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The securitization of Brexit by Vote Leave during the official Brexit campaign

Leiden University
Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs
MSc Crisis and Security Management

Written by: Thawin de Lange
Student Number: s1533274
Thesis Supervisor: Dr. M.B.D. Benraad
Second Reader: Dr. P.G.M. Aarten
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Abstract

The 2016 Brexit referendum on the European Union (EU) membership in the United Kingdom (UK) was the result of a long-term discussion about the United Kingdom's EU membership. The referendum resulted in a majority of the UK population voting in favour of leaving the EU. However, little attention is paid to the securitization of Brexit in Vote Leave's public communication during the Brexit campaign. Vote Leave was the official group that campaigned in favour of leaving the EU for the referendum. The aim of this research is to explain the securitization of Brexit in the Leave group's public communication during the official Brexit campaign. To this end, the research question is as follows: *To what degree and how can securitization theory explain the Leave group's public communication during the official Brexit campaign, and how is it likely to have influenced the actual Brexit?* The research question is answered through a thematic discourse analysis of Vote Leave's public communication. The public communication is divided into three main themes. These themes are: migration, economy, and terrorism. The research results show that securitization theory to a large extent explains the public communication. Moreover, the results also indicate that it is likely that Vote Leave's successful securitization of Brexit has influenced the actual Brexit. On the basis of the results, the consistency, clarity, and coherency in the public communication are the main explanatory factors for the securitization of Brexit. Future research could be undertaken to give insight into how Vote Leave's campaign plans are reflected in the Brexit negotiations between the UK and the EU, and the future UK-EU relationship.

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1. Introduction

The membership of the European Union (EU) has been the topic of much debate in the United Kingdom (UK) for a long time. The Conservative Party's victory in the 2015 UK general election marked the beginning of the Brexit referendum process that started in May 2015. The Conservative Party made a manifesto in which they called for a referendum on the EU membership. As a result, the UK Parliament established the European Union Referendum Act 2015 that formed the legal basis of the referendum. The referendum question was: "Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?" The citizens who were eligible to vote chose in favour of Brexit: 51.9% of the participating electorate in the UK voted to leave the EU in the referendum. However, this research focuses on the official Brexit campaign prior to the referendum on 23 June 2016.

The official Brexit campaign started on 15 April 2016 and ended on 23 June 2016, the day of the referendum. This time period was decided by the Electoral Commission. The Electoral Commission is an independent body in the UK, which was responsible for the regulations concerning the Brexit campaign and referendum. The official campaign for leaving the EU was led by one single organisation: Vote Leave. The Electoral Commission designated Vote Leave before the official Brexit campaign started (Stone, 2016).

There is lot of uncertainty about the consequences of Brexit and the possible repercussions for the UK, but this research focuses on what actually happened during the official Brexit campaign. The content of the Leave group's public communication during the Brexit campaign gained little attention after the referendum's decision to leave the EU. This was because academia and the media focused on the difficult process for the UK of leaving the EU, and all the possible consequences that Brexit will have for both the UK and the EU.

An understanding of the Brexit campaign is crucial for the understanding of the actual Brexit, because the Leave group's campaign was an integral part of the referendum. The members of Vote Leave performed several public speeches and also issued written statements in order to convince the UK electorate to vote in favour of Brexit. Little scholarly attention has been paid to the securitization of Brexit and the idea of transforming subjects into terms of security in Vote Leave's public communication during the official Brexit campaign.

The UK and the EU are currently negotiating about the withdrawal of the UK from the EU but it is interesting to look back on how Brexit actually happened in order to focus on how

issues were presented as a threat in the Leave group's campaign. This research looks at the process before the Brexit referendum and especially on how the Leave group securitized issues during the official campaign.

The theoretical framework of this research is built upon securitization theory of the Copenhagen School. Securitization involves a process of social construction: the securitizing speech act, in which a threat is socially constructed by a securitizing actor. The securitizing actor must label a subject as a threat and as posing an existential threat for the survival of a referent object. The acceptance of the securitizing speech act by the audience will legitimize the use of extraordinary measures in order to neutralize the threat (Šulović, 2010, p. 3). The four main concepts in securitization theory are: the securitizing actor, the referent object, the existential threat, and the audience.

1.1 The current status of the Brexit process

Brexit created fear and uncertainty among politicians and citizens about all the consequences of Brexit for both the UK and Europe. The political leaders of other EU countries were disappointed by the result of the referendum. The leaders of France and Germany, two important countries in the EU, expressed their concern and regretted the decision of the UK. Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany, stated that "We take note of the British people's decision with regret." And François Hollande, former French President, said that "This is a painful choice and it is deeply regrettable both for the UK and Europe." The Eurosceptical parties in Europe, however, were delighted with the referendum result and perceived Brexit as the beginning of the end of the EU. Both Geert Wilders of the Dutch Freedom Party and Marine Le Pen of the National Front in France demanded a similar referendum in their own country (BBC News, 2016).

The referendum result led to very mixed reactions in the UK, because the results showed that the Leave group had won with only a narrow majority. Many citizens expressed their fears, grievances and hopes in the days after the referendum. For the people who wanted to remain in the EU, Brexit came as a painful decision and they feared for the political and economic repercussions of the EU for the UK. Citizens who voted to remain in the EU, argued that Brexit could be seen as the beginning of a slippery slope to an economic catastrophe (Erlanger, 2016). Furthermore, many students were concerned about their opportunities and considered

remaining in the EU essential for their own future. But the Leave group supporters were very happy with the result and perceived Brexit as a great opportunity and the beginning of taking back control of their own country (Gleeson, 2016).

The UK is currently in the difficult process of leaving the EU. On 29 March 2017, the UK invoked Article 50 of the Treaty on the European Union. This article refers to the political and legal process whereby a member state of the EU wants to terminate their membership. The EU treaties are not applicable to the UK when there is a withdrawal agreement between the UK and the EU, or two years after the UK notified the European Council to leave the EU. This means that 29 March 2019 is the scheduled date for the UK to officially leave the EU.

The current negotiations between the UK and the EU focus on the future relationship between the UK and the EU and the possible plans for a "transition" period after 29 March 2019, in order to ease the way for a post-Brexit relationship between the two actors. The terms "hard" and "soft" Brexit are unofficial terms but became very popular in the media and the public debate. These terms refer to the future relationship between the UK and the EU after the official withdrawal of the UK. A "hard" Brexit means that the UK may fall outside of the trade arrangements with the EU. A "soft" Brexit means that the UK will remain access to the internal market of the EU (Raitio & Raulus, 2017, p. 27).

Brexit also raises a lot of questions about the security implications for the UK and the EU, because Brexit poses a direct security challenge for both actors. Brexit has various implications to the security of the countries in Europe, and in particular to the domestic security of the UK. There are several issues of concern. First of all, the defence budgets in the UK and the EU. Currently, the UK's defence budget is the second largest in NATO and the UK spends more on defence than any other EU member state (Black, Hall, Cox, Kepe, & Silfversten, 2017, P. 36).

The European migrant crisis is also challenging both actors. This is a very complex topic for the EU. The implications of Brexit for Europe's migrant crisis and especially the situation in Calais at the border with France are issues of concern.

Another important security challenge is the involvement of the UK in EU defence and security activities. The position and role of the UK as a main actor in regional and global security matters will be challenged (Chun, 2016, p. 340). It is uncertain what the future strategy of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy will be. The result of Brexit is that a major military power leaves the EU and it is therefore uncertain if the UK will be involved in the current and future European defence missions.

Another security challenge is the effect of Brexit on the current UK and EU efforts to combat terrorism and organised crime. It is unclear what the future relationship between the UK and EU agencies such as Europol and key tools such as the European Arrest Warrant (EAW) will look like. The recent terrorist attacks in Europe and the possible return of European foreign fighters creates a major security challenge for the European countries. Furthermore, organised crime poses a threat to both actors, because the EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment shows that there are approximately 3,600 organised crime groups active in the EU in 2017 (Black et al., 2017, p. 122).

Brexit also raises questions about how Brexit will affect EU intelligence and information sharing mechanisms between the UK and the EU. Europol is the European hub for the exchange of information and investigations on cross-border and organized crime. The UK's role is very important because around 40 percent of Europol's cases are focused on the UK. Moreover, the EAW has been proven to be a very useful tool for the UK and other EU member states in order to arrest criminals who attempted to flee the country (Black et al., 2017, pp. 124-126).

The Brexit referendum that resulted in the decision of the UK population to leave the EU created a lot of security challenges for both the UK and the EU. Therefore, given the direct consequences, looking at what inspired the UK population to support the Leave group is important to study. Hence, this research focuses on how the Leave group securitized Brexit during the official Brexit campaign.

1.2 Research question

To what degree and how can securitization theory explain the Leave group's public communication during the official Brexit campaign, and how is it likely to have influenced the actual Brexit?

1.3 Scientific relevance

Little academic research has been carried out in relation to the official Brexit campaign because most research focuses on the implications and possible consequences of Brexit (Hobolt, 2016, p. 1261).

This research's main academic relevance is the general lack of empirical research and interest in the field of security studies on the part of referendum campaigns because referendum

campaigns are an understudied topic in academia (Wirth et al., 2010, p. 328). However, the Brexit referendum has shown that referendums are an important political tool that can have a major and decisive effect with several security implications (Moore, 2018, p. 2). Furthermore, referendums are very different from regular national elections because a referendum presents a different sets of choices to the voter than a national election (Leduc, 2002, p. 711). This makes it interesting to study what the role of securitization theory in referendum campaigns is. Securitization theory provides the tools to study public communication and to analyse how issues are presented as threats. It is important to do research about the securitization of Brexit during the official campaign because the campaign was an integral part of the process prior to the referendum and Brexit created considerable security challenges and implications for both the UK and the EU (Chun, 2016, p. 330).

Furthermore, this research looks closely at the current state of the academic literature on securitization theory of the Copenhagen School. The empirical analysis of this research will offer new insights into securitization theory in relation to referendum campaigns that allows future research to implement the ideas of securitization theory in new ways and also to expand the research on securitization theory in the field of security studies.

Academia is currently more interested in the implications and challenges created by Brexit instead of in how the Brexit referendum actually happened and especially the Leave group's campaign (Menon & Fowler, 2016, p. 8). However, it is also relevant to focus on how the Leave group presented the UK's membership of the EU in terms of security and how this could have influenced the UK population to vote against the EU membership (Donnelly & Gani, 2017, pp. 1-2). From a security perspective it is interesting to focus now on the Leave group's campaign because the UK is currently negotiating with the EU about the process of leaving the EU.

This research aims to explain the securitization of Brexit in the Leave group's public communication during the official Brexit campaign. The empirical analysis of the public communication will contribute to a better understanding of how the Leave group's security plans might influence the Brexit negotiations, and also of what the future relationship between the UK and the EU could look like (Eldridge, 2016, p. 156).

1.4 Societal relevance

Brexit created a lot of uncertainty and fear in European societies and especially among citizens in the UK. In addition, many political leaders from all over the world were shocked after the

referendum result. This resulted in a lot of attention to Brexit's consequences and the political, social, and economic repercussions for the UK (Pollard, 2018).

The link from this research to the field of security studies follows from the fact that the Brexit referendum had a persuasive effect for citizens because of the different security implications that will likely have an impact on citizens in the UK and the EU (Biscop, 2016, p. 431). The news coverage of Brexit in the European and British media mainly focused on the uncertainty and the consequences for citizens in the UK and the EU (Corbett, 2016, p. 27). But instead of looking at the future it also relevant for the British society to look back on how Brexit actually happened and how the Leave group securitized Brexit in order to convince the UK electorate to vote in favour of Brexit.

Campaign periods are important times for politicians in order to convince the electorate prior to a referendum. The official Brexit campaign was the most important period for the Leave group to convince the UK electorate to vote against the EU in the referendum (Qvortrup, 2015, p. 40). This empirical research aims to explain to what degree the Leave group securitized Brexit in order to convince the UK electorate that leaving the EU was in the best interest of the UK and its citizens.

Moreover, there has been little research on referendum campaigns in general but also on referendums in the UK. This research will not only create a better understanding of how the Brexit referendum happened and what influenced the UK electorate, but it will also give the UK citizens a better insight into what the current Brexit negotiations are about and why certain themes are important points of discussion from a security perspective (Guldi, 2017, p. 155). Furthermore, this research contributes to a better understanding of the future relationship between the UK and the EU, and what this relationship could look like (Biscop, 2016, p. 440). The social, economic, and political conditions that existed in the UK during the official Brexit campaign are taken into account in order to help understand the context in which the Leave group securitized Brexit. Another aspect of the societal value of this research resides in the relevance to better understand future referendum campaigns and referendums in the field of security studies but also future referendums about the EU membership in other EU countries (Fisher & Shorrocks, 2018, p. 60).

This empirical research on the Leave group's securitization of Brexit during the official campaign will contribute to a better understanding of how the Leave group tried to frame the EU membership and tried to influence the UK population in their public communication.

1.5 Reading guide

In the first chapter, the topic and research question were introduced. It also explained the setting of Brexit in the UK and Europe. The main goal of this research is to explain the Leave group's public communication during the official Brexit campaign with the analytical tools of securitization theory. The next two chapters will explain the theoretical framework and methodology before turning to the analysis of the Leave group's public communication.

The second chapter will describe securitization theory and its main concepts. Furthermore, the criticism of securitization theory and related research on securitization theory are outlined in this chapter.

The third chapter will explain the methodology. This chapter describes the research design, method, and also the concepts and indicators of this research. In addition, the selection of cases, research choices, and limitations are justified.

The fourth chapter will provide the research findings of the thematic discourse analysis of the Leave group's public communication. This chapter is structured around the three most dominant themes in the public communication during the official campaign. These themes are: migration, economy, and terrorism (Vote Leave, 2016a).

The last chapter, building the conclusion respectively, contains a critical discussion of the research results and the answer to the research question. Furthermore, this section discusses the research limitations, and suggestions for further academic research on this topic are made.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is built upon securitization theory of the Copenhagen School because this theory forms the basis for the analysis of the Leave group's public communication. Securitization theory developed in the early 1990s and it was Ole Wæver who introduced the concept of securitization in 1995. In his article *Securitization and Desecuritization*, Wæver explained the general idea of securitization as a social process in which a securitizing actor labels a certain topic as a security topic (Wæver, 1995, pp. 31-32). Securitization theory can be seen as a response to the traditional and narrow definition of security, which mainly focused on military issues in which the state is the primary actor.

2.1 The meaning of security in securitization theory

Securitization theory creates a conceptual move and a new understanding of security in the field of security studies. In general, security was conceptualized in objectivist terms, in which threats were objective. In securitization theory, however, security is whatever a securitizing actor may regard as such (Guzzini, 2011, p. 330). The ontological standpoint of securitization theory is that security is the outcome of an intersubjective and social construction process. This means that security has no objective and given meaning, but is socially constructed. The definition of security is broadened to include threats that go beyond the traditional terms of military security because the definition of security is the outcome of a social construction process. Traditionally, the referent object has always been the state. By using the analytical framework of securitization theory, it becomes clear that different sectors, such as the political, the military, the economic, the societal, and the environmental sector, can have different referent objects. However, what all referent objects have in common is that they must face an existential threat that require extraordinary measures and the acceptance of the designation of the threat by an audience (Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, 1998, p. 27).

The main argument of securitization theory is that security can be achieved through a speech act in which a security issue is uttered by a securitizing actor. This process of labelling makes that a certain issue becomes a security issue (Wæver, 2004, p. 13). It is the language used by the actor that creates a security issue. The securitizing speech act is the social construction process of a threat that involves a securitizing actor, who labels a certain subject as urgent and

as posing a threat for the survival of a referent object. If the speech act is accepted by the audience, this legitimizes the use of extraordinary measures in order to neutralize the threat (Šulović, 2010, p. 3). In other words, something must be done immediately, because the survival of the referent object is at stake.

Securitization theory has four main concepts. First, the securitizing actor who declares that a referent object is under an existential threat. Traditionally, this actor is a state representative but the term securitizing actor can, however, also refer to actors who are part of the elite in other sectors. Most important is that the actor is supported by the threatened group and this group must be considered as the referent object. Second, the referent object is the term that refers to the object or entity who is facing an existential threat. The referent object must have a legitimate claim that their survival and existence are at stake because of this threat. Third, the existential threat refers to the entity that is threatening the referent object. This can be anything, as long as it threatens the referent object (Buzan et al., 1998, pp. 35-37). Fourth, the audience. These are the people who need to be convinced by the securitizing actor that a referent object is under an existential threat. It is important that the securitizing actor successfully convinces the audience, so that they will accept the extraordinary measures. In securitization theory, security has an intersubjective meaning and there is a need for a shared meaning between the securitizing actor and audience.

Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, the main scholars of the Copenhagen School, define securitization as the result of a successful speech act, “Through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat” (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 491). It is essential that an issue is presented as an existential threat. This can be done by stating that it is essential to deal with a specific problem and to make everything else irrelevant (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 24). For example, by arguing that it is essential to deal with a specific threat in order to ensure the continuing of our way of living in a free society. Securitization theory argues that a successful securitization act moves issues from the politicized area into the securitized area on a spectrum that ranges from non-politicized issues to securitized issues. This means that security no longer has any pre-existing or given meaning. Anything can now become a security issue, when a securitizing actor says it is. Security is a social construction and that requires an intersubjective understanding.

Wæver argues that “by uttering security,” a securitizing actor moves a particular issue into a specific area. The result is that the actor claims to have a special right to use whatever means are necessary to deal with the threat (Wæver, 1995, p. 55). The success of a securitization act depends on the ability of the securitizing actor to specify the threat to a collective group and to create a ‘we’ against a supposedly threatening ‘them’, in order to get support from the audience.

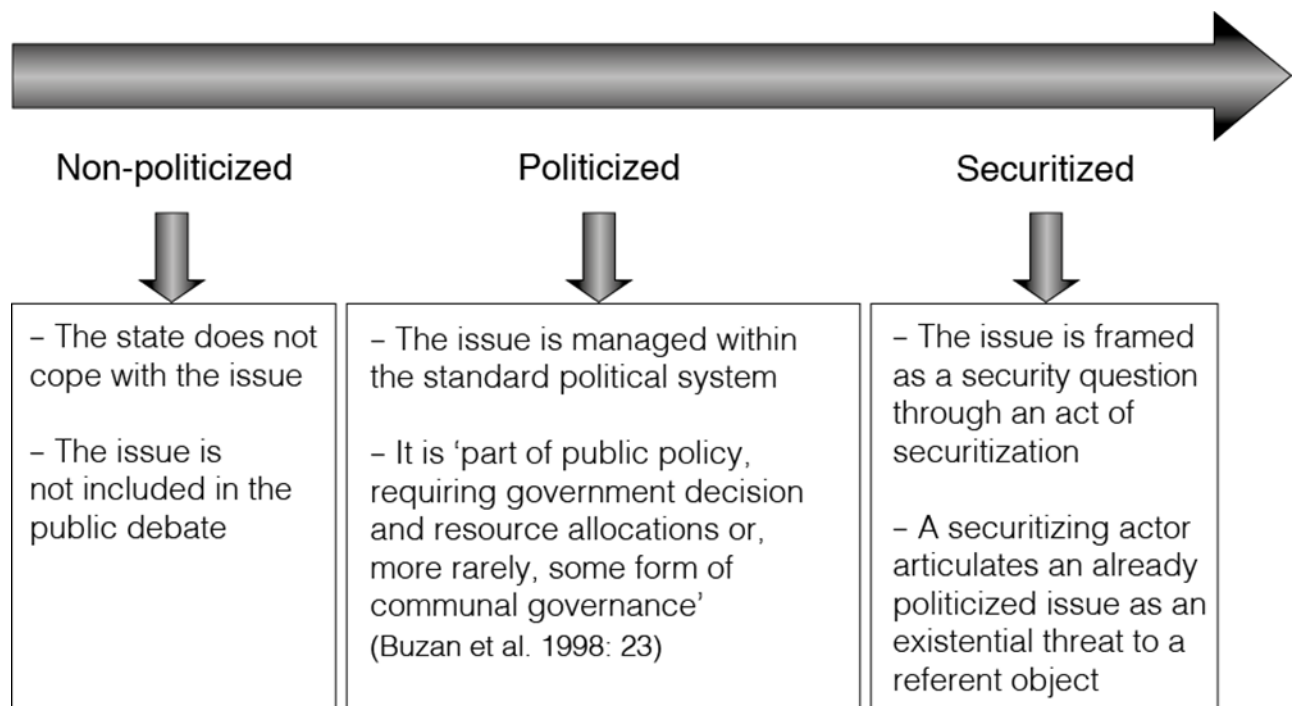


Figure 1. The securitization spectrum. Reprinted from *Contemporary Security Studies* (p. 133), by Emmers, R., 2010, New York: Oxford University Press. Copyright 2010 by Emmers, R.

Politicized issues are part of public policy issues that require action from the government. These issues are normally dealt within the political system, but securitization is about issues that require extraordinary measures. These measures go beyond the normal political procedures and measures (Does, 2013). As Figure 1 shows, securitized issues are at one end of the securitization spectrum and politicized issues at the other end of the spectrum. However, it is also possible to take issues out of the securitized area. Desecuritization is the opposite process of securitization and refers to “the shifting of the issues out of the emergency model and into the normal bargaining process of the political sphere” (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 4). However, the details of the process of desecuritization are not clearly explained by the Copenhagen School.

Important questions when studying securitization theory focus on who is able to perform a successful securitizing act, under what conditions, on what issues, and with what effects (Buzan

et al., 1998, p. 27). According to the Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, securitizing actors “are placed in positions of power by virtue of being generally accepted voices of security” (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 23). Furthermore, Wæver argues that security is mostly articulated by elites in a specific place or sector (Wæver, 1995, p. 57). The focus is on the dominant actors and voices in the construction of security. Other actors, such as the media, that promote and facilitate the security discourse, are identified as functional actors by the Copenhagen School.

Securitization happens through the process in which an issue becomes a security issue. This process does not happen because of the objective importance or the nature of a threat, but as a result of how an issue is presented as a threat by a securitizing actor. Securitization theory can be applied to any situation in which a securitizing actor tries to convince an audience to believe in a certain perspective (Carvalho Pinto, 2014, p. 164). The success of a securitizing act also depends on the acceptance of the audience. The audience plays a fundamental role because of the intersubjective character of securitization theory. The audience is essential in the creation of a shared understanding of security issues and also for the justification of extraordinary security measures.

Issues become securitized at a specific moment. The question is when this specific moment occurs. However, the literature of the Copenhagen School shows that this moment can be at different times. This moment can occur when an issue is defined as a security issue by a securitizing actor, when the audience supports the classification of the threat, or when the extraordinary measures are implemented (McDonald, 2008, p. 575).

2.2 Criticism of securitization theory

Securitization theory provides a broad theoretical framework in order to analyse how issues are positioned as security threats. This makes it possible to identify how issues can be successfully or unsuccessfully securitized. However, securitization theory is also being criticised. First, there are problems with the conceptual coherency. Since everything can be defined as a security issue, the concept of security becomes meaningless. The analytical framework of securitization theory will lose its utility because there are no limitations of what acts can essentially count as securitization and of what can be defined as a threat. This also makes it more difficult to identify securitization acts and the relevant actors. However, the broad framework can still be used to analyse various understandings of security that are different than the traditional view of security (Charrett, 2009, p. 37).

Second, the pre-established and fixed relation between the four concepts does not fit in the dynamic and broad framework of securitization theory. The four main concepts, the securitizing actor, the referent object, the existential threat, and the audience are strictly separated from each other. This does not fit into the dynamic process of securitization that focuses on a social construction process and shared understanding of security (Stritzel, 2007, p. 366). However, these concepts should rather be used to identify and structure the process when studying securitization.

Furthermore, securitization theory is mainly descriptive because the framework makes it impossible to compare securitized issues with the ‘actual’ situation and institutionalized practises. Information about the ‘actual’ situation often influences how an audience perceives and thinks about the referent object and the existential threat. Rather, the framework should be used to describe how threats acquire prominence in order to justify extraordinary measures (Balzacq, Léonard, & Ruzicka, 2016, pp. 518-519).

2.3 Related research on referendum campaigns and securitization theory

There is a clear lack of academic research in the literature of securitization theory that uses the analytical tools of securitization theory in campaigns prior to referendums. Referendums are an important political tool for citizens to express their opinion about a specific matter. The Brexit referendum has shown that a referendum can have a persuasive effect and this means that the campaign period is important in order to influence the electorate and to construct security threats. National referendums are only rarely held in the UK because referendums are not constitutionally binding for the UK Government and/or the Parliament. Only three referendums have been held in the UK: In 1975, 2011, and 2016. However, the Brexit referendum in 2016 has shown that referendums can have a decisive impact. Securitization theory in relation to referendum campaigns are an understudied topic and this research will use securitization theory to analyse the Leave group’s public communication during the official Brexit campaign.

Although there is little research on the securitization of topics during referendum campaigns, some research has been carried out on securitization theory in relation to politics within the field of security studies. For example, research by Karyotis and Patrikios (2010) shows how migration was securitized in the political discourse in Greece in the 1990s. The starting point for the securitization of migrants was the offensive language towards immigrants used by Greek politicians. The Greek politicians were the securitizing actors and they used symbolic language,

exaggerations, metaphors, and they criminalized the ‘other,’ all in order to construct migrants as a threat. The implemented restrictive policy was the result of the offensive language used by the Greek politicians that laid the foundation and formed the main legitimizing factor for new migration laws. The Greek government supported the new laws by arguing that that migration posed a threat to the Greek society, economy, and national interests. An official document by the Greek government showed that the word ‘problem’ was mentioned 28 times in relation to migration (Karyotis & Patrikios, 2010, p. 46).

Another study by Carvalho Pinto (2014) shows how securitization theory can explain the 2011 Arab Spring protests in Bahrain. The king of Bahrain securitized the Shiite demonstrations by taking the sovereignty of Bahrain as the referent object and he delineated an existential threat to the country’s national integrity. The securitization act was successful because the king consistently highlighted historical animosity between Shiites and Sunnis, an existing problem and major factor of conflict in the region. This study shows that it is important for a securitizing actor to take into account the specific cultural context, audience’s worldview, and existing problems during a securitizing act (Carvalho Pinto, 2014, pp. 168-173).

Furthermore, Carrapico (2014) did research about securitization theory in the context of the EU. Her research focused on how securitization theory can explain that organized crime has become one of the major security threats for the EU since 1980. Organized crime, just like referendum campaigns, have seldom featured as research topic for securitization theory (Carrapico, 2014, p. 603). Carrapico’s research findings show how organized crime was firstly considered as a concern for the individual member states but a policy document of the European Commission in 1985 showed that there was a need for a more active role of the EU in tackling organized crime. Moreover, the establishment of the Schengen area in 1985 increased the need and acceptance by the member states to enable the EU to expand their legal and political instruments to tackle organized crime (Carrapico, 2014, pp. 608-609). This research shows how securitization theory can explain how a non-traditional security topic is transformed into a security threat and that securitization theory can be applied to a wide variety of topics.

In addition, some other research in the field of political science focused on the adoption of frames during referendum campaigns. Research by Leduc (2002) focuses on the shaping of the public opinion during European and North American referendum campaigns. The public opinion can shift dramatically during referendum campaigns. Leduc argues that the dynamics of a referendum campaign make it difficult to predict the voters’ opinion, the voter turnout, and

outcome of the referendum. In some referendum campaigns there is no specific issue, partisan or an ideological basis from which voters might tend to form an opinion. This is because voters cannot be expected to have a well-formed opinion on an issue that has never been the subject of the public debate. It is therefore important that a topic is familiar in the political and public debate arena or that political parties take very competing positions. This will make the decision easier for voters and this decision also tends to be made earlier in the campaign (Leduc, 2002, pp. 716-718).

Other research on referendum campaigns by Schuck and Vreese (2009), who did a case study on the Dutch European Constitution referendum in 2005, shows how news framing can influence mobilization during referendum campaigns. Referendum campaigns are influential because they are characterised by a high degree of electoral volatility in comparison to national elections. Their research focuses on how political communication is used to mobilize voters in the context of a referendum. The research results indicate that the Dutch European Constitution referendum was positively framed in the Dutch media, the future benefits were promoted over the potential disadvantages. However, this positive framing of the referendum led to a reversed mobilization because it mainly mobilized the sceptical no-voters instead of the yes-voters. This research shows that a political message does not have to be negative to create a perception of negativity (Schuck & Vreese, 2009, pp. 42-55).

2.4 Securitization theory and the official Brexit campaign

Securitization theory provides an appropriate analytical framework for studying the Brexit campaign, since the Leave group needed to legitimate the extraordinary measure of leaving the EU to the UK population. The Brexit campaign is interesting to study because even though the referendum had a decisive political effect, the consequences are still uncertain. In terms of security, Brexit will have important security implications for both the UK and the EU, and is likely to affect the security cooperation in Europe. This research will give insight into how the Leave group presented different issues as a security threat for the UK, and it will contribute to a better understanding of securitization theory in relation to referendum campaigns.

This research provides an empirical analysis of the Leave group's public communication during the official Brexit campaign. The objectives of this research are to explain the securitization of Brexit in the Leave group's public communication and to contribute to a better understanding of the role of their public communication.

3. Methodology

This chapter explains the research design, method, and also the main concepts and indicators of this research. Furthermore, the selection of the Leave group's public communication and both the internal and external validity are discussed.

3.1 Research design

This research has a qualitative research method and uses a cross-sectional research design together with a case study of the official Brexit campaign. The research design is cross-sectional because the analysis focuses on the Leave group's public communication during the official Brexit campaign, a specific moment in time. The time element is important and the public communication cases are collected at a single point in time in order to collect a body of qualitative data that will be analysed (Bryman, 2012, p. 59).

Furthermore, this research consists of a holistic single-case study design because the goal of this research design is to provide contextualised insight into the official Brexit campaign. The context is important in order to analyse how securitization theory can explain the Leave group's public communication during the official Brexit campaign. The official campaign ran from 15 April 2016 to 23 June 2016. The Brexit campaign is chosen as a single case to test securitization theory and to provide a detailed and thorough analysis of securitization theory in the Leave group's public communication (Bryman, 2012, p. 66).

This means that this research has a deductive approach. The analysis of the public communication presents the research findings on the Leave group during the official Brexit campaign. The unit of observation is the Leave group's public communication and the unit of analysis is the Leave group.

3.2 Research method

The public communication of the Leave group is analysed by a Thematic Discourse Analysis (TDA). This method can identify and analyse themes in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). The TDA makes it possible to analyse the direct representation of an actor's own point of view, perceptions, and beliefs (Butcher, Holkup, Park, & Maas, 2001, p. 474). The TDA will analyse the three dominant themes during the Brexit campaign because these themes are explicitly mentioned in the Leave group's official campaign program. These themes are:

migration, economy, and terrorism (Vote Leave, 2016a). The analysis concentrates on these three themes and the securitization of the themes in the public communication. The focus is on how many times these themes occur in the public communication and how they are labelled and/or qualified by the Leave group. The securitization of these themes is analysed with the analytical tools of securitization theory.

Microsoft Word is the programme for the TDA of the public communication. The comment and highlight functions in this programme help to organize and structure all the material. The classification of all the public communication is the starting point of the TDA. Classifying will turn the data into fragments that are labelled in order to analyse the securitization of the three dominant themes in the public communication (Bryman, 2012, p. 575).

3.3 Operationalisation: Concepts and indicators

Securitization theory is used to analyse the themes in the Leave group's public communication. The four main concepts of a securitization act are: the securitizing actor, the referent object, the existential threat, and the audience. The definitions of the main concepts for this research are based on the definitions and explanations that are given in the book *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* by Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde. This book is chosen as a point of reference because it is written by Buzan and Wæver, who developed securitization theory and are also the main scholars of the Copenhagen School. The following concepts are used:

- The securitizing actor: the actor who securitizes an issue and thereby declares that a referent object is under an existential threat.
- The referent object: something that is under an existential threat and also has a legitimate claim to survival.
- The existential threat: the threat is always seen in relation to the referent object. This means that the existential threat can be anything but it has to threaten the referent object. In securitization theory anything can be presented as an existential threat.
- The audience: the people who need to be convinced by the securitizing actor that the referent object is existentially threatened (Buzan et al., 1998, pp. 35-37).

As Figure 2 shows, the definitions of securitization theory also provide the indicators for the analysis of the public communication.

Concept	Indicators
The securitizing actor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who wrote the public letter. - Who wrote the written statement. - Who performed the public speech.
The referent object	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is under an existential threat. - What needs to be protected in order to survive. - What requires extraordinary measures in order to ensure its existence in the future.
The existential threat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is explicitly mentioned and presented as an existential threat by the securitizing actor. - What is the issue or problem need to be dealt with. - What issue or problem requires extraordinary measure need to be taken in order to neutralize the threat.
The audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who is addressed by the securitizing actor in the securitization act. - Who needs to be convinced by the securitizing actor. - Who must accept the necessary extraordinary measures.

Figure 2. The main concepts and indicators of securitization theory.

3.4 Themes

Migration, economy, and terrorism are chosen as main themes for the TDA because these themes are explicitly mentioned in the Leave group's official plans and on their website. As a result, these themes were consistently highlighted during the campaign.

Migration was an important theme because it was directly related to UK border control and the European refugee crisis. The main statement on the Vote Leave website is: "The EU immigration system is immoral and unfair" (Vote Leave, 2016a). This statement is followed by four 'facts' about migration and the EU according to Vote Leave. The first fact is that the EU immigration system is out of control and the EU membership prevents the UK to control who comes into the country, on what terms, and also who can be removed. Secondly, the UK is unable to stop the entrance of criminals from Europe into Great Britain while job creators from non-European countries are blocked by the EU immigration rules. Thirdly, a vote to 'remain' will mean that the UK loses more and more control over their borders to the EU. And fourthly, there is a need to take back control of the UK border, so that the UK can decide who can and who cannot enter the country. This belief was expressed in one of Vote Leave's main slogans, "The only way to take control is to Vote Leave" (Vote Leave, 2016a).

Economy was also an important theme for the Vote Leave campaign - especially the costs of the EU membership. The following statement was published on the Vote Leave website: “Let's spend our money on our priorities” (Vote Leave, 2016a). This statement is followed by five ‘facts’ regarding the UK economy according to Vote Leave. Firstly, since the EU membership in 1973, the UK has spent more than £500 billion on the EU. Secondly, the costs of the EU membership for the UK are over £350 million each week and nearly £20 billion a year. Thirdly, all the money spent on the EU would be enough to create a new and fully staffed National Health Service (NHS) hospital every week. Fourthly, the EU economic policies and regulations cost businesses in the UK millions of pounds every week. And fifthly, the failure of the EU to establish just five trade agreements has resulted in the loss of 284,341 jobs in the UK (Vote Leave, 2016a).

Terrorism was the last main campaign theme. The main statement of Vote Leave in terms of security regarding terrorism is: “Vote Leave is the safer option” (Vote Leave, 2016a). In contrast to the other main themes, Vote Leave used the quotes and opinions of security professionals to support their argument to leave the EU. Vote Leave published these opinions on their website, which they then presented not as opinions but as facts related to security. Firstly, former head of the MI6, Sir Richard Dearlove, has argued that leaving the EU would lead to ‘security gains’ for the UK (Vote Leave, 2016a). Secondly, Ronald Noble, former head of Interpol, has said that the EU is ‘like hanging a sign welcoming terrorists to Europe’ and an ‘international passport-free zone for terrorists’ (Vote Leave, 2016a). Thirdly, the powers of the UK intelligence services and police are controlled by the EU Court, not the UK itself. And fourthly, the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights gives the EU court power over almost any security issue concerning the UK, and also prevents the UK from deporting violent criminals (Vote Leave, 2016a).

As shown in Figure 3, these three broad themes are further specified in several subthemes. This framework of themes and subthemes will be analysed by using the analytical tools of securitization theory.

Themes	Subthemes
Migration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The EU immigration system. - The European refugee crisis. - UK border control.
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Costs of the EU membership. - The businesses in the UK. - Trade, investments, and jobs in the UK.
Terrorism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UK border control. - EU borders control. - The UK intelligence and security services.

Figure 3. Framework of themes and subthemes.

3.5 Sampling

This research concentrates on the official discourse during the Brexit campaign because the empirical analysis focuses on Vote Leave's public communication, the official Leave campaign group. Vote Leave's key public communication consists of public letters, written statements, public speeches, television interviews, and other television appearances by the Vote Leave members. The Vote Leave campaign group consisted mainly of politicians, including Members of Parliament (MPs), from different political parties in the UK. Moreover, Vote Leave was publicly supported by several business leaders and politicians from other countries (Vote Leave, 2016a). All the key public communication issued by members of Vote Leave is published on their official website.

This research uses a purposive sampling technique to collect the cases for the analysis. In total there are 37 official cases of key public communication issued by Vote Leave during the official campaign period. The public communication includes interviews in newspapers and on television programmes by the Vote Leave members but these cases are not included in this research. However, the op-eds will be part of the analysis because an op-ed is a piece of writing, in which the personal opinion of an author is expressed who is not affiliated with the publication's editorial board.

This research includes 25 public communication cases in which Vote Leave members were the only performers. This means that the members could freely express their opinion and this was not strained or influenced by an interviewer or rephrased by an editorial board. 12 public communication cases are excluded from this research because these cases are interviews of Vote Leave members in newspapers, magazines, on television programmes, and other appearances on British television programmes (Vote Leave, 2016b). The interviews in

newspapers or on television were often according to a prescribed format and the Vote Leave members were very frequently disrupted by the interviewer(s) while expressing their opinion. The Vote Leave members had to answer the questions of the interviewer(s) instead of expressing their own opinion on Brexit. Moreover, most interviews in newspapers or magazines and some television programmes were edited afterwards, which means that they only show certain quotes of the Vote Leave members and this is also combined with the interpretation of the editors and/or journalists. These types of public communication can heavily distort the picture of the campaign and does not provide an accurate picture of the opinions held by the Vote Leave members.

The 25 public communication cases for this research are strategically chosen and considered to represent the main views of Vote Leave during the official campaign. The public communication includes: 3 public letters, 12 written statements, and 10 public speeches.

All the required data for this research is available in order to analyse Vote Leave's public communication. The key public communication is available online and there are also full transcripts of the public speeches that were performed by the Vote Leave members during the campaign. The public communication is available online for the public on Vote Leave's official website. This means that the complete analysis of this research is based on primary sources.

3.6 Internal validity

The internal validity refers to whether this research measures what it set out to measure (Wludyka, 2011, p. 96). This research formulated an a priori defined research question and theory, securitization theory, in order to structure the data collection process and therefore give priority to the most relevant public communication cases. The research question and the concepts of securitization theory were used as a guiding framework for this research. This resulted in a data collection process that focuses on the public communication in which the Vote Leave members were the only performers.

The operationalisation of concepts into indicators is based on the definitions and explanations that are given in the book *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* by Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde. Buzan and Wæver developed securitization theory and are considered as the main scholars of the Copenhagen School (McSweeney, 1998, pp. 137-138). The main concepts and definitions of securitization theory are used for the analysis, which improves the internal validity in order to measure and explain securitization in the Leave group's public

communication. This research is about theory testing, which means that the relation between theory and research is deductive. Securitization theory is analysed in the public communication and therefore there is no triangulation of methods.

This empirical research consists of several strengths because it provides a detailed description of the securitization of Brexit in the Leave group's public communication during the official Brexit campaign. The research focuses on the official Brexit campaign and contributes to a better understanding of how the Leave group securitized Brexit and tried to convince the UK electorate. Even though some level of subjectivity is unavoidable in a TDA, this research will use a structured technique for doing the TDA in order to limit the subjectivity of the researcher, and thus improve both the validity and reliability of this research.

This research has also limitations. There is a possible risk of losing the context of Brexit in the analysis of the public communication because the focus becomes too much on the content of the public communication and the social setting is lost. Another limitation is the risk of losing the narrative flow in a public speech or written statement, because the data becomes too fragmented during the thematic discourse analysis (Bryman, 2012, p. 578).

3.7 External validity

The external validity refers to the generalisability of a study. The generalisability of this research is low because of the single-case study design (Wludyka, 2011, p. 96). It is not possible to generalise the research findings to other referendum campaigns beyond the context of Brexit. The findings of this research cannot be generalised to another context because this research will only present results on the Leave group during the official Brexit campaign in the UK. However, generalisation is not the purpose of this research since its goal is to provide a detailed examination of one specific case (Bryman, 2012, p. 71). This in-depth research can provide new insights regarding the application of securitization theory in analysing and assessing referendum campaigns from a security perspective, which then may or may not be applied to other contexts.

The Brexit referendum had a decisive effect for both the UK and the EU. The actual consequences are currently being negotiated and it is still unclear what the future relationship between the UK and the EU could look like. The research findings will not only give insight into how the Leave group securitized Brexit, but also explain why certain topics of the current Brexit negotiations between the UK and the EU are important points of discussion. Furthermore, this research also contributes to a better understanding of what the future

relationship between the UK and the EU could look like.

An important limitation of this research is that not all the public communication of Vote Leave will be analysed. This means that it is not possible to provide a picture of all the Leave group's public communication. Vote Leave was founded on 8 October 2015 and already started to campaign by the end of 2015 when the legal basis of the referendum was officially announced by the UK Parliament (BBC, 2015). However, the Leave group's public communication before 15 April 2016 is excluded from this research. This research only includes the public communication during the official campaign period. Furthermore, it is also important to notice that this research provides a snapshot of the Leave group's campaign and the analysis may provide different results if another time frame had been chosen (Levin, 2006, p. 25).

4. Research Results

This chapter presents the research findings on the Leave group's public communication and is structured along the three main themes. Almost all public communication cases are structured around one specific theme but the cases sometimes also touch upon the other themes (see Figure 4).

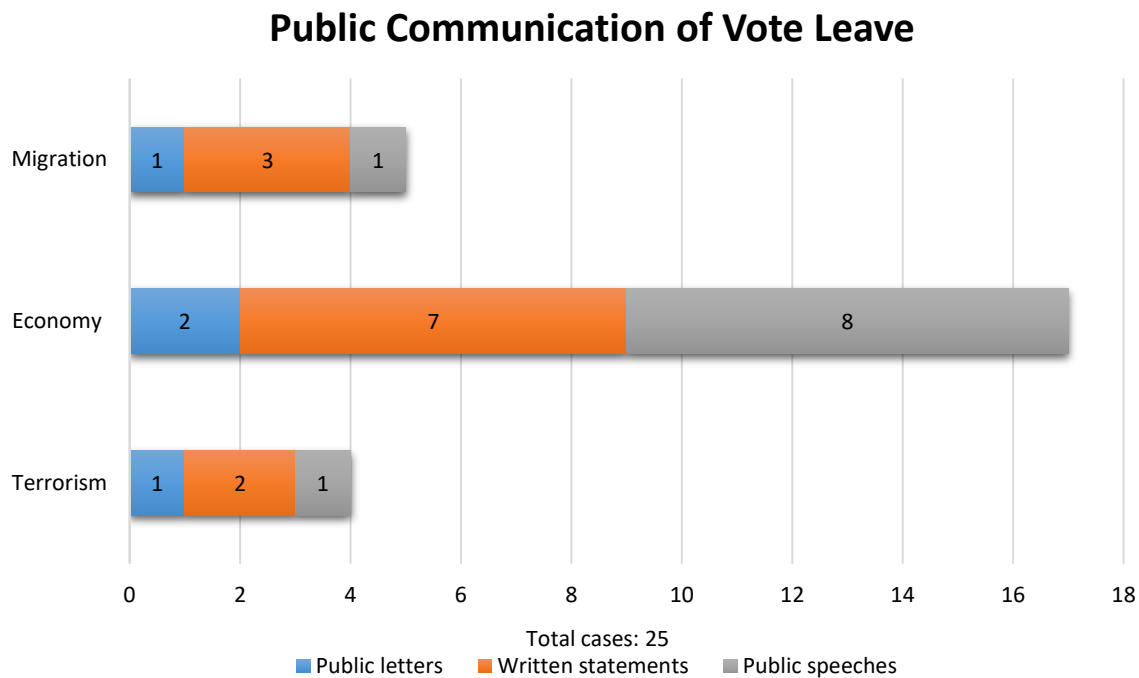


Figure 4. The public communication of Vote Leave divided into the three main themes.

Note. The public letter of 16 June 2016 has both economy and terrorism as main theme.

First of all, the public communication cases are classified by theme. After the classification of all the material, the securitization in the public communication cases is analysed by using the concepts and indicators of securitization theory. This section looks at the following elements:

- *Self and other representations.* What identity is ascribed to the self, the UK, and to the other, the EU.
- *Dominant representations.* What features and/or qualities occur regularly in the public communication.
- *Minor representations.* What features and/or qualities occur rarely in the public communication.
- *Silencing.* What topics are not represented in the public communication.

Vote Leave's key public communication was performed by several actors, most of which were MPs. Table 1 shows the securitizing actors in Vote Leave's public communication during the campaign.

Table 1

<i>The securitizing actors in Vote Leave's key public communication during the campaign</i>	
Name	Number of cases
Michael Gove MP, Boris Johnson MP, & Gisela Stuart MP	5
Boris Johnson MP	4
Michael Gove MP	3
Duncan Smith MP	2
Priti Patel MP	2
Gisela Stuart MP	1
James Cleverly MP	1
Liam Fox MP	1
Chris Grayling MP	1
Lord Michael Howard	1
Andrea Leadsom MP	1
13 Government Ministers	1
Michael Gove MP, Boris Johnson MP, Priti Patel MP, & Gisela Stuart MP	1
Michael Gove MP, Boris Johnson MP, Gisela Stuart MP, & John Longworth	1
Total	25

After the analysis of the individual public communication cases, the total discourse on migration, economy, and terrorism in the Leave's group public communication is analysed and discussed. This part of the analysis looks at the following aspects of the discourse:

- *Character*. What are the main characteristics of the discourse.
- *Dynamic*. What kind of othering is going on. Who is accepted to speak. What is accepted as the truth. What is acknowledged but has a minor status in the public communication.
- *Function*. How did the discourse work. What effect did the discourse generate.
- *Critique*. How can this discourse be criticized.

4.1 Migration

4.1.1 Public letters

The public letter (29 May 2016) by Gove MP, Johnson MP, and Stuart MP is addressed to the former Prime Minister, David Cameron. The letter is public, which means that the UK population besides the Prime Minister was also able to read the contents of the letter and are thus part of the audience that need to be convinced by Gove, Johnson, and Stuart, the securitizing actors. The letter focuses on the European refugee crisis and UK border control.

The dominant pattern in this letter is that the EU immigration system is ‘bad’ in economic, security, and humanitarian terms for both the UK and the refugees. The authors argue that “the tragic scenes unfolding in the Mediterranean underline how badly the European Union is handling population movements and migration pressures” (Gove, Johnson, & Stuart, 2016a). The approach of the EU immigration system will lead to more jobseekers from other countries coming to the UK. In economic terms, this will put an ‘unsustainable pressure’ on the public services in the UK. Moreover, the EU immigration system poses a direct security concern to the UK because the European Court of Justice can interfere when the UK Government decides to deport criminals and others whose presence is not conducive to the public good in the UK. Furthermore, they argue that the EU policies have failed in humanitarian terms because people smugglers are still able to exploit the situation in the European refugee crisis. The UK is the referent object because the economy and security of the country are under an existential threat because of the EU immigration system.

The self, the UK, is labelled as a ‘powerless’ country that lost control over their border and immigration policies because these policies are imposed by the EU. The other, the EU, is associated with characteristics such as ‘undemocratic’ and the ‘ultimate authority’. It is explicitly mentioned in the letter that the EU immigration system is the existential threat to the UK. The main conclusion of this letter is that the EU policies have failed, and that the EU is an undemocratic institution because “our membership of the EU means we don’t have control” (Gove, Johnson, & Stuart, 2016a).

What is shortly acknowledged in the letter, but not given much attention, is that immigration can also result in culturally, socially, and economically benefits for the UK.

4.1.2 Written statements

The written statement (23 April 2016) of Duncan Smith MP, the securitizing actor, highlights the flaws of the EU immigration system and the lack of UK border control. The dominant pattern is that the UK should take back control over their immigration policies instead of remaining in the EU and their ‘uncontrolled immigration’. The referent object is the UK, which needs to be protected from the EU, the existential threat. The statement claims that the official assumption is that immigration will add at least three million people to the UK population by 2030. That means 200,000 people, which can be compared to the size of Swindon or Aberdeen, every single year.

The self, the UK, is labelled as a country that lost control over their borders and this will have far-reaching consequences. Duncan Smith states:

People are already experiencing the cost of uncontrolled immigration – with pressure on jobs, wages, and housing – not to mention ever-increasing waiting times at hospitals that are full to capacity, and families struggling to find places for their children at our oversubscribed schools. (Duncan Smith, 2016a)

The other, the EU, is qualified as ineffective, and Duncan Smith argues that:

The truth is the EU is incapable of reform. It’s a failing project that no one in their right mind would join now. If we don’t leave, I fear that the pressures Brits are already facing will only get worse. (Duncan Smith, 2016a)

The statement concludes that 23 June, the day of the referendum, must become Independence Day for the UK in order to take back control. As shown in Figure 5, the belief of taking back control is also represented in Vote Leave’s logo.

However, the statement does not acknowledge that the EU is cooperating with the member states in order to control migration and deal with the European refugee crisis. Furthermore, the UK is also benefiting from and protected by the EU border control policies and agencies such as Frontex, a supranational agency for EU borders control with an extensive mandate for increased border control (Bozorgmehr & Wahedi, 2017, p. 10).



Figure 5. The official Vote Leave logo. Reprinted from *Vote Leave logo*, by Vote Leave, 2016c, retrieved from <http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org>. Copyright 2016 by Vote Leave.

The written statement (26 May 2016) in which Johnson MP is the securitizing actor highlights all the failures of the EU immigration system. The dominant pattern is that the UK has no control over the migrants that are coming to the country and the only way to take back control of the UK immigration policies is to leave the EU. The referent object is the UK, which needs to be defended against the EU, the existential threat.

The UK, the self, is represented as a country that surrendered and gave up all their powers to the EU. Johnson argues that “we cannot control the numbers. We cannot control the terms on which people come and how we remove those who abuse our hospitality. This puts huge pressure on schools, hospitals and housing” (Johnson, 2016c). The EU, the other, is labelled as ‘terrible’ and ‘deeply damaging’ for the UK. Johnson describes the impact of the EU immigration system as “the absurd situation in which . . . millions of unskilled people coming here from the EU” (Johnson, 2016c).

However, what is not acknowledged is that Johnson, throughout his statement, argues that the EU immigration system discriminates because it selects migrants on the basis of EU citizenship. This claim seems to contradict the new immigration system suggested by Vote Leave, which could also be considered as discrimination because it focuses on how migrants can contribute to the UK and this is based on the skills and competences of people.

The written statement (1 June 2016) of Gove MP, Johnson MP, Patel MP, and Stuart MP, the securitizing actors, focuses on the EU immigration system and UK border control. The dominant pattern is that the UK should step out of the EU and take back control over their immigration policies. The referent object is the UK, which needs to be protected from the flow of migrants that has resulted in the addition of ‘the population the size of Oxford’ to the UK population every year. This is caused by the EU immigration system, the existential threat.

The self, the UK, is portrayed as a country that lost complete control over their immigration policies and the authors argue that “if we remain in the EU the situation is only likely to get worse” (Gove, Johnson, Patel, & Stuart, 2016). The immigration policies of the

EU, the other, are positioned as ‘failed policies’ that have a ‘basic lack of democratic consent’. They also argue that it is fundamental for immigration policies to have democratic consent and that is why the UK should leave the EU. The writers conclude that “we will end our support for the EU’s disastrous policies that have encouraged the people-smugglers” (Gove, Johnson, Patel, & Stuart, 2016).

However, Vote Leave proposes a new immigration system based on the Australian immigration system, in which people are admitted to the UK on the basis of their skills and the needs of the British economy (see Figure 6). The statement does not explain, however, how this new immigration system should be implemented.



 Vote Leave, take back control on 23 June

Figure 6. The EU immigration system. Reprinted from *Vote Leave for a fairer immigration policy*, by Vote Leave, 2016d, retrieved from <http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org>. Copyright 2016 by Vote Leave.

4.1.3 Public speeches

The speech (2 June 2016) given by Fox MP, the securitizing actor, at Vote Leave Headquarters focuses on the negative effect of the EU immigration system on the UK housing market. The dominant pattern is that the UK lost control over their immigration policies and that the ‘uncontrolled migration’ of the EU immigration system will result in an overcrowded housing market in the UK. The referent object is the UK that needs to be protected from the ‘uncontrolled migration’ caused by EU, the existential threat.

The UK, the self, is qualified as a country that is ‘powerless’ and there is a clear risk

that it will soon be ‘overcrowded’. Fox states that “‘if we remain in the EU, if we have uncontrolled migration year after year after year after year, you will find it harder to get a home of your own’” (Fox, 2016). The immigration system of the EU, the other, is labelled as a ‘policy failure’ and Fox argues that if the UK remains in the EU, “‘we will be forced to accept unlimited free movement of people – but there will be no free movement of space coming with them’” (Fox, 2016).

However, this speech distinguishes itself from the other written statements in that it does not argue that the EU membership is often measured in monetary terms – instead, Fox argues that there are also other ways to measure the costs. From a different perspective, migration will result in building more houses at the expense greenery and open spaces in the UK (Fox, 2016). What is only shortly acknowledged is that not all the problems related to the UK housing market are caused by migrants. Other factors that have contributed to the tight housing market are not mentioned or explained.

4.1.4 The migration discourse

Character

The migration discourse shows that migration to the UK, caused by the EU policies and European refugee crisis, was considered as an existential threat for the UK and especially the British society. The discourse provides a negative picture of the EU, in which the UK has no control over their immigration policies and borders because of the EU membership.

The main characteristics of this discourse are: control, power, and morality. Migration became a very important theme during the Brexit campaign because of the European refugee crisis that developed into one of the driving factors behind the migration discourse. During the Brexit campaign, an increasing number of people tried to enter the EU through the Mediterranean Sea, this became a major concern for the EU and the member states. Moreover, the EU and the member states had great difficulties in dealing with the migrant crisis and it took a lot of time before concrete measures were taken. This difficult and complex process was used as an example by Vote Leave to show how the EU failed to effectively take care of the situation.

Dynamic

Vote Leave used a strong kind of othering to give a negative impression of the EU in the migration discourse. Vote Leave represented the UK as a powerless country that surrendered to the EU because they lost complete control over their border and immigration policies. As a

consequence, the UK is not aware of which people are coming to the UK. Moreover, the discourse argues that the UK will not be able to deal with the increasing number of migrants coming to the UK. The discourse positions the EU as the ultimate and undemocratic authority. The EU took the responsibility in order to handle the European refugee crisis, but they failed to find an effective solution to the situation. In this way, the EU is considered as an important contributing factor to the European refugee crisis. The discourse does acknowledge, however, that the European refugee crisis is a humanitarian tragedy - the main focus is on how the EU and the EU immigration system have failed to handle the situation for both the migrants and the EU member states.

The performers of the public communication cases were all MPs and were therefore generally accepted to speak on behalf of a part the UK population. Moreover, it was assumed that the MPs had extensive knowledge and information about the EU and the political processes such as decision-making within the EU.

Vote Leave presented a negative picture of the EU, in which the EU was the biggest threat to the sovereignty of the UK and the reason why the European refugee crisis has not yet been resolved. This picture was consistently presented as the truth during the campaign. Vote Leave specifically used the European refugee crisis in order to demonstrate how the EU was incapable of finding a solution for this problem, and as a consequence of the EU failures, this will lead to more migrants coming to the UK.

It is shortly acknowledged in the cases that the UK might benefit from the new migrants but this has a minor status in the public communication.

Function

The main function of the discourse is to convince the UK population that the EU is damaging the sovereignty and independence of the UK, and that the UK should leave the EU. However, the discourse on migration also shows what sovereignty means for the UK in terms of border control and immigration policies. Vote Leave defines sovereignty as being in control over your own immigration and border policies. It also means that the UK can determine how many and which migrants are allowed to enter the country.

Furthermore, the discourse regulates what is considered as legal and illegal migrants in the UK. Vote Leave proposes a new immigration system that only allows migrants who can make a positive economic contribution to the UK. Migrants are selected on the basis of their competences and skills instead of other criteria such as the humanitarian need to help migrants.

Critique

The critique on this discourse is that it presents a self-evident picture that the EU and the British EU membership are damaging the UK and encroach on the British sovereignty. The discourse provides a very minimalist representation of the European refugee crisis in which all problems were directly related to the EU. However, it does not provide space for a more nuanced analysis of the very complex European refugee crisis.

Moreover, the discourse mainly focuses on the number of migrants that are coming to the UK instead of the reasons why these people fleeing from their home country and how these people can make a positive contribution to the UK. The positive contribution of migrations is only measured in economic terms but migrants can also bring socio-cultural benefits.

4.2 Economy

4.2.1 Public letters

The public letter (5 June 2016), in which Gove MP, Johnson MP, and Stuart MP are the securitizing actors focuses on the costs of the EU membership and the economic risks for UK businesses. The letter is addressed to former Prime Minister David Cameron and former Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne. The dominant pattern is that the costs of the EU membership are damaging the British economy. The existential threat is the EU and the referent object is the UK economy.

The self, the UK, is represented as a country that is in ‘danger’ because all the money that is ‘wasted’ on the EU membership has created an existential threat for the UK economy and the continued existence of public services such as the NHS. Remaining in the EU means sending more billions to a ‘dysfunctional bureaucracy’. Furthermore, the small and medium-sized enterprises in the UK, ‘the backbone of the economy’, do not profit from the EU membership, because the EU has become the ‘driving factor’ behind job losses in the UK. The EU, the other, is labelled as a ‘centralised power’ and a ‘disaster for millions of Europeans and a danger to Britain’. Moreover, the UK was ‘forced’ to pay unexpected bills to the EU in the past. These are important reasons why the UK should leave the EU and it is feared that the British economy will not benefit from the EU economy in the future, as shown in the statement, “the EU now has slower growth than any other continent apart from Antarctica” (Gove, Johnson, & Stuart, 2016b).

What is only shortly mentioned in the public letter is that the EU membership has also brought economic benefits to the UK economy. For example, UK businesses are benefiting from the EU trade policies and agreements. None of the economic benefits are further explained in this letter.

The public letter (16 June 2016) by Gove MP, Johnson MP, and Stuart MP, the securitizing actors, highlights the costs of the EU membership and especially the prospect of Turkey joining the EU. The letter is addressed to former Prime Minister David Cameron and former Foreign Secretary, Philip Hammond. In the letter is the possible accession of Turkey to the EU associated with more and new economic risks for the UK. The dominant pattern in the letter is that Turkey should not become a member of the EU and that the enlargement of the EU is a risk to the UK.

The UK is both the self and referent object because the economy of the UK is under an existential threat if the country will remain in the EU. The existential threat is the prospect that Turkey will become an EU member and this is related to more economic damage in the UK. The EU membership and the possible Turkish accession are qualified as ‘economic risks’ because of the expected increasing costs of the EU membership and the UK already paid billions to Turkey in order to facilitate their accession, while that money could also be spent in the UK (Gove, Johnson, & Stuart, 2016c). There is a fear that the costs of the EU membership will increasingly rise because more prospect countries such as Albania and Serbia will follow in the “slipstream behind Turkey” (Gove, Johnson, & Stuart, 2016c).

However, none of the possible economic benefits of Turkey as an EU member - such as the development of new markets and the commercial and investment possibilities for UK businesses - are mentioned in the public letter (Gurbanov, Bilan, & Strielkowski, 2015, pp. 11-14).

4.2.2 Written statements

The written statement (22 April 2016) of Johnson MP, the securitizing actor, focuses on getting the support of the United States (U.S.) to back Vote Leave and Brexit. The dominant pattern is that the UK has lost control over their economic policies and that the special relationship between the UK and the U.S. would be better when the UK leaves the EU. The existential threat, the EU, is threatening the sovereignty of the UK, the referent object.

The self, the UK, is presented as a country that needs to fight for the ‘British survival’ and Johnson states that “‘if we are stay in this system, we will find ourselves hauled inch by inch towards a federal superstate – with no proper accountability to the people’” (Johnson, 2016a). The other, the EU, is represented as ‘deeply anti-democratic’ because “‘the European Union . . . is itself beginning to stifle democracy, in this country and around Europe’” (Johnson, 2016a). The UK would flourish as a non-EU member and still be a valuable ally for the U.S., as Johnson argues: “‘Britain is the fifth biggest economy on earth, a world leader in all kinds of 21 century sectors, with a capital city that is in many ways the capital of the world’” (Johnson, 2016a).

It is not mentioned that there is already a good relationship between the EU and U.S. in which the UK has considerable influence.

The written statement (23 April 2016) in which Patel MP is the securitizing actor, explains how the EU regulations are hurting businesses in the UK. The dominant pattern of the statement is: “‘we can look forward to a more prosperous, more secure, and brighter future if we vote to leave the failing EU project’” (Patel, 2016a). The referent object are the UK businesses that need to be protected from the EU, the existential threat.

The businesses in the UK, the self, are labelled as ‘damaged’ because “‘the truth is that the EU constrains us in all manner of ways and throws reams of red tape around British businesses’” (Patel, 2016a). Patel argues that the EU, the other, is a ‘failed project’ and that “‘the EU, with its unelected and unaccountable Commission, can dictate to us which projects and schemes it will support’” (Patel, 2016a). The main conclusion of this statement is that the EU membership prevents the UK economy including businesses to thrive and reach their full potential.

What is acknowledged, but not given much attention, is that the UK also receives money from the EU, for example through the EU Common Agricultural Policy. However, it is not further explained how the EU funding contributes to the UK economy and supports the agricultural sector, including businesses.

The written statement (25 April 2016) of Gove MP, the securitizing actor, highlights the costs of the EU membership and how the EU is threatening the economic independence of the UK. The dominant pattern is that the UK is stuck in the EU and that the EU has proven to be

incapable to reform The EU is explicitly mentioned as the existential threat to the UK, the referent object.

The self, the UK, is represented as a country that gave up all of their powers to the EU. Gove argues that if the UK remains in the EU, it “will increase regulation, hold back innovation, slow growth and reduce the amount of money available for our public services” (Gove, 2016b). The other, the EU, is associated with ‘orthodoxy’ and Gove argues:

That failure to reform over many years means the EU has become an economic sinkhole — growth and jobs disappear while neighbours look on increasingly nervously. Youth unemployment runs at more than 40 per cent in Spain and more than 50 per cent in Greece. The Eurozone has killed growth across the continent. (Gove, 2016b)

The statement concludes that the EU has proven to fail to reform and that the UK must leave the EU in order to drive forward and flourish in the future. However, it is not mentioned how the EU has changed over the years and that there have also been some successful reforms within the EU.

The written statement (15 May 2016) of Johnson MP, the securitizing actor, touches upon how the EU is negatively affecting trade, investments, and jobs in the UK. The referent object, the UK economy is threatened by the EU, the existential threat. The dominant pattern is that only the rich people are benefiting from the EU and their policies. Johnson argues that “the whole EU system of regulation is so remote and opaque that the super-rich are able to use it to their advantage, to maintain their oligarchic position” (Johnson, 2016b).

The UK, the self, is represented as a ‘desperate’ country and according to Johnson, “dominated by a group of powerful international civil servants, lobbyists and business people” (Johnson, 2016b). The single market of the EU, the other, is labelled as a ‘microcosm of low growth’ and Johnson argues that the EU “is blighted by chronically high unemployment” (Johnson, 2016b). Johnson concludes that it is important to leave the EU in order to end the domination by the EU and their manipulating regulations that only supports the rich European elite.

However, none of the economic benefits of the EU membership for UK businesses such as EU trade agreements and EU regulations that are related to the labour rights and sustainable development are mentioned in the statement.

The statement (31 May 2016) of Gove MP, Johnson MP, and Stuart MP, the securitizing actors, focuses on the negative impact of the EU on the UK economy - especially the costs of the EU membership and jobs in the UK. The dominant pattern is that the UK should take back control over their economic affairs and stop the domination by the EU. The UK, the referent object, needs to be defended against the EU, the existential threat.

The UK, the self, is portrayed as helpless and fully dependent on the EU. The economic risk of remaining in the EU is that “we will never be able to control the number of people coming here and putting more pressure on our public services” (Gove, Johnson, & Stuart, 2016d). Moreover, the EU only supports multinationals who keep wages down and the consequence is that many households in the UK are struggling to pay their bills. The economic policies of the EU, the other, are labelled as ‘unfair’ and the authors argue that “we already hand over £350 million to the EU every week . . . But we should control all of this money so we can spend it on our priorities like cutting NHS waiting lists” (Gove, Johnson, & Stuart, 2016d). The ‘safer choice’ for the UK population is to Vote Leave because that is the only way in which the UK can take back control over their economic affairs.

However, it is not acknowledged that one of the risks of leaving the EU is that some multinationals might leave the UK, which could have a negative impact on the UK economy. For example, this could result in a loss of jobs in the UK and also investments into the UK by multinationals (Conconi, 2018).

The written statement (3 June 2016) in which Gove MP, Johnson MP, and Stuart MP are the securitizing actors, highlights the costs of the EU membership and especially how this affects the functioning of the NHS. The dominant pattern is that the UK should leave the EU in order to ensure a properly functioning NHS for all British citizens. The existential threat is the EU, which is threatening the survival of the British NHS, the referent object.

The UK, the self, is qualified as a country that has become fully dependent on the EU. The NHS is labelled as “a great British institution and its core values - of solidarity, fairness and inclusivity - need to be protected and defended” (Gove, Johnson, & Stuart, 2016e). As illustrated in Figure 7, the NHS was an important topic during the campaign. In addition, one of Vote Leave’s main slogans was: “Let’s give our NHS the £350 million the EU takes every week”. The EU, the other, is characterised as a union with ‘foolish rules’. There is a need to take back control and as a result, the British “money will also be liberated” (Gove, Johnson,

& Stuart, 2016e). The money that is saved from the EU membership should be used as a ‘cash transfusion’ to the NHS.

What is silenced in the statement is that the NHS is also benefiting from the EU and their health policies. For example, through the cooperation between EU member states to deal with cross-border threats to health and the EU is ensuring the quality, safety, and efficacy of medicines within the EU (European Commission, 2015, pp. 6-8).



Figure 7. Boris Johnson and Gisela Stuart on tour with the Vote Leave campaign bus. Reprinted from *The Vote Leave battle bus with Boris Johnson and Gisela Stuart*, by Vote Leave, 2016, retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk>. Copyright 2016 by Reuters.

Another written statement (14 June 2016) is different than the public communication because the securitizing actors are 13 UK Government Ministers who were strong proponents of leaving the EU. The dominant pattern is to reassure that British citizens and organisations who currently receive EU funding will receive their money if the UK leaves the EU. The referent object is the UK that needs to be protected from the EU, the existential threat.

The UK, the self, is represented as a country that lost control and the authors argue that “we have no control over much of the money spent by the EU in Britain” (Brazier et al., 2016). The EU, the other, is labelled as ‘very damaging’ and ‘unnecessarily bureaucratic’. Moreover, they state that “the real danger to current recipients of funding from the EU institutions is that if we vote to remain the EU will further reduce their funding” (Brazier et al., 2016). The

securitizing actors want to reassure the British citizens by stating that the UK will still have more than enough money to ensure that those who currently receive EU funding will continue to do so after the UK leaves the EU.

It is only shortly acknowledged that there are also benefits from the EU but these are outweighed by all the costs besides the official contribution of £350 million to the EU every week.

4.2.3 Public speeches

The speech (13 April 2016) given by Stuart MP, the securitizing actor, at Vote Leave Headquarters, highlights the trade opportunities of the UK. The dominant pattern is that the UK should ‘break free’ from the EU and their restrictive regulations. The referent object is the UK that needs to be defended against the EU, the existential threat.

The UK, the self, is qualified as a country that lost control over their economic affairs to the EU. Stuart states that when the UK stays in the EU, “we will remain subject to all the restrictions on our sovereignty and economy that Brussels imposes” (Stuart, 2016). However, Stuart’s prospect is that the UK will be ‘free and prosperous’ without being an EU member. Moreover, the UK would have the freedom and possibilities to make trade agreements with economic superpowers such as India and China. The other, the EU, is represented as “an institution that keeps to a single trajectory, incapable of critical self-examination” (Stuart, 2016). Moreover, the EU is labelled as a ‘danger’ and ‘state building project’.

What is not represented in this speech is that the UK and their businesses have also benefited from the EU trade agreements. Because the EU trade policies have proven to be an important factor for UK businesses in order to attract investments from other countries (Farnsworth, 2017, pp. 715-716).

The speech (27 April 2016) delivered by Cleverly MP, the securitizing actor, at Vote Leave Headquarters is very different from the other public communication cases by Vote Leave because it focuses on how the EU policies are keeping Africa poor. The dominant pattern is that the EU food policies are one of the driving factors that keep the African continent poor. The referent object is Africa that needs to be defended against the EU, the existential threat. The reason why Africa is chosen is because Cleverly is from African descent and there are nearly 1 million people with African roots living in the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2015). Cleverly tried to use this speech in order to convince these people to vote against the EU.

The food policies of the EU, the other, are qualified as ‘unfair’ and ‘damaging’. Cleverly argues that “most disturbing drivers of Africa’s continued poverty is global food policy, particularly the EU’s food policies. The EU’s protectionist attitudes, particularly in food, keeps poor African farmers poor” (Cleverly, 2016). However, the self, is still the UK because the UK population is indirectly contributing to Africa’s continued poverty. Cleverly explicitly makes an appeal to vote against the EU because “the EU is keeping some of the poorest people in the world poor and it is using your money to do it” (Cleverly, 2016). Furthermore, the UK is positioned as a country that really cares about developing countries and global poverty reduction, but the EU membership prevents the UK to fulfil that desire.

What is not acknowledged is that the EU is also giving aid to Africa in order to eradicate poverty. The European Development Fund finances several development programmes that focuses on economic, social, and human development in Africa (Sicurelli, 2010, p. 164).

The speech (28 April 2016) by Patel MP, the securitizing actor, at the Spring Conference of the Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers, explains how the EU is hurting UK businesses. The dominant pattern is that the EU membership is damaging UK businesses and preventing them to thrive. The referent object are the UK businesses that are threatened by the EU, the existential threat.

The self, the UK businesses, are labelled as ‘powerless’ because according to Patel, “if we remain a member of the European Union, our hands are tied and we are powerless to act on reducing the burdens of red tape” (Patel, 2016b). UK businesses are unable to reach their full potential because of all the EU regulation and policies. The other, the EU, is qualified as ‘European superstate’. The EU policies are very damaging because the EU regulations cost UK businesses tens of billions each year. Patel states that “the biggest risks to business come from remaining in the EU” (Patel, 2016b). The UK must take back control of their economic policies. Without the EU membership, British businesses will have the freedom and opportunities to create more jobs and make new investments which also contribute to the UK economy. Figure 8 illustrates how the belief of taking back control is also represented in the setting in which Vote Leave’s public speeches were performed.

However, what is not mentioned is that UK businesses have also benefited from the EU policies and regulations. For example, British businesses and citizens have access to the EU single market which includes the free movement of goods, capital, services, and people.



Figure 8. Priti Patel delivers a speech during a Vote Leave event. Reprinted from *Priti Patel campaigning during the EU referendum*, by PA Images, 2016, retrieved from <http://www.politicshome.com>. Copyright 2016 by PA Images.

The speech (9 May 2016) delivered by Johnson MP, the securitizing actor, at Vote Leave Headquarters, provides a historical narrative about the ‘anti-democratic absurdities of the EU’ since 1972, the year in which the UK signed up for the EU. This narrative is related to how the EU has economically damaged the UK over the years. The dominant pattern is that the EU has taken control over almost all the policies of the members states and Johnson argues that “the crucial point is that it is still becoming ever more centralizing, interfering and anti-democratic” (Johnson, 2016d). The UK is the referent object that needs to be protected against the EU, the existential threat.

The UK, the self, and its citizens are being made fools of by the EU because they have no proper control over their money that is spent on the EU. Johnson argues that the UK population needs to make an important decision.

It is between taking back control of our money – or giving a further £100bn to Brussels before the next election. Between deciding who we want to come here to live and work – or letting the EU decide. Between a dynamic liberal cosmopolitan open global free-trading prosperous Britain, or a Britain where we remain subject to a undemocratic system devised in the 1950s that is now actively responsible for low growth and in some cases economic despair. (Johnson, 2016d)

The other, the EU, is qualified as a ‘federal superstate’ that has ‘destroyed’ democracy because the EU is a continuing and accelerating the effort to create a country called Europe. Moreover, Johnson argues that “the EU is like trying to ride a vast pantomime horse, with 28 people blindly pulling in different directions” (Johnson, 2016d).

What is not acknowledged in the speech, is that the UK has also benefited from the EU since their membership in 1972. However, Johnson only shortly mentions that it is very difficult to detect the economic benefits of to the EU single market for the UK.

The speech (10 May 2016) given by Duncan Smith MP, the securitizing actor, at Vote Leave Headquarters, explains how the EU policies are having a negative impact on UK businesses, trade agreements, and jobs. The dominant pattern is that the EU has become a ‘force for social injustice’ for the UK and their policies only support the rich people and corporations. The EU is presented as the existential threat to the UK, the referent object.

Businesses in the UK, the self, are damaged by the economic policies of the EU because “they are subject to EU red tape at the cost of tens of billions of pounds. Those regulations don’t just mean lower profits for small entrepreneurs, they also mean fewer new businesses starting up and fewer jobs created” (Duncan Smith, 2016b). Furthermore, British workers have to compete with millions of workers from other EU countries which results in low wages for UK citizens. The other, the EU, is labelled as a ‘failing project’ and Duncan Smith argues that “the reality is that it is first and foremost a political project; the aim of which is the creation of an overarching federal power, above the nation states. It is the reason why economic common sense cannot prevail” (Duncan Smith, 2016b). Duncan Smith concludes that 23 June should become the ‘British Independence Day’.

However, what it is not acknowledged is that the workers' rights of UK citizens are also protected by EU polices. The contribution of the EU to the UK workforce is substantial. For example, there are several gains - such as improved access to paid annual holidays, rights to unpaid parental leave, and improved health and safety provision - that British workers achieved over the years as a result of the EU membership (Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2017, p.176).

The speech (17 May 2016) delivered by Leadsom MP, the securitizing actor, at Vote Leave Headquarters is slightly different than the other public communication cases on economy because it specifically focuses on the energy sector in the UK. The dominant pattern is that the

UK should not be involved in the future EU integration plans to form an 'Energy Union' but keep full control over their energy policy. The EU, the existential threat, is threatening the energy sector in the UK, the referent object.

The self, the UK, is positioned as a country that must prevent further 'damage' by the EU because the EU is planning to form 'Energy Union', in which member states are obliged to help each other to ensure energy security and this means that the UK loses control over another policy area. Leadsom argues that "leaving the EU will give us freedom to keep bills down, to meet our climate change targets in the cheapest way possible, and of course, keep the lights on" (Leadsom, 2016). Furthermore, she states that most of the energy supply of the UK is secured for the future and that the UK energy sector will not be threatened if the UK leaves the EU. The future energy policy plans of the EU, the other, are labelled as a 'tragedy' and Leadsom states that "this EU proposal goes much further and takes control entirely out of our hands" (Leadsom, 2016). This will further increase the power of the EU and also prevents the UK to act in their best interest.

However, this speech only presents the disadvantages of the future EU plans but it is not mentioned that the new EU energy policy could also bring benefits for the UK. For example, better EU cooperation to support research and innovation on clean and sustainable energy could also lead to more business opportunities and jobs in the UK.

The speech (18 May 2016) performed by Lord Howard, the securitizing actor, at the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), focuses on how the EU is affecting UK businesses and a safe environment for businesses in the UK. The CBI is a business organisation that represents more than 190,000 businesses that together employ nearly 7 million people (Confederation of British Industry, 2018). The dominant pattern is that the UK should leave the EU in order to ensure a safe environment for businesses in the UK. The referent object are the UK businesses that must be protected against the EU, the existential threat.

The businesses in the UK, the self, are labelled as 'disillusioned' by the EU. Howard argues that the EU "has left many people feeling bewildered, confused, lost and angry. They feel they have lost control of their destiny" (Howard, 2016). The other, the EU, is labelled as a 'very dangerous phenomenon' for UK citizens and businesses because the EU legislation resulted in a "red tape from Brussels that stifles every one of Britain's 5.4 million businesses" (Howard, 2016). Moreover, Howard argues that the EU makes the UK less safe because the European Court of Justice does not allow that the UK refuses or deports citizens of other

European countries who have been involved in terrorism according to UK courts. As a consequence, both UK businesses and citizens will suffer the consequences of these decisions and this will result in a less safe environment.

However, it is not mentioned that the businesses in the UK have also benefited from the EU and their economic policies. But Lord Howard only sums up the disadvantages of the EU single market and trade agreements.

The speech (31 May 2016) given by Grayling MP, the securitizing actor, at Vote Leave Headquarters, focuses on how the EU economic policies are affecting the UK. The dominant pattern is that the EU has taken full control over the economic policies of the UK and that the UK must step out of the continuing European integration process. The referent object, the UK economy is existentially threatened by the EU.

The UK, the self, is represented as a country that lost control over all of their economic policies. As a consequence, the EU determines the social and economic policies and regulations but the control over these policies should lie in the UK instead of the EU. Grayling argues that when the UK remains in the EU, “our influence will diminish. Our sovereignty will diminish. Our ability to look after our own national interest will diminish” (Grayling, 2016). The other, the EU, is qualified as an ‘Ever Closer Union’ that has taken over the competences in many areas from the UK. The future is described as follows: “EU rules that would determine our minimum wage, EU rules that would say how our pensions work, it would be EU rules to govern our skills system and even EU rules that would tell us how health services should work” (Grayling, 2016).

However, what is not represented is that the UK has also enjoyed a number of economic benefits of their EU membership.

4.2.4 The economy discourse

Character

Economy was the most prominent theme during the Vote Leave campaign because most of the public communication, campaign posters, and other campaign material were devoted to this theme. The discourse provides a picture in which the EU membership costs a lot of money while that money could also be spend in the UK, and also that the EU economic policies are preventing the UK economy to thrive.

The characteristics of this discourse are: dominance, independence, and democracy. The

discourse on economy shows that the functioning and future of the NHS, the public health service, was an important topic during the Vote Leave campaign. Vote Leave used the NHS in their campaign because the NHS is a very well-known public service for all UK citizens. The NHS was consistently used in Vote Leave's public communication cases in order to convince the UK population to vote against the EU. The core argument was that the UK sends £350 million to the EU every week of the year while that money could also be spend in the UK on priorities such as the NHS. Moreover, it was argued that the UK has very little influence over their money spend on the UK membership.

Vote Leave also highlighted how the EU has a negative impact on other parts of the world. The discourse provides a picture in which the EU economic policies are not only damaging for the UK but also contribute to poverty in Africa.

Dynamic

The economy discourse was the most prevalent discourse during the Vote Leave campaign. Vote Leave used a very strong kind of othering to create and maintain a negative view of the EU. The main picture was that the EU economic policies and regulations created by unaccountable EU politicians are dominating the UK and that this prevents the UK economy and businesses to reach their full potential. The UK lost their sovereignty and has become too dependent on the EU. The EU is positioned as the dominant power that has proven to be a disaster for the UK because their policies prevent the UK businesses and economy to thrive in order to create more jobs and pursue new investment opportunities. Moreover, because of the EU membership, the UK is unable to make their own trade agreements with other countries such as China and India. Meanwhile, the UK population is paying for the economic damage caused by the EU through the EU membership.

The performers of the public communication cases were mostly MPs and were therefore generally accepted to speak on behalf of a part the UK population and UK businesses. It can be assumed that the MPs were properly informed about the economic weaknesses in the UK and that they had specific knowledge about the interaction between the economic policies of the EU and the UK. However, Vote Leave was not only publicly supported by their own members: people several from various backgrounds supported Vote Leave on British television news programmes during the campaign (see Table 2).

Table 2

<i>The backgrounds of the people that supported Vote Leave on British television news programmes during the campaign</i>	
Background	%
Vote Leave membership	80.2
Economist	0.6
Journalist/Media	0.2
Business	2.8
Academic	0.6
Foreign Leader/Diplomat/Institution	0.6
Celebrity	0.9
Security Services	0.4
Public	13.6
Total	100
<i>Note.</i> The results presented in Table 2 are based on an examination of the television news programmes on Channel 4, Channel 5, BBC, ITV, and Sky News.	
<i>Note.</i> Adapted from <i>EU Referendum Analysis 2016: Media, Voters and the Campaign</i> (p. 41), by Cushion, S., & Lewis, J., 2016, Bournemouth: Bournemouth University. Copyright 2016 by Jackson, D., Thorsen, E., & Wring, D.	

Vote Leave consistently used the picture of a dominant EU and a powerless UK as the truth during their campaign. The image that all the money spend on the EU is wasted on restrictive and damaging policies and regulations for the UK was presented as one of the main facts about the EU membership. In this way, Vote Leave constantly presented a clear negative image of the EU.

The discourse only shortly acknowledges that the UK economy, including business and citizens, has also benefited from the EU membership. However, most of the economic benefits for the UK are not further explained in the discourse.

Function

The main function of this discourse is to convince the UK population that the UK should leave the EU because the EU membership prevents the UK economy to flourish and it costs a lot of money, while that money could also be spent on British priorities such as the NHS.

Furthermore, the discourse also regulates what is considered as legitimate and illegitimate policies in the UK. The EU policies are considered as external and illegitimate policies created by politicians who cannot directly be held accountable in the UK. However, the British politicians who are directly accountable should have the last word in order to determine which economic policies are best for the UK. In this way, the discourse also regulates

what independence and sovereignty means for the UK in order to have full control over their economic affairs.

Critique

The main critique on the economy discourse is that it creates a picture in which it is self-evident that all economic problems in the UK are caused by the EU. It is not taken into consideration that factors within the UK could also have contributed to economic problems.

Moreover, the discourse only focuses on the disadvantages of the EU membership and does not provide a full picture and comprehensive analysis of the British EU membership in economic terms.

4.3 Terrorism

4.3.1 Public letters

The public letter (16 June 2016) in which Gove MP, Johnson MP, and Stuart MP are the securitizing actors addresses both economy and terrorism as theme, and also explains the security risks besides the economic risks of Turkey as a prospective EU member. The letter especially focuses on the possibility of a shared external border with Turkey. The dominant pattern in the letter is that Turkey should not become a member of the EU and this is associated with clear security ‘risks’ for the UK.

The UK is the self and also the referent object because the safety and security in the UK are under an existential threat if the country remains in the EU and Turkey becomes an EU member. The existential threat is the prospect that Turkey will become a member of the EU. This prospect is related to the possible ‘free movement’ and visa-free travel of Turkish citizens to the UK, which is considered as an important security concern in view of the instability and the conflicts in Syria and Iraq near the Turkish border. The authors argue that “the only way to avoid having common borders with Turkey is to Vote Leave and take back control” (Gove, Johnson, & Stuart, 2016c).

However, none of the potential benefits of Turkey as an EU member, such as a better security cooperation in order to find a solution for the European refugee crisis, and an improvement of the EU immigration system and EU borders control, are mentioned in the letter.

4.3.2 Written statements

The written statement (19 April 2016) of Gove MP, the securitizing actor, focuses on the EU integration plans in relation to EU borders control and UK border control. The dominant pattern is that it is safer for the UK to take back control and leave the EU. The EU poses an existential threat to the safety and security in the UK, the referent object.

The self, the UK, is qualified as a country that has ‘surrendered’ to the EU and Gove characterises the UK as “‘hostages locked in the back of the car and driven headlong towards deeper EU integration’” (Gove, 2016a). The other, the EU, is labelled as a ‘failed’ union because “‘anyone with an EU passport - even if they have a criminal record - can breeze into this country’” (Gove, 2016a). Moreover, the EU integration plans facilitate that countries in the pipeline and associated with high levels of criminality join the EU - Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey. Britain would thrive without being an EU member and Gove argues that “‘we’re a uniquely inventive nation. Our greatest invention is representative democracy - the principle that the people who run our country should be chosen by us and can be kicked out by us’” (Gove, 2016a).

What is not mentioned in the statement is that the UK has also benefited from the security cooperation in Europol, an EU agency, and important security tools such as the EAW.

The written statement (6 June 2016) by Gove MP, Johnson MP, Stuart MP, and Longworth, former director-general of the British Chambers of Commerce, the securitizing actors, highlights that a vote to ‘remain’ is dangerous for UK security. The statement addresses all the main campaign themes and the dominant pattern is that the UK must leave the EU because otherwise it will “‘lock Britain permanently in a broken system with ‘free movement’, a dysfunctional euro, and a permanent voting majority for the Eurozone’” (Gove, Johnson, Stuart, & Longworth, 2016). The referent object is the UK that needs to be protected from the EU, the existential threat.

The UK, the self, is labelled as a country in ‘danger’ because they have no control over their security policies and money. Staying in the EU means that the UK will be paying for the ‘Eurozone’s failure’. Moreover, the authors argue that “‘if we stay we will give away control of immigration permanently’” (Gove, Johnson, Stuart, & Longworth, 2016). The other, the EU, is qualified as a powerful actor that only wants to take away more power from the UK because “‘the EU’s official plan is not to change direction, it is to take even more powers from Britain’” (Gove, Johnson, Stuart, & Longworth, 2016). In terms of security, the authors state that “‘EU

rules have already made it easy for murderers and terrorists to access the UK’’ (Gove, Johnson, Stuart, & Longworth, 2016).

However, this statement only presents a list of how the EU is harming the UK in terms of migration, economy, and terrorism, the main campaign themes, but the securitizing actors do not explain that the UK is also benefiting from the EU policies in each main theme.

4.3.3 Public speeches

The speech (19 April 2016) delivered by Gove MP, the securitizing actor, at Vote Leave Headquarters, highlights the risk of terrorism in the UK related to the EU membership. The dominant pattern is that the European Court of Justice expanded their mandate in order to determine how the British intelligence services must monitor suspected terrorists and that they will also continue to overrule British court decisions. The referent object is the security in the UK that is existentially threatened by the EU.

The UK, the self, is qualified as a ‘hostage’ of the EU and Gove states that ‘‘if we vote to stay we are voting to give away more power and control to unaccountable EU institutions this year and every year’’ (Gove, 2016c). The British security is at stake because the EU will increase their power and as a result, the UK loses complete control over their security apparatus (see Figure 9). The UK intelligence and security services are the foundation of British security since the Second World War and these services must be defended at all costs. Moreover, Gove argues that the British taxpayers are paying for these developments and that they ‘subsidise failure’. The EU, the other, is labelled as the ‘real danger’ and an ‘Ever Closer Union’ that is increasingly taking power away from the UK. Gove highlights the importance of the referendum by arguing that ‘‘we are voting to be a hostage, locked in the boot of a car driven by others to a place and at a pace that we have no control over’’ (Gove, 2016c).

What is not represented in the speech is that the British intelligence and security services are also benefiting from the EU membership through the security cooperation and the exchange of information with other EU members states through Europol, an EU agency.



Using the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights, **EU judges now decide** what powers our intelligence agencies and police have to protect us.



Vote Leave, take control

Figure 9. The functioning of UK intelligence and security services with the Secret Intelligence Service building in the background. Reprinted from *Vote Leave security key fact*, by Vote Leave, 2016e, retrieved from <http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org>. Copyright 2016 by Vote Leave.

4.3.4 The terrorism discourse

Character

The discourse on terrorism shows that relatively few public communication cases specifically focused on terrorism. The main characteristics of the terrorism discourse are: independence, sovereignty, and violence. The European refugee crisis and the EU immigration system in combination with the free movement of persons were considered as the driving factors behind the increasing terrorist threat in the UK, and were also related to the recent terrorist attacks in other European countries such as France and Belgium. As a result of the EU and their policies, the UK lost their independence and sovereignty in terms of security because the UK has no control over its own security policies and court decisions.

A remarkable incident during the campaign was the murder of Jo Cox MP on 16 June 2016. Cox was murdered because the perpetrator argued that she was a supporter of both the European Union and immigration (Cobain, Parveen, & Taylor, 2016). After this incident, there was a lot of discussion whether or not this was an act of terrorism. However, it is not clear to what extent and how this incident influenced the Brexit campaign and the result of the Brexit referendum.

Dynamic

The Leave group used a very strong kind of othering in the terrorism discourse. The EU was consistently represented as one of the driving factors behind the increasing terrorist threat in the UK. In this picture, the EU policies allow terrorists and other criminals to freely enter the UK. As a consequence, the UK is in danger and the safety and security of UK citizens are at stake because the country has no control over their border and security policies. Moreover, the EU increasingly takes control over the UK, including over British court decisions and over how the UK security and intelligence services must work, while these agencies are considered as the cornerstone of British security.

The performers of the public communication cases were mainly MPs and were therefore generally accepted to speak on behalf of a part the UK population.

Vote Leave tried to present a consistent and coherent picture of the EU as the greatest enemy of the UK. This picture was presented as the truth during the campaign. Vote Leave used different EU policies in order to demonstrate how the EU is damaging the UK in terms of security, and how the EU facilitates terrorism. Furthermore, many of the MPs used their own experiences in order to show how the EU was negatively affecting the UK in their daily work as a MP.

Little attention has been given to the security benefits for the UK as a result of their EU membership. For example, the security cooperation in terms of intelligence and information sharing through Europol, in order to prevent terrorist attacks and arrest terrorists and other criminals, is underrepresented.

Function

The main function of this discourse is to convince the UK population to vote against the EU. However, the discourse on terrorism has also several other effects. The discourse regulates what are legitimate and illegitimate politics. The policies developed by the EU are considered as illegitimate because the EU politicians cannot be held accountable in the UK. This also shows what it means for the UK to be an independent and sovereign country in terms of security. Sovereignty in the terrorism discourse means that the UK has full control over their security and intelligence services and that the British court cannot be overruled by the European Court of Justice.

Critique

The critique on this discourse is that the fear of terrorism in the UK is only related to the EU. All the factors in the British society - such as UK homegrown terrorism that could contribute to the increasing terrorist threat in the UK - are not taken into consideration.

Moreover, the picture of the EU as a facilitator for terrorism and the driving force behind the terrorist threat in the UK is presented as self-evident by Vote Leave. However, the discourse provides no space for alternative explanations for terrorism in Europe and the terrorist threat in the UK.

5. Conclusion

This chapter concludes the findings of this research. The first section of the conclusion discusses the research results of Vote Leave's public communication. This section considers the research results of the TDA that was built upon securitization theory before turning to answering the research question. After that, an overview of the research limitations with some future research suggestions conclude this thesis.

This research grew out of a societal and academic interest regarding whether Vote Leave, the official Leave campaigning group, securitized Brexit during the official Brexit campaign prior to the referendum in 2016. During the referendum, a narrow majority of the UK population voted in favour of leaving the EU. As a result, Brexit created a direct security challenge for both the UK and the EU, and raises a lot of questions about the security implications for both actors. The aim of this study was to research whether, and if so, to explain the securitization of Brexit in the Leave group's public communication and what effect it generated. This led to the following research question: *To what degree and how can securitization theory explain the Leave group's public communication during the official Brexit campaign, and how is it likely to have influenced the actual Brexit?*

5.1 Discussion

In view of the referendum result, it can be concluded that Vote Leave successfully securitized Brexit during the campaign. However, the referendum result showed that the Leave campaign won by 51,9%, which can be considered as a very narrow majority.

The public communication of Vote Leave was performed by a select number of people, the securitizing actors, who became Vote Leave's key persons during the campaign. Boris Johnson, Gisela Stuart, Priti Patel, and Michael Gove were all MPs who became Vote Leave's main characters during the campaign and also the personification of Vote Leave's plans. It can be argued that these people became Vote Leave's key figures because they were MPs and most of the UK population was already familiar with them. These people made several appearances on British television and during a campaign tour through the UK, besides their public letters, written statements, and public speeches. The Vote Leave lead figures helped the UK population to identify themselves with Vote Leave during the Brexit campaign.

The results of the analysis show that there are three factors in the discourses on migration, economy, and terrorism that could help to explain Vote Leave's securitization of Brexit in their public communication during the campaign. These factors also help to explain how it is likely that Vote Leave's securitization of Brexit has influenced the actual Brexit. The three factors are: consistency, clarity, and coherency.

First, consistency. Vote Leave was very consistent in their use of negative labels for the EU. All discourses show a very strong kind of othering, in which the EU was constantly portrayed as the UK's biggest threat that prevented the UK to be a free, prosperous, and thriving country in various sectors. In the public communication, the EU is associated with danger and domination. The UK was constantly represented as a country that lost control and is locked up into the EU and their policies. By means of this consistent dominant pattern, Vote Leave tried to convince the UK population to vote against the EU.

Second, clarity. Vote Leave presented a clear picture of the negative impact of the EU membership on the UK. 'Take back control', was Vote Leave's dominant slogan and also represented in their official logo. Moreover, this idea was expressed in all public communication cases. The slogan implied a clear and also a simple description of how the EU works, including the decision-making. The interpretation of this slogan by Vote Leave was given in their public communication, in which the UK was portrayed as a country that was dominated by the EU and lost total control over their affairs. However, the slogan also suggests the prospect of a positive and independent future, in which final decisions over UK affairs are taken by the UK and not by the EU. Moreover, the Vote Leave campaign posters and other campaign materials were widely spread throughout the UK, and consisted of some clear and catchy slogans.

Third, coherency. Vote Leave made a very simplified analysis of the EU membership in their public communication, which was easy to understand for the UK population. Vote Leave presented a negative picture of the EU, in which all problems in the UK were more or less directly related to the EU and their policies. This picture was presented in a coherent way because the discourses on the three themes were also clearly related to each other. The discourses on migration, economy, and terrorism overlap one another in order to provide a full picture of the impact of the EU on the UK, in a clear and comprehensible manner, which allowed the UK population to understand how the EU is affecting the UK in several sectors.

All three discourses mainly focus on the disadvantages of the EU membership for the UK and hardly discuss the benefits, which in some cases are not even acknowledged. Moreover, the discourses shortly acknowledge that the UK has also benefited in some ways from the EU membership but the arguments to remain in the EU were easily refuted by Vote Leave.

5.2 Conclusion

Based on the research findings, the conclusion supports that Vote Leave's public communication during the official campaign can to a large extent be explained by securitization theory. The public communication shows how Vote Leave used language including labels and classifications in order to construct a shared meaning between Vote Leave and the UK population, the audience.

The research results show that the Vote Leave members, the securitizing actors, consistently positioned the EU and the UK's EU membership as the greatest enemy to the UK during the campaign. Vote Leave broadened the traditional definition of security by using the politics, economy, security, and society in the UK in order to demonstrate how the UK was existentially threatened by the EU and their policies. Vote Leave created a picture in which the future survival of the UK, the referent object, was at stake. The referendum was presented as a unique opportunity that justified the extraordinary measure to leave the EU in order to protect the UK from further damage by the EU and regain full control of the UK, to ensure a prosperous future. The prevalent picture in the public communication was that the EU damaged the UK and prevented the country to flourish in all sectors.

Thus, based on the research findings and the referendum result it can be argued that it is also likely that Vote Leave's successful securitization of Brexit influenced the actual Brexit. It is reasonable that the consistent, clear, and coherent use of language by Vote Leave in order to portray the EU as the greatest threat to the UK has influenced the actual Brexit. Nevertheless, the referendum result also shows that a very narrow majority of the UK population voted against the EU membership.

5.3 Limitations and suggestions for further research

Intentions. This research did not analyse, whether the initial aim of the Vote Leave members was reflected in their public communication. Interviews with the performers of the public

communication could, in hindsight, give more insight into their intentions and thoughts about the effects of their public communication.

Existing attitudes towards the UK and EU. The attitudes of the UK population, the audience and the people who needed to be convinced by Vote Leave, were not taken into account in this research. However, the attitude of the UK population towards both the EU and the UK politicians could already have contributed to a negative perception of the EU, and influenced the securitization of Brexit. Furthermore, this is also related to trust in the EU and UK politicians because political trust might help to explain why the UK population wanted to leave the EU.

Not all public communication analysed. This research focused on the public communication during the official Brexit campaign, in which the Vote Leave members were the only performers. However, the television appearances such as debates with the Remain group and interviews in various media were not analysed. This could have provided a different picture of the Vote Leave campaign that could also help to explain the securitization of Brexit.

This research can serve as a stepping stone towards research on the Brexit negotiations between the UK and the EU. Future research may use the results of this research in order to give insight into how and to what extent Vote Leave's campaign themes and plans are reflected in the Brexit negotiations. Moreover, another future research option is to analyse if the plans proposed by Vote Leave are reflected in the future relationship between the UK and the EU. Other further research on Brexit might focus on the implications of Brexit in the different policy areas that were prevalent in Vote Leave's public communication.

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