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Eksternalizing Risk: State Security and Its Consequences for Aceh in Operation Sovereign Borders

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ABSTRACT

Irregular migration has become an important issue as border security policies implemented by destination countries can also affect the conditions of migrants in transit countries. Australia has implemented Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB) since 2013 to strengthen border control and reduce irregular maritime arrivals. Previous studies have tended to discuss this policy, Indonesia's role as a transit country, and the responses of Acehnese communities separately. This study aims to analyze the conditions of transit migrants in Aceh in relation to the implementation of OSB through the perspective of state security and the concept of risk externalization. This study employed a qualitative method using a library research approach based on policy documents, reports from international organizations, and relevant journal articles published between 2013 and 2024. Information from these sources was compared and analyzed to examine the relationship between OSB and migrant conditions in Aceh. The findings show that OSB strengthened Australia's border control and reduced maritime arrivals, from 55 boats carrying 3.116 migrants before the policy was implemented to zero afterward. However, restricting access to Australia did not eliminate migration related challenges in transit countries. By the end of 2023, approximately 12.295 refugees and asylum seekers remained registered in Indonesia. In Aceh, these conditions were associated with prolonged legal uncertainty and a shift in local attitudes from solidarity toward social concern. These findings highlight the need for stronger regional cooperation and more equitable responsibility sharing.
Keywords: *Aceh; transit migrants; Operation Sovereign Borders; state security; risk externalization.*

ABSTRAK

Migrasi tidak teratur menjadi isu penting ketika kebijakan keamanan perbatasan negara tujuan turut memengaruhi kondisi migran di negara transit. Australia menerapkan Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB) sejak 2013 untuk memperketat control perbatasan dan men bgurangi kedatangan migran tidak teratur melalui jalur laut. Penelitian terdahulu cenderung membahas kebijakan ini, peran Indonesia sebagai negara transit, dan respons Masyarakat Aceh secara terpisah. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis kondisi migran transit di Aceh dalam kaitannya dengan penerapan OSB melalui perspektif state security dan konsep risk externalization. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi Pustaka yang memanfaatkan dokumen kebijakan, laporan Lembaga internasional, dan artikel jurnal relevan dari periode 2013 hingga 2024. Data dari berbagai sumber tersebut dibandingkan dan dianalisis untuk melihat hubungan antara kebijakan OSB dan kondisi migran di Aceh. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa OSB memperkuat control perbatasan Australia dan menurunkan kedatangan migran melalui jalur laut, dari 55 kapal yang membawa 3.116 migran sebelum kebijakan diterapkan menjadi nihil setelahnya. Namun, pembatasan akses ke Australia tidak menghilangkan persoalan migrasi di negara transit. Pada akhir 2023, sekitar 12.295 pengungsi dan pencari suaka masih terdaftar di Indonesia. Di Aceh, kondisi ini berkaitan dengan ketidakpastian status hukum berkepanjangan serta perubahan sikap masyarakat dari solidaritas menuju keresahan sosial. Temuan ini menunjukkan perlunya kerja sama regional dan pembagian tanggung jawab yang lebih adil.
Kata Kunci: *Aceh; migran transit; Operation Sovereign Borders; state security; risk externalization.*

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Introduction

Irregular migration has become one of the most significant issues in contemporary international relations. Cross border human mobility driven by armed conflict, political instability, human rights violations, and economic factors is no longer viewed solely as a humanitarian concern but also as an issue closely linked to national security and state sovereignty (UNHCR, 2023b). In recent years, the growing movement of migrants through irregular routes has encouraged many states to strengthen border control as part of their national security strategies. In the Asia-Pacific region, Australia has addressed this issue through *Operation Sovereign Borders* (OSB), a border security policy introduced in September 2013 in response to the increasing number of irregular maritime arrivals. Before the policy was implemented, 14.215 people seeking asylum arrived in Australia by boat between 2006 and 2011, with 5.175 of the 11.491 asylum applications lodged in 2010-2011 submitted by individuals who had entered Australia through maritime routes (Razak, 2019). Although these arrivals represented only around 1,3 percent of Australia's total migration, irregular migration became a major issue in the country's political debate and national security agenda.

In response, Australia implemented *Operation Sovereign Borders,* which emphasizes stricter border protection through the *turnback policy, offshore processing,* and enhanced maritime patrols coordinated by the Joint Agency Task Force involving multiple security agencies (Saragih & Pramita, 2020). From the Australian government's perspective, the policy has contributed to a substantial reduction in irregular maritime arrivals and strengthened state control over its territorial borders. However, its consequences have extended beyond Australia. By making access to Australia increasingly difficult, the policy may contribute to longer stays among migrants who remain in transit countries along regional migration routes, including Indonesia. This broader pattern is examined in this study through the concept of risk externalization, whereby Australia strengthens its border security while shifting part of the humanitarian burden beyond its own jurisdiction. The persistence of this policy, despite international criticism, is driven not only by border security concerns but also by domestic political dynamics and the competitive geopolitical landscape in the Pacific region (Aisha et al., 2025). Furthermore, the implementation of OSB has been widely criticized for contradicting Australia's obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention, particularly through the turnback policy which is argued to violate the principle of non-refoulement (Hudan, 2019).

Indonesia occupies a strategic geographical position between Asia and Australia and has long served as a transit country for asylum seekers and irregular migrants (Rafiki, 2017). However, Indonesia has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol. Consequently, refugee management primarily

relies on Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 concerning the Handling of Refugees from Overseas. While this regulation provides procedures for identifying, accommodating, securing, and supervising refugees, it does not offer permanent solutions for refugees residing in Indonesia (Sukma et al., 2021). As access to Australia has become increasingly restricted, many migrants have remained in Indonesia for extended periods while awaiting resettlement by UNHCR to third countries. As a result, many experience *legal limbo,* a condition in which they are unable to return to their countries of origin while also lacking certainty regarding their future in the transit country.

Aceh is one of the regions most directly affected by this situation. Located along the Andaman Sea and the Strait of Malacca, Aceh has become one of the primary landing points for Rohingya refugees travelling by sea from Myanmar to Southeast Asia (Missbach, 2017). According to UNHCR reports, thousands of Rohingya refugees arrived in Aceh and North Sumatra during 2023-2024, with most remaining in temporary shelters under limited living conditions (UNHCR, 2024). The prolonged presence of migrants has also generated various local dynamics. Initially, Acehnese communities were widely recognized for their humanitarian solidarity toward refugees (Listriani et al., 2020). In recent years, however, public responses have become increasingly diverse, shaped by social and economic concerns as well as information circulating through social media (Karim et al., 2025). These developments suggest that the impacts of irregular migration extend beyond cross-border human mobility and increasingly influence social dynamics within transit communities.

This phenomenon can be examined through the perspective of *state security.* According to Barry Buzan (1983), the state is the primary actor responsible for safeguarding sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national stability against various forms of threats. Similarly, Stephen Walt (1991) argues that state security concerns a state's capacity to identify threats and adopt the measures necessary to protect its national interests. From this perspective, *Operation Sovereign Borders* can be understood as Australia's attempt to strengthen border security by restricting irregular migration. At the same time, the *state security* framework helps explain how a state's security policy may generate consequences that extend beyond its territorial boundaries and affect other countries located along migration routes.

In this study, *state security* is operationalized through two dimensions of state authority over migration and territorial control. The first is territorial control, reflected in Australia's use of the turnback policy and enhanced maritime surveillance to determine who may physically enter its territory. The second is sovereign authority over the processing of asylum claims, reflected in the offshore processing policy, through which Australia asserts its authority over where and how asylum seekers are processed, rather than allowing such processing to take

place within its own territory. These two dimensions, territorial control and sovereign authority, provide the analytical basis for examining *Operation Sovereign Borders* as a state security policy in the discussion that follows.

In addition to the state security perspective, this study also draws on the concept of *risk externalization* to explain the consequences of Australia's border policy beyond its own territory. Externalization refers to a state's strategy of shifting responsibility for asylum seekers and refugees to other states, often through restrictive border measures that prevent access to its territory while leaving the resulting humanitarian burden to be absorbed elsewhere (Gleeson & Yacoub, 2024). In the context of Operation Sovereign Borders, this concept helps explain how Australia's success in strengthening state security has also shifted part of the humanitarian burden to transit countries such as Indonesia, particularly Aceh. State security and risk externalization are therefore treated as complementary lenses, the former explains the security rationale and policy mechanisms from Australia's perspective, while the latter explains the consequences of these measures for transit countries.

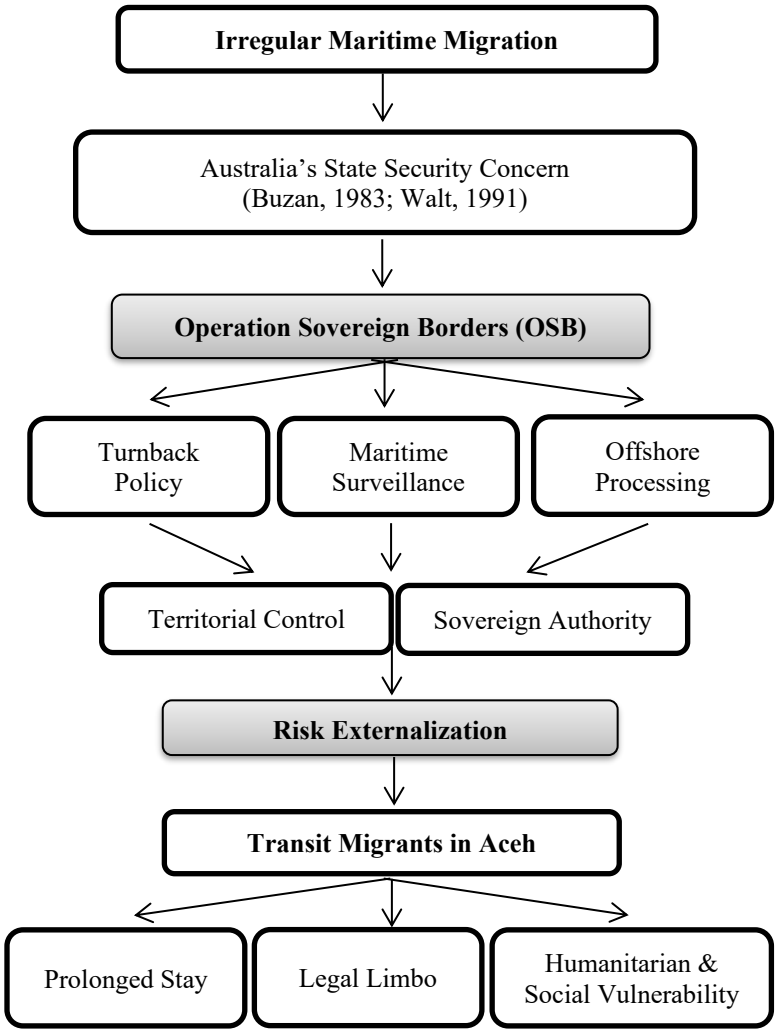


Figure 1. Analytical Framework: From State Security to Externalized Consequences in Aceh

Figure 1 illustrates the analytical framework used in this study. The framework begins with Australia's perception of irregular maritime migration as a state security concern, which is operationalized through Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB), namely the turnback policy, enhanced maritime surveillance, and offshore processing. These measures strengthen Australia's territorial control and sovereign authority, resulting in a strengthened border security regime. However, the restriction of access to Australia produces consequences beyond Australia's own territory, which this study conceptualizes as risk externalization. These externalized consequences are examined in this study through the prolonged stay, legal limbo, and humanitarian and social vulnerability experienced by transit migrants in Aceh.

Previous studies on asylum seekers and refugees in Indonesia have been mapped into several major themes, including the Indonesia-Australia relationship, people smuggling, living conditions in transit, the Rohingya crisis, and legal protection (Dewansyah, 2025). Studies on *Operation Sovereign Borders* have mainly focused on the effectiveness of Australia's policy in reducing irregular maritime arrivals (Razak, 2019). Other studies have examined Indonesia's role as a transit country, particularly regarding legal frameworks, refugee management, and the limitations of national regulations (Sukma et al., 2021). More recent research has explored how Acehnese communities have responded to the arrival of Rohingya refugees, highlighting the shift from humanitarian solidarity to growing rejection (Karim et al., 2025). Nevertheless, these studies remain largely fragmented along three separate lines, studies on *Operation Sovereign Borders* tend to focus on its effectiveness in reducing irregular maritime arrivals from Australia's own perspective (Razak, 2019), studies on Indonesia as a transit country tend to focus on legal frameworks and refugee management (Sukma et al., 2021), while studies on Aceh tend to focus on the evolving responses of local communities to the presence of refugees (Karim et al., 2025).What remains underexplored is the mechanism that connects these three dimensions, namely how the strengthening of Australia's state security through Operation Sovereign Borders produces consequences that are externalized to, and experienced by, transit migrants in Aceh. This study addresses that gap by examining Australia's border security policy and its consequences for Aceh within a single analytical framework.

Based on this research gap, this study asks: how does *Operation Sovereign Borders* affect the conditions of transit migrants in Aceh, producing consequences that can be understood through the perspective of *state security* and *risk externalization*? The novelty of this study lies in connecting Australia's border security policy, the conditions of transit migrants, and the responses of host communities within a single analytical framework that treats state security and risk externalization as complementary lenses, rather than examining these dimensions as separate issues as previous studies have done. Accordingly, this study not only

examines Australia's success in strengthening its border security but also explains how the implementation of this policy has produced consequences for transit areas. Theoretically, this study expected to contribute to the international relations literature migration, particularly by extending the state security framework with the concept of risk externalization to explain policy consequences beyond the state's own territory. Practically, the findings are expected to provide insights for improving transit migrant management and strengthening regional cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.

Research Methods

This study employed a qualitative method using a library research approach. The method was selected because the study focuses on analyzing Australia's *Operation Sovereign Borders* (OSB) policy and its impact on the conditions of transit migrants in Aceh from the perspective of *state security.* The analysis covers the period from 2013 to 2024, beginning with the implementation of *Operation Sovereign Borders* and extending to recent developments concerning migrants and Rohingya refugees in Aceh.

The documents used in this study were selected based on three main criteria, relevance to *Operation Sovereign Borders*, transit migration in Indonesia, or the situation of Rohingya refugees in Aceh, publication or issuance during or after the implementation of OSB, and credibility of the source, prioritizing peer-reviewed journal articles and official reports issued by government institutions or international organization over general news media. The selected sources comprised Australian and Indonesian government policy documents, reports published by international organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Indonesia government regulations, peer-reviewed academic journal articles, and relevant news reports. Each type of source served a distinct function in the analysis, government policy documents and official reports were used to establish the factual details of *Operation Sovereign Borders* implementation and its outcomes, UNHCR and IOM reports provided quantitative data on the number of refugees and asylum seekers registered in Indonesia and peer-reviewed journal articles provided the academic and theoretical basis for interpreting these data through the perspective of *state security* and *risk externalization.*

The document analysis followed four steps. First, documents meeting the selection criteria described above were collected. Second, the collected documents were screened and categorized according to the main themes of the study, namely the implementation of *Operation Sovereign Borders,* the condition of transit migrants in Indonesia, and the situation of Rohingya refugees in Aceh. Third, information across documents within each theme was compared through source triangulation,

which was conducted by cross checking quantitative data reported by UNHCR against corresponding Australian and Indonesian government sources, comparing claims made in Indonesia language academic journal articles against international reports and official documents, and verifying news reports against official government and institutional sources before the data were used in the analysis. Fourth, the findings were interpreted through the perspective of *state security* and *risk externalization* to formulate the conclusions of this study.

This study has several methodological limitations that should be acknowledged. First, as a library research relying exclusively on secondary data, this study does not include primary data such as field interviews with transit migrants or local communities in Aceh, which may limit the depth of insight into their lived experiences. Second, the study depends heavily on institutional reposts from UNHCR, IOM, and the Australian government, which may reflect the perspectives and priorities of these institutions rather than an independent account. Third, access to updated and detailed data specific to the condition of migrant in Aceh remains limited, as most available data are aggregated at the national level for Indonesia. These limitations suggest the need for future research incorporating primary data collection in Aceh.

Results and discussion

1.1 Operation Sovereign Borders as Australia's Border Security Policy

Before the implementation of *Operation Sovereign Borders* (OSB) in 2013, Australia experienced a significant increase in the arrival of irregular migrants and asylum seekers by sea. According to data from the from the Refugee Council of Australia, between 2006 and 2011, a total of 14,215 asylum seekers who arrived by boat. During the 2010 to 2011, 5,175 out of a total of 11,491 asylum applications were submitted by individuals who had arrived through maritime routes (Australia, 2019). Although this number represents only about 1.3 percent of total migration to Australia, the issue of irregular migration remains a focal point in the political debate in the country. The increasing number of boat arrivals was frequently associated with weak border control and the growing activities of people smuggling networks.

This situation then prompted a change in the Australian government's perspective on irregular migration. If previously this issue was more understood from a humanitarian perspective, irregular migration is then seen as a matter related to border security and the country's ability to control its territory. In response, Australia adopted stricter measures to regulate maritime migration. Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB) was officially launched in September 2013 under the administration of Prime Minister Tony Abbott as a response to the increasing number of irregular maritime arrivals. The policy aimed to strengthen border

protection while reducing the number of migrants entering Australia through unauthorized channels (Razak, 2019). To implement the policy, the Australian government formed the *Joint Agency Task Force* (JATF), which coordinated the activities of 16 government agencies, including the Australian Defense Force (ADF), the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service (ACBPS), the federal police, and several other security agencies (Saragih & Pramita, 2020). The JATF was then divided into several working groups with different tasks, including the Disruption and Deterrence Task Group led by the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and the Detection, Interception, and Transfers Group led by the Maritime Border Command (MBC) (Saragih & Pramita, 2020).

Operationally, Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB) was implemented through three principal measures, the *turnback policy*, maritime surveillance, and offshore processing of asylum seekers (Saragih & Pramita, 2020). One of the most prominent measures is the turnback policy, which involved intercepting and returning vessels carrying migrants to their country of origin or transit country before they could reach Australian territory. This policy become an important part of Australia's efforts to prevent the arrival of irregular migrants by sea. Since it was implemented from 2013 to 2018, Australia has recorded the return of at least 33 boats carrying around 810 migrants and asylum seekers (Pym, 2018). In addition, patrol and interception operations at sea were also strengthened through cooperation between the Australian Defence Force (ADF), Maritime Border Command (MBC), and the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service (ACBPS) (Razak, 2019). The significant role of the military and security forces in OSB indicates a shift in handling irregular migration, from being previously identified with immigration matters to becoming part of border security policy.

OSB is also implemented on offshore processing policy by transferring asylum seekers to processing centers located in Nauru and Manus Island, Papua New Guinea (ANAO, 2017). Under this arrangement, asylum seekers arriving by sea are processed outside Australian territory and were not permitted to settle in Australia even if they obtain refugee status. Following the implementation of this policy, more than 4,000 asylum seekers were transferred to these offshore processing centers (Australia, 2026). Maintaining this system, Australia incurred very high costs, amounting to approximately A-1.49 billion per year at its peak operational period. Even when the number of residents in the processing centers began to decrease, the Australian government continued to allocate around A$350 million per year to maintain the facilities in Nauru (Gleeson & Yacoub, 2024).

From the Australian government's perspective, Operation Sovereign Borders successfully reduced the number of irregular maritime arrivals. Within the first six months of its implementation, the government reported that no more migrant boats had successfully reached Australian territory since December 19,

2013. Before the OSB was implemented, the arrival of migrants by sea was still quite high. During the period from December 20, 2012, to March 24, 2013, 55 boats carrying 3,116 irregular migrants arrived in Australia. In contrast, during the same period after the OSB was implemented, no migrant boats were recorded as successfully reaching Australian territory (Leslie & Corcoran, 2014). For the Australian government, the decline indicates that the OSB successfully reduced the arrival of migrants by sea while simultaneously strengthening the state's control over its borders. Nevertheless, the policy has also been widely criticized. The turnback policy, in particular, has been argued to conflict with the principle of non-refoulement enshrined in the 1951 Refugee Convention, raising concerns regarding Australia's compliance with its international obligations (Hudan, 2019).

1.2 The Impact of Operation Sovereign Borders on Transit Migrants in Aceh

Indonesia has a strategically significant geographical position between Asia and Australia, making it a long standing transit route for asylum seekers and irregular migrants aiming to reach Australia (Rafiki, 2017). Many migrants from Afghanistan, Myanmar, Pakistan, Iran, and several other conflict countries stop in Indonesia before continuing their journey to their destination countries. For most of them, however, Indonesia is not their final destination. Indonesia has neither ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention not its 1967 Protocol, and the absence of a permanent integration mechanism for refugees means that their stay in Indonesia remains temporary in nature (Jumadi, 2025).

T. Following the implementation of *Operation Sovereign Borders* (OSB) in 2013, policies such as the turnback policy, enhanced maritime surveillance, and offshore processing have made access to Australia increasingly difficult (Lau, 2021). This development is relevant to Indonesia as a transit country, where refugees and asylum seekers may remain for extended periods while awaiting durable solutions or resettlement. By the end of 2023, UNHCR recorded approximately 12,295 refugees and asylum seekers still registered in Indonesia (UNHCR, 2023). These figures indicate that restrictive border measures did not eliminate the broader phenomenon of irregular migration or the presence of refugees and asylum seekers in transit countries such as Indonesia. Instead, prolonged stays in Indonesia continued alongside limited access to durable solutions.

Tabel 1. Number of Registered Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Indonesia (2020-2024)

Year	Number of Registered
2020	13.745
2021	13.343

2022	13.098
2023	12.295
2024	12.008

Source: UNHCR Indonesia Fact Sheet (2020-2024)

The data indicate that although the number of refugees in Indonesia has gradually declined, thousands of refugees continue to reside in the country each year. This suggests that the third-country resettlement process remains extremely limited, resulting in many migrants spending prolonged periods in transit. According to UNHCR (2024), only around 3-4% of refugees are resettled to third countries annually. Within this broader context, Aceh Province represents an important transit and landing area for refugees arriving by sea. Located along the Andaman Sea and the Strait of Malacca, Aceh has become one of the main landing points for Rohingya refugees travelling by sea from Myanmar to Southeast Asia (Missbach, 2017).

As part of Indonesia's role as a transit country, Aceh has long served as a transit area for migrants seeking to continue their journey to other destinations, particularly Australia. However, since the implementation of *Operation Sovereign Borders* in 2013, access to Australia has become increasingly restricted, contributing to a context in which migrants may remain in Indonesia for longer periods while awaiting onward movement or durable solutions (Lau, 2021b). UNHCR data indicate that Indonesia hosted 13.745 registered refugees and asylum seekers in 2020, and although this number declined to 12.008 in 2024, thousands of refugees continue to reside in the country (UNHCR, 2024). Despite the gradual decrease, many refugees remain in Indonesia because they have not secured a durable solution, whether through third-country resettlement, voluntary repatriation, or local integration.

This situation created what Sukma et al. (2021) describe as a *legal limbo*, a condition in which migrants cannot return to their home countries because of security concerns, while at the same time having no clear legal status in the transit country. They are unable to continue their journey to Australia because access has become increasingly restricted, but they also cannot return to their countries of origin due to the risks they face there. At the same time, refugees in Indonesia do not have the legal right to work or settle permanently. As a result, many of them rely on assistance from UNHCR and the *International Organization for Migration* (IOM) to meet their daily needs (Sukma et al., 2021). Opportunities for third-country resettlement have also become increasingly limited, leaving many refugees waiting for years without certainty about their future (UNHCR, 2022). For migrants in Aceh,

this situation has turned what was originally intended to be a temporary stay into a much longer period than they had expected.

To manage the presence of refugees and asylum seekers, the Indonesian government issued Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 on the Handling of Refugees from Overseas. This regulation provides the legal framework for the identification, accommodation, security, and supervision of refugees in Indonesia (Purwaningsih, 2019). In its implementation, both the central and local governments work together with UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to provide temporary shelters and humanitarian assistance for refugees (UNHCR, 2024). In Aceh, the local government, through the Social Affairs Office and other relevant agencies, has established temporary shelters, including UPTD Rumoh Sejahtera and temporary accommodation sites in Pidie, Lhokseumawe, and Aceh Besar (Nawar et al., 2025). Nevertheless, limited funding, inadequate facilities, and institutional capacity constraints mean that refugee management continues to rely heavily on support from international organizations.

1.3 Local Responses toward Transit Migrants in Aceh

The long term presence of migrants has created its own social dynamics within Acehnese society. During the early phase, particularly during the 2015 arrivals, the local community showed strong solidarity toward Rohingya refugees. Acehnese fishermen rescued refugees at sea, local residents provided food and clothing, and charity events were organized to support them. This humanitarian response was influenced by the local value of *Peumulia Jamee* (honouring guests) as well as religious solidarity, since most Rohingya refugees share the same Islamic faith as the Acehnese community (Missbach, 2017).

However, public attitudes have gradually changed in recent years. The initial sense of solidarity has shifted toward a more cautious attitude, with some groups openly rejecting the presence of refugees. This change has been influenced by several factors, including the prolonged stay of migrants without a clear solution, concerns over social and economic impacts, and narratives circulating on social media that increasingly portray refugees as a burden (Karim et al., 2025). UNHCR also reported cases during the 2023 and 2024 arrival waves in which local residents prevented several groups of migrants from disembarking from their boats (UNHCR, 2024).

These changes indicate that the prolonged presence of migrants affects not only the migrants themselves but also the social dynamics of communities in transit areas. The initial solidarity, which was rooted in humanitarian and religious values, has gradually weakened as uncertainty over the migrants' future continues for an extended period.

1.4 Relationship between Australia's State Security and the Conditions of Transit Migrants in Aceh

Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB) illustrates how Australia addresses irregular migration as an issue closely linked to border security. Through measures such as the turnback policy, offshore processing, and strict maritime surveillance, Australia has sought to prevent irregular migrants from entering its territory while strengthening control over its national borders (Razak, 2019). From a state security perspective, these measures reflect the Australia's effort to protect its sovereignty and national security. This view is consistent with the ideas of Barry Buzan and Stephen Walt, who regard the state as the primary actor responsible for ensuring security. As a result, protecting territorial integrity and national sovereignty often becomes a key priority in policymaking (Buzan, 1983).

From the Australian government's perspective, the policy has been considered successful. Before OSB was introduced, 55 boats carrying 3,116 irregular migrants arrived in Australia between 20 December 2012 and 24 March 2013. After the implementation of OSB, no migrant boats reached Australian territory during the same period (ANAO, 2017). These figures indicate that Australia succeeded in strengthening its border control and limiting irregular migration. In terms of state security, this demonstrates the state's ability to protect its territorial sovereignty and maintain domestic security and stability (Buzan, 1983).

However, this success does not mean that irregular migration in the region has come to an end. Instead, Australia's stricter border policies have made access to Australia increasingly difficult, contributing to prolonged stays among migrants who remain in transit countries, including Indonesia. Within Indonesia, Aceh represents an important location for examining these broader consequences, particularly given its role as a landing area for Rohingya refugees arriving by sea (Missbach, 2017). This indicates that Australia's success in strengthening its border security has been accompanied by consequences for transit areas. The turnback policy and enhanced maritime surveillance were designed to prevent irregular maritime arrivals from reaching Australia, while the offshore processing policy further restricted settlement within Australian territory. The combined effect of these measures did not eliminate irregular migration or the need for transit arrangements. Instead, the consequences associated with restricted access to Australia continued to be experienced in transit countries, a pattern this study conceptualizes as risk externalization.

In this context, many migrants in transit may experience a condition of *legal limbo.* They are unable to continue their journey to their destination country, while at the same time they cannot return to their country of origin because of security concerns. They also have no legal right to work or obtain permanent residence in Indonesia, forcing them to depend on humanitarian assistance provided by

UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (Sukma et al., 2021). This situation illustrates how the consequences associated with restrictive border policies can extend beyond Australia's territory and affect migrants residing in transit countries. Legal limbo, in this context, can be understood as one manifestation of risk externalization, in which the humanitarian and legal burden associated with displaced populations is absorbed by transit states such as Indonesia.

The consequences are experienced not only by migrants but also by the local communities in transit areas such as Aceh. As discussed in the previous section, the prolonged presence of migrants has gradually changed public attitudes from humanitarian solidarity to growing concerns over social and economic impacts (Karim et al., 2025). This demonstrates that the consequences of Australia's security policy are not limited to migration itself but also influence the social dynamics of communities in transit areas.

Based on these findings, this study argues that Operation Sovereign Borders has successfully strengthened Australia's border security while simultaneously creating consequences for transit countries. From the perspective of state security, a policy designed to protect one state's national interests may also generate impacts beyond its own jurisdiction. In the case of Aceh, these impacts are reflected in the prolonged stay of migrants, the persistence of *legal limbo*, and the changing social dynamics within the local community. Therefore, the security achieved by Australia through OSB has not eliminated the issue of irregular migration instead, it has shifted part of its consequences to transit countries such as Indonesia.

Theoretically, these findings extend the *state security framework* by showing that the achievement of state security is not necessarily confined within the borders of the state pursuing it. This study argues that *state security* and *risk externalization* should be read together rather than separately, the former explains why a state adopts restrictive border measures, while the latter explains where the unresolved consequences of those measures ultimately land. In the case of Operation Sovereign Borders, Australia's strengthened border control has been accompanied by consequences that extend beyond its territory, particularly humanitarian and legal burdens experienced by transit countries such as Indonesia. This finding suggest that state security in one state can coexist with the externalization of unresolved consequences beyond its territory.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB) has successfully achieved its primary objective of strengthening Australia's border security from a state security perspective. Through measures such as the *turnback policy*, offshore processing, and strengthened maritime surveillance, Australia has

significantly reduced the arrival of irregular migrants by sea while reinforcing control over its territorial borders.

However, the findings also show that the impacts of OSB extend beyond Australia's territory. Rather than eliminating irregular migration, the policy has shifted part of its consequences to transit countries, particularly Indonesia. In Aceh, this is reflected in the prolonged stay of migrants, the persistence of legal limbo, and their continued dependence on humanitarian assistance due to the absence of permanent legal status and limited opportunities for third country resettlement. The prolonged presence of migrants has also influenced the social dynamics within the local community, where initial humanitarian solidarity has gradually been accompanied by growing concerns over social and economic impacts. Therefore, this study concludes that while Operation Sovereign Borders has successfully strengthened Australia's border security, it has also generated humanitarian and social consequences for transit countries. These findings indicate that border security policies implemented by destination countries may produce significant impacts beyond their own jurisdiction, particularly for transit countries and the communities that host displaced populations.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the international relations literature by demonstrating that *state security* and *risk externalization* should be understood as complementary rather than competing frameworks, the achievement of border security by one state can coexist with, and indeed depend upon, the externalization of its unresolved consequences onto transit states. This offers a more complete account of border security policy than a *state security* framework alone, which tends to end its analysis at the point where a policy succeeds in protecting the implementing state, without accounting for where its costs are subsequently absorbed.

Practically, these findings suggest that Australia, Indonesia, and international organizations such as UNHCR and IOM need to strengthen regional cooperation framework, such as the Bali Process, so that the burden of managing displaced populations is shared more equitably rather than left to transit countries alone. This study is nonetheless limited by its exclusive reliance on secondary data and the absence of primary data from Aceh, as elaborated in the Research Method section, future research that incorporates field based data from transit migrants and local communities in Aceh would help verify and extend the findings presented here.

Suggestion

Based on the findings of this study, several suggestions are proposed. First, the Indonesian government should strengthen coordination between the central and local governments by improving the implementation of refugee management policies and providing adequate resources to support transit areas such as Aceh.

Second, international organizations, particularly UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), should continue strengthening coordination with host governments and resettlement countries while improving communication regarding the resettlement process to reduce uncertainty among refugees. Third, future studies are encouraged to examine the long-term social and economic impacts of prolonged migrant presence in transit areas or to conduct comparative research with other transit countries in order to provide a broader understanding of the regional consequences of irregular migration.

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