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Emmanuel Mordi,
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REVIEWED BY

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University of Western Macedonia, Greece
Damla B. Aksel,
Bahçeşehir University, Türkiye

*CORRESPONDENCE

Georgia Dimari
✉ zeta_dim@hotmail.com

RECEIVED 10 July 2024

ACCEPTED 22 April 2025

PUBLISHED 30 May 2025

CITATION

Dimari G, Tzagkarakis SI, Papadakis N and
Citkowska-Kimla A (2025) Desecuritization of
migration in Greece: re-visiting
“flexicuritization”.
Front. Polit. Sci. 7:1462902.
doi: 10.3389/fpos.2025.1462902

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Desecuritization of migration in Greece: re-visiting “flexicuritization”

Georgia Dimari^{1*}, Stylianos Ioannis Tzagkarakis^{2,3,4},
Nikos Papadakis⁵ and Anna Citkowska-Kimla⁶

¹Centre for Political Research and Documentation (KEPET), Department of Political Science, University of Crete, Rethymno, Greece, ²Department of Political Science, University of Crete, Rethymno, Greece, ³Centre for Political Research and Documentation (KEPET), University of Crete, Rethymno, Greece, ⁴Hellenic Association of Political Scientists (HAPSc), Steering Committee of the ECPR Political Culture Standing Group, Athens, Greece, ⁵Centre for Political Research and Documentation (KEPET/ UCRC), Department of Political Science, University of Crete, Rethymno, Greece, ⁶Faculty of Politics and International Relations, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland

Introduction: Migration has emerged as a defining global issue of the 21st century, reshaping political discourse, national policies, and international frameworks. Greece, due to its geographical position, has played a central role in Europe’s migration landscape, particularly during the 2015 refugee crisis.

Methods: This paper explores Greece’s migration governance through the lens of flexicuritization, a concept that integrates state security imperatives with human security concerns. Building on Dimari’s initial formulation, the study extends the theoretical scope of flexicuritization by incorporating political culture and national identity as critical variables influencing securitization practices. Through a case study of Lesbos, the paper empirically investigates the interplay between elite political discourse (2011–2019) and local perceptions of migration, based on 120 securitizing speech acts and 75 semi-structured interviews with market actors.

Results: The analysis reveals how cultural narratives of identity and otherness inform both public sentiment and policy responses, often legitimizing restrictive migration measures.

Discussion: By grounding the flexicuritization framework in the Greek context, the study proposes a culturally sensitive approach to migration governance that balances security concerns with humanitarian obligations, offering broader implications for frontline states managing similar migratory pressures.

KEYWORDS

migration, securitization, desecuritization of migration, Greece, political culture and migration

Introduction

Migration has become one of the defining global issues of the 21st century, driven by factors such as armed conflict, economic inequality, environmental degradation, and political instability. Massive movements of people across borders have challenged national policies, international frameworks, and societal perceptions worldwide. As a result, migration has not only transformed demographics and economies but has also significantly shaped public discourse, often polarizing societies between narratives of humanitarian obligation and security concerns. In many cases, this has led to heightened debates about national identity, social cohesion, and the securitization of migration.

Greece occupies a particularly significant position in this global discussion. Due to its geographical location at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa, Greece has historically served as both a transit and destination country for migrants and refugees. Its role became especially pivotal during the 2015 refugee “crisis,” when hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants—predominantly fleeing war and persecution in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq—arrived on its shores. The Greek islands, particularly Lesbos, became primary entry points into Europe, thrusting the country into the epicenter of one of the largest displacement movements in recent history. This sudden influx placed immense pressure on Greece’s already strained economic and social systems, intensifying public debates over migration, security, and identity, and bringing to the fore tensions between humanitarian responsibilities and concerns over national security. As such, Greece provides a crucial case study for understanding the complex interplay between migration governance, security practices, and political culture in the European context.

Research on the Greek migration experience highlights the need for new conceptual frameworks to better describe both the shortcomings of existing response mechanisms and the urgency for more targeted solutions to the challenges arising from massive migration and refugee flows since 2015. One such concept is flexicuritization, introduced by Dimari (2021). Flexicuritization emerges at the intersection of securitization theory—which explains how issues are framed as existential threats requiring extraordinary measures (Buzan et al., 1998)—and the human security paradigm, which emphasizes the protection and empowerment of individuals rather than states (UNDP, 1994). In essence, flexicuritization refers to a flexible, dual-track approach to security that simultaneously addresses the state’s need for border control and societal stability, while safeguarding the rights, dignity, and security of migrants and refugees. It recognizes the complexity of modern migration governance, where rigid, state-centric securitization often undermines human rights, and where purely humanitarian approaches may neglect legitimate concerns over social cohesion and public safety. Flexicuritization thus proposes a dynamic balancing act between these competing imperatives, attempting to navigate the tensions between security and humanitarianism.

While Dimari’s initial articulation of flexicuritization offers a valuable conceptual framework for understanding the interplay between state security and human security in migration governance, it remains underdeveloped in terms of its practical application and contextual specificity. This paper seeks to extend and refine the concept by addressing two critical gaps: first, by situating flexicuritization within the specific political and cultural context of Greece, and second, by analyzing how cultural heritage and identity dynamics influence securitization practices. Unlike prior conceptual treatments, this study foregrounds the role of political culture as a mediating factor in the success or failure of flexicuritization strategies. It argues that any long-term flexicuritization framework must account for the deeply ingrained narratives of national identity and societal perceptions of migration that shape both public opinion and policy outcomes in Greece.

To this end, the paper conducts an in-depth, empirically grounded analysis of the Greek migration narrative from 2011 to 2019. Focusing on Lesbos as a case study, it explores how cultural factors contribute to processes of ‘othering’ and securitization, reinforcing stereotypes and justifying restrictive migration policies

(Sarah Liu, 2021). By integrating cultural and identity dimensions into the flexicuritization framework, the study offers a more comprehensive and context-sensitive approach to migration governance. This constitutes the paper’s unique contribution: it advances flexicuritization from an abstract conceptual model to an applied, culturally informed strategy tailored to the Greek context, with potential relevance for other frontline states experiencing similar dynamics.

Key Distinctions tackled in this study:

1. Theoretical Extension: We are adding political culture and identity as core variables in the theory of flexicuritization.
2. Empirical Application: We are applying the concept to Greece, specifically to Lesbos, across a clearly defined timeline (2011–2019).
3. Practical Implications: We are proposing how flexicuritization could be operationalized in a culturally aware manner—not just theorized.

This study employs a qualitative, two-part methodology. First, a frame analysis examines political elite discourse in Greece from 2011 to 2019, focusing on how securitizing actors frame migration as a threat tied to identity concerns. A total of 120 speech acts, particularly from far-right parties Golden Dawn and Greek Solution, were analyzed for securitization frames. Second, a secondary qualitative analysis was conducted on 75 semi-structured interviews with market actors in Lesbos (2018). This explored local perceptions of migration and societal security, focusing on how political culture and identity shape securitization practices at the community level.

Lesbos holds particular significance in the study of the securitization and potential desecuritization of migration due to its central role in the 2015 refugee “crisis” and its continuing status as a primary entry point for refugees and migrants into Europe. As one of the key geographic gateways between Turkey and the European Union, Lesbos became emblematic of both the humanitarian response and the security challenges posed by large-scale refugee arrivals. The island’s reception facilities, especially the Moria camp, faced extreme overcrowding and deteriorating conditions, fueling public anxiety and heightening securitized narratives around migration. Lesbos thus provides a critical microcosm for examining how local political culture, identity concerns, and societal pressures shape security practices and discourses, making it an ideal case study for analyzing the dynamics of flexicuritization in Greece.

Theoretical insights

A taxonomy of desecuritization strategies

Desecuritization has been perceived differently by respective scholars in the field. For Balzacq (2014, p. 85), “desecuritization is the opposite of securitization,” whereas for Buzan et al. (1998), desecuritization marks the restoration of routine politics. Following the Copenhagen School’s statement that “desecuritization should be the optimal long-range option” (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 29), this concept has since been examined in light of a variety of approaches. As far as desecuritization strategies are concerned, Wæver (2006) was the first to suggest a range of them, which the authors of this paper

refer to as the ‘first generation strategies’: the non-existence of a dialectic on an issue as a threat, the management of a securitized policy so that it is not spiral, and the movement of the securitized issue back to the normal sphere of policy.

At a later stage, a body of literature emerged pertaining to desecuritization strategies, inspired by the ones formulated by Wæver (2006), which points to the return to normal politics, and which the authors of this paper refer to as the ‘second generation strategies.’ The approaches that focus on the position that desecuritization is the restoration of normal politics can be grouped into four categories: deconstructivism (Huysmans, 1998), emancipation (Aradau, 2004), reconstructivism (Jutila, 2006), and management (Roe, 2004). The first two regard migration, whereas the second set regards ethnic minorities.

More specifically, Huysmans (1998), after having proposed an objectivist, a constructivist, and a deconstructivist strategy, chose the latter as the most proper, due to the fact that it aims to re-shift migration as a political issue to a normative sphere of handling, casting out the existential threat factor. Aradau (2004), from the other side, goes for an emancipation type of unmaking security, which is influenced by the principles of universality and recognition. Roe (2004) views the management or the moderate securitization of ethnic minorities, arguing that the possibility for a functional desecuritization is limited, whereas Jutila (2006) proposes a reconstructivist strategy which is based on the dialectic of identity and political communities.

Hansen (2012) identifies four forms of desecuritization, which the authors of this article put in the box of the ‘third generation strategies.’ The first regards the change that comes as a process of stabilization. In this form, the implicated parts recognize each other as legitimate parties and decide to distance themselves from the logic of securitization. The second form is replacement, whereby a securitized issue is replaced by a new securitized one, signifying the former’s desecuritization. The third form, rearticulation, consists of a total redefinition and, as such, transformation both of the identity as well as the pursuits of the implicated parts involved. Last, silencing, whereby the cease of the political discourse on the security threat that would take place, is the fourth form proposed by Hansen (2012).

Perhaps the most coherent desecuritization strategy repertoire, or, in our words, the ‘fourth generation strategies,’ are presented in the book *Contesting Security: Strategies and Logics*, edited by Thierry Balzacq in 2014. In this collective effort, the ways to contest security are divided into four main categories. These are: resistance, desecuritization, emancipation, and resilience. Notably, within these strategies lies the concept of humanitarian securitization, as discussed by Lilie Chouliaraki. Chouliaraki (2013) critically examines the ways in which humanitarian discourses and practices, particularly in media representations, contribute to a form of securitization that frames vulnerable populations—such as refugees and migrants—as passive subjects in need of rescue, but also as potential risks requiring control and management. Humanitarian securitization thus creates a paradox: it combines care and control, protection and surveillance, offering legitimacy to security practices that are framed as humanitarian interventions.

Out of this category, the counter-securitization strategy was later on articulated by Ian Paterson and George Karyotis in 2020, which could be referred to as the securitization-of-securitization strategy. The second one is desecuritization, which is presented as a major strategy contesting security and pertains to the usage of a “grammar

that underwrites the enactment of practice clear of the security-defense rationale” (McDonald, 2012, in Balzacq, 2014, p. 86). The third one is emancipation, which now takes another impetus encompassing the notion that “emancipation does not aim to preserve an existing or past policy; it works toward a new state of affairs” (Balzacq, 2014, p. 139), whereas the last broad strategy articulated is resilience, which draws from material sciences and clinical psychology and refers to “strategies that can be deployed in order to enable subjects to overcome adversity and allow the society to continue to operate without or with little disturbance” (Balzacq, 2014, p. 170). In other words, it refers to the ability of a society to bounce back from and to absorb shocks.

Drawing from the necessity to formulate a strategy that would leave the realm of theory and extend to a tangible and implementable desecuritization strategy, flexicuritization came as a response to two important issues. The first concerns the excess refugee crisis of 2015 that severely hit Greece as a frontline country and brought to the forefront the structural deficiencies and discontinuities of Greek migration policy (Papadakis, 2021). The second concerns the realization that despite the fact that a desecuritization approach was much needed in the Greek case, it was nevertheless absent. Nowhere in the international literature could a tangible strategy be found. As such, flexicuritization was meant to fill in this gap, taking as an example the Greek case.

Flexicuritization (which is included in the fifth generation of desecuritization strategies) is defined as “the shift of a securitized issue away from a security-centered constructed political agenda” (Dimari, 2021, p. 3). Yet, what is crucial about it, is that, other than it stems out of normative considerations, it is more of a processual strategy which aspires to bridge the gap between human and state security for the benefit of migrants and refugees, the national interests of a state, and the host society. Flexicuritization is inspired by Roe’s (2004) desecuritization strategy on ethnic minorities which calls for a moderate desecuritization, and it is based upon the premises of management. This flexible construct cannot neglect the fact that security is a “substantive right of all people” (Dimari, 2021, p. 3), and as such, to cast aside even one side involved in the overall frame would automatically signify the failure of any desecuritization strategy from its onset. Hence, this strategy entails 15 actions (Dimari, 2021, pp. 10–11), which begin from the borders and extend inwards, through the use of positive forms of supervision and monitoring. In their essence, these actions have been constructed to serve pragmatic concerns of both the state and migrants/refugees, relying upon a utilitarian approach that is directed towards the host society—that is, Greece—and taking into consideration the formulation of a pragmatic strategy that would serve short, mid, and long-term considerations of all parts implicated. As such, they draw insights from the schools of realism, liberalism, and constructivism.

Rationale of study: a political culture approach

In 2015, the Greek island of Lesbos became the focus of international attention due to the vast refugee flows that reached its shores. According to international surveys, in the year 2015 more than 1 million migrants/refugees crossed Greek territories in order to find better living conditions, out of which, the overwhelming

majority used the town of Mytilene, Lesbos, as its entry point (Kotroyannos et al., 2020). At the end of August 2020, the Moria hotspot and the adjacent informal Olive Grove area were home to about 12,000 asylum seekers, including about 4,000 children (UNHCR, 2020). The response of Greek government officials and, more importantly, of local political elite actors on the island suggests that migrants as well as refugees have been securitized (Kotroyannos et al., 2020).

In the case of Lesbos, securitization occurred through multiple mechanisms. First, through political and media discourse: Greek officials and local elites frequently invoked narratives that framed migrants and refugees as potential risks to national security, public order, and social cohesion. They were portrayed not only as economic burdens but also as threats to Greece's cultural and religious identity—particularly because many refugees originated from Muslim-majority countries. This discourse resonates with what Lilie Chouliaraki (2013) describes as *humanitarian securitization*, where migrants are simultaneously constructed as vulnerable victims deserving compassion and as potential risks that need to be controlled and managed. Second, through policy responses and practices: The securitized framing justified the implementation of restrictive border control policies, the establishment of closed and controlled reception centers (hotspots), and the militarization of border enforcement. For example, the Moria refugee camp and its overflow into the Olive Grove area were heavily policed and often described in terms more associated with containment and deterrence than protection or humanitarian assistance. Third, through legal and administrative measures: As part of this securitization, asylum processes were often portrayed as potential loopholes exploited by individuals who might pose a threat, leading to stringent and often prolonged procedures for status determination. The emphasis on security concerns justified practices like detention and the restriction of freedom of movement for asylum seekers.

The implications of this framing pertain to dehumanization and victimization, as by securitizing migrants and refugees, the discourse reduces them to mere objects of fear or pity rather than recognizing them as subjects with rights and agency. They are stripped of their individual identities and instead lumped into an undifferentiated category of “threat” or “burden.” Another implication revolves around the justification for exceptional measures. Securitization legitimizes extraordinary policy measures—such as increased surveillance, militarized border controls, and the use of force—that might otherwise be seen as violating human rights or international refugee law. It creates a state of exception where normal legal protections can be suspended. In addition, there is a reinforcement of social divisions as framing migrants as threats exacerbates social tensions between locals and refugees, fostering xenophobia, nationalism, and social polarization (Buzan et al., 1998).

On Lesbos, this has manifested in periodic outbreaks of violence, protests against refugee facilities, and political support for far-right movements. Last, and very importantly all the above pose challenges for desecuritization, as once migrants and refugees are firmly entrenched in security discourse, it becomes significantly harder to shift public perception and policy toward more inclusive, rights-based approaches. The “securitized” narrative tends to persist even in the face of humanitarian crises, as security concerns dominate political agendas.

By framing migration as a security issue, rather than a humanitarian or social one, Greek government officials and local elites have contributed to a governance approach that oscillates between care and control—a dual logic central to Chouliaraki's concept of *humanitarian securitization*.

Yet, the securitization of migration in Greece is not a new phenomenon. Rather, it is an evolving process taking place ever since the 1990s, when Greece switched from a sending country to a receiving one (Karyotis, 2012). This ongoing securitization process raises the question of whether particular political processes within the political and civic culture abet successful securitization processes (Kalu, 2018). In other words, can the political culture of Greece be a driver of a successful securitization of migration? And if so, how can political culture open the door to specific political preferences or twist political outcomes as far as migration is concerned (Kalu, 2018)? A combination of these questions leads to the central research question of this research, which is: Does the political culture of Greece underwrite its security makings and, if so, does it imply their unmaking?

The departing point for the aforementioned questions has been a research conducted by the Centre for Human Rights (KEADIK) of the Department of Political Science of the University of Crete in 2018, entitled “Identification and categorization of refugees in the Greek productive system with case studies the regions of Crete and Mytilene (MIS 5006494),” co-funded by the European Social Fund and national funds, as part of the project “Supporting researchers with emphasis on young researchers,” “Human Resource Development, Education and Lifelong Learning” EDBM34 (IDA 6BNB4653C7-A1B). Its findings strongly support that the political culture of securitization of migrants and refugees in the island of Lesbos is deeply embedded in societal security concerns, which are inextricably linked with fears of otherness in a Schmitian logic (Kotroyannos et al., 2020).

Thus, this paper, taking as its starting point the case study of Lesbos, argues that the Greek political culture has played a significant role in security understandings concerning migration, especially following the refugee crisis of 2015. Another argument supported in this article is that cultural practices precipitated the refugee crisis of 2015 and that they continue to play powerful roles in Greek politics today, where they are essential to grasping the realization of a successful securitization of migration in Greece. As such the hypotheses of the study are the following:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): *The political culture of Greece has played a significant role in shaping security perceptions and policies concerning migration, particularly in the aftermath of the 2015 refugee crisis.*

Hypothesis 2 (H2): *Cultural practices embedded within Greek society and politics not only contributed to precipitating the 2015 refugee crisis but continue to exert a powerful influence on Greek political processes, facilitating the successful securitization of migration in Greece.*

Overall, and in the words of Oren (2000), culture and power are viewed as constituting a ‘nexus’ in the Greek case of securitization of migration, pointing out that any attempt to desecuritize should take into serious consideration political culture aspects.

Indeed, Greece is one of the most homogeneous European countries, where religion plays an important role at the societal level. Thus, illegal migration, as well as refugees and asylum seekers from Muslim countries, are often seen and framed by politicians as a threat to national homogeneity and Greek national identity (Paraskeva-Gkizi, 2017; Bossis and Lampas, 2018). This framing aligns with Chouliaraki's (2013) concept of humanitarian securitization, where care and control are not opposites but intertwined logics that shape migration governance and public discourse.

At the heart of these processes lies framing theory, which examines how issues are constructed and communicated in ways that shape public perception and policy responses (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 1993). Frames define what a problem is, diagnose its causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies (Entman, 1993). In the Greek case, the framing of migration as a security threat—rather than a humanitarian or social challenge—has played a pivotal role in legitimizing restrictive migration policies and practices. This study, therefore, employs framing theory as a lens to understand how political culture in Greece contributes to constructing migration within security discourses, reinforcing the dichotomy of “us” versus “the other,” in line with Schmitt's (1996) friend-enemy distinction.

The evolving nature of this phenomenon, which emerged in the 1990s (Karyotis, 2012), faded down in the 2000s (Swarts and Karakatsanis, 2013), and resurfaced from 2011 to 2020 (Dimari, 2021; Lazaridis and Skleparis, 2016; Grigoriadis and Dilek, 2019; Stivas, 2023), suggests that there is an underlying factor—in other words, a driver or facilitator—of successful securitization of migration in the case of Greece. Specifically, societal concerns pertaining to the dichotomy of “us” versus “the other” in Greece are linked with the fear of otherness, in a Schmittian logic—where, according to Carl Schmitt (1996), the distinction between “friend” and “enemy” is the fundamental criterion of the political—prompting, as such, the question of whether the political culture of Greece favors such dichotomies, thus providing fertile ground for the successful securitization of migration and, consequently, its potential desecuritization.

Lesvos constitutes the perfect case study for exploring broader political culture trends in Greece regarding migration and its connotations to security for several key reasons the first being that the island has been the epicenter of the Greek migration crisis (Nagopoulos et al., 2019). Lesvos has been at the forefront of migration flows into Greece, particularly since the 2015 refugee crisis. As one of the main entry points for asylum seekers arriving from Turkey, the island has experienced intense political, economic, and social pressures related to migration. The securitization of migration policies in Greece has been heavily influenced by developments on Lesvos, making it a microcosm of national and even European migration debates (Iliadou, 2023). Second, the presence of overcrowded refugee camps (e.g., Moria) and the perceived strain on local resources have contributed to the framing of migration as a security issue (Altunbaş and Memişoğlu, 2024).

Political actors, both at the national and local levels, have used Lesvos as a reference point to justify restrictive migration policies and securitization measures (Dimari et al., 2020). Studying securitizing actors on the island allows for an empirical investigation into how migration is constructed as a security concern within Greek political culture. In addition, Lesvos has witnessed significant political mobilization related to migration, with both pro-refugee and

anti-migration movements gaining traction. Far-right parties such as Golden Dawn and the Greek Solution have capitalized on the migration crisis to push securitized narratives. At the same time, strong civil society responses, including humanitarian efforts and local resistance to securitization policies, highlight the broader political contestation surrounding migration in Greece (Alexandrakis, 2019).

Moreover, events have consistently shaped national and international discourse on migration in Greece. The island has been a focal point for government decisions on border control, asylum policy, and security enforcement, often setting precedents for national policies (Iliadou, 2023). Examining Lesvos thus provides insight into how local experiences feed into and reflect broader political culture trends across the country. Last, but not least, as a geopolitical hotspot in the Aegean, Lesvos is not just a local case but a strategically significant location influencing Greece's foreign policy and relations with the EU and Turkey. The securitization of migration in Greece is deeply intertwined with national sovereignty concerns, EU border policies, and Greece's historical relationship with its eastern neighbor.

As such, by analyzing the securitization discourse on Lesvos, this study captures key aspects of Greece's broader political culture—how migration is framed, how security concerns are politically instrumentalized, and how securitization narratives influence policymaking at the national level.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, divided into two distinct parts. The methodology is tailored to address the central research question and its related dimensions. The central research question guiding this study is: Does the political culture of Greece underwrite its security makings, and if so, does it also imply their unmaking? To address this question, the research was conducted in two phases:

1. A frame analysis of political elites' speech acts in Greece (2011–2019), and
2. A secondary qualitative analysis of primary data collected from functional securitizing actors on the island of Lesvos (2018).

First, a frame analysis is conducted on speech acts of political elite actors in Greece. Framing, as a process, is defined as “*the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue*” (Chong and Druckman, 2007, p. 104). Framing finds fertile ground in the security-migration nexus and political discourse whereby security actors use constructivist means to depict a ‘threat,’ generating an alarming feeling among the general public (Sarah Liu, 2021; Karyotis, 2007). This framing mechanism has been labeled as a ‘realist policy frame,’ and it is used to convey ‘othering’ messages so that political elites justify the use of repressive policy tools to tackle migration (Lavenex, 2001).

The sources investigated include primary data by securitizing actors in Greece for the period 2011 to 2019. This timeframe is highly relevant to conduct such a study, as it is well established in the international literature that migration is securitized (Dimari, 2021; Lazaridis and Skleparis, 2016; Grigoriadis and Dilek, 2019; Stivas, 2023), providing a rich rhetorical database from which to draw safe conclusions. Particular emphasis is placed on Golden Dawn and the

Greek Solution, the two far-right parties in Greece that were nevertheless members of parliament during the timeframe under investigation. The speech acts were extracted via the internet using keywords such as ‘migrant’ and ‘refugee,’ along with the names of the respective political elite actors for the period under examination. These were combined with terms such as threat, risk, national security, health, labor market, terrorism, national interest, and national identity. In sum, 120 texts were investigated to detect frames pertaining to migrants and refugees for the period under investigation.

To ensure methodological rigor and enhance the reliability of findings, a systematic qualitative discourse analysis was employed to identify and categorize dominant frames within these speech acts. A deductive-inductive coding approach was adopted. Initially, categories were developed deductively, informed by the theoretical literature on securitization and migration discourse. These categories included frames such as “threat to national security,” “cultural identity at risk,” and “economic burden.” Subsequently, an inductive coding phase was conducted, allowing for the emergence of context-specific frames from the data itself.

Operational definitions were established for each frame, identifying specific indicators within the text. For example, the security frame was marked by references to “threat,” “risk,” “terrorism,” and “national security”; the cultural identity frame by references to “national identity,” “tradition,” and “otherness”; and the economic frame by mentions of “labor market competition” and “resource strain.” The creation and application of these operational definitions contributed to coding consistency and inter-coder reliability, as they provided clear guidelines for identifying frames.

The coding process was carried out manually, with each speech act reviewed in two phases. The first phase involved open coding to highlight relevant text segments, while the second phase involved axial coding to organize these codes into broader frame categories. To enhance reliability, a subset of the coded data was cross-checked by an additional researcher to ensure consistency in the coding process. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus. In cases where an additional coder was not available, iterative coding rounds and reflective memo writing were employed to verify coding decisions and maintain analytical consistency.

Dominant frames were identified based on their frequency of occurrence across multiple speech acts, their repetition by a variety of political actors, and their discursive prominence—particularly when frames were used to justify specific policy proposals or mobilize public opinion. Quantitative frequency counts were supplemented by a qualitative assessment of the frames’ salience in the broader narrative. These steps collectively enhanced the reliability of the analysis by ensuring a systematic and transparent approach to data interpretation.

The next step of this study was to conduct a secondary qualitative analysis on primary data obtained from functional securitizing actors on the Greek island of Lesbos, in Mytilene town, in 2018. Secondary analysis of qualitative data is a methodology that entails the reuse of data collected in another study. This method involves re-analyzing data that has already been generated for another purpose (Irwin, 2013).

In this article’s case, the researchers opted for a secondary qualitative analysis of primary data obtained during the previously mentioned study conducted in 2018 (Kotroyannos et al., 2019, 2020), to answer a new research question and gain closer insight into a difficult-to-reach population (Irwin, 2013). In the context of the study conducted in Mytilene, semi-structured interviews were conducted

with functional securitizing actors—market actors who, through their practices and discourse, contribute to the securitization of an issue without necessarily having the intention to do so (Buzan et al., 1998)—during the period of October to December 2018. The interview questions were divided into open questions, opinion questions, and elaboration probes, structured into five sections: introductory part, personal questions, entrepreneurship issues, migration issues, and concluding section, with a total of 25 questions. The questionnaire focuses on the perceptions of business owners in Lesbos regarding the influx of refugees and migrants in the area and its impact on the labor market, the economy, and social integration.¹

To answer the research question of the present study speech acts were extracted from the ‘migration issues’ and ‘concluding remarks’ sections of the interviews. Particular focus was placed on the “threat” and “identity” nexus and its respective connotations.

The participants consisted of a snowball sample of 75 market actors residing mainly in Mytilene, the island’s capital, and surrounding areas. Initial participants, who were entrepreneurs, referred additional participants for inclusion in the study. Discourse analysis was conducted on the 75 semi-structured interviews to detect securitizing speech acts that revolved around the societal sector, which refers to threats and securitization processes related to collective identity, such as migration, culture, and social cohesion (Buzan et al., 1998), as conceptualized by the Copenhagen School of Security Studies. To enhance reliability in this secondary analysis, consistent selection criteria were applied in identifying participants, and a structured analytic framework was used to ensure that the coding and interpretation of the data remained systematic and consistent across interviews.

The selection criteria for the 75 interview participants on the island of Lesbos were guided by the research objective to investigate how local functional securitizing actors perceive and articulate securitizing speech acts related to migration. In this context, functional securitizing actors are understood as market actors, specifically entrepreneurs, business owners, and individuals engaged in the local economy, whose interests and livelihoods were directly

1 Specifically, the five main sections are: Introductory Questions: These questions gather personal information about the participant, such as gender, professional status, and educational background. Entrepreneurship Issues: These questions explore the business climate in the area, the impact of the influx of refugees and migrants on the business environment, the type of business the participant owns, and their relationship with refugee employment. Migration Issues: This section includes questions about the participant’s views on refugees and migrants, their relationship with the labor market, the skills and qualifications refugees possess, potential difficulties in their integration, and the types of employment opportunities that could be offered to them. Barriers to Refugee Integration: Questions in this section focus on potential barriers to the integration of refugees into the labor market, such as language and cultural issues, legal restrictions, and the recognition of qualifications. Concluding Questions: The final set of questions addresses the standard of living in the area, opinions about NGOs and state structures related to refugee issues, and suggestions for resolving the refugee crisis. The interview methodology is semi-structured, designed to produce qualitative responses regarding the local business community’s experience with migration and its integration into Lesbos’ labor market.

affected by the refugee and migration influx. These participants were not political elites or local government officials but rather members of the local business community, whose socio-economic positions rendered them key stakeholders in the securitization discourse.

The rationale for focusing on market actors stems from the Copenhagen School's concept of functional actors, who, though not holding formal political or military power, can play a critical role in the securitization process (Buzan et al., 1998). These individuals often influence and are influenced by security discourses at the societal level, particularly in contexts where migration is perceived as impacting social cohesion, economic stability, and local identity.

A snowball sampling strategy was employed to reach this difficult-to-access population. Initial contacts were made with well-established entrepreneurs in Mytilene, who were then asked to refer additional participants within their professional and social networks. This method was chosen due to the limited accessibility of participants who might otherwise be reluctant to discuss sensitive issues related to migration and security. While the sample is not statistically representative, it captures a diverse range of perspectives among market actors operating within different sectors (e.g., hospitality, retail, services) and geographic areas on Lesbos.

By selecting market actors as participants, the study aimed to explore how securitizing narratives permeate and are reproduced within local economic sectors, thereby providing insight into the societal dimension of securitization processes in Greece. The application of a systematic analytic process and consistent criteria in participant selection and data interpretation further reinforced the reliability of the findings.

Results

Frames

The analysis of the speech acts that took place for the period 2011–2019, shows that migration is framed as a threat through the use of three dominating frames. The first frame used is the cultural one, whereby the issue of the national identity erosion is the key feature, the second frame is terrorism, where the interrelation of the tripole religion, refugee/migrant, and radicalization prevails and the last frame is criminality which depicts refugees and migrants as disrupting social order and posing a danger to the physical integrity of Greek people.

However, a more nuanced examination reveals that political culture and historical narratives could serve as avenues for the furtherance of flexicuritization. By shifting the dominant discourse away from exclusionary framings, alternative narratives could emphasize historical examples of cultural integration and economic contributions of migration. Political actors and policymakers could leverage these alternative framings to promote inclusion, fostering a sense of shared heritage rather than division. In this way, flexicuritization could be expanded to reframe migration not as a threat but as an opportunity for societal enrichment and cohesion. For the purposes of this research, the two overlapping frames of culture and terrorism will be analyzed due to the fact that they answer the research question posited in this study.

Cultural frame

In this dominant frame which is mainly used from Greek right and far right political parties, the main message conveyed from political elite actors is that migration has the power to transform the Greek society and subject it to a demographic alteration through the migrant and refugee “flood.” Indeed, the analysis shows that there is a call for the protection of Greek values which creates the need to resort to exceptional measures. This frame takes place aggressively using words such as, “wave” and phrases such as the “Dublin [agreement] murders the country” and “we are in danger,” the “barbarians” and others. Migration is communicated as a huge “issue of national security and survival” which, if left unhandled it will turn out to be an issue of “national sovereignty,” due to the vast migrants/refugees’ flows that, in the view of Greek politicians who convey such messages, could hinder the “national identity” of Greece.

Indeed, the foci of the cultural frame is that Greece is not an open vineyard” for foreigners to enter incessantly and as such, this narrative climaxes in a harsh stance towards foreigners who are called to “bring their families in” and consequently, to alter the demography of Greece placing the country into a position that it has never found itself as: “since the descent of the Dorians, 4,000 years ago, the country has never witnessed such a large-scale invasion.”

The cultural frame also conveys the message that the resolution of the migration issue is a “national challenge” and this because there is a risk of a complete “alteration of society,” as, “migration may be a bigger problem than the economic one.”

Several speech acts make use of the erosion of society, culture and identity sub-frame, so that core messages are passed to convince the audience of measures to tackle migration at a repressive way, such as that “Greek citizens are foreigners in their own country” and that the “Greek archipelago must remain Greek.” As it seems, the demographic issue is a central concern for all involved and for the entire examination period, on the grounds that illegal migration endangers the social and economic cohesion of the country. As such, “Greeks must take back [their] homeland and preserve [their] language, culture and religion. [Their] main concern is the demographic that leads [their] Nation to extinction.” In fact, the belief is that “instead of the State motivating the Greeks to give birth to Greeks, they try to make the Greeks the poachers,” as they “expelled tens of thousands of [Greek] children abroad, to become waiters and brought here migrants, who give birth to many children.”

Another finding that comes out regarding the cultural threat frame is the generation of fears of otherness in a Schmittian logic. This concerns the otherness of migrants and refugees that in relation to the Greeks is distinct and is transformed into a symbol of separation of ‘them’ from ‘us’. It becomes clear through the use of words that mark a differentiation among the host society and the newcomers such as, “Western world” (ie we) which sparks a great contrast with “refugees and migrants, from the east, from Turkey, to here” (ie others) and through the use of a language that suggests that a racial profiling takes place based on the analysis of the nationality statistics of those entering the country, leading to statements such as that “Greek citizens, after all, are foreigners in their own country due to the inability of the state to enforce the law and every day they experience wars of extermination of Libyans, Afghans, Somalis, Pakistanis and all kinds of criminals who invaded the Greek border.”

Terrorist frame

Framing has served as a useful analytical tool on a variety of topics, including terrorism. In the case of Greece, it overlaps with the culture frame due to the religion of jihadists, which is often interrelated with the danger of “radicalization” of refugees and migrants residing in Greek territory. The frames used to present migrants as terrorists are important as they have a huge impact on public consciousness and policymaking. In the Greek repertoire, they come from the entire Greek political party spectrum and were mostly used during the refugee crisis of 2015, with framings from the left such as “jihadists” and “terrorists,” and in the subsequent years, mainly from the right, with framings such as “extremists” and others.

The narrative of the Greek political elite revolves around “terrorist strikes in Europe,” which have taken place by “European citizens of second and third generation,” showing that “jihadists among refugees and migrants, so far, have not been shown to have influence.” Despite this affirmation, though, which came from a high-ranking official of the then Government, the narrative continued by stating that “for security reasons for the country” but also “for Europe,” there is an extended operational move to detect “people in relation to jihad and ISIS.”

These frames, even if not explicit, are based on the overall securitization narrative to support the political elite actors’ implicit quest for acceptance of emergency measures. In other words, the potentiality of terrorism is a strong frame marker. This framing contributes to the creation of a collective social structure and understanding of terrorism and is necessary to provoke othering emotions and responses. Indeed, the discourse on the refugee crisis is conflated with terrorism in a quasi-causal linkage that concerns the prevention of “unmanageable situations” where fertile ground is created for the “penetration of extremist elements.” This narrative climaxes through the usage of expressions such as “introduced Muslim Terrorism in Europe,” which is linked with the high refugee flow coming through Turkey, mainly towards the Greek islands.

As such, the conflation of migrants and refugees with “jihadists passing through Greece [who] take advantage of the crowd and move to Europe”—through the inclusion of migrants and refugees in the same notional and contextual box with “terrorists” and “jihadists” and by implying that there is a significant risk of “radicalization” of migrants and refugees residing in Greece—plays an important role in framing the issue in a way that convinces the public of the follow-up actions to be taken while also fostering resentment against migrants and refugees. As Abbas (2019:2450) argues, “the convergence of the ‘Muslim refugee’ and the ‘terror suspect’ as threatening mobilizes a racialized biopolitics present in intersecting counter-terrorism and asylum regimes that prioritize security concerns above human rights.”

The two governments that were in power during the period 2015–2019 have used terrorism frames regarding the peril of “radicalization” from, among others, people who are “sympathizers of the Islamic State” to stress the urgency of taking emergency measures to manage this situation and to “fight terrorism,” using, among others, the argument that the refugee issue is related to “Muslim radical nuclei associated with the Islamic State.”

What supports the framing of migrants and refugees as terrorists by Greek political elite actors is the fact that, despite the potentiality of the existence of terrorists and the hypothesis upon which the whole framing is built, Greek officers, especially in the post-2019 period, resorted to an intense anti-terrorist cooperation framework with their

European counterparts, communicating to the public the “importance of stable cooperation with the Counter-Terrorism Coordinator,” thereby perpetuating the terrorism–migrant/refugee discourse and resorting to actual institutionalized practice.

Generally, in the post-2019 period, there has been intense mobility from Greek government officials with representatives of both European and transatlantic institutions on the “challenge” of migration. The meeting of the Minister of Citizen Protection Michalis Chrysochoidis with the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator Gilles de Kerchove on 9/11/2019 is a characteristic example, where all issues related to “radicalization and terrorism in Europe” were discussed, as well as the “security challenges from the increase of immigration pressures in Greece.” Special emphasis was given to the “returning foreign fighters” and the use of new technologies in the fight against terrorism.

Secondary qualitative analysis

In order to discover the perceptions of market actors in the island of Lesbos on issues related to migration, the researchers of the study asked them to express their views on the influx of refugees and migrants in Greece (Kotroyannos et al., 2019, 2020). The analysis showed the existence of a relative understanding mainly regarding the arrival of refugees of the “first wave of migration,” however over the years this seems to shrink mainly because, as they claim, the arrival of refugees has decreased significantly and it has been substituted by economic migrants from Asian and African countries. They insist on the need for a comprehensive plan by the central government to address and manage high refugee / migration flows. As they state with clarity and relative intensity, such a plan did not exist, thus creating several negative effects in terms of security, including an increase in crime.

In the same direction, many interviewees expressed a negative view of the influx of refugees in Greece and especially in Lesbos noting that the island does not face a problem of migration or influx of refugees but a problem of “illegal immigration,” emphasizing that this is the right term to be used, thus highlighting their strongly securitized view towards newcomers.

When the interviewees were asked if the large number of refugees accepted by Greece poses a risk or opportunity for the labor market, it emerged from the analysis of their answers that the economic crisis combined with the absence of a policy mix that would aim at the smooth integration of refugees, creates an obvious dichotomy. On the one side there are those who see the refugee as a threat (the majority of the respondents) and on the other, those who view the situation in the light of neutrality.

The discourse analysis shows that migrants are perceived as a threat by a large part of the respondents, with a referent object being societal security. Most market actors believe that the influx of refugees is not an incentive but a significant risk for the labor market as it is combined with “undeclared work, uninsured work, everything illegal.” The prevailing negative image of the refugee relationship with the economy and the labor market has often been expressed by some interviewees in an extreme and racist manner, highlighting on the one hand the directly opposite views of the local community and, on the other, the risk that securitized perceptions become extreme practices. An illustrative example is the following excerpt “my opinion is to

throw them to the sea so that not even the dogfish can find them. This is my opinion. Why? Because they only harm our society.”

Market actors are also divided into those who assess migration as negative for the labor market and those who distinguish some positive parameters. Those who assess it as negative, use securitizing speech acts and initially focus on the effects it has had on the island's tourist visibility resulting in a decrease in tourist arrivals, an increase in crime and the sense of insecurity, as well as a rapid rise in the prices of some services, such as housing rents. Characteristically, they state: “It has affected it [negatively] very much, especially the tourist sector, because even in the most famous tourist destinations of the island, such as the areas of Petra, Molyvos, the tourist arrivals are lower, compared to previous years, and the result is that the hotels do not work. This negatively affects all the other professions that revolve around tourist sector,” “It has affected it a lot [negatively], especially the increase of housing rental prices,” “It has negatively affected the economy and the labor market, especially during the winter months there is an increasing feeling of insecurity,” “It has negatively affected the economic, but also the psychological state of the citizens due to the escalation of crime observed by the arrival of immigrants and refugees,” “The market of Mytilene has suffered great financial damage due to increased crimes committed by migrants. Worse, however, is the sense of insecurity and fear that now prevails. However, due to the arrival of immigrants, there are some categories of businesses that have been favored, such as rented rooms-houses, taxis, etc.,” “It has had a negative impact. It devalues the whole island. Today Spiegel named Lesvos the island of the cursed.”

The majority of the respondents are negative to the possibility of employing refugees and migrants in their business. Several use securitized or racist comments, such as the following: “To be in a coffin [the immigrants]. I would never hire them. There are Greeks with serious financial problems who are willing to work. These people have not learned to work.”

In the question about the biggest obstacles to the integration of refugees and migrants into business, most of the respondents used comments that show the breadth of their perception that the newcomers constitute cultural threats and that explicitly point towards their culture, such as the following: “We will end up being a minority in our own,” “It's their language, their culture, their religion, their culture; they have also shown an aggressive attitude towards us Christians,” “First we have a huge cultural difference. They cannot go

along with our beliefs, with our wants, with our habits, with our customs,” “The culture of the people that will come in relation to us. Not so much the papers or the health issue. We make these. Their mentality is completely different.”

The above passage clearly shows the societal element that is inherent in the fear towards others in the case under examination. The demographic erosion or alteration of the Greek identity prevails as an argument pertaining to integration obstacles. The respondents seem to address their fears and their denial for hosting newcomers based upon cultural and religion considerations. The Muslim religion is not well perceived by inhabitants of the islands who regard that is a religion that stands out for its overall different mentality which is totally contrasting to the Greek one and that causes ‘aggressiveness’ towards Christians which is the prevailing religion both in the island of Lesvos and in Greece overall.

As it is clear from the above analysis, the majority of the local market actors in Lesvos uses a highly securitized language but there is an obvious division between a significant part (but not the major) which is tolerant towards refugees/immigrants. The securitized perceptions of the majority of the respondents are strongly influenced by a political culture which mainly emphasizes the importance of religion and the same cultural and ethnic roots and even more, a sustainable front towards the dangers posed by the arrival of others that are Muslim in their striking majority. It is important to note though that there is a part among the respondents which holds humanitarian perceptions. Yet, it is not the dominant one. Its existence though reveals the potential for achieving flexicuritization in the future (Table 1).

Discussion

The analysis of the results of this study reveals a discourse on and a framing of migration, which revolves around the interaction of threat and identity. Two main findings come out from this research. The first, which concerns the secondary qualitative analysis, pertains to the unwillingness of the majority of the respondents to accept mass refugee and migrant populations for reasons relating to the erosion of the Greek national identity and to demographic alteration. The reasons that hide behind these views are prompted by overall culture considerations. Indeed, a closer look

TABLE 1 Markets sector's compiled perceptions towards issues related to migration in Lesvos.

Perceptions	Most common perceptions/securitized	Least common perceptions/humanitarian
Migration to Greece	Illegal migration, first wave positive but then negative, danger, instability, fear, crime, security concerns, danger of societal cohesion-others vs. us dipole	Integration in the society, positive aspects for economy, Responsibility of the state or the EU, migration is not their choice
Labor market impact	Difficulties in integration, lack of knowledge, incapable, fear about the Greek employees, security concerns	Positive for the economy and the labor market, fill gaps of the labor market
Remuneration of newcomers	Negative, Greeks first, high unemployment of Greeks should be addressed first, no remuneration experience	Positive, have already positive experience in remunerating them
Obstacles for newcomers integration	Cultural differences, criminality, different and conflicting religion, lack of working capabilities-desire to work	Bureaucracy, more incentives-investments in education/training by the state and it will be achieved
Living together in the society	Impossible, crimes, insecurity, cultural differences, fear of otherness	Possible integration, tolerance

Source: Data compiled from unpublished primary research data on market actors in Lesvos conducted by KEADIK (for further details on the research see: Kotroyannos et al., 2019, 2020).

to the respondents' answers clearly shows an interrelation of their answers with their set of ethnotic beliefs. The political culture of these attitudes towards migration is embedded in the dichotomy of 'us' vs. 'others' and is linked to perceptions of the "friend" and "enemy" dichotomy. The Muslim religion seems to be a driver for this dichotomy.

Second, as far as the frame analysis is concerned, it comes out that the afore mentioned processes precipitated the refugee crisis of 2015, suggesting that the Greek political culture and context abet the emergence, preservation and renewal of securitization of migration discourses, as, from 2011 to 2019 there has not been marked any-essential-change in the Greek political repertoire towards the sensitive issue of migration. What dominates the discourse is the culture of the foreigners and their potential to be terrorists (at a lesser degree though), two frames that are largely conflated indicating that the two analyses findings confirm and reinforce each other.

As such, this study empirically supports that the cultural legacy and the formation of the Greek political culture in the course of its historical becoming as a nation, a process which inspired and sustained the perception of migration as a threat during the 1990s (Karyotis, 2012; Triandafyllidou, 1998), also finds fertile support and ground in the present.

It is widely accepted in the international literature that the history of each nation is marked by the presence of important others that have influenced the development of its identity through their menacing presence (Triandafyllidou, 2003). Migrants and refugees, especially Muslim ones, constitute the significant others that are framed as threatening the Greek national identity. As Triandafyllidou (1998) argues, in the Greek national consciousness, the "othering" process is inextricably linked with the Turkish yoke and the Muslim religion. According to Veikou (2001, p. 78), the reason for this is that Muslims are perceived as a threat to the socio-political order of Greece, due to "power considerations, disputed borders and ethnic minority contents." Triandafyllidou (1998) asserts the national identity of modern Greece has first shaped as a response to the Ottoman occupation and second as a threat, a fact that has maintained vivid collective memory against oppression, especially in a place of Greece that is closely located to Turkey, such as the island of Lesbos. Thus, migrants and refugees both represent the "significant other" (Triandafyllidou, 1998, p. 604) in relation to Greeks and their perceived national identity.

Swarts and Karakatsanis (2013, pp. 111-112) argue that in the case of Greece, "Greek identity has traditionally been rooted in an

exclusivist, ethnocentric political culture" and therefore, "attempts to securitize migration resonated with historical Greek self-conceptions and national myths." An explanation for this is given by Stefanides who argues that the Greek Independence War (against the Turkish yoke) was the foundation of the shaping of the contemporary Greek political culture.

Indeed, as Triandafyllidou and Veikou (2002, p. 191) posited in their research on the "hierarchy of Greekness," the lack as well as the "reluctance" of articulating a comprehensive policy framework for migration in Greece, during the 1990s and the early years of 2000, a period when migration was also securitized (Karyotis, 2012), strongly argue that "there is a relationship between this reluctance and the ethnocultural definition of Greek nationality and citizenship." Hence, Paraskeva-Gkizi's (2017), argument that the Greek society does not trust Muslim immigrants, which is due, among other things, to the equation of Islam with Turkish rule or threat, is confirmed by the research of Triandafyllidou and Veikou (2002) who in their attempt to create taxonomies of Greekness, provided evidence that the limitations on who was an "insider" and who was an "outsider" in Greece was a matter of ethnic as well as religious characteristics.

It is evident that this section emphasizes historical narratives, particularly the Ottoman legacy, as a driver of securitization. To strengthen this claim and provide a clearer linkage between historical perceptions and contemporary migration discourse, though, it is essential to highlight how the Greek national identity has been historically shaped in opposition to the Ottoman Empire and how this continues to influence the securitization of Muslim migrants. Table 2 provides information on how the Greek national identity has been historically shaped in opposition to the Ottoman Empire and how this continues to influence the securitization of Muslim migrants.

The findings of this study, as such, empirically confirm all of the above studies and support the authors' thesis that the political culture of Greece underwrites its security makings in migration and as such it is necessary for its unmaking.

But how can they actually inform the flexicuritization strategy?

The empirical part of this study, clearly shows that cultural frames pertain to the construction of migrants and refugees as disruptors of Greece's cultural order and homogeneity, reinforcing exclusionary narratives. This framing serves the securitization processes in the sense that this is the justification for the emergency measures to be implemented in order to save the nation from the aliens, with the different culture who, according to these narratives, threatens the societal cohesion of Greece. However, an alternative approach could highlight historical instances of cultural integration and the

TABLE 2 Formation of Greek national identity and influence on securitization of migration in Greece.

Historical dimension	Explanation
Collective Memory and Historical Trauma	The Greek War of Independence and the prolonged Ottoman rule created a sense of historical grievance, particularly towards Muslims, which still shapes the perception of Muslim migrants as a threat in regions like Lesbos.
National Identity Formation and Othering	Greek national identity has historically been constructed in opposition to the Ottoman Empire, where Orthodox Christianity defined Greek identity. This religious and ethnic divide continues today, with Muslim migrants framed as outsiders threatening Greece's cultural and religious homogeneity.
Legal and Political Continuities	Greece's nationality laws have been influenced by its historical experience with Ottoman rule, emphasizing ethnic and religious homogeneity. This exclusionary approach continues to impact policies towards Muslim migrants, reinforcing their marginalization.
Contemporary Political Rhetoric and Media Representation	Modern political discourse and media often invoke historical tensions with the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, framing Muslim migrants as an extension of past adversaries. This historical framing justifies restrictive migration policies and emergency measures.

contributions of migration to Greek society, fostering an inclusive perspective. By reframing migration through narratives of shared heritage and coexistence, political culture could serve as a tool for flexicuritization, shifting the discourse toward mutual enrichment rather than division and as a threat to Greek society in its entirety, as culturally different and inferior—economically underdeveloped and subject to non-Western values that are incompatible with Greek or European culture.

In addition, to counter these narratives and facilitate the process of flexicuritization, political actors and civil society can employ alternative framings that promote inclusion and coexistence. For instance, policymakers could emphasize Greece's historical role as a crossroads of civilizations, demonstrating how migration has historically contributed to cultural and economic flourishing. Highlighting successful examples of integration and policy shifts in other contexts, such as EU countries that have leveraged migration for economic growth, could further reinforce this reframing. Additionally, education and public discourse can play a pivotal role in transforming perceptions, utilizing historical narratives that reflect Greece's diverse and multicultural heritage rather than exclusionary and fear-driven perspectives. By actively reshaping the discourse through media, political rhetoric, and policy interventions, flexicuritization can gradually take place, shifting migration from a perceived threat to an opportunity for societal enrichment and progress.

As regards the terrorist frame, political culture, as a crucial aspect of national identity and discourse, could play a pivotal role in advancing the flexicuritization strategy. Rather than reinforcing security-centric approaches, political elites could foster a more inclusive discourse that frames migration as an opportunity rather than a threat. The interplay between security concerns and human rights must be actively negotiated in public discourse to create space for policies that prioritize inclusion without compromising legitimate security needs.

In this sense, achieving flexicuritization—a balance between security concerns and integration policies—is possible through targeted strategies. These may include structured integration programs that focus on language acquisition, vocational training, and cultural exchange initiatives. Providing incentives for businesses to employ refugees, such as tax reductions or financial aid, can also help alter market actors' perceptions. Additionally, public awareness campaigns that emphasize the economic contributions and social benefits of migration could help mitigate hostility and change the dominant narrative. Strengthening institutional support to ensure lawful employment and fair wages would also counteract fears of economic destabilization. Finally, fostering community dialogue between locals and migrants can promote mutual understanding and reduce securitized rhetoric. While the dominant perception remains hostile, the existence of a minority with humanitarian perspectives indicates the potential for gradual transformation towards a more balanced and inclusive policy approach.

Overall, recognizing the historical underpinnings of securitization offers an opportunity to reframe migration discourse. Instead of reinforcing divisive narratives rooted in historical trauma, political actors and civil society can promote alternative framings that emphasize Greece's historical role as a crossroads of civilizations. By highlighting past instances of successful cultural integration and economic contributions of migration, the discourse can shift from securitization towards mutual enrichment. Additionally, structured integration programs, public awareness campaigns, and education

initiatives can help mitigate historical anxieties and foster a more inclusive national identity.

By integrating these historical dimensions into the discussion, it becomes evident that the securitization of migration in Greece is not merely a response to recent events but is deeply embedded in the country's historical consciousness. Understanding this continuity is crucial for developing policies that balance security concerns with inclusive integration strategies, ultimately fostering a more cohesive and forward-looking national identity.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to take the flexicuritization of migration strategy a step further, by drawing insights from a political culture standpoint. From a theoretical perspective, the extant desecuritization framework was taken as a starting point; a step which led to a new taxonomy of desecuritization strategies and to the inclusion of flexicuritization in the fifth generation of desecuritization strategies.

The article then provided the rationale behind the decision to conduct this research. More in particular, the authors of this study, having been inspired by the findings of a prior research (Kotroyannos et al., 2020), decided to use its findings and conduct a new one that would aim to answer a new research question, namely, whether the political culture of Greece is related to its securitization of migration processes thus implying that the strategy of flexicuritization should be further addressed encompassing political culture components that should be scientifically investigated to be embedded in the renewed strategy.

The secondary qualitative analysis that was conducted in 75 functional securitizing actors in Mytilene, Lesbos, yielded sufficient data, which point towards an affirmative answer regarding the central research question of this study. Yet, to build a stronger case, the authors decided to explore the research question through the lens of frame analysis as well, zooming on 120 speech acts of securitizing actors in Greece for the 2011–2019 timeframe, a period that is well established in the literature that migration in Greece is securitized.

What comes out from the analysis of the results is that the political culture of Greece has been a main driver in securitization of migration processes in Greece and as such it is considered a crucial factor to take into consideration in the advancement of the flexicuritization strategy. More specifically, for the period under investigation, societal concerns that are embedded in the fear of cultural erosion from Muslim populations seem to contribute in the political attempt to establish a successful security apparatus in Greece in relation to migration thus suggesting that the incorporation of these findings in the renewed flexicuritization strategy is necessary.

At a deeper level, it seems that recurring similarities in Greek history, pertaining to migration, can be seen as a product and as a reflection of relatively enduring aspects of the political culture and the history of Greece, overall. Despite the fact that each generation transforms its past, it nevertheless maintains a part of this past, while at the same time adding to it. As such, political context and culture, constitute the foundation upon which political elite actors build their securitization cases. In Triandafyllidou's (1998, p. 606), words, “*efforts to securitize migration are thus intertwined with historical Greek self-perceptions and national myths but also with stereotypes, especially in relation to Islam.*”

The findings of this study suggest that Muslim migrants are predominantly framed as “others” within Greek securitization discourse. While previous research has linked this framing to historical narratives—particularly the legacy of the Ottoman period (Triandafyllidou, 1998; Veikou, 2001)—the direct empirical evidence supporting this connection remains limited. The interviews analyzed in this study reveal strong associations between migration and national identity concerns, yet explicit references to the Ottoman past or historical grievances are not consistently present in respondents’ discourse.

However, indirect traces of historical narratives emerge in the way respondents articulate their concerns. Some interviewees expressed fears of “foreign influence” or “cultural invasion,” echoing longstanding perceptions of external threats that have historically shaped Greek national identity (Swarts and Karakatsanis, 2013). Moreover, political and media rhetoric frequently reinforce these historical framings. For instance, political statements referencing Greece’s struggle for independence and media portrayals of migrants as a “new occupation force” implicitly draw from these deep-seated historical anxieties.

Comparative cases further illustrate how historical legacies contribute to securitization discourses. In France, for example, colonial histories have shaped contemporary anxieties about Muslim migration (Hajjat and Mohammed, 2023). Similarly, in post-Soviet states, historical conflicts with Russia influence the framing of contemporary security concerns (Kymlicka, 2007). Applying this lens to Greece, while direct references to the Ottoman past may not be frequent in everyday discourse, the broader national memory of occupation and resistance continues to inform securitization processes at a structural level.

To strengthen the link between historical narratives and contemporary securitization, future research could focus on media analysis, political discourse, or public education narratives to trace how historical framings are actively reproduced. Additionally, examining generational differences in perceptions of migration could reveal whether older respondents, who may have been exposed to different historical narratives in education and public discourse, make stronger connections between migration and the Ottoman past.

From a practical standpoint, these findings have significant policy implications. Understanding the role of political culture in shaping migration security strategies can aid policymakers in designing more balanced approaches that account for societal concerns while promoting social cohesion and integration. Recognizing the cultural underpinnings of securitization can also help international organizations, NGOs, and governmental agencies develop communication strategies that challenge securitization narratives and foster desecuritization efforts. Furthermore, incorporating these insights into policy frameworks may enhance the effectiveness of migration governance by addressing public perceptions and mitigating fears that contribute to securitization.

These findings contribute significantly to the literature on (de) securitization by highlighting the role of political culture in security-making. Moreover, they open new avenues for research on the unmaking or contestation of security practices. However, to provide a broader perspective, future studies should compare Greece’s experience with other EU countries. Investigating how different political cultures influence securitization strategies across Europe could further refine the flexicuritization framework and enhance its applicability in diverse contexts.

Importantly, while this study emphasizes political culture as a driver of securitization, it relies on secondary literature and discourse analysis rather than direct empirical measurement through survey data or

comparative historical analysis. The claims about political culture are thus inferred rather than quantitatively tested. However, discourse analysis remains a valid methodological approach, as it captures the ways in which political actors construct meaning and shape public perceptions. To strengthen this claim, references to existing studies on Greek political attitudes toward migration and nationalism are incorporated to contextualize the findings. Additionally, comparative perspectives from other European countries that exhibit similar securitization trends help position Greece within a broader pattern. Future research could further validate these claims by incorporating direct empirical measures of political culture, such as surveys or historical case studies.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

Ethical review and approval was not required for the study on human participants in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided written informed consent to participate in this study. Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

Author contributions

GD: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. ST: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – review & editing. Writing – original draft. NP: Writing – review & editing. AC-K: Writing – review & editing.

Funding

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research and/or publication of this article.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Generative AI statement

The author(s) declare that Generative AI was used in the creation of this manuscript. AI was utilized for English language refinement purposes (Chat GPT 4).

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