueness of human security as both its political attraction and analytical weakness. Buzan et al. (1998) offer a partial solution: an issue becomes securitised when it is presented as an existential threat that appears to justify measures beyond ordinary politics. This draws attention to the social process by which threats are constructed, accepted, or rejected. It also shows why civil society and public communication matter: threat definitions should be exposed to contest, evidence, and revision rather than monopolised by a single institution.

Kaldor (2007) further reorients the security agenda toward the protection of persons in contexts where war, criminality, identity politics, and institutional weakness overlap. The synthesis of these perspectives yields a disciplined widening rule: a condition belongs in security analysis when it threatens basic human agency or the institutional capacity required to protect it, has consequences that ordinary individual action cannot reasonably manage, and demands coordinated public response. This rule prevents both militarised reduction and conceptual overexpansion.

3. Social Stability as Adaptive Capacity

The third result is that social stability is better understood as regulated adaptability than as the absence of visible conflict. Suppressed disagreement may produce short-term order while weakening feedback, trust, and institutional learning. In a complex society, disagreements about interests and values are normal. The critical question is whether institutions can process them without violence,

arbitrary exclusion, or systemic breakdown. Habermas (1996) locates legitimacy in the relationship between law and public communication; Cohen and Arato (1992) show how an autonomous civil sphere can mediate between private life, markets, and administrative power.

Adaptive stability contains at least four capacities. The first is anticipatory: institutions and communities must detect emerging risks before they become crises. The second is absorptive: essential functions must continue during disruption. The third is deliberative: affected groups require channels to contest diagnoses and proposed remedies. The fourth is corrective: rules and organisations must be capable of learning from failure. None of these capacities is produced by coercion alone. They depend on credible information, legal predictability, administrative competence, and social relationships that make cooperation possible.

Trust is central but must not be romanticised. Fukuyama (1995) treats trust as an expectation of regular and cooperative behaviour grounded in shared norms. Putnam et al. (1993) connect networks of civic engagement to institutional performance. Yet trust without scrutiny may shelter abuse, while distrust without mechanisms of verification can paralyse collective action. Resilient stability therefore depends on warranted trust: confidence generated and renewed through transparent procedures, reliable performance, accessible remedies, and the visible correction of error.

4. Civil Society as Security Capacity and Democratic Constraint

The fourth result is that civil society performs a dual security function. It can increase society's capacity to identify and address harm, and it can constrain the misuse of security power. Associations, professional communities, independent media, neighbourhood networks, faith-based organisations, and advocacy groups often possess information that central agencies cannot obtain quickly. They translate local experience into public claims, organise mutual assistance, and connect isolated individuals to wider institutions. These functions reduce informational distance and expand the range of actors able to recognise vulnerability.

Civil society also protects the political conditions of security by monitoring authority, contesting arbitrary classification, and defending access to rights. Cohen and Arato (1992) emphasise that civil society is distinct from both state administration and the market, although it interacts with each. Habermas (1996) explains how public communication can transmit social problems into formal decision-making. These perspectives indicate that participation is not simply consultation after a policy has been designed. Meaningful participation requires access to relevant information, the ability to formulate alternatives, a reasoned response from decision makers, and protection from retaliation.

The security contribution of civil society is conditional. Associations may be exclusive, poorly accountable, or captured by narrow interests. Dense internal solidarity can coexist with hostility toward outsiders. Social capital should therefore be evaluated by the direction in which it operates: whether it bridges social boundaries, supports equal legal standing, and improves the public verification of claims. Putnam et al. (1993) demonstrate the institutional relevance of civic networks, but their benefits cannot simply be assumed in every context. The rule of law and pluralistic competition remain essential safeguards.

A productive state–civil society relationship is neither absorption nor permanent antagonism. Absorption destroys the autonomy that makes civic information and oversight valuable. Permanent antagonism prevents coordination during collective threats. The more defensible arrangement is structured cooperation under constitutional guarantees: public agencies retain responsibility for lawful action and equal protection, while civic actors retain organisational autonomy, access to information, and channels for challenge. This arrangement turns civil society into a partner in protection without converting it into an administrative extension of the state.

5. The Four-Link Civic-Resilience Model

The comparative analysis supports a four-link model of civic resilience. The links are protection, institutional trust, meaningful participation, and adaptive capacity. They are analytically distinct but causally interdependent. Protection without trust generates compliance that may disappear when enforcement weakens. Trust without participation becomes paternalistic and difficult to correct. Participation without adaptive capacity produces voice without institutional response. Adaptation without rights may become a series of improvised exceptions that steadily erode legitimacy.

Table 1

The four-link civic-resilience model (author's conceptual synthesis)

Link	Core question	Institutional condition	Failure risk
Protection	Can serious harm be prevented, absorbed, and remedied?	Lawful capacity and equal access to protection	Coercion without legitimacy
Institutional trust	Are rules and commitments credible?	Transparency, competence, and effective remedies	Blind confidence or paralysing distrust
Meaningful participation	Can affected groups shape diagnoses and responses?	Information, voice, reasoned response, and civic autonomy	Symbolic consultation or capture
Adaptive capacity	Can institutions learn and reorganise under pressure?	Feedback, coordination, redundancy, and correction	Rigidity or permanent emergency

The model makes three relationships visible. First, protection is evaluated through both outcome and procedure: institutions must reduce harm, but they must do so lawfully and without arbitrarily distributing vulnerability. Second, trust is treated as an earned institutional resource. Reliable performance and reviewable decisions allow citizens to cooperate without surrendering critical judgement. Third, participation creates security value only when institutions can use the information it produces and explain how that information affected the decision. These relationships convert civil society from a decorative indicator of openness into an operational component of social resilience.

The model also clarifies the liberty–security relationship. Liberty is not simply the price paid for security, because expressive, associational, and procedural freedoms generate information that protective institutions need. At the same time, liberty does not remove the need for coordinated authority. Sen's capability perspective shows why substantive freedom requires enabling institutions (Sen, 1999), while human-security approaches show why exposure to severe harm can empty formal rights of practical value (Kaldor, 2007; UNDP, 1994). Civic resilience is therefore achieved when authority and freedom are institutionally arranged to reinforce, correct, and limit one another.

Discussion

The results refine three recurring debates. The first concerns the scope of security. A narrow state-centred definition misses threats that undermine human agency and social reproduction. An unlimited definition makes prioritisation impossible and invites the language of emergency into routine policy. The disciplined widening rule proposed here sets a threshold: the relevant harm must threaten basic

agency or the institutional capacity that protects it, exceed reasonable individual management, and require coordinated public action. This preserves the insight of human security while responding to the conceptual criticism identified by Paris (2001).

The second debate concerns stability. If stability means the persistence of current arrangements, reform itself can appear threatening. The adaptive account reverses this assumption. Institutions are stable when they can absorb conflict, revise error, and preserve essential functions without abandoning lawful constraint. This definition is normatively stronger and analytically more useful because it distinguishes resilience from repression. It also aligns with the classical intuition that political association should be judged by the quality of common life, not only by its duration (Al-Farabi, 1985; Aristotle, 1998).

The third debate concerns who produces security. State institutions hold distinctive legal authority and cannot transfer their obligations to voluntary organisations. Civil society nevertheless contributes capabilities that hierarchy alone cannot reproduce: granular knowledge, social connection, independent scrutiny, and channels for peaceful claim-making. These contributions are strongest when civic actors remain autonomous and when public institutions are required to respond through transparent procedures. In this sense, the state and civil society are neither substitutes nor inherently opposing forces. Their relationship is a designed institutional interface.

For policy analysis, the model suggests that security programmes should be evaluated with a balanced set of questions. Did the intervention reduce a specified harm? Were powers authorised, limited, and reviewable? Did affected groups receive usable information and a genuine opportunity to contribute? Did the intervention increase institutional learning and future preparedness? Did it strengthen warranted trust or merely demand obedience? These questions shift evaluation away from visible control toward sustainable protection.

The model is also relevant to information and technological threats. Such risks cross administrative sectors and change faster than formal rules. Effective response requires technical expertise, public communication, independent verification, and rapid correction. Treating uncertainty as a reason to close public debate can weaken detection and amplify misinformation. Treating every disputed claim as equally credible can have the same effect. The civic-resilience approach instead prioritises transparent evidence standards, trusted intermediaries, correction mechanisms, and protection for legitimate dissent.

Finally, the analysis cautions against turning civic participation into a symbolic performance. Participation that has no influence on diagnosis, design, or review does not generate the trust and knowledge attributed to civil society. A credible participatory mechanism must state what is open to change, disclose relevant evidence, record competing arguments, and provide a reasoned account of the final decision. These procedural features translate the abstract value of participation into institutional security capacity.

Limitations

This article is a conceptual synthesis and has three limitations. First, the purposive set of twelve works captures influential traditions but cannot represent the entire security-studies or civil-society literature. Second, the four-link model identifies plausible mechanisms rather than measured causal effects. It should not be used to rank countries or institutions without operational indicators and context-sensitive data. Third, civil society is treated at a general level; differences among associations, media systems, professional networks, informal communities, and digitally mediated groups require separate analysis. The model therefore offers a framework for empirical inquiry, not a substitute for it.

Future Research

Future research should operationalise each link of civic resilience and test the model across different threat types and institutional settings. Comparative case studies could examine whether transparent review and civic participation improve trust and compliance during emergencies. Survey research could distinguish interpersonal trust from confidence in specific institutions. Process tracing could identify when civic information changes security decisions, while network analysis could test whether bridging associations improve coordination across social divisions. Research should also investigate adverse cases in which securitisation weakens civic autonomy or in which civic networks amplify exclusion and disinformation.

Conclusion

Contemporary security theory has moved from an exclusive concern with territorial defence toward a wider analysis of human vulnerability, social institutions, and public legitimacy. This widening is necessary, but it must be disciplined. Security should refer to serious threats to basic agency or to the institutional capacity required for protection, not to every undesirable social condition. Social stability should likewise be understood as adaptive and lawful resilience rather than silence or institutional immobility.

The article's central claim is that durable security depends on four connected links: protection, institutional trust, meaningful participation, and adaptive capacity. Civil society matters because it supplies local knowledge, networks of cooperation, public scrutiny, and channels for peaceful contestation. These functions do not diminish the responsibility of the state; they improve the informational and normative conditions under which public authority can act legitimately. Conversely, law and accountable institutions create the conditions under which civic action contributes to common security rather than exclusion.

The practical implication is straightforward: the success of security policy cannot be measured only by immediate control or the absence of visible conflict. It must also be judged by whether rights remain usable, trust is warranted, civic knowledge reaches decision makers, and institutions learn before the next disruption. Security, on this account, is not a static shield. It is a public capacity to protect, cooperate, contest, and adapt.

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