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Security and Governance: The Discursive Power of "National Security"

Power relations are at the core of politics. Unlike authoritarian or totalitarian regimes, democratic regimes provide mechanisms by which the ruling powers are checked by the ruled. In fact, avoiding and minimizing domination is what democracy is about. In this part of our presentation, the argument is made that the concept of “national security” is able to alter this process of democratic checks and balances. Based on the concept of securitization developed by the Copenhagen School, security is seen as speech act, serving both as political tool and political goal. The use of “national security” as a political argument allows ruling powers to go unchecked to a larger degree than they usually would. Maintaining the protection of the national security is at stake, democratic control may be decreased, while room for political maneuver is being increased. This has become apparently striking with regard to the security discourse in the United States following the attacks of September 11, 2001. The paper will analyze the power of the national security argument by looking at Congressional debates and legislative outcomes.