

Securitizing Rohingya refugees: Domestic opinion, media narratives, and Indonesia's foreign policy (2015–2023)

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ABSTRACT

This article examines why and how Indonesia's approach to Rohingya refugees shifted from humanitarian solidarity to a more securitized and burden-oriented stance between 2015 and 2023. Drawing on securitization theory, it employs a qualitative case study based on document analysis of Indonesian legal and policy instruments, official statements, ASEAN records, reports from international organizations, media coverage, and academic studies. The analysis identifies three interrelated dynamics. First, public attitudes in key host areas, especially Aceh, have moved from empathy to resentment as prolonged refugee presence, economic pressures, and distributive grievances increasingly frame Rohingya as social and economic burdens, creating receptive audiences for restrictive policies. Second, media narratives have progressively foregrounded themes of disorder, illegality, and links to irregular migration, which normalize security-oriented interpretations of refugee arrivals and legitimize calls for tighter control. Third, a legal-institutional framework that treats refugees as temporary foreign guests, combined with ASEAN's limited burden-sharing and strong non-interference norm, enables the state to recalibrate between humanitarian and security logics while maintaining a humanitarian diplomatic posture. By tracing these dynamics across key turning points from 2015 to 2023, the article refines the application of securitization theory to refugee-hosting states in the Global South and shows how domestic opinion, media framings, and regional constraints jointly shape the space of possible foreign policy responses toward the Rohingya.

Keywords:

Rohingya refugees; securitization; Indonesia's foreign policy

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INTRODUCTION

The Rohingya refugee crisis has evolved into a protracted regional challenge that profoundly affects Southeast Asian foreign policies, including Indonesia's. Since the 2015

“boat crisis”, Indonesia has repeatedly received Rohingya refugees, particularly along the coast of Aceh, where local communities and Islamic organizations initially framed rescue and temporary shelter as an expression of Muslim solidarity and humanitarian duty (Pratisti et al., 2019). At the same time, Jakarta has sought to project itself as a responsible regional actor by promoting humanitarian diplomacy and advocating for a peaceful resolution of the crisis within ASEAN and broader international forums (Anggraeni, 2023). This dual orientation, combining moral solidarity with diplomatic caution, has produced a persistent tension between humanitarian commitments, domestic political constraints, and the limits of regional cooperation.

Over time, this tension has become more visible in domestic debates. While early responses emphasized compassion and shared religious identity, repeated arrivals, limited local resources, and the absence of durable solutions have fueled growing frustration in host communities. In Aceh and other locations, public attitudes have gradually shifted from welcoming Rohingya as victims of persecution to perceiving them as economic burdens and sources of social tension (Hanif, 2023). Local reports highlight concerns about competition for jobs and assistance, pressure on public services, and resentment over perceived privileges granted to refugees (Batubara, 2024). Similar dynamics can be observed in Bangladesh, where the Rohingya presence has increasingly been framed as a national burden rather than solely a humanitarian crisis, illustrating how host states’ perceptions evolve as refugee situations become protracted (Obaidullah et al., 2024).

These shifts in perception interact with Indonesia’s legal and institutional arrangements for refugee management. Indonesia has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol and therefore does not operate a full-fledged national asylum system (Gunawan et al., 2024). Instead, the country relies on Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 on the Handling of Foreign Refugees, which formalizes procedures for identifying, sheltering, and coordinating with international organizations such as UNHCR and IOM, while explicitly treating refugees as temporary “foreign” persons awaiting resettlement or repatriation (Zainuddin & Koto, 2025). This framework allows Indonesia to uphold basic humanitarian standards and cooperate with international actors, yet it also preserves significant discretion to recalibrate policies in line with domestic concerns about sovereignty, security, and resource constraints (Dewansyah & Handayani, 2019).

Regionally, Indonesia operates within an ASEAN environment that both enables and constrains its responses to the Rohingya crisis. ASEAN’s long-standing principles of non-interference and consensus-based decision-making have limited the organization’s ability to develop binding mechanisms for refugee protection or robust pressure on Myanmar (Shukri, 2021). While Indonesia has attempted to use humanitarian diplomacy and “quiet” or non-megaphone diplomacy, balancing Islamic humanitarianism, civil–military considerations, and regional norms, to address the crisis, these efforts have yielded only cautious statements and short-term humanitarian initiatives (Perbawani, 2021; Smith & Williams, 2021). Critical assessments argue that ASEAN’s responses to the wider Myanmar crisis, including ceasefire statements and humanitarian commitments, have fallen short of providing concrete measures and effective burden-sharing for affected populations such as the Rohingya (Asean Parliamentarians for Human Right, 2025).

Existing scholarship has analyzed important elements of this complex situation, but often in isolation. Studies have examined Indonesia’s humanitarian diplomacy and foreign policy change toward Rohingya asylum seekers (Anggraeni, 2023; Gaol & Wibowo, 2024), the country’s legal responsibilities and status as a non-party to the 1951 Convention (Gunawan et al., 2024; Sagio, 2024), and the constitutional and sovereignty implications of refugee management (Utami et al., 2018). Other works focus on shifting public attitudes in

Indonesia and Malaysia (Hurriyah, 2023), the dilemmas between legal responsibility and humanitarian obligation (Salle et al., 2025), or the economic and social impacts of Rohingya refugees on local communities in Aceh (Mawardi & Hanum, 2023; Nirwasita, 2024). Research on media coverage demonstrates how narratives in Aceh increasingly emphasize security, disorder, and illegality in relation to Rohingya arrivals, contributing to the securitization of the issue (Fitrah et al., 2025). However, these studies tend to privilege either foreign policy and diplomacy, legal frameworks, public opinion, or media narratives, and thus do not fully integrate how domestic, legal-institutional, and regional factors interact over time to shape Indonesia's evolving stance.

This article addresses that gap by examining how and why Indonesia's approach to Rohingya refugees shifted from humanitarian solidarity toward a more securitized and burden-oriented stance between 2015 and 2023. The analysis explores the evolution of Indonesia's policy toward Rohingya refugees across key turning points, the role of domestic drivers—including public opinion, local political dynamics, and media narratives—and the influence of legal and institutional frameworks as well as ASEAN's regional constraints on Indonesia's policy space. In line with this focus, the article investigates how Indonesian state and non-state actors framed Rohingya refugees in public and policy discourse during the 2015–2023 period, identifies the domestic, legal-institutional, and regional factors that contributed to the shift from humanitarian solidarity to a more securitized and burden-oriented approach, and assesses how this trajectory contributes to a deeper understanding of securitization processes in refugee-hosting states in Southeast Asia. Empirically, the article offers a longitudinal account that links local contestation in Aceh, national legal frameworks, and ASEAN-level diplomacy. Theoretically, it extends the application of securitization analysis by drawing on Barry Buzan's concept of security as a socially constructed process and applying it to a Global South context characterized by legal ambiguity and limited regional governance.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative case study design to analyse Indonesia's policy responses to Rohingya refugees between 2015 and 2023. A qualitative case study is appropriate because it allows an in-depth exploration of a contemporary political phenomenon within its real-life context and does not aim at statistical generalization (Creswell & Poth, 2024). The temporal scope, from the 2015 “boat crisis” to the renewed arrivals and local resistance in 2023, captures both the initial humanitarian framing and later shifts toward more restrictive and security-oriented policies.

Data were generated through document analysis of three main categories of sources. First, Indonesian legal and policy documents, particularly Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 on the Management of Foreign Refugees and related ministerial regulations, were examined to trace how the state formally defines and manages refugees. Second, official statements, speeches, and press releases issued by Indonesian authorities and ASEAN bodies were collected to identify the government's evolving narratives and regional diplomatic positioning. Third, reports from international organizations such as UNHCR and IOM, together with selected national and local media coverage of Rohingya arrivals in Aceh, were used to contextualize state discourse and capture how refugee issues are represented in public debate. Academic literature on Indonesian refugee policy and humanitarian diplomacy provided additional background and helped refine the analytical focus rather than serving as primary data.

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis combined with a discourse-analytical sensitivity. Following standard procedures in qualitative content analysis,

documents were read repeatedly to develop a coding frame that captured references to humanitarian obligations, security concerns, national interests, and regional cooperation (Krippendorff, 2022). Codes were then grouped into broader thematic categories corresponding to key dimensions of Indonesia's Rohingya policy, such as humanitarian diplomacy, securitization of refugees, and burden-sharing. Building on securitization theory, the analysis then focused on how specific actors, particularly state officials and regional organizations, constructed Rohingya refugees as security issues, which referent objects they claimed to protect, and how these constructions enabled or constrained particular policy options (Buzan et al., 1998). By linking changes in discursive framing with shifts in legal instruments and policy practice over the 2015–2023 period, the method clarifies how humanitarian and security logics have been negotiated in Indonesia's evolving response to the Rohingya refugee crisis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Evolution of Indonesia's Rohingya Policy (2015–2023)

The findings indicate that Indonesia's policy toward Rohingya refugees has moved through a gradual shift from humanitarian solidarity to a more cautious and security-oriented approach between 2015 and 2023 (Sudrajat et al., 2024). In the immediate aftermath of the 2015 "boat crisis", Indonesia's response was strongly influenced by moral appeals from Acehnese communities and Islamic solidarity, which framed the rescue and temporary sheltering of Rohingya as religiously and ethically required (Pratisti et al., 2019). Local initiatives to bring stranded boats ashore and provide food, clothing, and shelter created a powerful humanitarian narrative that resonated with national elites and enabled the government to justify accepting refugees as an expression of Indonesia's identity as a Muslim-majority and humanitarian state (Saragih & Damayanti, 2024). Under this framing, Jakarta authorized disembarkation, coordinated with UNHCR and IOM, and used foreign policy rhetoric that highlighted Indonesia's role as a compassionate and responsible regional actor (Anggraeni, 2023).

This initial phase of solidarity did not, however, generate a comprehensive asylum system that would anchor protection in long-term legal commitments. Instead, Indonesia adopted Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 on the Handling of Foreign Refugees as an ad hoc framework that formalizes procedures for reception, registration, and cooperation with international organizations, while positioning refugees as temporary foreign persons awaiting resettlement or repatriation (Suyastri et al., 2023). Legal analyses emphasize that this regulation allows Indonesia to reconcile basic protection with the preservation of sovereignty, since it avoids granting a right to local integration or permanent stay and leaves significant discretion to the executive to determine the scope of obligations (Dewansyah & Handayani, 2019). From a constitutional perspective, this arrangement fits a broader pattern in which immigration and refugee questions are managed through administrative instruments rather than parliamentary legislation, thereby limiting the extent to which refugees are incorporated into the national legal order (Utami et al., 2018).

From 2016 onwards, Indonesia's approach increasingly reflected tensions between its humanitarian self-image and growing concerns about security, social stability, and resource constraints (Priesdiantoro et al., 2024). On the one hand, Jakarta continued to advocate humanitarian principles in ASEAN and multilateral forums, calling for a peaceful resolution in Myanmar and emphasizing Indonesia's willingness to provide temporary shelter. On the other hand, domestic debates and bureaucratic practices began to stress irregular migration, transnational crime, and the risks of setting precedents that might encourage further arrivals (Gaol & Wibowo, 2024). As Indonesia's broader refugee population grew and stays became

longer, concerns about the financial and political sustainability of current arrangements gained prominence, particularly in host regions like Aceh and in cities where refugees resided in community housing.

These tensions became particularly salient during the renewed arrivals of Rohingya boats in Aceh in late 2023. Hanif's longitudinal study shows that by this time, many local actors no longer perceived the situation as an exceptional humanitarian emergency but as an ongoing burden with uncertain end-points (Hanif, 2023). Public protests, road blockades, and vocal demands for relocation signaled visible fatigue in host communities, while national media frequently highlighted the rising number of arrivals and the concentration of refugees in specific districts (Batubara, 2024). CNN Indonesia's reporting on the total number of Rohingya refugees and the distribution of shelters across Aceh reinforced the impression that local capacities were stretched and that the crisis was becoming a structural rather than episodic challenge (CNN Indonesia, 2023).

By the end of the 2015–2023 period, Indonesia's policy remained formally anchored in humanitarian norms and non-refoulement, but implementation was increasingly marked by practices of control, containment, and risk management (Gunawan et al., 2024). Authorities continued to rely on the procedural tools provided by Presidential Regulation No. 125/2016, such as registration, camp management, and coordination with UNHCR and IOM, while adopting a more guarded approach to further disembarkations and emphasizing national security and social stability in public statements (Priesdiantoro et al., 2024). In diplomatic arenas, Indonesia maintained itself-image as a humanitarian mediator, yet it also stressed the need for other actors, including Myanmar and the broader international community, to assume greater responsibility for durable solutions (Anggraeni, 2023). Overall, Indonesia's Rohingya policy across this period can be characterized as an evolving balance in which humanitarian commitments are progressively reframed and constrained by domestic pressures, institutional choices, and the absence of robust regional burden-sharing.

Domestic Drivers: Public Opinion, Local Politics, and Media Narratives

Domestic opinion and local politics, especially in Aceh, constitute a central driver of this policy shift (Hanif, 2023). Early arrivals were widely interpreted through a lens of Islamic solidarity and humanitarian empathy, with Acehese communities welcoming Rohingya as fellow Muslims and organizing support through local networks, mosques, and customary institutions (Pratisti et al., 2019). This initial enthusiasm was reinforced by narratives that drew parallels between the suffering of Rohingya and Aceh's own experiences of conflict and natural disaster, producing a strong sense of moral obligation to assist (Saragih & Damayanti, 2024). Over time, however, the prolonged presence of refugees, limited economic opportunities, and perceived imbalances in assistance contributed to a gradual reframing of Rohingya from victims of persecution into economic and social burdens for host communities (Mawardi & Hanum, 2023).

Economic concerns are particularly salient in Aceh's coastal districts. Analyses of local debates show that residents increasingly link refugee arrivals to pressures on labor markets, competition for small-scale trade, and strains on public services and infrastructure (Batubara, 2024). In some accounts, resentment is directed less at refugees themselves than at central authorities and international organizations, which are perceived to prioritize refugee needs while long-standing local demands for development and employment remain partially unmet (Nirwasita, 2024). These material anxieties intersect with symbolic grievances, as the visibility of international aid and media attention on Rohingya can be interpreted as overshadowing Aceh's own unresolved socio-economic issues (Batubara, 2024). Together, these dynamics create fertile ground for narratives that frame restrictions

on new arrivals and tighter control over existing populations as necessary measures to defend local welfare and fairness (Hanif, 2023).

Local political actors translate these sentiments into pressure on the central government. District leaders, village heads, and community figures in Aceh are accountable to constituencies who increasingly expect them to “protect” local interests by preventing further perceived disruptions (Mawardi & Hanum, 2023). This can involve urging Jakarta to strengthen maritime patrols, to redistribute refugees to other provinces, or to accelerate processes for resettlement and repatriation. High-profile incidents, such as reports of refugees leaving shelters without authorization, conflicts with local residents, or controversial behavior, are frequently mobilized in local debates as evidence that the situation has become unsustainable (Sumitro, 2023). These episodes are then picked up by national media, amplifying the political salience of local grievances and signaling to central authorities that continued acceptance of new arrivals carries significant domestic risks (Hanif, 2023).

Although Aceh is the most prominent locus of these tensions, concerns about fairness and social order also appear in other parts of Indonesia. Reporting from Makassar documents debates over refugees’ access to identification documents, where some Rohingya sought local ID cards based on UNHCR letters, prompting disputes about legal status and administrative authority (Isman, 2023). In Sidoarjo, coverage of Rohingya living in government flats has highlighted complaints about allowances and living conditions, which some local residents interpret as evidence that refugees receive preferential treatment compared with the domestic poor (Tripamungkas, 2023). These cases suggest that anxieties about distributional justice and social cohesion are not confined to Aceh but form part of a broader national conversation about how far Indonesia should go in accommodating refugees.

In combination, these domestic dynamics create a receptive audience for securitizing moves. When policymakers and officials frame Rohingya refugees as potential sources of instability, economic strain, or social disorder, such speech acts resonate with lived experiences and widely shared grievances in host communities (Hanif, 2023). This resonance strengthens the political legitimacy of more restrictive measures, such as tightening border controls, limiting new landings, or imposing stricter rules in shelters, and makes it increasingly difficult to sustain a purely humanitarian framing in Indonesia’s foreign and domestic policy toward the Rohingya (Mawardi & Hanum, 2023). Over time, domestic opinion and local politics thus function not only as background conditions but as active drivers of the securitization of Rohingya refugees in Indonesia.

Media Narratives and the Securitization of Rohingya

Media coverage plays a pivotal role in shaping how Rohingya refugees are perceived and, consequently, how policy options are justified. In the early years of the crisis, national and local media frequently highlighted stories of suffering at sea, rescue operations by Acehese fishers, and the moral obligation to assist fellow Muslims, reinforcing a humanitarian framing of the issue (Pratisti et al., 2019). As the situation evolved and arrivals continued, however, the tone and focus of coverage gradually shifted. Increasingly, reports emphasized the challenges of managing shelters, tensions with host communities, and questions about the fairness of allocating resources to refugees, which contributed to a more ambivalent public narrative.

Detailed analysis of media content from 2023 in Aceh shows how this shift fed directly into securitization dynamics. Fitrah and co-authors demonstrate that local and national outlets progressively foregrounded themes of disorder, illegality, and threat, including

headlines that associated Rohingya refugees with security risks, social unrest, and violations of local norms (Fitrah et al., 2025). Such coverage often framed refugee arrivals as “waves” or “influxes”, a vocabulary that implies loss of control and potential danger. At the same time, humanitarian elements, such as the refugees’ experiences of persecution in Myanmar, received comparatively less sustained attention, especially when overshadowed by stories of protests or conflict in host areas. This pattern of reporting provided fertile ground for interpreting the Rohingya presence not only as a moral concern but also as a security problem.

Specific episodes were instrumental in reinforcing these securitized narratives. For example, reports on refugees discarding aid packages into the sea in Bireuen were widely circulated and framed as evidence of ingratitude or unwillingness to comply with local arrangements, fueling perceptions that Rohingya refugees did not respect the generosity of host communities (Sumitro, 2023). Similarly, coverage of tensions and complaints in resettlement flats, such as grievances over allowances or living conditions, was sometimes presented in ways that highlighted conflict and dissatisfaction rather than mutual accommodation (Tripamungkas, 2023). These highly visible incidents became symbolic reference points in public debate, making it easier for commentators and officials to argue that stricter controls were necessary to maintain order.

Media narratives also intersect with discussions of crime and irregular migration. Investigative reporting on human smuggling networks, including cases where individuals who had previously entered Indonesia as refugees later acted as facilitators for subsequent Rohingya arrivals, linked refugee movements to organized criminality (Kurniati, 2022). By connecting the Rohingya presence to trafficking and smuggling, such stories strengthened a frame in which refugees were associated with transnational security threats rather than solely with humanitarian need. In addition, regular updates on the rising number of refugees and the distribution of shelters across Aceh, while informative, also contributed to a sense of escalation and burden when presented without parallel emphasis on international responsibility-sharing (CNN Indonesia, 2023).

These media dynamics are not confined to Aceh. Coverage from other parts of Indonesia, including Makassar and Sidoarjo, often highlights controversies around documentation, entitlements, and behavior in shelters, which can reinforce perceptions that refugees receive special treatment or that their presence generates social friction (Isman, 2023; Tripamungkas, 2023). In many cases, online comment sections and social media discussions further amplify these narratives, circulating decontextualized images and claims that depict Rohingya as ungrateful, unruly, or economically opportunistic (Fitrah et al., 2025). While such portrayals do not capture the full diversity of public opinion, they influence the discursive environment in which policymakers operate and signal that more permissive policies may face significant backlash.

From a securitization perspective, media narratives function as both conduits and producers of security discourse. By repeatedly highlighting stories of disorder, crime, and perceived unfairness, media actors contribute to constructing Rohingya refugees as potential threats to social cohesion, local welfare, and national control, thereby legitimizing calls for enhanced border management, stricter regulation of shelters, and more cautious acceptance of new arrivals (Fitrah et al., 2025). At the same time, the relative marginalization of narratives that emphasize persecution in Myanmar and international legal obligations narrows the discursive space for sustained humanitarian responses (Anggraeni, 2023). In this way, media framings help to bridge domestic grievances and national policy debates, linking everyday anxieties in host communities to broader arguments for securitizing Indonesia’s approach to the Rohingya.

Legal, Institutional, and ASEAN Constraints on Foreign Policy Choices

Indonesia's foreign policy choices toward the Rohingya are shaped by a legal and institutional setting that combines international human rights commitments with the absence of a comprehensive asylum regime. As a non-party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, Indonesia is not bound by the full suite of treaty-based refugee obligations, which gives the state considerable discretion in determining the scope and form of protection it is willing to offer (Gunawan et al., 2024). Instead, responsibility toward refugees is mediated through general human rights norms and domestic regulations, allowing policymakers to balance humanitarian considerations with concerns about sovereignty and national interests (Sagio, 2024). This structural ambiguity creates both room for humanitarian engagement and space for restrictive practices when political pressures intensify.

Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 on the Handling of Foreign Refugees is the central domestic instrument governing refugee management. The regulation establishes procedures for identifying, sheltering, and registering refugees, clarifies the roles of central and local authorities, and formalizes cooperation with international organizations such as UNHCR and IOM (Samuels, 2020). However, it explicitly frames refugees as temporary foreign persons awaiting resettlement or voluntary repatriation, without recognizing a right to long-term stay, local integration, or access to citizenship (Dewansyah & Handayani, 2019). Analyses of Indonesia's constitutional immigration policy show that this approach keeps refugees outside the core of the national legal community and avoids embedding protection in higher-order legislation, thereby maintaining a high degree of executive flexibility (Utami et al., 2018). In practice, this means that the protection offered to Rohingya refugees, while significant in humanitarian terms, remains contingent and reversible, rather than guaranteed.

Institutionally, this framework channels day-to-day management toward administrative and security-oriented agencies rather than bodies specialized in human rights. Responsibility for refugee status determination is effectively delegated to UNHCR, while Indonesian authorities focus on regulating entry, residence in shelters, and coordination with international organizations and local governments (Sagio, 2024). This division of labor helps address capacity constraints but also reinforces the idea that refugees are primarily an international matter, making it easier for the state to justify limiting long-term commitments on the grounds that durable solutions should be delivered by resettlement countries and international actors (Gunawan et al., 2024). When domestic opposition grows, this arrangement allows decision-makers to tighten practices, such as by restricting landings, relocating refugees, or reducing their visibility, without formally changing the underlying legal framework.

Debates over Indonesia's international obligations further illustrate this tension. Legal scholars argue that, despite the absence of treaty ratification, Indonesia is still bound by principles such as non-refoulement and by broader human rights commitments, which together create a moral and legal expectation that refugees will not be returned to situations of persecution or serious harm (Siregar, 2024). At the same time, other analyses emphasize that the lack of explicit domestic incorporation of these norms leaves considerable uncertainty for refugees and allows state actors to interpret obligations narrowly when political or security considerations demand it (Gunawan et al., 2024). This duality is reflected in policy practice, where Indonesia has refrained from forced returns to Myanmar but has also avoided establishing pathways for long-term integration.

ASEAN's institutional context further constrains Indonesia's foreign policy options. The organization's long-standing principles of non-interference and consensus have limited

efforts to develop binding regional mechanisms for refugee protection or to exert strong pressure on Myanmar over its treatment of the Rohingya (Shukri, 2021). While Indonesia has promoted humanitarian engagement through ASEAN forums and mechanisms such as the AHA Centre, these initiatives have largely produced cautious statements and short-term aid rather than enforceable burden-sharing arrangements (Anggraeni, 2023). Critical assessments by regional parliamentarians argue that ASEAN's responses to the broader Myanmar crisis, including statements on ceasefire and humanitarian access, have fallen short of providing concrete measures or meaningful accountability, underscoring the gap between rhetoric and action (Asean Parliamentarians for Human Right, 2025).

These regional limitations shape how Indonesia calibrates its own diplomacy. Analyses of "quiet" or non-megaphone diplomacy show that Jakarta has opted for behind-the-scenes engagement and consensus-building rather than public condemnation, partly to preserve ASEAN unity and partly to maintain access to Myanmar's authorities (Perbawani, 2021). Smith and Williams argue that this strategy is also influenced by domestic factors, including civil-military relations and the desire to align Islamic humanitarianism with a cautious approach to sovereignty and intervention (Smith & Williams, 2021). The result is a foreign policy posture that foregrounds humanitarian language but is careful not to push ASEAN norms beyond what other member states will accept.

These legal and regional constraints interact to shape the parameters within which Indonesia's foreign policy toward the Rohingya can evolve. Domestically, the absence of a comprehensive refugee law and the temporary orientation of Presidential Regulation No. 125/2016 mean that foreign policy commitments to humanitarian norms do not automatically translate into durable rights for refugees on Indonesian territory (Dewansyah & Handayani, 2019). Regionally, the lack of strong ASEAN obligations and enforcement mechanisms reduces incentives for Indonesia to adopt more expansive policies that could be perceived as unilateral burden-taking (Shukri, 2021). In this environment, securitizing framings that stress national stability, border control, and the need to manage irregular movements become attractive to policymakers, as they align with domestic legal discretion and the modest expectations of regional cooperation (Sudrajat et al., 2024). At the same time, Indonesia's reliance on humanitarian diplomacy and soft-spoken engagement allows it to preserve its international image while navigating, rather than resolving, the structural tensions between protection and sovereignty.

Securitization Dynamics and Foreign Policy Implications

Across these dimensions, the findings show that the securitization of Rohingya refugees in Indonesia is produced by the interaction of domestic opinion, media narratives, legal-institutional arrangements, and ASEAN's regional constraints rather than by national security concerns alone. In Aceh and other host areas, shifting public attitudes and local grievances about economic pressure, distributive justice, and social order create receptive audiences for arguments that portray Rohingya as burdensome or destabilizing. Media coverage that highlights incidents of tension, alleged misbehavior, and links to irregular migration reinforces these perceptions, encouraging the view that refugee arrivals pose risks that must be managed through tighter control and restriction. At the same time, a legal framework built around temporary accommodation and executive discretion, combined with an ASEAN environment that offers limited burden-sharing and prioritizes non-interference, lowers the institutional barriers to adopting more security-oriented practices.

From a securitization perspective, these conditions enable state officials and political elites to frame Rohingya refugees as potential threats to social cohesion, local welfare, and

national stability in ways that resonate with domestic experiences and regional norms (Buzan et al., 1998). Such speech acts do not eliminate humanitarian commitments but narrow their scope, legitimizing policies that foreground control, containment, and burden management while keeping protection contingent and reversible. For Indonesia's foreign policy, this dynamic produces a dual posture: externally, Jakarta continues to present itself as a champion of humanitarian diplomacy and quiet engagement on the Rohingya issue; internally, it increasingly calibrates its responses to align with domestic pressures, legal flexibility, and the modest expectations of ASEAN cooperation. This suggests that efforts to sustain a more robust humanitarian approach will require not only normative appeals but also concrete measures to reduce local burdens, clarify national obligations, and strengthen regional mechanisms for responsibility-sharing.

CONCLUSION

Indonesia's evolving approach to Rohingya refugees between 2015 and 2023 reflects a continuous negotiation between humanitarian commitments, domestic pressures, and the limits of regional cooperation. The trajectory traced in this article shows that an initial phase of strong humanitarian solidarity, rooted in Islamic empathy and Acehese local norms, gradually gave way to a more cautious and security-oriented stance as arrivals continued, resources were strained, and protests and fatigue emerged in host communities. This shift has not entailed a formal abandonment of humanitarian principles or non-refoulement, but rather a progressive narrowing of their practical scope as policymakers seek to balance moral obligations with concerns over social stability, sovereignty, and domestic legitimacy.

Empirically, the study has demonstrated how domestic public opinion, local politics, and media narratives in Aceh and other locations have contributed to the reframing of Rohingya refugees from primarily humanitarian subjects into perceived social, economic, and security burdens. Economic anxieties, distributive grievances, and highly publicized incidents, such as tensions in shelters and controversies over behavior, have provided fertile ground for calls to restrict new arrivals and tighten control. Media coverage and online debates have reinforced this trend by foregrounding themes of disorder, illegality, and crime, thereby contributing to the securitization of the Rohingya issue in public discourse. These domestic dynamics operate within a legal-institutional framework that treats refugees as temporary foreign guests under Presidential Regulation No. 125/2016, and within an ASEAN environment that offers only limited burden-sharing and prioritizes non-interference, enabling the state to recalibrate its practices toward control and risk management without fundamentally altering its formal commitments.

Theoretically, the findings refine the application of securitization theory to refugee-hosting states in the Global South by showing that security framings emerge not only from top-down elite decisions but from the interaction of local grievances, media ecosystems, flexible legal architectures, and weak regional governance. Indonesia's experience illustrates how humanitarian diplomacy and securitized refugee governance can coexist within the same policy framework, with security-oriented practices advancing incrementally through everyday administrative decisions and discursive shifts, rather than through dramatic policy reversals. For policymakers, this suggests that sustaining a more robust humanitarian approach to Rohingya refugees requires more than reaffirming norms: it demands concrete measures to reduce local burdens and resentment in host communities, clearer domestic regulation of refugee rights and responsibilities, and stronger ASEAN-level mechanisms for responsibility-sharing and accountability so that Indonesia's humanitarian commitments are not continually undermined by domestic and regional pressures.

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