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A Polish Tale of Securitization

**The Polish Law and Justice Party's Securitization in the
Context of Different Refugee Movements between 2015 and
2022**

Bachelor's Thesis

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Year of the defense:	2023

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on 06.06.2023

Jonte Maria van Giesen

References

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Abstract

This research investigates the ambiguous position of the ruling Law and Justice Party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość - PiS) in Poland concerning its treatment of refugees, focusing on the securitization theory as an explanatory framework. The study examines three significant events in Polish refugee policy in the last years: the 2015 migration crisis, the 2021 Polish-Belarusian border crisis, and the 2022 Russian-Ukrainian war. Each case is investigated to determine the mode of securitization employed and contextualized and discussed within Polish domestic and foreign policies. By adopting the audience approach by Stivas (2020) as an extension of the original Securitization Theory, the role of the audience in the securitization process is emphasized to explain the observed changes. The thesis employs a qualitative methodology, including primary and secondary literature analysis, studies, and interviews. The research finds a convergence between Polish-national and European-international security interests within the securitization discourse and refugee policy. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of the Polish public's acceptance of the PiS's securitization and refugee policy despite the public not always being the primary target audience. The findings contribute to an understanding of the increasing division among the Polish population and emphasize the role of the audience in shaping securitization strategies and refugee policies.

Keywords

Poland; Prawo i Sprawiedliwość; securitization; audience acceptance; refugees; migration crisis; Polish Belarusian border crisis; Russo-Ukrainian war

Preface

This thesis delves into statements that contradict my personal convictions on human dignity, the right to seek refuge, and the historical responsibility of Western countries. Nevertheless, I believe examining and understanding these views is essential to foster social change. This work aims to explore these perspectives without endorsing them, contributing to academic discourse, and promoting critical thinking, inclusivity, and respect for human rights. I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation, especially to my supervisor Hana Kubátová, for her exceptional support and guidance. I am deeply grateful for the time, interest, feedback, and involvement she invested in my thesis. Additionally, I sincerely thank my sister Lena, whose honest feedback has been immensely valuable in shaping the final thesis. To my dear mother, Vera, Leo, and Johanna, I am genuinely grateful for your unwavering assistance and mental support during both the joyful and challenging moments of the writing process. Lastly, I express my acknowledgment to all those who were forced to flee their countries and have faced discrimination, xenophobia, and injustice. Their experiences emphasize the urgency of challenging racism and exclusionary nationalism. May this thesis contribute to a more inclusive and compassionate world guided by principles of human dignity and solidarity.

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Introduction

The origin of people seeking asylum seemed to be the decisive factor in Polish stand toward refugees between 2015 and 2022. The refugee policies of the Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość - PiS*) Party's government accordingly exhibited a noticeable surge in multifaceted perspectives, intertwining elements of nationalism, xenophobia regarding refugees from Islamic countries, and considerable solidarity with neighboring states such as Ukraine. In particular, attention has been drawn to the two large refugee movements in 2015 and 2022 and Poland's different approaches to managing these incidents:

In 2015, the *migration crisis* reached Europe with over one million refugees from the Middle East (ME) and North Africa (NA). Several European Union (EU) member states, including Poland, actively rejected to take in the refugees and refused the EU's mandated responsibility sharing, which was intended to distribute the refugees fairly (Pachocka, 2016; Kabata & Jakcobs, 2022). Poland granted asylum to only 12.190 refugees (0.9% of all EU-28 countries) (Pachocka, 2016, p. 106f.). However, the situation was different regarding Ukrainian refugees in 2022. Poland, having already received 1.7 million Ukrainians before 2022 (Opiola et al., 2022, p.12), became the primary destination for Ukrainian refugees after the outbreak of the Russian-Ukraine War. Since the military war's onset in February 2022, the country has witnessed over 10 million border crossings from Ukraine, and more than 1.5 million Ukrainian refugees have been registered as temporarily protected war refugees, making Poland the most significant haven for Ukrainians today (UNHCR, Government, 2023). This indicates a very different reception of refugees than in 2015.

Many European countries showed similar “selective solidarity” (Paré, 2022, p.53) based on the ethnicity of the refugees. Yet, Poland is particularly remarkable because of the continuous presence of the Law and Justice Party as the sole governing party since the autumn of 2015. This prolonged political stability amplifies the significance of Poland's shifting response to refugee situations. The PiS, initially a conservative party focused on anti-communism and anti-corruption issues, transformed gradually into a party centered around Catholicism and an ethnically conceived nation (Folvarčný & Kopeček, 2020). The party often describes Ukrainian refugees as people in urgent need, whereas refugees from the ME and NA have been presented as economic immigrants

threatening Polish security (Hargrave et al., 2022). In general, many speeches and the party's line are aimed at a nationalist and xenophobic understanding of security which is why it seems reasonable to adopt a security-related methodology for the analysis.

In the current research, the most applied theory that explains policies based on security is the Securitization Theory by the Copenhagen School of Security Studies (CSSS). The CSSS describes with its theory how a problem, that can be seen as a threat but not necessarily is one, gets purposefully politicized as a hard-security issue (*securitized*) by leading politicians. This happens through a speech act in which the securitization actor frames an issue as an existential threat. The targeted audience of this securitization speech act becomes accordingly aware of the alleged threat imposed on a referent object and agrees to extraordinary policies to tackle the issue (Balzacq et al., 2016, p.495). The theory has received scholarly attention in research published after the so-called European migrant crisis in 2015. Scholars explored securitization processes within the EU in general (Ioy & Bodgan, 2017), Germany (Banai & Kreide, 2017), Poland (Podgórzńska, 2019), and Hungary (Stivas, 2023b).

This thesis addresses two shortcomings in existing research. Firstly, previous studies mostly only assume audience acceptance. Secondly, there is a lack of analysis of the various securitization processes over an extended period in a single country. To fill these gaps, the thesis focuses on the securitization conducted by the PiS party in Poland, specifically examining the targeted audience. The analysis includes three significant events in Poland between 2015 and 2022: the European migrant crisis in 2015, the Polish-Belarusian border crisis in 2021, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Despite occurring in different geopolitical contexts, these events share an aspect - refugees.

The hypothesis examined in this thesis is as follows: *The identity and acceptance of the targeted audience significantly influenced the securitization efforts of the PiS party, resulting in the selective treatment of refugees based on their regions of origin.*

The primary contribution of this thesis is to offer a comprehensive understanding of the Polish government's responses to refugees from diverse ethnic backgrounds, with a specific focus on the audiences who must accept the emergency measures according to the Securitization Theory. This research builds upon previous studies (Babakova et al., 2022; Paré, 2022) that identify existing policies characterized by racist resentments and prejudices and examines how these different stands have been made possible in more detail. As a result, this thesis not only enhances the understanding of Polish strategic security policies between 2015 and 2022 but also contributes to a broader comprehension

of securitization mechanisms, particularly in relation to refugees. It also highlights the importance of examining a sequence of different securitization cases, allowing for a better analysis of the phenomenon.

Some preliminary remarks. In most of the analysis, the words *refugee* and *immigrant* are used interchangeably. Although there is an ongoing debate about the political meaning of the difference between *refugee* and *immigrant* (see, e.g., Holmes & Castañeda, 2016), the use of the two words in Polish public and political debates transcends this difference anyway (Podgórzńska, 2019, p.78). Moreover, the analysis refrains from making gender, age, and detailed ethnic or national distinctions among larger refugee groups, the Polish public, the Polish government, the PiS party, NATO, and the European Union. It exceeds the general tendencies highlighted by the thesis and needs to be explored elsewhere. Furthermore, the thesis is not a normative assessment of the approach of the actors studied..

The structure of this thesis is as follows: The first part outlines the methodological approach of the study. Within this context, it delves into the application of classical securitization theory (1.1) and presents the chosen methodology, namely the Audience Approach by Stivas (2020) that extends the original securitization theory with tools for a better understanding of the audience aspect (1.2). The subsequent chapter presents the current state of research on which this thesis follows (1.3).

The second part involves employing the audience approach to examine the three most prominent incidents during this period concerning refugees: the widely recognized *migration crisis* in 2015 (2.1), the crisis at the Belarusian Polish border in 2021 (2.2), and the influx of refugees associated with the Russo-Ukrainian war in 2022 (2.3). For each case, the single aspects of the securitization are determined, which provides the necessary understanding of the securitization at hand. In the final part of the examination, a summary and elaboration on the sequence of the securitization aspects are presented to determine the modes of securitization (2.4).

The third part discusses the findings and results of the modes of securitization within Polish foreign (3.1) and domestic policies (3.2). It elaborates on the importance of the identity of the targeted and passive audience in securitization and how the choice of the audiences has led to a convergence of national and international security interests while simultaneously resulting in an increasing division within Polish society. Thereby, the concept of desecuritization is introduced as an explanation for the analyzed dynamic. The conclusion with limitations and outlook is given in the closing section (4).

1 Methodology

1.1 Securitization

The concept of security has different meanings. It is frequently associated with notions such as social justice or entitlement (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 21) and, within the context of military studies, with different strategies (Stritzel, 2007, p. 357). In the 1980s, the concept opened broadly to more individual forms of security. However, this expansion posed the risk of rendering the concept almost meaningless, as it became applicable to virtually all types of problems (Wæver, 1995, p.2).

Ultimately, the Copenhagen School of Security Studies (CSSS) developed a different security concept within international relations. In their understanding, “security is mainly about survival” (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 21). Therefore, an object's security is threatened when its survival is at stake, indicating an existential threat. This existential threat does not necessarily have to correspond to the actual and material circumstances of the world, but it can also be constructed by, for instance, a leader (Balzacq et al., 2016, p. 495). This means that, e.g., refugees are often presented as threats to the economy, security, culture, or identity in a receiving country (Huysmans, 2000).

The securitization theory of the Copenhagen School by Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde (1998) expands on socially constructed security (Emmers, 2018, p. 113). The approach is accordingly not focused on objective security threats but on security contested in political discourse and within power constellations between political actors (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 25). Securitization occurs when a securitizing actor, which can be any authority, e.g., government or political elite, articulates in a speech act a particular issue as existentially threatening to a referent object (e.g., state security, national sovereignty, or economy). In the next step, the audience accepts this securitization move (Emmers, 2018, p.113) and agrees with the extraordinary emergency measures the securitizing actor has proposed to tackle the alleged existential threat (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 25). This definition expands the range of security categories, encompassing military, environmental, economic, societal, and political security (Emmers, 2018, p. 111).

Accordingly, Baele and Sterck (2015) identify three main components of the theory present in every successful case of securitization: the speech act, the emergency measure, and the audience acceptance (p. 1124). In the research following the development of the theory, most scholars have focused on the speech act and the implemented emergency measures, while comparatively little emphasis has been placed

on the identity of the audience and their acceptance of the securitization move (Balzacq et al., 2016; Stivas, 2023a). Accordingly, the audience's acceptance remains undertheorized (Vaughn, 2009), under-determined (Salter, 2008), and underdevelopment (Williams, 2011) and needs further examination.

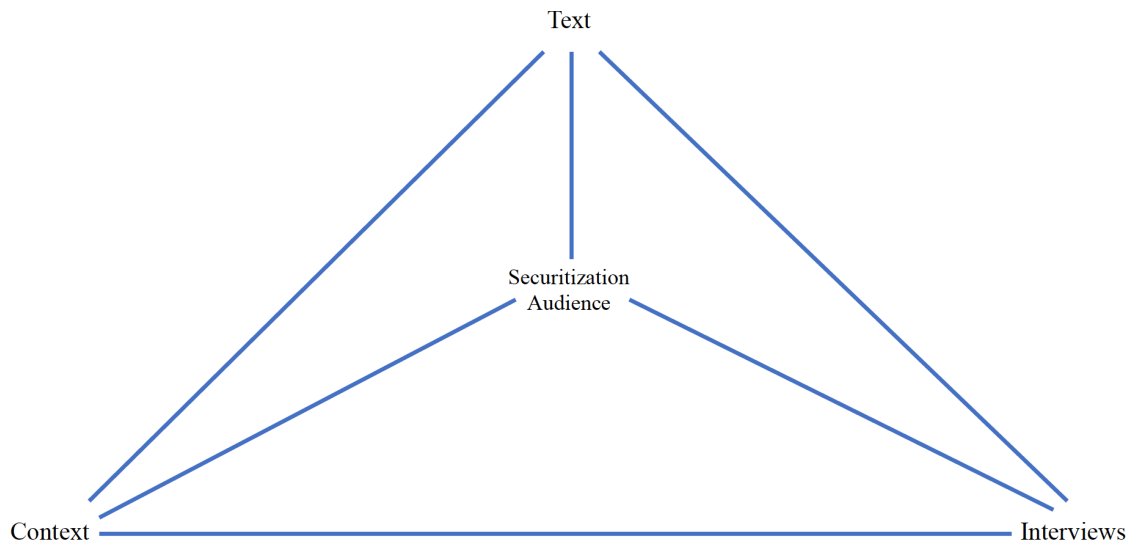
1.2 Audience Approach

Scholars, including Stivas (2023a/b), have accordingly shifted their focus toward the audience. Nevertheless, incorporating this aspect within the conventional framework of the Copenhagen School has proven to be challenging (Stritzel, 2007, p. 363). Most researchers have assumed the audience's identity by either textual analysis or considering the context of the securitization (Stivas, 2023a, p. 51). Thus, e.g., Balzacq (2005) speculated that, especially in liberal democracies, the securitization audience mainly comprises the general public (p.182). However, if researchers merely speculate about the identity of the securitization audience, their entire analysis runs the risk of being flawed and consequently rendered useless. This is primarily because determining the individuals or entities that endorse a securitization move in order for it to be deemed successful holds considerable significance (Stivas, 2023a, p. 52). To avoid this mistake, Stivas (2020) develops a methodology that makes it possible to determine the audience's identity and measure their acceptance empirically: The Audience Approach. The methodology combines the Copenhagen School's analytical framework with two other tools: A Triangulation Method of Audience Identification (TMAI) and the Comprehensive Securitization Empirical Framework (CSEF) (Stivas, 2023a, p. 52).

The TMAI enables the researcher to determine the audience's identity more precisely by observing it from three different angles: It considers the text and content of the speech act(s), the context of the speech act(s), and the personal view of the securitizing actor (Stivas, 2023a, p.52). The three angles form a triangle depicted in (Figure 1.). The first angle requires the investigation of the content of the speech act(s). Since “frequently, the identity of the targeted audience is revealed in the security speech acts’ text” (Stivas, 2023a, p. 52). The second angle requires the research to answer the following questions: “What kind of events were taking place in the temporal and geographical space surrounding the speech act? To what venue was the speech act performed? Who was the direct audience of the securitizing actor?” (Stivas, 2023a, p. 53). The third angle consists of (semi-structured or structured) interviews with the securitizing actors. They are

intended to facilitate the identification of the securitization audience (Stivas, 2023a, pp. 52f.).

Figure 1. Triangulation Method of Audience Identity (TMAI).



(Source and Representation: Stivas, 2023 a/b)

The CESF examines the three main parts of a successful securitization, the security speech act (SSA), the emergency measure (EM), and the audience acceptance (AA), as well as their sequence (Stivas, 2023a, pp. 53f.). Initially, the Copenhagen School of Security Studies (CSSS) assumed that the audience acceptance is always situated between the SSA and the EM (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 25). However, in real-world scenarios, the order of these components can vary. Thus, the CESF expands the possibilities for successful securitizations (see Table 1.).

Table 1. Modes of Securitization (according to the CESF).

Securitization components					Form of securitization
SSA ⁺	→	EM ⁺	→	AA ⁺	(1) Comprehensive Securitization
SSA ⁺	→	AA ⁺	→	EM ⁺	(2) CSSS' Ideal Securitization
SSA ⁺	→	EM ⁺	→	AA ⁻	(3) Arbitrary Securitization
SSA ⁺	→	AA ⁺	→	EM ⁻	(4) Void Securitization
SSA ⁺	→	AA ⁻	→	EM ⁻	(5) Void Vocal Securitization
AA ⁺	→	SSA ⁺	→	EM ⁻	(6) 'Bottom-Up' Securitization
AA ⁽⁺⁾	→	SSA ⁻	→	EM ⁻	(7) Void 'Bottom-Up' Securitization
SSA ⁽⁺⁾	→	EM ⁽⁺⁾	→	AA ⁽⁺⁾	(8) Meta-Securitization

Acronyms:

SSA	=	security speech acts	+	=	existence of the accompanying component
EM	=	emergency measures	-	=	absence of the accompanying component
AA	=	audience acceptance	(+)	=	conditional existence of the accompanying component
CSSS	=	Copenhagen School of Security Studies	→,←	=	sequence/direction of the securitization process

(Source and Representation: Stivas, 2020)

Stivas (2023a) identifies eight potential pathways for achieving a successful securitization (pp. 53f.):

- (1) “A Comprehensive Securitization takes place when the securitizing actors narrate the security speech act and adopt the emergency action without formally considering the audience’s reaction. The securitizers sense the audience’s views before narrating the security speech acts. Having estimated that the audience will not reject their securitizing rhetoric and instruments, the securitizers proceed with implementing the measures after pronouncing the speech acts” (Stivas, 2023a, pp.53f.).
- (2) “A Copenhagen School of Security Studies’ Ideal Securitization differs from the Comprehensive Securitization in that the securitizing actors measure formally the response of the audience after the announcement of the security speech acts and proceed with the adoption of the emergency measures only after they confirm the audience’s support” (Stivas, 2023a, p.54).
- (3) “An Arbitrary Securitization occurs when the securitizing actor designates the security threat and adopts the emergency action regardless of the audience’s discontent with the narrative and measures” (Stivas, 2023a, p.54).

- (4) “When a securitizing actor declares an issue as an existential threat to a particular referent object, examines and guarantees the support of the targeted audience but does not proceed with the emergency action, then we deal with a Void Securitization” (Stivas, 2023a, p.54).
- (5) “A Void Vocal Securitization occurs when the securitizing actor expresses orally her willingness to securitize a particular issue but lacking the support of the targeted audience abstains from proceeding with the emergency action” (Stivas, 2023a, p.54).
- (6) “In a ‘Bottom-Up’ Securitization, all the securitization components are present. However, the security speech act and the emergency measures constitute the securitizing actors’ responses to the audience’s demands for securitizing a particular topic” (Stivas, 2023a, p.54).
- (7) “When a potential securitization audience is actively and negatively predisposed towards a particular issue, demands the securitizing actor to proceed with emergency action, but the securitizing actor does not fulfill the requests of the audience, then we deal with a Void ‘Bottom-Up’ Securitization” (Stivas, 2023a, p.54).
- (8) “In the case of a Meta-Securitization, the securitizing actor declares the securitization tactics of other actors as existential threats to a referent object. To exit the emergency mode, the securitizing actor proposes the immediate termination of the securitization measures. The securitization audience endorses the ‘meta-securitizing’ speech acts” (Stivas, 2023a, p.54).

The forms of securitization or modes of securitization enable an even more comprehensive understanding of the securitization since they take not only the single aspects but also the sequence of these aspects into account. This is extraordinarily important to assess the exact role that the identity and acceptance of the audience in the securitization plays.

1.3 State of Research and Chosen Data

Since the 1980s, scholars have been aware of the linkage between the movement of people and international politics. Amongst the different approaches, the Securitization Theory is

nowadays the most developed and, accordingly, most widely applied theory of the securitization of migration (Bourbeau, 2011, p. 2).

Yet, the research on the securitization of migration in Poland within the framework of the Securitization Theory is limited. Several scholars find that Poland's political and public aversion to the *migration crisis*¹ 2015 was closely linked to the politicians' portrayal of refugees as a threat to national security (Klaus, 2017a; Podgórzńska, 2019). Still, only Jędrzejczyk-Kuliniak (2017) and Podgórzńska (2019) try to explain this phenomenon using the Copenhagen School of Security Studies' securitization theory. Jędrzejczyk-Kuliniak's analysis, though, does not primarily focus on the securitization process but describes its implications concerning fear and emerging tensions within Polish society (Jędrzejczyk-Kuliniak, 2017). On the other hand, Podgórzńska (2019) offers a detailed examination of how framing refugees as a security threat in Poland has contributed to a hostile public attitude, employing the securitization theory. However, she predominantly neglects the identity and acceptance of the audience. Podgórzńska's analysis relies on limited surveys of the Polish public attitude, lacking a consistent empirical foundation and failing to establish a comprehensive understanding of audience acceptance (AA).

The literature concerning the Polish-Belarusian Border Crisis and the Refugees in light of the Russo-Ukrainian War is even more limited. There exist a few analyses that emphasize the hypocritical behavior of the Polish government toward refugees from different backgrounds on the example of the Polish Belarusian crisis (see amongst others Bodnar & Grzelak, 2023; Halemba, 2022) and the refugee influx related to the Russo-Ukrainian War (see Babakova et al., 2022; Duszczuk et al., 2023). However, there exists no coherent analysis of the role of the audience in the treatment of refugees by the Polish government, neither from Refugees in Ukraine in 2022 compared to the refugees from the ME and NA in the *migration crisis* in 2015 nor a general application of the Securitization Theory on the two cases.

As of now, Stivas' Audience Approach has never been applied to Poland. The only examined cases are the analysis of the audience identity and acceptance in Hungary (2023b) and Greece (2023a), particularly concerning the *migration crisis*. These two case studies have been significant in shedding light on the dynamics of securitization in

¹ The word *migrant crisis* comes from the Polish *kryzys migracyjny* which is widely used for the European migrant crisis in Poland (Krzyżanowska & Krzyżanowski, 2018, p. 613). Nevertheless, since the word *crisis* is in itself not neutral, it will be written in cursive subsequently to ensure the readers attention to the fact.

specific national contexts and the roles played by the audiences in shaping the securitization processes. However, as Stivas (2023a, 2023b) notices, a case-to-case examination of more cases is necessary to understand better the interplay between the audience and modes of securitizations.

This study aims to bridge the existing research gaps by applying the Audience Approach to the Polish case, marking the first application of this approach in Poland. This study will significantly expand the research on securitization in Poland and specifically shed light on the transition within the securitization process over the last eight years. Stivas' approach allows focusing in a balanced way on all main components, enabling an in-depth analysis of the government's securitization efforts and which role the respective audience has played in it. This study relies on various secondary data sources, including speeches, statements, scientific articles, governmental documents, surveys, and opinion polls, to ensure a rigorous investigation of the cases.

In order to bolster the empirical evidence supporting the findings of the second and third parts of this study, data from various public polls conducted by the Polish Opinion Research Center (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej - CBOS), as well as from the European Social Surveys (ESS) is incorporated. Additionally, surveys conducted by Ipsos, and a meta-study conducted by Hargrave et al. (2022) are referenced. These additional data sources strengthen the study's empirical foundation, providing further context and supporting the analysis undertaken.

2 The Polish Tale of Securitization

Poland has a long tradition of migration, with notable multicultural and multireligious diversity during the 18th century within the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania (Nornan, 1986, pp. 83f.). Nevertheless, according to Hargrave et al. (2022), after World War II, Poland experienced significant population changes due to German deportations, genocide, and post-war population transfers, resulting in a more homogenous population. After the democratic transition in 1989, Poland gradually opened up to migration flows from other Eastern European countries and regions (i.e., Ukraine and Chechnya) (Hargrave et al., 2022, p. 2). Nevertheless, Poland remained more a country of emigration than of immigration (Krzyżanowski, 2018, p. 79). This was also why immigrants and refugees were not subject to significant political debate. This changed drastically with the coincidence of the Polish parliamentary elections and the European *migration crisis* in 2015 (Jaskulowski, 2019; Krzyżanowski, 2018). The electoral campaign of several right-wing Polish parties exhibited aggravated Islamophobic and xenophobic rhetoric. In this regard, the populist (Zabdyr-Jamróz et al., M., 2021) and later sole governing party PiS stood out, particularly (Klaus, 2017b; Jaskulowski, 2019).

2.1 The *Migration Crisis* in 2015

In 2015, the European Union faced an unprecedented influx of refugees from the ME and NA. The sudden increase of people fleeing to Europe was due to the political instability following the Iraq war 2003, the Syrian and Libyan civil wars, and the Arab Spring (Jaskulowski, 2019, p.32). However, what contributed to the massive illegal border crossings at the EU's external borders, which would eventually give the event the name “crisis,” was the increasing securing and closing of these borders. (Jaskulowski, 2019, pp. 32ff.). In 2015 alone, Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency detected 1.82 million cases of illegal border crossing (European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union., 2016, p. 14), and approximately 1.3 million people submitted asylum applications in EU member states (Paré, 2022, p.45). However, the crises affected countries differently, with Italy and Greece being most pressurized due to their location at the Mediterranean exodus routes, which were most easily accessible for refugees coming mainly from the Middle and Near East. This is why the European Union unsuccessfully

tried to introduce a reallocation and resettlement scheme in 2015 to distribute asylum seekers fairly among EU member states (Jaskulowski, 2019, p. 35).

In contrast, Poland was not located on one of the flight routes and was, therefore, hardly directly affected by the refugees (Pachocka, 2016). In 2014 Poland had 8.020 asylum applications (1.3% of total applications in the EU-28 area), and in 2015 they only had a slight increase in total applications with 12.190 (0.9%) (Pachocka, 2016, p. 106f.). Notably, these were mainly applicants from Ukraine, Chechnya, Georgia, and Tajikistan (Klaus, 2017a, p. 19). Poland remained the only Visegrád country that initially agreed to the reallocation and resettlement mechanism, but like many other countries, it did not fulfill its obligations (Pachocka, 2016, p. 118f.). The later PiS and Hungarian governments were primary opponents of the European reallocation scheme. In the years after 2015, the number of asylum seekers in Poland continued to fall due to shifting migration routes, Poland's low appeal for refugees in comparison to other Western European countries, and the Polish government's increasingly restrictive asylum policy (Hargrave et al., 2022, p. 6).

2.1.1 The Security Speech Acts

Until September 2015, Poland was governed by a center-right coalition comprised by the Polish People's Party PSL (*Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*) and the PO (*Platforma Obywatelska*). PSL and PO did not change Poland's migration policies significantly. In fact, the government accepted the European Union's allocation scheme in 2015 (Jaskulowski, 2019, pp.36f.). Yet, a prominent political and later public discursive shift occurred in the electoral campaign in 2015. The political strategy of several right-wing parties, especially the PiS, was to attract votes with extensive emphasis on the alleged threat that immigrants pose to the national identity (Jaskulowski, 2019, pp.76ff.). This led to the politicization and subsequent securitization of the issue at two levels:

At the first level, the mostly imagined asylum seekers were targeted. The PiS depicted refugees from the ME and NA as economic migrants instead of refugees fleeing prosecution and war. The narrative suggested that their motivation for coming to Poland was primarily driven by access to welfare benefits (Jaskulowski, 2019, p.40). These pretextual excuses to reject the refugees from the ME and NA in PiS's election campaign gradually shifted towards rhetoric in which Polish nationalism and security concerns increasingly played a role. Refugees and migrants from the ME and NA, without clear

differentiation between these terms, as the *others* were increasingly considered a security threat to the Polish national identity (Podgórzńska, 2019, p.78). Particularly during the autumn election campaign of PiS, refugees from Islamic countries were depicted as posing a threat to Poland's culture, religion, and overall security (Podgórzńska, 2019, pp.78f.). A critical moment in the securitization of refugees was when the PiS chairman Jarosław Kaczyński stated in a widely reported speech in parliament the following:

SSA (2015/1):

“Or what is going on in Italy? Churches have been taken over and are often treated as toilets. What is going on in France? Non-stop arguments, Sharia introduced, even patrols which check if Sharia is observed. Same in London or even in the toughest, in this case, Germany, all of this is taking place. So do you all want that all of this becomes reality in Poland, that we stop feeling at home in our own country?” (Cited in: Krzyżanowska & Krzyżanowski, 2018, p.615; Krzyżanowski, 2018, p.86).

On several other occasions, he also pointed out the alleged health risks that refugees bring with them:

SSA (2015/2)

“There are already symptoms of the occurrence of diseases that are very dangerous and long not seen in Europe: cholera on the Greek islands, dysentery in Vienna, various parasites, protozoa, that are not dangerous in the bodies of these people, yet they can be dangerous here. This does not mean discriminating against someone ... But it needs to be checked” (PN, 2015; translation according to Podgórzńska, 2019, p. 79).

PiS also established the alleged connection between refugees from the ME and NA and the threat of terror attacks. Amongst others, Jarosław Gowin, the later science minister, claimed that ISIS trains its soldiers to blow up babies and that he sees his responsibility in reducing “the risk that someone will ever blow up a Polish newborn” (Jaskulowski, 2019, p. 40). This Islamophobic narrative around security concerns about refugees from the ME and NA was further reinforced after the PiS party won the national parliamentary elections with an absolute majority and several terrorist attacks in Europe in late autumn

of 2015 (Hargrave et al., 2022, p. 18; Krzyżanowski, 2018, p. 82). Amongst others, the PiS politician Zbigniew Giżyński emphasized:

SSA (2015/3)

“75% of these alleged refugees are strong men who come to make jihad here in Europe.” (cited in Jaskulowski, 2019, p.40)

The second level that contributed to the securitization of refugees from the ME and NA and the later implemented emergency measures was the general Euroscepticism present in the rhetoric of PiS members. They used statements about the *Brussels elites* to convince the voters that the EU relocation scheme is an imposed instrument by the powerful European states to limit Polish sovereignty (Szałańska, 2020, p.44). Kaczynski pointed out that Poland has no direct responsibility for the crises:

SSA (2017/1)

“We did not exploit the countries from which refugees come today. We did not use their work, we did not invite them to Europe. We have every moral right to say, ‘No!’” (cited in: Szałańska, 2020, p. 29).

In several other statements, he declared that the actual problem was that other European states (i.e., Germany) opened their doors to the refugees and acted as a “magnet” (Sobczak-Szelc et al., 2022, p. 50). In response to the coming refugees' alleged threat and the EU's encroaching behavior, the PiS government implemented several emergency measures (EM), as shown in the subsequent chapter.

2.1.2 The Emergency Measures

PiS's securitization served the implementation of extraordinary EM affecting the inner legislation of Poland, its relationship with the European Union, and the treatment of refugees at the Polish border. Feld Klaus (2017b) emphasizes that the PiS increasingly eroded checks and balances within the Polish legal system upon gaining power. They diminished the activity of the Constitutional Court, transformed the public press into highly regulated *national media*, and intimidated non-governmental organizations perceived to have foreign interests. These actions were ostensibly aimed at

renationalizing Poland. However, they had detrimental effects on citizens, depriving them of avenues to protect themselves against potential abuses of state power (Klaus, 2017b, p.524).

Since Poland's joined the European Union in 2004, its asylum system originated in international and EU law and respected the 1951 Refugee Conventions. Nevertheless, since September 2015, the Polish government has initiated fundamental changes. According to Klaus (2020), a pivotal change was the introduction of the Act on Antiterrorist Activities (AAA) on 10th June 2016. This legislation featured broad definitions of terrorist activities, granting authorities almost unrestricted surveillance powers over non-Polish citizens. Moreover, suspected persons could be temporarily arrested purely based on the assumption that they intend to commit a terrorist crime. Notably, the regulation predominantly associated terrorism with Islam and focuses on protection against "Islamic radicals" (Klaus, 2020, pp. 80f.). Together with the not fulfilling its obligations within the European reallocation and resettlement scheme; this presented a focus on national instead of European migration regulations (Pachocka, 2016, pp. 118ff.).

Despite the formal adherence to the European humanitarian standards, the reality at the borders for most refugees from the ME and NA remained terrible (Sobczak-Szelc et al., 2022, p. 85). They were still seen as economic migrants threatening the safety of Poland. Border guards denied refugees even requests for asylum (Klaus, 2017a, p.25). Moreover, the asylum seeker had no chance to challenge these decisions of the border procedure. Even in case of refusal, no administrative court could stop the expulsion from Polish territory (Klaus, 2020, p. 82). This approach was at least tolerated, if not encouraged, by the Polish government.

It becomes clear that there is a linkage between the SSAs framing the refugees from Islamic countries as a security threat and the Ems implemented in response to this alleged threat. Nonetheless, to speak about a successful securitization, one must also examine the relevant audience(s) and whether they accepted (AA) the securitization move (Buzan et al., 1998).

2.1.3 The Identity of the Audience

The speeches' content suggests that the PiS party, in their role as securitization actor spoke in the name of the whole Polish civilization. This is indicated by the extensive use of the

word *we* and the almost omnipresent distinction between *us* Poles and the *other* Muslims (Jaskulowski, 2019, pp. 38f. and see SSA (2015/1) as well as SSA (2017/1)). The examples chosen by the PiS party highlight the perceived significant consequences of the influx of individuals from the ME and NA on other nations, implicitly cautioning the Polish public about the potential for such disruptive unrest (Krzyżanowski, 2018, p. 86 and see SSA/1 and SSA/2). Employing a typical populist approach (according to Zabdyr-Jamróż et al., 2021), speakers of the PiS considered themselves and the Polish public as one. They aimed for the Polish people as their primary audience.

The context of the 2015 election plays a crucial role in understanding these securitization efforts. PiS initiated the securitization of refugees during the campaign, ultimately leading to the Law and Justice Party's victory, consolidating their position for subsequent SSAs, and implementing EMs. Many SSAs were publicly presented through various media channels, including social and traditional media outlets (Krzyżanowska & Krzyżanowski, 2018, p. 615). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the general Polish public served as the primary audience, considering Poland's representative parliamentary democracy.

Nevertheless, a distinction must be made at this point. The securitization of refugees played a role in the entire election campaign that should not be underestimated (Sengoku, 2018). However, framing refugees as alleged security threats intensified after the terror attacks in Paris in November 2015 (Podgórzńska, 2019, p.75). Additionally, PiS strategically used migration rhetoric to appeal to a specific electorate more likely to vote (Sengoku, 2018, p.47). Leveraging the Polish electoral system, PiS formed a sole government despite receiving only 37% of all votes (Markowski, 2016, p. 1314).

Following the terror attacks in France, Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydło emphasized in interviews that the government's actions primarily focused on ensuring the safety and security of Polish citizens. This implied that the legitimacy of these actions relied on gaining acceptance from the public:

“Until Friday, I thought it was going to be a completely different expose. We imagined that the emphasis would be on talking about the economy and development - what is most important to us. But since Friday, things have changed and things have redefined. For every citizen in Poland, and certainly for us, who

take responsibility for the affairs of the Polish state, the most important thing is security” (wPolityce.pl, 2015)²

Furthermore, PiS chairman Kaczyński, in a statement made in the Sejm, reiterated that the PiS party spoke on behalf of the Polish people:

“Do you want this to appear in Poland too so that we are no longer hosts in our own country? The Poles don't want this and the PiS doesn't want this” (TVN24 & PAP, 2015)³

These statements provide evidence supporting the assertion made by Podgórzńska (2019) that the PiS party securitized the issue of refugees from the ME and NA, with the Polish public as its primary audience.

2.1.3.1 The Response of the Audience

As everywhere in Europe, the word *crisis* became very persistent in connection with the influx of people in 2015. Yet, the term *kryzys migracyjny* (migration crises) became interchangeably used with the even more negatively connoted *kryzys migrancki* (migrant crises) (Krzyżanowska & Krzyżanowski, 2018, p. 613). The PiS election campaign generally contributed to a normalization and broader acceptance of negative words for people from mainly Islamic countries (Krzyżanowska & Krzyżanowski, 2018, p. 616).

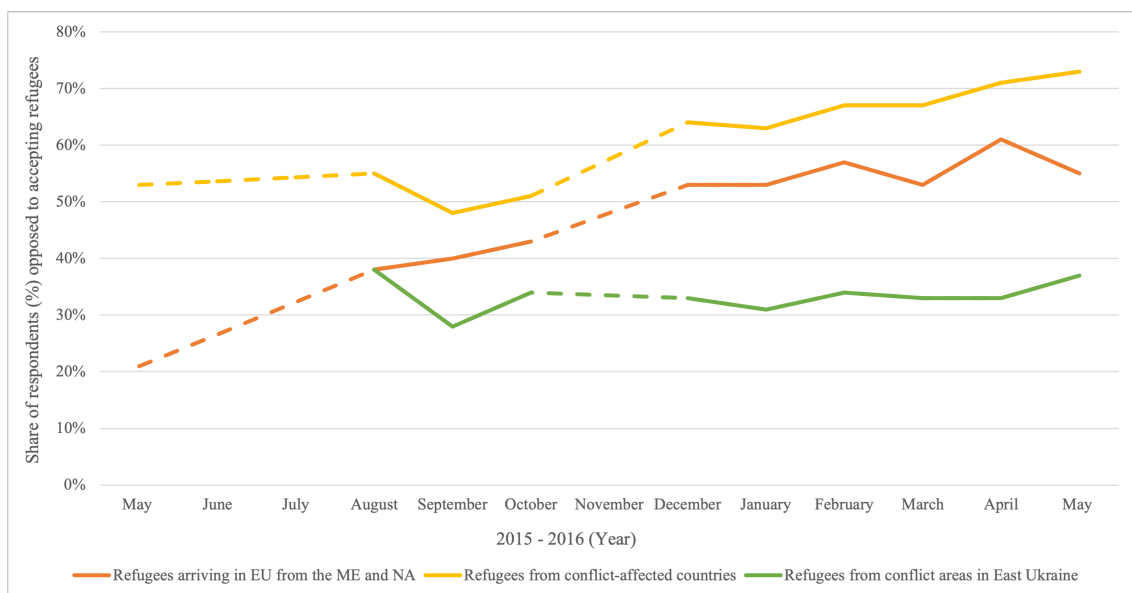
It should be noted that attitudes toward refugees depend strongly on their country of origin. The Polish population was particularly welcoming towards refugees from the Ukrainian crisis region. Again, the data from CBOS shows this quite clearly: In 2017, 75% of Poles opposed the reallocation of refugees from the ME and NA to Poland, while at the same time, 61% approved giving refugees from Ukraine asylum (Podgórzńska, 2019, p. 76).

² Original: “Do piątku myślałam, że to będzie zupełnie inne expose. Wyobrażaliśmy sobie, by nacisk był na rozmowę na gospodarce, rozwoju - tym, co jest dla nas najważniejsze. Ale od piątku sytuacja uległa zmianie i sprawy się przedefiniowały. Dla każdego obywatela w Polsce, a na pewno dla nas, którzy bierzemy odpowiedzialność za sprawę polskiego państwa, najważniejsze jest bezpieczeństwo” (wPolityce.pl, 2015. Translated with google translator).

³ Original: “Czy chcecie państwo, żeby to pojawiło się także w Polsce, żebyśmy przestali być gospodarzami we własnym kraju? Polacy tego nie chcą i nie chce tego PiS” (TVN24 & PAP, 2015. Translated with google translator).

Public opinion on refugees from the ME and NA took a noticeable negative turn in 2015 accordingly (see Figure 1.). Overall, the PiS's hostile rhetoric found fertile ground among other social institutions. Thus, there was no effective political or civil opposition to the opinion, and the church and right-wing parties reinforced the prejudices (Follis, 2019, p. 314). In May 2015, before PiS's election success, almost three-quarters (72%) of the Polish public supported accepting refugees from conflict-affected countries. In contrast, in April 2016, after the election win and the terror attacks in Paris and Brussels, only one-third (33%) still agreed, while 61% explicitly opposed it (Hargrave et al., 2022, p. 18).

Figure 2. Poles oppose the acceptance of Refugees.



An increase in the opposition of the Polish attitude toward accepting refugees from the ME and NA and conflict-affected regions occurs primarily in the context of the securitization after the terrorist attacks in November 2015 and March 2016. Dotted points represent missing points in the data (Source: CBOS, 2016; Representation: Hargrave et al., 2022, p.17).

In 2016 almost three-quarters of the Polish population perceived refugees from countries such as Iraq and Syria as major threats, and 71% agreed that welcoming refugees would increase the threat of potential terrorist attacks (Wike et al., 2016, p.3). The securitization of the PiS that coincided with the terrorist attacks in Paris (November 2015) and Brussels (March 2016) was therefore accepted by the Polish public (Podgórzńska, 2019, p. 76).

2.2 The Polish-Belarusian Border Crisis in 2021

The actuality of the threat imposed by refugees from the ME and NA remained rather artificial in the years following the *migration crisis* in 2015. In contrast, the influx of Ukrainian individuals became a more tangible reality, particularly after Russia annexed Crimea and the Donbas in 2014. Approximately 1.7 million Ukrainians sought refuge in western Ukraine, with Poland hosting 1.35 million refugees even before the 2022 (Opiola et al., 2022, p.12). Most Ukrainians who fled came for economic reasons, as Poland needed a workforce and accordingly facilitated access to the labor market (Duszczuk & Kaczmarczyk, 2022, p.165). Interestingly, this economic motivation was used as an excuse to reject refugees from the ME and NA (Ociepa-Kicińska & Gorzałczyńska-Koczkodaj, 2022, p.7). The subsequent significant event that brought the issue of refugees from the ME and NA to the forefront was the Polish-Belarusian border crisis.

The *crisis* started with the announcement by Belarus' president Aleksandr Lukashenko that he would not hinder migrants from crossing the border to Poland if they wanted (Halemba, 2022, pp. 2f.). Plains from several cities of the Near East brought in the following weeks several thousand refugees from the Middle East to the Polish-Belarusian border, heavily supported by Belarusian authorities (Grześkowiak, 2023, p. 82; Halemba, 2022, p. 3). Many scholars emphasize that Lukashenko utilized migrants to exert pressure and destabilize the European Union with support from Russia (Bodnar & Grzelak, 2023; Bornio, 2021; Halemba, 2022; Łubiński, 2022).

The situation at the border quickly intensified. Approximately 3000-4000 people were stuck in the forests between Belarus, and because of a declared state of emergency in Poland, border guards were able to prevent them from entering. Simultaneously, they did not allow volunteers and NGOs to help the refugees, mostly camping in the area, resulting in images of a humanitarian crisis that show frightening similarities to the images of Jews fleeing from the German army in the same region in 1941 (Opiola et al., 2022, p.14). The Polish Border Guard announced 39,670 attempts of illegal border crossings in 2021 (Grześkowiak, 2023, p.82), with refugees being brutally pushed back to Belarus or dying (Halemba, 2022, p.5). The situation eased in 2022 due to the brutal winter, the EU's pressure on the Belarusian government to limit the flights, and the repatriation of some refugees at the border (Grześkowiak, 2023, p.82). Nevertheless, the obstacles for migrants from the ME and NA to enter Poland have remained unchanged even when nowadays, millions of Ukrainians can cross the border easily (Bodnar & Grzelak, 2023, p.10).

2.2.1 The Security Speech Act

The Polish debate about Refugees has remained relatively politicized in the aftermath of the so-called migration crisis in 2015 (Bornio, 2021, p.3). Nevertheless, the political and media debate about the Polish-Belarusian border crises was not primarily focused on the migrants stuck in the border region. It emphasized that the “defense of the border” (Halemba, 2022, p.4) was necessary to react to the attack by Lukashenko’s Belarus, which acted as a proxy state of Russia (Halemba, 2022, p.4). The PiS securitized the threat by Russia and Belarus accordingly. The state-controlled media reported about the refugees constantly referring to army training maneuvers by Belarus and Russia in the border region (Halemba, 2022, p.5). The Polish lower house (*Sejm*) adopted a resolution on the protection of Polish borders in response to the refugees that ‘the regime of Alexander Lukashenko has attacked Poland using the thousands of migrants it brought to Poland as an assault on the borders of the Republic of Poland (Bodnar & Grzelak, 2023, pp. 64f.).

Poland’s prime minister Mateusz Morawiecki ultimately performed the Security Speech Act (SSA) in a Youtube video he shared on his other social media channels on the 21st of November 2021. The video is named with the hashtag #WeDefendEurope. It shows alternating Morawiecki speaking in front of Polish and European flags and refugees that either violently try to cross borders or are prevented by supposedly Polish security forces. In the video, the Polish prime minister recites the following:

SSA (2021/1)

“Ladies and Gentlemen, I turn to you because Europe, our common home, is threatened. At this very moment, a hybrid war is taking place on the Polish-Belarusian border, which Aleksander Lukashenko, with the backroom support of Wladimir Putin, has declared against the entire European Union. From a distance, these events may look like an ordinary migration crisis. But they are not. This is a political crisis created for a special purpose. The objective is to destabilize the situation in Europe first time since the end of the Cold War thirty years ago. Over the weeks, we have provided ample evidence that it is the Belarusian regime that is bringing migrants to the border in order to transport these people then to Western Europe. Today, the target is Poland, but tomorrow it will be Germany, Belgium, France, or Spain. This is the concept of organization of migration routes. Lukashenko’s and Putin’s pressure is already being felt throughout Europe. [...] This is just the beginning. The dictators will not stop. I want to assure you Poland

will not yield to blackmail and will do everything to stop the evil threatening Europe. For centuries Poland has been guarding our common home. When invaders, tyrants, and later totalitarian dictatorships had to be confronted, we always stood in the front line. This was the Polish solidarity with other free-world countries long before the European Union and NATO were born. But at the same time, I appeal to all the people of the free world. Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia need your solidarity and support today. Right now, I want to thank everyone who has been supporting so far our actions on the border to Belarus. I thank the countries of the Union, the European Commission, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. We formed alliances so that in times of trouble, we could be together, not apart. To support each other and not let ourselves be divided. No matter where we live, we all know this one thing: When someone tries to break into our home, we defend our home. This principle also applies to national borders, the borders of the European Union, and NATO, our common home. Let us stand together. Let us defend Europe.” (Morawiecki, 2021).

Morawiecki’s SSA is remarkable. He did not securitize the coming refugees as the PiS used to do in the *migration crisis* in 2015. Instead, he entirely focused on the threat that Lukashenko and, with him, Putin posed to Poland and the EU. Factually, he even denied the existence of an “ordinary migration crisis” (Morawiecki, 2021) and neglected all humanitarian aspects that could be addressed. The security concerns were the only ones relevant for the implementation of emergency measures (EMs).

2.2.2 The Emergency Measures

In the case of the Polish Belarusian border crisis, the PiS Party used its SSAs to legitimate extraordinary emergency measures, which under normal circumstances would be more challenging to implement than it is after that.

Therefore, Defense Minister Mariusz Blaszczak announced sending 13.000 troops to the border and suspending the trans-border traffic at one crossing point of the border completely (Bornio, 2021, p.2). Moreover, the Polish authorities decided to erect a temporary fence and later a permanent wall on the border (Bornio, 2021, p.2; Grzeškowiak, 2023, p.82). In response to the growing number of refugees, Poland introduced a state of emergency. It drastically restricted the freedom of movement in a 3-

kilometer strip along the border and additionally 183 border towns. Also, journalists and civic organizations were no longer allowed to enter the area and, therefore, to document the situation and help refugees. With this, they provided the way for fundamental human rights violations (Bodnar & Grzelak, 2023, pp. 4f.).

In addition, on 14th October 2021, the parliament enacted an amendment to the act that grants protection to foreigners in Poland (Law 2021/1918 2021). According to this amendment, the head of the border police was not authorized to process asylum applications if the underlying cause is illegal immigration. In practice, this legalized push-backs, i.e., the pushing back of asylum seekers from EU territory. The actual enforcement of these push-backs at the Polish-Belarusian border accordingly constituted a non-punished breach of the non-refoulment principle and the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) (Grzeškowiak, 2023, p. 83).

Moreover, the law on aliens and other laws came into effect on the 26th of October. The legislation included a new administrative act according to which the decision of the border police also entailed a ban for the whole Schengen area for six months up to three years. In addition, any possibility of taking legal action against these decisions was effectively prevented (Grzeškowiak, 2023, p.85). In practice, this meant that most refugees, if caught by the Polish border police, were pushed back to Belarus. This also happened to women and children (Bodnar & Grzelak, 2023, p.6). When refugees arrived on the Belarusian side, they were also prevented from entering Polish territory using physical violence (Grzeškowiak, 2023, p.85). This further criminalized the refugees, which led, among other things, to a group of asylum seekers being stuck in the forest for 2.5 months, unable to go forward or back. Due to the state of emergency, they were cut off from outside help (Halemba, 2022, p.5).

2.2.3 The Identity of the Audience

The content of the SSA suggests that the PiS, respectively Morawiecki, targeted mainly the other states of the European Union as his primary target. He stated that “Putin has declared (hybrid war) against the entire European Union” (see SSA (2021/1)), emphasizing that this threat affected not only Poland's security but also the European Union's general security. This is even more emphasized when he clarifies that it may be Poland today, but the next targets could be Germany, Belgium, France, and Spain. Morawiecki even expressed gratitude to the countries of the Union, the European

Commission, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America for creating an alliance that supported each other in times of crisis. These statements indicate an attempt to garner support from other Western countries aligned with Poland within the EU and NATO, seeking approval for the Polish government's emergency measures (EMs).

Understanding the context of the crisis is more complex. First and foremost, the border crisis did not occur out of nowhere. Instead, it was the last escalation stage of a conflict waged between the EU and Belarus since 1996, employing sanctions and threats (Erdoğan & Karakoç Dora, 2022). The situation escalated in May 2021 when Belarusian authorities diverted a plane to detain a Greek journalist, prompting the EU to impose even stricter sanctions (Erdoğan & Karakoç Dora, 2022, p. 425). Since the treatment of immigrants remained one of the most controversial issues within the EU, Lukashenko, with Russian support, tried to use this weak spot and realize political goals in the region (e.g., further excerpt Ukraine's possible NATO affiliation) (Erdoğan & Karakoç Dora, 2022, p. 432). The existing tensions allowed the Polish government to succeed in its securitization move and persuade the EU, and especially NATO as its targeted audience, to agree with its EMs.

The interviews also shed light on Morawiecki's perspective, demonstrating that while emphasizing national sovereignty, he increasingly recognized the refugee issue as a European concern requiring a collective response. In an interview with dpa, he highlighted the need for a common migration policy at the European level:

“Asylum policy should be the prerogative of a sovereign state. But we should develop a common migration policy at the European level (...) In this respect, unity in Europe is much greater than three or four years ago. The previous refugee policy turned out to be a mistake. Most EU countries, except for one or two, understood that we cannot pursue an open-door policy.” (Polish News, 2021)

In a widely acknowledged interview with the German newspaper “BILD”, Morawiecki again emphasized that Polish Western allies' audiences' acceptance (AA) and support is expected for their emergency measures at the border:

“If necessary, there are different stages of escalation. First of all, I am glad that the leaders of other NATO states have expressed their assistance. This includes Chancellor Angela Merkel and her soon-to-be successor, Olaf Scholz. The next

step would be a decisive statement by Belarus' neighbors: Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia. Another step could be the activation of Article 4 of the NATO treaty that officially recognizes a violation of their state territories ..." (Ronzheimer & Vehlewald, 2021)

These statements indicate that Morawiecki primarily targeted Poland's Western allies, focusing on garnering AA and support from the European Union and NATO.

2.2.3.1 The Response of the European Union

The crisis got little attention in Poland and the rest of the world (Judzińska & Sendyka, 2022, p.1). While several Western politicians criticized the Polish government for its stance in the border crisis (Halemba, 2022, p.8), the primary audience, namely the European Union, particularly the European Commission, notably adopted the narrative presented by the Polish government (Grześkowiak, 2023, p.89). This is noteworthy, considering that EU politicians had previously criticized the Polish government for its policies on issues such as abortion, LGBT rights, and changes to the legal system that were seen as undermining democracy. However, in the context of the border crisis, these politicians welcomed Poland's hardline approach and downplayed the resulting humanitarian suffering (Grześkowiak, 2023, p.89; Halemba, 2022, p.9). Ylva Johansson, the Commissioner for Home Affairs of the EU, even denied that it is a migration crisis at all. Instead, it is "part of the aggression of Lukashenko toward Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia, intending to destabilize the E.U." (Grześkowiak, 2023, p.90). The Commission itself went even further and declared that it had "provided for the measures and operational support to Member States to manage this emergency in a humane, orderly and dignified manner" (Grześkowiak, 2023, p.91) while referring to the legislative changes that deprived refugees of fundamental rights (Grześkowiak, 2023, p.91). Accordingly, it can be said that securitization was accepted and even supported by the target audience, the European Union.

2.3 The Russo-Ukrainian War

The Polish-Belarusian border crisis was the last incident involving refugees from the ME and NA at the Polish border. Nevertheless, geopolitical events brought Ukrainian refugees back to the spotlight by the beginning of 2022. As shown above, more than one million

people have fled to Poland since 2014, but this number multiplied significantly with the outbreak of Russian aggression. The origin of the conflict was that the Ukrainian population is increasingly oriented towards Western European and democratic values and thus inevitably came into conflict with the authoritarian Russian ruling elite (Opiola et al., 2022, pp.11f.).

The conflict escalated into a full-scale war on 24 February 2022 and continues to this day. The exact course of the war will not be examined further here. What is essential is that in the course of the war, there have been not only humanitarian emergencies and economic problems but an unprecedented movement of refugees from Ukraine (Opiola et al., 2022, p.7). At this point (9th May of 2023), 8.207 million refugees have been registered in Europe, of which more than 5 million are under temporary protection in other countries - 1.593 million in Poland alone (UNHCR, Government, 2023). In the following examination, especially in the case of the emergency measures (EMs), the study focuses in particular on the measures in connection with the Ukrainian refugees because these take on the most significant role in the overall analysis. In order to understand the PiS's securitization in light of the Russo-Ukrainian war, this analysis focuses firstly on the performed Securitization Speech Acts (SSAs).

2.3.1 The Securitization Speech Acts

It is interesting to note the shift in perception and treatment of refugees in the context of the Russian aggression in February 2022. While Ukrainian refugees had been integrated into Polish society as a matter of course in the past years since 2014, they were now presented as fellow Ukrainians in need of urgent assistance, mobilization, and support (Stepaniuk, 2022, p.45).a

The securitization of the Russian aggression in Ukraine by the Polish government is evident in the strong rhetoric and narrative presented by Polish officials. Although the Polish president and PiS party member, Duda, assured the public several times in January 2022 that Poland was not in danger (PAP, 2022a, 2022b), the political tone quickly became harsher. The PiS government, led by Prime Minister Morawiecki and supported by President Duda and Foreign Minister Rau, framed the situation as a broader threat to the values and structures of Western democratic states. Morawiecki presented the Russian aggression in line with a neo-imperial logic and stated:

SSA (2022/1)

“Today, the pressure is on Ukraine, tomorrow it may be on the countries of Central Europe, and the day after tomorrow – Western Europe” (PAP, 2022c).

The language used by PiS officials drew parallels to the securitization of the Belarusian-Polish border crisis, with similar rhetoric emphasizing the potential expansion of the threat beyond Ukraine to Central and Western Europe. The portrayal by the Polish foreign minister Rau of Russia's actions as an "act of state terrorism" that “poses a threat to OSCE’s existence” (PAP, 2022f). Morawiecki also emphasized:

SSA (2022/2)

“If we fail to win the war against Russia, we’re risking something more than losing the security of Ukraine. Most importantly, we’re risking the marginalization of the entire continent” (PAP, 2022h).

According to Duda, Russia’s intervention in Ukraine presented an “unprecedented aggression” (PAP, 2022d). He also pointed to the possibility of Russia using chemical weapons (PAP, 2022e) and compared the Russian army's process to the German Waffen SS (PAP, 2022g). Therefore, Russia and its willingness to use military force were depicted as the most existential threat to Poland’s and Europe’s security there is (Śliwa, 2023, p.131). The SSAs, again, mainly served the implementation of emergency measures (EMs) that will be considered in the following chapter.

2.3.2 The Emergency Measures

Poland reacted very quickly and opened its borders to Ukraine on the 24th of February of 2022, even before the EU Temporary Protection Directive⁴ came into function in March. The influx of the refugees coincided with an enormous feat of strength by Polish society to provide voluntary humanitarian assistance to Ukrainian refugees without government leadership in the first days of the war (Ociepa-Kicińska & Gorzałczyńska-Koczkodaj, 2022).

⁴ The procedure of temporary protection in the EU enables Ukrainians to get access to medical care and education and allows them to move freely between EU countries. However, Syrians were not granted similar freedoms (Ociepa-Kicińska & Gorzałczyńska-Koczkodaj, 2022, p.7).

Poland implemented exceptional policy measures at the legislative level through the Act on Aid for Ukrainian Citizens in Connection with the Armed Conflict in the Territory of Ukraine (AnA). This law, which took effect on March 12th, 2022 (retroactively binding from February 24th, 2022), granted comprehensive rights to Ukrainian refugees in Poland. These rights included access to accommodation, transportation if needed, medical assistance, education, and more. Furthermore, Ukrainian refugees in Poland were granted 18 months of temporary protection, exceeding the standard 12 months provided in other EU countries. This extended period of temporary protection allowed Ukrainian refugees to integrate better into the job market, education system and take advantage of European freedom of movement. They were also issued a Polish personal identification number, enabling them to access the job market and avail themselves of welfare benefits provided by the Polish state (Ociepa-Kicińska & Gorzałczyńska-Koczkodaj, 2022, p.7).

After the Russian attack, Poland and other NATO members heavily invested in support of its military to better protect the country. The Parliament passed a law on the defense of the homeland that accelerated the Polish army's modernization. Moreover, from 2023 on, at least 3% of the GDP will be spent on military defense, and the military will be increased to 250,000 soldiers (Śliwa, 2023, p.132). Also, the Polish government pressures for better support of the NATO eastern front and the accession of Sweden and Finland to strengthen the alliance even further (Śliwa, 2023, p.135). Poland has also been one of the primary weapons suppliers of Ukraine. Amongst others, they have sent tanks, rocket launchers, and infantry fighting vehicles (Śliwa, 2023, p. 133). The country was also the first NATO member who declare to give Ukraine fighter jets in March 2023 (AP News, 2023).

2.3.3 The Identity of the Audience

The SSAs do not directly reveal the audience's identity. Nevertheless, certain aspects of the speech act are noteworthy. Firstly, the rhetoric emphasizes the potential impact of a Russian attack not only on Poland but also on other countries (SSA (2022/1), SSA (2022/2)). The focus is mainly on the European Union and other Western allies such as NATO. The securitization narrative highlights the threat that if Ukraine were to lose and Poland became the target of Russian aggression, it would only be a matter of time before Putin would also target other Western states (SSA (2022/1)). Based on this indication, the

primary audience of the securitization can be inferred to be Poland's Western allies, including the EU and NATO.

Poland and Ukraine have a significant historical connection, notably characterized by the pressure exerted by Russian interventions. Ukraine's fate has always interested Poland, given their shared history and the recurrent Russian involvement in both countries (Śliwa, 2023, pp.123ff.). Additionally, Ukrainians and Poles have shared common cultural features and have similar languages. Since the introduction of the visa-free regime⁵ between the two countries in 2017, there has been a growing familiarity between the peoples of Poland and Ukraine (Ociepa-Kicińska & Gorzałczyńska-Koczkodaj, 2022, p.3). On the other hand, the relationship between Poland and Russia has traditionally been complex. The Polish government has often criticized other European countries, such as Germany, in the context of Nord Stream 2, for what they perceive as excessive reliance on Russia (Śliwa, 2023, pp.124f.). This suggests that in the face of Russian military aggression, the Polish government has sought to mobilize other European and Western states, urging them to take more decisive action.

In an interview with CTV News, Polish prime minister Morawiecki underlined this when he emphasized:

“And I think if Europe wants to have stable and long-term growth, stability, and development in a peaceful way, we have to fend off all those barbaric attacks by the Russians. These were also the arguments which I believe were important for Chancellor Scholz, for President Macron, and our other allies in Western Europe.”
(CTV News, 2023)

This interview indicates that Morawiecki and his government sought acceptance and assistance from their targeted audience, primarily comprised of Western European states. By highlighting Western European allies' shared interests and concerns, Morawiecki aimed to rally support and collaboration in countering the perceived threats posed by Russia's aggression for the Western world and Poland particularly.

⁵ Implemented on the 11th of June 2017, enabling traveling without a visa between both countries (Ociepa-Kicińska & Gorzałczyńska-Koczkodaj, 2022, p.3).

2.3.3.1 The Response of the European Union and NATO

The EU responded to the outbreak of the war in an unprecedented scope and speed especially compared to their reaction to the Polish-Belarusian border crisis. The first EU sanctions were already issued on the 23rd of February, 2022 (Bosse, 2022, p.531). For the first time in history, the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) was set into power, allowing Ukrainian nationals to live permanently in the EU and access housing, education, etc., in their respective countries (Bosse, 2022, p. 532). NATO and the EU directly started to isolate Russia, delivering heavy weapons to Ukraine, and enabling them to resist the Russian army. As suggested by the statements of the Polish government, many EU politicians also started to perceive the attack by Russia as a threat to their respective interests and convictions. Therefore, a new block formation was visible, with many Western countries such as Poland heavily reinvesting in their military, preparing for an even bigger conflict (Pradetto, 2022, pp. 1ff.).

Still, it should be noted that this is not the natural reaction of the Union against aggression from Russia, as the example of the annexation of Crimea showed (Bosse, 2022, p.533). At this time, the EU imposed single sanctions but disagreed about a common sanction strategy in response to Russia. Initially, the Eastern European states, including Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and particularly Poland, attempted to securitize the potential of Russian aggression. Yet, their efforts did not receive widespread support until the military conflict escalated in February 2022 (Bosse, 2022, pp. 533ff.).

In the current securitization process of the Russo-Ukrainian War, Poland is one of the leading actors, even though its position mostly aligns with the current narrative of most Western states. It is important to note that other actors, such as Ukraine, are involved in this process. Nevertheless, it can be said that the EU and NATO have accepted Poland's securitization of Russia.

2.4 The Modes of Securitization

Now that the analysis of the individual components in the cases of securitization during the migration crisis of 2015, the Polish-Belarusian border crisis of 2021, and the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2022 is conducted, the next step is to determine the sequence of these elements. This allows for an examination of the role played by the audience in each corresponding securitization. Accordingly, the next three subchapters apply the CSEF and determine in which sequence the Securitization Speech Act(s) (SSA), the Emergency

Measure(s) (EM), and the Audience Acceptance(s) (AA) occur. The results can be summarized and depicted in Table 2, building the foundation for the following discussion.

Table 2. The Modes of Securitization in Poland between 2015 and 2022

	<i>Migration Crisis 2015</i>	Belarusian-Poland Border Crisis 2021	Ukraine-War 2022
Securitization Actor	PiS-Party/Government	PiS-Government	PiS-Government
Alleged threat	Refugees and Immigrants “Economic” migrants/ Refugees (European Union)	Lukashenko’s and Putin’s regime Refugees as weapons in a hybrid war “Useful Idiots” (e.g., Polish NGOs)	Russia (i.e. Putin himself) Possible spill-over effects of the war
Referent object of security	Poland’s national security National identity, culture and religion (National sovereignty)	Poland’s and EU’s sovereignty and independence	Poland’s and EU’s sovereignty and independence
Proposed EMs	Act on Antiterrorist Activities (AAA) Unrestricted surveillance Restriction on asylum procedures (Rejection of reallocation scheme)	Push-Backs State of emergency Prohibition of reporting and humanitarian help for refugees	Extensive support of Ukraine Weapons, Sanctions, etc. Act on Aid for Ukrainian Citizens (AnA) Extensive Support for Ukrainian refugees
Targeted Audience	Polish public opinion	European Union	European Union, USA, NATO
Audience response	Positive/Acceptance	Positive/Acceptance	Positive/Acceptance
Form of CSEF securitization	Ideal Securitization	Reversed Comprehensive Securitization	Ideal / Comprehensive Securitization

(Source: Author's own compilation of information)

2.4.1 The Mode of Securitization in the *Migration Crisis* in 2015

One of the most standard securitization cases is observable in Poland in 2015 conducted by the PiS. The sequence of events strongly suggests an ideal securitization. The securitization components align with the original theory by the Copenhagen School of Security Studies. This means that the SSA proceeded the AA, which legitimizes the EM. As Chapter 2.1 identifies, the PiS first performed the SSA, which securitized the refugees from the ME and NA in their successful election campaign in 2015 because of the alleged threat they imposed on Polish national identity, culture, and religion. Based on the election's outcome and several surveys, they received the AA from the Polish public and initiated a successful securitization move. Subsequently, the PiS government continued to securitize refugees, particularly in response to terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels, and the audience continued to accept these securitization moves. With the Polish public's acceptance, the government could implement the EMs of restrictive asylum laws for people from the ME and NA. It is worth noting that the securitization process also extended to the European Union. The PiS government successfully securitized the EU,

presenting it as an encroaching superpower that wants to saddle them with the burden of taking care of refugees. This interconnected securitization of the EU ultimately allowed the PiS government to reject the implementation of the European reallocation scheme.

2.4.2 The Mode of Securitization in the Polish-Belarusian Border Crisis in 2021

In this study, a significant shift in the securitization approach by the PiS and, therefore, in their mode of securitization can be observed in 2021. The securitization in light of the Polish Belarusian border crisis indicates a reversed comprehensive securitization. Meaning that the AA proceeded with the EM, and the securitization actors only subsequently legitimized them by their SSA. Having secured their reelection, the PiS government shifted its focus from targeting the Polish public, which it deemed already politicized, to a new audience: the European Union. The EU established a similar stand toward refugees as Poland did after 2015, meaning that the European Union dealt with refugees similarly dehumanizingly (see Bodnar & Grzelak, 2023). They also became increasingly skeptical toward Russia after 2014 and had already established the necessary AA. Consequently, the Polish government could implement the EM, which consisted of the Act on Antiterrorist Activities (AAA) and the quasi-legalization of Pushbacks, without the fear of sanctions by the targeted audience. Notably, Prime Minister Morawiecki still used an SSA to legitimize the implemented Emergency Measures retrospectively.

2.4.3 The Mode of Securitization in the Russo-Ukrainian War in 2022

With the onset of the Ukrainian War in February 2022, the mode of securitization underwent another shift, albeit with some complexity. The specific mode of securitization depends on the implemented Emergency Measures (EM). In one case, it is an ideal securitization, where the Securitization Speech Act (SSA) precedes the Audience Acceptance (AA), legitimizing the EM. This can be observed in the case of weapon deliveries as EM. In contrast, in another case, it resembles a comprehensive securitization, where the SSA precedes the EM, and the AA subsequently legitimizes the EM. This can be seen in the extraordinary openness displayed towards Ukrainian refugees as EM. In both instances, the PiS government acted as the Securitization Actor and securitized Russia through several SSAs. Concerning the Ukrainian refugees, the EM was taken even before the European Union formally accepted the move and granted their AA. This was

shown by, e.g., the fast implementation of the quick opening of the borders and the implementation of the Act on Aid for Ukrainian Citizens in Connection with the Armed Conflict in the Territory of Ukraine (AnA) even before the EU implemented similar political measures. Nevertheless, in the context of weapon deliveries, the Polish government must wait for the AA by the relevant audience (i.e., NATO) before supplying weapons to Ukraine as their EM.

3 Discussion

This chapter contextualizes the findings of Chapter 2 within the broader context of Polish domestic and foreign policy. The first part discusses the purpose and strategy behind the change in the targeted audience. The first argument is that this change is due to a convergence between Polish national and foreign interests. The second part focuses on the implications of such a shift. The second argument is that the Polish domestic audience has mostly tolerated the securitization from the PiS. Still, together with the PiS domestic policy, this has resulted in a growing polarization of Polish society. The thesis scrutinizes how the securitization of a democratically elected government is influenced by the role played by the Polish public. Both arguments evaluate the impact of securitization on refugees from the Middle East/North Africa and Ukraine.

3.1 The Influence of the Targeted Audience

It is immediately noticeable that all securitization acts were passed during geopolitical tension. Whether these affected Poland (as in 2021 and 2022) or were only of secondary relevance (as in 2015) plays a subordinate role. The PiS party make use of already heated political climates. Many SSAs were held after actual events, such as the terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels, the unilateral opening of the border by Lukashenko, or the Russian invasion on 24 February 2022. At the same time, the response of the respective audiences also showed that securitization was always particularly effective after these events. Surveys, as shown, present an increasingly hostile attitude of the Polish public after the SSAs following the terrorist attacks in Brussels and Paris and the subsequent acceptance of the unrestricted opening of Borders to Ukraine after the outbreak of the War in 2022.

The PiS party did, therefore, not create threats out of nothing. Instead, it took existing fears and exploited them for its purposes. The PiS's choice of which audience it wanted to target played a decisive role in this process. Through it, the PiS seemed to determine on which (inter-)national level a topic perceived as a threat was securitized. In other words, the PiS considered the level of the threats and decided which audience will agree to securitization based on this. A clear indication of this was that in all three cases, the targeted audience accepted the securitization move. Also, in the cases of the Polish-Belarusian border crisis and parts of the Russia-Ukraine war, the audience's acceptance already preceded the PiS's securitization move.

This strategic utilization of securitization advanced mainly the PiS government's political objectives. While in 2015, the party attracted awareness through a slight Euroscepticism connected with concerns about Polish national sovereignty, this changed entirely in the face of the increasing Russian threat. This becomes evident when one examines the Polish Foreign Policy Strategy for the period of 2017-2021.

„Today, terrorism and uncontrolled migration flows – an aftermath of political and economic destabilization in North Africa and the Middle East constitute a genuine challenge to transatlantic security. This challenge is aggravated by Russia's deliberate policy aimed at destabilizing both the eastern and southern neighborhoods of the European Union. Traditional distinctions between internal and external security dimensions have begun to blur.“ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland, n.d., p.2)

The Polish government, while still struggling with the European Union about issues such as the rule of law controversy⁶ and a problematic relationship with especially Germany⁷ (Karolewski & Wilga, 2018), noticed that they cannot tackle the threat imposed by Russia without the help of the EU and NATO (Tavares & Kolano, 2022, p.27). All this led the Polish government to become increasingly involved in the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), to provide Poland as the main hub for American NATO troops in Eastern Europe (Tavares & Kolano, 2022, p.27) and to declare the international security situation a national security issue:

„All of this takes its toll on the European Union and NATO. Membership of these two major international institutions helps Poland develop its two overarching goals: to ensure security of the state and its citizens, and to create conditions for overall growth. Any long-term deterioration in the international status of both the

⁶ The European Commission has the authority to initiate a formal investigation into the rule of law concerns within an EU member state. Such an investigation can potentially lead to sanctions, including losing voting rights within the EU. Poland was the first country to face this scrutiny due to controversies surrounding its rule of law, particularly related to the actions of the PiS government in influencing the Polish Constitutional Tribunal through legislative changes (Karolewski & Wilga, 2018, p.28).

⁷ Challenges and complexities have marked the historical relationship between Poland and Germany. Polish politicians have raised concerns and suspicions about Germany's perceived efforts to establish European hegemony and their support for the Nord Stream pipelines with Russia. Furthermore, discussions about unresolved issues related to World War II, including the question of compensation for damages incurred by Poland, remain topics of contention (Karolewski & Wilga, 2018).

EU and NATO would harm Poland's vital interests. All efforts must today be undertaken to strengthen these bodies and to ensure their internal consolidation.“

(Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland, n.d., p.2)

In 2015, the PiS's primary goal was to secure acceptance from the Polish public as they sought unity in the face of upcoming elections. The European Union was too divided then to support a more comprehensive securitization approach. Nonetheless, this changed with the growing threat from Russia. In 2021, the EU could already be targeted as a securitization audience because the emergency measures aligned with the European handling of refugees, and the Russian threat was increasing. The securitization after the outbreak of war in 2022 functioned in a similar logic. The PiS government was able to securitize Russia and implement emergency measures because they were aware of the support and acceptance from the entire Western world. The changing securitization reflected a shift from national to international crises. In this sense, the PiS's securitization strategy demonstrated the convergence of national and international interests, particularly Western ones.

The PiS party's securitization approach also directly affected their treatment of refugees from diverse backgrounds. Interestingly, similar to the evolving perception of the Russian threat, the stance of the PiS party and the European Union (EU) toward refugees began to converge immediately after the conclusion of the *migration crisis*. Despite its efforts to maintain the narrative of the threat posed by refugees and the EU's welcoming policies in Poland, the policies taken by the PiS government differed. In fact, the Polish government aligned largely with the common European approach to address the root causes of migration to reduce the number of people seeking refuge in Europe (Follis, 2019, p. 312).

Nothing was more exemplary for the new common refugee policy than the securitization during the Polish-Belarusian border crisis: The mode of securitization and the unity of the European Commission and the PiS in denying that there was a refugee crisis at all showed a somewhat cynical common understanding of the humanitarian values represented by the European Union. The convergence of national and international interests and objectives suggests that the ambiguous stance of the Polish government towards refugees from different backgrounds should not be perceived as solely a national issue confined to Poland. Instead, it reflects a broader Western standpoint that facilitated

both the inhumane treatment of refugees from the ME and NA and the initially welcoming treatment of refugees from Ukraine.

Yet the securitization of the PiS affected not only the targeted audience, e.g., the EU but also the Polish population. Accordingly, in the next section, the analysis also deals with the dynamics in Polish society as the non-direct audience, which was nevertheless crucial for the success of the securitization strategy.

3.2 The Division within Polish Society

Chapter 2 of this thesis reaffirms the significance of the public as the primary audience of securitization moves in democratic contexts, as supported by Stivas (2023b, p.52). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that while the Polish public may not always have been the direct target audience of the securitization efforts by the PiS party, their acceptance (or lack of opposition) has been crucial for the success of their securitization. In this sense, the gradual absence of the Polish public in the securitization discourse is quite notable. It would be inaccurate to overlook their role in the securitization process, as they twice re-elected the PiS party as the sole governing party. This also means that most of the public must have accepted the government's actions.

Nonetheless, as indicated in Table 1, the public was explicitly targeted only in 2015. Surveys demonstrate that the predominantly negative attitude fostered by securitization towards accepting refugees from the ME and NA persisted until at least 2019 (Hargrave et al., 2022). Simultaneously, the influx of ultimately 1,3 million immigrants from Ukraine remained completely without any securitization move from the PiS and was still primarily accepted by the Polish public. Most of the society remained in this ambiguous stand toward refugees, with a welcoming attitude toward refugees from Ukraine and a rather hostile attitude toward refugees from the ME and NA. This ultimately also enabled the overreaching acceptance and engagement of Polish civil society in the face of the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war described above.

All of that indicates that, apart from the securitization in 2015, in which the PiS actively contributed to a more hostile climate toward refugees from the ME and NA, the party has relied on a passive acceptance of the Polish public regarding their securitization and policy measures toward refugees (both from the ME and NA as well as Ukraine). Yet the picture is not as uniform as this firstly suggests, and attention must be drawn to nuances after the year 2019. It marked the year of the PiS's second election win and the

beginning of warming attitudes toward refugees from the ME and NA (Hargrave et al., 2022, p.21). While in 2021, a large part of the Polish population still accepted and supported stopping refugees with the help of fences and violence (Opióła et al., 2022, p.14), there was also support from the civilian population. Locals, helping to distribute food and other essentials to the refugees, were often portrayed as “Useful idiots” (Halemba, 2022, p.7) for Putin's purposes (Halemba, 2022, pp.6f.) and became securitized themselves. This highlights the developing existence of a more divided attitude toward refugees in Polish society. In the framework of the securitization theory, this indicates an increasing desecuritization.

Desecuritization describes “the shifting of issues out of the emergency mode and into the normal bargaining process of the political sphere” (Buzan et al., 1998, p.4). Accordingly, desecuritization is not the exact complement to securitization, e.g., there has not to be a *desecuritization speech act*. Hansen (2012) identifies four different types of desecuritization: *Change through stabilization* describes the normalization of an issue within the securitized realm without being constantly framed as such. *Replacement* is self-speaking when a securitized issue gets subsidized by another issue that gets securitized. *Rearticulation* is the move out of the securitized realm into the politicized realm because of a lack of urgency. Finally, *silencing* describes the marginalizing of a topic and the quasi-depoliticizing of it (Hansen, 2012, p.529).

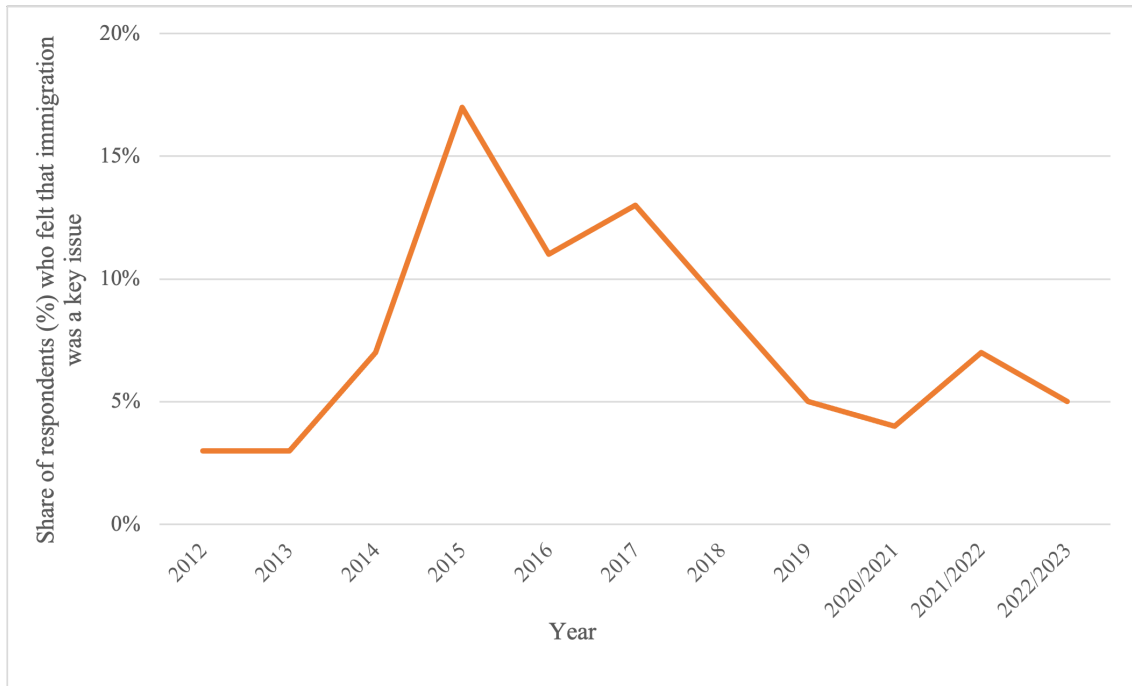
What one can observe in the case of Poland is desecuritization through replacement. This is indicated by replacing the refugees in the scope of the PiS's securitization. This study discussed this process already in chapters 2 and 3.1. On the national level, it is apparent that in the 2019's election campaign, the PiS party pursued policies that shifted the focus away from the refugee issue. The strongly decreasing salience of the issues of refugees, in general, indicates this (Figure 3).

The PiS party used in their 2019's election campaign mainly the *LGBT+ ideology*⁸ as the new threat imposed within the country on the national identity (Kinowska-Mazaraki, 2021, p.2). Some parts of the party also worked with open antisemitic rhetoric (Folvarčny & Kopeček, 2020, p.173). The party's emphasis on these matters, alongside

⁸ In fact, while LGBTQ communities were mainly targeted by this, the campaign was against everything and everyone who did not represent true ‘Polishness’ according to the narrative of the PiS. This means that only people supporting conservative, Catholic values and the PiS party were considered ‘true Poles’ (Kinowska-Mazaraki, 2021).

the broader socio-political context, further contributed to the complete departure of the refugee issue from the realm of securitization.

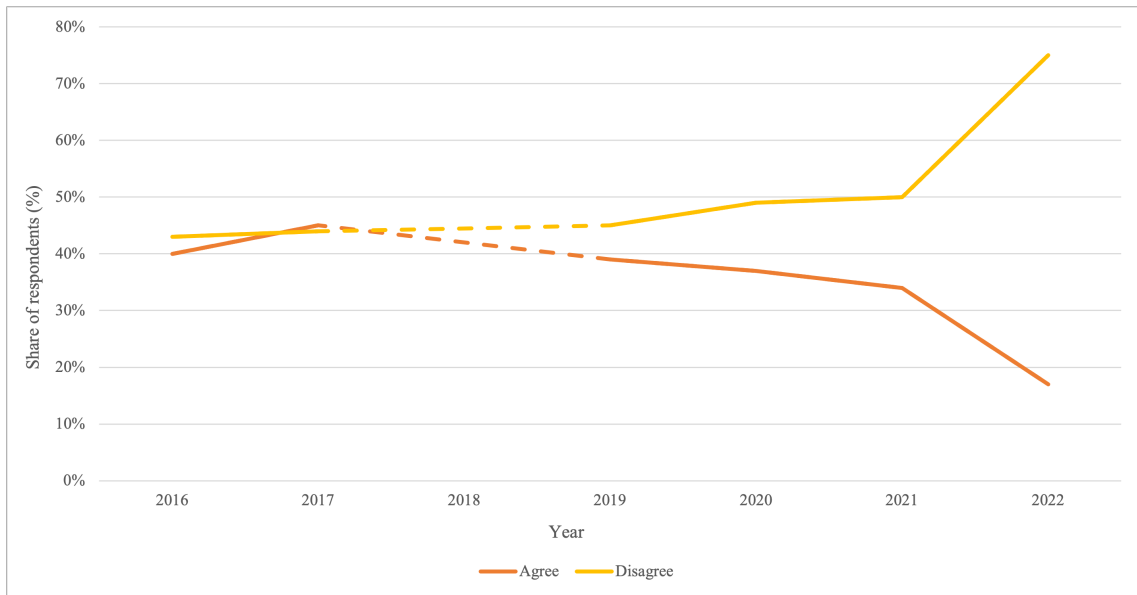
Figure 3. Immigration as a key issue in Poland.



The figure shows how many respondents (%) answered with 'immigration' to the question, 'What do you think are the two most important issues facing Poland today?'. The data from 2012 to 2019 is from the autumn surveys, and between 2020 and 2023 from the winter surveys (Source: Eurobarometer, n.d.; Representation: Hargrave et al., 2022, p.18).

Polish society has become more divided ever since, and satisfaction with the government has steadily decreased in the last ten years (ESS, 2021, 2023a, 2023b, n.d.b, n.d.a). The PiS has, instead of trying to unify the Polish society as they did with the securitization in 2015, concentrated on dividing elements. It created a space where more people could become critical of the government's refugee approach. E.g., a substantial part of the population (50%) actively opposed closing borders in light of the Polish Belarusian border crisis in 2021 (see Figure 4.).

Figure 4. Polish opinion on closing the border for Refugees.



The figure shows the percentage of people disagreeing/agreeing with the following statement: 'We must close our borders to refugees entirely – we can't accept any at this time'. The dotted line represents missing data for 2018 (Sources: Ipsos, 2016, 2017, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022; Representation: Hargrave et al., 2022).

The increasing polarization about LGBTQ and abortion rights led to a mobilization of civil society resulting in mass protests in most Polish cities in 2020 that went far beyond the mere criticism of abortion laws and also demanded a more extensive separation of church and state and the dismissal of the government (Kinowska-Mazaraki, 2021, pp.2ff.). This also translated into more civil engagement for refugees, as apparent in the civilian willingness to help the people on the border between Belarus and Poland. Even if these efforts were successfully prevented by the government's introduction of the state of emergency, it shows that the stand toward refugees was no longer as uniform as the line dictated by the government in 2015.

The outbreak of war in Ukraine represented a moment of unity between public opinion and the government's line in this heated atmosphere. The swift action of both civilians and the government in February and March of 2022 demonstrated what is possible when the securitization of specific population groups does not create national divisions. The significant civilian support for refugees in the early days of the war clearly indicated that state securitization was unnecessary and, moreover, could have been less effective compared to civilians' voluntary and generous assistance. Nevertheless, surveys

on satisfaction with the government and acceptance of refugees of other ethnic origins also show that this does not necessarily have to remain the case.

The crucial question remains whether this realization and the spirit of unity will be reflected in the upcoming elections in autumn 2023 or if the divisions within Polish society on issues such as refugees, abortion rights, and criticism of the church will persist.

4 Conclusion

The primary aim of this thesis was to conduct a comprehensive and rigorous analysis of the audience's role in the securitization processes employed by the PiS party. Specifically, this analysis focused on the targeted audience and the Polish public, whose approval played a crucial role in shaping the response to various refugee movements. Thereby, the study started with the following hypothesis: *The selection and acceptance of the targeted audience played a substantial role in the securitization by the PiS party and, thus, in its selective treatment of refugees from different regions of the world.* This hypothesis was validated through an in-depth examination of the securitization modes in relation to the PiS party's foreign and domestic policies. The key findings of this thesis can be summarized as follows:

The analyzed events showed a clear trend: the securitized threat in the securitization efforts of the PiS has gained greater geopolitical significance over time. In parallel, the targeted audience of the PiS securitization expanded as well. The audience had a direct influence on the securitization by the PiS, indicating a convergence between Polish national security interests and those of the European and Western community. This alignment was also evident in the treatment of refugees from different backgrounds. After the 'migration crisis,' both the PiS and the EU adopted similar approaches in dealing with refugees from the Middle East (ME) and North Africa (NA), focusing on addressing the issue outside of Europe and employing measures such as push-back and denial of refugee concerns, exemplified in the context of the Polish-Belarusian border crisis. Conversely, there was a favorable reception of Ukrainian refugees, actively promoted by the PiS and embraced by the EU in response to Russian aggression in Ukraine.

Secondly, this study focused on the importance of the Polish public's acceptance, despite not being the primary target of the PiS's securitization efforts. While the Polish public was specifically targeted during the *migration crisis* and convinced to support anti-refugee emergency measures by the PiS, their continued support has been essential in subsequent securitization actions, as demonstrated by the PiS's re-election for two terms. On average, over the years, surveys showed that the Polish public has consistently displayed a more favorable stance towards accepting refugees from Ukraine compared to those from the ME and NA, thereby facilitating the PiS's response to the Polish-Belarusian border crisis and the Russo-Ukrainian war. Nevertheless, this study revealed a growing opposition regarding the PiS government's stand toward refugees from the ME

and NA that expressed itself in citizens and NGOs aiding refugees at the Belarusian border. Also, other aspects, such as the securitization of LGBTQ individuals, contribute to a Polish society that has become deeply divided, expressing increasing dissatisfaction with the PiS government.

This thesis presented significant implications for understanding security policies and securitization in democracies. It underscored the importance of considering the sequence of events to grasp dynamics in the process between single securitizations that may otherwise go unnoticed. While this research focused on Poland and the PiS government, which provided a favorable study environment due to its stability, it is essential to consider whether future research should incorporate the security-related context of securitization in a broader range of countries, including those where there have been changes in government. By doing so, it could provide a more comprehensive understanding of securitization dynamics and their implications in different political contexts. This would enable researchers to explore the influence of political transitions on security policies and shed light on the variations and similarities in securitization processes across democracies.

Furthermore, this study highlighted the intricate relationship between securitization and desecuritization. It revealed that the desecuritization of refugees by the PiS was contingent upon the acceptance of the Polish public, ultimately leading to heightened polarization. It remains uncertain if this dynamic holds universally in democracies. The concept of desecuritization, both in general and specifically regarding refugees, needs further theoretical development. It cannot be regarded simply as the opposite of securitization (Hansen, 2012), as it encompasses complexities that require a more precise definition and a framework applicable to diverse cases. The presented analysis shed light on the involvement of actors not directly addressed by securitization theory, emphasizing the need for broader discussions to enhance our understanding of security policies.

Also, this thesis highlighted notable similarities with Stivas' research, particularly in relation to the securitization audience. Similar to Hungary (Stivas, 2023b) and Greece (Stivas, 2023a), the Polish public played a significant role as the securitization audience in 2015. It would be valuable to investigate whether this pattern indicates a broader trend within Europe during the *migration crisis* in 2015 or is simply a coincidence. Additionally, Stivas (2023a) has also identified the convergence of Greece's national and European interests, as well as securitization targeting the EU as an audience. Combined

with the presented study, these findings suggest a potential trend toward a common European response to refugees that merits further examination.

As Stivas (2023b) suggests, further research focusing on the audience on a case-by-case basis is necessary to explore the various modes of securitization and the dynamics between audience selection and the implementation of emergency measures. Such a case study could also look more closely at the limitations of this thesis, namely, gender, age, ethnic and national differences among the individual securitization parties. In the Polish context, this is particularly relevant as existing studies and reports highlight significant disparities related to these characteristics. For instance, people of color from Ukraine have been attacked by Polish nationalists (Tondo & Akinwotu, 2022), and Roma refugees from Ukraine have faced harsh discrimination (Kottasová, 2022). Therefore, gathering more empirical data on the precise composition of securitization actors is essential and would contribute to a more comprehensive analysis.

Lastly, the research conducted by Stivas (2023 a/b), and this study raise important questions about the normative dimensions of securitization and desecuritization concerning refugees. While this analysis aimed to be descriptive and objective, it is crucial to recognize that it serves as a starting point for ethical considerations regarding the legitimacy of emergency measures targeting refugees with the right to seek asylum. In the Polish context, the question should be asked whether it is morally justifiable to turn away and define refugees from the ME and NA in this way, while pursuing a policy of open borders and society towards Ukrainians. Engaging in broader discussions and investigations is essential to address the ethical implications and normative considerations surrounding securitization and its impact on the rights and well-being of refugees. Ultimately, the scientific exploration of the treatment of refugees from different countries must serve as a foundation for striving towards a more compassionate and respectful treatment of all individuals, regardless of their origin.

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