

## Refugee Management in the National Security Dimension: A Comparative Study in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand

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### ABSTRACT

*This study comparatively analyzes refugee management models in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand – three key ASEAN frontline states that have not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention. It investigates how this humanitarian issue has been securitized and integrated into their national security frameworks. Refugee movements, dominated by populations like the Rohingya, have evolved from a humanitarian crisis into a regional security challenge involving sovereignty, border control, human smuggling, and domestic social cohesion risks. Due to the lack of a binding international legal structure, these countries rely on ad hoc and discretionary approaches, dictated by internal political and geopolitical calculations. Using a qualitative-comparative methodology based on securitization theory, the research reveals significant variation in implementation. Indonesia attempts to balance humanitarian efforts (via IOM/UNHCR) with sovereignty concerns, viewing management as an issue of maritime security and public order. Conversely, Malaysia demonstrates the highest level of securitization, explicitly linking refugees to immigration violations and economic/health threats, with harsh law enforcement as the primary measure. Thailand employs a 'pragmatic border control' model, treating refugees as a short-term immigration matter susceptible to domestic military and political interests. This demonstrates a dominant security logic prioritizing national interests and rationalizing the rejection of non-refoulement. The main conclusion is that the failure to establish a binding regional burden-sharing mechanism encourages states to shift responsibility to the security domain, exacerbating refugee vulnerability and empowering smugglers. An urgent ASEAN policy shift toward a legal-institutional protection framework is required.*

**Keywords:** Comparative Study, National Security, Refugee

### Introduction

The phenomenon of forced migration has transformed into one of the most pressing geopolitical and humanitarian challenges of the 21st century. Data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) consistently indicate an escalation in the number of individuals forced to flee their homes due to conflict, persecution, human rights violations, and climate change. At the end of a given year, global statistics frequently surpass 100 million people recorded as refugees, asylum seekers, or Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), representing an unprecedented crisis of protection.

Southeast Asia, as a region geographically prone to internal and border instability, is inherently on the frontline of this crisis. The region features vital maritime and land routes, which are often exploited by human smuggling networks to facilitate the movement of refugees. The countries central to this study – Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand – hold pivotal and strategic roles within the Asian migration corridor. Malaysia, in particular, has long been a primary destination for economic migrants and refugees, while Indonesia and Thailand function as significant transit or recipient countries, especially in the context of the Rohingya crisis. The crisis

centered in Myanmar is not merely an internal issue for one nation but has evolved into a regional concern, highlighting the fragility of migration management within ASEAN. The mass exodus of this ethnic minority, peaking in recent years, has compelled thousands to undertake perilous sea journeys, often resulting in them being stranded in the waters of these three countries.

According to UNHCR data, the number of refugees and asylum seekers continues to increase, creating complex management challenges for host countries. Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand are geographically and historically located on major migration routes in the region, placing them as transit countries and, in some cases, destination countries for refugee populations, particularly those fleeing the Rohingya crisis and other regional conflicts (Adhaniah, 2021). Despite bearing this humanitarian burden, these three countries are not parties (non-signatories) to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. This non-signatory status fundamentally shapes their domestic legal frameworks, where refugee issues are often addressed under the lens of immigration law, rather than international protection law. Consequently, there has been a shift in the narrative linking refugee issues to national security dimensions, both in the traditional sense (sovereignty, border security) and non-traditional (threats to health, economic stability, and potential human trafficking).

The involvement of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand in refugee handling rests upon a unique and problematic legal foundation. Formally, these three nations are non-signatories to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The direct consequence of this status is the absence of binding international legal obligations to provide formal protection and rights to refugees at the domestic level. This creates a deep 'protection gap,' where refugees are legally identified and treated as irregular migrants or "Undocumented Immigrants" (PATI) under domestic immigration laws (Hourdequin, 2008).

This shift in legal categorization automatically triggers a governmental response dominated by a security approach. When refugees are categorized as a threat to sovereignty, public order, or immigration law, their handling shifts from the domain of humanitarianism and human rights protection to the domain of law enforcement and border control (Kudo, 2013). Therefore, this comparative study becomes crucial for analyzing how each non-signatory state, amidst global humanitarian pressure and moral obligation, formulates policies that often reflect National Security priorities over protection principles. This research aims to dissect the nuances of these policies and their implications for forced migration management in Southeast Asia. Stemming from the context of a protection crisis exacerbated by non-signatory status and the securitization of the issue, this comparative research posits three core questions that underpin the analysis.

First, how are the specific legal and policy frameworks for refugee handling in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand structured and implemented? This question demands a detailed analysis of the formal legal architecture (Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 and the informal one (immigration or ministerial regulations) in force, as well as the practical roles of respective law enforcement institutions (military, police, immigration).

Second, to what extent is the National Security dimension articulated and implemented in these policies across the three countries, and how does this emphasis affect the treatment of refugees? This question will dissect the securitization discourse: is the focus on traditional security (sovereignty in Malaysia and borders in Thailand) or is it shifting toward non-traditional security (health and economic management in Indonesia)?

Third, through a comparative study, what are the fundamental similarities and differences in the refugee handling approaches across the three countries, and how do these comparative implications affect the overall effectiveness of handling and regional security stability? The core of this research is comparing policy models (structured versus ad hoc) and their impact on regional human smuggling networks and the humanitarian burden in the region. This research has a Dual Objective: (1) To provide a systematic comparative analysis of the refugee handling policy models, identifying legal, institutional, and operational variables in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. (2) To explain the critical dynamics between the humanitarian issue (refugees) and the perception of security threats, thereby mapping the extent to which humanitarian principles can be integrated into the national security framework of non-signatory states.

The Significance of the Research is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it contributes to the literature on regional security studies and forced migration management by providing a comparative framework focused on securitization in non-Western states. Practically, the research findings are expected to offer constructive input for policymakers in the three countries to review the balance between the enforcement of national sovereignty and the fulfillment of humanitarian obligations. Furthermore, this research provides a strong analytical foundation to support ASEAN's regional policy harmonization efforts in responding to future forced migration crises, aiming to create more effective, just, and stable handling for all parties.

## **Methods Research**

This research employs a qualitative approach utilizing a comparative study design focused on policy analysis (Mahoney, 2007). The comparative design is chosen to systematically identify, compare, and contrast the legal frameworks, institutional structures, and implementation practices in the handling of refugees in three non-signatory states to the 1951 Refugee Convention: Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. This approach allows the researcher to move beyond single-case descriptions and develop a richly nuanced explanation regarding the policy variables (independent variables) that influence the resulting treatment outcomes (dependent variable) within a shared regional context.

The specific research type applied is desk-based research, with the primary methodology being document and literature analysis (Levy, 2007). The data utilized is secondary, encompassing three main categories: (1) Official domestic legal and policy documents, such as Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 (Indonesia), the Immigration Act 1959/63 (Malaysia), and relevant Ministry of Interior regulations governing border camp management (Thailand). (2) Factual reports from key

international and regional organizations, including the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), IOM (International Organization for Migration), and ASEAN. (3) Relevant academic literature, case studies, journal articles, and reports published by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, which offer critical perspectives and field-level implementation data. The use of data source triangulation is essential to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, particularly in verifying the consistency between official policy claims and actual practices on the ground.

The analytical steps comprise: (a) Case Description: presenting a detailed profile of the refugee handling policies and institutions in each country. (b) Core Analysis: applying the securitization framework to critically examine the security discourse. (c) Comparison: conducting structural and functional comparative analysis to clearly identify common patterns and key differences in policy enforcement and security practices. Through this rigorous methodological framework, the research aims to deliver empirically grounded and theoretically significant conclusions regarding forced migration management in Southeast Asia.

## Discussion

This discussion section presents an in-depth analysis of the empirical findings derived from a review of policy documents and literature, focusing primarily on comparing refugee handling models in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. This analysis utilizes the Securitization Theory to identify how the refugee issue is framed as an existential threat, and how that framing influences policy implementation on the ground.

### Indonesia: Structured Humanitarianism and Limited Security

Refugee handling in Indonesia occupies a unique position in Southeast Asia (Ali, et.al., 2016). Although Indonesia maintains its status as a non-signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, the country possesses a domestic legal foundation that explicitly regulates refugee handling procedures through Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 concerning the Handling of Refugees from Foreign Countries (Sumarlan, 2019). This regulation serves as *lex specialis*, significantly differentiating Indonesia from Malaysia and Thailand, where the refugee issue remains entirely subject to repressive immigration laws. Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 does not grant permanent legal status or socio-economic rights (such as the right to work and mobility), but it provides legitimacy to the phases of rescue, temporary accommodation, and reporting mechanisms (Kneebone, 2017).

#### 1. Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016: Procedures and Institutional Structure

Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 establishes structured procedures, starting from the Discovery stage (by the TNI, Polri, or other parties), Temporary Accommodation (managed by Local Governments, with support from IOM and UNHCR), up to Security and Supervision. The key to this regulation lies in the designation of the Coordinating Ministry for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs (Kemenko Polhukam) as the primary coordinator for handling. Placing the coordination function under Kemenko Polhukam—an institution inherently

responsible for state security issues—implicitly indicates that, despite the implementation process being conducted with a humanitarian spirit (especially in the sea rescue phase), the refugee issue is still categorized as having a strategic security dimension.

The role of formal security institutions like the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) and the Indonesian National Police (Polri) is vital, particularly in search and rescue operations in Indonesia's outer waters. Under the principles of the Law of the Sea, saving lives at sea is an obligation, and Indonesian policy consistently adheres to this principle, especially in responding to the Rohingya boat crises. The success of rescue operations, often involving naval vessels and patrol aircraft, demonstrates that the traditional security dimension (maritime defense) is integrated with the humanitarian dimension (saving lives) at the operational level (Sampson, et.al., 2016).

## 2. Limited and Non-Traditional Securitization Dimension

In the context of securitization, refugee handling in Indonesia can be analyzed as a process of limited securitization dominated by non-traditional threats (Tan, 2016). The threats most frequently securitized are:

- Threat to Public Order and Public Health: The concentration of refugees in temporary shelters, particularly in areas like Aceh, Medan, or Makassar, often creates social friction with local communities. Local governments and Immigration frequently frame this issue as a threat to local social stability and order, which then justifies strict surveillance measures and mobility restrictions (Taylor & Rafferty-Brown, 2010).
- Threat of Transnational Crime: The issue of human smuggling and human trafficking is a real threat that is the main focus of Indonesian security agencies. Refugees entering Indonesian territory through illegal channels are viewed as both victims and potential entry vectors for transnational criminal networks. The security focus here is on dismantling smuggling networks, rather than merely detaining the refugees themselves.

Nevertheless, Indonesia avoids the process of hard securitization that regards refugees as an existential threat to national sovereignty or the economy, unlike Malaysia (Prabandari & Adiputera, 2019). Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016, as an official "speech act," attempts to place the issue back into the realm of managed and humanitarian policy, albeit with clear limitations. The role of TNI/Polri in handling tends to be reactive (responding to emergencies and securing assets/people), not proactive (conducting mass arrests or indefinite detention).

### **Malaysia: Hard Security Approach and the Issue of Illegal Workers**

The refugee handling model in Malaysia is the most apparent hard security model in Southeast Asia (Mat, et.al., 2023). Malaysian policy is based on strict non-signatory principles and directly categorizes refugees as Undocumented Foreigners (Pendatang Asing Tanpa Izin - PATI). The legal basis is the Immigration Act 1959/63, a repressive legal instrument that grants full authority to the Malaysian Immigration Department (JIM) and the Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM) to arrest, detain, and deport individuals without valid documents.

### 1. Dominant Immigration Legal Framework (PATI)

In Malaysia, the UNHCR does maintain an office and performs Refugee Status Determination (RSD), but the UNHCR card issued only grants a level of tolerance or exemption from immediate arrest, not recognized legal status or civil rights. Without legal status, refugees are prohibited from working, accessing public education, or subsidized healthcare services (Munir-Asen, 2018). Violations of these prohibitions are considered violations of domestic law, thereby justifying intensive law enforcement operations (Kaur, 2007).

The PATI concept is the core of securitization in Malaysia. By identifying refugees as "illegal," the state has performed the most definitive speech act, transforming a humanitarian issue into one of domestic criminality and a threat to legal sovereignty. Consequently, refugee handling policy effectively becomes a policy of detention and expulsion. The use of immigration detention centers, which are frequently reported to violate human rights standards, is the clearest manifestation of this hard security approach (Haron, et.al., 2023).

## **Economic and Sovereignty Securitization**

The securitization process in Malaysia is rooted in two primary existential threats:

### 1. Economic Threat

Malaysia, as an industrial nation heavily reliant on low-cost foreign labor, frames the presence of refugees as a direct threat to economic stability and the formal labor market. The dominant argument is that refugees:

- a. **Undermine the Labor Market:** They are willing to work in the informal sector at wages significantly below the minimum standard, depressing wages for local and legal migrant workers.
- b. **Fiscal Burden:** Although refugees cannot officially access public services, claims that they burden the national budget and infrastructure are often used to justify mass arrest and detention operations.

This economic securitization justifies massive raid operations and a zero-tolerance policy against PATI. Securitizing actors, particularly the Ministry of Home Affairs and JIM, frequently employ the narrative that refugees are "a cause of social disorder and financial loss," necessitating emergency action (Ahmad, 2016).

### 2. Sovereignty and Demographic Threat

Beyond the economy, Malaysia is also highly sensitive to issues of sovereignty and demographic control (Nazri, 2019). The large influx of refugees, particularly those deemed to belong to specific ethnic groups, is securitized as a threat to the national socio-political order and demographic composition. This policy also involves shifting full responsibility for refugee affairs to the UNHCR, a strategy to assert that the issue is an international, not national, responsibility, thereby avoiding protection obligations.

In summary, the Malaysian model is the most extreme implementation of securitization theory: a humanitarian issue is reduced to an immigration

enforcement issue, justifying the mobilization of security resources (detention, patrols) to defend sovereignty and economic stability deemed existential.

### **Thailand: Camp Management and Geopolitical Transit Policy**

Thailand has a long history of refugee handling, especially concerning conflicts in neighboring countries, such as Cambodia and Myanmar (McConnachie, 2012). The Thai model is an ad hoc and camp-based management model, heavily influenced by geopolitical border policies.

#### **a. Ad Hoc Legal Framework and Military-Interior Control**

Like Indonesia and Malaysia, Thailand is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention. Refugee handling is primarily governed by Ministry of Interior Regulations, which grant authority to the Border Security Committee and local authorities to manage refugee camps. Due to its ad hoc and internal regulatory nature, the protection offered is highly situational and tied to border security conditions (Lee, 2014).

The principle of non-refoulement in Thailand is implemented de facto through executive discretion and informal agreements, not based on national law. Refugees residing in border camps (e.g., along the Thai-Myanmar border) are under strict surveillance by the military and appointed civilian authorities. Their status is that of temporary residents with the expectation of being quickly repatriated once conditions in their home country improve. This policy is explicitly designed to prevent integration or permanent settlement within Thai territory (Jittiang, 2022).

#### **b. Geopolitical Securitization and Demographic Control**

The securitization process in Thailand is strongly influenced by geopolitical factors and traditional defense concerns. The threats securitized include:

a. Threat of Border Instability (Spillover Instability): The presence of a large number of refugees on the border is securitized as potential destabilization originating from internal conflicts in neighboring countries (Myanmar). Security forces, dominated by the military, argue that strict camp management is necessary to prevent the entry of combatants or the escalation of conflict across national boundaries. Maritime pushback policies, although heavily criticized, are justified on the grounds of maintaining sovereignty and preventing security vulnerabilities in territorial waters (Kyaw, 2024).

b. Threat of Human Trafficking and Transnational Crime: Thailand is a significant regional hub for human trafficking. Securitization in this context focuses on dismantling criminal networks, but often results in adverse impacts on the refugees themselves, who become targets of severe law enforcement operations (Chotinukul, 2020).

c. Demographic Threat: Similar to Malaysia, Thailand is concerned that non-repatriated refugees will alter the demographic composition and burden public resources. Strict control over mobility and the prohibition of work outside the camps are justified actions to maintain "demographic security."

The Thai model reflects a buffer zone strategy, where border camps function as a security mechanism to isolate the refugee issue from the national core territory. Thus, the refugee issue is securitized within the realm of National Defense and Territorial Control (Napaumporn & Kneebone, 2024).

## Comparative Analysis of National Security Dimensions in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand

A comparative analysis of the three models—Indonesia (Structured Humanitarian Policy Model), Malaysia (Hard Security Model), and Thailand (Ad Hoc Camp Management Model)—reveals fundamental similarities and substantial differences in how the national security dimension is applied.

### 1. Fundamental Similarities: Sovereignty and the Immigration Lens

The three countries share several fundamental commonalities that serve as the foundation for their security approaches:

- a. **Non-Signatory Status:** All nations prioritize national sovereignty over international obligations. The principle of *pacta sunt servanda* does not apply to the Refugee Convention, allowing states to define the refugee issue entirely based on national interests. This is the starting point that justifies securitization.
- b. **Dominance of Immigration Law:** Notwithstanding Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 in Indonesia, essentially all refugees are subject to Immigration Law. Refugees are non-citizens residing in the territory without official authorization, which by default makes them targets of immigration law enforcement. Even Indonesia's Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 is only procedural and does not confer substantive legal status; their legal status remains under the authority of Immigration.
- c. **Securitization of Public Order:** All countries, at a minimum level, securitize the refugee issue as a threat to public order and local stability (e.g., land use, resource competition, and potential social friction).

### 2. Differences in Implementation Model and Securitization Focus

The differences among the three countries indicate variations in the "depth" and "focus" of the securitization applied:

**Table 1. Implementation Model Comparison and Securitization Focus**

Comparative Variable	Indonesia (Structured Humanitarian Model)	Malaysia (Hard Security/Economic Model)	Thailand (Camp Management/Geopolitical Model)
Primary Legal Framework	Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 ( <i>Lex Specialis</i> procedural)	<i>Immigration Act 1959/63</i> (PATI)	Ministry of Interior Regulations ( <i>Ad Hoc</i> )
Securitization Focus	Non-Traditional Threats (Order, Transnational Crime)	Hard Security Threats (Economic, Sovereignty, Demography)	Geopolitical Threats (Border Stability, Territorial Control)
Dominant Securitizing Actor	Kemenko Polhukam (Coordinator), Immigration (Supervisory Executor)	Immigration Department (JIM), PDRM (Law Enforcement)	Military/Border Police, Ministry of Interior
Key Implementation Response	Maritime Rescue, Temporary Accommodation, Mobility Restriction	Mass Arrests ( <i>Raid</i> ), Indefinite Detention	Border Camp Management ( <i>Isolation</i> ), Conditional Repatriation

<b>Application of Non-Refoulement</b>	<i>De facto</i> (in maritime rescue operations)	Minimal (UNHCR tolerance only)	<i>De jure</i> (tied to <i>ad hoc</i> border regulations)
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Sources: Data processing results

This fundamental difference shows that despite all three countries rejecting the 1951 Convention, Indonesia has taken a political step to desecuritize the initial rescue and accommodation aspects, separating them from the realm of pure immigration criminality. Conversely, Malaysia and Thailand have adopted securitization as a standard policy, where refugees are subjects of rigorous law enforcement for internal (economic in Malaysia) and external (geopolitical in Thailand) purposes.

a. Theoretical Implications: Spectrum of Securitization and De-Securitization

The observed policy variations allow for a theoretical positioning of these states along a securitization spectrum, where the intensity and breadth of the 'speech act' determine the severity of protection outcomes. Malaysia occupies the extreme end of Hard Securitization, where the refugee identity is entirely subsumed under the category of 'illegal threat,' justifying coercive and exceptional measures (indefinite detention, criminalization). Thailand, while employing hard measures (military control, isolation), represents a model of Geopolitical Securitization, where the threat is localized to the border and tied to foreign policy objectives rather than domestic economic stability, making the policy conditionally de-securizable upon regional peace.

Indonesia, however, represents an attempt at Managed De-Securitization—or limited securitization—where Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 acts as a counter-speech act, acknowledging the humanitarian nature of the issue while simultaneously retaining the right to strict control under the umbrella of security coordination (Kemenko Polhukam). This duality is critical: the state accepts the initial humanitarian obligation (*jus cogens* principles of saving lives) but immediately re-securizes the subsequent stay (mobility, livelihood) as a public order threat. The key theoretical takeaway is that securitization is not a binary state but a dynamic process where different state agencies can perform simultaneous, competing speech acts, resulting in fragmented and often contradictory policy outcomes for the refugees themselves.

This fragmentation directly impacts the "audience" of the securitizing act. In Malaysia, the audience is primarily the domestic workforce and political base, concerned about economic competition, leading to popular support for raids. In Indonesia, the audience is dual: the international community (seeking humanitarian recognition) and the local government/public (concerned about social burdens). This dual audience compels Indonesia's policy to be softer on entry but tighter on stay.

Furthermore, the lack of a standardized regional approach highlights the enduring failure of the Bali Process—the primary regional consultative forum—to transition from an informal talking shop to a mechanism capable of enforcing common protection standards or mandatory burden-sharing. The core obstacle remains the inviolable principle of state sovereignty, effectively serving as an anti-securitization shield against external humanitarian intervention. When the securitizing actor is the state itself, any multilateral attempt to desecuritize the

issue is immediately blocked by the claim of interference in internal affairs. Thus, the enduring policy gap is not a lack of resources, but a deeply entrenched political willingness to allow securitization to trump international solidarity, ultimately sustaining the crisis as a predictable and recurring regional phenomenon.

## b. Comparative Implications for Handling Effectiveness and Regional Stability

### 1. Impact on Human Smuggling Networks

The policy divergence among the three states creates a profitable arbitrage opportunity for transnational criminal organizations (TCOs).

- **Push-Pull Dynamics:** The hard security approaches of Malaysia (detention) and Thailand (isolation) generate a push factor. Poor detention conditions and the absence of basic rights compel refugees to seek new routes, often involving smugglers, toward a perceived softer destination.
- **Pull Factor (Indonesia):** The existence of Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 and consistent maritime rescue policies act as a pull factor, channeling Rohingya boats and other refugees toward Indonesian waters. This shifts the operational burden of rescue and temporary accommodation to Indonesia, which then becomes vulnerable to international criticism when shelter resources are overwhelmed.

Human smugglers strategically exploit this policy disparity. They direct refugees towards territories responsive to rescue (Indonesia) or those providing access to the black labor market (Malaysia), meaning that the hard security policies in one state paradoxically strengthen transnational criminal networks in the region.

### 2. Regional Burden and ASEAN Harmonization

The lack of an effective burden-sharing mechanism at the ASEAN level is the most critical implication of these policy differences.

- Malaysia carries the largest burden of urban refugees in the region.
- Thailand bears the burden of managing long-term border camps.
- Indonesia bears the burden of first asylum and transit accommodation.

Each nation claims that this burden is an internal issue or the responsibility of the UN/UNHCR, thereby avoiding substantive regional collaboration. The failure to create a binding ASEAN Consensus on the definition and handling of refugees, alongside a firm commitment to regional non-refoulement, ensures that the forced migration crisis will continue to trigger egoistic and uncoordinated security responses.

### 3. International Image and Soft Power

The implications of security policy are also clearly visible in the international image.

- Indonesia receives positive recognition and substantial soft power in international forums based on its political willingness to enact Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 and its maritime rescue actions. This action positions Indonesia as the de facto leader in regional humanitarian leadership, despite criticisms regarding the speed of resettlement processing.
- Malaysia and Thailand consistently face severe criticism from international human rights organizations and Western nations over practices of detention

violating human rights, forced expulsion (pushback), and the criminalization of refugees.

This image affects diplomatic relations, investment, and strategic positioning on the global stage. Hard security policy models, although domestically justified as protecting sovereignty, ultimately damage the country's international standing.

Overall, this comparative analysis confirms that refugee handling in Southeast Asia is dominated by a security dimension that is securitized differently in each country. Indonesia uses a security lens for internal supervision, Malaysia for economic protection, and Thailand for border security. This disparity is not merely a matter of policy difference but represents a continuous regional failure to manage a humanitarian crisis under a legal framework based on protection, not securitization.

## Conclusion

Comparative research on refugee management within the national security dimension in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand concludes that there are fundamental divergences in policy models, despite the three countries' shared status as non-signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention. This divergence is fundamentally determined by the focus of securitization chosen by each state actor. Indonesia adopted the Structured Humanitarian Model, facilitated by Presidential Regulation No. 12 of 2017, establishing a limited managed de-securitization model. In this model, refugee issues are desecuritized at the maritime rescue and initial resettlement stages, based on humanitarian principles. However, they are quickly resecuritized by institutions such as the Coordinating Ministry for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs in the context of non-traditional threats, particularly those related to public order and transnational crime. This approach results in a reactive, surveillance-oriented policy, with substantial procedural safeguards.

In contrast, Malaysia implements the Hard Securitization Model, in which refugees are explicitly categorized as Unauthorized Foreigners (PATI) under the Immigration Act 1959/63. The securitization process in Malaysia focuses on traditional existential threats, namely economic stability and state sovereignty, manifested in concerns about the labor market and demographic change. The resulting coercive implementation response, characterized by mass arrests and indefinite detention, places Malaysia at the extreme end of the securitization spectrum in Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, Thailand exhibits the Geopolitical Camp Management Model, where the refugee issue is securitized through the lens of National Defense and Territorial Control. This policy, governed by internal regulations of the Ministry of Home Affairs, treats refugees as "temporary residents" who must be isolated in border buffer zones, aiming to prevent conflict spillover and maintain demographic security. This reflects a securitization that is situational and tied to the dynamics of border politics.

The comparative implications of these differences are contradictory and destructive to regional stability. These policy disparities create openings for transnational criminal organizations, generating a push-pull dynamic exploited by human traffickers. While Indonesia receives international soft power for its humanitarian actions, regional burdens cannot be managed equitably. This situation

is exacerbated by ASEAN's collective failure—including through the Bali Process mechanism—to create a binding burden-sharing framework. Overall, these findings confirm that refugee management in the region remains dominated by sovereign egoism, prioritizing domestic security and effectively preventing collective efforts to desecuritize the issue regionally.

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