HUMAN SECURITY ANALYSIS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF REALISM, LIBERALISM AND CONSTRUCTIVISM

Achdijat Sulaeman

International Relation Department Faculty And Social Politics Sciences

e-mail : achdijat123@gmail.com

Abstract : Human security shifts the focus of security from the state to the individual, emphasizing the protection of "freedom from fear, freedom from want, and the freedom to live in dignity." This article examines the conceptual foundations of human security, linking it to the seven dimensions introduced by UNDP (1994), while updating the empirical landscape through selected indicators (global food security, essential health service coverage, etc.). The analysis shows that intersecting crises—conflict, climate change, and economic shocks—create vulnerabilities across dimensions, requiring responses that are people-centered, comprehensive, contextual, and preventive, as emphasized by the UN General Assembly (A/RES/66/290). Policy implications highlight the need for integrated protection-empowerment strategies, strengthened data governance, and adaptive, risk-based financing.

Keywords : Human security; UNDP 1994; A/RES/66/290; food security; UHC; climate risk; protection–empowerment.

1. Introduction

The concept of human security emerged as a critique of traditional security approaches that focused on territory and the military. The Human Development Report (HDR) 1994 formulated security as "people-centered," consisting of seven interrelated dimensions: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political.

In 2012, the UN General Assembly adopted the common understanding of human security (A/RES/66/290), affirming a people-centered, comprehensive, contextual, and preventive approach, with a dual strategy of protection and empowerment.

Human security, while increasingly recognized as a critical paradigm in International Relations (IR), has been conceptualized differently depending on theoretical perspectives. Three major schools of thought—Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism—offer contrasting views on the relevance and feasibility of placing individuals at the center of security analysis.

From a realist perspective, the state remains the primary referent of security. Realists argue that the anarchic nature of the international system compels states to prioritize military power and sovereignty over broader human-centric concerns. Human security issues such as poverty, disease, or climate change are often seen as secondary to the preservation of state survival and national interest. Consequently, while

realists acknowledge that threats such as pandemics or terrorism may indirectly affect state stability, they are reluctant to embrace human security as an autonomous framework. Critics highlight that realism's state-centric bias limits its ability to fully address transnational, non-military threats that directly endanger individuals.

Liberalism provides a more supportive framework for human security, emphasizing international cooperation, institutions, and the promotion of human rights. Liberals argue that global governance mechanisms—such as the United Nations, World Health Organization, and World Food Programme—play a crucial role in mitigating human insecurities across borders. Liberal institutionalists view human security as achievable through multilateral agreements, rule-based cooperation, and economic interdependence. For example, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are framed within liberal principles of shared responsibility and collective problem-solving. Thus, liberalism expands the concept of security to encompass economic, health, and environmental dimensions, aligning more closely with the UNDP's seven pillars of human security.

Constructivists approach human security by emphasizing the role of ideas, norms, and identities in shaping global security agendas. They argue that security is not merely an objective condition but also a social construct influenced by dominant narratives and international discourse. Human security gained prominence in the post-Cold War era partly due to the diffusion of norms related to human rights, humanitarian intervention, and global solidarity. Constructivists highlight how epistemic communities, advocacy networks, and international organizations frame human security as a legitimate concern, thereby influencing state behavior and policy. In this sense, human security is understood not only as a policy goal but also as a normative framework that reflects changing conceptions of what constitutes "security."

2. Conceptual Framework: The Seven Dimensions of Human Security

UNDP (1994) classified threats to people into seven domains: (1) economic (secure livelihood), (2) food (physical and economic access to food), (3) health (access to care and protection from disease), (4) environmental (protection from degradation/disasters), (5) personal (freedom from violence), (6) community (protection of identity/social cohesion), and (7) political (basic rights, participation, accountability).

Conceptual Framework: The Seven Dimensions of Human Security The concept of human security, first popularized by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its 1994 Human Development Report, identifies seven interrelated dimensions. These dimensions underscore the multidimensionality of threats faced by individuals, emphasizing that security cannot be achieved solely through military power but requires comprehensive protection across different spheres of human life (UNDP, 1994) :

1. Economic Security ; Economic security entails ensuring a basic income and access to resources necessary for a dignified life. According to Sen (1999), economic deprivation undermines individual freedoms and contributes to social instability. Issues such as unemployment, extreme poverty, and inequality represent significant threats. The World Bank (2022) highlights that over 700 million people still live in extreme poverty, reflecting persistent economic insecurity.

2. Food Security ; Food security refers to reliable access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2023) reports that approximately 733 million people face chronic hunger globally. Food insecurity often correlates with political instability, climate change,

and conflict, particularly in vulnerable regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (Devereux & Maxwell, 2001).

3. Health Security ; Health security focuses on protecting people from diseases, malnutrition, and unsafe living conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the fragility of global health systems, exposing gaps in preparedness and access (WHO, 2021). The Universal Health Coverage (UHC) index remains uneven, with low- and middle-income countries facing structural deficiencies.
4. Environmental Security ; Environmental security emphasizes the importance of a safe physical environment. Climate change, biodiversity loss, and natural disasters are major threats to human well-being (Barnett, 2003). Rising sea levels and extreme weather events increasingly displace populations, leading to what scholars term "climate refugees" (Bettini, 2013).
5. Personal Security ; Personal security refers to protection from physical violence, whether from the state, non-state actors, or within communities. Civil wars, terrorism, and gender-based violence (GBV) exemplify threats to personal safety. Kaldor (2012) stresses that in "new wars," civilians are often the primary targets, raising concerns for human security in conflict-affected zones.
6. Community Security ; Community security relates to the preservation of cultural identity and protection from inter-ethnic, religious, or communal tensions. According to Paris (2001), the erosion of community cohesion may lead to violent conflict and displacement. Initiatives that strengthen local resilience and intercultural dialogue are crucial for maintaining peace.
7. Political Security ; Political security ensures protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Repression, authoritarianism, and denial of civil liberties remain critical threats. The Freedom House Report (2023) indicates a global decline in political rights and civil liberties for the 17th consecutive year, highlighting the fragility of political security in both democratic and non-democratic states.

While each dimension addresses a distinct aspect of human well-being, they are deeply interconnected. For instance, food insecurity may exacerbate health crises, while environmental degradation often leads to economic instability and forced migration. Thus, human security requires a holistic, multi-sectoral approach that bridges development, governance, and peacebuilding.

3. Methodology and Data Sources

This paper combines: (a) the normative frameworks of UNDP (1994) and UNGA (2012), and (b) updated global indicators relevant to each dimension. Two quantitative indicators were selected for measurability and regular updates: (i) prevalence of hunger (SOFI), and (ii) Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Service Coverage Index (WHO). SOFI 2024 estimates that ~733 million people suffered from hunger in 2023 (range: 713–757 million; ~9.1% of the global population).

WHO reports that the UHC Service Coverage Index increased globally from 45 (2000) to 68 (2021), but has stagnated since 2019; around 4.5 billion people are not fully covered by essential services, with significant gaps in financial protection.

4. Dimension-by-Dimension Analysis

A multidimensional framework of human security invites a critical analysis through the lens of International Relations theories. Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism offer competing yet complementary insights into how each of the seven dimensions is understood, prioritized, or contested in global politics.

4.1. Economic Security

Key issue. Income insecurity, unstable employment, and rising living costs reduce household capacity to absorb shocks. In human security, the economy is foundational because failures here exacerbate vulnerabilities across food, health, and political dimensions.

Analysis. Livelihood diversification, social protection coverage, and price stability are essential mitigation tools. The protection–empowerment approach calls for adaptive safety nets (responsive to life-cycle/seasonal cycles) alongside empowerment strategies (skills development, green MSMEs).

Proposed indicators. Poverty rate, unemployment/informal employment, social protection coverage, and price volatility of basic goods.

4.2. Food Security

Global status. SOFI 2024 estimates that 733 million people (range: 713–757 million) faced hunger in 2023—around one in eleven people—with stark regional variation (in Africa ~1 in 5).

Risk drivers. Conflict, climate shocks (e.g., El Niño), and economic crises exacerbate household vulnerability; more than 2.8 billion people could not afford a healthy diet in 2022.

Key policies. Building resilient food systems: protecting smallholder farmers, investing in post-harvest infrastructure, diversifying local food sources, and counter-cyclical financing for nutrition programs.

4.3. Health Security

Global status. WHO reports the global UHC Service Coverage Index at 68 (2021), stagnating since 2019; more than half of the world's population is not fully covered by essential health services, and around 2 billion people face financial hardship from health spending.

Human security implications. Lack of service coverage and financial protection amplifies preventable deaths and poverty from illness.

Key policies. Expanding UHC through priority benefits packages based on disease burden, progressive pre-paid financing and pooling, strengthening primary care, and pharmaceutical governance to reduce drug costs.

4.4. Environmental Security

Key issue. Environmental degradation, hydrometeorological disasters, and climate change cause livelihood disruptions, internal migration, and health risks. (IPCC AR6 stresses that risks rise with warming, with cascading impacts on food–water–health systems.)

Key policies. Ecosystem-based adaptation, multi-hazard early warning systems, and just energy transitions to reduce exposure to pollution and energy price shocks.

4.5. Personal Security

Key issue. Interpersonal violence, crime, and gender-based violence undermine safety and productivity. Under human security, states are obliged to prevent violence and provide access to justice—alongside victim recovery services—as part of "freedom from fear."

Key policies. Community policing, evidence-based violence prevention (hot-spots policing, youth engagement programs), criminal justice reform, and integrated victim support services.

4.6. Community Security

Key issue. Identity-based tensions, discrimination, and fragile social cohesion drive communal violence and disinformation.

Key policies. Local conflict prevention architecture (mediation, social cohesion programming), minority protection, digital governance (countering online hate/violence), and strengthening civic space.

4.7. Political Security

Normative foundation. A/RES/66/290 affirms the right of all people to live in freedom and dignity; a people-centered response requires states to guarantee civil-political rights and meaningful participation.

Key policies. Reform for accountability (transparency, anti-corruption), human rights protection, inclusive elections, and corrective mechanisms against repression/discrimination.

5. Interdependence and "Spillover" Risks

Vulnerability in one dimension exacerbates others: climate shocks → crop failure → rising food prices → malnutrition → health vulnerability and socio-political tensions. Thus, single-sector policy designs are suboptimal; cross-sectoral intervention packages are more effective (e.g., adaptive social protection linked with early warning systems and nutrition programs).

6. Illustrative Case Snapshots

Food–Health: In conflict- or climate-affected areas, stabilizing nutrition requires combined cash/food assistance with primary health services and water–sanitation support. SOFI 2024 shows stalled progress toward Zero Hunger, calling for more flexible and cost-effective financing.

Health–Economic: Stagnating UHC increases risk of illness-driven poverty; expanding pooling and strengthening primary care reduces preventable mortality and safeguards household income.

Political–Community–Personal: Inclusive governance reduces risks of polarization and violence, strengthening social resilience.

7. Policy Implications

1. Mainstreaming human security. Use A/RES/66/290 as a framework: people-centered, comprehensive, contextual, preventive, and do-no-harm.

2. Cross-dimensional policy packages.

Economic–food: adaptive safety nets + food production/logistics interventions (SOFI trends).

Health: expand UHC (S-CI) and financial protection, especially for vulnerable groups.

Environment: invest in adaptation and early warning systems linked to social and health services.

3. Risk-based financing. Align public budgets and development assistance to fund cross-sectoral packages with contingency financing triggered when risk indicators exceed thresholds.

4. Data governance & accountability. Build a human security dashboard with core indicators (SOFI, UHC S-CI, poverty, interpersonal violence, social cohesion, political participation) and policy feedback loops.

5. Community empowerment. Support local organizations and civil society to co-produce services (health, nutrition, social protection) for context-appropriate responses.

8. Limitations

This paper centers on available global indicators, which may not capture subnational variations. In addition, some dimensions (personal and community security) lack standardized cross-country, up-to-date indicators.

9. Conclusion

Human security provides an integrative lens for assessing and reducing multidimensional vulnerabilities. Recent data underscores two urgent agendas: stagnating UHC and stalled progress on global food security. Adopting a human security approach—people-centered, comprehensive, preventive, and combining protection with empowerment—is essential for building long-term social resilience and accelerating SDG achievement.

References

1. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Human Development Report 1994: New Dimensions of Human Security. New York: UNDP. (Chapters: "New dimensions of human security" & "Components of human security").

2. United Nations General Assembly. Resolution A/RES/66/290: Follow-up to paragraph 143 on human security of the 2005 World Summit Outcome. 10 September 2012. (Common understanding of human security).

3. FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, WHO. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2024 (SOFI 2024). (2023 estimates: 713–757 million; midpoint ~733 million; ~9.1% of global population).

4. World Health Organization (WHO). Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Fact Sheet (26 March 2025) & UHC Global Monitoring Report 2023. (UHC S-CI global 68 in 2021; stagnation since 2019; ~4.5 billion not fully covered; significant financial burden).

5. UNICEF Data. SOFI 2024—Key messages on affordability of healthy diets. (2.8 billion people unable to afford healthy diets in 2022).