



The Impact of The US-Israel vs Iran Conflict Escalation On The Phenomenon Of Panic Buying In Indonesia: A Securitization Theory Perspective

Dampak Eskalasi Konflik AS-Israel vs Iran terhadap Fenomena Panic Buying di Indonesia: Perspektif Teori Sekuritisasi

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Info Article

| **Submitted:** 6 July 2026 | **Revised:** 13 August 2026 | **Accepted:** 18 August 2026

| **Published:** 18 August 2026

How to cite: Lailatul Mahmudah, "The Impact of The US-Israel vs Iran Conflict Escalation On The Phenomenon Of Panic Buying In Indonesia: A Securitization Theory Perspective", *Sociale : Journal of Social and Political Sciences*, Vol. 2 No. 2, 2026, p. 284-296.

ABSTRACT

The escalation of military conflict involving the United States, Israel, and Iran has heightened geopolitical tensions in the Strait of Hormuz and sparked anxiety in the global energy market. In Indonesia, this uncertainty triggered a phenomenon of fuel panic buying, largely driven by the public's heightened threat perception resulting from circulating crisis narratives rather than actual physical supply shortages. This study aims to analyze the impact of the U.S.-Israel-Iran conflict escalation on panic buying phenomena in Indonesia through the lens of Securitization Theory. Utilizing a descriptive-qualitative method with a systematic literature review, secondary data were gathered from academic journals, official government reports, and reliable media documentation, which were then processed using discourse analysis techniques. The findings reveal that government statements regarding national energy reserve limits were over-interpreted by the public (over-acceptance). The combination of information asymmetry, historical trauma from past crises, and social media viral content transformed state speech acts into triggers for irrational consumption, leading to artificial shortages across regions and a dramatic surge in national energy subsidy expenditures. This study concludes that fuel panic buying in Indonesia was primarily driven by perceived risk and ineffective public communication dynamics rather than a genuine supply deficit. As a recommendation, the government must design more transparent, measured, and cohesive crisis communication strategies to prevent over-securitization from causing moral panic, while simultaneously strengthening data-driven fuel distribution governance and accelerating the energy transition to reduce national vulnerability to global geopolitical shocks.

Keywords: US-Israel-Iran Conflict, Panic Buying, Economic Uncertainty, Securitization, Indonesia.

ABSTRAK

Eskalasi konflik militer antara Amerika Serikat, Israel, dan Iran meningkatkan ketegangan geopolitik di Selat Hormuz dan memicu kecemasan pasar energi global. Di Indonesia, ketidakpastian ini memicu fenomena panic buying bahan bakar minyak (BBM) yang disebabkan oleh tingginya persepsi ancaman masyarakat akibat penyebaran narasi krisis. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis dampak eskalasi konflik AS-Israel-Iran terhadap fenomena panic buying di Indonesia melalui kacamata Teori Sekuritisasi. Menggunakan metode deskriptif-kualitatif berbasis tinjauan pustaka sistematis, data sekunder diperoleh dari sintesis jurnal ilmiah, laporan resmi kementerian/lembaga pemerintah, serta media massa dan media sosial yang kemudian dianalisis menggunakan teknik analisis wacana. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pernyataan pejabat pemerintah mengenai batas cadangan energi nasional direspon secara berlebihan (over-acceptance) oleh publik. Kombinasi asimetri informasi, trauma historis krisis masa lalu, dan disinformasi di media sosial mengubah speech acts pemerintah menjadi pemicu kepanikan konsumsi irasional, yang berdampak pada kelangkaan buatan (artificial shortage) di berbagai daerah serta pembengkakan drastis beban anggaran subsidi dan kompensasi energi negara. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa fenomena panic buying BBM di Indonesia lebih didorong oleh persepsi risiko dan dinamika komunikasi publik yang kurang efektif ketimbang defisit pasokan yang nyata. Sebagai rekomendasi, pemerintah perlu merancang strategi komunikasi krisis yang transparan, terukur, dan

kohesif agar narasi sekuritisasi tidak memicu ketakutan moral, serta memperkuat tata kelola distribusi BBM berbasis data riil dan mempercepat transisi energi guna mengurangi kerentanan nasional terhadap gejolak geopolitik global.

Kata kunci: *Konflik AS-Israel-Iran, Panic Buying, Ketidakpastian Ekonomi, Sekuritisasi, Indonesia.*

Introduction

On February 28, 2026, the U.S. and Israel launched an attack against Iran. The U.S. referred to this attack as Operation Epic Fury. In the attack, the U.S. and Israel targeted Iran's defense infrastructure, military facilities, and a number of strategic elites. Iran responded to the attack with a counterattack using missiles and drones. This escalation of the conflict heightened geopolitical tensions in the Middle East, particularly along the strategic Strait of Hormuz, which has long been one of the world's largest oil distribution routes. Instability in the region has the potential to disrupt the smooth flow of global energy and create international economic uncertainty. (Editors, 2026)

In the global economic system, everything is interconnected; one country is linked to another. Geopolitical conflicts in the Middle East not only affect countries in the immediate vicinity of the conflict but can also impact global economic stability. Iran's geographical position, bordering the Strait of Hormuz a key route for global oil trade means that any threat to regional stability can trigger global concerns about a potential closure of the Strait of Hormuz at any time. (Al Arif, 2026) When the threat of a closure or traffic disruptions in this strait arises, the global oil market reacts quickly. This indicates that, even without an official announcement regarding the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, oil prices tend to rise due to market uncertainty. When oil prices rise, this has an impact on the entire global economy. This is because oil serves not only as an energy source but is also the most critical raw material for various sectors: transportation, manufacturing, the petrochemical industry, and food distribution. Consequently, as oil prices increase, so do the costs associated with production and distribution. (MS, 2026)

In Indonesia, the escalation of the conflict between the U.S.-Israel and Iran, coinciding with the holy month of Ramadan, has led Indonesia – as a developing country with a Muslim majority to grow concerned that a prolonged war could lead to rising prices for goods and essential needs. This is compounded by the rising prices of non-subsidized petroleum products following the Middle East conflict. (M. Irham, 2026) Although actual shortages may not necessarily occur, information regarding potential price hikes, energy supply disruptions, and economic instability spread through the mass media and digital platforms shapes the public's perception of threat. In this context, an economic threat does not need to materialize to elicit a social response; it is sufficient for it to be perceived as an imminent risk. Thus, perceptions of economic risk can drive excessive consumption behavior (panic buying) as a form of anticipation of a potential crisis. This phenomenon

demonstrates that panic buying is not always triggered by actual scarcity, but also by threats amplified through the media and public information. This was evident in Banda Aceh in early March 2026, where long queues formed at gas stations for two consecutive days after the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources stated that national fuel reserves would only last around 20 days, even though Pertamina officials confirmed on the ground that local depots still held millions of liters in stock (Antara, 2026).

Research on the relationship between international geopolitical conflicts and the domestic consumption behavior of the Indonesian public remains relatively limited. Most previous studies have focused more on the impact of the Middle East conflict on global economic stability or the phenomenon of panic buying during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this study is important to understand how the escalation of the U.S.-Israel conflict with Iran is constructed as an economic threat that shapes public perception and drives the phenomenon of panic buying in Indonesia. Based on the above background, does the escalation of the US-Israel conflict with Iran shape a perception of threat that triggers the phenomenon of panic buying in Indonesia?

Table 1. Previous Studies and Positioning of This Research

Researcher (Year)	Focus	Method	Gap with This Study
Chen et al. (2024)	Government intervention and panic buying during COVID-19 in Hubei, China	Online comment data mining	Focuses on a health crisis, not a geopolitical/military conflict, and is not framed through securitization theory
Li et al. (2021)	Psychological drivers of panic buying (dual-system theory, SOR framework)	Quantitative survey model	Explains individual psychology, not the state's securitization narrative as a macro-level trigger
Phillips et al. (2026)	Securitization of "panic buyers" in Covid-19 news media (moral panic)	Media discourse analysis	Studies media framing, not government speech acts as the primary securitizing move, and outside the Indonesian context
Patiro & Budiyantri (2022)	Panic-buying behavior during Covid-19 in Indonesia (social cognitive model)	Quantitative + qualitative survey	Indonesian context but pandemic-driven, not linked to international geopolitical conflict or securitization theory
This Study (2026)	Panic buying of fuel in Indonesia driven by US-Israel-Iran conflict escalation	Qualitative, systematic literature review	Links state securitization speech acts to public over-acceptance and panic buying, in an international-geopolitical (non-pandemic) case

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach to examine the complexities of the phenomenon of panic buying in the

context of escalating geopolitical conflicts; this approach was chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of the relationship between national security narratives and public behavioral responses. All data were collected through systematic library research integrating academic literature on consumer behavior and securitization, official policy documents from government agencies such as the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources and the Ministry of Trade, as well as national media reports to map public perceptions during the conflict. In the analysis phase, the data was processed using discourse analysis techniques focused on interpreting the speech acts of state actors to examine the extent to which the securitization narratives constructed by the government actually contributed to the emergence of threat perceptions among the public, thus, by integrating policy data and the securitization theoretical framework, this study is able to explain the logical chain linking the government's macro-level policies to the micro-level behavioral phenomena of society amidst the uncertainty of international conflict.

Results and Discussion

1.1 The Escalation of the Middle East Conflict and Its Implications for the Global Energy Order

Political tensions in the Middle East have escalated once again after the conflict between the United States, Israel, and Iran sparked concerns about global repercussions, including for Indonesia's economic stability. Amid growing public speculation about the possibility of a major war, analysts argue that this conflict is not merely a temporary military issue but rather a culmination of long-standing rivalries rooted in fundamental security concerns between nations. (University Public Relations, 2026)

The tensions in the Middle East are believed to be linked not only to geopolitical issues and threats to security. According to official reports, this dispute is also seen as having strategic objectives in the competition for access to global energy resources, particularly regarding Iran's massive crude oil reserves. Iran is known as the country with the third-largest crude oil reserves in the world, with verified reserves reaching 208.6 billion barrels, equivalent to nearly 12% of the world's total oil reserves, according to information from OPEC. (Author, 2026)

The escalation of this conflict has the potential to trigger a global energy crisis, given Iran's geographical position near the Strait of Hormuz the world's most critical energy distribution route. Military tensions in the region would likely cause a surge in global energy prices. Disruptions to global energy routes could also trigger a ripple effect on the world economy. Not only would oil prices rise, but this could also potentially fuel inflationary pressures in various countries and increase financial market instability on a global scale, including in Indonesia. Although

Indonesia is not directly involved in this conflict, as a net oil importer, it remains vulnerable to fluctuations in global energy prices. (Milah, 2026)

Ultimately, this event highlights the current state of energy geopolitics. No country can escape such major disruptions. The crisis is not merely a regional dispute but a systemic shock revealing the level of vulnerability in the global supply chain, starting with the largest energy products, as well as the significance of strategic locations, such as the Strait of Hormuz. As countries strive to secure alternative energy sources and protect their economies from rising costs, the focus will shift from the dream of energy independence to the creation of long-term stability in the global energy landscape of the future. (Mahesh, 2026)

1.2 Indonesia's Energy Vulnerability Amid the U.S.-Israel vs. Iran Conflict

The tensions in the Middle East between the United States, Israel, and Iran are expected to have a significant impact on the stability of the international energy market, including Indonesia, which remains heavily dependent on fossil fuel imports. As a country that still relies on oil imports, Indonesia is considered highly vulnerable to global energy price shocks. Indonesia's reliance on natural gas is considered a highly risky move, potentially threatening the nation's energy security. Amid the current uncertain global geopolitical landscape, the government's plan to build power plants focused on natural gas serves as a warning. Indonesia's reliance on fossil fuels not only causes climate-related issues but also leaves the country vulnerable to geopolitical conflicts and domestic price instability. (Adiputro, 2026)

From the perspective of securitization theory, the actors in the escalation of the U.S.-Israel vs. Iran conflict regarding the potential for panic buying in Indonesia are dominated by state stakeholders, particularly the Indonesian government through the presidential office, relevant ministries, and the legislature. The government plays a role in shaping the narrative regarding threats to energy stability, inflation, and national economic resilience caused by geopolitical conflicts in the Middle East. The presidential institution, through the President's statements, emphasizes the importance of national preparedness in addressing global instability by enhancing energy self-reliance and economic mitigation. Meanwhile, technical ministries such as the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources serve to convey technical data regarding energy supply conditions, the stability of fuel and LPG prices, and strategies for energy supply diversification. (Office of the Assistant to the Deputy Cabinet Secretary for State Documents & Translation, 2026)

An analysis of speech acts and framing regarding the phenomenon of panic buying in Indonesia indicates that the government employs assertive speech acts by narrating that energy supplies are secure, directive speech acts by urging the public not to be provoked by hoaxes, and commissive speech acts specifically,

guaranteeing the security of supplies—to quell public panic. However, its effectiveness is hampered by poor communication between the government and the public; by the time the public has already engaged in panic buying, the government only then clarifies the news. Here, the role of social media is very evident (Achdiani, 2026)

Social media, in general, can reinforce government messaging. It amplifies the government's statements by presenting various data from multiple sources, thereby strengthening public trust and preventing panic buying. However, some analyses also identify long-term vulnerabilities, which can support energy transition as the best solution and enrich the narrative without undermining the urgency. While official government accounts and influencers largely support the government, there is also viral critical content circulating regarding concerns about rising prices, accusations that the government lacks adequate preparation to address the escalation of this conflict, and other public anxieties. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter can simultaneously amplify the government's messaging while undermining it through alternative narratives. This impacts the success of securitization among the mainstream, fuels polarization in the digital space, and demands greater government transparency regarding reserve data and fiscal risk. This is where algorithms that prioritize content that provokes anger, panic, and controversy come into play. (Redaksi, 2026)

1.3 The Dynamics of Panic Buying and Its Impact on National Energy Security

The phenomenon of panic buying has emerged amid rising global uncertainty. Here, consumer behavior is influenced not only by real economic conditions but also by psychological factors. Psychologically, panic buying is typically associated with the perception of limited availability of goods. It is often triggered by uncertainty about the future, leading individuals to seek ways to ensure their survival—one of which is purchasing goods in large quantities. In the current era of conflict, marked by uncertainty regarding global energy supplies, this has led to a surge in the purchase of petroleum products (BBM).

One instance of panic buying in Indonesia, resulting from the U.S.-Israel conflict with Iran, occurred at several gas stations in the city of Surabaya, where long lines of vehicles formed due to concerns over a fuel price hike effective April 1, 2026. The lines began to form on Monday, March 30, 2026, in the afternoon and peaked on Tuesday, March 31, 2026, with vehicles ranging from two-wheelers to four-wheelers, stretching all the way onto the roadway at the Jemursari gas station and the SIER Rungkut area. Gas station attendants reported that the lines began to get busy around 11:00 a.m. local time, with the lines growing to a significant length. Although Pertamina has confirmed that there will be no price adjustments for subsidized and non-subsidized fuel, public concerns continue to trigger panic

buying. This issue was triggered by the conflict in the Middle East, which has impacted perceptions of a global fuel shortage. (Huda, 2026) However, the surge in fuel buyers is not limited to Surabaya alone but has also occurred in several other regions, such as Banda Aceh (gas stations), Jakarta, Medan, Banjarmasin, and other cities. In Banda Aceh, long queues at gas stations were reported for two consecutive days in early March 2026 after the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources' statement on the 20-day national reserve (Antara, 2026). In Jakarta, vehicle queues lengthened at major Pertamina stations on 31 March 2026 amid rumors of an imminent fuel price increase, even though the government confirmed no price change would take effect on 1 April (Media Kampung, 2026). In Medan, queues mounted along Jalan HM Yamin and other major roads in mid-July 2026, which the head of BPH Migas publicly attributed to panic buying rather than a supply shortfall (Kompas, 2026). In Banjarmasin, the city's fuel terminal was tapped as an emergency backup supply point (Regular Alternative Emergency) to reinforce stock in neighboring Central Kalimantan after queues built up there in May 2026 (Berita Kaltim, 2026).

The long lines of people at gas stations are driven by public distrust of official information regarding fuel price policies. Past experiences with fuel crises in Indonesia have made the public more vulnerable to rumors of price hikes, leading them to engage in panic buying when negative news emerges. Additionally, the influence of social media accelerates the spread of such rumors without proper verification. The abundance of photos and videos circulating on social media further reinforces public perceptions of scarcity and encourages more people to purchase fuel. As more people lose trust in the government, combined with the widespread circulation of these images, the result is an acceleration of panic buying among the public. (Jasman, 2025)

The panic buying sweeping the public has triggered an artificial shortage, with some gas stations temporarily running out of stock due to uneven distribution across locations. Gas stations in strategic locations have run out of certain types of fuel, while others still have stock. This imbalance is lengthening lines as drivers must move around to find a gas station with the fuel they need. This pattern was documented in Banda Aceh, where a station supervisor at SPBU Lamdingin confirmed the outlet had just received two fuel tankers carrying roughly 48 tons of combined fuel and stated the shortage was "only public panic," not an actual supply gap (Antara, 2026). A similar imbalance triggered a regional overreaction in West Kalimantan, where local governments in Singkawang and Bengkayang imposed purchase limits of around 30 liters per vehicle, which the public misread as a sign of scarcity and ended up worsening the queues until the Ministry of Home Affairs ordered the limits revoked (RRI, 2026). The resulting imbalance can lengthen lines because many vehicles must move to find available gas stations, thereby worsening

traffic congestion and exacerbating psychological stress due to public fears of shortages or rising fuel prices. (Wadrianto, 2026)

Consequently, the government and Pertamina must accelerate fuel distribution and conduct emergency imports to meet urgent needs, which directly increases pressure on the subsidy budget. A report from the Ministry of Finance indicates that subsidies and compensation for fuel and LPG surged by 226% to Rp 118.7 trillion as of March 2026, driven by unstable energy price fluctuations. (Haa, 2026) This crisis has heightened public awareness of the vulnerability of national energy security and, at the same time, highlighted the dangers of panic buying, which can create artificial shortages. As a policy response, the government has encouraged the adoption of work-from-home (WFH) arrangements for civil servants and private-sector workers, and has also imposed restrictions on the purchase of subsidized fuel to prevent hoarding by the public. (Suaradotcom, 2026)

1.4 Energy Securitization and the Phenomenon of Panic Buying in Indonesia

Energy securitization in Indonesia has been relatively successful in creating political legitimacy for maintaining fuel subsidies and emergency import measures, though it has failed entirely to prevent panic buying. The government, through Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Bahlil Lahadalia and Pertamina, framed the crisis as an existential threat to economic stability and national resilience due to the potential closure of the Strait of Hormuz. The statement that stocks are secure and there will be no increase in subsidized prices until the end of 2026 constitutes a securitization speech act emphasizing the necessity of state intervention. Consequently, public fear often exceeds the actual conditions. Thus, if some people hoard fuel, many others will follow suit. Consequently, the emergence of panic buying among the public creates artificial scarcity. This situation has the potential to disrupt the national energy distribution system or even drive up prices at the consumer level. (Commission 6, 2026)

However, the success of securitization is determined not only by the speech acts of state actors, but also by the extent to which that narrative is accepted by the public. Within the framework of Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998), audience acceptance is a crucial element that determines whether an issue is truly socially securitized. In this case, the Indonesian public, as the audience, actually accepted the framing of the threat to an excessive degree, going beyond what the government intended. Instead of responding with the calm expected from the statement “supplies are secure,” the public interpreted the statement as confirmation that the situation was indeed far from normal. It was this over-acceptance that became the primary trigger for panic buying, not actual shortages on the ground.

Several factors explain why audience acceptance in Indonesia is excessive. First, information asymmetry and uncertainty. The statement that Indonesia’s

energy reserves would last only 21–25 days, without adequate operational context, can trigger perceptions of scarcity among the public. Information circulating on social media further exacerbates gas station lines and creates a sense of fear of missing out (FOMO), where when some people hoard, others follow suit out of fear of being left behind. (Li et al., 2021) Second, historical trauma. Indonesia has experienced recurring episodes of panic buying, such as the cooking oil shortage and the fuel shortage in 2022, during which actual shortages did indeed occur (Cahya, 2025). This collective memory causes the public to tend to overreact when even the slightest sign of a threat emerges. Third, the influence of media and framing. Coverage of long lines and rumors about imports creates public panic while reinforcing the perception that the government is unprepared to handle the crisis.

This case of conflict escalation demonstrates that excessive or misdirected securitization can cause efforts to frame threats to escalate irrational intensity. Because what occurred was not desecuritization that is, bringing the issue back to normal politics, but rather the framing of the energy crisis reinforced the perception of threat, triggering public expectations through panic buying. This aligns with studies discussing the relationship between securitization and moral panic, where the public, once securitized as a threat, reacts by behaving in ways to protect themselves. (Phillips et al., 2026)

This phenomenon of “over-acceptance” demonstrates that excessive or misguided securitization can actually intensify the public’s irrational response. What occurs is not desecuritization the process of bringing an issue back into the realm of normal politics but rather the opposite: framing the energy crisis reinforces perceptions of threat and triggers expectations of scarcity through panic buying. This aligns with the study by Phillips et al. (2026), which examines the relationship between securitization and moral panic, where the public, upon accepting a threat narrative, reacts with counterproductive self-protective behaviors. Thus, if some people hoard fuel, many others will follow suit, creating artificial scarcity that has the potential to disrupt the national energy distribution system and drive up prices at the community level. (Commission 6, 2026)

When compared to previous cases, the 2026 fuel panic buying shares a similar pattern of public acceptance with the 2022 cooking oil crisis. In 2022, the securitization of the “cooking oil crisis” succeeded in legitimizing import and subsidy policies, but failed to reassure the public due to poor communication and low public trust in government regulations (Retaduari, 2022). A more comparable precedent is the 1990–1991 Gulf War, when Iraq's invasion of Kuwait threatened a similarly strategic oil chokepoint and drove sustained oil-price shocks and stockpiling behavior worldwide; audience acceptance of that threat narrative held for months because the disruption to supply routes was direct, prolonged, and

repeatedly reaffirmed by wartime developments, whereas in the 2026 fuel case, acceptance was intense but faded within days once Pertamina and government officials clarified that domestic reserves remained adequate (Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, 1990). This difference indicates that the level and duration of audience acceptance are significantly influenced by the nature of the communicated threat, the credibility of the securitizing actors, and the public's collective memory of similar crises in the past.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the escalation of the U.S.-Israel-Iran conflict since February 2026 triggered panic buying of fuel in Indonesia, primarily as a product of threat perception rather than actual scarcity. Three main points emerge from this analysis:

First, the Indonesian government successfully constructed a securitizing narrative of threat to national energy stability through official statements, but this narrative was overinterpreted by the public. Information asymmetry, historical trauma from the 2022 cooking oil and fuel shortages, and unverified content circulating on social media combined to spread panic buying to major cities including Surabaya, Banda Aceh, Jakarta, and Medan.

Second, this threat perception carried real fiscal consequences: the fuel and LPG subsidy budget surged by 226% to Rp118.7 trillion in March 2026 due to artificial scarcity, confirming securitization theory's core argument that perceived threat, not the threat itself, drives costly collective behavior.

Third, audience acceptance of this securitizing narrative was intense but short-lived, unlike the broader and more enduring acceptance seen during a prolonged global threat such as COVID-19. This shows that the durability of securitization depends heavily on the government's ability to sustain transparent, swift, and consistent crisis communication.

For future research, comparative or longitudinal studies are recommended to examine panic buying across multiple geopolitical shocks or countries, paired with quantitative measures linking the intensity and phrasing of government statements to the scale of public panic response. Such work would strengthen the empirical grounding of securitization theory as applied to economic and consumer behavior, beyond the single-case, qualitative approach used here.

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