

The Rise of Online Gambling and Its Securitization Efforts in Indonesia Post COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Online gambling activities in Indonesia have seen a significant increase in recent years, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. One of the factors contributing to this rise is boredom due to social distancing measures implemented to minimize the spread of the virus. This rapid increase has turned online gambling into a serious threat for Indonesia, necessitating immediate action to address the issue. This research aims to examine the securitization stages undertaken by the Indonesian government to tackle this threat, using the securitization theory by The Copenhagen School. Through qualitative research methods, it was found that the online gambling issue has been successfully securitized by the Indonesian government through three stages: speech act, acceptance by the audience, and emergency measures. The author also discovered that during the acceptance by the audience stage, the response received was substantial and varied, ranging from individuals to institutions, indicating that the issue has gained attention from the target audience of this securitization.

Keywords: *Online Gambling, Transnational Crime, Securitization, Indonesia*

Aktivitas judi online yang terjadi di Indonesia terus mengalami kenaikan yang signifikan dalam beberapa tahun terakhir, terkhususnya pada saat pandemi Covid-19 yang salah satu faktornya dikarenakan kebosanan akibat pemberlakuan kebijakan pembatasan kontak demi meminimalisir penyebaran virus tersebut. Kenaikan aktivitas yang sangat pesat ini menjadikan isu ini menjadi suatu ancaman yang nyata bagi Indonesia dan membutuhkan tindakan untuk segera mengatasi ancaman ini. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk melihat tahapan sekuritisasi yang dilakukan oleh pemerintah Indonesia dalam upayanya mengatasi ancaman ini dengan menggunakan teori sekuritisasi milik The Copenhagen School. Dengan metode penelitian deskriptif menggunakan teknik penelusuran data studi pustaka. Ditemukan bahwa isu judi online telah dapat disekuritisasi oleh pemerintah Indonesia melalui tiga tahapan yakni speech act, acceptance by the audience, serta emergency measure. Penulis juga mendapatkan teuan bahwa dalam upaya sekuritisasi ini, dalam tahapan acceptance by the audience, respon yang diterima cukup banyak dan mencakup tingkatan yang cukup bervariasi mulai dari individu hingga instansi, yang membuktikan bahwa isu ini telah mendapatkan perhatian dari target audiens sekuritisasi ini.

Kata Kunci: *Judi Online, Kejahatan Transnasional, Sekuritisasi, Indonesia*

Introduction

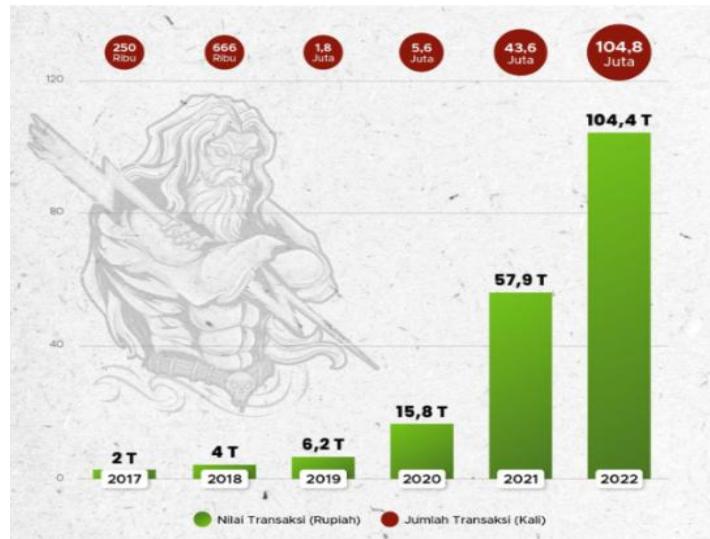
Advances in information and communication technology have transformed how people connect, work, and do business. The internet has removed geographical barriers, driving major social, economic, and cultural changes. (Husen et. Al., 2022). While this digital expansion has generated numerous social and economic benefits, it has simultaneously facilitated the rise of new forms of criminal activity. These technology-based offenses, collectively known as cybercrime, represent a significant challenge in today's digital environment (Jidan & Fitriono, 2024). As noted by David S. Wall (2024), cybercrime encompasses criminal acts committed within digital spaces and reflects the broad spectrum of insecurities and risks inherent in the online world. One prominent example is online gambling, which differs fundamentally from its traditional counterpart because it does not require a physical setting for its operation. Through online platforms, individuals can participate in gambling activities with ease and convenience, thereby contributing to the rapid proliferation of such illicit practices (Sitompul, 2012).

Gambling is defined by Kartini Kartono (2005) as a "deliberate wager that involves risking something of value, with an awareness of the potential risks and expectations related to events, games, competitions, races, and uncertain outcomes." The term "online" refers to activities conducted over the internet. Therefore, online gambling can be described as an activity where individuals place bets using agreed-upon values, utilizing the internet to access these activities. Gainsbury (2015) add that Online gambling offers an alternative to visiting physical venues. It is automated, private, and accessible anytime and anywhere through fast internet connections, allowing users to place bets and get results almost instantly.

Online gambling largely involves overseas platforms, making it primarily a transnational issue. Online gambling operates in a highly concealed manner, making it difficult to detect and investigate. Unlike traditional gambling, which requires physical space and personnel, online gambling only needs internet-based software or programs, often disguised through web advertisements. Participants can hide their identities, locations, and use virtual accounts to place bets. Financial transactions are electronic, often involving bank transfers or temporary accounts managed by agents, which makes evidence easy to destroy or conceal. The operations are usually organized by hierarchical, cross-border groups that use coded communication and multi-level structures, enabling gambling without any physical meetings (Jia Y. et. Al. 2022). This sophisticated modus operandi, combined with its global reach, makes online gambling crimes particularly elusive, contributing to related criminal activities and posing serious threats to public order, economic stability, and the security of internet users' assets.

Gambling has emerged as a significant social concern and is regarded as a crime due to its illegal status in Indonesia (Zurohman, Astuti, & Sanjoto, 2016). In Indonesia, online gambling is governed by various regulations, including the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (UU ITE). Article 27 of this law addresses gambling in cyberspace, stating: "Any person intentionally and without authority distributes, transmits, or makes accessible Electronic Information or Documents containing gambling content." The penalties associated with this article include imprisonment for up to 6 years and/or a fine of up to IDR 1 billion.

Figure 1. Transaction Value and the Number of Online Gambling Transactions in Indonesia (2017-2022)



Source: GoodStats

The data presented indicates a clear upward trend in the transaction value of online gambling among the Indonesian population. In 2017, the transaction value was only IDR 2 trillion, which doubled to IDR 4 trillion in 2018. This figure increased further to IDR 6.2 trillion in 2019. In 2020, the transaction value surged to IDR 15.8 trillion, and in 2021, it dramatically rose almost fourfold to IDR 57.9 trillion. The most recent data for 2022 indicates a transaction value of IDR 104 trillion, which is fifty-two times greater than the figure from 2017. Additionally, the number of transactions related to online gambling saw a significant rise, growing from 250,000 transactions in 2017 to 104.8 million transactions in 2022 (GoodStats, 2023).

According to the latest data from PPATK released last year, online gambling activities in Indonesia continued to escalate, with a transaction value of IDR 327 trillion and a total of 168 million transactions, estimated to have been made by around 3.2 million people in Indonesia (CNBC Indonesia, 2024). That number represents both the highest transaction value and the greatest number of transactions in online gambling in the country, accounting for more than half of the total transaction value since 2017, which stands at IDR 517 trillion, representing 63% of the total transaction value over the past five years. These impressive numbers, both in terms of transaction value and the quantity of online gambling transactions in Indonesia, highlight the ongoing growth of this illegal activity, which cannot be overlooked.

The figure above also shows a sharp rise in online gambling during the COVID-19 pandemic, both in Indonesia and globally. This increase is largely due to the closure of physical gambling venues during public health restrictions (Hodgins & Stevens, 2021). Lin & Shih (2024) also note that the pandemic accelerated the shift from traditional to online gambling, with online revenues eventually surpassing those of physical casinos. However, this trend raises concerns, as increased online gambling can lead to gambling disorder, which is linked to depression, substance abuse, domestic violence, financial ruin, and a higher risk of suicide (Moreira, Azeredo, & Dias, 2023).

In a previous study on online gambling in Indonesia by Budiman et al. (2022), it was found that online gambling significantly impacts its participants, particularly among

young people. When these youth become addicted to online gambling, they may develop negative behaviors, such as spending excessive time gambling, reducing physical activity, neglecting personal health, avoiding essential daily tasks, minimizing social interactions, struggling to resist urges to gamble, and failing to fulfill work and personal responsibilities. The research also revealed that information about online gambling is frequently acquired through peer interactions, which piques curiosity and can lead individuals to engage in online gambling, ultimately resulting in addiction. Additionally, it has been observed that the operators of online gambling sites are not located in Indonesia but in countries where gambling is legal or where the penalties for violating gambling laws are relatively lenient. These operators often provide online gambling services to regions where such activities are prohibited, allowing them to operate and profit substantially without the risk of arrest or prosecution (Paoli, 2014). This observation is further supported by statements from Budi Arie, the Minister of Communication and Information Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, who noted that in Southeast Asia, only Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam do not legalize online gambling. As a result, online gambling platform providers and operators in Indonesia are predominantly from abroad (Tempo, 2023).

Transnational organized crime group in online gambling is growing quickly and threatens national and regional security. Criminal groups exploit differences in regulations to operate in legal grey areas, such as using Cambodia as a hub for Indonesia's illegal online gambling activities. Between 2022 and 2024, hundreds of Indonesians were reportedly exploited and forced to work in these centres, showing how such crimes increasingly exceed the control of individual states (Laras, 2025).

The growing prevalence of online gambling poses a significant threat to Indonesia's national security and, more critically, its economic security. The complexities of this activity, which can operate transnationally present a clear and pressing danger to the nation. If this issue is not addressed promptly, there is a strong likelihood that more foreign operators will seek to enter the Indonesian market due to its high-profit potential, complicating efforts to resolve this matter. Therefore, securitization initiatives are essential to recognize online gambling as a security threat to Indonesia. With the uncontrolled increase in transaction flows each year, especially in recent years, this issue has become urgent and is the focal point of this paper.

This study engages with the concept of securitization as articulated by The Copenhagen School, notably through the contributions of Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde (1998). Securitization refers to a heightened stage of politicization, wherein an issue is framed as an urgent problem that demands immediate resolution due to its perceived existential threat. Within this framework, the issue becomes a primary concern that must be addressed swiftly to avert potential risks to broader stability or existence. Furthermore, securitization justifies actions that lie outside conventional norms, emphasizing that the identified threat necessitates prompt intervention. According to this rationale, if the issue remains unaddressed, all other considerations are rendered secondary. Thus, responding to the problem with extraordinary measures is viewed as both legitimate and essential. This perspective underscores the critical need for a rapid and decisive reaction to the recognized threat, eclipsing regular procedures or standards to protect the securitized entity.

The concept of securitization encompasses three fundamental components: existential threats, the securitizing actor, and the referent object. Existential threats involve the process of elevating an issue that previously garnered minimal public attention and did not necessitate governmental intervention into a significant concern. The securitizing

actor is the stakeholder that designates the issue as a security problem, asserting that the referent object faces a genuine threat requiring immediate action. This actor also endeavors to persuade both the public and authorities of the necessity for urgent measures. Finally, the referent object is the entity identified as being under real threat and possesses a legitimate claim to ensure its protection; this may include a state, a community, the environment, or specific values, all positioned as entities that must be defended against the articulated threat.

The concept of securitization involves three primary stages: the speech act, audience acceptance, and emergency measures. The speech act represents the process through which the securitizing actor constructs and articulates a collective understanding of a perceived threat. In this phase, the actor underscores to the referent object the critical importance and urgency of addressing the identified issue. The success of this stage is determined by whether the audience acknowledges the issue as a security threat. The second stage, audience acceptance, indicates that securitization is deemed successful only when the audience recognizes the existential threat that has been presented. Acceptance from the audience signifies that the speech act performed by the securitizing actor has resonated positively with the public. However, it is important to note that the Copenhagen School does not provide specific insight into who constitutes this audience. The final stage of the securitization process involves emergency measures, which are typically invoked to justify the existence of the existential threat when prompt action is not taken. The Copenhagen School asserts that extraordinary actions are not always necessary within the securitization process. Instead, this stage serves primarily to rationalize the need for emergency measures to address the pertinent issue at hand.

Method

This research uses qualitative approach. As outlined by Sugiyono (2020), descriptive research aims to identify the existence of variables independently, whether involving a single variable or multiple variables, without making comparisons among them. The goal of descriptive research is to explore the relationship between different variables. In this study, a descriptive research method is employed to characterize the securitization process concerning online gambling issues in Indonesia, following the stages of securitization defined by The Copenhagen School. The data utilized in this research is qualitative, providing non-numeric insights into processes, conditions, and events, presented in the form of written narratives (Haryono and Ilkodar, 2005). For data collection, literature review techniques were applied, involving the compilation of information from various sources, including books, journals, academic papers, newspapers, and other reputable written materials. The data sources comprise two categories: primary and secondary data. The research scope commences with the issuance of Presidential Decree (Keppres) No. 17 of 2023, which signifies the conclusion of the COVID-19 pandemic status in Indonesia (Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia, 2023). This study is framed around the specific moment when the Indonesian government officially announced the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Presidential Decree No. 17 of 2023 represents a critical juncture, marking the formal transition from pandemic response to post-pandemic recovery in the country's public health policy and governance. The issuance of this decree establishes a foundation for analyzing subsequent social, economic, and governmental changes, particularly concerning emerging issues such as online gambling and other challenges that arise in the post-pandemic landscape.

Results and Discussion

Before delving into the analysis of the stages and processes involved in securitization efforts, it is crucial to identify the three key elements that underpin this concept. The first element pertains to existential threats; in this context, the threat being addressed is related to online gambling practices. As highlighted in the background section, there has been a significant surge in online gambling activities in recent years. Recent data indicates that the transaction value for online gambling in Indonesia reached 104.4 trillion rupiah in 2022, an astonishing 50-times increase compared to figures from 2017, accompanied by a total of 104.8 million transactions in that year. The prevalence of online gambling in Indonesia not only affects the economic well-being of its participants, often leading them into debt, but also undermines essential social and spiritual values (Zurohman, Astuti, & Sanjoto, 2016). In Indonesia, online gambling remains illegal and is viewed as a criminal act, as it sharply contradicts the nation's moral standards and religious norms (Setiawati, et al., 2022). This issue represents a significant threat across all layers of society, primarily due to its rapid growth and increasing transaction amounts, making online gambling a real and present danger. The next key component is the securitizing actor, which in this context is identified as the President of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, who is striving to address the threats associated with online gambling. This will be further examined in the subsequent discussion of the stages involved. The final component is the referent object, which, in this case, is the continued well-being and stability of Indonesian society that the securitizing actor aims to protect from the identified existential threat.

(1) Speech Act

In addressing the significant threat posed by online gambling to Indonesian society, President Joko Widodo has taken the initiative to express the urgency of this issue. He has repeatedly emphasized that online gambling has become a genuine danger that must be tackled without delay. The initial instance of this concern being articulated by President Widodo occurred during the Digital Literacy Movement event on June 13, 2023, where he highlighted the growing and concerning nature of online gambling activities.

"Hoaxes, online fraud, gambling, sexual exploitation of children, cyberbullying, hate speech, digital radicalism need to be watched out for as they threaten the unity of the nation... Gambling is like drugs; it has infiltrated all layers of society. This cannot be left unchecked. I'm not talking about hundreds of sites. There are tens of thousands of online gambling sites. It is impossible that there is no backing or at least neglect."

In his initial address, President Joko Widodo underscored the significance of a substantial digital transformation aimed at enhancing public productivity. However, he also emphasized that this rapid technological advancement must be met with the society's readiness to manage and promote positive content. He reminded the public that such progress entails new responsibilities. It is imperative to empower individuals with sufficient digital literacy so they can discern and share constructive and beneficial information. Furthermore, there is a need for increased education on healthy and ethical internet usage to mitigate potential threats that may emerge in the digital realm (CNN Indonesia, 2023).

On a separate occasion, President Joko Widodo conveyed the serious concerns regarding online gambling through key figures in the campaign against it. One such instance involved the Minister of Communication and Information, Budi Arie, who articulated this message during a press interview on October 13, 2023. He emphasized the necessity of eradicating online gambling due to its detrimental effects on the impoverished (Kompas, 2023). Following this initial directive to combat online gambling, Detik News (2023) reported on October 27, 2023, that President Joko Widodo also issued a message to Chief of Police General Listyo Sigit Prabowo, outlining further instructions :

"Mr. President (Joko Widodo) has ordered that gambling related to football be eradicated. Since 2015, I have emphasized the importance of keeping football free from gambling, free from football mafia. So, when the police arrested those related to football and online gambling, I think this is very good. Don't stop here, continue, so that football is truly clean, the game is fair. This will drive the transformation of Indonesian football, with no match-fixing, no money games in matches, and that will drive the transformation of Indonesian football."

President Joko Widodo's messages and directives clearly demonstrate Indonesia's concerted efforts to eradicate online gambling within the country. These initiatives did not conclude in 2023; the ongoing threat posed by online gambling has been consistently addressed by President Widodo on multiple occasions. On June 12, 2024, at the Istana Negara, he once again emphasized the detrimental effects of online gambling, highlighting its impact not only on individuals but also on the futures of the nation's children (President of the Republic of Indonesia, 2024).

"Don't gamble... Don't gamble... Don't engage in gambling... either offline or online. It's better to save the money or use it as capital for business... Gambling is not just about risking money, not just a casual game with a prize. But gambling risks your future, both your own future, the future of your family, and the future of our children."

Given the various statements mentioned, it is evident that online gambling poses a significant threat to Indonesia. President Joko Widodo has consistently highlighted the detrimental effects of this activity, aiming to foster an understanding within Indonesian society—his intended audience for this securitization—that this issue is indeed a serious concern that requires urgent resolution.

(2) Acceptance By the Audience

The subsequent stage in the securitization process, as previously discussed, is the acceptance by the audience, which is a crucial component of the entire process. This stage is essential because the success of securitization hinges on the audience's acknowledgment of the genuine threat posed by the securitizing actor. According to Balzacq (2013), the relevant target audience in this securitization process can encompass individuals as well as entire institutions.

Research conducted by the Center for Digital Society (CfDS) at Gadjah Mada University (2023) indicates that public discourse surrounding online gambling in Indonesia has been on the rise. In their study titled "Polemik Judi Online di Indonesia," researchers collected and analyzed data comprehensively from January 2022 to November 2023. The study examined 17,250 posts on social media platform X and 1,439 articles from

various Indonesian digital media outlets. The findings revealed a notable increase in discussions about online gambling, which began to surge sharply in early 2023, particularly in March, and peaked in October 2023.

The study not only analyzed public discourse on social media but also examined the news coverage by major Indonesian media outlets. It found that two media entities were most prominent in reporting on the issue: Detik, with 750 articles, and CNN Indonesia, with 268 articles. Overall, the data collected during this period revealed that public sentiment towards online gambling was predominantly negative. A significant majority of posts and news articles expressed disapproval; specifically, 13,788 out of 17,250 posts on social media X conveyed negative sentiment. Similarly, 1,329 out of 1,439 articles in digital media reflected negative connotations regarding online gambling.

Thus, the overwhelming sentiment across social media platforms illustrates widespread acceptance of the threat construction. The public is not merely aware of online gambling, they are actively responding to it as a harmful and unacceptable phenomenon. Media outlets like Detik and CNN Indonesia act as amplifiers of the securitizing narrative. In this way, mainstream media functioned as a key actor that magnified and legitimised the construction of online gambling as a national threat, helping align public sentiment with the securitizing discourse.

In addition to the research conducted by Gadjah Mada University, public recognition of the genuine threat posed by online gambling was evident through various demonstrations. One notable protest organized by the Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam (HMI) took place in front of the Ministry of Communication and Information in Central Jakarta. During this mass demonstration on June 29, 2023, participants called on the National Police (POLRI) to take stringent action against individuals involved in online gambling activities, particularly targeting public figures who promote online gambling websites. Protesters demanded immediate government action to eradicate online gambling. (Media Indonesia, 2024). The HMI protest shows active civil society mobilisation, indicating that the public has embraced the framing of online gambling as a serious threat and is pressuring the state to act.

The acceptance of the constructed threat posed by online gambling, as conveyed through the previously mentioned speech acts, has garnered additional support in addressing this issue from various institutions. For instance, Bank BRI, as reported by Tempo (2024), has blocked approximately 1,049 accounts suspected of involvement in online gambling activities in Indonesia. The bank's risk management director indicated that these account blockages have been in progress since July 2023 and have continued for over a year.

Further backing has been expressed by the Attorney General's Office of the Republic of Indonesia. As reported by Berita Nasional (2024), Harli Siregar, the Head of the Legal Application Center at the Attorney General's Office, stated their commitment to supporting the government's initiatives to combat online gambling by imposing maximum penalties on offenders. He emphasized that their aim is to deter violators through stringent legal measures, given the public concern surrounding this issue. Institutional responses from bodies such as BRI and the Attorney General's Office demonstrate state-level compliance with the securitizing move. These institutions operationalise the government's framing of online gambling as a security threat. Their actions lend formal legitimacy to the narrative and show that the state apparatus is aligning itself with, and reinforcing, the securitization process.

In conclusion, the constructed threat of online gambling, as articulated by President Joko Widodo, has garnered widespread recognition and support from various segments of society. Public sentiment, demonstrations, and institutional endorsements clearly indicate that this issue has gained significant traction and is now regarded as a serious threat by both the public and authorities. This multi-level alignment signals that the second stage of the securitization process, audience acceptance, has been effectively achieved. The growing awareness paves the way for continued efforts to address the challenge in Indonesia.

(3) Extraordinary Measure

The final stage in the securitization process, as articulated by The Copenhagen School, involves the implementation of emergency measures. This phase encompasses actions that exceed standard procedures to effectively address the constructed threat at hand. In this context, the emergency measures pertain to the extraordinary steps taken by the Indonesian government to combat online gambling.

The widespread accessibility of online gambling sites and apps through the internet has emerged as a pressing issue that necessitates eradication (Kuasa & Jaya, 2022). In response, one of the significant measures undertaken by President Joko Widodo was to block access and shut down online gambling platforms in Indonesia. According to CNN Indonesia (2024), the government has successfully closed approximately 2.1 million online gambling sites. This decisive action underscores the seriousness with which President Widodo's administration is addressing the escalating and perilous problem of online gambling in Indonesia, which has resulted in numerous casualties..

In addition to shutting down online gambling sites, President Joko Widodo is in the process of establishing a dedicated task force aimed at combating and eradicating online gambling in Indonesia. Jokowi has formed the Satuan Tugas Pemberantasan Perjudian Daring (Task Force for Eradicating Online Gambling) through the issuance of Presidential Decree No. 21 of 2024 (Menko Polhukam, 2024). According to this decree, the task force has been assigned three primary responsibilities. First, it will take action against accounts used to store funds generated from online gambling activities, which includes blocking these accounts and conducting thorough investigations. Second, the task force will target individuals involved in the buying and selling of accounts that facilitate online gambling. Third, it will address various online games identified as being associated with online gambling activities through mechanisms for inspecting virtual account top-ups. The task force will be led by the Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs, and will include the Minister of Communication and Information Technology, the Director-General of Information and Public Communication (IKP) from the Ministry of Communication and Information as his deputy, along with the Chief of Police and the Head of the Criminal Investigation Unit serving as heads of the Law Enforcement Task Force.

The actions taken by the Indonesian government under President Joko Widodo's leadership clearly reflect a serious commitment to addressing the escalating issue of online gambling in Indonesia, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This initiative underscores a robust determination to confront the complex and detrimental impacts of online gambling activities, which have emerged as a pressing concern and a significant threat to society.

Conclusion

Based on the preceding analysis, this study shows that the Indonesian government has attempted to securitize the issue of online gambling in the post-pandemic period, yet the effectiveness of this effort cannot be assessed solely through the procedural completion of the three stages of securitization. Presidential statements have clearly functioned as speech acts, and the alignment of responses across multiple levels, society, state institutions, and related agencies indicates that the audience acceptance stage has been achieved. However, the depth of this acceptance remains uneven, as many responses appear driven by moral panic grounded in religious values rather than by a full internalization of an existential threat narrative.

Furthermore, although the government has introduced policies such as website blocking and the establishment of the Task Force for Eradicating Online Gambling, the extent to which these measures constitute extraordinary actions remains debatable. Many of the policies fall within existing regulatory and law-enforcement frameworks, and therefore do not fully reflect the exceptional measures expected in a mature securitization process. Accordingly, this study argues that the securitization of online gambling in Indonesia is ongoing and supported by clear audience alignment, yet the limited transformation of policy practices reveals a gap between securitizing claims and measurable outcomes. The absence of a significant decline in online gambling activity further underscores this discrepancy.

These limitations shape the study's contribution by demonstrating how securitization can operate symbolically in contexts where governments face pressure to respond rapidly to emerging social issues, but lack the institutional capacity or political commitment to enact genuinely extraordinary measures. Future research should examine policy implementation more closely, map variations in audience acceptance across different societal groups, and assess whether the task force and related initiatives generate sustained and measurable changes in online gambling activity.

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