

# SECURITIZATION OF COVID-19 AND STATE'S RESPONSE TO MITIGATE PANDEMIC THREAT

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#### **Abstrak**

Novel Coronavirus atau yang lazim disebut dengan Covid-19 merupakan jenis virus baru yang pertama kali muncul di Tiongkok pada bulan November 2019. Semenjak kemunculannya tersebut, Covid-19 telah menjelma menjadi sebuah ancaman terhadap manusia dan telah merenggut banyak jiwa. Berdasarkan penelitian yang dilakukan oleh para ilmuwan, virus corona ini merupakan jenis virus yang bersifat zoonosis. Sebuah virus yang menular dari hewan ke manusia yang diprediksi muncul pertama kali di sebuah pasar di Wuhan, Tiongkok. Pada awalnya, Covid-19 hanya bersifat endemik. Namun seiring dengan meningkatnya jumlah manusia yang terinfeksi virus ini, World Health Organization (WHO) memutuskan Covid-19 sebagai wabah pandemi global. Fenomena Covid-19 telah menarik sejumlah studi karena kemunculannya mengancam nyawa manusia. Tujuan dari artikel ini adalah untuk meneliti fenomena Covid-19 dari perspektif studi keamanan. Penulis menggunakan konsep sekuritisasi untuk menjelaskan fenomena Covid-19. Metode yang digunakan adalah kualitatif. Penulis menganalisis bahwa proses sekuritisasi Covid-19 mendorong negara untuk menetapkannya menjadi sebuah ancaman. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa proses sekuritisasi di antara negara-negara berbeda satu sama lain. Namun pada satu titik, negara-negara sepakat bahwa Covid-19 merupakan ancaman yang harus ditanggulangi. Pada akhirnya, aktor negara perlu memperkuat kapabilitasnya untuk menghentikan laju ancaman pandemi tersebut.

## Kata Kunci: Studi keamanan, sekuritisasi, Covid-19, pandemi.

#### Abstract

Novel Coronavirus, commonly known as Covid-19, is a new type of viral species that has been discovered in China during November 2019. As of recent, Covid-19 has been a threat and a threat to the humans. Based on research performed by scientists, the coronavirus is a type of virus that can be transmitted to humans from wild animals. The first person infected with a virus is expected to appear in the city of Wuhan, China. Initially, Covid-19 was only endemic. Given the fact that so many people are infected with this virus, the WHO declared it a global pandemic. The Covid-19 phenomenon has gained prominence despite the danger that it presents to human life. The aim of this article is to analyze Covid-19 in the perspective of security studies. The author uses securitization concept to describe the Covid-19 phenomenon. The author used qualitative analysis methods. The author claims that the Covid-19 securitization process encourages state actors to define it as one of threat that needs to be overcame. Owing to variations in the securitization process between countries, the results are different



among states. However, at one point, nation-state treated Covid-19 as a challenge to be solved. In the end, state actors need to strengthen their capabilities to stop the pandemic threat's pace.

**Keywords:** Security studies, securitization, Covid-19, pandemic.

# Background

At the beginning of 2020, the world was shocked by a new virus, SARS Cov-2, that causes Covid-19 disease. This disease is a devastating blow to humanity that has an impact on the slow growth of the world economy. How did the coronavirus that caused the outbreak of Covid-19 develop? Several studies have shown that the virus first appeared in Wuhan, China, at the end of December 2019 (Liu, Kuo, & Shih, 2020, p. 1). In a study entitled "Covid-19: The First Documented Coronavirus Pandemic in History," physicians and healthcare professionals predict that the virus that causes Covid-19 is zoonosis (Liu, Kuo, & Shih, 2020, p. 2). According to the study, bats were hypothesized to be one of the first hosts to cause coronavirus (Liu, Kuo, & Shih, 2020, p. 2). Another study shows that this virus is reproducing in the Wuhan Animal Market, a market that trades wild animals for human consumption (Shereen et al., 2020, p. 91). Clinically, coronavirus is transmitted by bats to their second host, the pangolins, before it is finally transmitted to humans (Shereen et al., 2020, p.93). Experts predict that wild animals infected with the virus will spread to humans as they are part of their diet. Unclean food processing is ultimately predicted to be the primary source of the spread of this disease before the virus mutates and spreads from human to human (Shereen et al., 2020, p.91).

The disease of Covid-19 has received international attention due to the rapid nature of its spread. Other

medical research shows that Covid-19 is a sickness similar to acute respiratory diseases, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome) Covid, which broke out in the Middle East in 2012 (Hakim et al., 2020, pp. 18-19). Like Covid 19, bats are the first hosts to transmit the virus (Hakim et al., p. 19). However, the intermediary animal for the spread of Covid-19 is still under discussion among medical experts. Even then, in MERS Covid, experts believe that camels are the second intermediate animal to transmit the disease to humans (Shereen et al., 2020, p. 93). Humans exposed to Covid-19 will experience high fever, dry cough, and may even cause nausea and diarrhea in some cases (Wu, Chen, & Chan, 2020, p. 218). This disease spreads very quickly and is life-threatening for the elderly and those with comorbidities (Wu, Chen, & Chan, 2020, p. 218). Its rapid spread eventually forced the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare the disease a global pandemic (WHO, 2020). According Worldometer data of October 8th 2020, number of fatalities reached 36,403,847 cases with a total death toll of 1,060,601 and a total of 27,419,156 patients recovered (Worldometers, 2020).

The emergence of the phenomenon of the Covid-19 outbreak has attracted many fields of science to research, including International Relations (IR) studies. The security studies also examines the phenomenon of Covid-19 as part of the IR studies.



Security studies seek to explain how Covid-19 can be transformed into a threat through the securitization process how this disease ultimately endangers human security. The United Development Nations Program UNDP) has submitted a study that seven fundamental human rights must be fulfilled, one of which is access to health (Gomez & Gasper, 2013, p. 1). In the view of the UNDP, seven fundamental human rights must be fulfilled in order to achieve human security (Gomez & Gasper, 2013, p. 1). This achievement can not be separated from the concept of human security in line with the process of development and community empowerment (Gomez & Gasper, 2013, p. 7). Issues of disease and pandemics are closely linked to human security when the government neglects to address the dangers of such threats (Yuk-ping & Thomas, 2010, p. 448). As the nation's highest authority, the state should protect people against the threat of disease (Yuk-ping & Thomas, 2010, p. 448). If the state does not build capacity and capability in the health infrastructure, it neglects about the safety and security aspects of its citizens (Yuk-ping & Thomas, 2010, p. 449). In essence, the Covid-19 pandemic can push society towards insecurity (Chattu et al., 2019, p. 3). Pandemics are transboundary so that they can threaten not only one country but also the entire world (Chattu et al., 2019, p. 3). Moreover, the threat of the Covid-19 pandemic threatens human health and the stigma attached to the sufferers (Dwinanto & Sumarni, 2020, p. 78). Patients suffering from Covid-19 tend to have a negative stigma in society (Dwinanto & Sumarni, 2020, p. 78). UNDP maintains that human security is essentially a human being

free from fear (Gomez & Gasper, 2013, p. 3).

The aim of this article is to analyze how the issue or phenomenon of Covid-19 is seen in security studies, particular in the concept securitization. In the beginning, Covid-19 does not appear to be a threat that needs to be overcome. It requires a process known as securitization. The author's aim is to analyze how Covid-19 appears to be a real threat. The author will describe how the process of securitization is carried out by state actors. After emerging as a threat, the author will analyze how Covid-19 has a horrendous impact on society and how the state responds to mitigate this threat. The author will use the concept of securitisation analyze to this phenomenon.

## Securitization

In this article, the author will use the concept of securitization to explain the phenomenon of the Covid-19 pandemic threat from a security study perspective. The concept of securitization is coined by Copenhagen School researchers such as Barry Buzan, Ole Weaver and Jap de Wilde (Van Rythoven, 2019, p. 4). Securitization is a concept that seeks to explain how a security issue can be transformed into a threat that needs to be overcome (Van Rythoven, 2019, p. 4). These threats may pose a threat to a security-based threatened object (referent object) (Van Rythoven, 2019, 4). At the beginning of its development, this securitization process only highlighted traditional security issues such as military and political issues (Van Rythoven, 2019, p. 5). This traditional threat usually focuses on the question of military invasion and war (Van Rythoven, 2019, p. 5). However, after the end of the Cold War, security



threats have now changed, discussing military or political issues as well as economic, social and environmental issues (Van Rythoven, 2019, pp. 5-6). What should be emphasized in this concept of securitization is that threats and "referent objects" may emerge from non-traditional sectors (Van Rythoven, 2019, pp. 6-7).

How could security issues turn into real threats? The actors themselves are the key to securitization. Securitization actors are virtually present to declare threats that could endanger a reference object (Kalkman, 2019, p. 1). These actors play a role in defining the threat and identifying who is at risk because of it (Kalkman, 2019, pp. 1-2). Threats can not therefore be securitized unless they have an audience (Kalkman, 2019, p. 2). Why is the position of the audience or the public so crucial to the securitization process? The audience has a role to play in assessing or providing perceptions of the form of the threat (Kalkman, 2019, p. 2). When the securitization actor makes a threat declaration or speech act. the public should accept the threat. The actor must then legitimate preventive action to counter the it (Kalkman, 2019, p. 2).

The process of securitization must have at least two key sequences of processes. Thierry Balzacq explained that the security issue could be considered a threat if it had gone through a political and legitimate process (Balzacq, 2019). He explained securitization moves beyond political boundaries, stressing essence of fear (Balzacq, 2019). This fear seeks to see what kind of vulnerability an object has and what impact it has on the presence of a threat (Balzacq, 2019). Moreover, engaged in securitization must affirm

and demonstrate a real threat that has the potential to change the sociopolitical life of a country (Balzacq, 2019). The position of the political elite as actors engaged in securitization is therefore crucial (Balzacq, 2019). The element of legitimacy in the process of securitization is also critical. Legitimacy is essentially an authority for actors who carry out securitization in the form of threats and who are at risk (Balzacq, 2019). However, the process of legitimacy can be effective if institutions such as the state have a legal system to mitigate the threats that arise (Balzacq, 2019). Securitization actors must then justify the threat and how to mitigate it (Balzacq, 2019). Finally, the element of legitimacy can implemented if it has an agreement (Balzacq, 2019). As an actor engaged in securitization, the state must consciously actively and develop policies to overcome threats (Balzacq, 2019). However, the approval element can only be fulfilled if the public understands the threat and abides by the rules or policies of the State (Balzacq, 2019). In the end, the securitization process is a speech act that is stated in the form of a declaration that there is a real threat that must be addressed and mitigated (Sheikh, 2018, p.3; Aradau, 2018, p.302).

# Methodology

author uses qualitative a methodology to analyze the Covid-19 phenomenon from the perspective of security studies. **Oualitative** methodology explains a social process phenomenon without using numerical numbers (Creswell, 2014, p. 232). This methodology also has a pragmatism approach and a reflectivist concept. The researcher has the freedom to choose a methodology in analyzing



phenomenon and allows the author's perspective in his description and analysis (Creswell, 2014, p. 232). The qualitative methodology allows the author to interpret textual data and draw descriptions of perspective, meaning, and experience (Hammarberg, 2016, p. 499). The author also uses a case study writing technique in explaining the phenomena in this article. Case studies in IR studies attempt to explain phenomena, cases, or issues related to one variable's influence on another (Roselle & Spray, 2012, p. 61). Case studies discussed in IR studies can focus on political economy, international security, foreign policy, or other contemporary issues (Roselle & Spray, 2012, p. 61). Regarding data collection in scientific articles using case study techniques, Creswell divides it into several ways: observation, interviews, documents, scientific journals, data from credible institutions, or audiovisual documents (Creswell, 2014, p. 240). In writing this scientific article, the author uses secondary data such as journals. documents. scientific credible institutions' data. The data is needed as one of the supporting arguments in the analysis stage.

## **Discussion**

The country's primary responsibility is to respond to the threat posed by Covid-19. Essentially, the threat of disease can prevent people from living safely. Mitigation of the threat of the Covid-19 can not be separated from the role of the state. The main aim of alleviating the threat of Covid-19 is not a major medical problem. Moreover, the issue of alleviating the threat of disease is a policy area of the country (Nunes, 2012, p. 151). In a study entitled "Health, Politics and Security," Joao Nunes explained that the state is responsible

for tackling disease outbreaks (Nunes, 2012, p. 152). Nunes explained that the state has the authority to securitize against the potential danger of disease outbreak (Nunes, 2012, p. 152). If not managed, disease pandemics can lead the country to other social conflicts such as riots, coups, regional instability and international conflict (Nunes, 2012, p. 153). Indeed, the threat of disease threatens the safety of society and the stability of the country. In this case, Covid-19 is a global disease threat that needs to be mitigated. The disease knows no national boundaries and does not choose the target to be threatened (Rokvic & Zoran, 2015, p. 55). A pandemic is a global threat that not only destabilizes a country, but also has a massive global impact (Rokvic & Zoran, 2015, p. 55). The threat of diseases such as Covid-19 is invisible, but its harmful effects are threatening society and the country (Rokvic & Zoran, 2015, p. 55). The characteristics of disease as a threat to security studies are unique. The disease is inherently hidden because it can not be detected (Smith III, 2016, p. 2). Due to its undetectable nature, the threat of disease may cross national borders and potentially spread and infect many people (Smith III, 2016, p. 2). Detection of disease hazards requires a large number of experts and sophisticated equipment (Smith III, 2016, p. 2). As a result, the process of securitizing a pandemic threat like Covid-19 needs to be carried out by all state actors. The impact of the pandemic has broken the social, political and economic order of the world community (Herington, 2010, p. 486). The disease becomes a securitized problem when it manages to change the existing "normal" order (Herington, 2010, p. 486).



The process of securitization of Covid-19 as a threat to a global pandemic does not happen immediately. World health institutions such as the WHO declared Covid-19 a pandemic threat on 11 March 2020 (Capano et al., 2020, p. 285). The WHO's threat declaration was issued after the health agency began an analysis of coronavirus movements, which started to spread to several countries (Capano et al., 2020, p. 285). In contrast to natural disasters such as floods or landslides, the threat of a pandemic such as a disease is invisible (Capano et al., 2020, p. 286). However, these threats are dangerous and harmful to human health. The threat posed by Covid-19 must therefore be dealt seriously by the state (Capano et al., 2020, pp. 286-288). The acceptance is one of the conditions for after securitization the declaration. After the WHO declared the Covid-19 pandemic to be a global disaster, all countries around the world began taking mitigate the threat steps to securitization. China is one of the countries that are securitizing against the threat of Covid-19. As the country that was first hit by this pandemic, China took steps to securitize when the first case occurred in Wuhan in December 2019 (Zhao & Wu, 2020, p. 777). The Chinese government reflected on the SARS tragedy of 2003 when the country was paralyzed by the disease (Zhao & Wu, 2020, p. 779). In order to prevent an ever-increasing spread, the implemented Chinese government lockdowns, limited the amount of transportation to and from Wuhan, built emergency hospitals, and sent 42,600 medical personnel to Wuhan (Zhao & Wu, 2020, p. 777). The Chinese Government also coordinates the dissemination of the hazards of this coronavirus pandemic between

government. regional central committees and non-profit organizations (Zhao & Wu, 2020, p. 778). Through this coordination, the Chinese Government imposed lockdown of Wuhan and prohibited any citizen of its country from carrying out activities in the vicinity of Wuhan. The process of securitizing the threat of this pandemic has not received strong opposition, as its citizens understand the dangers of Covid-19 (Zhao & Wu, 2020, p. 779). China had to struggle to emerge from the outbreak of SARS in 2003. At the end of the day, the country has drawn up a mitigation plan if a similar outbreak occurs again.

The process of securitization that has taken place in other parts of the world, such as Italy, has a different example. Securitization in China is somewhat faster, because the center of the threat of Covid-19 is in Wuhan. Whereas in Italy, the threat was not taken seriously and most of its citizens were denied it (Capano, 2020, p. 330). This threat became a major disaster when Covid-19 began to disrupt Italy's socio-economic and political life with an increasing number of victims in the country. Two factors that have caused the Italian Government to delay the implementation of the securitization process that pandemic disease mitigation plan have been forgotten by Italian government. Meanwhile, the country has never experienced a major threat of a pandemic again (Capano, 2020, p. 330). The Italian Government only carried out the securitization process on 11 March 2020 when the number of Covid-19 cases increased to 12,250 and the total number of victims reached 827 (Capano, 2020, p. 331). In the case of Italy, the securitization actor is the Italian Ministry of Health, which has issued a rule to lock down ten cities



in the province of Lombardia because they have been categorized as red zones due to an increase in Covid-19 cases (Capano, 2020, p. 331). It was legitimately justified by the Italian Government that Covid-19 was a threat because the increase in the number of patients could lead to a loss of hospital capacity to manage the number of patients being treated (Capano, 2020, p. 338). The Italian Government itself set up a Covid-19 task force to mitigate this threat (Capano, 2020, p. 338). The task force consists of experts from various ministries responsible for alleviating the threat posed by Covid-19, such as strategies to track disease sufferers, formulating post-pandemic social, economic and political recovery, and even handling cases of coronavirus spread in state prisons (Capano, 2020, p. 338).

South Korea is one of the successful countries that has managed to mitigate the threat posed by Covid-19. The Korea Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Korea Center for Disease Control and Prevention) or KCDC is the securitization actor in South Korea facing the threat of this pandemic (Lee et al., 2020, p. 371). The Korean Government South mandated the KCDC to monitor and manage the threat of pandemic disease that could potentially disrupt their country (Lee et al., 2020, p. 371). The existence of the KCDC institution became very important after the threat of MERS disrupted the country in 2015 (Lee et al., 2020, p. 371). The initial stage of the securitization of the threat of Covid-19 occurred when the first cases took place in Wuhan and the KCDC raised the emergency status of a crisis alert or code blue (Lee et al. 2020, 373). After warning of this status, KCDC again raised the crisis status to

stage two or yellow code when one of the tourists from China entering South Korea showed symptoms similar to those of Covid-19 (Lee et al., 2020, p. 373). The South Korean government has also imposed restrictions on each of its borders and repatriated its citizens from China (Lee et al., 2020, p. 373). The threat of Covid-19 became even more apparent when a mass infection occurred in a church in Daegu when a positive corona patient attended a religious event (Lee et al., 2020, p. 374). The first legitimate step of the South Korean government was to issue the "Corona Act 3," which became the for the formation of "Guidelines for Responding to New Infectious Diseases". These guidelines are the basis for the Korean government to implement mitigation measures in response to the Covid-19 pandemic (Lee et al. 2020, p. 374). The public acceptance of the securitization of the Covid-19 threat in South Korea is very receptive. In addition to the threat of MERS experienced by South Koreans, data-based leadership and transparent policies related to the development of Covid-19 encourage public confidence in the government to mitigate the pandemic (Lee et al., 2020, pp. 374-376).

What about the Covid-19 securitization process in Indonesia? This threat was detected by Indonesian government on 27th of January 2020. At that time, Indonesian government prohibited visits and access from Wuhan, China, and repatriated 238 Indonesian citizens who were living in the city (Djalante et al., 2020, p.2). The Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia itself has not declared them as a threat, even though it has announced a new disease called Covid-19 by Decree No. 104 of 2020 of



the Minister of Health of The Republic of Indonesia (Djalante et al., 2020, p. 4). When Covid-19 patients were first detected in Indonesia and the number of increased, the Indonesian patients government, through the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB), announced the spread of the disease as a national disaster on 28th of February 2020 (Djalante et al., 2020, p. 4). The legitimacy of the Indonesian government in the securitization process is to set up a Covid-19 task force to contain the rate of pandemic disease from the central to the municipial level (Dialante et al., 2020, p. 4). In addition, the Indonesian government increased the number of referral hospitals for Covid-19 patients from 100 to 227 hospitals. The Government has also begun to implement strict health protocols across Indonesia, prohibiting crowd-inviting events, enforcing work from home, and organizing online learning teaching and activities (Djalante et al., 2020, pp. 2-7). The framing of Covid-19 as a threat has also generated public resistance. Public rejection of the threat of Covid-19 is inseparable from the lack information, the pluralism of Indonesian society, and the government's first initial response to the threat of disapproval of the disease (Djalante et al., 2020, p. 7). In order to ensure that the public accepts the Covid-19 as a new threat, the Indonesian government disseminates information on the dangers of Covid-19 in 19 local languages. The Government also maximizes the impact of social media on the dissemination of authentic information across the region (Dialante et al., 2020, p. 7). Public acceptance of the securitization process has been very slow, but the impact of information on the massive threat of Covid-19 has begun to change the

behavior of Indonesians. The term "new normal" has become a lifestyle for Indonesians as they become familiar with standard health protocols such as wearing masks and washing hands (Djalante et al., 2020, p. 7).

Reflecting on the abovementioned process of securitization, the author analyzes that this process requires actors, security issues, legitimacy and public acceptance. In the case of the securitization of Covid-19 in Communist China. the central government of China securitization actor (Zhao & Wu, 2020, p. 777). The Chinese government takes the threat of Covid-19 very seriously, given that they experienced a similar threat, namely SARS, in 2003 (Zhao & Wu, 2020, p. 779). Public acceptance of the Covid-19 threat is very responsive, considering the epidemic epicenter in their country, and the threat of SARS in 2003 continues to haunt the majority of Chinese citizens. As a process of legitimacy, the Chinese government has built an emergency hospital, shut down City of Wuhan from all visitors, and implemented health protocols. same thing has been seen in South Korea. The two countries are located in the East Asian region, and their geographical position is close together. Like China, South Korea experienced paralysis due to the threat of MERS in 2015 (Lee et al., 2020, p. 371). The potential threat of Covid-19 has not been underestimated by both China and South Korea. Although South Korea 's early detection system is more advanced than China, both of them see Covid-19 as a real threat. The process of securitization involving public perception in both acceptance or countries ran very smoothly. involving regional committees and nonprofit organizations, the Chinese



government has convinced its people to build public perceptions of the threat posed by Covid-19 (Zhao & Wu, 2020, p. 778). Meanwhile, the South Korean public received a statement from its government on the threat of Covid-19 because President Moon Jae-In prioritized transparency and data-based policy to mitigate the threat of this new disease (Lee et al., 2020, p. 374-376). Because the process of securitization between state actors and society is going well, China and South Korea been quite successful overcoming the threat posed by Covid-19.

The securitization of Covid-19 the Italian and Indonesian by governments has something in common. They both denied the dangers of Covid-19. The Italian public believes that Covid-19 is in Wuhan and will not jeopardize the safety of its citizens. The Italian Government's response to the threat posed by Covid-19 is not as intense as China and South Korea. On the other hand, the Italian Government has abandoned the Pandemic Disaster Mitigation Plan (Capano, 2020, p. 330). The same thing has happened in Indonesia. The process of securitizing the threat of Covid-19 is progressing slowly. State actors who should declare Covid-19 to be a threat seem to refuse and consider a pandemic impossible to occur in Indonesia (Djalante et al., 2020, p. 7). Denial of the Covid-19 threat by the government and confusing information ultimately hindered the process of accepting this threat in society (Djalante et al., 2020, p. 7). The Italian and Indonesian governments have declared Covid-19 to be a threat when the number of cases of disease is increasing day by day. Of course, the measure of legitimacy in the form of alleviating the threat of Covid-19 has

become constrained. These problems generally arise at the community level, which have not been justified by the government. In the end, this problem has resulted on sluggish progress to decrease number of Covid-19 cases. By reference to Worldometers data of 20th October 2020, Italy was ranked 16 as the country with the most active cases, with 423,578 cases. In the meantime, Indonesia is in the 19th rank, with 368,842 cases. Meanwhile, China ranks 54th with 85,704 cases, and South Korea ranks 86th with 25,333 cases (Worldometers, 2020). Based on the empiric example and the brief analysis referred to above, the author argues that countries who are responsive securitizing the threat of Covid-19 tend to be successful in alleviating the threat of a new disease.

#### **Conclusion**

Covid-19 is a new disease caused by novel coronavirus. The virus brings a new disease that threatens the survival of the human race. Covid-19 caused the world to be hit by a pandemic and forced people to live in a new normal order. Covid-19 is a threat not only to society, but to the state as well. This disease has forced a number of states to declare it as a new threat. Covid-19 has an impact not only on rising mortality rates across the country, but also on social, economic and political ends. The state, as an actor engaged in securitization, needs to mitigate this threat so that it is not prolonged. In order to mitigate the threat posed by Covid-19, countries need to pursue inclusive policies. As in conclusion, state who respond this threat faster than others are likely successful to alleviate pandemic problem in their country.



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