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From protection to threat: the Finnish ‘securitization’ on instrumentalized migration

A critical discourse analysis of political language surrounding the
Instrumentalization Law

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Abstract

Från skydd till hot: den finska "säkerhetiseringen" av instrumentaliserad migration: En kritisk diskursanalys av det politiska språket kring Instrumentaliseringslagen.

Mot bakgrund av Finlands antagande av Lagen om temporära åtgärder för att bekämpa instrumentaliserad migration (2024), syftar denna uppsats till att undersöka hur säkerhetisering-relaterat språk kan användas för att legitimera lagen inom den finska politiska diskursen. Lagen presenterades som ett svar på Rysslands påstådda användning av migranter som ett verktyg i hybridpåverkan mot Finland. När migration på detta sätt omdefinieras som ett medel i krigsföring riskerar det att påverka både lagstiftning och synen på asylrätten. Hur politiker legitimerar sådana undantagsåtgärder blir därmed ett centralt analysobjekt. Uppsatsen utgår från frågeställningen: Hur kan säkerhetisering förklara legitimeringen av Instrumentaliseringslagen i den finska politiska diskursen?

Med hjälp av Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver och Jaap de Wildes teori om säkerhetisering, samt Norman Faircloughs kritiska diskursanalys, undersöks politiska uttalanden och partiprogram från sex riksdagspartier. Resultatet visar att migrationen i regeringspartiernas diskurs framställs som ett existentiellt hot där staten och den nationella identiteten behöver skyddas. Oppositionen uttrycker mer återhållsamma eller kritiska positioner. Resultatet visar att lagen utgör en lyckad säkerhetisering, men väcker frågor om rättssäkerhet, tillgång till skydd och förskjutningen av referensobjekt från individ till nation.

Nyckelord: säkerhetisering, instrumentaliserad migration, Finland, Ryssland, politisk diskurs, asylrätt, kritisk diskursanalys

Abstract

Finland's adoption of the Act on Temporary Measures to Combat Instrumentalized Migration (2024:482) provides the background of this investigation. The legislation was introduced as a response to Russia's alleged use of migrants as a tool of hybrid influence against Finland. When migration is reframed as a form of warfare, it risks reshaping both legislation and perceptions of asylum rights. How politicians legitimize exceptional measures thus becomes a central object of analysis.

The research question is: *How can the concept of securitization explain the legitimization of the Instrumentalization Law in Finnish political discourse?*

Drawing on the securitization theory of Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, and Norman Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis, the study examines political statements and election programs from six Finnish parliamentary parties. The analysis shows that government parties portray migration as an existential threat, that requires the protection of both the state and national identity. In contrast, opposition parties adopt more restrained or critical positions. The results suggest that the law represents a successful securitization, while simultaneously raising concerns about legal certainty, access to protection, and a shift in focus from individual rights to national security.

Keywords: securitization, instrumentalized migration, Finland, Russia, political discourse, asylum rights, critical discourse analysis

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1. Introduction

In recent years, Finland's eastern border has become the focal point of national security discussions, particularly in the context of tensions with Russia.¹ In 2023-2024, the Finnish government increasingly described so-called irregular migration via the Russian border as a hybrid threat,² a form of hostile activity by which migrants are used as tools for political pressure.³ In response, the Finnish Parliament adopted the Act on Temporary Measures to Combat Instrumentalized Migration (2024:482), a law allowing temporary restrictions on the right to seek asylum in certain border regions.⁴

This development is part of a broader trend in European migration policy, where migration is increasingly framed as a security issue. Since the 1980s and 1990s, the European Union has tightened its external borders while presenting these actions as protective and humanitarian responses to instability and crisis.⁵ At the same time, it has shown how central language is in contexts of legitimizing political actions, particularly by appealing to authority, morality, rationality, or storytelling to align with societal norms and secure public approval.⁶

The thesis at hand examines how political actors in Finland utilized security-related language to legitimize the 2024 law on instrumentalized migration. Migration frequently analyzed through humanitarian or legal perspectives was rather constructed as a threat, enabling the justification of exceptional legal measures challenging international protection norms. The study focuses on Finnish political discourse surrounding and legitimizing the law and investigates how political figures and parties framed the issue.

¹ Katariina Mustasilta and Tyyne Karjalainen, *Russia's Hybrid Operation at the Finnish Border*, FIIA Comment 15, Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2023.

² Sandström, E. (2024). 'Riksdagen godkände avvisningslagen – se hur ledamöterna röstade', Svenska Yle.

³ Mustasilta and Karjalainen, *Russia's Hybrid Operation at the Finnish Border*.

⁴ FFS 2024:482. *Lag om ändring av gränsbevakningslagen*.

⁵ Paulina Polko, 'Just and Unjust Securitization of Migration: A Comparative Analysis of Migration to Poland from MENA Countries and Ukraine', *Frontiers in Political Science*, 7 (2025), pp. 87-89.

⁶ T. van Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 105–106.

The purpose of the thesis is therefore to explore the link between language and power in contemporary Finnish migration policy. The following research question guides the analysis:

- How can the concept of securitization explain the legitimization of the Instrumentalization law in the Finnish political discourse?

To answer this, the study applies the securitization theory developed by Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998) alongside Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model within critical discourse analysis.

1.1. Background

1.1.1. The Instrumentalization Law in Finland

On July 12th 2022 an act on amendment (16 §) of the Border Guard Act came in force allowing the Finnish government to temporarily close and restrict traffic at border crossing points. It also enables to centralize asylum applications to specific crossings if necessary. The law is declared to be applied in the event of a large number of inbound entries in a short period of time, or if suspicion arise that the entry is due to the influence of a foreign state.⁷ Based on this amendment (16 §) the Finnish government decided in November 2023 to close the last opened border crossing between Finland and Russia for two weeks starting November 30. The decision was derived from Russia's continued instrumentalization of migrants, sending them to harsh winter conditions on the Finnish border.⁸ On May 21, 2024, the Finnish government submitted a proposal to the Parliament for a law on temporary measures to counter instrumentalized migration. The aim is to strengthen border security and ensure that Finland can respond effectively when migration is used as a means of political pressure.⁹ The Parliament voted in favor of the *Act on Temporary Measures to Combat Instrumentalized Migration (2024:482)*, also called Instrumentalization Law (2024:482) and enters into force on July 22 2024. The law is valid for one year from its enactment.¹⁰ The passing has been criticized for restricting asylum rights and risks violating EU and international law. For

⁷ FFS 2022:698. *Lag om ändring av gränsbevakningslagen.*

⁸ Statsrådet, *Finlands hela östgräns stängs*, pressmeddelande 28 november 2023.

⁹ Inrikesministeriet, *Regeringens proposition om gränssäkerhetslagen till riksdagen*, pressmeddelande, 21 maj 2024.

¹⁰ FFS 2024:482. *Lag om ändring av gränsbevakningslagen.*

instance, Amnesty International warns that this law undermines protections of non-refoulement, which may lead to arbitrary and violent border actions. Further, they argue that this also challenges Finland's commitment to the rule of law and conflicts with recent EU regulations.¹¹ In spring 2025, the Finnish government proposed another extension of the law until the end of 2026.¹² Yet, the government has not explicitly justified the reasons for it. Critics warn that prolonging the law to a total of 2,5 years jeopardize the initial claim of the law as a temporarily act.¹³

1.1.2. Introduction of relevant actors

After Finland's 2023 parliamentary election, a new government was formed by the National Coalition Party (NCP), the Finns Party (PS), the Swedish People's Party (SFP/RKP), and the Christian Democrats (KD). The coalition secured 108 out of 200 seats in the Parliament and formed a clear majority.¹⁴ In their government program, stricter immigration and integration policies are on the agenda. Other priorities include halving the refugee quota, increasing income and residency requirements, and put more resources onto immigration obligations.¹⁵ The outcome of parliamentary alliances after the election had a direct impact on the 2024 vote on the *Law on Temporary Measures to Counter Instrumentalized Migration*. In the vote, 106 members of the government supported the proposal and only one opposed it. The opposition on the other hand was split: 61 voted in favor, 30 against, and one was absent.¹⁶ This thesis includes six parliamentary parties that represent a range of political and discursive positions on security and human rights.

- Centre Party (Keskusta) – moderate with both modern and traditional views.
- National Coalition Party (NCP) – centre-right, economically liberal and conservative.
- Finns Party (FP) – right-wing populist, anti-immigration with traditional views.

¹¹ Amnesty International, *Finland: Emergency law on migration inconsistent with EU law and must be "rigorously scrutinized,"* 12 July 2024.

¹² Finnish Ministry of the Interior, "Government Proposes to Extend Validity of Border Security Act," press release, 27 March 2025.

¹³ Erik Sandström, "Ungern fick böta 200 miljoner – men Finland går vidare med omstridd gränssäkerhetslag", *Yle*, 10 mars 2025.

¹⁴ Jon Henley, 'Finland's "most rightwing government ever" to cut spending and immigration', *The Guardian*, 20 June 2023.

¹⁵ Sofia Kajander and Erik Sandström, 'Det här ska den nya regeringen ändra på – här är tio saker du behöver veta', *Svenska Yle*, 16 June 2023.

¹⁶ Sandström, 'Riksdagen godkände avvisningslagen'.

- Social Democratic Party (SDP) – centre-left, rooted in labor movement and union.
- Green Party (Green) – green liberal, environmental focused.
- Left Alliance (LA) – left-wing, focus on labor rights.¹⁷

1.1.3 Geopolitical context and border relation

After the independence from Russia in 1917, the Finnish-Russian border was officially defined in the 1920 Treaty of Tartu.¹⁸ During World War II, Finland fought to defend its border with the Soviet Union, leading to the Winter War (1939–40) and the Continuation War (1941–44). After the conflicts, Finland ceded large territories, and the eastern border was officially confirmed in the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty.¹⁹ During the Cold War, Finland balanced its official neutrality with strong Soviet influence, a situation called “Finlandization.” At the end of the Soviet Union, Finland joined the EU and strengthened Western ties while continuing cooperation with Russia.²⁰ Since 2015, right after Russia’s invasion of Crimea, Russia and Belarus are directing migrants to the border of Poland, the Baltic States and Finland as a tool of political influence. This hybrid tactic operation, known as instrumentalization of migrants, were during the first years done in a hidden way trying to test the reactions from EU and the receiving countries. Since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 these tactics now occurs in a more hostile geopolitical context to exert pressure on Finland and the EU.²¹ By Finland applying for NATO membership in 2022 due to Russia’s further aggression in Ukraine, the western military alliance got an additional 1340 km border towards Russia, the longest in Europe.²²

1.2. Purpose and research question

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how securitizing-related language has been used in Finnish political discourse to legitimize the Instrumentalization Law

¹⁷ Yle News, ‘A really simple guide to Finland's 2023 parliamentary election’, *Yle News*, 5 March 2023.

¹⁸ Katariina Kosonen, ‘Making Maps and Mental Images: Finnish Press Cartography in Nation-Building, 1899–1942’, *National Identities*, 10.1 (2008), pp. 31-32.

¹⁹ Anssi Paasi, ‘Boundaries as Social Practice and Discourse: The Finnish-Russian Border’, *Regional Studies*, 33.7 (1999), pp. 5-6.

²⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 6-8.

²¹ Mustasilta and Karjalainen, *Russia’s Hybrid Operation at the Finnish Border*.

²² Artis Pabriks and Henri Pabriks, *Finland, Russia and the Lessons for NATO*, Centre for European Reform, December 2022.

(2024:482). The analysis focuses on how political actors frame instrumentalized migration as a security issue, and how this framing supports the adoption of exceptional legal measures.

The research question of this thesis follows:

- How can the concept of securitization explain the legitimization of the Instrumentalization law in the Finnish political discourse?

In this research question, *legitimization* refers to the discursive process by which political actors justify actions, policies, or laws to make them appear acceptable and appropriate within a given social context. Legitimization is the process by which actions, policies, or laws are made to appear acceptable and appropriate within a specific social context. This includes the use of various strategies, such as appealing to authority, moral values, rational arguments, or narratives, to align these actions with societal norms, thereby securing public acceptance.²³

1.3. Scope and limitations

1.3.1. Scope

The analysis consists of two parts. The first part focuses on political statements, such as interviews, debates, and press conferences. These were selected to capture how political messaging reaches and influences the public. To present this, a stakeholder overview (see Table 1), identifies six key-political figures based on their political roles, media presence, and involvement in migration-related policymaking, more specifically their involvement in the legitimization. These include the Prime Minister, deputy ministers, party leaders, and members of parliament across both government and opposition parties. The second part analyzes the instrumentalization law as a primary source and is complemented by statistical data from the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri). Two reports are used to provide context on current migration trends to Finland, with a particular focus on labor and student immigration from outside EU. Together these materials form the foundation of a CDA of how instrumentalized migration has been constructed as a security issue in Finland's recent political debate.

²³ van Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice*, pp. 105–106.

<i>Political Actors</i>	<i>Political Party</i>	<i>Role</i>
Petteri Orpo	National Coalition Party (NCP)	Prime Minister, Party leader
Riikka Purra	Finns party	Party leader, Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister of Finance
Annika Saarikko	Centre party	Party Leader, Minister for Foreign Affairs
Antti Lindtman	Social Democratic Party (SDP)	Party Leader
Atte Harjanne	Green party	Chairperson of the Green parliamentary group
Li Andersson	Left Alliance	Party Leader Member of Parliament

Table 1. Overview of analyzed political actors.

Note: All political roles listed in the table reflect the positions held during the period of public debate and enactment of the instrumentalization law (2023–2024). Some individuals have stepped down or taken on new roles after this period.

1.3.2. Limitations

This thesis is limited by its scope in the material selection and applied theory. It further does not scope juridical measures of the instrumentalization law. The Swedish People’s Party (SFP/RKP) and the Christian Democrats (Kristillisdemokraatit) are excluded from the analysis, as their political stance closely aligns with the rest of the government coalition. Since the aim of the thesis is to explore contrasts in security-related discourse, focus has instead been placed on parties that distinguish more clearly in rhetoric and policy. This also explains the inclusion of opposition parties that voted against the law. One public statement per political figure has been analyzed. Together with party programs from the 2023 parliament election, these statements are used to represent the general position of each party, rather than the personal opinions of individual politicians. All quotes in Swedish are presented in their original form but also translated or explained in English to ensure transparency. When it comes to the theoretical and methodological frameworks, the thesis applies only three out of five sectors from securitization theory. Within each sector, selected concepts are included. This is due to space limitations and the scope of a bachelor thesis. The selected concepts have been combined with the analytical framework to set a framing of the analysis.

1.3.3. Evaluation of sources

This thesis is based on sources available only in English and Swedish. Since I do not speak Finnish, original material in Finnish has not been included. Simultaneously, Swedish are an official language in Finland and has therefore been crucial to assess this conduct. This limits the range of available sources, especially when it comes to spoken political content, such as speeches, interviews or debates.

Another challenge concerns the availability of up-to-date parliamentary election programs. The Finns party had not published an election program for 2023 at the time of writing. Despite this, their 2019 program is included to provide an overview of their ideological stands in this matter.

1.4. Research ethics

This thesis is based entirely on publicly available sources such as press releases, political statements, media interviews, and parliamentary statements made by elected officials. As such, it does not involve direct interaction with individuals, nor does it include any personal or sensitive data requiring informed consent.

The political actors featured in the study are included in their public roles as representatives of government and political institutions. Their analyzed statements have been made in public arenas and are part of an institutionalized political debate. However, the focus lays on the discursive structures and rhetorical strategies employed, rather than on individuals.

In line with the principles of good scientific practice, the study is grounded in theoretical tools and methodological transparency. This includes keeping a record of coding decisions and making clear how interpretations have been reached. The aim is to understand how language is used to shape political realities - particularly how securitization discourse has been used to legitimize extraordinary legal measures.

As a researcher, I recognize that my own background, experiences, and values inevitably influence how I approach and interpret the material. Acknowledging my potential biases, I focused on my position as a researcher in human rights while remaining grounded in the analytical tools provided by CDA and securitization theory.

2. Literature overview and previous research

To cover the existing research landscape relevant to this thesis, the field has been structured thematically around the concept of securitization process and instrumentalization as justification for pushbacks.

2.1. Securitization process

2.1.1. Securitization theoretical framework

The Copenhagen School (CS) securitization theory has been widely used during the past 3 decades in academic and policy research to understand how political and social issues are framed as security threats.²⁴ The theory is rooted in speech act theory, particularly the work of Austin and Searle. A common criticism of the speech act approach is that it places too much emphasis on the speaker and the act of speaking, while underestimating the role of the audience. Although the theory claims that securitisation depends on audience acceptance, it does not clearly define who the audience is or how their approval is measured. This causes a contradiction in the theory, which claims to be based on shared social meaning, but treats securitisation as something decided by powerful actors alone. As a result, the theory is seen as overly static and neglectful of how security threats are constructed in society.²⁵

Thierry Balzacq, a leading scholar in international security studies, critiques the CS theory concept as a "security as a speech act" similarly, arguing that it oversimplifies the process of securitization by focusing mainly on language (illocution) while neglecting the broader context and audience impact (perlocution).²⁶ Instead, he proposes replacing the limited speech act model with a more comprehensive *pragmatic act* model, which includes the speaker's identity, the audience's role, and contextual factors like metaphors and media.²⁷

²⁴ Maciej Stepka, *Identifying Security Logics in the EU Policy Discourse: The "Migration Crisis" and the EU* (Cham: Springer, 2022), p. 18

²⁵ Ibid, pp. 19-21.

²⁶ Thierry Balzacq, 'The Three Faces of Securitization: Political Agency, Audience and Context', *European Journal of International Relations*, 11, no. 2 (2005), pp. 177-178.

²⁷ Ibid, pp. 178-179.

Inspired by the Just War Theory, Floyd criticizes the CS securitization theory for avoiding examining whether threats are truly real and if they are morally and ethically measurable and justifiable. As a response, Floyd introduces the Just Securitization Theory (JST), which is about determining when it is morally permissible (not required or ideal) for actors to treat an issue as a security threat and take exceptional measures in action. Unlike the original securitization theory, JST does not require audience approval and focus solely on speech acts, it focuses more on actions taken in response to threats.²⁸

Paulina Polko applies Floyd's JST framework to analyze Polish parliamentary debates on migration and explores how the political discourse is framed and divided among migrants from MENA countries (Middle East and North Africa) and refugees from Ukraine.²⁹ The overall result reveals the far-right and right parties strongly securitized migration, especially from MENA countries, portraying migrants as existential threats. This securitization was unjust because the threat was exaggerated and based on prejudice rather than real danger. Nevertheless, right parties applied just securitization to Ukrainian refugees by linking their support to the real threat of Russian aggression, which justified extraordinary protective measures.³⁰

2.1.2. History of securitization process within EU

The European migration policy has gone through an evolving securitization process starting during the 1970s and onwards where migration became more politically sensitive due to economic changes and rising public concern. Migration policies shifted to become more politically sensitive, especially as immigrants settled permanently. In the 1980s and 1990s, the European Union began to coordinate migration policies increasingly by treating immigration and asylum as threats to public order, cultural identity, and the welfare system.³¹ During the same time The EU had efforts to create an internal market without internal borders to allow free movement of goods, services, capital, and people, EU policies responded by strengthening external borders to maintain control and security.³²

²⁸ Rita Floyd, *The Morality of Security: A Theory of Just Securitization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 10-16.

²⁹ Polko, 'Just and Unjust Securitization of Migration', pp. 3-4.

³⁰ Ibid, pp. 4-5.

³¹ Balzacq, 'The Three Faces of Securitization', pp. 753-756.

³² Ibid, pp. 758-759.

During the 21st century migration in the EU has increasingly been framed as a crisis and security threat, a process termed the “crisification of migration”. Major events such as 9/11, the 2015 arrival of refugees from Syria and other regions, and the COVID-19 pandemic have been used to justify exceptional security measures and policies targeting migrants. This process is supported by both governments and private companies, particularly military and security companies who influence EU policymaking and promote stricter border control. These controls are often described as humanitarian efforts, even though they involve the externalization of migration and raise concerns about human rights.³³

As part of this development, alternative ways to understand migration and security has emerged. Paulina Polko emphasizes that migration once was viewed mainly as part of a social or economic phenomena and is now largely treated as a security issue. She conducts the state-centric *strategic approach* focusing on protecting states from migration-threats, with the *human security approach* which emphasizes the rights and protection of migrants. Polko problematize both these views for being too narrow and tend to exclude suitable humane solutions. Instead, she proposes a balanced approach called *desecuritization migration*. This approach endorses the phenomena when moving away from emergency-driven responses and shift focus on inclusive and long-term solutions.³⁴

2.2. Instrumentalization as justification for pushbacks in national rhetoric

The concept of instrumentalization is broadly studied and researched in the cross-cutting field(s) of social science, critical discourse studies and mathematics. Previous research, illustrate that instrumentalization generally involves the use of entities – individuals, tools or concepts as means to gain political aims.³⁵ For

³³ Laura Planas Gifra, ‘Securitizing Migration in Times of Crisis: Private Actors and the Provision of (In)Security’, *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10, no. 1 (2024), pp. 3-5.

³⁴ Paulina Polko, ‘The Migration–Security Nexus: Desecuritization and the Shift Towards the Sustainable Approach’, *Journal of Modern Science*, 6.60 (2024), p. 87-91.

³⁵ Huabin Wang, ‘Instrumentalisation of critical discourse studies: a linguistic analysis of public relations concepts in the CDS journal article abstracts (2000–2020)’, *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 10 (2023), p. 3-4.

instance, Bob Clifford a political scientist known for his work on human rights and transnational advocacy, demonstrates how rights can be strategically deployed in political struggles as tools to advance interests. Bob Clifford, categorizes rights metaphorically as “spears”; “blockades”, or “dynamites” to show how actors may use them to pressure opponents, mobilize support or obstruct policy³⁶

In recent years, the concept of instrumentalization has obtained increased recognition within EU migration discourse. Originally the concept is covered in legal and political contexts but has further developed into a regularly used term describing the strategic use of migrants by third countries as tools to pressure the EU or its member states for political bargain.³⁷ However, more recent research has shown how this discourse is no longer confined to interstate relations but has shifted to a national political rhetoric,³⁸ where it is used to justify exceptional border practices such as pushbacks,³⁹ legal derogation and the temporary suspension of asylum rights.⁴⁰

One essential contribution into this area is one study that includes how member states of the EU such as Greece, Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania have relied on the language of hybrid threats to present irregular migration as a national security issue.⁴¹ This framing allows states to label migration patterns as potential coordinated attacks, enabling the declaration of emergency measures and border restrictions.⁴² Their analysis is especially strong in showing how prompts such as "hybrid warfare" creates a legal and discursive gap in which previously unlawful actions, for instance collective expulsions gets political legitimacy.

³⁶ Clifford Bob, *Rights as Weapons: Instruments of Conflict, Tools of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), pp. 3-4.

³⁷ Lucas Rasche, *The Instrumentalisation of Migration: How Should the EU Respond?* (Berlin: Jacques Delors Centre, 16 December 2022), p. 2.

³⁸ Anne Peters, ‘Humanity as the A and Ω of Sovereignty’, *European Journal of International Law* 20, no. 3 (2009), p. 514–517.

³⁹ Jari Pirjola, ‘Hostile Instrumentalized Migration and the Right to Seek Asylum: Reflecting the European Legal Framework’, *European Journal of Migration and Law* 27 (2025), p. 5-6.

⁴⁰ Mariana Gkliati, ‘Let’s Call It What It Is: Hybrid Threats and Instrumentalisation as the Evolution of Securitisation in Migration Management’, *European Papers* 8, no. 2 (2023), p. 561-563.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 565-566.

⁴² Ibid, p. 566.

Further, Lucas Rasche adds to this by emphasizing the role of the European Commission in reinforcing instrumentalization narratives through both statements and proposals. He highlights the paradox in which the EU criticizes instrumentalization while simultaneously responding with measures that infringe on migrants' rights.⁴³ Nevertheless, the analysis is focused primarily on supranational features and does not unveil how national leaders use these discourses in domestic debates - a gap this thesis aims to address in the Finnish context.

Ultimately, the research-field of the justification of instrumentalization demonstrate a growing scholarly concern with how states rhetorically justify rights-restrictive practices by calling for emergency actions.

⁴³ Rasche, *The Instrumentalisation of Migration*, 2022, p. 4-6.

3. Theory and methodology

3.1. Securitization theory

This chapter will present the theory securitization coined and developed by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde in *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (1998). Barry Buzan is a leading scholar in international security studies and a senior researcher at the London School of Economics; Ole Wæver is widely recognized for founding the Copenhagen School of securitization and introducing the concept of critical security studies⁴⁴; and Jaap de Wilde is a respected expert in international relations and global security. Together they have developed what has been described as one of the most widely used and foundational theoretical frameworks in the field of critical security studies.⁴⁵ Within their framework, Buzan et al., outline five sectors in which securitization can occur: military, environmental, economic, societal, and political. This thesis focuses on the political and societal sectors, where securitization often interacts with questions of state sovereignty, identity, and public order. These themes will be further introduced under each selected securitization sector.

According to Buzan et al., an issue has become securitized when it has moved beyond the level of being “politicized” and is instead viewed as “an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure.”⁴⁶ To identify an existential threat, an issue must move from being politicized (part of normal public debate) to securitized, meaning it is treated as urgent and requiring immediate state action, often with exceptional measures and resources.⁴⁷ Buzan et al., presents three crucial components when analyzing whether an issue is undergoing a securitization:

⁴⁴ Ole Wæver, ‘Securitization and Desecuritization’ in Ronnie D Lipschutz (ed), *On Security* (Columbia University Press 1995) 46-86.

⁴⁵ Rita Floyd, *Security and the Environment: Securitisation Theory and US Environmental Security Policy* (Cambridge University Press 2010) 7; Lene Hansen, ‘The Little Mermaid’s Silent Security Dilemma and the Absence of Gender in the Copenhagen School’ (2011) 29 *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 285, 285-286.

⁴⁶ Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), p. 24.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 23-24.

- a *securitizing actor*: an individual or institution that raises the issue – typically a political leader, government representative or authority figure);
- a *referent object* (which is claimed to be under existential threat - this can be the state, societal identity, public order, or another entity that requires protection);
- and an *audience* (a group whose acceptance or support is needed for the securitization to succeed - this can include the public, lawmakers, media or international allies.)⁴⁸

Other relevant components are:

- a *functional actor* (an entity that contributes to the securitization process without being the primary securitizing actor or the referent object – this can include ministries or institutions that influence security outcomes e.g., through resources or policies).⁴⁹
- a *systemic referent object* (something larger than a single state – such as the international system, the EU, or NATO – which may be presented as under threat. This is only relevant when securitization is framed as protecting a political or institutional order, beyond the nation-state.)⁵⁰

The located actors and individuals in a securitization process does not need to agree peacefully – it just means the public or political bodies must react in a way that shows they accept the threat.⁵¹ Buzan et al., further proclaims three core elements and/or steps for a successful securitization: (1) an existential threat is identified, (2) emergency action is proposed or taken, and (3) established rules are broken or suspended to deal with the threat.⁵² If the acceptance of the audience is missing, it remains only a so-called *securitization move*, and not a successful securitization.⁵³ Securitization is not just about how dangerous a situation “really” is. Instead, threats

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 25.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 36.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 148.

⁵¹ Ibid, pp. 25-26.

⁵² Ibid, p 26.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 25.

are constructed through discourse. This is called a *speech act* – meaning the act of labeling something to be a certain way that also has an impact politically.

3.1.1. The political and military sector

Starting off with the military sector within securitization theory that concerns threats to the state's physical integrity and survival.⁵⁴ This is within the military sector the referent object. It involves situations where the survival of the state is seen as dependent from the protection of its borders, territory and national independence.⁵⁵ The role of the military sector in the analysis will not be played out to assess actual conflict or armed aggression. Instead, it is used to analyze the rhetorical and discursive strategies political actors adopt to legitimize exceptional measures. Although the military sector is typically concerned with armed threats, securitization in this sector can occur through rhetoric alone. Through speech act, an issue can be framed to jeopardize the state's integrity or physical survival without direct military force to be present.⁵⁶ Buzan et al., explain:

In practice, the military security agenda revolves largely around the ability of governments to maintain themselves against internal and external military threats, but it can also involve the use of military power to defend states or governments against nonmilitary threats to their existence, such as migrants or rival ideologies.

It is worth noting that perceived threats in the military sector do not need to be objectively real. Buzan et al., explain that securitization is a bilateral process where threat perceptions are socially constructed: "Paranoia (the securitization of nonexistent threats) and complacency (the nonsecuritization of apparent threats) are both possible."⁵⁷

Moving on to the political sector in the securitization theory. Political securitization refers to the survival of the state as a *unit*, in terms of its ability to maintain its

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 50.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 51.

⁵⁶ Ibid, pp. 26, 50.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 57.

independence in the international and domestic political systems. Buzan et al., define units as follows:

...meaning actors composed of various subgroups, organizations, communities, and many individuals and sufficiently cohesive and independent to be differentiated from others and to have standing at the higher levels (e.g., states, nations, transnational firms).⁵⁸

Existential threats to the survival of the state are automatically also a threat to the sovereignty. These threats are distinct from those in the military sector because they are not primarily about the use of force.⁵⁹ Instead, threats to the sovereignty are approached in three different components: *Ideas* (like nationalism or political ideology can be threatened through delegitimization or ideological attacks); *physical base* (though often tied to military threats, may also be politically challenged through territorial disputes or internal fragmentation); and *institutions* (such as laws or democratic systems - can be weakened by internal or external interference).⁶⁰ Within the political sector the government are oftentimes the securitizing actor. In the context of threats, considered weak governments happen to use security-related language when concern raises that the unit itself is under threat.⁶¹

What is explicitly crucial to understand about the political sector, is that it acts residual. This means that all other forms of the security sectors (military, societal, economic and environmental) automatically involve or overlap political dimensions.⁶² Political authority is the foundation of any kind of state action, which means that any security issue could potentially escalate into the political sector.⁶³

3.1.2. The societal sector

In contrary to the political sector where the unit of the state is very central, the societal sector is centered around nations or communities of people. Societal

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 6.

⁵⁹ Ibid, pp. 141-142.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 150.

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 146.

⁶² Ibid, p. 141.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 142.

security is not about the survival of the state as a political system. It is about the survival of identity-based communities.⁶⁴ Here the securitizing actors often draw on narratives to frame threats as the issue of “who we are.”⁶⁵ Buzan et al., define the identity’s position in the social cohesion as follows:

Society is about identity, the self-conception of communities and of individuals identifying themselves as members of a community. These identities are distinct from, although often entangled with, the explicitly political organizations concerned with government.⁶⁶

The referent object is in the societal sector typically a collective identity perceived to be under existential threat. Threats are constructed when identity is perceived as being diluted or undermined. The authors list the most common issues that have been viewed as threats to societal security: (1) *Migration*; (2) *Horizontal competition*; (3) *Vertical competition*.⁶⁷

Furthermore, identity as a phenomenon is not rigid but can change and develop over. Yet, securitization theory treats identity as fixed and therefore sees any change as a threat to the survival of society.⁶⁸ Buzan et al., also emphasizes that every state is individual when it come to threats. States have different *vulnerabilities* depending on how their identity is constructed. For instance, if a state is geographically isolated country as Finland, with a relatively small and homogenous population, migration patterns can be seen as a threat to social cohesion and national identity.⁶⁹

3.2. Methodology

This thesis applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its methodological tool, following Norman Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of discourse as an analytical framework. CDA draws on several elements within linguistics and social

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 119.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 123.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 119.

⁶⁷ Ibid, pp. 120–121.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 23.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 124.

theory.⁷⁰ What unites the components is a mutual concern with how language function in social contexts and contributes to the (re)production of power relations.⁷¹ It is especially valuable for examining how inequalities, exclusions, and dominant ideologies are sustained or challenged through discourse⁷²

3.2.1. Analytical framework: Fairclough's three-dimensional model

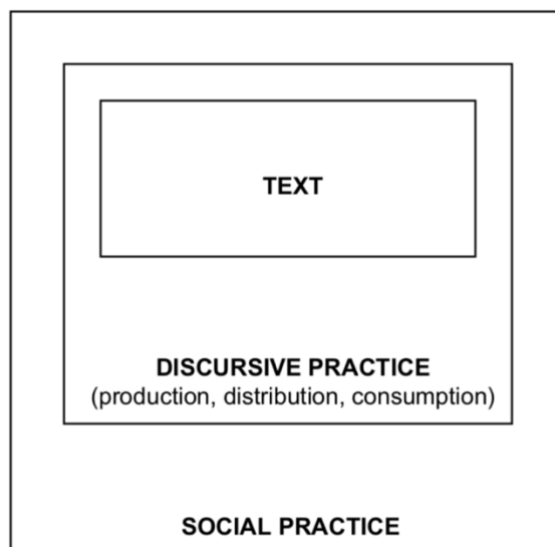


Figure 1. Graph based on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse.⁷³

The model has its foundational roots in CDA, but the founder himself has developed the framework by taken it one step further, rooted in the understanding of how language and linguistics is formed of and is forming the society.⁷⁴ The model is often presented in a framework of three dimensions, illustrated in boxes, where each box represents an analytic dimension (see Figure 1).

1. **Text** - This level focuses on the original texts linguistic form and structure. The emphasis here is *how* it is shaped, e.g., through: vocabulary, grammar, cohesion etc. Fairclough implies that this usually comes with an ideological agenda – which should always be considered.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Kristina Boréus and Charlotta Seiler Brylla, 'Kritisk diskursanalys', in *Textens mening och makt: metodbok i samhällsvetenskaplig text- och diskursanalys*, 4th edn, ed. by Kristina Boréus and Göran Bergström (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2018), p. 305.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 306.

⁷² Ibid, p. 307.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 73.

⁷⁴ Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p. 63-64.

⁷⁵ Ibid, pp. 75-76.

2. **Discursive practice** - This level's focus is on how the text is produced, distributed and consumed. The level aim to provide the reader with knowledge of the actor behind a text; for who, under what circumstances and how they are being interpreted.⁷⁶
3. **Social practice** - The third level investigates the broader societal structures and power dynamics affecting and affected by the discourse. For instance, how discourses relate to politics, economics or dimensions within an institution.⁷⁷ Social practice seeks to challenge or maintain social structures, power relations, and ideologies of a society.⁷⁸

Fairclough's three-dimensional model has been criticized for lacking clear methodological guidance, with scholars pointing out inconsistencies across studies. The model outlines what to analyze but provides limited instruction on how to do so in practice.⁷⁹ Therefore, the following analysis will be structured of a matrix combining the three dimensions model alongside the securitization theory. Textual analysis and discursive practice are paired with discourse as a speech act within the political and military sector, and social practice is linked to the societal sector. This integration helps to contextualize the method and strengthen its weakness. This structure of matrix also reflects a shared notion in both the three-dimensional model as well as in securitization theory - that language does not reflect reality but actively constructs it through meaning.⁸⁰ The speech act, (see 3.1. Securitization theory for definition) at the core of securitization theory aligns with Fairclough's view of discourse as a social practice. This aim is to bridge the integration coherent between theory and the analytical tool.

3.2.2. Operationalization and coding

To operationalize how securitization is constructed in Finnish political discourse, this thesis investigates the concept through thematically discursive elements. The

⁷⁶ Ibid, pp. 78–79.

⁷⁷ Ibid, pp. 86-87.

⁷⁸ Ibid, pp. 67.

⁷⁹ Hilary Janks, 'Critical Discourse Analysis as a Research Tool', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 18, no. 3 (1997), p. 329-330; Ruth Breeze, 'Critical Discourse Analysis and Its Critics', *Pragmatics* 21, no. 4 (2011), p. 499.

⁸⁰ Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, p. 64.

concept of securitization is applied across two analytical parts: political discourse (textual and discursive practice) and the law's real-world effects (social practice).

In the first part, political statements from the the period of 2023-2024, and respectively 2023 parliament election program was collected. These were selected to reflect how party leaders and ministers talked about the instrumentalization law around its proposal, enactment, and extension. To operationalize the discourse, the material was coded based on the following themes:

- Use of security-related language (e.g., “hybrid threat” and “instrumentalization”).
- In favor or opposition of the instrumentalization law.
- Justification for their stance (e.g., national security, legal obligations or human rights).
- Actor positioning (e.g., “we,” “our borders,” “Russia,” “irregular migrants”).

These themes were not fixed from the beginning. Instead, the coding was flexible and adjusted as new patterns were discovered during the reading.⁸¹ Since the political statements are often short, the analysis instead focuses on recurring rhetorical patterns their function within a security policy discourse. The second part of the analysis focuses on social practice. It uses statistics and official documents to explore how the law was carried out and whether asylum applications changed afterward. Although this part does not rely on coded language in the same way as the first part, it applies discursive concepts from the societal sector to understand how the audience's acceptance of the law shows a shift of the referent object. Important to highlight is that this part is not independent but inter-connected with the first part, since the societal lens is essential to conduct the selected methodology.

⁸¹ Boréus and Seiler Brylla, ‘Kritisk diskursanalys’, p. 309.

4. Analysis and results

Followingly, the findings of the analysis are presented using Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA and the securitization theory by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde. Based on the selected methodology, the analysis will be divided into two parts:

1. textual and discursive practice
2. social practice.

The research question follows:

How can the concept of securitization explain the legitimization of the Instrumentalization law in the Finnish political discourse?

4.1. Hybrid threat equals instrumentalized migration?

This first part focuses on how the law has gained legitimacy in the political discourse through securitization-related language. It is structured following the most common themes in the discourse to legitimize the instrumentalization law, these are: "Russia and exceptional border policies", "Ensure national security" and "Human rights obligations." These three subheadings are structured based on the analyzed parties presented in part "1.4.1. Scope." Furthermore, they are presented two by two since they have expressed similar attitude to the law: In favor of law and coalition parties (NCP and Finns party); In favor of law but opposition parties (SDP and Centre party); and against law and opposition parties (Green party and Left Alliance). Finally, the securitizing theory here is played out through the lens of the military sector as a rhetorical tool and the political sector. Accordingly, this part is conducted from the perspectives of the securitizing actor and the referent object.

<i>Political Actors</i>	<i>Political Party</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>In favor against the law</i>	<i>Use of securitizing language</i>
Petteri Orpo	National Coalition Party (NCP)	Prime Minister, Party leader	In favor	Yes
Riikka Purra	Finns party	Party leader, Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister of Finance	In favor	Yes
Annika Saarikko	Centre party	Party Leader, Minister for Foreign Affairs	In favor	Yes
Antti Lindtman	Social Democratic Party (SDP)	Party Leader	In favor	Ambivalent
Atte Harjanne	Green party	Chairperson of the Green parliamentary group	Against	No
Li Andersson	Left Alliance	Party Leader Member of Parliament	Against	No

Table 2. Use of securitizing language by analyzed political actors

4.1.1. Russia and exceptional border policies

The term *hybrid threat* is most used from the governmental parties. All parties in the coalition have expressed a positive and welcoming attitude towards implementation and all voted in favor of the law.⁸² From the quotes collected, at least 7 times the terms have been used, particularly from the NCP and the Finns party. It is explicitly used in the context of describing Russia's role and justifying exceptional border policies. In an interview Petteri Orpo stated:

Russia is attacking the EU on multiple fronts, from GPS jamming to weaponizing migrants, and the bloc has to do a better job of responding... We have to recognize that Russia has changed behavior. Russia is aggressive, uses all kinds of hybrid tools against the West, against Europe,⁸³

⁸² Erik Sandström, 'Riksdagen godkände avvisningslagen – se hur ledamöterna röstade', *Yle*, 12 July 2024.

⁸³ Jacopo Barigazzi, *Finnish PM warns of hybrid threats from 'aggressive' Russia*, Politico, 22 May 2024.

According to Buzan et al., this framing of rhetoric overlaps both the political and the military sector. From Petteri Orpo's stand, he is the securitizing actor, framing a set of developments (Russia's behavior) as existential threats. He speaks in his capacity as a top-political actor and institutional authority, which gives him the social capital and legitimacy to invoke a case of securitization. When we move on to the referent object there are two potential interpretations. On the one hand, Orpo positions Finland and the EU as sovereign entities under direct threat – "*attacking the EU on multiple fronts*" – a statement which aligns with the military sector, where the referent object is the state's territorial integrity and survival. On the other hand, his reference to the EU needing "*to do a better job of responding*" illustrates an internal concern for the stability and effectiveness of the EU as a political bloc, which falls under the political sector, where the referent object is the legitimacy and organizational stability of political units.

To better understand which referent object is being prioritized, and why, it is necessary to examine where Orpo's party, the NCP situates itself ideologically. The election program functions as an interpretive framework for understanding what the party seeks to protect and therefore clarifies which type of existential threat they are responding to. Through this, it is easier to clarify whether the discourse of NCP primarily defends the territorial state, the political order, or both. In their election program from 2023 it states:

The National Coalition Party strives for a safe Finland, which is an inseparable part of the Western value, economy and security community. The most important partners of Finland are the European Union and NATO. In addition to international cooperation, we wish to invest in strong national defence, internal security and the basic pillars of the rule of law.⁸⁴

The parliamentary election program makes it evident that the NCP prioritizes both external defense and internal political resilience. The phrase "*an inseparable part of the Western value, economy and security community*" frames Finland's

⁸⁴ National Coalition Party, *National Coalition Party Election Program*, Kokoomus, 8 February 2023.

geopolitical position as structurally tied to the EU and NATO. This complements Orpo's statement that "*Russia is attacking the EU on multiple fronts,*" and thereby positions Finland not solely on as an individual state actor, but as a political unit embedded in a broader alliance. This states the referent object as within the political sector, where what is being defended is the unit's integrity and coherence of Finland's alliances.

At the same time, the party's pledge to "*invest in strong national defense, internal security and the basic pillars of the rule of law*" emphasizes the military sector of Orpo's statement. In military terms, it declares the framing of a threat to the state's territorial's integrity. Orpo's claim that Russia "*uses all kinds of hybrid tools against the West*" positions NCP's rhetoric on hybrid threat grounded in current action.

In November 2023, Party leader and Minister of Finance Riikka Purra of the Finns party addressed the situation at Finland's eastern border, stating:

It's not about the number of asylum seekers, but about Finland's national security and the change in Russia's activities.⁸⁵

This statement phrases the migration pattern positioning them as secondary to the priority to sustain national security. Further, this is a similar tone and rhetorical framing as Prime Minister Orpo's earlier claim that "*Russia is attacking the EU on multiple fronts.*" Meanwhile Orpo's rhetorical strategy lays in "*hybrid tools*" and "*weaponizing migrants*" Purra frames the concern as "*the change in Russia's activities*" Both securitizing actors thereby unites on a shared framing: the border situation is arranged.

In this case Riikka Purra's role as Minister of Finance, and her party's strong influence within the coalition government, positions her not solely as a securitizing actor but also as a functional actor in affecting the broader picture of securitization through her authority in budget and policy. The focus here highlights Finland's need to be prepared for threats. This reflects how the military-sector is not just about

⁸⁵ Anne Kauranen and Essi Lehto, *Finland says Russia leads asylum seekers to its border*, Reuters, 14 November 2023.

what politicians say, but also about how different parts of the government work together to respond to her proclaimed threats. As Buzan et al., proclaims ministries like Finance and Defense help shape security policy by providing the tools and resources needed for action. The Finns party's 2019 election program further emphasizes this perspective. The program highlights the importance of national sovereignty and security, stating:

The very reason for the existence of a country defined as Finland. It is to defend and promote the interests of Finland and the Finnish citizens – There could be no other justification.⁸⁶

Once more, these claims and statements underscore the party's main priority of Finnish citizens' security and interests – which goes in firsthand under the military sector than the political sector.

Additionally, the program expresses skepticism towards external influences, particularly from the EU, and emphasizes the need for Finland to maintain control over its borders and immigration policies.⁸⁷ This perspective supports the implementation of exceptional border policies in response to perceived threats, in this case the proclaimed instrumentalization of migrants by Russia.

4.1.2. Ensure national security

In contrast to the coalition parties' securitized framing of migration as a hybrid threat, the opposition parties, including the SDP and the Centre Party, take a different but not fully oppositional stance. Instead of questioning the existence of a threat, they acknowledge the implementation of the law along with its complexities and in need of international cooperation. Without using war-related or emergency language.⁸⁸ The SDP voted in favor of the instrumentalization law. Party leader Antti Lindtman expresses concern for both border stability and legal accountability,

⁸⁶ Perussuomalaiset, *The Finns Party's Election Programme for the Parliamentary Election 2019*, Helsingfors: Perussuomalaiset, 2019.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Carl Deconinck, 'Finnish Parliament approves controversial border law on migrants', *Brussels Signal*, 15 July 2024; Päivi Lakka and Sofia Kajander, 'Inrikesminister Rantanen: Regeringen försöker hitta sätt att avvisa asylsökande vid östgränsen', *Yle*, 23 February 2024.

stating that the main interest is to ensure the EU's and NATO's external border holds, while all measures remain in line with the rule of law:

Vårt stora gemensamma intresse är att gränsen, som också är Natos och EU:s yttre gräns mot Ryssland, håller, och att åtgärderna samtidigt genomförs i enlighet med rättsstatsprincipen.⁸⁹

Approximately four months later Antti Lindtman concluded the following aligned view: “Although the law is not perfect, there are some tools to ensure border security.”⁹⁰ This statement shows that the SDP agrees on the importance of protecting Finland's borders but also suggests that they see the law as a compromise. The focus is not on framing the situation as an extreme or military threat, but on finding legal tools to manage it. This places the SDP's approach within the political sector of securitization, where the main goal is to protect the stability and functioning of the state and the unit. In the SDP's election program from 2023, they state:

We support a strong, united EU that promotes peace, stability, and security through cooperation, not division. The rule of law and respect for international agreements must guide our actions in all situations.⁹¹

The attitude in the election program, explicitly in this extraction, confirms that the party sees international cooperation and legal measures as the best way to build national security. It also helps to understand why the SDP voted in favor of the law – they saw it as part of a broader effort to “protect security” while respecting the laws foundation.

The Centre Party has also spoken in favor of stronger border control but uses a different kind of language compared to the ruling government. In their 2023 election program, they state out their support for multilateral cooperation and

⁸⁹ Lakka and Kajander, ‘Inrikesminister Rantanen’.

⁹⁰ Deconinck, ‘Finnish Parliament approves border law’.

⁹¹ Social Democratic Party of Finland, ‘A Safe World and a Safe Finland’, *SDP*, 2023.

respect for international law in foreign and security policy.⁹² The same spring as the law was proposed, party leader Annika Saarikko expressed that no one wants Finland to end up in a situation of uncontrolled migration, where a foreign state exerts pressure⁹³. She continued by drawing a line between asylum seeking and politically motivated migration flows, stating: “Då är det inte längre frågan om asylsökande i den mening som internationella avtal i tiderna har avsett.”⁹⁴ She suggests that when migration is used as a geopolitical tool, it no longer fits the definition of asylum as originally outlined in international agreements. This statement shows a rather careful tone. Saarikko points out the risk that another state could try to influence Finland through migration but avoids using language connected to warfare strategy. Instead, she draws a line between real asylum seekers and politically motivated pressure, with intentions for a better control of migration without demanding exceptional actions.

The Centre party’s election program further emphasizes this under the chapter of migration policy. It outlines a mix of both controlled and humanitarian responsibility. It supports faster processing of asylum applications and more efficient deportations for those who break the law, while also stressing the importance of helping the most vulnerable through controlled immigration.⁹⁵ In summary, both the SDP and Centre Party present a language motivated attitude to ensure national security. Their argument is based on existing laws and international cooperation along with an assurance of trust to national institutions. This differs to the coalition parties, who use more forceful language. Their responses to the same security concerns raised by Orpo and Purra show that national security can be articulated through different discursive paths – some securitized, others restrained.

4.1.3. Human rights obligations

This final section of the first part of the analysis focuses on the textual and discursive practice of the two opposition parties that raised strong concern and voted against the law: the Green party and the Left Alliance. Unlike the governmental coalition and other parties in favor of the law, the Greens and the Left

⁹² Centre Party of Finland, *Framåt! Vi tar ansvar för hela Finland: Centerns valprogram i Riksdagsvalet 2023*, 2023.

⁹³ Lakka and Kajander, ‘Inrikesminister Rantanen.’

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Centre Party of Finland, *Framåt! Vi tar ansvar för hela Finland*.

challenge the legitimacy of the law. Their rhetoric is centered on human rights and ratified official documents. As the securitizing move originates from the government – the opposition parties cannot be considered securitizing actors. Instead, their statements and party programs will be analyzed in terms of how they construct alternative referent objects.

The chairman of the Green parliamentary group Atte Harjanne, stated: “For the first time, the Finnish Parliament has passed a law that conflicts with EU law and international treaties and that interprets the Constitution in a new way.”⁹⁶

Similarly, Li Andersson, previous Party leader, and Minister of Education for the Left Alliance openly condemned the legislation: “It is a sad day for Finland's rule of law and human rights”⁹⁷

These statements challenge the framing of migration as an existential threat. Instead of constructing migration as a security issue, they emphasize constitutional and human rights obligations. From a securitization stand, this illustrates a refusal to engage in the securitizing move. Their discourse does not follow the pattern in which the securitizing actor (the government) frames the referent object as under existential threa. Rather, their statements stay within the domain of normal political procedure and legal argumentation. In terms of discursive practice, both parties consistently criticize the government's security framing as unjustified or excessive. This rhetorical stance has continued even after the law's adoption, indicating persistent opposition to the process of securitization itself.

In the Green party's 2023 election program, they state the following:

There is war in Europe and international cooperation is facing new challenges. Ukraine must not be left alone in the war of aggression by Russia. We must keep our eyes and our doors open to Ukraine. International cooperation must rely on the objectives of equality, human rights, the rule of law, democracy and peace. Finland as a

⁹⁶ Deconinck, ‘Finnish Parliament approves border law’.

⁹⁷ DW News, ‘Finland passes bill to stop migrants at border’, *DW News*, 12 July 2024.

country can be greater than our size in solving problems that affect the world.⁹⁸

The focus on human rights, the rule of the law and the belief in international cooperation positions the greens discourse clearly within the political sector, where the referent object is not the state's survival, but rather the institutional and normative framework that defines the legitimacy of the political system.

Similarly, the Left Alliance frames their opposition to the law by stressing the risks it process due to non-refoulement. When it comes to their 2023 party program, it states:

Finland must be critical and present solutions that promote common security at all international forums. National defense resources must be sufficient. Due to the changed security situation in Finland and Europe, the defense budget for permanent expenditure should be kept at the current level and the agreed procurements should be completed.⁹⁹

It continues:

We do not want other countries' military bases, permanent troops or nuclear weapons on our soil. We do not participate in military interventions that violate international law. As a NATO country, Finland must ensure that NATO is bound by the UN Charter in all its activities. As a member of NATO, it is important that Finland continues its foreign and security policy based on a broad understanding of security and human rights and acts as an active peace mediator and promoter of disarmament in the world.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Green League, *The Parliamentary Election Program of the Greens 2023* (Helsinki: Green League, 2023).

⁹⁹ Left Alliance, *A Fairer Tomorrow for All, Not Just the Few: Left Alliance's Parliamentary Election Programme 2023, 2023*

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Taking this into account, the referent object as proclaimed instrumentalization according to the left are not encouraged but resisted. The securitizing actor here, the government, is challenged for overstepping political boundaries. Instead, here the referent object is the legal and ethical legitimacy of the Finnish asylum system. This proved resistance also operates within the discursive practice of political opposition. According to Fairclough, discourse is shaped not only by content but by who is speaking and how their statements position itself within institutional structures. The Green party and the Left Alliance are in this stance minority voices in regards that they cannot stop the legislation, but their discourse disrupts the status quo by insisting on legal continuity and ethical principles.

4.1.4. Results on textual and discourse practices

This section summarizes the analytical findings from the prior textual and discursive analysis of party statements and election programs.

To begin with, the language differs from the coalition parties to the oppositional parties. The NCP and Finns party emphasizes urgency and portray Finland as under threat from hybrid attacks. Their rhetoric frames migration as part of a broader military strategy, where the state's physical borders and sovereignty are jeopardized. According to Buzan et al., only if a physical threat or vulnerability directed to a sovereign state would fall under the military sector, where the referent object is the territorial integrity and survival of the state. In the case of NCP, their referent object is both the territorial integrity of the Finnish state and the institutional stability of Finland as part of the Western political alliance. These objects place their discourse within both the military and political sectors, through rhetoric of defense and control, as well as the framing of EU and NATO membership as essential to national identity and security.

However, this does not fully meet the criteria for a securitization of a systemic referent object. For a threat to a systemic referent object to be entitled it is only applicable when the existential threat is directly pointed to the broader international system. In this case, the core securitizing moves remain focused on Finland itself, particularly its sovereignty and institutional resilience. The discourse reveals an important distinction between the state and the government as political actors. In

securitization theory, the government may act as a securitizing actor in ways that serve its own institutional or ideological survival. The great use of militarized language and urgency, especially among the NCP and Finns party, suggests that the perceived threat may serve to reinforce the government's authority and therefore justify exceptional measures.

Interestingly, this militarized language is not equally distributed across the political spectrum. Though supportive of the law, the Centre party and SDP employ more cautious rhetoric. Their rhetoric aligns more closely with the political sector's framing of threats. In all text and discourse analyzed they focus on institutional stability and rule of law, rather than framing the instrumentalization of migrants as an existential threat.

While the coalition parties use militarized language to construct migration as a hybrid threat, the Green party and Left Alliance actively refusing to label asylum seekers as instruments of warfare. Their rejection is grounded in a focus of the political sector as a state for maintaining institutional integrity and international norms, rather than asserting territorial sovereignty.

Finally, it is notable that neither the NCP nor the Finns Party mention human rights obligations in their discourse on instrumentalized migration. The fact that human rights are not mentioned shows how easy securitized matters can be put ahead of legal rights and protections.

4.2. Law enactment vs asylum rights

The second part of the analysis shifts focus to the third dimension of Fairclough's model: social practice. Unlike the first part which centered on the securitizing actor and referent object, this section focuses on the audience. Analyzing this component helps to unveil whether the law represents a completed act of successful securitization. The societal sector is particularly relevant here since it focuses on protecting national identity. This part looks at how these concerns may have helped justify the law and resulted in fewer asylum applications.

4.2.1. Legislative justification

According to 1 § of the enacted Instrumentalization Law (2024:482), it states that the aim is to "strengthen border security and to ensure that Finland can respond effectively when migration is used as a means of political pressure."¹⁰¹ The law enables authorities to prevent asylum applications at specific border crossings and instead reroute them to assigned locations. The arguments are based on the notion that Finland's systems and institutions must be protected from foreign influence. It means that to preserve national security the state itself should have the capacity to manage asylum when facing pressure. This justification assumes that the audience accepts the securitizing move, that instrumentalized migration do represent an existential threat. From a societal securitization perspective, this further then frames migration not solely as a "legal challenge" but as a threat to national identity and cohesion. When this happens, it treats national identity as fixed and fragile when it is something that can naturally change over time. It turns the referent object, national identity into something that needs to be protected through security measures.

4.2.2. Measurable outcomes

Looking at the impact, the European Migration Network's annual report and data from the Finnish Immigration Service shows a significant decrease in asylum applications in 2024. According to the EMN, asylum applications from third countries dropped drastically after the border closures were introduced in late 2023. Migri's independent forecasting also predicts that irregular migration will remain low in the coming years due to continued restrictions and surveillance at the eastern border.¹⁰² Migri's own forecasting also predicts that irregular migration will remain low in the coming years due to continued restrictions and surveillance at the eastern border.¹⁰³ Meanwhile these outcomes may suggest that the law was effective in reducing entries, it also raises concern regarding access to international protection.

¹⁰¹ FFS 2024:482, 1 §. *Lag om ändring av gränsbevakningslagen.*

¹⁰² Finnish Immigration Service (Migri), *European Migration Network Annual Report on Migration and Asylum – Finland 2024* (Helsinki: Finnish Immigration Service, 2024).

¹⁰³ Finnish Immigration Service (Migri), *Forecasts on Migration to Finland 2024* (Helsinki: Finnish Immigration Service, 2024).

4.2.3. Results on social practice: A successful securitization?

From the lens of the securitization theory, the enactment and continued implementation of the law demonstrate a successful securitization. The audience, represented by the Parliament has accepted the framing of instrumentalized migration as a threat requiring exceptional legal measures. This success comes however at the cost of human rights protections and shifts the referent object from vulnerable individuals to a perceived coherent national identity. Finally, the societal sector helps illustrate how migration can be framed as a threat to collective identity and how that framing is used to legitimize legal exceptions. The decrease in asylum applications suggests a tangible impact, but it also raises ethical and legal questions regarding access to protection in a securitized political climate.

5. Discussion

Reflecting on the research process, this thesis has proven that overcoming practical limitations can provide meaningful insights. Choosing to investigate political discourse of a country whose main language I do not speak fluently was a conscious decision that required planning. The language barrier did limit access to some material, for example political speeches and nuanced debates in Finnish. Nevertheless, it also pushed me to be strategic in my source selection and to work rigorously with pre-translated materials. By relying on publicly available statements, party programs in Swedish and English, and verified secondary sources, I was able to construct a solid result despite this. Working with the matrix of my analytical frameworks alongside deep-diving into the Finnish political landscape covering both security and migration policy has deepened my understanding of both the topic and the research process itself.

The thesis contributes to the research of securitization studies. The Copenhagen School, particularly Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998) have developed an influential framework for understanding how issues like instrumentalized migration can become constructed as security threats. This thesis shows that the Finnish instrumentalization law can be analyzed as a successful act of securitization.

At the same time, this theoretical lens risks reinforcing a state-centric perspective of security. As presented, a lot of previous research sheds light on nation-states meanwhile disregards who securitization ultimately impacts. As Polko (2024) argues in her article “The Migration-Security Nexus: Desecuritization and the Shift Towards the Sustainable Approach”, there is a growing need to explore alternative frameworks that re-centre the focus on human security and desecuritization. What happens when emergency laws like the instrumentalization law expires? How does the discourse change once the state no longer presents migration as a hybrid threat? These questions remain unanswered for now but deserve further exploration.

Similarly, another impulse for future research relates to how different migrant groups are framed within securitization processes. In her comparative study of

migration to Poland, Polko (2025) shows that migration from MENA countries is often unjustly securitized, whereas migration from culturally and geographically closer countries in this case Ukraine is treated more favorably. Although this thesis did not focus on migrant origin or identity, secondary sources suggest that similar dynamics exist at the Finnish eastern border. Due to the scope and focus of this thesis, these dimensions were not investigated in depth.

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