

Protracted Rohingya displacement and national security in Bangladesh: Examining security and socio-political stability in Cox's Bazar

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ABSTRACT

The prolonged presence of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh has evolved from a predominantly humanitarian concern into a multidimensional national-security and socio-political challenge, particularly in Cox's Bazar. This article examines how the Rohingya refugee influx affects Bangladesh's national security and socio-political stability, with particular attention to internal and border security, transnational crime, camp insecurity, and host-community stability. Drawing on Securitization Theory from the Copenhagen School, the study conceptualizes how prolonged displacement has been increasingly framed as an existential security threat, justifying exceptional governance measures through a control-stability feedback loop. The study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, targeting five stakeholder groups directly affected by or managing the security environment: government and security officials, local administrators and political leaders, humanitarian and Non-Governmental Organization [NGO] personnel, host-community members, and Rohingya refugees. Proportionate stratified sampling was employed to ensure adequate representation across these groups, yielding a sample of 443 respondents from an estimated population of 3,900 stakeholders. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and key informant interviews, with 380 questionnaires returned and analyzed, representing an 85.8% response rate. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze quantitative data, while qualitative evidence was thematically interpreted. The findings indicate that 89.3% of participants perceived an increase in internal and border-security pressures associated with the Rohingya influx. Drug trafficking (83.9%), cross-border crime (72.6%), and illegal movement (61.3%) emerged as the most prominent security challenges, while radicalization was comparatively less prominent (22.9%). Furthermore, 92.6% of participants assessed security risks in and around refugee settlements as high or very high, while 66.5% perceived deterioration in host-community law and order. Overall, 78.4% reported a high or very high negative effect of the refugee influx on socio-political stability. The findings demonstrate that the Rohingya crisis has evolved into a chronic security-stability challenge, shaped by the interaction of protracted displacement, organized criminality, border vulnerabilities, institutional pressures, and socio-economic tensions. From a theoretical perspective, the study demonstrates that securitization has become institutionalized rather than remaining a temporary emergency response, with persistent criminality providing material conditions through which security claims acquire credibility. The article contributes to knowledge by demonstrating that the principal security implications are associated more strongly with criminality and illicit mobility than with radicalization, while simultaneously affecting refugee and host-community security. The study recommends targeted disruption of criminal networks, strengthened border intelligence, improved community security, and protection-oriented refugee governance rather than blanket securitization of the Rohingya population.

Keywords: Bangladesh; Cox's Bazar; Cross-Border Displacement; National Security; Rohingya Refugees; Socio-Political Stability; Securitization; Transnational Crime

I. INTRODUCTION

The Rohingya crisis embodies one of the most protracted displacement situations in contemporary South and Southeast Asia (Mostofa & Akter, 2026). The mass influx of 2017, exemplified by the fled of more than 700,000 Rohingya from Myanmar for Bangladesh, transformed Cox's Bazar into the principal site of refugee concentration and humanitarian intervention. Combined with earlier arrivals, the displaced population exceeded one million, generating substantial humanitarian, economic, environmental and governance pressures on Bangladesh (Nuruzzama & Wohab, A. (2026).). Despite the examination of the crisis mainly through humanitarian and human-rights lens, its prolonged nature has increasingly raised questions concerning national security and socio-political stability. The concentration of a large stateless population in a strategically sensitive border district has coincided with concerns over drug trafficking, cross-border crime, illegal movement, armed-group activity, pressure on law-enforcement institutions and deteriorating relations between refugees and host communities.

The central argument of this article is that the security consequences of the Rohingya influx ought not to be reduced to the ubiquity of refugees themselves. Rather, insecurity springs from the interaction of protracted

displacement, porous borders, organized criminal networks, institutional pressures, socio-economic competition and regional instability. This distinction is analytically significant because treating refugees as the direct source of insecurity risks obscuring the broader structures through which criminal and security risks are produced. This article contributes to existing scholarship in three ways. First, it demonstrates that the security implications of protracted displacement have become institutionalized rather than remaining temporary. Second, it identifies the principal operational security challenges associated with the crisis, demonstrating that drug trafficking; cross-border crime and illegal movement are more prominent than radicalization. Third, it demonstrates that insecurity transcends beyond refugee camps into host communities, creating a feedback mechanism through which deteriorating local security perceptions reinforce support for securitized governance.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The mass influx of Rohingya refugees, especially in 2017 into Bangladesh has evolved from an acute humanitarian emergency into a protracted displacement situation with significant implications for national security and socio-political stability (Rana & Riaz, 2022). According to Nuruzzaman and Wohab (2026), the concentration of a large refugee population in Cox's Bazar, coupled with a porous border with Myanmar and the persistence of transnational criminal networks, and has triggered sustained pressures on border management, internal security institutions and host communities. Drug trafficking, cross-border crime, illegal movement, insecurity within refugee settlements and socio-economic tensions in host areas have increasingly become part of the security environment associated with the crisis (Naim, 2022).

However, despite extensive research on the humanitarian, political and human-rights dimensions of the Rohingya crisis, including but not limited to Habib (2021), Milton et al. (2017), Howlader et al., (2025) and among others, there remains insufficient empirical understanding of how prolonged displacement is specifically reshaping Bangladesh's national security and socio-political stability. Existing studies and policy reports recognize trafficking, narcotics, radicalization, border insecurity and institutional pressure, but these dimensions have rarely been examined in an integrated manner that links changes in internal and border security with the lived security experiences of refugees and host communities. This creates a significant empirical gap because the available evidence suggests that the dominant operational security challenges are drug trafficking, cross-border crime and illegal movement, while radicalization appears comparatively less prominent.

At the same time, the security implications transcends beyond the refugee population. Host communities report worsening law-and-order conditions, increased insecurity and socio-economic pressures, while refugees themselves experience persistent exposure to theft, violence and intimidation. These interconnected pressures have contributed to the institutionalization of security responses, including sustained surveillance, policing and border-control measures. Yet, insufficient attention has been given to how these security pressures and securitized responses interact to influence socio-political stability.

1.2 Research Objective

To examine how the Rohingya refugee influx affects Bangladesh's national security and socio-political stability.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Securitization Theory

The article is grounded in Securitization Theory developed by the Copenhagen School. The theory argues that an issue becomes a security concern when political actors successfully frame it as an existential threat to a valued referent object and obtain sufficient audience acceptance to justify exceptional measures (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). Three elements are particularly relevant: the securitizing actor, the referent object and the audience. Within the context of Rohingya, government and security institutions have increasingly framed displacement in terms of border integrity, public order, criminality and national stability (Habib, 2021). The referent objects include the state, territorial sovereignty and the security of host populations, while public institutions and communities constitute important audiences.

The study's evidence suggests a transition from humanitarian framing towards institutionalized security management. During the initial phase of displacement, Bangladesh emphasized humanitarian accommodation and international burden-sharing (Rahman & Sakib, 2021). Over time, concerns surrounding trafficking, narcotics, illegal movement and camp insecurity strengthened the security framing. This was accompanied by expanded policing, biometric registration, and border surveillance and centralized security coordination. In this study the vitality of Securitization Theory, however, lies not simply in demonstrating that the Rohingya crisis has been securitized. The empirical findings indicate that securitizing narratives are cemented by genuine operational pressures. The existence of persistent criminality and insecurity provides material conditions through which security claims acquire credibility.

This triggers what may be described as a control–stability feedback loop. Persistent insecurity encourages stronger surveillance and restrictions; intensified controls may reduce some immediate risks but can also constrain livelihoods and increase perceptions of inequality; these conditions can contribute to social tension, which subsequently reinforces the perception that stronger security measures are necessary.

2.2 Empirical Review

Empirical research previously conducted mainly focused on the humanitarian consequences of the Rohingya influx. For instance, Milton et al. (2017), examined the vulnerability of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and demonstrated how statelessness, displacement, overcrowding and inadequate living conditions created profound humanitarian insecurity. Although their study was not primarily concerned with Bangladesh's national security, it provides an important foundation for understanding how prolonged displacement can generate conditions of vulnerability that subsequently interact with wider security processes. The relevance to the present article is therefore indirect but significant: humanitarian insecurity constitutes part of the environment within which criminal exploitation, social tension and securitized governance develop.

The absence of citizenship, political representation, property rights and freedom of movement produces structural vulnerability extending beyond individual humanitarian concerns. The study is particularly relevant because it conceptualizes security as encompassing both state and societal dimensions. This perspective aligns with the present article's argument that refugee insecurity and Bangladesh's national security should not be treated as mutually exclusive domains. Similarly, Naim (2022) examined the security implications of the Rohingya crisis and highlighted the growing importance of refugee displacement within Bangladesh's broader security environment. The study contributes to the emerging recognition that the crisis cannot be adequately understood through humanitarian considerations alone. However, much of this earlier literature remained conceptual or descriptive and did not provide extensive empirical evidence on how security pressures were evolving over time.

More recent work provides stronger evidence of the institutionalization of these pressures. For instance, Mostofa and Akter (2026), specifically examined the security implications of protracted Rohingya displacement in Bangladesh, while a study by Nuruzzaman and Wohab (2026), was confined to the relationship between crime, displacement and securitization in Cox's Bazar. The latter is particularly vital for the present study because it locates security consequences within the local environment rather than treating them solely as national-level policy concerns. Their work is significant because it demonstrates that the consequences of displacement are spatially concentrated but not necessarily geographically contained. The security implications extend into surrounding communities through pressure on resources, infrastructure and local governance.

A study conducted by Howlader et al., (2025) widens the analysis by demonstrating the relationship between the Rohingya crisis, irregular maritime migration and human trafficking. Their findings show that displacement can intersect with transnational trafficking systems, particularly where refugees face restricted livelihood opportunities and uncertain futures. Such networks operate across national boundaries, making them difficult to address through conventional camp-level policing alone.

Human Rights Watch (2023) provides another important dimension by examining restrictions and rights concerns within Rohingya camps. Its relevance to the present study lies in demonstrating the tension between security governance and humanitarian protection. Bangladesh's use of biometric registration, surveillance and enhanced policing reflects an attempt to control security risks, but such measures can simultaneously constrain mobility and generate concerns about refugee protection. Similarly, Mostofa and Akter (2026) and Nuruzzaman, & Wohab (2026) are especially significant in this respect. Their work provides a basis for understanding the relationship between protracted displacement, crime and localized securitization. The present study extends this literature by demonstrating that security pressures are no longer perceived simply as temporary consequences of the 2017 influx. Instead, institutional respondents reported that security responsibilities have become permanent components of border and camp governance.

The study therefore supports the argument that securitization has become institutionalized. However, it also introduces a significant qualification: securitization ought to not automatically be equated with refugee criminality. The evidence indicates that criminal networks operate within and around the displacement environment, involving cross-border actors and local networks. Consequently, treating the entire refugee population as a security threat risks obscuring the structural and transnational nature of the problem.

The reviewed literature demonstrates substantial agreement that the Rohingya influx has generated significant security pressures in Bangladesh. The strongest areas of convergence concern drug trafficking, human trafficking, cross-border crime, illegal movement, camp insecurity, socio-economic competition and the expansion of security governance. However, from the review, three limitations can be deduced: First, much of the earlier research examines humanitarian vulnerability or individual security threats in isolation. Second, relatively limited empirical work simultaneously examines the perspectives of security institutions, refugees and host communities. Third, there is insufficient triangulation between perception data, administrative crime records and qualitative evidence. The main

document explicitly identifies these limitations as part of the existing empirical gap. The present article addresses these gaps by integrating institutional perceptions, refugee experiences, host-community perspectives, qualitative evidence and district-level administrative records. Its central contribution is therefore not simply to confirm that the Rohingya crisis has security consequences, but to demonstrate how different forms of insecurity interact to produce a broader national-security and socio-political stability dilemma.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, where qualitative and quantitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed separately and then integrated during interpretation. This design is appropriate when the researcher seeks to compare and corroborate findings from different data sources within the same study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The qualitative component explored the lived experiences and opinions of Rohingya refugees, host community participants, security actors and humanitarian organizations' personnel, while the quantitative component measured the patterns and effects of refugee's influx on security and socio-political stability through structured questionnaires. This design guaranteed a comprehensive understanding of the effects of refugee influx on both security and socioeconomic stability in Bangladesh (Rahman & Sakib, 2021).

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Cox's Bazar District in southeastern Bangladesh, with particular focus on Ukhiya and Teknaf sub-districts, which host the largest concentration of Rohingya refugees and constitute a critical interface between refugee settlements, host communities and the Bangladesh–Myanmar border. The area was selected because it represents the principal operational setting in which the security and socio-political consequences of protracted Rohingya displacement are experienced and managed.

Cox's Bazar provides a particularly appropriate setting for examining the relationship between displacement and national security because the concentration of refugee settlements has coincided with increased demands for border control, policing, surveillance and criminal-risk management. At the same time, host communities in Ukhiya and Teknaf have experienced pressures relating to employment, public services, resources and social cohesion. The area's proximity to Myanmar and exposure to irregular movement, trafficking and cross-border criminal networks further make it important for analyzing the security dimensions of displacement.

3.3 Target Population

The target population comprised stakeholders directly experiencing, managing or responding to the security and socio-political consequences of the Rohingya refugee presence in Cox's Bazar. Consistent with the article's focus on national security and socio-political stability, the population comprised government and security officials, Rohingya refugees, host-community members, and humanitarian/UN/INGO personnel. Government and security actors provided institutional perspectives on internal and border security, criminality and law-enforcement pressures; Rohingya respondents provided evidence on security conditions and human insecurity within refugee settlements; host-community members provided evidence concerning changes in law and order, perceived safety and socio-political stability; while humanitarian personnel provided complementary evidence concerning security-related operational constraints and the interaction between humanitarian and security governance.

3.4 Sampling and Sample Size

The study employed proportionate stratified sampling to ensure adequate representation of the stakeholder groups relevant to the examination of the effects of the Rohingya refugee influx on Bangladesh's national security and socio-political stability. The original study estimated the broader stakeholder population at approximately 4,000 individuals, comprising government and security officials, local administrators and political leaders, humanitarian actors, diplomats and regional representatives, host-community members, and Rohingya representatives. For the present article, the population was analytically restricted to five stakeholder categories directly relevant to the first objective: government and security agencies, local administrators and political leaders, humanitarian and NGO personnel, host-community members, and Rohingya representatives/refugees. The resulting article-specific population was estimated at 3,900.

Sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula, $n = N / [1 + N(e)^2]$. The desired sample of 443 respondents from the estimated population of 4,000 corresponds to an approximately 4.48% level of precision. Accordingly, 443 respondents were selected as the quantitative sample. The sample was then distributed proportionately across the five stakeholder strata. Of the 443 questionnaires, 45 were allocated to government and security agencies, 23 to local administrators and political leaders, 57 to humanitarian and NGO personnel, 204 to host-

community members, and 114 to Rohingya representatives/refugees. Therefore, 443 structured questionnaires were distributed in total.

The use of proportionate stratification was considered appropriate because the stakeholders occupy different positions within the Rohingya security environment. Government and security actors provide institutional perspectives on border and internal security; local administrators reflect sub-national governance pressures; humanitarian actors provide operational perspectives; host communities provide evidence of socio-political stability; and Rohingya respondents provide evidence concerning insecurity within refugee settlements. This multi-stakeholder structure enables triangulation of perceptions and strengthens the assessment of the relationship between protracted displacement, national security and socio-political stability.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

The study utilized both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected through questionnaires and key informant interviews. The questionnaire generated quantitative data on community perceptions of effects of Rohingya refugees' influx on both security and socio-political stability of Bangladesh. The KIIs guide allowed participants to explain the implications of refugee influx on security and socio-political stability of Bangladesh in greater depth. Various documents such as research publications, policy reports, government reports, reports by various commissions of enquiry and other relevant minutes from meetings such as records from chiefs' office, website searches, newspaper and magazine publications and other relevant literature were reviewed as secondary data.

3.6 Data Analysis and Presentation

Quantitative data from questionnaires was coded and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 28). Descriptive statistics including frequencies, means and percentages summarized data. Qualitative data from interviews was analyzed thematically. NVivo software supported data organization and theme development. The emerging themes were then compared with quantitative findings to identify convergence and divergence. Results from both strands were integrated during interpretation. Areas of convergence and divergence was analyzed to enhance the depth, validity and reliability of findings through triangulation.

3.7 Ethical Consideration

Ethical clearance was obtained from National Defense University – Kenya (NDU-Kenya) Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to data collection. Further authorizations were granted by the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). The researcher fully informed the participants about the purpose and scope of the study and assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Informed consent was obtained before administering questionnaires or conducting interviews. Respondents were also informed of their right to withdraw at any point without penalty. Data was securely stored and all sources acknowledged in accordance with academic integrity standards.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

The study sought to establish the effects of Rohingya refugee influx on Bangladesh's national security and socio-political stability.

Table 1

Response Rate

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
Questionnaires administered	443	100.0%
Questionnaires returned	380	85.8%
Questionnaires not returned	63	14.2%

Table 1 shows a total of 443 questionnaires were distributed to the targeted stakeholder groups. Of these, 380 were returned and considered sufficiently complete for analysis, representing an overall response rate of 85.8%. The response rate was considered adequate for the analysis because the returned questionnaires provided representation across the major stakeholder categories relevant to national security and socio-political stability. A response rate of 85.8% provides a strong basis for descriptive analysis. More importantly, the multi-stakeholder design allows the findings to be interpreted from institutional, refugee, host-community and humanitarian perspectives rather than relying on a single stakeholder group. The analysis focused on four interconnected dimensions: changes in internal and border security conditions, dominant security challenges, security conditions within and around refugee camps, and socio-political stability in host communities. The findings are discussed below.

4.1.1 Perceived Change in Internal and Border Security

The researcher asked the participants to indicate whether the Rohingya influx had changed Bangladesh's internal and border-security situation. The findings are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Effect of the Rohingya Influx on Internal and Border Security

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very increased	278	73.2%
Somewhat increased	61	16.1%
No significant change	25	6.6%
Decreased	16	4.2%
Total	380	100.0

The findings suggest a strong perception that the prolonged presence of refugees has intensified both internal and external border pressures. In particular, 73.2% of respondents reported that security pressures had very increased, while a further 16.1% indicated that they had somewhat increased. Combined, therefore, 89.3% perceived an increase in internal and border-security pressures. In contrast, only 6.6% perceived no significant change and 4.2% reported a decrease. This finding reveals that the protracted refugee influx is strongly related in participants' perceptions with heightened national-security pressures. Particularly, the results are vital because it suggests that the security implications of displacement have become embedded in the continuing governance of Cox's Bazar rather than remaining a short-term consequence of the 2017 emergency. The qualitative evidence reinforces this interpretation. For instance, an interview with a security officer yielded the following:

"The security situation has significantly increased, especially along the border. This has been worsened by the uncontrolled influx...I think the existing security apparatus have not done enough to contain the situation" (Key informant interview with security officer held on 15th February, 026).

The finding also aligns with the broader evidence that Cox's Bazar has become an area requiring sustained security and governance interventions. The significance of this result, therefore, is not simply that refugees are physically present near the Bangladesh–Myanmar border. Rather, large-scale protracted displacement interacts with border vulnerability, population concentration, criminal networks and institutional demands to increase the security burden on the state. This interpretation is consistent with the article's Securitization Theory perspective, whereby an issue becomes increasingly treated as a security concern when threats to territorial integrity, public order and societal stability become institutionally recognized.

4.1.2 Main Security Challenges Linked to Rohingya Influx

The researcher asked the participants to identify the major security challenges associated with the prolonged Rohingya presence. The findings are shown in Table 3;

Table 3

Main Security Challenges Linked to Rohingya Influx

Security Challenge	Frequency	Percentage
Drug trafficking	319	83.9%
Cross-border crime	276	72.6%
Illegal movement	233	61.3%
Radicalization	87	22.9%
Human trafficking	196	51.6%
Armed-group activity	168	44.2%

Note: Multiple responses were permitted; therefore, percentages do not sum to 100%.

Drug trafficking emerged as the most prominent security challenge, identified by 83.9% of respondents. Cross-border crime followed at 72.6%, while illegal movement was reported by 61.3%. Human trafficking was identified by 51.6%, armed-group activity by 44.2%, and radicalization by only 22.9%. The ordering of these responses is analytically significant. It suggests that respondents associated the security implications of the refugee situation more strongly with organized criminality, transnational movement and border-related insecurity than with ideological radicalization. Drug trafficking, in particular, was identified by more than four-fifths of respondents, making it the most prominent security concern in the study. This finding reinforces the article's central argument that the security implications of the Rohingya crisis should not be reduced to generalized assumptions about terrorism or radicalization. The relatively low ranking of radicalization, at 22.9%, compared with drug trafficking at 83.9%, cross-border crime at 72.6% and illegal movement at 61.3%, provides empirical grounds for distinguishing criminal-security

threats from ideological-security threats. Qualitative findings further contextualize these patterns. For instance, a humanitarian field officer observed the following;

“Criminal networks adapt quickly; whenever restrictions tighten in one area, routes and methods shift”
(Key informant interview with INGO Field Staff, Survey held on 18th February, 2026).

Another Rohingya responded added that;

“We fear both thieves and armed groups; at night there is intimidation” (Key informant interview with Rohingya Participant held on 16th February, 2026).

4.1.3 Security Conditions in and around Refugee Settlements

The researcher asked participants to assess the level of security risk in and around Rohingya refugee settlements. The findings are shown in Table 4;

Table 4

Perceived Security Risk in and Around Refugee Settlements

Level of Risk	Frequency	Percentage
Very high	153	40.3%
High	199	52.4%
Moderate	24	6.3%
Low/No notable risk	4	1.1%
Total	380	100.0

The findings show that 92.6% of participants considered the security environment in and around refugee settlements to be either high or very high risk. Only 1.1% considered the area to have low or no notable security risk. This finding indicates that insecurity has become a persistent feature of refugee-settlement governance. The high-risk perception is consistent with evidence from the main study concerning criminal networks, intimidation, and armed-group activity, drug trafficking and illegal movement. However, the finding should not be interpreted to mean that refugees themselves constitute the source of insecurity. Rather, refugee settlements have become environments in which displacement, vulnerability, criminal networks, restricted livelihoods and weak institutional capacity interact.

4.1.4 Effect on Host-community Law and Order

The study examined whether the refugee influx had affected law and order within host communities. The findings are shown in Table 5;

Table 5

Perceived Effect on Host-Community Law and Order

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Much Worse	132	34.7%
Worse	121	31.8%
No significant change	107	28.2%
Improved	15	3.9%
Much Improved	5	1.3%
Total	380	100.0

The results indicate that 66.5% of participants perceived host-community law and order to have become worse or much worse following the refugee influx. Only 5.2% perceived an improvement. The finding indicates that the effects of displacement extend beyond refugee settlements. Host communities may experience increased pressure on policing, public services, employment opportunities and local resources. Such pressures can contribute to perceptions of insecurity and social tension. This finding is consistent with United Nations Development Programme. [UNDP] (2021), which documented socio-economic pressures affecting host communities in Cox's Bazar. It also supports the broader argument that prolonged displacement can affect social cohesion when host communities perceive unequal access to employment, services or humanitarian assistance.

4.1.5 Perceived Safety among Participants

The researcher asked the participants to assess their current level of safety in areas affected by the Rohingya influx. The findings are shown in Table 6;

Table 6*Perceived Level of Safety*

Perception of safety	Frequency	Percentage
Very unsafe	86	22.6%
Unsafe	155	40.8%
Neither safe nor unsafe	92	24.2%
Safe	39	10.3%
Very safe	8	2.1%
Total	380	100.0

The results indicate that 63.4% of participants felt unsafe or very unsafe, while only 12.4% reported feeling safe or very safe. This demonstrates a relatively high level of perceived insecurity within communities affected by the refugee crisis. The finding is important because perceived safety is an important indicator of socio-political stability. Persistent feelings of insecurity can reduce trust in public institutions, increase support for restrictive security measures and contribute to social tensions between refugee and host populations.

4.1.6 Implications for Socio-Political Stability

The researcher asked the participants to assess the overall effect of the Rohingya influx on socio-political stability in affected areas. The results are shown in Table 7;

Table 7*Perceived Effect on Socio-Political Stability*

Perceived effect	Frequency	Percentage
Very high negative effect	147	38.7%
High negative effect	151	39.7%
Moderate effect	55	14.5%
Low effect	21	5.5%
No effect	6	1.6%
Total	380	100.0

The findings show that 78.4% of participants perceived the Rohingya influx as having a high or very high negative effect on socio-political stability. Only 7.1% perceived a low or no effect. The result suggests that the consequences of prolonged displacement extend beyond conventional security concerns to encompass social cohesion, community relations, public trust and local governance. The pressure on host communities is particularly important. Competition for employment, increased demand for public services, environmental pressures and perceptions of unequal humanitarian assistance may generate resentment and weaken social cohesion.

4.2 Discussion

The findings on the effect of the Rohingya influx on internal and border security corroborate with Mostofa and Akter, (2026) who demonstrate that protracted Rohingya displacement has generated security pressures extending beyond the immediate humanitarian consequences of refugee arrival. In the present study, 89.3% of respondents reported that internal and border-security pressures had either very increased (73.2%) or somewhat increased (16.1%), while only 4.2% perceived a decrease. This indicates that the security implications of the Rohingya influx are perceived as persistent rather than temporary.

The finding particularly aligns with Mostofa and Akter (2026), whose analysis emphasizes the security implications associated with prolonged Rohingya displacement. It also corroborates Nuruzzaman and Wohab (2026), who links the prolonged Rohingya presence in Cox's Bazar to crime and localized securitized governance. The convergence between these studies and the present findings is important because it demonstrates that the security consequences of displacement have evolved alongside the protracted nature of the refugee situation. Rather than remaining an emergency-management concern associated with the initial 2017 influx, security management has become an enduring institutional responsibility involving border surveillance, policing and management of population movement. The finding further complements Naim (2018), who situate the Rohingya crisis within Bangladesh's broader security environment. Their work emphasizes the relationship between statelessness, restricted mobility, vulnerability and wider security concerns. The present study extends this literature by providing multi-stakeholder empirical evidence that these broader concerns are reflected in perceptions of increased internal and border-security pressure among actors directly exposed to the security environment in Cox's Bazar. Regarding the main security challenges associated with the Rohingya influx, the findings are consistent with United Nations Office on Drugs and

Crime. [UNODC] (2021) and Howlader et al., (2025) particularly regarding narcotics trafficking, irregular movement and human trafficking. Drug trafficking was identified by 83.9% of respondents, followed by cross-border crime at 72.6% and illegal movement at 61.3%. Human trafficking and armed-group activity were identified by 51.6% and 44.2%, respectively, while radicalization was identified by only 22.9%.

The prominence of drug trafficking strongly aligns with UNODC (2021), which identifies narcotics trafficking as an important security concern along the Bangladesh–Myanmar border. The present findings reinforce this literature by demonstrating that drug trafficking is not merely a policy or institutional concern but is perceived by a substantial majority of respondents as the leading security challenge associated with the Rohingya displacement environment. Similarly, the finding aligns with Howlader et al., (2025) who associate the Rohingya crisis with irregular movement and human trafficking. In the present study, illegal movement was identified by 61.3% and human trafficking by 51.6% of respondents. This convergence suggests that displacement, restricted mobility and uncertain livelihood opportunities can create conditions that criminal networks exploit. The qualitative evidence further indicates that such networks are adaptive, changing routes and methods when restrictions are tightened.

In relation to security conditions in and around Rohingya refugee settlements, the findings align with Human Rights Watch (2023), Mostofa and Akter (2026), all of whom draw attention to insecurity, vulnerability, restrictions and security pressures within the Rohingya displacement environment. In the present study, 92.6% of respondents assessed the security risk in and around refugee settlements as either high or very high, while only 1.1% considered the risk low or not notable.

The strong perception of insecurity corroborate with Human Rights Watch (2023), whose work highlights protection concerns and insecurity within the camps. The convergence indicates that refugee settlements should not be conceptualized simply as humanitarian spaces separated from national-security concerns. Instead, prolonged displacement has produced environments where vulnerability, restricted livelihoods, criminality, population concentration and security governance intersect. The article nevertheless makes a significant analytical qualification. High levels of perceived insecurity within refugee settlements should not be interpreted as evidence that refugees are inherently responsible for insecurity. Rather, the findings indicate that refugees themselves are exposed to insecurity, including theft, intimidation and armed-group activity. This interpretation is supported by the qualitative evidence in which a Rohingya participant reported fear of thieves and armed groups.

The findings on the effect of the Rohingya influx on host-community law and order align with UNDP (2021), particularly concerning the socioeconomic and governance pressures experienced by communities surrounding refugee settlements. In the present study, 66.5% of respondents reported that host-community law and order had become worse or much worse, while only 5.2% perceived an improvement.

The convergence with UNDP (2021) is particularly important because the latter documents socioeconomic and humanitarian pressures affecting host communities in Cox's Bazar. The present study extends this evidence by demonstrating that these pressures are perceived not only in economic or service-delivery terms but also through the lens of local law and order. Similarly, Milton et al. (2017) emphasize that the consequences of refugee concentration can extend into surrounding communities through pressure on resources, infrastructure and governance. The present finding reinforces this argument by showing that a substantial proportion of respondents associate the prolonged displacement environment with deterioration in local law-and-order conditions.

The finding further supports the broader literature's argument that the security consequences of displacement are spatially concentrated but socially interconnected. Refugee settlements and host communities constitute an interconnected security environment in which pressures in one domain can influence perceptions and experiences in another. Competition over employment, public services and local resources may contribute to resentment and social tension, while insecurity may increase demands for stronger policing and restrictions. The findings on perceived safety align with the literature emphasizing the human-security consequences of protracted displacement, particularly Milton et al. (2017), Human Rights Watch (2023). In the present study, 63.4% of respondents reported feeling unsafe or very unsafe, compared with only 12.4% who reported feeling safe or very safe.

The convergence with Milton et al. (2017) is particularly relevant because their study demonstrates how statelessness, displacement, overcrowding and inadequate living conditions generate profound forms of insecurity among Rohingya refugees. Although their primary emphasis is humanitarian vulnerability, the present findings demonstrate that insecurity remains relevant to the wider social environment affected by the refugee crisis. The conceptualization of security encompasses both state and societal dimensions. The high level of perceived insecurity in the present study demonstrates that security cannot be assessed exclusively through border control, crime or institutional capacity. People's subjective perceptions of safety constitute an important component of the broader security environment.

Similarly, Human Rights Watch (2023) highlights insecurity and protection concerns within refugee settlements. The present study extends this literature by demonstrating that perceptions of insecurity are not confined to refugees but form part of the broader environment affected by the Rohingya influx. This is analytically important because widespread perceptions of insecurity can influence trust, social relations and attitudes toward government

security measures. The finding therefore reinforces the article's argument that the Rohingya crisis has generated interconnected forms of state, societal and human insecurity. A security policy that focuses exclusively on territorial control may fail to address the insecurity experienced by people living within and around refugee settlements. Conversely, protection-oriented interventions without adequate attention to criminal networks and border vulnerabilities may fail to address the concerns of host communities and state institutions.

Regarding the effect of the Rohingya influx on socio-political stability align with UNDP (2021) and the wider literature on host-community pressures and social cohesion. In the present study, 78.4% of respondents perceived the refugee influx as having a high or very high negative effect on socio-political stability, while only 7.1% perceived a low or no effect. The convergence with UNDP (2021) is evident in relation to the socioeconomic pressures experienced by host communities. Where refugee concentrations place additional demands on employment, public services and local resources, perceptions of unequal access and competition can generate resentment. The present study extends this argument by demonstrating that such pressures are perceived as having consequences for socio-political stability rather than being restricted to socioeconomic welfare.

The finding also complements Rana and Riaz (2022), who demonstrate that the effects of refugee concentration can extend beyond refugee settlements through pressures on resources, infrastructure and local governance. The present study provides empirical evidence that these broader pressures are associated, in respondents' perceptions, with deterioration in socio-political stability. This suggests that the consequences of protracted displacement may gradually move from humanitarian and socioeconomic domains into the political and societal domains. The relationship between insecurity and socio-political stability is further strengthened by the combined findings of the study. The 66.5% reporting deterioration in host-community law and order and the 63.4% reporting that they felt unsafe or very unsafe occur alongside the 78.4% who perceived a high or very high negative effect on socio-political stability. While these descriptive findings do not establish a statistical causal relationship, their convergence suggests that perceptions of insecurity, deteriorating law and order and socio-political instability form interconnected dimensions of the broader displacement-security environment.

From the perspective of Securitization Theory, the findings suggest that the Rohingya crisis has increasingly been framed and managed as a security issue. The persistence of criminality and border insecurity provides material justification for surveillance, policing and border-control measures. However, excessive securitization may itself contribute to mistrust, restrictions and social tension if refugees are collectively treated as security threats.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, the Rohingya refugee influx has significantly altered Bangladesh's national security and socio-political environment. The evidence demonstrates that the crisis has transcends beyond humanitarian emergency management to become an institutionalized and chronic security concern. Internal and border-security pressures have increased substantially, while drug trafficking, cross-border crime and illegal movement have emerged as the dominant operational challenges. At the same time, insecurity is not confined to the state or security institutions. Rohingya refugees report persistent exposure to theft, violence and intimidation, while host communities report deteriorating law-and-order conditions and widespread feelings of insecurity. These findings demonstrate that displacement produces interconnected forms of state, societal and human insecurity.

Therefore, generally, the study concludes that the security ramifications of the Rohingya crisis stem from the interaction between displacement and wider structures of criminality, border vulnerability, institutional pressure and socio-economic tension. The crisis should consequently not be understood as a simple relationship between refugees and national insecurity. Rather, it represents a complex security ecosystem in which transnational criminal networks, governance pressures and local grievances interact. For Bangladesh, the strategic challenge is to maintain effective security governance without allowing securitization to become synonymous with refugee containment. A sustainable security approach must simultaneously protect territorial integrity, disrupt transnational criminal networks, strengthen host-community resilience and safeguard the security and dignity of displaced populations.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that Bangladesh adopt an integrated, intelligence-led security and community-stability strategy that prioritizes drug trafficking, cross-border crime, illegal movement and organized criminal networks rather than broadly securitizing the Rohingya population. This should involve strengthening specialized law-enforcement and border-control capacity, improving intelligence and information-sharing, and targeting criminal networks operating across camps, host communities and border routes.

At the same time, security interventions should be accompanied by targeted host-community development and refugee protection measures to reduce socio-economic tensions, reinforced local trust and prevent insecurity from becoming self-reinforcing. Since host communities report worsening law and order and heightened insecurity, while

refugees themselves experience theft, violence and intimidation, security governance should protect both populations rather than treating refugee presence as inherently synonymous with insecurity. In concise policy terms, Bangladesh should pursue targeted criminal-network disruption, stronger border intelligence, enhanced local policing capacity, equitable host-community investment, and protection-oriented camp security, while avoiding blanket securitization of the Rohingya population. This approach would address the actual security threats identified by the study while reducing the control–stability feedback loop associated with prolonged displacement.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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