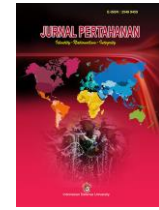




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SECURITIZATION OF AUSTRALIA'S MIGRATION ISSUES DURING SCOTT MORRISON'S LEADERSHIP ERA

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Abstract

In the last two decades, the Australian Government has intensified the practice of securitizing migration issues. The difference is that the pre-Scott Morrison migration securitization program was more focused on handling cases of Illegal Maritime Arrivals, while the core of Scott Morrison's migration program was to reduce the pressure on the immigrant population. Through the discourse of Planning for Australia's Future Population, Scott Morrison cut the quota of permanent immigrants from 190,000 to 160,000 people. Scott Morrison also implemented immigration transfer policies and migration reforms. Therefore, this study focuses on analyzing the process of framing the issue of Australian immigrants under the leadership of Scott Morrison. This research uses securitization theory and qualitative methods, particularly process-tracing. As a result, this research found that Scott Morrison, as the securitization actor, intentionally created a speech act and convinced the public that the referent object, namely Australia's national security, was in a threatening situation due to the surge in the immigrant population. Functional actors, including parliament, media, and epistemic groups, reinforced Scott Morrison's speech acts.

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INTRODUCTION

For the past two decades, Australia has continued to perpetuate restrictive policies on migration issues. In 2019, Prime Minister Scott Morrison issued a work plan titled "Planning for Australia's Future Population" (Australian Government, 2019a). One of the controversial policies in

Scott Morrison's plan is cutting immigrant quotas. Under the pretext of saving the future of Australia's population, Scott Morrison cut 15% of the permanent immigrant quota, from 190,000 to 160,000 people (Ministers' Media Centre, 2019). The restrictive policies of Scott Morrison's predecessors did not cut the quota of

immigrants in large numbers. Scott Morrison believes that immigrants do not always bring an advantage but have the potential to threaten domestic stability and disturb public order in Australia (Griffith, 2019). As a result, some consider Scott Morrison to apply the practice of burden-shifting and policy transfers of international responsibility related to the fulfillment of immigrants' rights instead of protecting Australia's sovereignty from the surge in the immigrant population. Although some parties consider Scott Morrison's statement about immigrants a public narrative, Scott Morrison is still adamant about continuing the policy of reducing Australia's permanent immigrant quota (Loughnan, 2019).

Indeed, the policy of reducing the quota of permanent immigrants is a realization of Scott Morrison's political promise regarding "Planning for Australia's Future Population". In other words, reducing the number of immigrants reflects Scott Morrison's nationalistic populist policy in ensuring Australia's national security, especially saving Australia from the problem of the Population Bomb, which means Australia is experiencing a population explosion. Moreover, the immigrant population in Australia reached more than 1.5 million people from 2011 to 2017 alone (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Not surprisingly, Scott Morrison constructed the issue of migration as a security issue or in the realm of international relations called securitization. That then makes the issue of migration in Australia often framed in the context of threats rather than being interpreted as a humanitarian crisis and does not need to get holistic handling (Davidson, 2016).

On the other hand, Scott Morrison's immigration quota reduction policy intensified through the 'congestion-busting' discourse. Congestion-busting is indeed intensified to overcome the congestion problem in Australia. Therefore, in addition to reducing the immigrant quota to the lowest level, Scott Morrison has also

implemented a policy of immigrant transfers and even migration reform (Parliament of Australia, 2019). By raising the issue of the immigrant population in the federal election and a significant overhaul of the migration system, it was able to raise the status of the immigrant population problem to a level of security. Indirectly, the issue of the immigrant population is increasingly articulated and has its place during political deliberation ahead of the general election. As a result, the legitimacy of the securitization of immigrants is increasingly possible. Of course, it would be interesting to research further how Scott Morrison's process and strategy in constructing the migration issue into an Australian security issue. Moreover, Scott Morrison's migration policies differ significantly from past Australian leaders. This research uses securitization theory and the concepts of securitization actor, referent object, and functional actor to analyze Scott Morrison's migration securitization practice, especially regarding of how the process of securitizing the issue of Australia's migration during the leadership of Prime Minister Scott Morrison (2018-2019) was. This research argues that actors and processes interpret an issue as a threat.

METHODS

This research applies a qualitative approach and seeks to describe the process of a phenomenon. It is known that qualitative research does focus on the process and meaning of results (Aspers & Corte, 2019). In addition, McCusker & Gunaydin (2015) stated that qualitative research aims to understand how individuals and communities respond to and accept an issue, so quality in the qualitative research process is of great concern. Departing from a deductive mindset regards security issues, this research will also precisely and comprehensively explain the process of securitizing migration issues in Australia during Scott Morrison's leadership. This research uses two data sources at once, namely primary and secondary data

sources. The primary data sources in this research were statements from sources on the social media of the relevant official institutions. Then, secondary data sources are obtained from second-hand documents, such as books, journal articles, and statements from the mass media, both domestic and international. Moreover, this research's data was analyzed comprehensively through the process-tracing method, which explains a cause-and-effect relationship and a process or how something can happen (Bennett, 2010).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Population Explosion: The Reason Why Scott Morrison Securitized Migration Issues

No longer struggling to deal with the problem of Illegal Maritime Arrivals as was the policy of his predecessors, Scott Morrison is now focusing on efforts to suppress and map the immigrant population. Over the past decade, cases of illegal immigrants have tended to decline, but the Australian population has continued to increase. Moreover, Australia's population has increased almost five times during the last century and has reached more than 25 million people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). The Australian Government does not deny that Australia's population growth increases yearly. That is influenced by two main factors: Natural Increase and Net Overseas Migration. Net Overseas Migration is the difference between immigrants and emigrants. However, the most significant contributor to Australia's population is immigrants rather than natural population growth. Table 1 shows further exposure to Australia's population growth in recent years.

Natural increase, net overseas migration, and Australian population fluctuate continuously from year to year. However, it is confident that total net migration will always experience higher growth than Australia's natural population growth. From 2011 to 2017 alone, at least Australia's total

net immigration reached 1,541,895 people, while the natural population growth was only around 1,074,151 people. On the other hand, Australia's population growth trend has always been around 1.6 percent. Although fluctuating, the percentage of Australian population growth is relatively high.

Table 1. Natural Increase, Net Migration (NOM), and Australian Population 2011-2017

Year	Natural Increase	NOM
2011-2012	158.882	231.947
2012-2013	161.958	230.329
2013-2014	156.976	187.778
2014-2015	151.779	184.033
2015-2016	154.351	206.233
2016-2017	147.602	263.351
2017-2018	142.604	238.224

Source: Reprocessed from the Australian Institute of Wealth and Welfare, 2021

Although the rate of migration is relatively stable and peaceful, Scott Morrison realizes that Australia is still faced with a big problem, namely a population explosion due to the arrival of immigrants. The problem of the explosion of the immigrant population can affect the survival of the Australian state and society adversely. Ultimately, the adverse effects of migration require Scott Morrison to focus on two situations (Australian Government, 2019b). First, Australia must continue to ensure that the growing immigrant population does not interfere with the needs of the Australian people to live a decent life. Second, Australia needs to keep the economy strong and ensure an even distribution of the economy across Australia. In short, the consequences of increasing migration flows require the Australian Government to ensure that population growth continues to benefit all Australians without exception.

Scott Morrison's Migration Issues Securitized Efforts

Although Scott Morrison continues to relay restrictive policies on migration issues,

Scott Morrison's migration policy focuses more on efforts to suppress the surge in the immigrant population rather than eradicating Illegal Maritime Arrivals. Scott Morrison asserts that the real threat of a surge in migration is that it threatens the future of the Australian population (Clench & Farr, 2018). In a sense, even though various migration policies ranging from soft policies or even brutal policies, have been implemented, the increase in the immigrant population will not shrink if there is no policy to limit the quota of immigrants entering Australia. Therefore, Scott Morrison has stated loudly that Australia's migration policy will be much more selective. As long as immigrants are judged to be beneficial to Australia, these immigrants are allowed to enter Australia. This statement is clearly stated in the narrative "We make decisions about who comes here based on what is in Australia's interests" (Greene, 2019).

Ten months after Scott Morrison's tenure, the Australian Government again held federal elections in May 2019. To seek mass sympathizers, Scott Morrison also offered a political promise, which was to resume the program of cutting the permanent immigrant quota in Australia from 190,000 to 160,000 in the period future (Burke, Loomes, & AAP, 2019). The policy of cutting the quota of permanent immigrants on a large scale has never been directly practiced by Prime Minister Pre-Scott Morrison. The offer to reduce the quota of permanent immigrants arose because, during his tenure as prime minister in the previous period, Scott Morrison considered that the surge in immigrants in Australia had a destructive impact on the quality of the population and life of the Australian people (Murphy, 2019a). Because the problem of immigrants will spread to other sectors such as the economy, society, and infrastructure.

Indirectly, the plan to reduce Australia's permanent immigrant quota shows that Scott Morrison is trying to construct the case of the surge in immigrants as a security

issue. As stated by Barry Buzan, trying to construct an issue into a security issue is an act of securitization. Moreover, today's security issues are no longer focused on military and state issues but include political, social, economic, and environmental sovereignty (Buzan & Lawson, 2015).

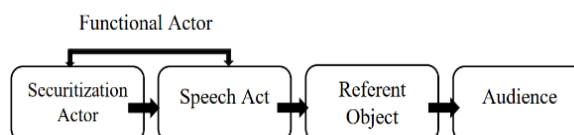


Figure 1. Schematic of the Australian Migration Issue Securitization Process
Source: Has been reworked from Albert & Buzan, 2011

In the securitization agenda, it is necessary to securitize actors, referent objects, and functional actors (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998). First, the securitization actor is the main determinant of the securitization agenda. This securitization actor has the legitimacy to claim when and how an issue is constructed to become an existential threat, where a problem is considered to have a threat to security and needs special handling. Second, the referent object is an existentially threatened entity, and securitization actors must take immediate security measures (Nyman, 2013). If an issue is judged to threaten the referent object, the securitization actor will issue a security discourse through speech-act. Armed with the narratives in the speech act, the securitization actor tries to convince the public that the referent object is really in a threatening situation. Third, functional actors are involved in the securitization process's dynamics. The useful actors' role is to strengthen securitizing actors' threat perception and speech-act. That means that functional actors are not the main actors of securitization but are supporting actors who can indirectly influence public opinion or even political decisions.

As a securitization actor, Scott Morrison has repeatedly made speech acts that the main impact of the surge in immigrants is

that it threatens the future of Australian life and population. Therefore, reducing the quota of permanent immigrants is the right step to suppress the surge of immigrants in Australia. In fact, on one occasion, Scott Morrison said that "Reducing the quota of permanent immigrants is one of the efforts to maintain Australia's quality of life" (Australian Federal, 2019). Nevertheless, then, Scott Morrison also emphasized that "Managing immigrant growth is not just saving the population, but also the economy and infrastructure in Australia" (Beech, 2018).

Through his speech act, Scott Morrison also tried to strengthen the security narrative discourse and build public opinion that the surge of immigrants in Australia negatively impacted the referent object, namely Australia and Australian society itself. Scott Morrison released a report titled *Planning for Australia's Future Population* to this extent. The report informs that the Australian Government under Scott Morrison agrees that the main impact of the surge in immigrant arrivals is that it threatens the future of the Australian population (Australian Government, 2019b). In addition to population growth will increase rapidly, the explosion of immigrants is also considered to pose some crucial problems for Australia.

First, Australia's three major cities, Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane, have to endure population pressures. Scott Morrison delivered a speech that "Australia is currently in a population crisis where immigrants prefer to live in big cities" (news.com.au, 2019). Then reinforced through the statement, "Meanwhile, cities outside Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane want more population and jobs" (Miller, 2018).

Second, Australian states and territories other than New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland experience stagnation in economic productivity and income distribution disparities. Regarding this, Scott Morrison delivered a speech act, "Immigrants come here because they want

jobs and take the opportunities of the Australian people" (Dalzell, 2019). On the other, Scott Morrison's speech act loudly emphasized that "Managing the growth of the immigrant population is significant for the economic development of cities in Australia" (BBC News, 2018).

Third, the surge in immigrants has further exacerbated the congestion problem in Australia's major cities. Speech act Scott Morrison complained that "the roads are constantly congested, the trains are always full, and the schools no longer accept students" (Skatssoon, 2019). In addition, the problem of congestion also harms Australian residents outside the big cities. That is because travel between cities is hampered and takes longer. As a result, public transportation services cannot function optimally.

It can be concluded that Scott Morrison's speech act shows that Scott Morrison is trying to convince the public and strengthen the security narrative discourse that the surge in immigrants impacts the referent object. Namely, influencing population pressure and exacerbating congestion problems in Australia's big cities, even hindering the economic productivity of the people of Australia's interstates and territories.

Scott Morrison's speech act on the issue of immigrants during the campaign was successful in getting attention and attracting public interest. Scott Morrison's narratives about the relevance of immigrant issues to the economy, infrastructure, and public services successfully led Scott Morrison to be the winner in the 2019 election. Some well-known survey institutions in Australia, such as Newspoll, Ipsos, YouGov Galaxy, Essential, and Roy Morgan, previously predicted that Scott Morrison would lose heavily to Bill Shorten as a political opponent (Cockburn & Kontominas, 2019). Moreover, Scott Morrison is predicted only to win 48.5% of the vote, while Bill Shorten is 51.5% of the vote (Murphy, 2019b). In addition, Scott Morrison had also succeeded in selling narratives about his

success and track record when he led Australia in the previous period. However, 47% of Australians complain that the immigrant population in Australia is too high; 71% agree that Australia's major cities are overcrowded; and 58% cited immigrants as a burden on Australia's social welfare system (Kassam, 2021). In the securitization agenda, this percentage shows that the Australian public as the audience justifies Scott Morrison's security narratives.

The success of Scott Morrison's speech act is also inseparable from the role of functional actors. In a sense, functional actors are also involved in the success of Scott Morrison's narratives and convince the audience that the intent of the security discourse is true. In "Securitization and the Function of Functional Actors," Floyd (2021) mentions that at least three functional actors have the most influence on the success of the securitization agenda, namely Parliament, the epistemic community, and the media. That is because the three of them can improve and break the speech act narrative of the securitization actors. In Scott Morrison's migration issue securitization agenda, these three functional actors also play essential roles and their respective functions.

1. Parliament

The Australian Parliament facilitates a special session where the Opposition can examine and directly question the government's performance through Question Time. Here, ministers are asked to take responsibility and explain all government decisions and actions and the government's portfolio track record (Parliament of Australia, 2019). Uniquely, all discussions and debates in Question Time are also published to the public through the official website of the Parliament of Australia. Question Time is also broadcast live on the YouTube page "About the House: The Official Channel of the Australian House of Representatives". Question Time scheme, where the Opposition asks the

government a question, and then the government lays out the answer. Since Scott Morrison replaced Malcolm Turnbull before the 2019 general election, Question Time sessions have taken six times, namely 1) September 10-20, 2018; 2) October 15-25, 2018; 3) November 25-28, 2018; 4) December 4-6, 2018; 5) February 2-21, 2019; and 6) April 2-4, 2019.

From the six Question Time sessions, the author noticed that the Scott Morrison Government adhered to the plan of reducing immigrant quotas. Although the Opposition had pros and cons during the debate, this debate facilitated the government to disseminate Scott Morrison's security discourse. Because, apart from being broadcast live, parliamentary debates can also be attended by the media and the public. That way, the public can understand the meaning of Scott Morrison's security discourse. The coalition's narratives can certainly increase public confidence that cutting immigration quotas is essential for the future of Australia's population. The same applies to immigration transfer policies and migration reform. From the six Question Time sessions, the authors conclude that the surge in Australia's immigrant population has prompted the government to focus on three things, namely overcoming the problem of congestion in big cities and accelerating the distribution of regional infrastructure, intensify economic distribution and regional productivity, and encouraging immigrants to live in areas to reduce population pressure in Australia's major cities.

2. Media

In the securitization agenda, the media is the Fourth Estate and plays a significant role in disseminating the security discourse from securitization actors. Through state and non-government media, public opinion will indirectly be formed and oriented to approve or reject

the narratives and actions of securitization actors related to framing an issue (Floyd, 2021).

In Scott Morrison's migration securitization agenda, Press Gallery is the eyes and ears of the public. That is because the Press Gallery also covers all information and activities of people's representatives in parliament. Thus, the public can control the performance of the Scott Morrison government and all discussions in parliament. Moreover, public understanding and trust come from media coverage and scrutiny. In short, the Press Gallery played a significant role in disseminating the security discourse and Scott Morrison's migration narrative.

On the other hand, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), as Australia's non-commercial public broadcasting media, both through ABC News and ABC Radio, has also intensively informed the public that the problem of the surge in the immigrant population is a crucial issue today. For example, in the show entitled "Government Flags Cut to Permanent Immigration", ABC News Australia (2018) shows that immigrants are the most significant contributor to Australia's population. The reduction of the quota of 30,000 immigrants is the most significant historical migration policy in Australia. Regarding Scott Morrison's immigration quota reduction policy, ABC has published more than twenty reports.

Non-governmental media such as Reuters, The Conversation, and The Guardian have even been actively involved in expanding Scott Morrison's security discourse. For example, in an article titled "Australia Cuts Annual Immigrant Cap, Puts Key Cities Off-Limits to Some," Reuters notes that migration and population issues are frustrating for Australian leaders and citizens (Packham, 2019). This is because immigrants are not expected to

live in Australia's major cities. On the other hand, The Conversation in "Australian Prime Minister Foreshadows Cut to Migration Settings" recommended that Australia improve its population growth management system (Grattan, 2018). It is because Scott Morrison estimates that Australia will continue to experience public pressure if it does not immediately address the migration problem.

Moreover, many residents have complained about the population. Through "Scott Morrison Flags Cutting Migration in Response to Population Concern", The Guardian states that stable population growth will also support Australia's economic progress (Murphy, 2018). Therefore, the policy of reducing the immigrant quota needs to be handled carefully.

3. Epistemic Group

As professionals, epistemic groups have the potential to influence the public interpretation of an issue. It is not uncommon for Australian public policy formulation to be influenced by this group. That is because epistemic groups have cohesion and coherence on an issue, knowledge, and experience (Floyd, 2021). In framing Scott Morrison's migration issue, at least two of the most influential epistemic groups, namely academics and think tanks.

The Center for Independent Studies (CIS) has dramatically influenced Australian public policy as an independent think tank for nearly five decades. Since Scott Morrison's leadership, CIS has published at least five research results on migration issues namely "Australian Attitudes to Migration: Coming Apart or Common Ground?", "We are More United About Immigration Than We Think", "We Mostly Agree on Immigration", "Mapping Migrants: Australians' Wide-Ranging Experiences of Migration", and "Stereotypes Drive Division on Immigration".

CIS seeks to convince the public that the problem of increasing immigrant populations is a crucial issue and that the policy of reducing immigrant quotas is the solution to this problem. In addition, CIS also shows data that most Australians, both rich and poor, fully support the policy of cutting Australia's permanent immigrant quota. For example, the CIS stated that 65% of rich and 77% of poor Australians agreed to the immigration quota cut program (Sammut & Wilkie, 2018). That is because Australians believe that the pressure of the immigrant population harms the deterioration of infrastructure, public services, and social integration.

In addition, to think tanks, the existence of academics also impacts the success of Scott Morrison's migration discourse. In a YouTube show titled "Australia's Population: How Big Is Too Big? Australia 2050", the experts agree that the problem of the immigrant population will have a negative impact in the long term, especially regarding infrastructure, congestion, and social integration (ABC News In-depth, 2018). First, Abul Rizvi, an independent columnist and former Deputy Secretary of the Australian Department of Immigration, confirmed that Australia is currently an overpopulation of immigrants. Then, Professor Ann Evans, Australia's senior demographer, said that the population problem would impact changing Australian lives where the congestion problem will worsen. Furthermore, Leith Van Onselen, an Australian economist, added that apart from congestion problems, Australia will also suffer from infrastructure pressures. Finally, as an economic and social observer, Phil Ruthven said that the reason was the density in Australia's big cities. As a result, the various statements of the academics received various public responses. The reason is that there are more than two thousand comments, both pro, and con, on the

show "Australia's Population: How Big Is Too Big? Australia 2050."

Although most Australians do not object to significant changes to Scott Morrison's migration policy, Scott Morrison's security discourse has not escaped some criticisms and objections. Domestically, criticism came from the Opposition, the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA), and the Committee of Economic Development of Australia (CEDA). Meanwhile, international criticism was raised by Michelle Bachelet as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and also objections from Global citizens.

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATION, AND LIMITATION

The impact of the surge in the immigrant population motivated Scott Morrison to continue the relay of restrictive policies while at the same time hastening securitization actions on migration issues. As a securitization actor, Scott Morrison intensively delivered a speech act on the referent object, namely national security and the Australian people, which were in a threatening situation due to the surge in the immigrant population. As a result, the boom in the immigrant population has had a devastating impact on population pressure, congestion, and the productivity of the Australian economy. In practice, Scott Morrison's speech act was strengthened by narratives and actions from functional actors, including parliament, media, and epistemic groups. Although it did not escape some criticisms, Scott Morrison's series of processes for framing the issue of migration managed to convince the majority of Australians that the threat of a surge in the immigrant population was real. As a result, the public realized that Scott Morrison's migration policies needed to be implemented, whether cutting migration quotas, transferring immigrants, or reforming migration. However, it should be

understood that this research focuses on analyzing and explaining the securitization process of Prime Minister Scott Morrison's migration issue and does not measure the achievements of the migration policy under his leadership. Thus, the authors hope that there will be further research on the achievements of Scott Morrison's migration securitization agenda. Moreover, it continues a shift in Australia's migration securitization agenda after Scott Morrison's leadership. The Australian Government has perpetuated the migration securitization agenda for two decades.

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