

Securitized humanitarianism and the partial securitisation of Syrian refugees in Jordan

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Received: 7 November 2025; Accepted: 25 January 2026; Published: 21 May 2026

Abstract

The protracted Syrian conflict is one of the largest displacement crises in recent history, worldwide, forcing Jordan to accommodate a large number of refugees under conditions of regional insecurity and economic strain. This study employs the Copenhagen Securitisation theory as a theoretical framework and examines how the Syrian refugee crisis has been partially securitised in Jordan, as well as how securitisation narratives are constructed, institutionalised, and received by different audiences. Adopting a convergent mixed-methods design, the study combines qualitative interviews with security actors, media representatives, government officials and humanitarian organisations with a quantitative survey of Syrian refugees and Jordanian citizens ($n = 100$). The qualitative findings demonstrate that political and security elites frame refugees primarily as social, economic and security threats, legitimising extraordinary measures such as biometric registration, border restrictions and camp securitisation. Quantitative results reveal selective audience acceptance, with social and economic threat framings resonating more strongly than terrorism-related narratives. This divergence highlights the contingent and negotiated nature of securitisation, rather than its automatic success. The study concludes that Jordan's refugee governance reflects a hybrid model of securitised humanitarianism, in which restrictive security practices coexist with humanitarian commitments and donor-driven assistance. By integrating elite discourse with public perception, the research contributes to securitisation theory by demonstrating how partial audience acceptance can sustain security-oriented policies without full societal consensus.

Keywords: Humanitarian, Jordan, national security, securitisation, state response, Syrian refugees

Introduction

Jordan has become one of the major destinations of refugees escaping the Middle East because of the war in Syria since 2011. The Syrian civil war has resulted in over 6.2 million refugees fleeing the country (UNHCR, 2024) and over 7.41 million people are being internally displaced (UNHCR, 2025). Jordan, being a neighbouring country to Syria, is experiencing the impact of the high number of refugees. Nearly 15% of all Syrian refugees have settled in Jordan, resulting in an approximate 10-12% increase in the country's population over a few years (Alhaj Hasan et al.,

2024). At the beginning of 2024, Jordan had registered more than 730,000 refugees, mainly from Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Sudan and various other countries; hence, the country's share of refugees is among the greatest worldwide (UNHCR, 2024). The influx of refugees has strained Jordan's water system, public services, economy and community spirit. Due to its massive population, Jordan is struggling with its already scarce resources: the country is arid and lacks a sufficient water supply and the unemployment rate has increased significantly (World Bank Group, 2022). Concurrently, the crisis has given rise to security threats, such as the fear that militants can exploit flows of refugees to infiltrate Jordan (Ajil et al., 2020). The Jordanian government has attempted to strike a balance between humanitarian concerns (to protect vulnerable refugees) and national security needs. Securitisation theory demonstrates how states can elevate different topics to matters of security with their words and policies (Buzan et al., 1998). As a result, Jordan faces various challenges in politics, security, the economy, humanitarian matters and national issues due to the Syrian crisis.

Although Jordan has been trying to deal with the Syrian refugees crisis, there is a large gap in comprehension regarding the contribution of securitisation narratives in shaping public opinions and the choice of policies towards refugees. The available qualitative research has depicted how policymakers construct the Syrian refugees as a security threat and legitimize the extraordinary interventions that entail closing the border and conducting biometric screenings and limited mobility (Alshreifat, 2023; Turner, 2023). However, such studies frequently do not offer systematic, generalizable data about whether there are widespread levels to which such narratives have an appeal to the wider population and have an impact on their perception and behavior. Additionally, although few studies clarify the contradiction between humanitarian and security interests in Jordanian policies regarding refugees (Momani, 2020; Gabbay, 2023), there are few articles that have quantitatively estimated the correlation between perceived threats and perceived positive or negative interests in restrictive or inclusive policies. This gap remains significant in terms of contributing to the explanation of migration governance and informing evidence-based interventions that do not solely concentrate on issues of security and the satisfaction of humanitarian demands.

To fill this gap, this research employs a mixed-methods design that combines qualitative interviews with key participants and a quantitative survey of Jordanian citizens and Syrian refugees. The qualitative strand examines the ways in which actors involved in securitisation politics, such as government officials, security agencies, media outlets and international organizations frame refugee matters on a speech act and policy-making basis. The quantitative strand objectively measures societal opinions about refugees across multiple dimensions, including economic burden, security threat, cultural disruption and humanitarian obligation. Triangulating these approaches, it is possible not only to map the discursive construction of such threats as refugees, but also to examine whether these narratives find favour with more general audiences.

This study has profound implications for both the academic field and policymaking. In addition, it develops the securitisation theory in terms of non-speculative evidence on how the threat narratives are created, propagated and consumed by society. Furthermore, it is a significant contribution to the emerging body of migration governance literature, highlighting the challenges of addressing mass displacement in an environment of resource scarcity, as well as feelings of insecurity. In addition, the results can guide policymakers in Jordan and other countries that host refugees regarding the possible outcomes of treating refugees as threats. What is provided in the

study, through which influences the way people think, can be used to take action in order to increase social cohesion and reduce xenophobia, while addressing legitimate security concerns.

Literature review

Securitisation theory and forced migration

Securitisation theory, associated with the Copenhagen School of security studies, depicts security as a matter that involves speech and legitimation (Buzan et al., 1998). Initially, securitisation theory was applied to subject matters like military threats and ecological challenges and its application has since expanded to migration and refugee studies (Aljamal & Han, 2023; Asderaki & Markozani, 2021; Georgia, 2022; Rana & Riaz, 2023). Key elements of the theory, such as the securitizing actors, speech acts, referent objects, audiences and measures within the theory, have been researched broadly (Balzacq et al., 2015). When applied to the migration and refugee field, a political actor, typically a state leader, issues a speech act that purports to establish how an issue constitutes an existential threat to a referent object, such as the state, society or culture. When accepted by a relevant audience, this justifies the application of extraordinary measures beyond the ordinary rules (Buzan et al., 1998; Balzacq et al., 2015; Al Hussein et al., 2024). Studies confirmed that governments are prone to associate migrants or refugees with crime, terrorism, or social or economic burden in order to support their harsh and strict policies (Freedman et al., 2017; Triandafyllidou, 2024; Polko, 2025). Despite the security and humanitarian response frequently employed by nations hosting refugees, they are not always devoid of conflict and tension (Pasha, 2021; Karşıyaka, 2024; Polko, 2025).

Critical scholars have noted that securitisation can be viewed as *just or unjust* (Floyd, 2014; Gates, 2024; Polko, 2025). According to the just securitisation framework, securitisation should be morally justified, the threat should be legitimate, the response should be proportionate, and it should safeguard rights (Floyd, 2014; Polko, 2025). A number of studies observe that the securitisation of migration without objective threats is a frequent occurrence, as states employ it under the pretext of fear in order to justify restrictive policies (Asderaki & Markozani, 2021; Polko, 2025). The main opponents contrast these perspectives with systematic sources or routine activities by citing state actors and speech (Floyd, 2014; Whitworth, 2014). Recent scholarship attributes the achievement of securitisation as multidimensional, whereby a speech act could potentially resonate with some audiences even if refuted by others (Karyotis, 2020; Polko, 2025).

Global trends in refugee securitisation

Since the late 20th century, there has been a growing tendency worldwide to portray refugee and migrant populations as security issues (Alrababa'h et al., 2021; Triandafyllidou & Ricard-Guay, 2019). As a case example, the migration-security nexus has been even augmented in the wake of 9/11 and the European refugee crisis in 2015, with states regularly accusing migrants of terrorism, criminality or cultural threat to justify the construction of border walls, detention and restrictions (Waeber, 2011; Frelick et al., 2016; Dimari et al., 2025). Polko (2025) compares the case of Poland in 2015-2023 and concludes that asylum seekers in Muslim-majority MENA states were far more securitised (projected as a threat to the state) than Ukrainian refugees, as biases occurred both by

origin and religion. This affirms that the securitisation process is informed by identity politics and political goals (Asderaki & Markozani, 2021; Polko, 2025).

Migration in the Global South is also frequently linked to security discourse. In particular, the host governments in Africa and Asia have occasionally cited “national security” as an excuse to restrict the rights of refugees (Ullah et al., 2020; Chigudu, 2024; Ikanda et al., 2025). The analysis of the Kenyan and Ethiopian approach to Somali asylum seekers explains the fact that they are increasingly being surveilled and portrayed as potential Islamist sympathizers (Audette et al., 2020; Ikanda et al., 2025). In contrast, several scholars argue that presenting a refugee influx as a humanitarian rather than a security crisis can garner international support (Betts & Collier, 2017; Masterson & Lehmann, 2020; Jumbert et al., 2023). This creates a dialectical push-and-pull situation. Accordingly, there exists a dynamic tension in the foreground since accentuating security may create resource openings (global aid promises) and allow the legitimization of hard-liner policies (Huysmans, 2006; Pasha, 2021).

State responses to forced migration

The literature on refugee policy by host states emphasises that policy decisions are shaped by a balanced combination of security, economic and normative considerations (Thielemann, 2004; Taha, 2019; Lee, 2021). Salehyan and Savun (2024) observe that a tension is inherent in integration and refugee admissions policies, with the implication that once states admit a large number, they are expected to exert pressure to curb benefits, which results in the restriction of integration policies. These policies are influenced by the commitment of international organizations, including the United Nations conventions, aid and incentives from foreign governments and local government decisions. For instance, in Liberal democratic states, legal frameworks are often employed for fair hearings, whereas in more authoritarian states, governments frequently use administrative orders or deportation instead (Anderson, 2013). Thus, some refugee-hosting countries adopt a strategic humanitarian approach, which involves admitting refugees primarily to project a humanitarian image globally, while limiting the extent to which refugees can be involved and integrated into society (Schwartz & Steinhilper, 2020; Salehyan & Savun, 2024).

Most of the Middle Eastern host states are not signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention, until 2015–2022, when Iraq and Yemen joined as members (Rasmussen, 2024). In reality, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey admit and manage refugees using temporary or ad hoc frameworks. By partnering with the United Nations agencies like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Jordan has been able to provide services and run camps for refugees, helping the country keep a good humanitarian reputation (Jaber & Nashwan, 2022; Turner, 2023). Meanwhile, both Jordan and Lebanon have tried to keep Syrians from being integrated and becoming permanent residents, classifying them as temporary guests and placing tight restrictions on Syrian workers (Wali, 2021; Şahin-Mencütek & Yılmaz-Elmas, 2024). Literature focusing on refugee management in the Middle East often discusses the use of geographic restrictions, refugee camps, aid that relies on international donors and securitised rhetoric (Al-Dajani et al., 2023; Pasha, 2021; Fakhoury & Chatty, 2025).

Securitisation in Jordan

Jordan has been a subject of examination in various research works. Pasha (2021) notes that Jordan's policies for Syrian refugees are described as "securitised humanitarianism" because, on the one hand, refugees receive humanitarian support, but on the other, they are restricted in their movement and given security screening. Since incidents such as the Rukban incident and the increasing presence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Jordan's discourse on security has become more prominent (Al Sabaileh, 2019; Pasha, 2021). According to Turner (2023), refugee recognition in Jordan is strongly influenced by politics, as most Syrians are denied formal refugee status and rights. Civil society research (UNHCR, 2022; Segnana et al., 2024) supports the view that Jordanian citizens perceive refugees as a source of competition for jobs and government help, which further justifies restrictive policies (Woldemariam & Pacificque, 2024). Based on media analyses, the Jordanian state media portray refugees as victims in need of support in one moment, while also painting them as a security threat in the next (McCann et al., 2023). Existing scholarship suggests that Jordan walks a fine line. It seeks to be perceived as a generous host and frontline state bearing regional burdens, but it also fears domestic instability and the risks of extremism. The securitisation framework helps dissect these competing discourses. What remains underexplored is precisely how the securitisation process, from elite framing to policy action, has played out *on the ground* in Jordan with regard to the Syrian crisis. This study fills that gap by using interview data to chart the dynamics of securitisation and public response in Jordan from 2012 onward.

Method and study area

The securitisation of the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan is a complex social and political phenomenon that cannot be fully understood through a single methodological lens and requires gathering and analysing qualitative and quantitative survey and interview data individually and subsequently combining them at the interpretive level. The integration of quantitative and qualitative methods, therefore, enhances analytical depth, validity and theoretical alignment with securitisation theory. So this study employs a qualitatively dominant mixed-methods design, justified by the discursive nature of securitisation theory and the study's focus on explaining how and why the Syrian refugee crisis is framed as a security threat in Jordan. The quantitative strand (questionnaire survey) is also assigned a secondary priority and is used to supplement and validate the qualitative findings by measuring the extent to which securitisation narratives resonate with the public

Phase 1 - Qualitative strand (Interview)

The qualitative aspect explored the discourse of constructing and institutionalising securitisation among political elites, security agencies and media actors. A total of 20 sample key informants, chosen through purposive sampling, were then interviewed in depth from mid-2023 to early 2024. Among the participants were representatives from the Jordanian government (Ministry of Interior, planning bodies and security agencies), international organisations (UNHCR, IOM, UNRWA), local NGOs, academic institutions and journalists (Alshreifaf, 2023). Interviews were conducted in English and Arabic and were tape-recorded and transcribed.

After conducting NVivo coding and thematic coding, the inductive (emerging category) and deductive (grounded in securitisation theory) strategies were followed. Codes included securitising actors, speech acts, perceived threats, extraordinary measures, as well as audience responses. The reliability of inter-coder was achieved by the independent coding of a few transcripts by two researchers. It was this strand that facilitated the identification of core narratives, policy framings and securitisation moves (Pasha, 2021).

Phase 2 - Quantitative strand (Questionnaire)

To balance the elite-based narratives, a statistically designed questionnaire was administered to respondents (n = 100), with half being Jordanian nationals (n = 50) and the other half comprising Syrian refugees living in host communities and camps (n = 50). It employed stratified sampling, ensuring representation across regions (Amman, Irbid, Mafraq, Zarqa and camp settings). A self-developed questionnaire was administered on a 5-point Likert scale. Initially, a pilot study was conducted to assess the clarity and reliability of the questionnaire. Its internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with all constructs exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory reliability. Trends were summarised using descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, standard deviations). Differences in terms of demographic factors (age, gender) and the identification of predictors influencing the securitisation acceptance were assessed through inferential tests (t-tests, ANOVA and regression model) (Salehyan & Savun, 2024; Polko, 2025). As more securitisation begins to recognise the fact that audience acceptance is part of the negotiation process and can be partial, the application of large-scale samples is no longer considered necessary to make any significant quantitative inquiry (Polko, 2025). As a result, a sample of 100 respondents was deemed sufficient to represent the changes in perceived economic, social and security threats. This small sample is therefore a methodologically sound and contextually suitable balance between the feasibility and the analytical rigour.

Ethical statement

Before collecting data, ethical clearance had been obtained from the respective authority. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and confidentiality was maintained. Anonymisation of the interviewees was imposed (participants) and privacy of the survey respondents was anonymised (de-identified survey respondents). Due to the sensitive nature of security factors associated with refugees, data storage and reporting are conducted under strict ethical guidelines (UNHCR, 2022; Amnesty International, 2024).

Results and discussion

Table 1 and Figure 1 below summarise the main themes, sub-themes and their roles. However, audience acceptance was partial, constrained by humanitarian norms and local variations, which are explored together with the survey results in the quantitative section.

Table 1. Themes, Sub-themes and illustrative evidence of securitised humanitarianism in Jordan

Theme	Sub-themes	Key findings	Illustrative quote / Evidence	Policy / Outcome
Securitizing actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political leaders & government Security agencies Media (state, private, social) International organizations & donors 	Leaders framed refugees as a security priority; security agencies stressed extremist threats; media amplified mixed images; international actors reinforced narratives through aid conditionality	<i>“The intelligence services were clear; allowing unchecked flows could bring fighters or arms into the country.”</i>	Creation of SRAD; border militarization; media securitisation; donor-driven security discourse
Securitisation moves (Threat frames)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic burden Security threat Social & cultural disruption 	Refugees framed as draining resources, linked to terrorism/crime and disrupting cultural cohesion	<i>“The perceived threat that stood out most prominently was the possibility of the infiltration of extremist groups among the refugees.”</i> <i>“During parliamentary sessions, lawmakers often made the case that assisting refugees should be considered a matter of national security.”</i>	Work restrictions; biometric screening; camp segregation; narrative of cultural “otherness”
Speech acts and narratives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal speeches Parliamentary debates Media campaigns International & community forums 	Security discourse repeated at national, community and international levels; global platforms reinforced pressure on Jordan	<i>“Refugee camps became semi-permanent cities with tight controls—curfews, guards, exit permits.”</i>	Security-oriented framing institutionalized; local forums spread national security logics
Extraordinary measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Border restrictions Refugee camps Budget allocation Controlled integration & deportation 	Border closures & biometric controls; highly securitised camps; international funding tied to security; conditional integration	<i>“Although Jordanians mostly agreed that security was</i>	Borders fortified; Za’atari & Azraq camps; security-driven aid flows; limited integration policies
Audience acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public in north Public in south/central 	Majority public acceptance, especially in north; civil society resisted but weak;	<i>“Although Jordanians mostly agreed that security was</i>	Legitimized government policies; weak opposition;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Civil society & NGOs ▪ Local communities 	<p>communities showed mixed resentment and solidarity</p>	<p><i>necessary, there seems to be a strong sense of caring for those affected.”</i></p>	<p>dual narrative of fear & compassion</p>
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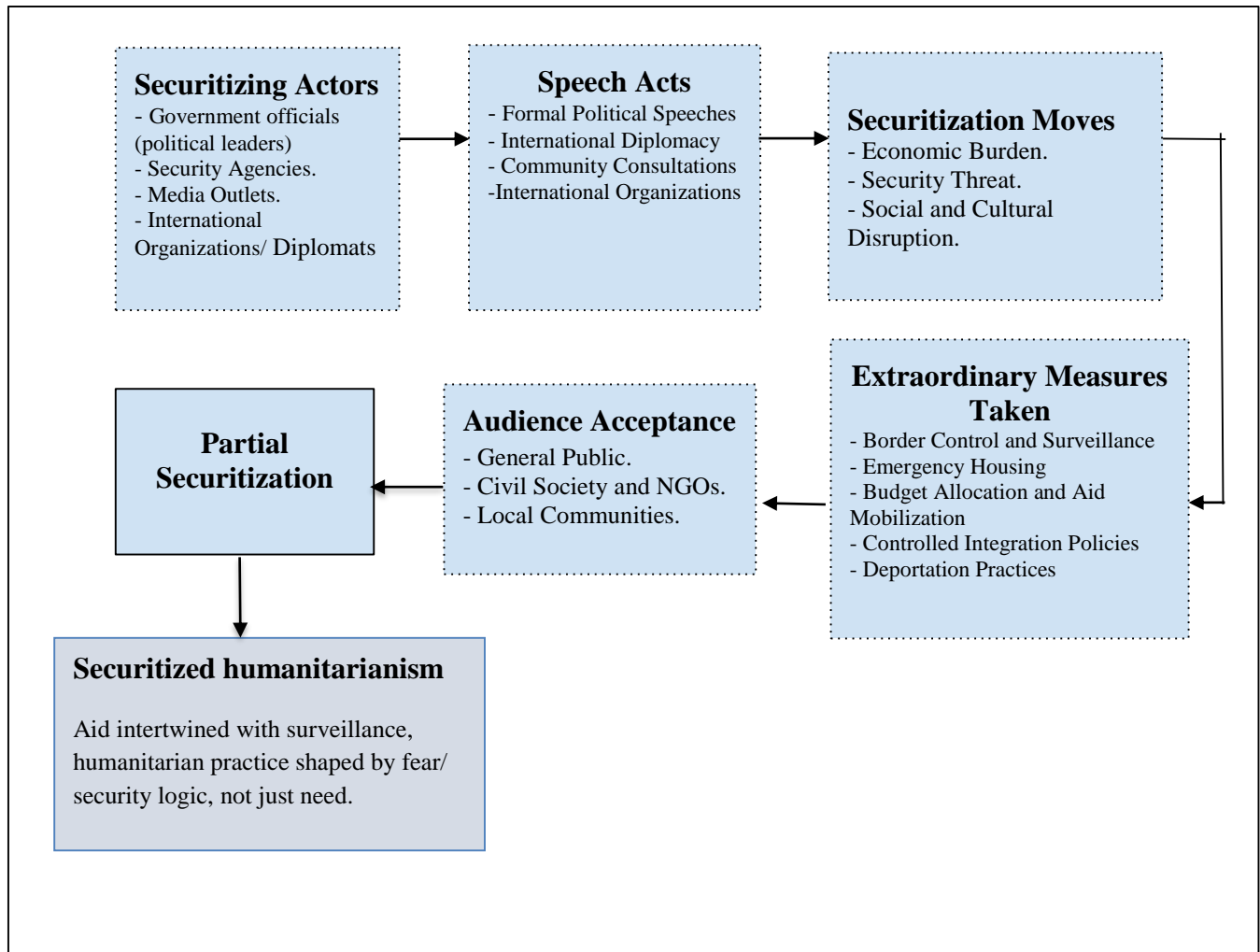


Figure 1. Map of partial securitisation in Jordan’s response to the Syrian refugee

Qualitative analysis

Interview data reveal a structured securitisation of the Syrian refugee issue in Jordan. The findings are organized into five themes: (1) *Securitizing Actors* (who frames refugees as threats), (2) *Securitisation Moves* (dominant threat frames used), (3) *Speech Acts and Narratives* (forms of communication and discourse), (4) *Extraordinary Measures Taken* (policies and actions implemented) and (5) *Audience Acceptance* (public and social responses).

a) Theme 1: Securitizing actors

Political Leaders and Government - Jordanian leaders had been instrumental in the smooth application of presenting the existence of the Syrian refugees as a national security issue. Starting with the crisis, the Royal Court, various ministries and parliamentarians have been emphasising that the management of refugees is a strategic priority. King Abdullah II frequently referred to Jordan as a “frontline state”, with his efforts focused on reconciling humanitarian obligations with security interests. To systematise such a framing, the Syrian Refugee Affairs Directorate (SRAD) agencies were established, thereby situating the logic of refugee governance within the framework of a larger state-based security.

Security Agencies (Military, Intelligence) - The military and intelligence services have solidified this discourse through their current operational practices. The issues of extremist infiltration, weapons smuggling and terrorism highlighted in these institutions have identified the refugee camp as a “high-risk zone”. There had been extensive reports of border screening, surveillance posts and patrols related to counter-terrorism. One of the participants stated, “*The intelligence services were clear; allowing unchecked flows could bring fighters or arms into the country*”. These measures gave political speech a tone of genuineness and authorised unprecedented limitations.

Media outlets (State and Social) - Media outlets acted as essential conduits of securitisation. The narratives by the state-controlled media mostly repeat those of the officially voiced statements, often linking refugees to criminality or terrorism. Standalone sources occasionally bring humanitarian plights into the limelight, although they often have a slant towards conflict-fragmenting reporting. On social media, they spread memes and narratives about job competitions or crimes, thus exaggerating their sense of insecurity. Media channels in general convey and acclimatize the discourse of securitisation to the masses.

International Organizations and Diplomats - Indirectly, the contribution by external actors led to securitisation. United Nations agencies plus non-governmental organisations focus on humanitarian needs; however, they also allude to security risks to rationalise the assistance, building support for securitised humanitarianism. The forums of donor conferences are leveraged by Jordan as a platform through which the dangers of terrorism spillover and regional instability are addressed in an effort to raise funds. As one participant commented, “*Even reports about refugee hardship mentioned ISIS and Al-Qaeda, which fed back into how locals saw the refugees*”. In turn, this results in humanitarian assistance and security becoming increasingly interdependent in the loop of international assistance.

Taken together, these findings identify political leaders, security agencies, media outlets and international organizations as securitizing actors in the sense defined by the Copenhagen School, actively constructing the refugee issue as an existential concern requiring exceptional governance responses.

b) Theme 2: Securitisation moves (Threat framing)

Interviews showed that three main securitisation strategies in terms of which Syrian refugees were portrayed as an existential threat to Jordan, namely: economic burden, security threat and cultural disruption. These approaches to politics and policy-making often overlapped and supported each other in a reciprocal manner within the political discourse and the policy-making process.

Economic Burden - The refugees were consistently portrayed as placing a significant financial burden on Jordan's fragile economy and limited resources. The respondents cited employment, housing, water, electricity and infrastructure as areas of pressure. With the help of this framing, restrictions on the issuance of work permits to refugees were justified and unemployment and fiscal deficits were promoted as a national threat. With the conflation of the existence of refugees and economic pressure, authorities reoriented humanitarian management as a security issue that would undermine the stability of the state.

Security Threat - A second framing equated refugees with being terrorists and criminals. One of the recurrent motifs of security discourse was the threat of extremists infiltrating it by way of refugee migration, with references to local unrest and single violent acts. According to one interviewee: " *The perceived threat that stood out most prominently was the possibility of the infiltration of extremist groups among the refugees*". This framing makes extraordinary measures absolutely justified, such as biometric checks, strict border control and camp blockades. Social and Cultural Disruption.

Social and Cultural Disruption - Refugees were often represented as culturally different and perceived as social troublemakers. Possibly, the media and authorities said that the population would be unbalanced in terms of demographics, the social bond would be more fragile and the family would continue to approach polygamy and related practices. These stories reinforced the notion of otherness and legitimized the policy of segregation between refugee camps and urban areas. One of the participants pointed out that " *the cultural difference in some practices, such as polygamy, affects the family structure in Jordan*." The securitisation and correlation of cultural distance with instability in Jordan penetrated the economic and security perspective to include the social fabric of the country. This multi-dimensional framing closely tracks patterns found in other contexts (Asderaki & Markozani, 2021; Pasha, 2021), further suggesting the embeddedness of securitised humanitarianism in refugee-hosting discourse.

From a securitisation theory perspective, these threat framings function as securitizing moves that designate refugees as existential threats to key referent objects, including economic stability, social cohesion and national security. By framing refugee presence as a multidimensional threat, political and institutional actors sought to legitimize the elevation of refugee governance from the realm of normal politics to that of security politics.

c) Theme 3: Speech acts and narratives

Securitisation was promulgated by the use of speech acts. According to the interviews, there were three main modalities, which include official speeches, local consultations and international advocacy.

Official Speeches and Media Campaigns - The use of securitizing language was constantly evident among the top officials as they had to conduct press conferences, sit in Parliament and appear on television. The heads of the Minister of Interior and Gendarmerie often related the risk of terrorism along the border areas with refugees and parliament members conceptualized aid to refugees as a national security concern. The urgency with which international aid is presented to the state was amplified by the Jordanian diplomats at international arenas, especially at the Brussels Syria Conference and the UN General Assembly where they emphasized the heavy security cost the state has to bear. These acts of speech have consistently represented refugees as a floating menace that should be dealt with without any further delay.

Community Consultations and Local Forums - These occur simultaneously at the national scale, aiming to encourage citizens to understand the frameworks and context of institutional reforms. Securitizing language could sometimes dominate dissent trails and local fora in refugee host governorates, including Irbid, Mafraq and Zarqa. The participants also noted that national narratives were operationalized by representatives of the government in accordance with the language of the community so that the process of surveillance and restrictions would be justified with references to territory-specific issues concerning jobs, shelter, and safety. These localized speech acts made securitisation a reality for the communities most impacted.

International Organizations and Reports Sedimentary - Though independent agencies of the UN and Non-Governmental Organization did not publish any direct securitizing speech acts, their reports helped implicitly influence securitisation. The most common way of shedding light on refugee hardship was with the help of international advocacy; every mention about the need to use fraud, crime, or extremism by the Jordanian officials was selectively used to justify their security claims. One interviewee said: "*Even UNHCR reports on rights were framed locally as challenges to Jordan's security policies*". International communication, therefore, cuts back to the domestic discourse, which shifts the justification of security practices.

These communicative practices correspond to what securitisation theory conceptualizes as speech acts, through which political authority and legitimacy are mobilized to justify extraordinary policy responses beyond routine administrative procedures.

d) Theme 4: Extraordinary measures taken

The reaction of Jordan to the flow of refugees went even further than the standards of normative policy, including some extraordinary actions that symbolize securitised humanitarianism. The interviews identified four major measures.

Border Control and Security Screening - First, in the past, Jordan kept its borders open (2011-2012) and thousands of Syrians flooded in. However, in the latter part of 2012, the government created severe processing regulations. After the Rukban bombing of 2016, borders were mostly closed and many of the refugees were refused the right to enter. All the measures discussed, such as military patrols, biometric checks and emergency powers, helped to make border closure necessary to combat extremist infiltration.

Refugee Camps and Emergency Housing - The circumstances faced by refugees and daily emergency asylum seekers due to the lack of their own homes. Along with informal settlements (such as Rukban) Jordan created Za'atari (2012), Azraq (2014) and Mrajeeb Al-Fhood (2016). These camps were originally designed as temporary, but soon developed into semi-permanent, closely guarded spaces. Instead of care, there were high fences, military guards, curfews and exit restrictions, leading the participants to refer to the camps as open-air prisons, depicting how humanitarian care was coupled with checklists and seclusion.

Budgeting and Dependence on Donors - The government provided emergency funds and capitalized on international relationships with world organizations like the World Bank, USAID and the Gulf donors. To appeal to donors, refugees were being packaged in strategic terms as a security cost to Jordan's state interests and failure to provide sufficient support would affect Jordan and the entire region. This securitised financial story enabled it to get long-term international support.

Conditional Integration and Deportation - When the Secretary of State deems that effective integration and cooperation could aid efforts to protect the nation's security, amnesty for

illegal immigrants alongside deportation may be provided under certain conditions to U.S. soldiers who served in the Vietnam War. There were reduced labour permits in agriculture and building work, and refugee children were placed in schools through donor-funded schemes. However, interlocutors said that deportations and the refusal of asylum requests have also occurred. This conditional incorporation emphasized securitised humanitarianism: conditioned assistance given in a format of governance. Managing refugees in Jordan follows a similar pattern to that seen in Kenya's emergency camps after 1998 (Githigaro, 2020; Ikanda et al., 2025).

In securitisation terms, these policies represent extraordinary measures, enacted outside the logic of ordinary governance and justified through sustained security framing. Their implementation indicates that securitisation in Jordan moved beyond discourse into concrete institutional practice, albeit in a conditional and selective manner consistent with securitised humanitarianism.

e) Theme 5: Audience acceptance

As the theory of securitisation argues that threat framing should aim and be successful when accepted by the audience, based on the interview data and the surveys conducted to back them, the discourse of securitisation of Jordan was partially successful, however, significantly in terms of acceptance.

Public Support in Host Communities - A large number of Jordanians, particularly those living in the northern governorates most affected by the influx, supported the idea of increased border patrols and limited access to work permits for refugees. The respondents associated such a comity with real sufferings, including unemployment, lack of housing preferences and an unhealthy water supply. According to survey research conducted from 2016 to 2023, such an attitude is widely accepted in the context of security-focused refugee management.

Limited Resistance from Civil Society - Human rights attorneys, nongovernmental organizations and pressure groups denounced deportations and restrictions on asylum and convened forums to pressure governments to observe international law. However, participants observed that these voices were often perceived as elite or foreign, thereby limiting their appeal to the general public.

Mixed Community Reactions - Communities less directly impacted, living in central and southern Jordan, were mostly neutral. To the north, competition in the workplace was also resented; however, it was manifested through solidarity, as evidenced by the practice of taking in refugee families or providing aid. Hospitality cultural disposition cultured the intake of securitisation, which led to an increase in acquiescence and mercy.

Overall Audience Response - The majority of Jordanians have taken securitisation passively, as evident in the fact that there have been no major protests and support against restrictions has been largely muted and ongoing among the population. However, a counter-narrative, focused on kinship, humanitarian responsibility and cultural value, moderated this assimilation, which resulted in a bipolar discourse of fear and care. Several major protests and numerous polls indicating support for stringent immigration rules during a recession suggest that the security frame has gained popularity. Nevertheless, because humanitarian concerns are long-lived, the policy environment affected by security concerns is challenged. This is supported by recent studies that observe that discussing Syrian refugees as a security concern in the Middle East also generates a dual narrative of fear and kindness (Sehli, 2020; Pasha, 2021; Abduljabbar et al., 2025).

Importantly, securitisation theory posits that securitizing moves succeed only when they are accepted by a relevant audience. The findings here indicate partial and differentiated audience acceptance, whereby economic and social threat narratives gained broader resonance than terrorism-related framings. This pattern demonstrates that securitisation in Jordan was negotiated rather than total, reinforcing recent theoretical advances that emphasize selective resonance over unanimous consent.

Guided by securitisation theory, the quantitative analysis examines how securitizing actors deploy speech acts to frame refugees as threats, mobilize extraordinary measures and secure varying degrees of audience acceptance.

Quantitative analysis

Participants' and respondents' profiles - Table 2 summarises the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents, providing important contextual insight into the audience whose perceptions of securitisation are analysed. The sample consisted of 99 valid responses, with one case of missing demographic data. Respondents aged 50 and above were the least represented (13.1%), reflecting the younger and working-age population most directly affected by labour market competition and service pressures associated with refugee hosting. The sample was predominantly male (61.6%), a factor that is analytically relevant given existing research linking perceptions of economic insecurity and security threats to gendered labour market exposure. These demographic characteristics are therefore not merely descriptive but help contextualise why economic and social threat framings may resonate more strongly among respondents.

Normality Test - Table 3 presents the distribution of securitisation responses across varying levels (1.25–4.13), assessed through skewness and kurtosis statistics. Rather than indicating statistical irregularity, the observed variation reflects uneven audience resonance across different securitisation dimensions. The clustering of responses around specific securitisation levels suggests that public acceptance of security framing is not uniform but selectively concentrated. From a theoretical perspective, this supports securitisation scholarship that conceptualises audience acceptance as partial and negotiated, rather than automatic or homogeneous. These findings align with the qualitative results, which demonstrate that elite securitizing narratives are internally coherent but unevenly internalised by different social groups (Abduljabbar et al., 2025).

Table 2. Statistics of demographic variables

		Age group	Percent
N	Valid	50 - above	13.0
		40-49	49.0
		30- 39	17.0
		18- 29	20.0
	Total	99	99.0
	Missing	1	1
		Gender	Percent
N	Valid	Male	61.0
		Female	38.0
	Total	99	99.0
	Missing	1	1

Table 3. Descriptive normality test of securitisation levels in Jordan’s refugee crisis response

Descriptives ^{a,b,c,d,e,f,g}				
	Refugee_Crisis_Jordan		Statistic	Std. Error
Securitisation	1.25	Skewness	.476	.794
		Kurtosis	-2.469	1.587
	1.50	Skewness	.493	.845
		Kurtosis	-1.552	1.741
	1.63	Skewness	1.545	1.225
		Kurtosis	.	.
	1.75	Skewness	-1.207	.913
		Kurtosis	.580	2.000
	1.88	Skewness	.310	.687
		Kurtosis	-1.269	1.334
	2.00	Skewness	.706	.752
		Kurtosis	-.149	1.481
	2.13	Skewness	1.490	.752
		Kurtosis	2.626	1.481
	2.25	Skewness	.705	.845
		Kurtosis	-.930	1.741
	2.38	Skewness	.411	.637
		Kurtosis	.923	1.232
	2.50	Skewness	1.613	.913
		Kurtosis	2.486	2.000
	2.75	Skewness	-.401	.913
		Kurtosis	-2.910	2.000
	2.88	Skewness	.036	1.014
		Kurtosis	-5.795	2.619
	3.00	Skewness	-.764	1.014
		Kurtosis	1.500	2.619
	4.13	Skewness	1.732	1.225
		Kurtosis	.	.

- a. Securitisation is constant when Refugee_Crisis_Jordan = 1.00. It has been omitted.
- b. Securitisation is constant when Refugee_Crisis_Jordan = 2.63. It has been omitted.
- c. Securitisation is constant when Refugee_Crisis_Jordan = 3.38. It has been omitted.
- d. Securitisation is constant when Refugee_Crisis_Jordan = 3.50. It has been omitted.
- e. Securitisation is constant when Refugee_Crisis_Jordan = 3.63. It has been omitted.
- f. Securitisation is constant when Refugee_Crisis_Jordan = 3.75. It has been omitted.
- g. Securitisation is constant when Refugee_Crisis_Jordan = 4.00. It has been omitted.

Table 4 and Figure 2 provide the results of the normality tests and the securitisation level in the response attained in the refugee crisis in Jordan.

Table 4. Tests of normality for securitisation levels in Jordan’s refugee crisis response

		Tests of Normality ^{a,d,e,f,g,h,i}					
Refugee_Crisis_Jordan		Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^b			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Securitisation	1.25	.357	7	.007	.719	7	.006
	1.38	.260	2	.			
	1.50	.191	6	.200 [*]	.925	6	.540
	1.63	.328	3	.	.871	3	.298
	1.75	.253	5	.200 [*]	.854	5	.207
	1.88	.200	10	.200 [*]	.923	10	.378
	2.00	.184	8	.200 [*]	.946	8	.673
	2.13	.216	8	.200 [*]	.867	8	.140
	2.25	.210	6	.200 [*]	.930	6	.582
	2.38	.187	12	.200 [*]	.957	12	.739
	2.50	.262	5	.200 [*]	.833	5	.146
	2.75	.236	5	.200 [*]	.863	5	.241
	2.88	.306	4	.	.777	4	.066
	3.00	.250	4	.	.961	4	.783
	3.13	.260	2	.			
	3.25	.260	2	.			
4.13	.385	3	.	.750	3	.000	

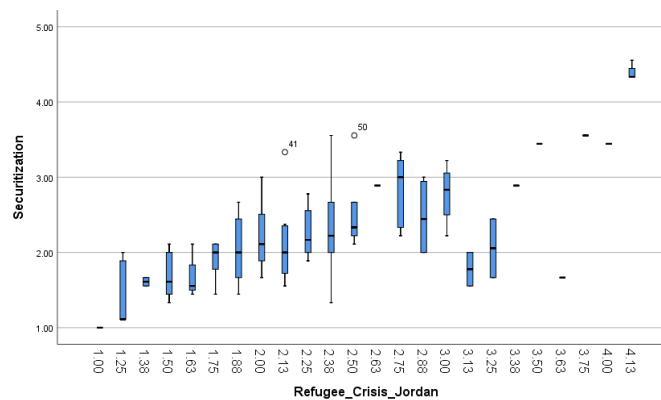


Figure 2. Normality tests of securitisation level in the refugee crisis in Jordan

The normality and distribution diagnostics, here, primarily serve to observe the variation in skewness and kurtosis across securitisation levels, indicating that public responses are not uniformly distributed, but rather clustered around specific dimensions of perceived threat. This uneven distribution reflects differentiated audience resonance, where certain securitizing frames, particularly those related to economic and social pressures, generate stronger and more consistent public alignment than others.

The absence of a symmetrical or normally distributed securitisation response suggests that securitisation in Jordan operates through partial legitimization, with acceptance concentrated around

everyday material concerns rather than existential security threats such as terrorism. Accordingly, the normality results do not merely validate the statistical model, but empirically support the argument that securitisation outcomes are contingent, differentiated and socially mediated, key characteristics of what this study conceptualizes as partial securitised humanitarianism.

Reliability Test - The reliability test (Table 5) shows moderate internal consistency for the variables, with Cronbach’s Alpha values of .700 (Refugee Crisis Jordan, 8 items) and .738 (Securitisation, 9 items).

Table 5. Reliability test

Reliability statistics		
Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
Refugee Crisis Jordan	.700	8
Securitisation	.738	9

Source: Author

Relationship between Refugee Crisis Perceptions and Securitisation - The correlation analysis (Table 6) reveals a strong positive relationship between the two variables (Pearson Correlation = 0.701, $p < 0.01$), where the Regression analysis (Table 7) confirms this significant association ($p < .001$), with both variables influencing each other in a bidirectional manner. These analyses jointly demonstrate a strong and statistically significant association between perceptions of the refugee crisis and support for securitisation in Jordan. These results indicate that heightened perceptions of refugee-related economic and social pressure are systematically linked to increased acceptance of securitizing policies. From a theoretical perspective, this relationship provides empirical support for securitisation theory’s core proposition that perceived threats, rather than objective conditions, shape audience acceptance and legitimize extraordinary measures. The strength of the association suggests that securitisation gains traction primarily when refugee presence is framed in terms of everyday material risks, reinforcing the study’s broader finding that securitisation in Jordan operates through selective and socially mediated resonance rather than automatic or total acceptance.

Table 6. Correlation analysis

Correlations			
		Refugee_Crisis_Jordan	Securitisation
Refugee_Crisis_Jordan	Pearson Correlation	1	.701**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	99	99
Securitisation	Pearson Correlation	.701**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	99	99

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Author

Table 7. Hypothesis by regression

		Correlations	
		Securitisation	Refugee_Crisis_Jordan
Pearson correlation	Securitisation	1.000	.701
	Refugee_Crisis)_Jordan	.701	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Securitisation	.	.000
	Refugee_Crisis_Jordan	.000	.
N	Securitisation	99	99
	Refugee_Crisis_Jordan	99	99

Source: Author

Analysis of ANOVA - The Model Summary (Table 8) indicates a strong predictive model with an R-Square value of .491, meaning 49.1% of the variance in securitisation is explained by the refugee crisis in Jordan. The ANOVA test (Table 9) confirms the model's significance, with a high F-value (93.585) and a p-value of .000, showing that the relationship between the variables is statistically significant. The regression coefficient for Refugee_Crisis_Jordan (.722) is positive and significant (p = .000), indicating that as the refugee crisis intensifies, securitisation levels increase significantly. The confidence interval (.574 to .870) further supports the robustness of this relationship. Collinearity statistics (Tolerance = 1.000, VIF = 1.000) confirm no multicollinearity issues. These findings indicate that perceptions of the refugee crisis explain a significant percentage of the variance in securitisation attitudes. The fact that this relationship is, however, the greatest with the economic and social dimensions rather than with terrorism, supports the suggestion that securitisation in Jordan is incomplete and disproportionate, representing differentiated salience of threats among audiences.

Table 8. Model summary

Model Summary									
Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate	Change statistics				
					R square change	F change	df1	df2	Sig. F change
1	.701 ^a	.491	.486	.51541	.491	93.585	1	97	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Refugee_Crisis_Jordan

Source: Author

Table 9. ANOVA test

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	24.861	1	24.861	93.585	.000 ^b
	Residual	25.768	97	.266		
	Total	50.629	98			

a. Dependent Variable: Securitisation

b. Predictors: (Constant), Refugee_Crisis_Jordan

Coefficients ^a						
Model	Unstandardized coefficients	Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% confidence interval for B	Collinearity statistics

	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower bound	Upper bound	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	.606	.177		3.423	.001	.255	.958		
Refugee_Crisis_Jordan	.722	.075	.701	9.674	.000	.574	.870	1.00	1.00

Source: Author

Public Opinion and Media Acceptance - The survey highlights the perceptions of people regarding the dangers posed by the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan (Table 10). The results revealed varying degrees of concern across different risk classes. The emergence of social unrest and economic instability became even more pronounced issues of concern, with 58% and 57% of the respondents, respectively, expressing concern. 39% of participants marked the crime risk, and only 24% of participants found the terrorism risk to be threatening. Other risk dimensions were also perceived as minimal, with only 8% of the participants reporting apprehension. These results suggest that the meaning of the economic and social risks attracts the resonance of more actors, reflecting the state discourse that puts refugees in the conceptualization as a cost and a factor of social destabilization (Balzacq et al., 2015; Polko, 2025).

Table 10. Public opinion and media acceptance

Q6 - Crime risk					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Not selected	61	61.0	61.0	61.0
	Selected	39	39.0	39.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	
Q6 - Terrorism risk					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Not selected	76	76.0	76.0	76.0
	Selected	24	24.0	24.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	
Q6 - Social unrest risk					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Not selected	42	42.0	42.0	42.0
	Selected	58	58.0	58.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	
Q6 - Economic instability risk					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Not selected	43	43.0	43.0	43.0
	Selected	57	57.0	57.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	
Q6 - Other risk					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Not selected	92	92.0	92.0	92.0
	Selected	8	8.0	8.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author

Integrated mixed-methods findings: Selective audience acceptance and partial securitisation

This study integrates a convergent mixed-methods design, revealing both convergence and divergence in the securitisation of Syrian refugees in Jordan. Qualitative interviews show that political elites, security institutions and media actors emphasize economic, social and terrorism-related threats, while survey results demonstrate selective audience reception of these narratives. Convergence is evident in the strong public resonance of economic and social threat framings, with majorities expressing concern over economic instability (57%) and social unrest (58%), confirming that securitisation is most effective when linked to everyday material pressures. In contrast, divergence emerges in relation to terrorism-based securitisation, as public concern remains comparatively low (24%), indicating that elite securitizing moves do not automatically translate into audience acceptance. Comparative analysis further shows that Jordanian citizens exhibit stronger endorsement of securitisation narratives than Syrian refugees, reflecting their differing positionalities within the securitisation process. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that securitisation in Jordan operates as a partial, negotiated and socially differentiated process, in which elite narratives gain legitimacy primarily through host-community acceptance, thereby reinforcing the concept of securitised humanitarianism rather than a uniformly accepted security regime.

Taken together, the quantitative findings move beyond descriptive reporting by empirically demonstrating how securitisation functions at the level of audience reception. The uneven distribution of threat perceptions, coupled with group-level differences between Jordanian citizens and Syrian refugees, confirms that securitisation in Jordan is selective, negotiated and socially differentiated. These results complement the qualitative analysis by showing that elite securitizing moves gain legitimacy primarily through economic and social framings, thereby reinforcing the study's central argument concerning partial securitised humanitarianism.

Discussions

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods design to examine how the Syrian refugee crisis has been securitised in Jordan and how securitisation narratives are produced, received, and legitimized. The findings demonstrate that securitisation emerges through the interaction between top-down framing and bottom-up audience resonance. Together, the qualitative and quantitative results show that Jordan has engaged in a partial and negotiated securitisation, in which restrictive security practices coexist with humanitarian commitments to balance domestic pressures and international expectations.

Partial Securitisation and Mixed-Methods Integration - The qualitative results show that political leaders, security agencies and media actors consistently framed refugees as economic, social and security threats, thereby legitimizing measures such as biometric enrolment, camp militarization and border controls. However, the quantitative findings reveal that these securitizing moves were not uniformly accepted by the public. While economic (57%) and social (58%) threat framings generated substantial resonance, terrorism-based narratives were far less persuasive (24%). The strong correlation between perceptions of the refugee crisis and support for securitisation ($r = 0.701$, $p < 0.001$), combined with variation across threat categories, explains why securitisation succeeded selectively: it aligned most closely with everyday material concerns experienced by host communities.

This pattern clarifies how the two strands of evidence converge and diverge. They converge in demonstrating the salience of economic and social burden narratives, confirming that securitisation is most effective when framed around labour competition, service pressure and social stability. They diverge in relation to terrorism framing, where elite emphasis did not translate into equivalent public concern. Rather than indicating inconsistency, this divergence is analytically significant: it shows that securitisation in Jordan operates through negotiated audience acceptance, not automatic compliance. In this sense, securitisation is neither absent nor total, but conditional and uneven, consistent with the logic of partial securitisation.

The coexistence of restrictive security measures with continued service provision education, healthcare and urban residence, further explains why securitisation took a hybrid form. Jordan's governance approach reflects securitised humanitarianism (Pasha, 2021), in which humanitarian practices are preserved not in opposition to security, but as part of a strategy to maintain legitimacy domestically and internationally. This duality allows the state to exercise control while sustaining its image as a responsible humanitarian host.

Integrated Synthesis: Literature, Theory and Policy Implications - These findings align with and extend existing literature on migration securitisation, which shows that migration is typically framed as a multidimensional threat encompassing economic, social and security dimensions (Edmond, 2025; Abduljabbar et al., 2025). Unlike many Western contexts where securitisation is often institutionalized with limited contestation, the Jordanian case demonstrates that securitisation can remain politically effective even under selective audience acceptance. This supports recent theoretical advances emphasizing negotiated resonance rather than unanimous consent (Gabbay, 2023). The findings also contribute to debates on the simultaneous operation of securitisation and desecuritisation. The persistence of humanitarian counter-narratives alongside restrictive practices illustrates what Secen (2022) and Dimari et al. (2025) describe as the coexistence of exclusionary and inclusionary logics. Jordan's economic vulnerability, dependence on donor assistance and regional insecurity further explain why securitisation unfolds within constrained political-economic conditions, reinforcing arguments that securitisation must be analysed within specific governance contexts (Fakhoury & Chatty, 2025).

From a theoretical standpoint, the study advances securitisation theory in three key ways. First, it demonstrates that securitisation can succeed politically through partial audience acceptance, refining assumptions about legitimacy formation. Second, it shows that risk framing produces unequal salience, with economic and social threats outweighing terrorism in shaping public attitudes. Third, by integrating elite discourse with audience perception, the study reinforces the value of analysing securitisation as a dynamic interaction between top-down and bottom-up processes. The concept of securitised humanitarianism is thus validated as a useful framework for explaining hybrid governance outcomes.

These insights also carry important policy implications. While security-oriented framing can generate short-term legitimacy, the dominance of economic and social burden narratives risks entrenching xenophobia and undermining integration (Alshreif, 2023; Abduljabbar et al., 2025). Survey evidence suggests that policies addressing labour inclusion, equitable service provision and community-level engagement may foster greater social cohesion than reliance on security rhetoric alone. For international donors, the findings highlight the need to recognize how aid conditionalities shape host-state discourse and to design assistance mechanisms that strengthen refugee protection rather than reinforce exclusionary governance regimes (Sarker, 2023).

Limitations and future research

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The survey sample (n = 100) limits generalisability, and the study focuses exclusively on Jordan. Comparative research involving Lebanon, Turkey, and other refugee-hosting states would help assess whether partial securitisation represents a broader regional pattern (Lucchesi & Cerase, 2023). Future longitudinal studies could examine how shifts in conflict dynamics or donor fatigue reshape securitisation over time (Stepka, 2022; Soliman et al., 2023). Incorporating refugee-centred perspectives would further illuminate how securitisation is experienced at the grassroots level and how counter-narratives emerge.

Conclusion

This study examined how the Syrian refugee crisis has been securitised in Jordan and how such securitisation has shaped state responses. Using a convergent mixed-methods design, the findings show that elite political and security actors framed refugees primarily as economic, social and security risks, legitimizing extraordinary governance measures. However, public acceptance of these narratives was selective, with economic and social framings resonating more strongly than terrorism-related claims. This uneven audience reception demonstrates that securitisation in Jordan has been partial rather than total. Conceptually, the study advances securitisation theory by showing that security governance can be sustained through negotiated and differentiated audience acceptance, rather than unanimous consent. By integrating elite discourse with public perceptions, the analysis confirms the relevance of securitised humanitarianism as a framework for understanding hybrid policy outcomes in refugee-hosting states, where restrictive security practices coexist with ongoing humanitarian commitments. From a policy perspective, the results demonstrate the risks of overreliance on security-oriented narratives, which may reinforce social exclusion and xenophobia. Simultaneously, they underscore the importance of addressing economic and social burden through equitable service provision and inclusive policies. For international donors, the study suggests the need to recognise how aid relationships reframe state-host discourse and to design support mechanisms that strengthen protection norms rather than entrench exclusionary governance.

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