



Uneventful: Securitization of Unregulated Online Gambling in Indonesia

*Bintang Indra Wibisono¹ Awalia Dhia Nisrina² Ivana Putri Cahyaningtyas³
Constantin Brilliant Barus⁴

¹ Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia,
Pusat Studi ASEAN UNS

^{2,3,4} Students at Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta,
Indonesia

bintang.i.wibisono@staff.uns.ac.id

Abstract. The proliferation of unregulated online gambling in Indonesia has caused a significant economic toll for Indonesian, prompting the government to implement extraordinary policy measures, such as the formation of an Online Gambling Task Force. However, these measures have been criticized as largely uneventful and theatrical. This research employs the securitization framework to explore the relationship between the construction of online gambling as an existential threat, the corresponding speech acts, and the resulting extraordinary policy measures. By analyzing 44 speeches categorized into nine distinct themes, our initial findings indicate that the securitization of online gambling in Indonesia predominantly frames the issue as a threat to social fabric, household economy and religious values. The discourse portrays online gambling as an economic problem at household level and a danger to the society, overshadowing more serious concerns like money laundering or organized crime. This threat construction also shows that there is a strong indication for a desecuritization that is reflected in the policy option.

Keywords: Securitization, Online Gambling, Indonesia, Non-traditional Security Threat.

1 Introduction

The issue of unregulated online gambling (UOG) has emerged as a pressing concern in Indonesia, capturing widespread public attention and becoming a dominant theme in national discourse since 2023. It has risen in prominence during the presidential debates in 2024, where it was a central topic of discussion, it has shown the gravity of the issue and fueled public demand for decisive action via government interaction. This demand, fueled by growing societal concerns about the social and economic consequences of UOG, has placed significant pressure on the government to address this problem. In response to this pressure, President Joko Widodo established the Gambling Eradication Task Force, signifying a high-water mark moment in the fight against UOG and demonstrating a commitment to tackling this complex issue at the presidential-level of government.

Prior to this, there had been no concerted effort at the national level to address this issue, despite the increasing prevalence and detrimental effects of UOG on Indonesian society. The formation of the task force, as outlined in Presidential Decree number 21 of 2024, aims to decisively and comprehensively suppress online gambling activities. This action signals a renewed and intensified effort to combat the detrimental effects of unregulated online gambling within Indonesia, marking a turning point in the government's commitment to safeguarding public well-being through the eradication of UOG.

The pervasiveness of UOG extends across all levels of Indonesian society. The ease of access to these platforms, facilitated by the use of readily identifiable keywords like "Slot," "Gacor," "Toto," and "Wede,". This accessibility, coupled with the proliferation of gambling websites, has created a challenging and widespread problem. The sheer scale of the issue is reflected in the efforts of the Ministry of Communication and Informatics of Indonesia (Kominfo), which blocked a staggering 3.4 million gambling websites in 2024 alone, highlighting the persistent and pervasive nature of UOG in the country.[1]

The alarming reality of UOG's impact on Indonesian society is further exacerbated by a disturbing wave of gambling-related deaths.[2], [3], [4] These tragic events, often linked to suicide, murder, violence, and divorce, shows the devastating consequences of addiction and financial destitution brought about by gambling. The grim reality of these cases has garnered widespread public attention, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive measures to address the destructive effects of UOG. The desperation and despair driven by gambling addiction have tragically manifested in these incidents.

UOG is a growing problem in Southeast Asia, and Indonesia is not alone in this boat. The region has seen a rapid rise in UOG, especially since the pandemic, fueling a surge in transnational crime like money laundering and human trafficking. According to Luo's findings, Cambodia has become a major gambling hub, attracting significant Chinese investment and creating an environment ripe for criminal activity.[5] The Philippines has also been seen as a new gambling hub, The Philippines has also emerged as a gambling hub, but recent developments in the Senate suggest a shift with the proposed enactment of an anti-POGO (Philippine Offshore Gaming Operators) act in 2024.[6] The Philippines' potential move towards stricter regulations, coupled with Indonesia's efforts to combat UOG, signals a broader trend in Southeast Asia. As countries grapple with the negative consequences of this unregulated industry.

While the President of Indonesia has framed the issue of UOG as a security threat, the response from the executive branch of government, while assertive in rhetoric, has yielded lukewarm, if not uneventful, results. This research aims to delve into the securitization process employed by actors within the executive branch, specifically analyzing their speech acts and their correlation with policy outcomes. By examining the language and framing used by these actors, the study seeks to understand the extent to which they have successfully securitized UOG, and how this securitization has influenced their policy decisions and overall capacity as actors in tackling this complex issue.

2 Literature Review

This research examines the securitization of UOG in Indonesia, recognizing it as a multifaceted issue with implications for economics, sociology, criminology, and international relations. The study employs the securitization framework, which views security as an intersubjective process, asking: "Who can 'do' or 'speak' security successfully, on what issues, under what conditions, and with what effects?". Buzan further emphasizes that security is a move that transcends established political norms, framing issues as "above politics".[7]

The securitization framework hinges on language as a speech act, a speech that elevates the urgency of an issue, shifting it from a normalized level to a politicized, and potentially securitized level. Securitizing an issue necessitates immediate and potentially exceptional action. The core concepts of this theory include the securitizing actor (the agent who presents an issue as a threat), the referent object (the entity threatened), the audience (whose agreement is necessary to validate the threat), the context, and the adoption of distinctive policies (exceptional or not) .[8]

Previous research has applied securitization theory to transnational crime, highlighting the varied ways in which organized crime is securitized across different contexts [9]. Emmers demonstrates how transnational crime can trigger regional mechanisms to limit its spread in Southeast Asia, while Mackenzie explores cooperation between Indonesia and Australia in tackling transnational issues[10], [11].

While research on UOG is still emerging due to its relatively new nature, existing studies offer valuable insights. Assidiqi emphasizes the intertwining of UOG with globalization, highlighting how the pandemic and instability in Myanmar have created fertile ground for UOB in Southeast Asia [12]. Akbar et al. analyze the legal gaps in Indonesia's regulatory framework, demonstrating the challenges in addressing the complexities of online gambling in the digital era[13]. Budiman et al. document the negative impact of UOG on Indonesian teenagers[14].

This study builds upon these existing frameworks and case studies, focusing specifically on the Indonesian context. By analyzing the speech acts of political actors and their correlation with policy outcomes, the research aims to contribute to the understanding of how UOG has been securitized within Indonesia and the potential consequences of this process.

3 Methods

This research employs thematic analysis to examine the securitization of UOG in Indonesia. The analysis focuses on the speech acts of political actors within the executive branch of government, specifically heads of ministries and departments.

Data Collection and Analysis:

Data Source: The research draws on 44 documents, consisting of speeches and pronouncements delivered by heads of relevant ministries and departments.

Data Analysis: Thematic analysis is conducted using a six-step process as outlined by Braun and Clarke [15]:

- Familiarizing Yourself with the Data, Generating Initial Codes: Identifying key words, phrases, and concepts that emerge from the data.
- Generating Initial Themes: Grouping codes into broader, more abstract themes that represent recurring patterns and ideas.
- Reviewing Themes: Examining the relationships between themes and identifying any overlaps or contradictions.
- Defining and Naming Themes: Refining and defining each theme, providing clear labels that capture their essence.
- Writing Up: Developing a narrative account that systematically presents the themes, supported by illustrative quotes and examples.

Software and Tools:

Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) Software: Atlas.ti is employed to facilitate the coding and analysis process. Atlas.ti enables the organization, categorization, and visualization of the data, allowing for a more systematic examination of the relationship between themes and actors.

Correlation Analysis:

The analysis aims to identify any correlations between the themes identified through thematic analysis and the specific actors within the executive branch. This involves examining the frequency and prominence of certain themes within the speeches of individual actors.

By utilizing this systematic approach, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how political actors in Indonesia have contributed to the securitization of UOG, and the implications of this process for policy and practice.

4 Results and Discussion

Thematic analysis of the speeches revealed 11 distinct codes, which were subsequently grouped into broader themes. The analysis highlighted several key concerns that emerged in the discourse surrounding UOG in Indonesia:

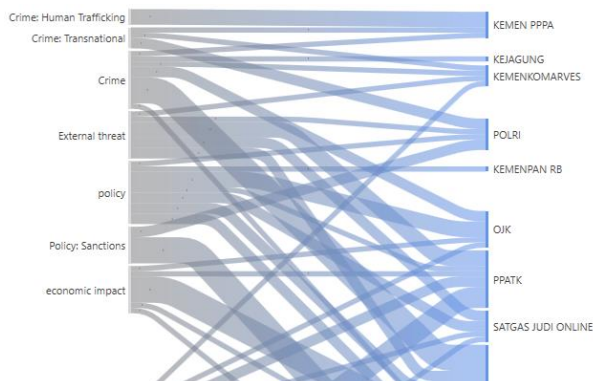


Fig 1. Sankey Diagram of Themes and actor

4.1 **Crime**

This theme focused on the criminal aspects of gambling, emphasizing the legal framework in place to prohibit gambling in all forms. This concern is woven throughout the speeches of executive branch leaders, who repeatedly emphasize the legal framework in place to prohibit gambling in all its forms. From the time-honored articles of the Criminal Code (KUHP) to more recent legislation like the ITE Law, the message is clear: gambling is illegal, particularly when conducted online. This emphasis on the legal framework is further amplified by a focus on the broader criminal landscape surrounding UOG, highlighting associated crimes like murder, theft, and violence often linked to gambling debts and disputes.

The severity of this concern is further emphasized by the speech act uttered by some officials. The Minister of Communication and Information (Kominfo) bluntly stated that gambling is a scam, declaring "Judi itu penipuan." Similarly, the Financial Services Authority (OJK) asserts, "Judi itu ilegal." The Attorney General's Office (Kejaksaan Agung) reinforces this stance, declaring, "Our principle as public prosecutors is to act within the existing legal framework. Since this has become a public concern and a source of anxiety, we will apply the maximum legal provisions." [16], [17], [18]

4.2 **Crime: Human Trafficking**

The Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection (Kemenko PPPA) stands out as the sole voice linking the rise of unregulated online gambling (UOG) to increased human

trafficking. This ministry argues that the burgeoning gambling industry, with its need for a workforce, has created a new *modus operandi* for human traffickers. Individuals are lured with promises of high-paying jobs overseas, often as website operators, but these promises are often deceptive, leading to forced labor and human trafficking.

This alarming trend is exemplified in a statement by the ministry: “Saat ini mayoritas kasus TPPO yang terjadi yaitu melalui pekerja migran indonesia sebagai asisten rumah tangga, melalui pemagangan, dan yang baru-baru ini banyak terjadi yaitu melalui judi online”[19]

4.3 Crime: Transnational

This theme viewed the root of the UOG problem as originating from other countries in the region, particularly Cambodia, Myanmar, and the Philippines. This was attributed to the location of server infrastructure and the transnational nature of online gambling, often linked to cross-border money laundering and human trafficking.

These themes demonstrate a significant focus on the criminal aspects of UOG, highlighting the perception of online gambling as a threat to national security and societal well-being. The analysis further reveals a tendency to emphasize the transnational nature of the issue, placing blame on foreign actors and highlighting the need for regional cooperation. In this theme POLRI directly points to organized crime groups operating from the Mekong Region as the perpetrators of UOG, POLRI states: “Ini merupakan transnational organized crime, para pelakunya adalah para kelompok-kelompok organized crime yang mengoperasikan perjudian online ini dari Mekong Region Countries” [20]. The Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (KEMENKOMARVES) echoes this sentiment, calling for stricter border controls to prevent individuals involved in online gambling or other criminal activities from entering Indonesia [21]. Even The Indonesian Agency for the Protection of Migrant Workers (BP2PMI) points to specific individuals allegedly involved in online scams operating from Cambodia, underscoring the perceived need to target foreign actors [22].

4.4 Economic Impact:

The theme highlights concerns about the economic impact of UOG, focusing primarily on the microeconomic level. The concern centers on the individual and familial consequences of UOG, highlighting the potential for debt traps, financial ruin, and increased poverty.

The narrative repeatedly emphasizes the devastating impact of UOG on households, echoing concerns about mounting debt and the desperation that can lead to illicit economic activity to support gambling habits. This focus on the microeconomic dimension is evident in this sample speech act from KOMINFO, “Kita tidak boleh diam saja jika rakyat dimiskinkan. Negara tugasnya mensejahterakan rakyat, judi online adalah perilaku rakyat ditipu, dimiskinkan,”[16]

While this discourse reveals a deep concern for the economic vulnerability of individuals and families, it notably avoids discussing the macroeconomic implications of UOG. There's a distinct lack of discussion regarding capital outflows due to online gambling, highlighting a focus on the domestic economic consequences while neglecting the broader economic impact of UOG.

4.5 Economic Impact: Online Loan

The theme of online loans used to fuel gambling activities reveals a deep concern about the negative consequences of this practice on individual finances and household stability. The discourse highlights the ease and uncontrolled nature of online loans in Indonesia, which has led to widespread exploitation and a cycle of debt. UOG and online loans are often intertwined, as individuals resort to loans to fund their gambling habits. This vicious cycle, coupled with a lack of financial literacy, further exacerbates the problem, pushing vulnerable individuals into a precarious financial situation.

This concern is underscored by statements from government officials, such as the Minister of KOMINFO, who warns that online gambling "destroys society, sucking the blood of the people," through the opportunities it creates for illegal online loans[16]. The Head of the National Agency for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs (BPIP) highlights the dire consequences of this cycle, stating that individuals facing mounting losses often resort to desperate measures like taking out online loans[17]. The Minister of Finance, Sri Mulyani Indrawati, echoes this concern, urging increased financial literacy and caution against both online loans and online gambling[18].

4.6 External Threat:

The theme of UOG as an external threat underscores a deep-seated perception of vulnerability in Indonesia, with neighboring countries like Cambodia and the Philippines often cited as the source of the problem. This perception highlights the transnational nature of online gambling and its association with criminal activities, particularly in Southeast Asia. More than just recognizing the international dimension, this narrative reveals a sense of limitations on Indonesia's jurisdictional reach and a tendency to shift blame for the inability to combat UOG onto foreign actors perceived as beyond control.

Statements from officials like those from the Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (PPATK) further emphasize this view: "Negara-negara seperti Singapura, Filipina, dan Tiongkok menjadi surga bagi para pelaku judi online." [19] This perception of Indonesia as susceptible to external threats highlights the need for a coordinated regional response. The Anti-Online Gambling Task Force (Satgas anti Perjudian Online) echoes this sentiment, stating, "Kita bekerja dengan Interpol, dengan Kemenlu, untuk bisa memfasilitasi agar server-server yang ada di luar sana bisa tidak mengakomodir kepentingan judi online dari Indonesia." [20]. The PPATK further confirms the global reach of this problem, by stating that money flows to 20 countries, primarily in Southeast Asia[21].

This narrative, while highlighting the transnational nature of UOG and the threat originating from beyond Indonesia's borders, underscores a sense of helplessness and the need for international action.

4.7 Impact on Future Generations:

The discourse expresses concern about the impact of UOG on future generations. Speakers highlight the potential for addiction and the normalization of gambling among young people, which is seen as a threat to the social fabric and moral values of the country.

The President himself warns of the devastating impact of UOG, stating, "Judi itu mempertaruhkan masa depan, baik masa depan diri sendiri, masa depan keluarga, dan masa depan anak-anak kita." [22] This statement underscores the perceived threat to the well-being of future generations, emphasizing the need to protect young people from the harmful effects of UOG. The focus on the impact on youth is echoed by Budi Arie, Minister of

KOMINFO, ". Banyak anak-anak kita yang menjadi korban. Generasi muda Indonesia harus kita selamatkan dari praktik haram ini." [23] The Head of the National Agency for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs (BPIP) further highlights the need for cultural interventions, to educate children about the dangers of online gambling and its violation of societal norms and values. [24]

This focus on the impact on future generations reveals a deep-seated concern about the potential for UOG to erode societal values and undermine the future of the country. The discourse emphasizes the need for proactive measures to protect young people from the harmful influences of UOG and to foster a sense of moral responsibility among future generations.

4.8 Policy

The discourse surrounding UOG in Indonesia emphasizes the need for robust policies to combat this perceived threat. A key theme centers on the call for a range of measures, including legal prosecution, website blocking, and asset freezing, to deter participation in UOG and create a more robust regulatory environment. The formation of the Anti-Online Gambling Task Force serves as a central policy initiative, aimed at coordinating efforts across various government agencies. This task force, established to combat UOG, underlines the commitment to addressing this issue through a coordinated and comprehensive approach.

The discourse also highlights the importance of financial surveillance and regulatory cooperation. The Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (PPATK) emphasizes the need to monitor financial transactions linked to UOG, stating that they are "PPATK menjalin kerja sama erat dengan berbagai lembaga, termasuk Kepolisian, Otoritas Jasa Keuangan (OJK), dan Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informatika (Kominfo)." [25] This collaborative approach underscores the necessity for coordinated efforts across different government agencies to effectively combat UOG.

The OJK, for instance, has taken concrete steps to address the financial flow associated with UOG, such as ordering banks to block over 6,000 accounts suspected of involvement in online gambling transactions and requiring banks to conduct Enhanced Due Diligence (EDD) [26].

The Anti-Online Gambling Task Force further emphasizes the need to disrupt the flow of funds associated with UOG, focusing on cutting off overseas connections. The task force states its objective is to "Satgas nanti akan memutus jalur yang keluar negeri, terutama adalah network access provider (NAP)." [20]

This discourse highlights a concerted effort to combat UOG through a combination of legal prosecution, financial monitoring, and regulatory cooperation. The establishment of the Anti-Online Gambling Task Force, the emphasis on international collaboration, and the focus on disrupting financial networks demonstrate a multi-pronged approach to tackling this complex issue.

4.9 Policy: Sanction

The discourse surrounding unregulated online gambling (UOG) in Indonesia often takes a hardline approach, emphasizing the need for sanctions to deter individuals from engaging in this illegal activity. While the government's rhetoric focuses on the "chilling effect" through punishment, the actual implementation of these sanctions remains largely theatrical, raising questions about their effectiveness.

The threat of punishment extends to government employees, including military personnel and police officers, with penalties ranging from withheld promotions to outright dismissal for those caught engaging in online gambling. The Indonesian National Police (Polri) declares that members found involved will face action, even going as far as dishonorable discharge [27]. The Commander of the Indonesian Armed Forces (Panglima TNI) echoes this sentiment, stating that TNI personnel will face strict sanctions for involvement in UOG [28]. The Minister of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform (KEMENPAN RB) further emphasizes the severity of the consequences, stating that civil servants found engaging in UOG will be subject to strict action”[29]

This strong stance, however, is not matched by evidence of widespread implementation. The disconnect between rhetoric and practice leaves a question mark over the effectiveness of these sanctions as a deterrent. Instead of merely relying on punitive measures, a more comprehensive strategy that addresses the root causes of UOG, including public awareness campaigns, targeted intervention programs, and robust preventative measures, may prove more effective in combating this complex issue.

4.10 Social Impact

The social impact of UOG emphasizes the perceived disruption it causes to Indonesian society. Speakers frequently invoke the sanctity of the family unit, portraying gambling-induced divorce as a major threat. Concerns about the erosion of traditional values and family stability are evident in the anxieties expressed about the perceived negative impact of UOG on national mentality and morality. The narrative paints a picture of a society becoming increasingly lazy, addicted, and obsessed with finding “easy money.”

This moral panic is amplified by the prominent role of religious perspectives in the discourse. Religious leaders and institutions condemn gambling as a moral vice, drawing on religious teachings to frame UOG as a grave sin. For example, the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) declares that gambling is a “perbuatan tersebut termasuk dosa besar yang sangat berbahaya dan sangat besar dampak mudaratnya.”[30] This religiously grounded condemnation reinforces the portrayal of UOG as a threat to not only societal well-being but also deeply held religious principles. The BPIP warns that “Judi online membuat masyarakat menjadi spekulatif. Keinginan untuk cepat kaya tanpa bekerja keras membuat banyak orang terjebak dalam perangkap judi online,”[17] fostering a detrimental desire for “easy money” without hard work.

The perceived link between UOG and societal breakdown is further reinforced by pronouncements from government officials. The Minister of Communication and Information (Kominfo) provides statistical evidence linking online gambling to divorce, stating, “Tahun 2020 angka (perceraian karena judi online) tersebut turun menjadi 648 kasus. Namun, di tahun 2023, terjadi kenaikan jumlah kasus perceraian karena judi online menjadi 1.572 kasus.”[31] This statistical evidence, combined with the moral pronouncements and anxieties about societal decay, creates a powerful narrative that frames UOG as a serious threat requiring immediate action.

4.11 Threat Construction

This theme delves into the specific language employed to construct UOG as a pressing threat, revealing how political actors strategically use rhetoric to emphasize urgency, evoke fear, and justify exceptional measures. The language used is not merely descriptive but performative, actively shaping public perception and creating a sense of crisis.

The urgency of the issue is often underscored through the use of evocative terms like "darurat" (emergency), "krisis" (crisis), and "bahaya" (danger). For example, the Minister of Communication and Information (Kominfo) declares, "Para pelaku makin berani dan terang-terangan mempromosikan judi online via media sosial. Kita darurat judi online." [23] This declaration of emergency elevates UOG beyond a simple social problem, framing it as a critical situation demanding immediate action.

Beyond the framing of urgency, other actors broaden the scope of the threat. The BPIP, for instance, portrays UOG as an ideological threat to the nation, stating that it contradicts the principles of Pancasila. They argue, "Bertentangan, justru kalau orang yang menghayati Pancasila, orang kan punya pengetahuan takut akan tuhan. Judi online itu kan sebenarnya dosa. Mengapa dosa? Karena dengan judi online, mereka, artinya pelaku judi itu, tidak menggunakan talentanya kemampuan untuk yang produktif tapi non-produktif." [24] This framing links UOG to a broader moral and ideological struggle, expanding the perceived threat beyond its immediate social and economic consequences.

The financial impact of UOG is also frequently evoked to justify exceptional measures. Kominfo emphasizes the economic devastation caused by online gambling, stating, "Judi online ini betul-betul merusak masyarakat, menghisap darah rakyat. Daya rusaknya ini langsung ke ekonomi, pinjaman online ilegal, membuat masyarakat makin sengsara. Yang kami pertaruhkan adalah nasib rakyat.." [23] This statement employs vivid imagery of economic exploitation and suffering to further underscore the gravity of the threat posed by UOG and the need for decisive action."

Several key findings can be observed. KEMEN PPPA stands out as the sole voice addressing "Crime: Human Trafficking," while POLRI predominantly focuses on "Crime: Transnational." Concerns about "Impact for Future Generation" are primarily voiced by the President and relevant ministries. "Policy: Sanctions" is the domain of KEMENPAN RB, OJK, and TNI, indicating their focus on punitive measures.

"Crime," a broadly discussed theme, connects to KEJAGUNG, KEMENKOMARVES, and POLRI. "Economic Impact" and its online loan implications are shared concerns for KEMENKOMINFO, the President, and BPIP. "External Threat" is primarily addressed by PPATK and the Gambling Task Force, reflecting their focus on international aspects. "Social Impact" and "Threat Construction" are discussed across various governmental bodies, particularly those focused on religious and social issues.

KEMENKOMINFO emerges as a central actor, addressing most of the themes, demonstrating a broad involvement in the UOG discourse. This diagram effectively illustrates the multifaceted nature of the UOG issue and the complex interplay between the various actors involved in addressing it. It highlights the specialization of certain actors on specific themes, while also revealing the shared responsibility and collaborative efforts required to combat UOG.

5 Conclusion

This research examined the securitization of unregulated online gambling (UOG) in Indonesia through a thematic analysis of 44 speeches by executive branch actors. While the discourse constructs UOG as a significant threat to national security, societal well-being, and moral values—emphasizing criminal aspects, economic hardship, and the potential for social disruption—the resulting policy responses have been largely symbolic and ineffective. This discrepancy between rhetoric and action suggests a performative securitization, where the language of threat is deployed without corresponding concrete measures.

Several key findings highlight this disconnect. Despite strong rhetoric criminalizing UOG and associated activities, the implementation of sanctions, particularly against government employees, remains largely theoretical. While the discourse acknowledges the transnational nature of UOG and calls for regional cooperation, it simultaneously externalizes blame, attributing the problem to neighboring countries and highlighting Indonesia's limited jurisdictional reach. This externalization potentially deflects responsibility and hinders the development of effective domestic strategies. Furthermore, the discourse focuses heavily on the microeconomic impacts of UOG, such as household debt and individual financial ruin, while neglecting the broader macroeconomic implications. This narrow focus limits a comprehensive understanding of the issue and its potential systemic consequences. Finally, while the establishment of task forces signals a commitment to addressing UOG, their effectiveness remains questionable due to a lack of clearly defined objectives and concrete actions. Therefore, while the securitization framework has successfully raised the salience of UOG in Indonesia, it has not translated into effective policy. Future research should explore alternative frameworks and the role of non-state actors to better understand and address this complex issue.

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