

Counting Security in the Vernacular: Quantification Rhetoric in “Everyday” (In)Security Discourse

LEE JARVIS 

University of East Anglia, UK

Recent years have witnessed a “vernacular turn” in critical security scholarship centered on everyday constructions of (in)security. In this article, I advance this turn by arguing for greater attention to the role of numbers in non-elite discourse on (in)security. Doing so deepens understanding of the mechanisms and registers through which (in)securities are constructed in the vernacular while conceptually strengthening work on vernacular security through insight from literature on the rhetorical, sociological, and political functions of numbers. To pursue this claim, the article develops a new methodological framework through which to explore the work of numbers in vernacular security discourse before applying it to original focus group data on (counter-)radicalization. From this, I highlight the importance of numerical arguments in vernacular constructions of threat, evaluation of security policies, contestation of dominant security discourses, and performances of security literacy.

Ces dernières années, nous avons assisté à un «tournant vernaculaire» dans les travaux de recherche en sécurité critique centrés sur les constructions quotidiennes de la sécurité et l’insécurité. Dans cet article, je fais progresser ce tournant en défendant un plus grand intérêt envers le rôle des chiffres dans les discours relatifs à la sécurité et l’insécurité des personnes n’appartenant pas à l’élite. Ce faisant, nous approfondissons notre compréhension des mécanismes et comprenons lesquels permettent la construction des sécurités et insécurités dans la langue vernaculaire. Sur le plan conceptuel, nous renforçons aussi les travaux sur la sécurité vernaculaire grâce à des éléments issus de la littérature sur les fonctions rhétoriques, sociologiques et politiques des chiffres. Pour étayer cette affirmation, l’article développe un nouveau cadre méthodologique avec lequel explorer le travail sur les chiffres dans le discours sur la sécurité vernaculaire, avant de l’appliquer aux données d’un groupe type original sur la (contre-)radicalisation. À partir de cette première étape, je souligne l’importance des arguments chiffrés dans les constructions vernaculaires de menace, l’évaluation des politiques de sécurité, la remise en question des discours dominants sur la sécurité et les performances du lettrisme en matière de sécurité.

Durante los últimos años, hemos sido testigos de un «giro vernáculo» en el mundo académico con relación a la crítica de la seguridad centrada en las construcciones cotidianas de la (in)seguridad. En este artículo, presentamos este giro y argumentamos a favor de una mayor atención al papel

Lee Jarvis is a Professor of International Politics at the University of East Anglia, UK. He is the author or editor of fifteen books and over fifty articles on the politics of security, including *Times of Terror: Discourse, Temporality and the War on Terror*; *Security: A Critical Introduction* (with Jack Holland); and *Banning Them, Securing Us? Terrorism, Parliament and the Ritual of Proscription* (with Tim Legrand).

Jarvis, Lee (2023) Counting Security in the Vernacular: Quantification Rhetoric in “Everyday” (In)Security Discourse. *International Political Sociology*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olad013>

Corresponding author e-mail: l.jarvis@uea.ac.uk

© The Author(s) (2023). Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the International Studies Association. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted reuse, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

de los números dentro del discurso no elitista sobre la (in)seguridad. Haciendo esto, conseguimos profundizar en la comprensión de los mecanismos y los registros a través de los cuales se construyen (in)seguridades en lo vernáculo, al tiempo que fortalecemos conceptualmente el trabajo sobre la seguridad vernácula a través de la comprensión de la bibliografía sobre las funciones retóricas, sociológicas y políticas de los números. Este artículo busca contrastar esta afirmación y para ello desarrollamos un nuevo marco metodológico a través del cual podemos estudiar la aportación de los números dentro del discurso de seguridad vernácula, antes de aplicarlo a los datos originales de los grupos focales relativos a la (contra)radicalización. A partir de todo esto, destacamos la importancia que tienen los argumentos numéricos sobre las construcciones vernáculas de la amenaza, la evaluación de las políticas de seguridad, la impugnación de los discursos de seguridad dominantes y las actuaciones con relación a la alfabetización en materia seguridad.

Introduction

One of the most exciting developments within contemporary security scholarship has been an increasing engagement with the “vernacular” (Jarvis and Lister 2013; Croft and Vaughan-Williams 2017; Jarvis 2019; Djolai 2021, 8; Vaughan-Williams 2021). Drawing on the pioneering work of Nils Bubandt (2005)—but engaging with a longer tradition of feminist and other “bottom-up” approaches—this research explores “how citizens . . . construct and describe experiences of security and insecurity in their own vocabularies, cultural repertoires of knowledge and categories of understanding” (Croft and Vaughan-Williams 2017, 22). A response to the ontological elitisms of traditional and, indeed, much critical security work, it “brings ‘lay’ actors into the equation, offering insight into how security is constructed through local idioms” (Downing and Dron 2022). In so doing, it harnesses a constructivist sensitivity toward security’s contingent and provisional nature, on the one hand, to a critical attentiveness to traditionally neglected individuals, issues, contexts, and power relations, on the other.

In this article, I advance this vernacular turn by arguing for greater attention to the work of quantitative claims in the “everyday security speak” (Croft and Vaughan-Williams 2017, 23) of citizens. Such claims, I argue, are both prominent and powerful within everyday constructions of (in)security, assisting in the assessment and comparison of threats, the evaluation of security policies, and the anchoring, claiming, or rejecting of arguments about (in)security. Focusing on the discursive and political work done by numbers in everyday contexts, therefore, has huge potential to further our conceptual and empirical understanding of the mechanisms through which (in)securities are constructed in the vernacular. It also, importantly, provides new opportunities for bridge-building between the insights of vernacular security research and hitherto-unconnected literatures, including on numbers and international security, and on the rhetoric and sociology of quantification.

The article proceeds in three parts. I begin by bringing literature on vernacular security studies into contact with an emerging scholarship on quantification and international security. Here, I argue that each has the potential to address the other’s limitations, given the former’s neglect of numbers, and the latter’s focus on political elites in rarefied contexts. A second section develops observations from sociological and rhetorical work on quantification to construct a new methodological framework for analyzing numbers in vernacular security discourse. A third section then offers an empirical illustration of the framework’s utility by applying it to data collected via focus groups on (counter-)radicalization. Here, I demonstrate that quantitative claims are pervasive and heterogeneous in vernacular security discourse, doing im-

portant political work including in relation to the construction of threats, the evaluation of security actions, the contestation of dominant security discourses, and the claiming of security (il)literacy.

By concentrating on quantification rhetoric in vernacular security discourse, this article makes three original contributions to knowledge. First, conceptually, it identifies and addresses gaps in two important contemporary literatures on security, highlighting the constitutive and persuasive importance of numbers in “bottom-up” constructions of (in)security, and taking scholarship on numbers and international security into vernacular and quotidian sites for analysis. Second, it offers an agenda-setting contribution through its development of an original methodological framework through which future work might proceed in other contexts. Third, it also offers a sustained empirical application of this framework, demonstrating its utility via a worked engagement with original data.

Words, Numbers and (In)Security

Recent years have seen a burgeoning interest in “bottom-up” approaches to international security (see [Jarvis 2019](#)). Driven by dissatisfaction with the elitist ontologies and generalizing epistemologies of more traditional scholarship, such work forces engagement with the granularity of localized or “everyday” experiences of (in)security ([Stanley and Jackson 2016](#); [Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2016a](#); [Nyman 2021](#), 314). Although conceptually and normatively plural, this research highlights the importance of neglected actors, contexts, discourses, and encounters within which security is understood, governed, and lived. In so doing, it builds most obviously upon a longstanding emphasis within feminist international relations (IR) scholarship on the ostensibly local and banal (e.g., [Sylvester 2013](#), 614; [Enloe 2014](#); [Elias and Roberts 2016](#)). As [Cynthia Enloe \(2011\)](#) neatly reminds us, the “mundane matters” within global politics.

This “turn” to the everyday and banal has been a polysemous one, with advocates working through diverse frameworks including ontological security, postcolonialism, and critical security studies, as well as relevant feminist scholarship ([Jarvis 2019](#)). Increasingly prominent within this conversation, though, has been work on “vernacular security”, which seeks, explicitly, to address the “security speak of those voices otherwise excluded from mainstream analyses” ([Croft and Vaughan-Williams 2017](#), 24; also [Downing 2021](#), 4). Drawing inspiration from [Bubandt’s \(2005, 275\)](#) exploration of “the contradictions within and interplay between global, national and local discourses on security” in the “political imagination in Indonesia”, this work mobilizes an ontologically empty conception of security, taking the “linguistic constructions of citizens’ accounts of threat and (in)security in their daily lives as [the] primary object of analysis” ([Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2016b](#), 44). It offers, put simply, “an approach that explores how security or insecurity is understood and experienced by people in everyday life” ([Baker and Lekunze \(2019, 208\)](#)).

Although relatively nascent, the breadth of vernacular security scholarship is indicative of its potential to shed light on security dynamics in diverse contexts. Despite [Bubandt’s \(2005\)](#) initial focus on Indonesia, the “vernacular turn” initially concentrated on UK citizens’ constructions of (in)security (e.g., [Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2016b](#)), especially in the counter-terrorism space (e.g., [Jarvis and Lister 2016](#)). More recent work, however, has taken as its focus dynamics including the policing of gender and sexuality in Fiji ([George 2017](#)); the lived (in)security experiences of internally displaced persons in Nigeria ([Oyawale 2022](#)); and the post-conflict work of development organizations in the North Waziristan district of Pakistan ([Makki and Tahir 2021](#)). A shared dissatisfaction with “the prevalent elitist focus on politicians, security professionals and private security companies—even in the ‘critical’ study of the politics of threat and (in)security” ([Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2016b](#), 43) focuses attention, in this work, on the experiences of people sub-

ject to, or governed by, security policy in quotidian and everyday sites such as homes, workplaces, and public spaces. Although the parameters of such populations are, of course, contextually variable, the vernacular turn tends to focus its attention on those publics who are exposed to security discourse and policy decisions not of their creation. Although sometimes designated “non-elite”, the growing responsabilization of citizens in security’s delivery—for instance, through counter-terrorism hotlines—means we should beware casting such populations as straightforwardly “victim”. Indeed, a common concern in this work is to identify everyday examples of resistance and dissent in public responses to security frameworks (O’Loughlin and Gillespie 2012; Lister and Jarvis 2013; Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2016b).

For advocates of vernacular security scholarship, this emphasis on “the experience and social agency of those who are ‘secured’” (Luckham 2017, 111) has metatheoretical and perhaps normative value as a corrective to the tendency of security scholarship to “speak for, rather than to (or, perhaps better, with) ‘ordinary’ people and the conditions of (in)security they experience, encounter or construct in everyday life” (Jarvis and Lister 2013, 158). This is, not least, due to the opportunities opened for inductive research once *a priori* assumptions about the nature or meaning of (in)security are removed:

“Security in the vernacular” emphasises that those who are vulnerable and insecure are not just social categories but people, groups and communities, who perceive, cope with and respond to violence in ways that differ, sometimes radically, not only from the dominant state security narratives, but sometimes also from universal conceptions of human and citizen security. (Luckham 2017, 112)

This openness has been analytically productive—facilitating conversation with proximate theoretical concerns, including around gendered norms (George 2017; Hart 2022), identity (Croft and Vaughan-Williams 2017), human security (Rudnick and Boromisza-Habashi 2017), emergency politics (Kurylo 2022), and peacebuilding (George 2018). It has also been generative of a valuable methodological pluralism, with early focus group research complemented by recent engagements with creative methods such as body-mapping (Badurdeen et al. 2022), digital storytelling (Atakav et al. 2020), and visual analysis (Downing 2021; Nyman 2021). Approached collectively, this scholarship has now shed considerable light on linguistic constructions of (in)security in spoken (e.g., Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2016b) and written (e.g., Downing et al. 2022) discourse. It has worked through concepts familiar to security studies (e.g., Jarvis and Lister 2013), and through less familiar adjacent concepts (e.g., Huff 2017, 161). It has explored representations of (in)security in dominant languages (e.g., Bogain 2020) and minority dialects (e.g., Shaykhutdinov 2018). And it has analyzed constructions of (in)security that preexist data collection (e.g., Da Silva and Crilley 2017) and that emerge through research (e.g., Löffmann and Vaughan-Williams 2018). Without diminishing this work’s importance, my argument, here, is that its attentiveness to the intricacies of language—to words—has been accompanied, perhaps understandably, by a neglect of numbers as a similarly significant symbolic system in everyday (in)security discourse. It is to numbers—or, more specifically, the “significance of numerical phenomena in human discourse” (Merriam 1990, 338)—which I therefore now turn.

On Words and Numbers

The focus on words within vernacular security scholarship likely has multiple roots. First is the naming of the framework itself with its connotations of local, informal language. This etymology, no doubt, encourages attentiveness to linguistic nuances in everyday constructions of (in)security, perhaps attracting researchers already convinced by the productive power of language. Second, relatedly, is a wider emphasis on the importance of “discourse” within critical security scholarship more

broadly (e.g., [Campbell 1998](#); [Hansen 2006](#)), often—legitimately or otherwise—taken as synonymous with language. Numbers do, of course, receive occasional illustrative use in critical security research, especially within introductory texts (e.g., [Peoples and Vaughan-Williams 2010](#), 34–35) or to highlight global injustices (e.g., [Booth 2007](#), 11–20). But the tendency toward an “ontological monism” in much critical work—the refusal to distinguish the world and knowledge thereof ([Jackson 2008](#))—helps explain a scepticism toward the straightforwardly evidential or objective status of numerical claims. This scepticism feeds both from and into the quantitative-qualitative divide’s continuing resilience (see [Mac Ginty 2019](#), 268), and the sense that numbers, statistics, data, and mathematical techniques remain the preserve of particular—positivist—traditions ([Sjoberg and Horowitz 2013](#), 103–4). A third factor, finally, may simply be the embryonic emergence of paradigmatic ways of doing the “normal science” of vernacular security studies ([Kuhn 1970](#)), with newer scholarship speaking to and building on the assumptions of earlier work.

My argument is not, to be clear, that vernacular research should turn away from linguistic constructions of (in)security. Rather, I intend to demonstrate that emphasis on the linguistic framing of threats risks overlooking the potentially significant impact of quantitative claims within everyday (in)security contexts and interactions. Such neglect is important because it is almost impossible to overstate the pervasiveness of numbers in the construction, communication, and management of (in)security. Numbers are called upon to determine and convey the scale of threats, as with estimates of national nuclear stockpiles or the publication of pandemic death tolls. Future harms are represented numerically in the quantifications of danger that populate risk registers. Numbers have considerable, perhaps increasing, agency in governing threats, with algorithms and big data identifying suspect individuals and transactions ([Amoore and Raley 2017](#)). They operate as thresholds, for instance, with battle death counts distinguishing conflict from war ([Fazal 2014](#)); as limits, as on financial transfers due to concerns around organized crime; as obligations, as with refugee quotas; and as benchmarks for international comparison ([Broome and Quirk 2015](#)). Numbers signal political determination to address security threats via commitments to future military expenditure or target setting around climate change. Numbers justify security architectures, as with intelligence counts of foiled terrorist plots. And, numbers, importantly, enable critique of dominant security discourses, with initiatives such as [Iraq Body Count \(n.d.\)](#) highlighting the human toll of military conflict.

This importance of numerical phenomena within international security has (belatedly) begun to receive recognition within critical scholarship. One recent conceptual piece argues that numbers play three vital functions within global security governance: shaping audience perception of security issues; (de)politicizing and thereby shifting the importance of issues; and setting global standards for design, terminology, performance, and practices ([Baele et al. 2018a](#)). Detailed case studies trace the importance of numerical technologies and decisions in contexts including state fragility measurement ([Rocha de Siqueira 2017](#)), global health governance ([Pichelstorfer and Paul 2022](#)), self-determination claims ([Busse 2015](#)), and dead body counts ([Auchter 2016](#)). Often taking theoretical inspiration from [Foucault \(2007\)](#) or actor–network theory (e.g., [Toom 2020](#)), this work has been vital in stimulating a reckoning with the power of numbers in global security dynamics. At the same time—and without diminishing its contribution—it suffers from two limitations.

First, its overwhelming focus, as with much global security literature, remains on the communication, (inter)actions, and decisions of decision-makers and experts. As the above examples indicate, it remains heavily geared toward political executives, international organizations, policy professionals, and other structurally privileged actors in the international system. Although recent studies have started exploring citizen understandings of numbers in securitization dynamics (e.g., [Baele](#)

et al. 2018b), such work still positions citizens as audiences or targets—rather than *producers*—of numbers. In this sense, their agency remains restricted to the reception and interpretation of others’ discourse (see Côté 2016). Second, again with very few exceptions (e.g., Baele et al. 2018), existing critical work on numbers and security also focuses overwhelmingly on quantitative *practices* of counting, measurement, and comparison. Because of this, much remains to be done in understanding the discursive work of quantitative rhetoric in the construction, communication, and contestation of security threats.

My suggestion, then, is that we might profitably use the insights of these two literatures to address their respective limitations. Where scholarship on vernacular security has theorized how security is produced in everyday contexts, its emphasis on spoken and written language has engendered a neglect of numbers and their power in constructing (in)security. From the scholarship on numbers and international security, we see the importance of this neglect given the ubiquity and power of numbers across security contexts. At the same time, however, the latter’s emphasis on quantification practices in relatively rarefied global political sites risks overlooking the ostensibly mundane discursive interactions upon which vernacular security scholarship has so successfully focused. In the following, I therefore bring these insights together through a new methodological framework for exploring quantitative constructions of (in)security that surface beyond the deliberations, decisions, and discourses of the politically powerful.

Numbers and Vernacular Security: Toward a New Framework

To begin exploring the importance of numerical claims within vernacular security speak, I turn now to sociological and rhetorical work on quantification. Such work is substantial and diverse (see Berman and Hirschman 2018; Mennicken and Espeland 2019), yet it provides important insight into the production, functions, and implications of numerical claims in different contexts. Three prominent observations, in particular, are relevant: (i) the *prevalence* of numbers in contemporary life, (ii) the *contingency* of numbers, and (iii) their sociopolitical *significance*. The following takes each in turn, using these as anchors for the methodological framework that follows.

First, and perhaps most widespread, is the sheer pervasiveness of numbers across contemporary life. Potter et al.’s (1991, 333) analysis of quantitative rhetoric in cancer research communication, for instance, begins with a typical observation: “Numbers and various styles of non-numerical quantification are a pervasive part of contemporary everyday understanding of the world”. Berman and Hirschman (2018, 257), with reference to “big data” and “the quantified self”, note that the “proliferation of scholarship on numbers goes hand in hand with a proliferation of numbers themselves”. For Mennicken and Espeland (2019, 224), similarly, “In the past thirty years, the pace, purpose, and scope of quantification have greatly expanded.” Reflections on this prevalence often highlight the nineteenth-century birth of statistics, and the “avalanche of numbers” engendered by the ensuing “fetishism for numbering”, as Hacking (1982, 281) memorably put it. In the contemporary context, numbers are seen as vital for everything from policy formulation (Lingard 2011) to “everyday data cultures” in which “data is created, transformed and shared in and through people’s daily activities” (Burgess et al. 2022, 9). The quantification of the social sciences (Desrosières 2016) and the rise of general readership books on numerical literacy (e.g., Yates 2021) alike, indeed, both reflect and reproduce this creeping ubiquity.

A second observation is the contingency of quantitative practice and rhetoric (Bruno et al. 2016, 3). Numbers, this literature demonstrates, are constructed, not given (e.g., Hansen and Porter 2012, 414), emerging out of contextually specific decisions about what to count, how, when, and where (Martin and Lynch 2009, 245).

As demonstrated so dramatically by contestation over death tolls—from the war in Iraq (Steele and Goldenberg 2008) to COVID-19 (Campbell 2022)—“when treated as a contextual performance, the situated work of counting is subject to practical, organizational, and political contingencies” (Martin and Lynch 2009, 245). This contingency helps to explain widespread and common concerns over the manipulation of numerical data, evidenced in the aphoristic conjoining of “lies, damn lies, and statistics”, and the continuing success of texts such as Huff’s (1993) *How to Lie with Statistics* as, “a sort of primer in ways to use statistics to deceive”. Once we recognize numbers’ contingency, importantly, we can also begin to pay attention to the form they take in specific communicative contexts. Mitra (2012, 155), for instance, highlights the importance of heterogeneous numerical forms in relation to the 1943 Bengal famine, noting, “By numbers here I not only mean numerical data but a host of structural devices like enumeration, listing and non-numerical quantification rhetoric like ‘vast’ and ‘overwhelming’ that develop a sense of scale.” Billig’s (2021) recent account of COVID-19 discourse, relatedly, focuses attention on the political and “semi-magical” power of round numbers as targets and milestones.

Third, sociological and rhetorical literature on quantification also highlights the *significance* of numbers for social, political, and economic outcomes. It reminds us, put simply, that numbers have power (Rose 1991): power to create, to construct, to illuminate, to hide, to inform, to deceive, and to contest. This power takes multiple forms. Rhetorically, it involves a persuasive authority and a capacity to structure and communicate knowledge (Merriam 1990). For Rocha De Siqueira (2017, 168), for instance, “numbers authorize themselves and gain power by continuously reinforcing the view of a world that can be measured.” But numbers have a constitutive power, too, whereby they do not simply count preexisting realities, but (re-)produce those realities, such that, “to collect, store, retrieve, analyse, and present data through various methods means to bring those objects and subjects that data speaks of into being” (Ruppert et al. 2017, 1).

This constitutive power of numbers renders them particularly valuable to “problem promoters”—governments, activists, the media, corporations, and so on—who may use numerical claims as “ammunition” to “draw attention to or away from a problem, [or to] arouse or defuse public concern” (Best 2012, 28). It is, of course, no coincidence that the emergence of statistics dovetailed with the state’s growing appetite for accurate “political arithmetic” (e.g., Fioramonti 2014, 4). From a very different starting point, however, work on “statactivism” demonstrates how “social movements use statistics and quantification as part of their repertoire of actions, both criticizing certain statistics as well as using other ones as powerful instruments in political fights” (Bruno et al. 2014, 202) on political and ethical issues such as gender equality (e.g., De Rosa 2014). As related work on “data activism” demonstrates, engaged citizens respond to the growing datafication of everyday life in multiple ways (Milan and van der Velden 2016).

This productivity of numbers is linked directly to their valorization. Numbers are able to (re)create the world in particular ways, in part, because they are so venerated:

In our society, statistics are a sort of fetish. We tend to regard statistics as though they are magical, as though they are more than mere numbers. We treat them as powerful representations of the truth; we act as though they distil the complexity and confusion of reality into simple facts. (Best 2012, 160)

For Bruno et al. (2016, 3), these connotations of objectivity and impartiality connect to a widespread perception of numbers’ apoliticality, and yet, as Wendy Espeland (2022, vii) recently summarized:

Numbers do things. They highlight and obscure. They integrate and disaggregate. They mark and measure. They represent and intervene. They tame and inflame. They structure people's interactions. They create new objects and new kinds of people. They possess a power that hides itself. They are rhetoric that is anti-rhetorical. What all of these features of numbers share is that they express a certain agency. They perform.

Drawing on these insights into quantification's ubiquity, contingency, and significance, I now present a new framework for analyzing the rhetorical work of numbers in vernacular security discourse organized around three questions.

First: *What numbers are present in vernacular security discourse?* What, specifically, is given quantitative treatment in non-elite discourse on security issues? Who does the counting, when, and where? Are numerical claims attributed to specific sources or sites of expertise? Are numerical claims spoken with confidence or hesitation? What goes uncounted or unquantified in numerical security constructions?

Second: *How do numbers appear in vernacular security discourse?* Are numbers rounded or precise in vernacular quantifications? Are they absolute or relative? Are numbers offered as evidence, as illustrations, as targets, as milestones? How are numbers represented and visualized in graphs, charts, or images? How do numerical quantifications interact with linguistic quantifications such as "tiny" or "huge"? Are numbers reproduced or altered as they travel between sites or issues?

Third: *What work is done by numerical claims in vernacular security discourse?* How, for instance, do numbers constitute specific issues as security threats? How do quantitative arguments help explain or justify responses to threats? How do numbers challenge or critique security claims? What sorts of security knowledge or arguments do numbers militate against?

This framework is deliberately broad and designed for adaptability to a range of research contexts, recognizing that the pertinence of these questions will, inevitably, vary. In the remainder of this article, I now demonstrate its utility through engagement with original focus group research.

Counting (Counter-)Radicalization in the Vernacular: An Illustration

The focus groups on which I draw were organized to explore vernacular understandings of radicalization, counter-radicalization, and the UK Prevent Strategy amongst students at higher education institutions (HEIs) in England and Wales.¹ Eight online groups were conducted between June and July 2021, with forty-three participants from twelve HEIs recruited via voluntary and snowball sampling. The conversations lasted between 65 and 81 minutes and generated a corpus of 96,378 words. My coding of this material for the purposes of this article began with a first, deductive, reading of the transcripts to sift the data into the three above themes. A second, inductive reading then sorted the material within each.

The groups were organized around a topic guide structured around five questions: (i) What can you tell me about the Prevent Strategy? (ii) Where does your knowledge of Prevent come from? (iii) What does the term radicalization mean to you? (iv) How successful is Prevent in countering radicalization? and, (v) If you were in charge of the UK's counter-radicalization program, what would it look like? The immediate background to this research was the then-ongoing Independent Review of the UK's Prevent Strategy. Participants were told that the findings would be sub-

¹Prevent is the UK's official counter-radicalization strategy, first introduced in 2003. The strategy has a preemptive orientation—seeking to intervene before terrorist activity becomes manifest. It has undergone several iterations and received widespread criticism not least due to fears that it stigmatizes minority communities.

mitted to the review team and inform academic publications. This opportunity to contribute directly to public policy in this highly charged area means, as [Jarvis and Lister \(2016, 281\)](#) argue elsewhere, “It is a reasonable assumption . . . that at least some individuals saw [participation] as an opportunity to ‘speak truth to power’.” Ethics approval was granted by faculty research ethics committees following submission of information on the project’s purposes, processes, and management; review of research materials to assess issues such as participant consent; and reflection on participant confidentiality given the topic.

Two points regarding my illustrative use of this material merit mention. First, the method and sample size obviously militate against any claims to statistical representativeness. I make no argument here about the wider resonance of the numerical security claims explored below, or about my arguments’ external validity. Instead, my emphasis is on questions of construction and function that are typical of discourse analytic approaches ([Potter 1991, 336](#)), namely: (i) *how* are numerical claims and arguments about (in)security communicated within vernacular contexts; and (ii) what explanatory and justificatory work is performed by such claims. Second, these groups were not explicitly designed to explore quantitative rhetoric in vernacular security discourse, and contained no questions relating directly to numbers. As such, they provide important original insight into the unprompted use of numerical discourse in vernacular constructions of (in)security. This use of unprompted insight builds on earlier studies such as [Billig’s \(2002, vii\)](#) on how “ordinary families” talk about royalty: “To talk about royalty is to talk of many other things: privilege, equality, nationality, morality, family and so on. . . as families sit in their living-rooms, discussing the life of royalty, so they give glimpses of ordinary ways of living.” In this sense, the article moves beyond the emphasis on responses to targeted questions typical in the work on vernacular security considered at this outset.

Counting Security, in the Vernacular

In the following, I explore four types of discursive work performed by quantitative rhetoric: (i) threat construction, (ii) evaluating security actions, (iii) contesting dominant security discourses, and (iv) reflecting on security (il)literatecies (see [table 1](#)). As noted above, this framework is illustrative and provisional rather than exhaustive, and intended to highlight the significant yet heterogeneous work of numbers within vernacular security speak.

The first, and most immediate, discursive work done by numerical claims in vernacular security speak is in the construction of security issues. A range of quantitative claims relating to a variety of threats were evident in our focus groups, from gang violence—“We currently have a *massive*, a *huge*, amount of young people . . . who get recruited and groomed into gangs . . . *in terms of numbers we can’t have more issues* in regards to things like these” (Group [G] 8: Participant [P] 3),² to online radicalization, which was seen to:

pose *quite a threat*, especially with the likes of social media. . . *it’s so prevalent* in everyday life, *a lot of younger kids* now use social media as well. *And a lot more than they did a few years ago*. . . *it’s a quite a big problem.* (G5: P1)

This use of nonnumerical or “vague” quantifiers is important because they perform evaluative as well as numerical functions, attributing qualitative significance to threats such as radicalization and gang violence by virtue of their scale. Although ostensibly imprecise, such quantifiers pull attention to relations between objects ([Pezzelle et al. 2018, 117](#))—numbers of people, social media use, and so on—and are “rhetorically intended to facilitate the drawing of specific inferences that are relevant to the broader argument in which they stand” ([Lischinsky 2015, 555](#)). As

²Citations are lightly edited for readability; all emphasis is mine.

Table 1. Numbers in vernacular security discourse

Function	Features	Example
Threat construction	Threats can, in principle, be accurately counted or estimated. Large numbers and small numbers may emphasize risk. Recognition that numerical threat assessments have limitations.	"We currently have a massive, a huge, amount of young people . . . who get recruited and groomed into gangs"
Evaluating security actions	Numbers to evaluate the effectiveness and legitimacy of security policy. Numbers to reflect on the challenges confronting security professionals. Recognition that numerical threat assessments have limitations.	"there's going to be hundreds and hundreds of reports, where the general public aren't privy to"
Contesting dominant security discourses	Media and government security discourse may be biased. Statistical evidence may challenge official threat constructions. Numbers often seen as reliable and accurate, in principle.	"the actual percentage of people that [are] likely to be radicalized and then go on to perform violent extremism, which then results in people dying is so low compared to how sensationalized, uhm, Islamist terrorism has become in the media"
Reflecting on security (il)lteracy	Numbers to demonstrate public misconceptions of (in)security. Numbers may offer evidence of security literacy. Evident in arguments around public underestimation <i>and</i> overestimation of threats.	"I think the general public think it's a strategy just to combat Islamic extremism. But you know consistently in regions around the UK, far right referrals have made considerable numbers of the referrals, you know, big percentage"

the following indicates—from a participant recollecting a training session on the UK Prevent Strategy—they have potential to convey *more* information than would be possible through referencing an abstract number alone (Potter et al. 1991, 34):

there's a bog-standard video saying if they have *a lot of* contact lens solution, don't assume that they have bad eyes, they're probably a terrorist and you're like, OK? You know *a bit of a big step*, but I can get that and then *just loads of like similar things* like that like hair dye. Anything in *ridiculously large volumes*. (G1: P2)

Although this sense of a positive relationship between quantitative size and threat significance was common in the groups, other quantitative claims, including reflection on the importance of ostensibly small numbers in specific contexts, were also made. Examples included reference to the victims of specific violences—"if, uhm. . . people go to a concert and [there's a terrorist attack] and I think it's *21 people died*. . . I think it's inevitable that these things are gonna' make headlines" (G7: P1)—and to the occurrence of terrorist attacks in the UK: "It was people that carried out like London terror attacks. I think there was *four or five* in the *span of six or seven years* in London" (G2: P2). One participant, indeed, suggested that the emphasis on the already-large within official security imaginaries may engender neglect of emergent threats: "animal rights activists don't really get brought up. . . there's *a lot of things that don't*. It's difficult, right? Because in terms of the *number of attacks* and *perceived threat and damage* done by these groups *may be quantifiably less*. It doesn't necessarily mean that they should receive *less attention*" (G1: P1). This participant subsequently moved this observation into overtly normative territory, arguing that

the emphasis on statistical recurrence within security politics may link to implicit biases:

[if] you're looking at tackling radicalisation and extremism...when you specifically say like this group or this selection of people...then you have an image in your head...who the problem is and so on. So I think that you know there's *a lot of groups* out there, even if they're *quantifiably doing less harm*, it's still worth mentioning them or not mentioning anyone at all. (G1: P1)

The correlation between quantity and significance was also problematized, on occasion, by reflection on the limits of numerical risk assessments. For one participant, such assessments could lack the nuance of finer-grained qualitative understandings: “*you don't look at every single white male in the UK as someone who's willing to join proud boys simply because they're white and they're male. You have to understand why*” (G2: P2). Another argued that official risk assessments could mislead because they are inevitably based on incomplete and therefore inadequate numerical data:

every year or two you get...the government...or somebody that's really high up in counterterrorism say, you know, we stopped X amount of attacks this year, and, that's very much. Those attacks are kind of the tip of the iceberg, because people can get radicalized. They might not act on it, but...it feels like a problem that needs to be addressed. (G5: P6)

These problematizations of official risk assessments reflect concerns with the availability rather than veracity of security numbers: concerns that official data may be incomplete rather than objectively false. This speaks to a general sense across the groups that threats could—at least, in principle—be accurately counted or estimated, hence the concern with both under- and over-estimation of risk, for instance: “*you should not underestimate [the threat of radicalisation], because. . .you have young people in the UK and they are basically getting brainwashed from. . .a very young age*” (G2: P1), and “*I think the perceived threat is possibly more of an issue than the quantity in the statistical accounts. . .I think the risk is really in people's views*” (G1: P1). In each of these cases, a distinction is clearly drawn between the statistical reality of specific threats and (mis-)perceptions thereof. This faith in statistical realities, moreover, also opens space for comparison between contextualized risks within vernacular discourse. As one participant argued: “*the United Kingdom is at risk for sure ... more than other countries without that particular history [of colonialism]*” (G2: P5). In the words of another: “*the West has been so protected that they think that, oh, this is the most violence that we have ever seen, but in the global South, we've seen more violence on a day to day basis, which is not just coming from bombs*” (G6: 4).

A second function of quantitative language in vernacular security discourse is in the evaluation of security policy and professionals. One participant, for instance, employed what Billig (2021, 544) terms “non-numerical number words” to emphasize the scale of the challenge confronting intelligence communities: “*there's going to be hundreds and hundreds of reports the general public aren't privy to*” (G1: P2). Related to, but distinct from, the non-numerical quantifiers considered above, unspecified number-plurals such as this employ numbers to convey size *without* denoting exact quantities (Billig 2021, 544): How many “hundreds” of reports, here, is not specified.

Within vernacular evaluations of security policy, quantitative language also helped discuss measures and metrics of effectiveness. In the following, we see one participant questioning the utility of numerical assessments of policy success, with another going further to argue that policy effectiveness may be fundamentally resistant to quantification:

how it's making you feel? Do you feel safer in the UK as a result of this? ...that's kind of how I would want to measure an impact. Like, we had *four terrorist attacks in 2017*,

and we *haven't had four in one year in the UK since*, so maybe something is working in our counterterrorism strategies, but...I'd want to ask people (G2: P1)

And:

the same way that you can't gauge success, *you can't kind of quantify failure*. So even if you've so-called de-radicalised someone, the negative press that came as a result...might've pushed a lot more people over the edge ...Unfortunately...these things...*can never really be quantified* (G1: P1)

This argument that purely numerical considerations may be limiting for evaluating security policy was common. One participant, discussing counter-terrorism, suggested: "it's difficult to judge based on you know *number of terrorist attacks* because like you don't know at any point whether any of these systems really have worked. . .by definition you only see the system failing' (G2: P3). Others, however, drew on explicitly quantitative terminology to highlight legitimacy issues here, especially in relation to racial biases: "*the disproportionate impact* [Prevent] has on people of colour, particularly men, or young black men...I can't see how Prevent can be justified" (G7; P4). These two examples, taken together, point toward a potentially counterintuitive situation wherein numbers have their credibility questioned for empirical assessments, yet are seen as inherently valuable for normative evaluations. Indeed, as the second above participant continued, we can see how claims to injustice benefit directly from overtly numerical framing in vernacular discourse:

I read somewhere like *16% of police interaction* with Asian, ethnic minority groups, particularly men involved stop and searches for drug charges. So, I think prevent is being abused by the police to promote...interventions into communities. (G7: P4)

This brings us to a third function of numbers: contesting dominant security discourses. Government framings of threats received quantitative criticism from several participants in our groups: "Muslims are *more targeted* by Prevent because they're supposedly *more likely to become* terrorists, even though there's no basis to that" (G4: P4). As, more frequently, did sensationalist and misleading media representations:

in terms of deaths caused by terrorism in the UK *the numbers aren't all that high* to something like natural causes like cancer rates or things like that, but it gets a *lot of the media coverage*. (G1: P1)

And:

the media will say, OK, *we had 100,000 people come into the country* last year and we'll see, well, that's 100,000 too many for [right-wing extremists who] will see that as a threat (G2: P2).

In the following example, indeed, we see a convergence of government and media biases:

the Prevent Duty...stipulates at the very beginning that the terrorist threat has *never been higher*. But then if you look at *the actual percentage of people* likely to be radicalized and then go on to perform violent extremism, which then results in people dying is *so low* compared to how sensationalized, uhm, Islamist terrorism has become in the media, it's become one of those things that I feel like is a really hot topic and sells a lot...and kind of gains a lot of traction in media. ...*there's so many instances of actual threats* within the country that have *more likelihood of causing terror* or causing harm or causing death than actual radicalization itself. (G7: P4)

None of these examples offer specific numerical claims—recalled or invented—to characterize or challenge dominant security discourses. The value of quantitative rhetoric here, again, is in its contrastive ability to distinguish official constructions from empirical actualities. In this sense, the claims move between objectivist and

constructivist desecuritizing moves (Huysmans, in Roe 2004, 285–7). Where the former contrasts official framings of threats with security’s “reality” to highlight distortions and exaggerations, the latter focuses on the contingent and invented dramatization of threats. In making this move, though, these examples clearly share a faith in the reliability of numbers to contest authoritative prejudices. Although numbers are vulnerable to manipulation, they appear, here at least, fundamentally truthful.

A final invocation of quantitative rhetoric related to public awareness of security issues. Examples here ranged from documenting “ordinary” citizens’ ignorance—“I know *the majority of my peers* had not heard of the [Prevent] scheme before” (G2: P3)—to highlighting ostensibly widespread public misconceptions:

people might be surprised at *how many referrals* are not in relation to Islamic extremism. I think the general public think [Prevent’s] a strategy just to combat Islamic extremism. But you know *consistently* in regions around the UK, far right referrals have made *considerable numbers* of the referrals, you know, *big percentage*. (G3: P2)

And:

it’s been shown that *there is no higher likelihood* of someone that’s Muslim become a terrorist than someone of any other religion. [But] people that don’t have any kind of background in counterterrorism or any sort of criminal background that that’s kind of just what they assume. (G4: P4)

Although participants were sometimes cautious in their generalizations—“*maybe I’m in a minority knowing about [Prevent] for so long*” (G2: P1)—these examples see the speaker claiming privileged access to numerical truths that are not apparent to the wider public. And, as illustrated above, this is the case whether the public is believed to under- or over-estimate (in)security realities.

Making Sense of Numbers in Vernacular Securities

Notwithstanding my opening caveats about representativeness, the above examples illustrate the saturation of vernacular security discourse with quantitative rhetoric. Indeed, across these focus groups, an abundance of subjects and objects were subject to quantification. Security threats and their responses—as we have seen—were prominent recipients of numerical treatment. But so, too, were entities including time—“*a 60 second video* on what Prevent is. . . people might scroll past it” (G1: P2); money—“[Prevent has] become a bit of a cash cow. . . [charging] *a couple of grand a day* to deliver training” (G3: P2); and epistemic confidence—“I might not be *100 percent accurate* on that” (G1: P4). Numeric idioms and phrases were widespread, as rhetorical flourishes—“*no one thought twice* about [it]” (G1: P2)—or for argumentative emphasis: “there’s *zero kind of apology* [from Shamima Begum]” (G1: P4). As shorthand signifiers of atrocities—“7/7” (G7, P4) and “9/11” (G7, P4)—numerical references re-affirmed the significance of ostensibly singular events (Derrida 2003, 85–87). And, numbers were called upon, too, in thought experiments and hypothetical scenarios as in this questioning of counter-terrorism’s proportionality:

if there’s *a handful of incidents*, you know, across a span of years, is it worth putting . . . however many resources into. . . a program like this? I also wouldn’t know how large Prevent actually is either, so you know if it’s, if we’re spending, you know like *a couple million pounds* on it, is that worth *however many lives* that you’re saving through this? (G2: P2)

This repeated invocation of quantitative rhetoric is possible, in part, because of the connotations of objectivity and neutrality numbers enjoy (Fioramonti 2014, 20–24), and their perceived susceptibility to verification and replication. Notwithstanding awareness of a vulnerability to manipulation—explicitly recognized by some participants, as we have seen—much of the above vernacular discourse replicates a

wider understanding of numbers as conveyers of certainty, such that “A shift to numbers implies, often problematically, a shift toward accuracy and truth” (Hansen and Porter 2012, 415). In this sense, vernacular constructions of security draw on *and* reproduce the sociopolitical ubiquity of numbers explored in the preceding section: A ubiquity not unfamiliar to participants in our groups as indicated by commentary therein on data’s contemporary pervasiveness: “everyone kind of like does live in *their own kind of algorithm*” (G1: P4).

The heterogeneity of that which is counted within vernacular security discourse is matched, I suggest, by the plurality of ways in which numbers appear. As indicated already, precise numbers were relatively uncommon in these groups, with many participants using nonnumerical, often informal, language to count everything from experience of the Prevent Strategy—“I seem to remember reading *a few* news articles about it” (G2: P5), to vicarious encounters with terrorism—“*A couple* of members of my family have had near misses” (G1: P4) and media biases—“*By and large* you see Muslims portrayed as terrorists in film and TV” (G4: P6). Numbers were also, however, expressed as fractions—with Prevent depicted as “a quarter of the [UK’s counter-terrorism] strategy” (G3: P2). And, more commonly, as percentages—whether known or estimated:

I think Muslims in the British Army make up *less than 0.5%*, I’m sorry this is such like random knowledge and that. ...I think *in 2015 it was like 98%* were white and then I think...they *got to like a 5%* on uhm, not white by uhm 2017. And that was like a big win for them. (G1: P4)

To summarize, briefly, in relation to my framework’s three questions, these examples offer illustrative support for three important overarching claims. First, a diverse range of subjects and objects receive quantitative treatment in vernacular security discourse, with threats and their responses particularly prominent. Numbers, moreover, may be attributed to a range of sources, including the government, the media, and the public imagination, and spoken with varying degrees of confidence. Second, quantitative claims take on heterogeneous forms in vernacular (in)security speak. They are used, amongst other things, to empirically evidence arguments and critiques, and to construct hypothetical scenarios. Moreover, while nonnumerical quantifiers appear particularly common, percentages, fractions, precise, and rounded numbers are also evident. And, third, as we have seen, numbers also play multiple roles in constituting and contesting (in)security in the vernacular, including via practices of counting and comparison.

Conclusion

This article offered the first exploration of quantitative rhetoric in vernacular security discourse. In so doing, it made three original contributions. *Conceptually*, it connected emerging literatures on vernacular security, and on numbers and global security. Combining insight from these, I argued, provides us with rationale and resources with which to explore vernacular quantifications of (in)security. Second, the article developed a new *methodological framework* for exploring numbers in vernacular securities, drawing on insights from rhetorical and sociological work. Third, it offered *empirical illustration* of this framework’s potential via original focus group data demonstrating that quantitative claims play multiple important roles in vernacular discussion, including in relation to threat construction, evaluating official security activity, contesting dominant security discourses, and reflecting on public security (il)lteracies. As we have seen, numbers’ association with objectivity or truth renders them powerful everyday tools for normative argumentation on security’s workings and (in)justices. At the same time, concerns around statistical manipulation means official numbers are often approached with caution, or seen as contingent, contextual, and subject to misrepresentation.

My findings on the plurality of roles played by numerical claims in vernacular securities have an immediate and a wider significance. Immediately, they offer a forceful demonstration of the power of numbers to critique and contest security policies and their sociopolitical consequences. In this sense, the article extends earlier scholarship on the contestation of dominant security discourse within vernacular (e.g., [Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2016b](#)) and everyday (e.g., [Grayson 2013](#); [Davies and Chisholm 2018](#)) sites of global politics. It does so by charting numbers' capacity to add concision, facticity, or rhetorical flourish to vernacular security speak, and to challenge the foundations, integrity, or outcomes of professional security work. This is particularly important given the longstanding assumption in fields like IR that security discourse *and* quantification are the projects, if not quite the preserve, of structurally privileged actors.

This brings me to the findings' wider significance, which is the opportunity they occasion for exploring further connections between vernacular security research and other scholarship that has concentrated on the deployment of numbers by security's governed. Literatures on data activism and stactivism, in particular, highlight the deliberate, strategic production and use of numerical information by individuals and groups attempting to effect societal change (see [Milan and van der Velden 2016](#)). My focus here on the conversational productivity of numbers away from the exertions of targeted political action broadens and builds on this earlier work's insight, situating my findings—as well as the article's rationale and framework—within wider academic discussions.

The focus on how citizens give meaning to security frameworks such as Prevent also, of course, resonates with work on security-as-practice within international political sociology. Although my attention, here, is on security's subjects, not professionals, there is a shared emphasis upon the espousing of security logics and justifications in concrete contexts ([Côté-Boucher et al. 2014](#), 198). Indeed, the contemporary reliance on citizens as providers of security policy ([Vaughan-Williams 2008](#)) adds further urgency to the study of vernacular security constructions here, allowing us to center the numerical work of “everyday security practitioners” ([Rowley and Weldes 2012](#), 518) in (counter-)radicalization and other contexts. Such work, as we have seen, goes beyond (de)constructions of threat to include the situating of the self socially—by positioning oneself as better or less informed than, say, other citizens or the wider public—or by reflecting on questions around authority and expertise within contemporary society.³

As a first exploration of quantification in vernacular securities, this article also presents opportunities for future related work. First, such work might profitably study numerical claims in more “natural” (in)security discourses, such as online conversations to provide insight into whether numbers are used with enhanced or reduced frequency, intent, and precision in particular contexts. Second, future research might explore how citizens produce, reflect on, and critique quantitative constructions of security when explicitly prompted. Do requests for, say, numerical assessments, estimates, or predictions relating to nuclear stockpiles or illicit migration change the functions, form, or vernacular work done by numbers? Do different publics engage differently with numbers? Third, and relatedly, my focus on (counter-)radicalization provides opportunity for complementary scholarship on other security challenges from the climate crisis to COVID-19 and beyond. Do official numbers—1.5C, the “R” value—resonate at everyday levels? Do publics use alternative numerical framings to official discourse? And, fourth, given the UK-based focus of this article, there is clear capacity for comparative work with other national contexts, especially where characterized by different security priorities and imaginaries.

³My thanks to both anonymous reviewers, whose comments significantly shaped my thinking here.

Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks to Stuart Macdonald and Andrew Whiting for their permission to use our focus group data for this article. My huge thanks, too, to Alan Finlayson and Michael Lister for their reliably insightful comments on an earlier draft; to Claire Jowitt, Hussein Kassim, Tim Legrand, and John Street for earlier feedback on ideas contained herein; to colleagues in the Faculty of Arts, Business, Law and Economics at the University of Adelaide for their feedback on a presentation of this work; and to attendees at the BISA 2023 annual conference in Glasgow for the same. The article also benefited considerably from the generous and challenging feedback of the anonymous reviewers and editors at International Political Sociology.

Funder Information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

References

- AMOORE, LOUISE, AND RITA RALEY. 2017. "Securing with Algorithms: Knowledge, Decision, Sovereignty." *Security Dialogue* 48 (1): 3–10.
- ATAKAV, EYLEM, LEE JARVIS, AND LEE MARSDEN. 2020. "Researching 'British [Muslim] Values': Vernacular Politics, Digital Storytelling, and Participant Researchers." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 19: 1–11.
- AUCHTER, JESSICA. 2016. "Paying Attention to Dead Bodies: The Future of Security Studies?" *Journal of Global Security Studies* 1 (1): 36–50.
- BADURDEEN, FATHIMA AZMIYA, SAHLA AROUSSI, AND MICHAELINA JAKALA. 2022. "Lived Realities and Local Meaning-Making in Defining Violent Extremism in Kenya: Implications for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in Policy and Practice." *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 16 (1): 1–22.
- BAELE, STEPHANE J., THIERRY BALZACQ, AND PHILIPPE BOURBEAU. 2018a. "Numbers in Global Security Governance." *European Journal of International Security* 3 (1): 22–44.
- BAELE, STEPHANE J., TRAVIS G. COAN, AND OLIVIER C. STERCK. 2018b. "Security through Numbers? Experimentally Assessing the Impact of Numerical Arguments in Security Communication." *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 20 (2): 459–76.
- BAKER, BRUCE, AND MANU LEKUNZE. 2019. "The Character and Value of Vernacular Security: The Case of South West Cameroon." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 37 (2–3): 208–24.
- BERMAN, ELIZABETH POPP, AND DANIEL HIRSCHMAN. 2018. "The Sociology of Quantification: Where Are We Now?" *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews* 42 (3): 257–66.
- BEST, JOEL. 2012. *Damned Lies and Statistics: Untangling Numbers from the Media, Politicians and Activists* (revised ed.). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- BILLIG, MICHAEL. 2002. *Talking of the Royal Family* (revised ed.). London: Routledge.
- . 2021. "Rhetorical Uses of Precise Numbers and Semi-Magical Round Numbers in Political Discourse about COVID-19: Examples from the Government of the United Kingdom." *Discourse & Society* 32 (5): 542–58.
- BOGAIN, ARIANE. 2020. "Understanding Public Constructions of Counter-Terrorism: An Analysis of Online Comments during the State of Emergency in France (2015–2017)." *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 13 (4): 591–615.
- BOOTH, KEN. 2007. *Theory of World Security*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- BROOME, ANDRÉ, AND JOEL QUIRK. 2015. "The Politics of Numbers: The Normative Agendas of Global Benchmarking." *Review of International Studies* 41 (5): 813–8.
- BRUNO, ISABELLE, EMMANUEL DIDIER, AND TOMMASO VITALE. 2014. "Statactivism: Forms of Action between Disclosure and Affirmation." *Partecipazione e Conflitto* 7 (2): 198–220.
- BRUNO, ISABELLE, FLORENCE JANY-CATRICE, AND BÉATRICE TOUCHÉLAY. 2016. "Introduction. The Social Sciences of Quantification in France." In *The Social Sciences of Quantification: From Politics of Large Numbers to Target-Driven Policies*, edited by Isabelle Bruno, Florence Jany-Catrice and Béatrice Touchélay, 1–14. Cham: Springer.
- BUBANDT, NILS. 2005. "Vernacular Security: The Politics of Feeling Safe in Global, National and Local Worlds." *Security Dialogue* 36 (3): 275–96.

- BURGESS, JEAN, KATH ALBURY, ANTHONY MCCOSKER, AND ROWAN WILKEN. 2022. *Everyday Data Cultures*. Cambridge: Polity.
- BUSSE, JAN. 2015. "The Biopolitics of Statistics and Census in Palestine." *International Political Sociology* 9 (1): 70–89.
- CAMPBELL, DAVID. 1998. *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (revised ed.). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- CAMPBELL, DENIS. 2022, March 10. "Global COVID-19 Death Toll 'May be Three Times Higher than Official Figures'." *The Guardian*. Accessed October 24, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/10/global-covid-19-death-toll-may-be-three-times-higher-than-official-figures>.
- CÔTÉ, ADAM. 2016. "Agents without Agency: Assessing the Role of the Audience in Securitization Theory." *Security Dialogue* 47 (6): 541–58.
- CÔTÉ-BOUCHER, KARINE, FEDERICA INFANTINO, AND MARK B. SALTER. 2014. "Border Security as Practice: An Agenda for Research." *Security Dialogue* 45 (3): 195–208.
- CROFT, STUART, AND NICK VAUGHAN-WILLIAMS. 2017. "Fit for Purpose? Fitting Ontological Security Studies 'into' the Discipline of International Relations: Towards a Vernacular Turn." *Cooperation and Conflict* 52 (1): 12–30.
- DA SILVA, RAQUEL, AND RHYS CRILLEY. 2017. "Talk about Terror in Our Back Gardens": An Analysis of Online Comments about British Foreign Fighters in Syria." *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 10 (1): 162–86.
- DAVIES, MATT, AND AMANDA CHISHOLM. 2018. "Neoliberalism, Violence, and the Body: Dollhouse and the Critique of the Neoliberal Subject." *International Political Sociology* 12 (3): 274–90.
- DE ROSA, EUGENIA. 2014. "Gender Statactivism and NGOs: Development and Use of Gender Sensitive-data for Mobilizations and Women's Rights." *Partecipazione e Conflitto* 7 (2): 314–47.
- DERRIDA, JACQUES. 2003. "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides—A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida." In *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, edited by Giovanna Borradori, 85–136. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- DESROSIÈRES, ALAIN. 2016. "The Quantification of the Social Sciences: An Historical comparison." In *The Social Sciences of Quantification: From Politics of Large Numbers to Target-Driven Policies*, edited by Isabelle Bruno, Florence Jany-Catrice and Béatrice Touchelay, 183–204. Cham: Springer.
- DJOLAL, MARIKA. 2021. "Introduction: Fighting for Security from a Minor Perspective and against Securitisation of Minorities in Europe." *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 20 (1): 1–23.
- DOWNING, JOSEPH. 2021. "Memeing and Speaking Vernacular Security on Social Media: YouTube and Twitter Resistance to an ISIS Islamist Terror Threat to Marseille, France." *Journal of Global Security Studies* 6 (2): ogz081.
- DOWNING, JOSEPH, AND RICHARD DRON. 2022. "Theorising the 'Security Influencer': Speaking Security, Terror and Muslims on Social Media during the Manchester Bombings." *New Media & Society* 24 (5): 1234–57.
- DOWNING, JOSEPH, SARAH GERWENS, AND RICHARD DRON. 2022. "Tweeting Terrorism: Vernacular Conceptions of Muslims and Terror in the Wake of the Manchester Bombing on Twitter." *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 15 (2): 239–66.
- ELIAS, JUANITA, AND ADRIENNE ROBERTS. 2016. "Feminist Global Political Economies of the Everyday: From Bananas to Bingo." *Globalizations* 13 (6): 787–800.
- ENLOE, CYNTHIA. 2011. "The Mundane Matters." *International Political Sociology* 5 (4): 447–50.
- . 2014. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (2nd ed.). London: University of California Press.
- ESPELAND, WENDY NELSON. 2022. "Foreword: What Numbers Do." In *The New Politics of Numbers: Utopia, Evidence and Democracy*, edited by Andrea Mennicken and Robert Salais, vii–x. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- FAZAL, TANISHA M. 2014. "Dead Wrong?: Battle Deaths, Military Medicine, and Exaggerated Reports of War's Demise." *International Security* 39 (1): 95–125.
- FIORAMONTI, LORENZO. 2014. *How Numbers Rule the World: The Use and Abuse of Statistics in Global Politics*. London: Zed.
- FOUCAULT, MICHEL. 2007. *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France*, edited by Michel Senellart, 1977–78. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- GEORGE, NICOLE. 2017. "Policing 'Conjugal Order': Gender, Hybridity and Vernacular Security in Fiji." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 19 (1): 55–70.
- . 2018. "Liberal–Local Peacebuilding in Solomon Islands and Bougainville: Advancing a Gender-Just Peace?" *International Affairs* 94 (6): 1329–48.
- GRAYSON, KYLE. 2013. "How to Read Paddington Bear: Liberalism and the Foreign Subject in a Bear Called Paddington." *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 15 (3): 378–93.
- HACKING, IAN. 1982. "Biopower and the Avalanche of Printed Numbers." *Humanities in Society* 5 (3–4): 279–95.

- HANSEN, LENE. 2006. *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- HANSEN, HANS KRAUSE, AND TONY PORTER. 2012. "What Do Numbers Do in Transnational Governance?" *International Political Sociology* 6 (4): 409–26.
- HART, LINDA. 2022. "Willing, Caring and Capable: Gendered Ideals of Vernacular Preparedness in Finland." *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 29 (2): 405–27.
- HUFF, AMBER. 2017. "Black Sands, Green Plans and Vernacular (In) Security in the Contested Margins of South-Western Madagascar." *Peacebuilding* 5 (2): 153–69.
- HUFF, DARRELL. 1993. *How To Lie with Statistics*. London: W. W. Norton.
- IRAQ BODY COUNT. n.d. Accessed November 8, 2022. www.iraqbodycount.org.
- JACKSON, PATRICK THADDEUS. 2008. "Foregrounding Ontology: Dualism, Monism, and IR Theory." *Review of International Studies* 34 (1): 129–53.
- JARVIS, LEE. 2019. "Toward a Vernacular Security Studies: Origins, Interlocutors, Contributions, and Challenges." *International Studies Review* 21 (1): 107–26.
- JARVIS, LEE, AND MICHAEL LISTER. 2013. "Vernacular Security and Their Study: A Qualitative Analysis and Research Agenda." *International Relations* 27 (2): 158–79.
- . 2016. "What Would You Do? Everyday Conceptions and Constructions of Counter-Terrorism." *Politics* 36 (3): 277–91.
- KUHN, THOMAS S. 1970. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- KURYLO, BOHDANA. 2022. "Emergency: A Vernacular Contextual Approach." *International Studies Review* 24 (3): viac036.
- LINGARD, BOB. 2011. "Policy as Numbers: Ac/Counting for Educational Research." *The Australian Educational Researcher* 38 (4): 355–82.
- LISCHINSKY, ALON. 2015. "What is the Environment Doing in My Report? Analyzing the Environment-as-stakeholder Thesis through Corpus Linguistics." *Environmental Communication* 9 (4): 539–59.
- LISTER, MICHAEL, AND JARVIS LEE. 2013. "Disconnection and Resistance: Anti-Terrorism and Citizenship in the UK." *Citizenship Studies* 17 (6-7): 756–69.
- LÖFFLMANN, GEORG, AND NICK VAUGHAN-WILLIAMS. 2018. "Vernacular Imaginaries of European Border Security among Citizens: From Walls to Information Management." *European Journal of International Security* 3 (3): 382–400.
- LUCKHAM, ROBIN. 2017. "Whose Violence, Whose Security? Can Violence Reduction and Security Work for Poor, Excluded and Vulnerable People?" *Peacebuilding* 5 (2): 99–117.
- MAC GINTY, ROGER. 2019. "Complementarity and Interdisciplinarity in Peace and Conflict Studies." *Journal of Global Security Studies* 4 (2): 267–72.
- MAKKI, MUHAMMAD, AND MENAHIL TAHIR. 2021. "Mapping Normalcy through Vernacular Security-Development in Post-Conflict North Waziristan." *Conflict, Security & Development* 21 (5): 565–92.
- MARTIN, ARYN, AND MICHAEL LYNCH. 2009. "Counting Things and People: The Practices and Politics of Counting." *Social Problems* 56 (2): 243–66.
- MENNICKEN, ANDREA, AND WENDY NELSON ESPELAND. 2019. "What's New with Numbers? Sociological Approaches to the Study of Quantification." *Annual Review of Sociology* 45: 223–45.
- MERRIAM, ALLEN H. 1990. "Words and Numbers: Mathematical Dimensions of Rhetoric." *Southern Communication Journal* 55 (4): 337–54.
- MILAN, STEFANIA, AND LONNEKE VAN DER VELDEN. 2016. "The Alternative Epistemologies of Data Activism." *Digital Culture & Society* 2 (2): 57–74.
- MITRA, RAJARSHI. 2012. "The Famine in British India: Quantification Rhetoric and Colonial Disaster Management." *Journal of Creative Communications* 7 (1-2): 153–74.
- NYMAN, JONNA. 2021. "The Everyday Life of Security: Capturing Space, Practice, and Affect." *International Political Sociology* 15 (3): 313–37.
- O'LOUGHLIN, BEN, AND MARIE GILLESPIE. 2012. "Dissenting Citizenship? Young People and Political Participation in the Media-Security Nexus." *Parliamentary Affairs* 65 (1): 115–37.
- OYAWALE, AKINYEMI. 2022. "The Impact of (Counter-)Terrorism on Public (In)Security in Nigeria: A Vernacular Analysis." *Security Dialogue* 53 (5): 420–37.
- PEOPLES, COLUMBA, AND NICK VAUGHAN-WILLIAMS. 2010. *Critical Security Studies: An Introduction*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- PEZZELLE, SANDRO, BERNARDI RAFFAELLA, AND MANUELA PIAZZA. 2018. "Probing the Mental Representation of Quantifiers." *Cognition* 181: 117–26.
- PICHELSTORFER, ANNA, AND KATHARINA T. PAUL. 2022. "Unpacking the Role of Metrics in Global Vaccination Governance." *International Political Sociology* 16 (2): 1–18.
- POTTER, JONATHAN, MARGARET WETHERELL, AND ANDREW CHITTY. 1991. "Quantification Rhetoric—Cancer on Television." *Discourse & Society* 2 (3): 333–65.

- ROCHA DE SIQUEIRA, ISABEL. 2017. "Development by Trial and Error: The Authority of Good Enough Numbers." *International Political Sociology* 11 (2): 166–84.
- ROE, PAUL. 2004. "Securitization and Minority Rights: Conditions of Desecuritization." *Security Dialogue* 35 (3): 279–94.
- ROSE, NIKOLAS. 1991. "Governing by Numbers: Figuring out Democracy." *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 16 (7): 673–92.
- ROWLEY, C., AND J. WELDES. 2012. "The evolution of international security studies and the everyday: Suggestions from the Buffyverse." *Security Dialogue*. 43 (6): 513–530.
- RUDNICK, LISA, AND DAVID BOROMISZA-HABASHI. 2017. "The Emergence of a Local Strategies Approach to human Security." *Journal of Multicultural Discourses* 12 (4): 382–98.
- RUPPERT, EVELYN, ISIN ENGIN, AND DIDIER BIGO. 2017. "Data Politics." *Big Data & Society* 4 (2): 1–7.
- SHAYKHUTDINOV, RENAT. 2018. "The Terrorist Attacks in the Volga Region, 2012–13: Hegemonic Narratives and Everyday Understandings of (In) Security." *Central Asian Survey* 37 (1): 50–67.
- SJOBERG, LAURA, AND JEFFREY HOROWITZ. 2013. "Quantitative Methods." In *Critical Approaches to Security: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*, edited by Laura J. Shepherd, 103–17. Abingdon: Routledge.
- STANLEY, LIAM, AND RICHARD JACKSON. 2016. "Introduction: Everyday Narratives in World Politics." *Politics* 36 (3): 223–35.
- STEELE, JONATHAN, AND SUZANNE GOLDENBERG. 2008, March 19. "What is the Real Death Toll in Iraq?" *The Guardian*. Accessed October 24, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/mar/19/iraq>.
- SYLVESTER, CHRISTINE. 2013. "Experiencing the End and Afterlives of International Relations/Theory." *European Journal of International Relations* 19 (3): 609–26.
- TOOM, VICTOR. 2020. "Ontologically Dirty Knots: The Production of Numbers after the Srebrenica Genocide." *Security Dialogue* 51 (4): 358–76.
- VAUGHAN-WILLIAMS, NICK. 2008. "Borderwork Beyond Inside/Outside? Frontex, the Citizen–Detective and the War on Terror." *Space and Polity* 12 (1): 63–79.
- . 2021. *Vernacular Border Security: Citizens' Narratives of Europe's 'Migration Crisis'*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- VAUGHAN-WILLIAMS, NICK, AND DANIEL STEVENS. 2016a. *Everyday Security Threats: Perceptions, Experiences, and Consequences*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- . 2016b. "Vernacular Theories of Everyday (In)Security: The Disruptive Potential of Non-Elite Knowledge." *Security Dialogue* 47 (1): 40–58.
- YATES, KIT. 2021. *The Maths of Life and Death: Why Maths Is (Almost) Everything*. London: Quercus.