

Unpacking Desecuritization: Analyzing The Praxis of Hansenian Desecuritization Theory through The Transformation of United States Cannabis Policy

Nurridho Aryawan

nurridhoaryawan@mail.ugm.ac.id

Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Although the concepts of securitization and desecuritization in the realm of international security studies emerged simultaneously and are inseparable from one another, the concept of desecuritization has not undergone as comprehensive development as the concept of securitization. The development of desecuritization is conceptually fragmented and often contradictory to one another. Utilizing a case study of the transformation of United States' cannabis policy patterns both home and abroad alongside Lene Hansen's concept of desecuritization, this paper attempts to illustrate how Hansenian desecuritization theory enables the simultaneous use of different desecuritization concepts in analyzing a single case study. This paper identifies three type of desecuritization that leads to the transformation of United States cannabis policy, including: i) the type of desecuritization change through stabilization, where the dynamics of the issue remain stable for a considerable period, thus removing the cannabis issue from the realm of security, ii) replacement type, in which the emergence of new threats in renders the old issue in security discourse no longer relevant, and iii) rearticulation type, where efforts are made by actors to change old cannabis policy patterns. Moreover, this paper finds that although one desecuritization process does not always occur simultaneously with another desecuritization process, each of them still influences the process of an issue transitioning from a security issue to a normal-political issue.

Keyword: Policy Transformation, Desecuritization, Security, War on Drugs

Introduction

For over 50 years since the 1970s, the United States' policy patterns regarding cannabis have remained consistent. Washington policy towards cannabis can be simplified into two patterns (Ferreira,2015). First, the criminalization of all activities related to cannabis. Including production, consumption, and distribution of those substances. The criminalization happens domestically by using law making tools and abroad by utilizing lobbying and diplomatic means to influence other countries cannabis policies through encouragement from donor assistance to the targeted nations. Second, the abolishment of cannabis supply chains through all means that were available including provision of incentives and military approach both domestically and internationally.



These policy patterns have remained unchanged since the Nixon era and their War on Drugs doctrine. The Nixon regime and their WoD doctrine successfully brought the issue of cannabis into the discourse of security which means allowing the utilization of all available approaches to address these issues as immediately as possible (Siff,2014). Including using a militaristic approach and interventions into the territorial jurisdictions of other countries. During the Reagan era, the administration and their way of campaigning War on Drugs doctrine further solidified cannabis's position as a security issue. Reagan also intensified U.S. intervention actions abroad, especially in Latin American countries (Morales,1989). What began under the Nixon regime and continued under the Reagan administration not only successfully introduced cannabis as a security threat but also ensured that the United States' policy pattern in handling cannabis remained unchanged for over 50 years.

However, the pattern of United States policy toward cannabis has begun to change in recent years. A significant shift in policy patterns began to gain momentum in the 2010s. Colorado came out to be the first state to legalize the use, cultivation, and commercial transactions of recreational cannabis in 2012. This step was subsequently followed by policy changes regarding cannabis in other states, including decriminalization, legalization for medical purposes, and legalization of recreational cannabis (Lopez,2020). As of early 2024, 38 U.S. states have legalized the use of cannabis for medical purposes, while 24 of them have recently legalized its use for either medical and recreational purposes (US National Conference of State Legislature,2023). These policy transformations also align with shifts in public opinion regarding the substance. A 2022 Pew Research survey indicated that 89 percent of Americans approve of cannabis legalization (Van Green,2022). Among those in favor, over half of the surveyed population or approximately 59 percent of them support cannabis legalization for either recreational or medical purposes and another 30 percent only agree for medical legalization of cannabis. Conversely, only 10 percent oppose cannabis legalization efforts. Another Gallup survey yielded similar results with 70 percent of Americans agreeing to legalize cannabis (Gallup,2023). This transformation of cannabis policy in the US which had been rooted in security discourse for over 50 years and subsequently changed to normal political discourse could only occur through a process of desecuritization.

Using the case study of the transformation of United States policy patterns regarding cannabis both domestically and internationally, this paper attempts to demonstrate how Hansenian desecuritization allows for various desecuritization theories to be concurrently employed to analyze a case study. The paper identifies three type of desecuritization concept that have led to the transformation of United States cannabis policy, namely: i) the 'change through stabilization' desecuritization

type, where the longstanding ineffective cannabis policy patterns prompted the emergence of legalization as an alternative policy discourse, ii) the 'replacement' desecuritization type, where the emergence of new threats in the cannabis discourse rendered the old approach patterns irrelevant, iii) the 'rearticulation' desecuritization type where there is a real efforts by actors to alter the old cannabis policy patterns are observed. The paper then argues that although the desecuritization process in the case of the transformation of United States cannabis policy patterns did not occur simultaneously, each desecuritization process has had an impact on the changes in United States cannabis policy patterns.

The Development of Desecuritization Theory

The Copenhagen School as the origin of the concept of desecuritization holds the view that an issue does not automatically become a security concern even if it poses a real existential threat. The identification of what needs to be protected and what constitutes as a threat according to the Copenhagen School is an intersubjective process heavily dependent on the interpretations of actors with the power to identify what is important to protect, why is important to protect, and what is deemed a threat to the protected entity (Rachmat,2023). Conversely, an issue of security cannot simply transform into a normal-political issue that is freely negotiated by anyone in political spaces. The process of transforming an issue from one initially perceived as dangerous, urgent, and requiring immediate attention into a normal-political issue that can be debated in public spaces is facilitated by a process called desecuritization (Buzan,et al.,1998). Desecuritization makes the political community stop treating an issue as an existential threat and reduce or stop extraordinary measures that have been taken previously to address the threat (Buzan&Weaver,2003).

The concept of desecuritization emerged within the framework of the Copenhagen School alongside the concept of securitization. However, the concept of desecuritization has not received as much development as the concept of securitization. The development of the concept of desecuritization in security discourse is highly fragmented among academics. Since its introduction by the Copenhagen School, there has been disagreement among academics particularly regarding how an issue exits the security discourse and becomes a discussion topic akin to other normal issues in political spaces. One of the efforts to mediate this debate is done by Lene Hansen. Firstly, Hansen attempted to categorize the differences in opinions among academics involved in the discourse of desecuritization. In addition to categorizing the differences in perspectives related to desecuritization, Hansen also demonstrated that one category of desecuritization could be used alongside another in practical application. In this paper, the

application of various desecuritization concepts in analyzing an issue is described as Hansenian desecuritization.

At least four groups of academics hold differing perspectives on how the process of desecuritization could have happened. The *first* group of academics believes that an issue can only exit the realm of security when the threat is no longer perceived as threatening or has been successfully neutralized. Changes in the perception of the threat often occur over time. Hence, this desecuritization type believes that time is an important thing that may or may not change the status of the issues. If there is no substantive change related to the issue over a long period of time, it can alter the perception of the threatening nature, how it can pose a threat, and the actors involved (Hansen,2012). When the threatening issue remains stable meaning there is no movement threatening it, this situation leads to changes in the discourse and perspectives regarding the threat as well as the emergence of new actors with alternative narratives in addressing the threat (Hansen,2012). This leads to emergence of new measures to address this threat shifting towards less harsh and less militaristic approaches. One example of the application of this type of desecuritization can be seen in Weaver's analysis of the cold war issue exiting the realm of security. Utilizing the term *détente*, Weaver (1995) explained that the stability in the dynamics of the cold war issue without any meaningful actions from the involved actors led to this issue exiting the security discourse. Therefore, the desecuritization type 'change through stabilization group' sees that desecuritization is caused by the lack of change in the threat of an issue over a long period.

The *second* group of academics sees that desecuritization happens due to the emergence of other issues that pose a greater threat to a referent object that are being protected. The emergence of new issues maketh the security threat posed by an old issue are no longer relevant and replaced with new issues carrying new threats (Hansen,2012). Because of that, narratives and perceptions of what constitutes a threat from the old issue become obsolete. When views on the threat, measures, and referent objects posed by an old issue posed by an issue begin to change at both the level of actors capable of speech acts and within society as an audience. Thus, desecuritization occurs. One example of 'replacement' type of desecuritization is the analysis by Aras and Polat (2008) regarding the desecuritization of Turkey's relations with Syria and Iran. The normalization of relations between Turkey and these two countries was greatly influenced by the emergence of Northern Iraq as a security threat to Turkey. The emergence of Northern Iraq as a threat then replaced Syria and Iran as a new threat to Turkey.

Meanwhile, the *third* group of academics argue that desecuritization can occur due to efforts from actors with the ability to alter public perceptions to change the audience's view of a security issue. This desecuritization is consciously done by

offering alternative solutions to address the threat including through political and bureaucratic channels (Hansen,2012). One example of desecuritization of the rearticulation type is Mahendra, et al (2023) analysis in China's efforts to desecuritize relations with countries in the ASEAN region through the Belt and Road Initiative projects. Finally, the *fourth* group of academics think that desecuritization can also occur when an issue fails to enter the realm of security. Not all processes of securitization or the process of an issue becoming a security concern are successful. It is not uncommon for securitization efforts to fail in changing the audience's perception of objects that could pose a threat. The fourth group views that when securitization efforts fail and do not produce the desired outputs, at that point, the desecuritization will happen (Hansen,2012).

Through a case study of the transformation of United States policy patterns regarding cannabis, this paper attempts to demonstrate how Hansenian desecuritization enables various diverse desecuritization theories to be concurrently employed to analyze a case study. At least three of the four branches of desecuritization theory will be utilized in this paper: desecuritization types of change through stabilization, replacement, and rearticulation. The paper then argues that although each type of desecuritization process in the case of the transformation of United States policy patterns regarding cannabis does not occur simultaneously, each desecuritization process has a significant influence on the changes in United States cannabis policy patterns.

Research Method

Causal Process Tracing

In explaining how each Hansenian desecuritization allows for the concurrent use of each desecuritization branch, this paper will employ the method of case study with a causal-process tracing (CPT) approach. This method and approach focus on identifying causal relationships within a case study (Bennet,2004). The case study method with a CPT approach will guide this paper in identifying causal relationships between each desecuritization process of cannabis that occurred in the United States and the changes in United States cannabis policy patterns.

The CPT approach relies on three types of data to guide the examination of a case study. First, comprehensive storylines are data that can be used to construct a coherent and organized narrative over time, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the desired causal relationships (Blatter&Haverland,2012). In this research, Comprehensive storylines will be obtained through a literature review from various sources, including journal articles, books, reports, and news headlines discussing the transformation of United States cannabis policy patterns, both

domestically and internationally. Second, smoking-guns are data consisting of evidence that can connect causal relationships between one event and another (Blatter & Haverland, 2012). The Smoking-guns technique focuses on searching, selecting, and processing data that can serve as evidence of causal relationships in a case study. In this study, the Smoking-guns technique is used to search for evidence with strong causal relationships between the transformation of United States cannabis policy patterns and the process of cannabis discourse exiting the realm of security (desecuritization). Third, Confessions are used to strengthen the connection of causal relationships from the data networks built by the first two types of data into a coherent narrative. In CPT, Confessions rely on data in the form of statements from actors involved in a case study's discourse (Blatter & Haverland, 2012). In this research, confessions are obtained from various literary sources in the form of text, audio, or audio-visual documentation of opinions and statements from actors involved and influential in the discourse of United States cannabis.

Case Selection

The selection of the transformation of United States cannabis policy patterns as a case study in examining the implementation of the Hansenian desecuritization concept which allows for the use of several different types of desecuritization in a specific case is based on two epistemic reasons.

The first reason is the consideration of the position of theoretical foundation towards the relevance of using case studies methods. The Copenhagen School, as the origin of the desecuritization concept, does not place the analysis obtained through theoretical review in a case study as a single truth (Malik, 2015). The position of a case study is as a provider of arguments regarding which theory is most important to consider in understanding the social dynamics occurring within an issue (Blatter & Haverland, 2012). The transformation of United States cannabis policy was chosen because this case study is rich in various discourses from political, economic, and sociocultural perspectives. Making this case possible to be examined through at least three of the four types of desecuritization grouped within the Hansenian desecuritization concept. Additionally, the case study of cannabis transformation in the United States was also chosen because it shares similarities with several other historically similar objects in a similar geographic scope. The dynamics of cannabis in the US have conditions somewhat similar to the dynamics of alcohol and tobacco in the United States in the 19th century. Both of which experienced processes of criminalization and legalization dynamics.

Secondly, cannabis represents a "positive case" in the methodological context. The position of cannabis in social and formal legal realities is often associated with other types of narcotics. However, its position has recently begun

to change significantly. Meanwhile, there have been no changes in the position of other types of narcotics in both social reality and formal legal aspects. The selection of cannabis as the sole case study is intriguing due to the changes that have occurred within it compared to other types of narcotics. More importantly, the cannabis case has provided a necessary condition for drawing hypotheses in the CPT approach case study method: existing outputs. This is crucial in a methodical context considering that the only way to determine whether the variables we have identified have causal effects on the output or not is to see the output of the events (Blatter&Haverland,2012).

Result and Discussion

The Hansenian Desecuritization enables the utilization of one desecuritization approach alongside other desecuritization approaches to analyze one case study. The desecuritization of the cannabis issue in the United States progresses through three desecuritization pathways: change through stabilization, replacement, and rearticulation.

The three desecuritization processes unfolding in Washington drive transformations in the United States' policy patterns regarding Cannabis. This is evident in the shifting policy patterns at both federal and local levels. At the local level, as of early 2021, as many as 38 states in the United States have granted permission for the medical use of cannabis. Colorado became the first state to legalize the use, cultivation, and sale transactions of recreational marijuana in 2012. This step was then followed by policy changes regarding cannabis in other states, whether in the form of decriminalization, legalization for medical purposes, or legalization of recreational marijuana.

1. Change Through Stabilization Type of Desecuritization: Stagnation and Ineffectiveness of War on Drugs Measures Both Home and Abroad

Desecuritization of the *Change Through Stabilization* type occurs due to the absence of substantive changes related to a security issue. This opens up opportunities for political engagement from new actors who subsequently alter the understanding of the threatening nature, how it can pose a threat, and which actors are involved. It also opens up opportunities for changes in discourse related to this security issue within society. The stability of the issue coupled with changes in discourse and the emergence of new actors with alternative narratives in addressing the threat, leads to changes in measures to address this threat; towards a more normal-political direction and with less militaristic style (Hansen,2012).

As Ferreira (2015) mentioned, the core of the Washington cannabis policy can be simplified into two patterns. First, the criminalization of all narcotics activities (production, consumption, distribution) domestically and abroad by offering aid to targeted countries. Second, the destruction of the narcotics supply chain through

various means including using incentives and military measures. At least until the 2010s, the extraordinary measures style has not undergone significant changes. Measures taken by authorities remain stagnant and do not produce the desired outputs. This sentiment is also felt by the American public itself. Data from Gallup in October 2023 showed that 57% of Americans feel that the government's efforts to tackle the narcotics problem have not yielded the desired outputs (Gallup,2023).

Domestically, the approach taken by Washington in addressing the cannabis issue is through criminalization and imprisonment of individuals involved in cannabis-related activities. Although during the Obama administration there was a commitment to reduce what he termed as racially biased and unfair incarceration approaches and to prioritize prevention and rehabilitation, data on the number of incarceration related to cannabis tells a different story (Cooper, 2018). In fact, the data on criminalization continues to rise until the early days of the Biden administration. From fewer than 5,000 arrests in 1965, it rose to 663,000 in 2018 (Sawyer&Wagner,2023). This indicates two things. Firstly, although the number of cannabis criminalization cases continues to increase annually, state authorities have failed to regulate or curb the distribution channels of illegal cannabis. Secondly, referring to the first point, despite the proven ineffectiveness of the criminalization approach, state authorities continue to use it to this day. This implies stagnation and ineffectiveness in domestic cannabis measures.

The ineffectiveness of the outputs from measures implemented domestically also occurs with measures taken abroad. The destruction of the narcotics supply chain through various means including using incentives and military routes continues to be carried out by Washington in addressing this issue. During the Trump era, these kinds of measures were often implemented alongside anti-immigrant policies (Cooper,2018). Despite the fact that illegal cannabis can still enter through the US borders as evidenced by the increasing number of domestic criminalizations, these measures are still carried out by US authorities until now.

Furthermore, after the administration of George W. Bush, there were no more speech acts regarding the threat of cannabis that captured enough attention from the American public. In fact, the next president, Barack Obama, in one of his speeches concerning the justice system and narcotics, expressed his disagreement with the handling of cannabis and other illegal narcotics (The Obama White House, 2015). He mentioned that arrests and prosecutions aimed at illegal drug users do not reflect our belief in the idea of equality before the law. And, the consequences of mass incarceration are not only felt personally but also by families and communities around them, especially minority communities and people of color.

Without significant securitization measures being implemented, whether they are extraordinary measures or speech acts, the issue of cannabis becomes a

stable issue with the same handling. The stagnation in addressing illegal cannabis both domestically and internationally without any substantive changes opens the door for political involvement from new actors.

In the epistemic community, the gaps opened up by this stability have given rise to new criticisms and thoughts regarding effective ways of handling the complexities of cannabis issues. For example, one critic argues that the criminalization of cannabis and other narcotics makes it increasingly difficult to address addiction victims. Jenner instead offers a legalization solution, which makes addiction victim treatment facilities more accessible to those in need (Jenner, 2011). Other academic criticisms were also voiced stating that direct military intervention measures in addressing narcotics cases actually lead to increased poverty (Borden, 2013). Some interventions through military routes have proven effective in eradicating illegal cannabis production in a certain area, but this only lasts for a short period of time. In fact, illegal cannabis production resurfaces in the same area or simply moves elsewhere. The criminal actions and violence that arise as a result of its emergence in other areas and times ultimately contribute to increasing poverty levels in the area where these two events were happening.

Meanwhile, at the grassroots level, the ineffectiveness of measures that have negative impacts on society such as mass incarceration domestically and violence resulting from military interventions abroad are used by pro-cannabis organizations to campaign for their legalization ideas such as campaigns and advocacy carried out by NORML (National Organization for the Reform of Cannabis Laws), MPP (Marijuana Policy Project), and DPA (Drug Policy Alliance). The stagnation of measures to address illegal cannabis and the increasing popularity of legalization as an alternative measure also give rise to the growth of organizations that cater to cannabis trading communities, such as the NCIA (National Cannabis Industry Association). These organizations also contribute to promoting the idea of legalization at the federal level.

Moreover, the stagnation and ineffectiveness of measures have also brought about new actors in the policymaking arena by offering alternative measures. For instance, the cannabis policy initiative known as the Freedom and Opportunity Act sponsored by Senator Charles Schumer on May 20, 2019, aims to decriminalize cannabis at the federal level (US Federal Legislative Information, 2019a). Additionally, other policy initiatives offering new measures have been proposed by Representative Jerrold Nadler in the Marijuana Opportunity Reinvestment and Expungement (MORE) Act of 2020. The policy which was approved by the House with a vote of 228-164 would allow for a change in the classification of cannabis from a categorization of schedule I drug (US Federal Legislative Information, 2020). On the executive side, the Biden administration regime also plays a role in shaping

the new cannabis discourses. Policy measures under the Biden regime such as implementing amnesty programs for defendants in small possession of marijuana cases as well as Biden's speech acts in which he encourage local governments to decriminalize and implement similar amnesty programs and also his speech act in urging relevant agencies to evaluate the position of cannabis classified as Schedule I drugs, indicate that opportunities for alternative policies in addressing marijuana issues are wide open (The US White House, 2023).

As a result, the securitization of cannabis is starting to weaken gradually and the debate about whether cannabis indeed poses a security threat and how to address this issue continues to rise to this day.

2. Replacement Type of Desecuritization: Changing Views on the Securitization of Cannabis and the Promising Future of Legalization Solutions

The replacement type of desecuritization can occur when an issue that was previously securitized is replaced by another issue. In this marijuana case, measures taken to prevent the circulation of illegal cannabis both domestically and internationally in order to protect the American society have actually transformed into threats feared by a significant portion of the US population, especially minority groups. Domestically, the threat of imprisonment for those involved with cannabis is actually more feared by the majority of Americans than the side effects of cannabis itself. Meanwhile, internationally, interventions carried out by US authorities including using military interventions indirectly strengthen drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) and worsen violence in the areas where Washington operates.

The process of cannabis entering the security discourse began in 1973. Starting with Nixon's speech titled Special Message to the Congress on Drug Abuse Prevention and Control. In Nixon's speech act, cannabis was portrayed as the main enemy of American society that undermines the physical and moral health of its citizens (Siff,2014). In other words, the referent object of this security measure was the moral and physical health of American citizens. The construction process of the cannabis threat was also echoed by the Nixon regime through government campaigns in various media outlets called the National Drug Abuse Mass Media Information Campaign. Between 1970 and 1973, this campaign successfully advertised its propaganda in 40 television ads, 16 radio ads, 11 magazine ads, 33 newspaper ads, and more than a dozen billboards (Siff,2008). In 1972 alone, the campaign spent \$45 million. Making it the 17th largest media campaign of the year. Through its campaign, the Nixon regime succeeded in convincing the American public that cannabis was a threat that could harm health, damage the body, and undermine the morals of US citizens. This can be seen from the public response to the cannabis issue at that time. At the elite level, Nixon's campaign managed to raise donations of \$100 million to launch an anti-drug campaign program. At a broader

societal level, public approval of marijuana criminalization increased. In 1965, as many as 82% of Americans agreed that marijuana should remain illegal (Danniler,2019). The figure shown by the Pew Research survey remains the highest record of public disapproval of the legal status of marijuana per year to date. This is consistent with what Siff described regarding Nixon's influence on American public perceptions of marijuana. He stated that Nixon's actions successfully heightened public fear of drug users, especially excessive marijuana users (Siff,2018). Additionally, Nixon succeeded in spreading the stigmatization of marijuana users as criminals which made them seen not as a victim of abuse but as a threat by American society.

However, the threat construction during the Nixon era is no longer relevant today considering the changing responses and perspectives of US citizens towards cannabis. While cannabis was previously perceived as a dangerous substance, recent studies by Gali, et al.(2021) stated that Americans today perceive cannabis as having several health benefits such as reducing pain in some severe conditions and improving mental health. The perception of the American public regarding the health benefits provided by cannabis also tends to continue increasing with the legalization of cannabis in various states (Gali, et al,2021). This is also supported by a survey by Pew Research which states that 91% of Americans agree to legalize cannabis for medical purposes (Schaeffer,2023). Meanwhile, Nixon's narrative that cannabis could damage the nation's morals is also deemed irrelevant today. This is demonstrated by a Gallup survey in May 2023 which concluded that cannabis use is a morally acceptable activity in the eyes of the American public (Gallup,2023). As a result, Nixon's threat framing in his speech act is no longer relevant to the current situation. Consequently, the security threat construction attached to cannabis is beginning to change.

Similar to Nixon, the Reagan administration also made significant contributions to cannabis issues entering the security discourse. Reagan also positioned the American people as the referent object in the context of securitizing cannabis. Furthermore, he specified that the referent object that must be protected from the dangers of cannabis is the youth and families of the United States (Lee,2012). In order to protect the nation's future generations and the harmony of American families from this danger, Reagan even attempted to equate the war on drugs with the struggle waged by US soldiers in World War II. Not only that, Reagan also sought to project the war on drugs carried out by his administration as a war that involved all American citizens, as stated in his statement: "our national crusade" (Reagan Library,2016).

The speech act efforts undertaken by Reagan at that time succeeded in garnering affirmation from the American public. The issue of cannabis transformed

into a significant security issue that needed immediate attention. A survey published by CBS in March 1988 showed that nearly 50 percent of Americans believed that the narcotics issue should be prioritized in their country's foreign policy over terrorism and arms control issues (Morales,1989). Surveys from 'American Talks Security' also indicated that 44 percent of Americans considered international drug trafficking organizations to be the biggest threat to US security compared to the threat from the Soviet Union which only accounted for about 18 percent of the survey population (Morales,1989).

However, the threat construction during the Reagan era is no longer relevant today considering the changing responses and perspectives of US citizens towards cannabis. The narrative that cannabis use could destroy families is no longer effective in convincing the American public of the dangers of cannabis. Gallup (2023) surveys show that 73% of people say cannabis use does not cause problems in families. The threat of imprisonment caused by cannabis use is actually more feared by US citizens, especially families from minority groups, than the side effects of cannabis use itself. This is because minority groups are four times more likely to be detained than white groups in the US (Hudak,2020). And, according to 83% of Americans, cannabis legalization could protect users from this racist and unfair imprisonment system (Gallup,2023). The threat framing used in past cannabis securitization efforts is not relevant to today's audience. The threats perceived by US citizens actually come from the extraordinary measures implemented by Reagan and still ongoing today. US citizens are more afraid of imprisonment caused by cannabis use than the social effects of cannabis use that can harm families as Reagan discussed in the past.

Meanwhile, the reasons for implementing the War on Drugs measures by the US federal authorities abroad are also beginning to be deemed less relevant by various parties. This is due to the fact that the circulation of cannabis and narcotics entering the country is still very prevalent, considering the continuously increasing number of arrests in the US. The latest data from 2023 shows that there were 1.6 million arrests related to narcotics (Sawyer&Wagner,2023). This condition indicates that the steps taken by the US to prevent the entry of cannabis and other types of narcotics into the country are less effective. However, these methods continue to be implemented until today.

These measures have actually created new threats that are considered menacing for both domestic and international audiences. These new threats come from Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs). The methods employed from the Nixon era until now have only increased cases of violence perpetrated by DTOs as a spillover effect in areas where the US War on Drugs is conducted (Kilmer, et al.,2010). US military interventions abroad and domestic criminalization have

centralized the circulation of cannabis and other narcotics. The circulation is now solely controlled by DTOs. Allowing these groups to reap huge profits in this industry. Kilmer, et al., (2010) estimated that Mexican DTOs make profits of up to \$1.5 billion annually simply by exporting illegal cannabis to the US. These significant profits sustain and strengthen the existence of DTOs. The power and weapons acquired from such large profits are not only utilized by DTOs for illegal drug trafficking but also for other criminal activities often resulting in violence, such as extortion, kidnapping, and human trafficking. This means that the measures taken during the securitization phase originally aimed at stopping the circulation of illegal cannabis, have actually led to the emergence of new kinds of problems. The activities of these DTOs ultimately increase violence in areas where the WOD is conducted and lead to other criminal actions. The narrative of the new threat posed by DTOs was even affirmed by the Trump administration regime. In Trump's inaugural speech, he once stated that gangs (DTOs) along with narcotics and the criminal actions caused by them have taken too many lives and stolen too much from the American people (Politico, 2017).

This condition made legalization a new alternative in addressing cases of illegal cannabis distribution gaining public support. At least, this can be seen from the trend of cannabis legalization in various states. Whether for medical, recreational purposes, or simply decriminalization of this substance. In terms of its consequences, cannabis legalization is projected to address the threats posed by illegal cannabis, both old threats and new threats arising from measures that were already implemented to address this issue.

First, the impact of cannabis legalization on the efforts of monitoring and regulating its distribution is significant. Legalization facilitates the government in monitoring the distribution of this substance (Reuter, 2013). Drawing from the cases of US alcohol and tobacco legalization in the 19th century, monitoring and regulating the distribution of cannabis can be done more easily by using socio-economic mechanisms such as licensing and taxation. The data available from the mechanisms implemented by the government in legalization policies can also be used to formulate effective cannabis policies. Legalization policies can also minimize cannabis use among underage individuals. By implementing strict policies similar to those regulating tobacco and alcohol, the state can more effectively control who can and cannot consume this substance, as opposed to criminalization policies, which indirectly facilitate underage individuals obtaining it through informal black markets.

Secondly, the impact of legalization on mass incarceration and racism in the US justice system surrounding cannabis issues. With cannabis legalization, no one is incarcerated for using cannabis. No more families have to suffer because a family

member is in prison. No more children lose their developmental years with their parents because one of their parents is in jail. No more children lose their play and educational time because they are imprisoned just for possessing cannabis. Additionally, cannabis legalization can also minimize the racism inherent in the US justice system where minority groups are four times more likely to be detained for cannabis use than white groups in the US (Hudak,2020).

Third, the impact of cannabis legalization on the threat posed by Drug Trafficking Organizations. By legalizing cannabis, it directly reduces the income generated by DTOs from the production, distribution, and sale of illegal cannabis. For instance, 15-26% of the profits of Mexican DTOs came from the sale of illegal cannabis in the US market (Kilmer, et al.,2010). Some estimates suggest even higher profit figures, up to 60%. Legalizing cannabis could seize the profits obtained by DTOs which could weaken or even destroy them (Kilmer, et al.,2010). The substantial profits gained by DTOs enable them to acquire weapons and power. Often, these weapons and power are used for criminal activities other than narcotics, such as extortion, kidnapping, human trafficking, and oil piracy. Legalizing cannabis means reducing the income obtained by DTOs. This implies that DTOs can no longer purchase weapons and power because the money generated from illegal cannabis trafficking decreases. In the long run, cannabis legalization policies will make people less inclined to join DTOs due to the minimal profits from these operations.

Fourth, the impact of cannabis legalization on the economy is substantial. Legalization is claimed to save the government costs associated with cannabis-related legal processes. Estimates suggest savings ranging from 7.7 million to 13.3 million USD per year (Evan,2013). This legalization policy can also create a new economic sector. Thus, legalization can generate revenue from taxes and licensing from the cannabis industry. State revenue from this sector is estimated to reach 9.7 million USD per year. Some parties even estimate higher revenues. Based on Washington State's legalization proposal Initiative 502, Oglesby in Evans concluded that legalization could generate 500 million USD (Evan,2013). Additionally, considering Colorado's taxation scheme on cannabis, Oglesby also estimated that legalization would bring in revenue ranging from 47 to 100 million USD. Furthermore, legalization policy is projected to benefit the increase in productivity of US citizens. 40% of the 1.6 million drug-related arrests are cannabis arrests. And, 9 out of 10 cannabis-related arrests occur due to simple possession (Gramlich,2020). Not drug dealers, not couriers, not cartels. By legalizing cannabis, we no longer need to witness arrests and imprisonment due to simple possession of cannabis. This means that there is no longer a need to spend time in court and can instead

utilize time for work, thus increasing overall productivity of US productivity in generals.

The narrative of cannabis legalization as an effort to address the issues stemming from the old cannabis policy approach is also endorsed by Joe Biden's regime. In Biden's speech regarding marijuana reform, he stated that the old United States policy approach to cannabis has failed to address the cannabis issues and instead has resulted in many adverse effects on society, particularly in terms of racism and mass incarceration (The US White House, 2023). According to Biden, imprisonment due to simple possession of marijuana has significantly impacted many lives, hindering American individuals from pursuing their well-being, obstructing access to opportunities for education, housing, and employment (The US White House, 2023).

In the end, the changing threats and narratives surrounding cannabis have prompted various parties to seek new solutions to the issue of illegal cannabis circulation. One policy option that is widely supported is cannabis legalization. This policy is touted to bring highly positive impacts across various aspects. Ranging from social to economic impacts. Therefore, it is not surprising to see the high trend of cannabis legalization in various states. More importantly, legalization policy provides solutions to both new and old threats resulting from illegal cannabis circulation. Consequently, the securitization of cannabis in previous eras and its associated measures are beginning to erode due to the changing public perceptions of what constitutes the threat of cannabis coupled with the emergence of promising new alternative policies, namely legalization policies.

3. Rearticulation type of Desecuritization: Grassroots Organizations' Efforts in Advocating Cannabis Legalization through Political and Bureaucratic Channels

Rearticulation is a type of desecuritization that occurs because there are efforts made by certain parties who seek to change what has been securitized (Hansen, 2012: 543-544). This desecuritization process is consciously carried out by offering alternative solutions to address the threat. In the case of cannabis, rearticulation desecuritization is conducted by various grassroots organizations through campaigns, socialization efforts, negotiation lobbying, and bureaucratic channels such as state ballots. The success of the efforts made by pro-cannabis organizations at the state level in the 2020s has made them more proactive in advocating for legislative changes related to cannabis which are a form of rearticulation type of desecuritization.

Efforts by pro-cannabis organizations to advocate for changes in the perception of cannabis as a security threat have been underway since the era of securitization. In fact, some of these organizations were established at the beginning of the Nixon securitization period in the 1970s. Initially, the grassroots efforts of

these organizations had little impact on policies, both at the federal and state government levels. However, the results of the campaigns, socialization efforts, advocacy, and government lobbying carried out by community organizations over decades only began to yield results in the 2010s, which marked the period when the trend of cannabis legalization occurred in many states.

In discussing the efforts made by these organizations, this article will categorize them into two types of interests. The first type is organizations that are solely interested in legalizing the use of cannabis. The second type is organizations that seek to legalize cannabis for economic purposes. The majority of the second type organization began to emerge in the 2010s when states started legalizing cannabis.

The first type of organizations began to emerge even during the era where the securitization of cannabis began. Theoretically, the emergence of new narratives debating something that has already been securitized may occur. Although, it may not have a significant impact on deeply entrenched securitization processes (Hansen,2012). In the case of cannabis securitization, the first movement to oppose securitization was the LeMar (Legalize Cannabis) movement in 1964. This small group organized small protests in New York with the aim of changing the dangerous construction of cannabis to a more enjoyable one through their slogan "Pot is Fun" (Davis,2017). LeMar later joined the pro-legalization cannabis movement from California, known as 'Amorphia' in 1971. The movement by Amorphia focused more on decriminalizing cannabis at the local-state level (Davis,2017). With funding from its rolling paper sales business, Amorphia was able to campaign more freely for the pro-cannabis narrative. It even managed to hire several media outlets to advertise its narrative. This movement also donated tens of thousands of dollars to decriminalization efforts in Oregon and California (Davis,2017). Although the movement in California failed, the decriminalization movement in Oregon was successful, making it the first state to decriminalize cannabis in 1973 (Davis,2017). Amorphia later joined an organization called NORML (National Organization for the Reform of Cannabis Laws). NORML played a crucial role in advocating, campaigning, lobbying, and socializing for cannabis decriminalization in 10 other states from 1973 to 1978, including California, New York, Maine, Alaska, Colorado, North Carolina, Mississippi, Ohio, Minnesota, and Nebraska (Davis,2017). However, the progress made by the movement in the first type did not last long. The Reagan administration's intensification of securitization and the emergence of anti-cannabis movements, especially the 'parents' movement' that issued counter-narratives halted these decriminalization processes (Davis,2017).

As a result, the process of cannabis desecuritization was halted and only began to resume in the 2000s, where they began focusing on efforts to decriminalize and legalize cannabis for medical purposes. At least three grassroots organizations played significant roles during this decade: NORML, MPP (Marijuana Policy Project), and DPA (Drug Policy Alliance). Similar to NORML, MPP in the 2000s focused on efforts to decriminalize and legalize cannabis for medical purposes at the state level. MPP sought to achieve this goal through two different approaches (Davis,2017). The first approach focused on advocacy tasks and lobbying governments to change regulations that criminalize cannabis. The second approach involved campaigning, socializing, and advocating for cannabis-related issues. Meanwhile, DPA, despite having broader goals beyond cannabis issues, played a significant role in the process of decriminalization and legalization of cannabis for medical purposes during this period. Established in 2000, DPA's contributions included advocacy, campaigns, and socialization related to cannabis and the negative impacts of securitization measures implemented by the US government (Davis,2017). Consequently, the efforts of NORML, MPP, and DPA were claimed to have successfully legalized the medical use of cannabis in 12 states during the 2000s, either through state legislatures resulting from the lobbying and advocacy efforts of these organizations or through state ballots resulting from the campaigns and socialization efforts of these organizations (Davis,2017). The successful desecuritization efforts in the 2000s continued into the 2010s. More and more states decriminalized and legalized cannabis for medical purposes. This paved the way for efforts to legalize cannabis for recreational purposes and it didn't take long. In the early 2010s, specifically in 2012, Colorado became the first state to fully legalize cannabis, allowing all activities including production, distribution, and recreational use (Lopez,2020).

What happened in Colorado spurred the formation of the second type of pro-cannabis organization, namely organizations that want cannabis legalized for economic purposes. For the second type of group, the large market potential of the cannabis industry is too significant to ignore. According to Dorbian (2020), the projected size of the cannabis market could reach \$24 billion USD. This is one of the factors behind the emergence of these second type pro-cannabis organizations. Another factor for the emergence of these second type organizations is the difficulty in meeting bureaucratic regulations to trade cannabis. The emergence of legalization regulations does not automatically mean that cannabis can be freely obtained. There are many rules and requirements that need to be met if an individual or a business entity wants to produce and trade cannabis. By organizing themselves, business groups can create a platform to facilitate compliance with the necessary rules and requirements. Moreover, criminalization still occurs in several

states and at the federal level. This naturally limits the potential markets that should be accessible to cannabis business groups. Based on these factors, the second type of pro-cannabis organizations emerged. One of the first organizations in the second type that contributed significantly to the efforts to legalize cannabis is the National Cannabis Industry Association (NCIA). NCIA aims to achieve its goals through advocacy, campaigns, and socialization related to cannabis especially by promoting the narrative that the cannabis industry can generate significant revenue for the government in the form of taxes and create numerous job opportunities (Davis,2017).

The success of the efforts by both types of pro-cannabis organizations conducted at the state level has propelled them to expand their goals towards changing policies at the federal level. The fact that 38 states have legalized cannabis in various forms, including decriminalization, legalization for medical purposes, and legalization for recreational purposes, makes the target of cannabis legalization at the federal level seem achievable.

Both types of organizations, whether in the first or second category, continue to employ various methods to advocate for the legalization of cannabis at the federal level. At least, the grassroots efforts of these organizations can be grouped into two main approaches. The first approach involves educating the public through campaigns, advertisements, and socialization about cannabis and how the measures taken by the federal government to address illegal cannabis (incarceration and U.S. intervention beyond sovereign territory) have had detrimental effects. Another narrative promoted is that the cannabis industry can generate significant revenue for the country and create job opportunities for many people. In this first approach, one strategy that garnered significant public attention in 2021 was the strategy employed by NORML to promote the Cannabis Freedom and Opportunity Act. Although successfully brought the discussion into the council, the legislative approval process for this bill remains stagnant (Fertig,2021). Therefore, Senator Charles Schumer, who initiated this bill, is attempting to discuss it with President-elect Joe Biden. This moment is being supported by NORML through a campaign to send letters to Biden urging him to initiate discussions on this bill. The second approach involves lobbying and advocacy directed at the government. One advocacy effort that is considered quite successful is the advocacy carried out by DPA and NORML in the initiation of the MORE ACT policy (Davis,2017). DPA and NORML, as part of the Cannabis Justice Coalition, assisted in drafting and promoting the MORE Act to the council and the public. As a result, the MORE Act was approved by the council with a vote count of 228 to 164, which will allow for a change in the classification of cannabis from a Schedule I drug (US Federal Legislative Information, 2020). On the other hand, organizations in the second

category are more active in promoting draft laws regulating the buying and selling of cannabis being discussed at the federal level. For example, NCIA, through its policy council team, strives to push the Regulate Cannabis Like Alcohol Act initiated by Representative Earl Brumenauer (US Federal Legislative Information, 2019b).

Although the efforts made by pro-cannabis organizations of both types, whether the first or the second, have not yet brought about significant changes in federal cannabis policy. The outcomes achieved by these parties are currently promising given the changing attitude of the Biden administration towards cannabis issues.

Conclusion

The case study of the transformation of marijuana policy in the United States indicates that various approaches to desecuritization can be concurrently employed to analyze the shift of a security issue into a normal political concern. The evolution of US cannabis policy follows three Hansenian desecuritization logics. While not always proceeding in tandem, these three desecuritization pathways collectively influence the transformation of cannabis policy in the United States, both domestically and internationally. The first trigger for this change stems from the stagnation and ineffectiveness of measures implemented by the US government to prevent the influx of illegal cannabis. This creates opportunities for alternative policy initiatives and the emergence of new actors to critique the US approach to addressing the issue of cannabis. The second trigger is a shift in societal perceptions regarding the threats posed by cannabis itself. Domestically, US citizens appear to fear incarceration due to cannabis use more than the side effects of its consumption. Internationally, US intervention through the War on Drugs policy has ironically spawned new problems such as Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) and the criminal and violent actions associated with them. Consequently, legalization emerges as a promising solution as it eliminates incarceration for mere cannabis possession and can diminish the profits of DTOs, thereby weakening these organizations. The third trigger is propelled by the emergence of pro-cannabis organizations actively campaigning, socializing, and advocating for cannabis. These three triggers move cannabis from being initially within the realm of security alongside other narcotics to transitioning towards a normal-political issue. Consequently, although there exist remnants of the securitization period in the form of federal laws against cannabis, current outcomes tend to indicate a positive shift towards decriminalization and legalization of cannabis.

At this point, the writing does not assert that the cannabis issue has been fully desecuritized. Indeed, from the 2010s to the present, there have been no actors of securitization successfully disseminating speech acts substantially driving the securitization of cannabis. There has indeed been a change in the attitude of the American public towards cannabis as a threat, as evidenced by survey results from Pew Research in 2022 and Gallup in 2023, demonstrating a shift in public opinion

in the United States regarding cannabis. Referring to Buzan's securitization theory, where issues that have been securitized cannot be debated again, the current state of affairs, where debates on the appropriate handling of cannabis abuse are extensively discussed in both academic and general public environments, indicates that the securitization of the cannabis issue has ceased. Indeed, 38 states have decriminalized or legalized cannabis for medical purposes, with 24 of them legalizing cannabis for recreational use. There has been a change in perception from political elites at the federal level and efforts and initiatives from policy stakeholders at the federal level to change measures used to address the cannabis issue. This includes executive branch institutions granting amnesty for small possession of cannabis defendants, pushing related institutions to review the categorization of cannabis as a Schedule I drug. Additionally, there have been legislative changes related to cannabis evident in several bills, such as the Cannabis Freedom and Opportunity Act of 2019, the MORE Act of 2020, and the Regulate Cannabis Like Alcohol Act of 2019.

However, the fact that remnants of formal legal aspects in measures implemented during the securitization era are still enforced by the federal government of the United States both domestically and internationally indicates that the process of removing the cannabis issue from the realm of security is still incomplete. Consequently, this text only seeks to conclude that the process of desecuritizing cannabis in the United States has not yet been fully successful. Desecuritization of cannabis in the United States is ongoing and considering the social contexts outlined in this text.

Furthermore, this paper also recognizes the need for further research on the desecuritization of the cannabis issue in the United States, especially given the changing stance of the US government towards cannabis, particularly after the writing of this text, given that the recent Biden regime stated that "Too many lives have been upended because of our failed approach to marijuana. It's time that we right these wrongs" (The US White House, 2023). Naturally, this could be interpreted as indication that there will be significant change in the US policy approach to marijuana. Therefore, further research on the new political dynamics, new policy, and new measures regarding the desecuritization of cannabis is necessary considering there are significant regime changes in United States domestic politics.

Future Directions

Despite the simultaneous emergence of securitization and desecuritization as key concepts within the Copenhagen School framework, as stated many times in these writings, the development of desecuritization theory has remained significantly underdeveloped in comparison to its securitization counterpart. This

disparity presents a crucial research opportunity. Future studies should aim to expand and refine the conceptual foundation of desecuritization theory, particularly through the lens of Hansenian desecuritization, which enables a pluralistic and flexible analytical framework. There remains a gap in the literature in terms of systematically exploring the interplay between different types of desecuritization within a single case study—an area that this paper only begins to unpack.

Additionally, the United States cannabis policy remains a dynamic and evolving case of contention. The political discourse surrounding cannabis has not fully settled, with federal and state-level dynamics, shifting public opinion, and legislative initiatives continuously reshaping the issue. Future research should further investigate how the transformation of cannabis policy progresses under changing political regimes. Tracking these developments will offer deeper insight into how ongoing desecuritization processes unfold in real-time and how they interact with broader socio-political and institutional changes.

Ultimately, the study of desecuritization—both as theory and praxis—requires sustained scholarly attention. By expanding empirical case studies and refining theoretical tools, future research can contribute to balancing the intellectual weight currently skewed toward securitization studies and offer a more comprehensive understanding of how security politics evolve and normalize over time.

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Author's Brief Biography



Nurridho Aryawan is a Bachelor of Social and Political Sciences from Universitas Gadjah Mada. His academic interests lie at the intersection of international relations, critical security studies, social data analytics, and social data sciences fields. One of his published research in those particular fields titled “The Complexities of Establishing Transboundary Water Management Institutions in Post-Colonial Territories: A Study of Nile River TWMI Construction”