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Strategic Humanitarianism: Host States and Refugee Policy

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Abstract

The significant rise in the number of forcibly displaced people crossing international borders, i.e., refugees, necessitates a thorough examination of the policies implemented by receiving states to manage the arrival of these vulnerable populations. This article reviews the literature on the factors that influence refugee policies, focusing on two dimensions of host state responses: admission and integration. We argue that there may be an inherent tension between refugee admissions and refugee integration policies, as countries attempt to restrict benefits when admission numbers increase. Further, we highlight how refugee policies are influenced by international and domestic constraints and priorities that can at times be conflicting or complementary. The article ultimately advocates for a systematic analysis of the endogenous relationship between refugee policies, public perception of refugees, and migration patterns.

INTRODUCTION

There has been a sharp increase in the number of forcibly displaced people as a result of armed conflict, human rights violations, and natural or human-made disasters in recent years.[1] The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that by the end of 2022, there were over 37 million refugees and asylum seekers worldwide and over 62 million internally displaced people—more than double the numbers of a decade ago. Most refugees remain in the Global South—Turkey currently hosts the largest number of refugees, with 3.7 million in its territory, followed by Colombia (2.5 million), Germany (2.2 million), Pakistan, and Uganda (1.5 million each).[2] Given the sustained surge in the number of refugees, host state policies that regulate their admission and integration have been hotly debated and are important to understand from an academic and practical perspective (Thorson & Abdelaaty 2023).

Clearly, refugee policies reflect humanitarian values and universal human rights norms, as countries provide critical support for vulnerable populations arriving at their borders. Yet, such policies are also guided by geopolitical and domestic considerations, as states balance respect for human rights against their foreign policy goals and the demands of their own citizens. Therefore, refugee policies can best be thought of as instances of strategic humanitarianism (Snyder 2011). In other words, rather than an unqualified humanitarianism, in which refugees are granted safe haven and rights in an unbiased manner (Gibney 1999), refugee policies can deviate significantly from meeting the objective needs of vulnerable people due to a combination of international and domestic pressures, which lead to the selective application of human rights principles. Indeed, states may even politicize the very definition of "refugee," claiming that certain migrants arrive for better economic opportunities rather than legitimate human rights concerns, thereby justifying their exclusion (Neumayer 2005, Stanley 1987).

In this article, we focus on the factors that shape the policies of host states toward refugees. We classify such policies into two distinct categories: admissions and integration. Admissions policy includes the state's decisions to allow refugees to enter its territory in the first place; recognize such migrants as bona fide refugees, rather than as "temporary" or "undocumented" migrants; and allow refugees to remain without fear of *refoulement* (i.e., forcible deportation) to unsafe conditions in the sending country. Integration policy refers to the rights refugees are granted while residing in the receiving country. To begin with, states must decide whether to allow refugees to self-settle in localities of their own choosing or to restrict them to refugee camps. Subsequently, receiving states may grant or deny other basic rights, such as the ability to work freely, attend school, buy property, obtain social services, and eventually acquire citizenship. These policies may in turn create feedback loops in which generous admissions and integration policies create further incentives for refugees to attempt crossing borders (Blair et al. 2022b, Moore & Shellman 2007); this increased migration may then foster domestic opposition to liberal policies.

Akin to a two-level game (Putnam 1988), these policies are shaped by international and domestic priorities that are sometimes conflicting and sometimes complementary. Research has

[1] By "forced migration," we refer to migratory movements that involve force, compulsion, or coercion within and across borders. In this review, our focus is on one type of forced migration: refugees who cross an international boundary. We recognize that the distinction between forced and voluntary migration is often blurred, with people leaving for a mix of economic and safety motivations (Hamlin 2021). Nonetheless, for analytical clarity, our review focuses on people who have migrated across borders, primarily because of fear of physical harm.

[2] These figures exclude Palestinian refugees, who are not under the auspices of the UNHCR but fall under the care of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

confirmed that refugees are most prominently associated with civil conflict and human rights abuse in the sending country (Adhikari 2012, Davenport et al. 2003, Moore & Shellman 2004, Schmeidl 1997). Receiving states are often biased participants in conflicts occurring in sending countries. Civil wars are frequently shaped by external government or rebel support (Regan 2002, Salehyan et al. 2011), and neighboring states—to which most refugees flee—can be major sources of funding, sanctuary, and logistics. Accepting refugees from rival states may be used as a symbolic tool to signal that the sending regime violates human rights and fails to maintain domestic security (Chu 2020), while rejecting refugees can shield allies from such scrutiny. Beyond relations with the sending state, countries are also embedded in the larger international community of states and face pressure to fulfill their international legal obligations as well as the requests of aid donors and major powers (Blair et al. 2022a, Ghezelbash 2018).

Domestically, states are also attuned to the preferences of their citizens, especially in democratic regimes. As we discuss below, hosting refugees entails a complex set of costs and benefits for the receiving state. Refugees may be welcomed out of humanitarian sympathy for their plight (Bansak et al. 2016, Fraser & Murakami 2022), which may itself be shaped by factors such as coethnicity or cultural similarity (Abdelaaty 2021, Bloom et al. 2015). Those refugees who are seen as economically beneficial or culturally similar are more likely to be well received by the host society. However, refugees can be perceived as being security threats, economic competitors, or culturally undesirable (Weiner 1992). Such public backlash may incline states to repel refugees at the border, deny them opportunities, or both. For instance, Hangartner et al. (2019) demonstrate that the exposure to large numbers of asylum seekers in Greece led to significant increases in anti-immigrant sentiment and willingness to lobby the government for migration restrictions.

Our purpose in this review is to examine the current literature on refugees and state responses, which underscores the complex logic of strategic humanitarianism. To this end, we begin by surveying the literature on the economic, security, and sociopolitical impacts of hosting refugees, as these consequences are important for understanding refugee policies. Next, we discuss host state policy responses to refugee flows, focusing on admission rights and integration rights. Finally, we discuss gaps in the current literature and identify promising topics for future analysis. Some of the relationships we discuss have seen considerable scholarly attention (e.g., refugees and domestic public opinion) (Bansak et al. 2016, Buehler et al. 2020, Hangartner et al. 2019), while in other areas there is significant work to be done (e.g., the trade-off between admissions and integration policies). We hope this guide will bring together various strands of the forced migration literature and spark new ideas and insights for further research on this important topic.

THE IMPACT OF REFUGEE FLOWS ON HOST STATES

Before turning to a discussion of refugee policy, it is important to understand the real or perceived effects of refugees on host states, as these influence government responses. The effects of refugees on the host country are multifaceted and complex, including effects on public health (Maystadt et al. 2019, Toole & Waldman 1997), the environment (Black 1994, Maystadt et al. 2020), educational systems (McBrien 2005), and foreign relations (Greenhill 2010, Tsourapas 2019). In this section, we focus on some of the best-researched aspects of refugee hosting, mainly its economic, security, and sociopolitical impacts. Despite often-heard, simplistic claims that refugees impose a burden on the hosting country in terms of fiscal costs, economic competition, and negative security spillovers, the story is often much more complex, and the mix of costs and benefits is often mediated by additional contextual factors.

Economic Effects

Large inflows of people crossing state borders unavoidably yield economic repercussions on host states and local communities. Such costs can be substantial, especially in the light of the fact that more than 80% of refugees are hosted in developing countries with limited capacity, potentially leading to competition between locals and refugees for land, jobs, and environmental resources (Jacobsen 2002a,b; Maystadt et al. 2019). However, while conventional wisdom links antirefugee attitudes to the economic costs of hosting refugees, empirical evidence for the underlying assumption—that refugees are an economic liability—is mixed. It is difficult to determine the overall economic impact of hosting refugees for several reasons.

First, the distributional effects of refugee hosting create local winners and losers, resulting in significant variation in whether refugees are perceived as an economic asset or a liability (Ruiz & Vargas-Silva 2013, Taylor et al. 2016). For instance, locals who are well-off with regard to resources and education are better positioned to benefit from the human capital of refugees in the form of labor, skills, and entrepreneurship (David et al. 2020, Maystadt & Verwimp 2014, Whitaker 2002). Conversely, employment losses often occur among local unskilled workers, especially in the informal economy (Tumen 2016). However, such losses can be somewhat offset if humanitarian aid is allocated in a way to facilitate positive downstream effects on local populations (Jacobsen 2002a, Taylor et al. 2016). In the case of Uganda, Zhou et al. (2023) show that the increased presence of refugees in parishes, when combined with humanitarian aid, improves public service delivery for host communities, thereby contributing to local economic development.

Second, the costs of refugee hosting can be front-loaded due to the sudden surge in demand for resources and services. This may overwhelm existing infrastructure, such as housing and health facilities (Jacobsen 2002a, p. 580). On the other hand, the possible economic benefits of hosting refugees, such as increased economic growth, are more likely to be realized in the long run if and when refugees are legally integrated into the workforce and other market adjustments are made (Manthei 2021, Verme & Schuettler 2021). For example, recent evidence suggests that resettled refugees in the United States pay on average $21,000 more in taxes than they receive in benefits over their first 20 years of residency, making them a net contributor to the welfare system over time (Evans & FitzGerald 2017).

Third, international and domestic policy responses to refugee flows play a critical role in shaping the economic impact of mass migration. For low-income countries, adequate foreign assistance from international donors, the UNHCR, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) can offset the costs of accommodating refugees while also stimulating local economic development through spillovers to the host community (Maystadt et al. 2019, Zhou et al. 2023, Zhou & Shaver 2021). Moreover, even though the influx of refugees generally raises the labor supply (Alix-Garcia et al. 2018), the magnitude of this effect is influenced by host country policies, such as refugee settlement patterns (camped or self-settled), host state policies regarding refugees' right to work and freedom of movement, and whether host and refugee labor are substitutes or complementary (Alix-Garcia & Saah 2009, Taylor et al. 2016, Whitaker 2002).

In sum, despite the commonly held belief that refugees are a burden on the economy, refugees can provide valuable human capital, make a direct contribution to the local economy, and indirectly stimulate economic growth through increased foreign aid. This effect is particularly pronounced in host states in the Global South, where the human capital of a median refugee may be higher than that of median locals (Kreibaum 2016). Despite these aggregate benefits, it is often the case that economic actors in direct competition with refugees are negatively impacted in their employment opportunities and wages (Verme & Schuettler 2021). Moreover, there can be notable differences between the actual economic impact of hosting refugees and the perceptions of locals,

who often view refugees as a burden. Kreibaum (2016), for instance, finds that although refugee-hosting communities in Uganda experience objective improvements in welfare, they perceive that refugees have had a negative impact on their livelihoods (see also Loschmann et al. 2019). These perceptions, moreover, can be used by xenophobic politicians and political movements to foster an antimigrant backlash.

Security and Sociopolitical Effects

The early scholarship on the security effects of refugees is founded on the premise that refugees, far from being passive victims, can potentially participate in political violence against both the sending and the host state. Weiner (1992) explicitly treated forced migration as a security issue, which deviated from the traditional approach of studying refugee flows solely through a humanitarian lens. The securitization framework is perhaps best exemplified by Zolberg et al.'s (1989) conceptualization of refugees as potentially militarized and politically motivated "warriors," who generate further instability in receiving and sending states. It is noteworthy that the early scholarship relied on a few well-known instances of militarized refugee groups, including Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan, Afghan refugees in Pakistan, and Rwandan Hutu refugees in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The inferential problems associated with selecting on the dependent variable (examining only cases where refugees are militarized) are addressed by subsequent qualitative and quantitative studies. Notably, Lischer (2003, 2005) and Whitaker (2003) utilize rich case evidence to identify various factors that are likely to contribute to the militarization of refugees, such as the original reasons for refugee flight (e.g., persecution in the country of origin), characteristics of the host country (e.g., state capacity, legitimacy, and electoral dynamics), features of refugee settlements (e.g., camp size and proximity to the border), and international factors (e.g., the presence of humanitarian aid).

Salehyan & Gleditsch (2006) conduct the first large-N analysis of the relationship between refugee hosting and conflict diffusion across borders. They posit that refugee presence can contribute to the onset of civil conflict in neighboring host states through multiple paths. First, refugees may partake in armed conflict against the host government by providing resources such as arms, fighting experience, and networks across borders, as well as enlisting as recruits for local rebel groups. Another pathway through which refugee groups can increase the risk of conflict in host states is by creating circumstances that may amplify the local population's grievances against the government and its refugee policies. This may occur when refugees are seen as economic competitors or when they change the ethnic balance within society (Krcmaric 2014). Subsequent research shows that refugees are more likely to contribute to violence in host states if they share ethnic ties with marginalized populations and change the demographic balance between groups (Rüegger 2019). For instance, refugee migration from Kosovo to Macedonia helped to foster a short-lived insurgency among the Macedonian Albanian community.

Drawing on the work of Salehyan & Gleditsch (2006), a plethora of quantitative studies have established positive correlations between hosting refugees and various manifestations of political violence, such as interstate conflict (Salehyan 2008), civil conflict (Salehyan 2009), terrorism (Milton et al. 2013), one-sided violence (Fisk 2018), communal violence (Fisk 2019), and repression (Wright & Moorthy 2018). Importantly, most of these studies have highlighted that the nexus between refugees and conflict is intricate, multifaceted, and contingent upon various conditioning factors, such as the military and economic capacity of the host state (Böhmelt et al. 2019, Wright & Moorthy 2018), the type of refugee settlement (Fisk 2018), ethnic divisions within communities (Rüegger 2019), and the liberality of host state refugee policies (Savun 2022).

Recent research on the security effects of refugees has begun to use disaggregated and micro-level approaches with particular emphasis on establishing causality. Importantly, the shift from macro- to micro-level analyses has elucidated that refugee hosting is not conflict-inducing in all instances. Relying on georeferenced data on refugee settlements in the post–Cold War era, Zhou & Shaver (2021) find no evidence that refugees increase the likelihood of new conflict in a locality or prolong existing conflict. Focusing on subnational variation in the presence of refugees within host countries in Africa, Fisk (2014) shows that the size of the refugee population is not related to civil conflict. In a similar vein, Masterson & Lehmann's (2020) investigation into Syrian refugees in Lebanon reveals that the recruitment of refugees into local armed groups is minimal, challenging the claim that refugees are particularly susceptible to recruitment—at least in this case.

Another strand of the literature shifts attention to domestic backlash against refugees and the potential for xenophobic attacks against them. Onoma's (2013) pioneering qualitative work on antirefugee violence in Africa has paved the way for a burgeoning literature on violence against refugees. Starting with the observation that the vast majority of refugees are not militarized—an empirical regularity backed by a recent global cross-national data set on refugee-related violence (Gineste & Savun 2019)—Onoma (2013) advances an argument that large-scale attacks against refugees are a response to political elites' vilification of refugees, who are suspected of having links to opposition groups. Locals subscribe to such demonization only in low-information environments where refugees are isolated and have minimal interactions with locals (Ghosn et al. 2019).

Building on Onoma's work, subsequent quantitative analyses have sought to identify additional factors that contribute to violence against refugees. Savun (2022) shows that generous refugee policies are associated with a decrease in antirefugee violence by locals. Further, Polo & Wucherpfennig (2022) demonstrate that refugee populations do not increase terrorism in wealthy host states but that they are more prone to becoming targets of domestic extremist attacks. Similarly, while Choi & Salehyan (2013) find that hosting refugees is associated with more terrorist attacks, they argue that refugees and aid workers are frequently the victims of such violence. Lehmann & Masterson (2020) present evidence that international aid to Syrian refugees in Lebanon, in the form of cash transfers, reduced the likelihood of antirefugee violence by creating positive benefits for local communities.

While violence against refugees is perhaps the most extreme response, domestic opposition can manifest itself in additional ways. Numerous studies have focused on public opinion and nativist backlash against migrants and refugees in the Global North. Research supports the claim that citizens are particularly hostile toward migrants who are culturally dissimilar and have relatively low levels of skill and human capital (Hainmueller & Hopkins 2014). Concerns about the economic and sociocultural impacts of refugees and migrants have contributed to a recent surge in support for far-right parties and populist politicians in Europe and the United States (Golder 2016). While there are fewer studies on antirefugee attitudes in the Global South (e.g., Ghosn et al. 2019, Whitaker & Giersch 2015), in many contexts refugees are viewed as potential security risks, as culturally undesirable, or as burdens on the economy, leading to pressure for restrictive policies.

Taken together, the literature on the economic and security effects of refugee hosting suggests that these effects are often conditional and differentially impact local communities. In some cases, the aggregate economic benefits of refugee hosting can outweigh the initial costs incurred by a sudden increase in population. In the security realm, newly available global data on refugee-related violence reveal that violence against refugees is more frequent than violence by refugees (Gineste & Savun 2019). Moreover, refugee presence is associated with an increased risk of political violence, but only in very specific circumstances (Böhmelt et al. 2019, Fisk 2019, Rüegger 2019). In some cases, hosting refugees can even dampen the risk of violence by promoting local economic growth and attracting foreign aid (Zhou & Shaver 2021). Therefore, the portrayal of refugees as

an economic burden and a security threat can often be attributed to rhetoric propagated by populist politicians seeking to garner greater political support (Onoma 2013, Savun & Gineste 2019), as well as the negative framing of refugees in the media (Gilbert 2013, Greussing & Boomgaarden 2017). These economic and security effects—real or perceived—shape refugee policies in receiving countries. As we discuss in the next section, the decision to allow refugees entry and the rights they are provided after entry are predicated on the mix of costs and benefits to the host nation.

REFUGEE POLICIES: FROM ADMISSION TO INTEGRATION

Asylum and refugee policies are guided by two major questions. First, who should be allowed to enter and remain in the host state's territory? Second, once refugees are given access, what rights and benefits should they be afforded? We term these factors admission rights and integration rights, respectively.

While it may be assumed that these dimensions are positively associated with one another, this is often not the case. Rather, there are good reasons to believe that the number of refugees that a state hosts is negatively associated with their degree of access to social services and employment. Thielemann & Hobolth (2016) identify a trade-off between refugee numbers and rights in the European Union, as countries attempt to limit the number of asylum seekers at their borders and restrict access to relatively generous welfare, educational, and employment rights. Conversely, countries such as Lebanon and Bangladesh have admitted a significant number of refugees in recent decades, although these refugees often face restrictions on their economic and political rights, such as the ability to find legal employment and organize collectively.

Admissions Policies

The 1951 UN Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees clearly indicate that countries are not to *refoule* refugees to their countries of origin, a strong norm in international law (Goodwin-Gill & McAdam 2021). While states do sometimes engage in involuntary deportations, many have routinely attempted to restrict access through other channels, which—even if they do not violate the letter of international law—certainly conflict with the spirit of refugee protection. States have, at various times, prevented asylum seekers from entering their territory and receiving a hearing by closing the border (Long 2013); they have created legal and administrative barriers to refugee status determination (Schoenholtz et al. 2021); and they have contracted with migrant transit states to prevent onward journeys and detain asylum seekers en route (Adepoju et al. 2010). State leaders often seek to delegitimize the claims of asylum seekers by arguing that they are economic migrants rather than bona fide refugees (Crisp 1999, Stanley 1987). In other instances, receiving countries have opened the door to certain refugee groups and have granted them prima facie refugee status or relaxed admissions requirements.[3] For example, Pakistan allowed over a million Afghans access following the 1979 Soviet invasion; the United States granted quite generous access to Cuban refugees; and several South American countries have welcomed Venezuelan refugees in recent years. Granting expedited status determination may simply be a function of the inability of receiving states to process many arrivals at once. This was the case during the peak of the South Sudan civil war when the governments of Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia acknowledged thousands of South Sudanese crossing their borders as prima facie refugees.

[3]Prima facie recognition is an expedited process whereby states confronted with a sudden surge of displaced individuals acknowledge specific members of a group as refugees based on easily identifiable and objective circumstances (Albert 2010).

Foreign relations between host and sending countries strongly condition admissions policies; thus, strategic goals shape and influence humanitarian policies. Several scholars have noted that admissions policies are often guided by a country's foreign policy priorities and geopolitical interests (Jacobsen 1996, Rosenblum & Salehyan 2004, Snyder 2011, Turkoglu 2022). During the Cold War, for instance, refugees fleeing communist dictatorships such as Hungary and Vietnam were more likely to be welcomed by the United States (Bon Tempo 2009). Noting a discrepancy in the way the US treated Cuban refugees relative to Salvadorans and Guatemalans, Teitelbaum (1984, p. 439) wrote, "Refugee admissions policies have been guided. . .by the belief that refugee outflows serve to discredit and embarrass adversary nations." Refugee policies during the Cold War were explicitly tied to global rivalries, as Western democracies argued that refugees were "voting with their feet" against communism.

Beyond the United States, there is strong evidence to suggest that foreign policies shape refugee policies. Moorthy & Brathwaite (2019) confirm through large-N statistical tests that countries are more likely to accept refugees fleeing rival states than those fleeing allies. Jackson & Atkinson (2019) further argue that the type of rivalry matters; refugees from ideological rivals are more likely to be admitted than refugees from territorial or positional rivals. Accepting such refugees symbolically disparages the sending country for its human rights violations and facilitates the formation of opposition groups in exile, including militant organizations (Stedman & Tanner 2004). Zolberg et al. (1989) note that "refugee warriors"—militarized refugee communities engaging in cross-border attacks—are frequently used to further the foreign policy goals of the host regime. Groups such as Nicaraguan refugees in Honduras, Rwandan refugees in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Cuban refugees in the United States during the Bay of Pigs invasion were afforded access not only for humanitarian reasons but also to undermine the sending regime. More recently, Turkey has not only provided access to Syrian refugees but also allowed militant groups, such as the Free Syrian Army, sanctuary in its territory in order to undermine the Assad government (Tol 2023).

In addition to sending/receiving country relations, the management of refugee flows is embedded in broader geopolitics, with major powers often influencing regional responses to refugee crises. During the Cold War, for instance, the United States worked closely with Pakistan to ensure safe haven for both Afghan refugees and *mujahidin* militants among them (Schöch 2008). Following the exodus from Vietnam after 1975, neighboring states such as Thailand and Malaysia were persuaded to keep their borders open with the promise of generous humanitarian assistance and resettlement opportunities, particularly resettlement to the United States (Suhrke 1998). Williams & Zeager (2004) present a game theoretic model and evidence that threats to close the Macedonian border to refugees were used during the Kosovo campaign to extract greater concessions from NATO. Differences in refugee resettlement policies targeted toward Iraqi and Afghan refugees following US invasions of both countries were guided by the "politics of neighbors," with the United States enacting far more generous resettlement policies for Iraqis due to concerns about refugee impacts in the immediate region (Micinski 2018). Each of these scenarios exhibits the use of strategic humanitarianism to guide refugee policies.

Finally, there is a strong international norm of *nonrefoulement*, backed by international law and agencies such as the UNHCR (Allain 2001). Even states that have not formally ratified the UN Refugee Convention face pressure to comply with international norms and refrain from sending refugees to places where their lives would be in danger (Goodwin-Gill & McAdam 2021). The UNHCR and donor states, moreover, can influence state policies toward refugees, encouraging them to comply with international law. Hartigan (1992), for instance, finds that Mexico and Honduras initially opted for a policy of forcible deportations and border closures in dealing with Central American refugees, but they eventually came to cooperate with the UNHCR to regain

international legitimacy, while also maintaining good relations with sending states. Betts et al. (2011) discuss the complex bargaining environment between hosts, donor states, and the UNHCR, as each has incentives to offer more or less expansive refugee protection measures.

Beyond such international factors, admissions policies are also guided by domestic politics—including the perception of economic costs and security risks. One of the strongest findings in the literature pertains to the demographic composition of the host country and ethnic ties with refugee communities. As Weiner (1992, p. 105) writes, "A government and its citizens are likely to be receptive to those who share the same language, religion, or race, while it [*sic*] might regard as threatening those with whom such an identity is not shared." Using data on the ethnic composition of refugee groups, Rüegger & Bohnet (2018) find that refugees tend to flee to countries where coethnics reside. When the governing regime in the host country favors said ethnic group, refugee admissions policies tend to be more generous (Abdelaaty 2021, Jacobsen 1996). Along these lines, states are receptive—to various degrees—to the preferences of their citizens, and studies of individual-level attitudes toward refugees and asylum seekers indicate that religious, ethnic, and cultural similarity are strong predictors of favorable attitudes toward admissions (Bansak et al. 2016, Betts et al. 2023, Hainmueller & Hopkins 2014). For example, drawing upon archival records of a representative sample of asylum applications filed in France between 1976 and 2016, Emeriau (2023) shows that Christian applicants are more likely than Muslims to be granted refugee status. This is not to say that humanitarian concerns do not factor into local populations' support for admissions. In fact, the perceived deservingness and legitimacy of asylum requests can increase the willingness of host populations to admit refugees (Bansak et al. 2016, Fraser & Murakami 2022).

Fears about subversive elements and extremists using refugee admissions as a pathway for entry are not new (Arar & FitzGerald 2022, Bon Tempo 2009). However, since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Western nations have subjected Muslim refugees and immigrants to heightened scrutiny (Givens et al. 2009, Rudolph 2003). In the United States, the Trump administration issued a travel ban against nationals of several Muslim-majority nations and suspended the refugee resettlement program, citing fears about terrorism. Politicians such as Viktor Orban in Hungary and Marine Le Pen in France, as well as the Brexit movement in the United Kingdom, often portrayed the refugee and asylum system as a "backdoor" for Islamist extremists to gain entry. Yet, there is little to no evidence that refugee admissions—including from Muslim nations—pose a significant security risk or that vetting procedures are inadequate (Nowrasteh 2016, Polo & Wucherpfennig 2022). Nonetheless, policies have often been shaped by the perception of risk and by security discourses in the media, which themselves reflect cultural biases against certain refugee groups.

Integration Policies

After allowing admission, host states vary considerably in the degree to which they allow free movement, employment rights, educational opportunities, and political participation. Despite allowing access to safety in their territory, states can deny refugees a meaningful livelihood. Fortunately, there is some evidence of improvements in refugee rights over time. Blair et al. (2022a) present new data on various dimensions of de jure refugee rights in the Global South. In addition to access rights, they address freedom of movement; provision of social services; ability to work and own property; and political participation rights, including citizenship. They find that refugee policies in the Global South have liberalized over time—particularly with respect to freedom of movement—and that neighboring civil wars that negatively impact ethnic kin groups are most likely to prompt liberalizing policy reform. Focusing on Latin America, Hammoud-Gallego & Freier (2023) find that leftist governments were often at the forefront of refugee policy liberalization as part of a larger symbolic commitment to universal human rights. In the context

of wealthy democracies, scholars have noted a general move toward the expansion of the rights of immigrants and refugees, including access to social services and eventual citizenship (Freeman 1995, Hollifield 1992). Nonetheless, in more recent years, OECD countries have made it much harder to apply for asylum and have rolled back some of the more generous welfare provisions enacted in the 1970s and 1980s (Hatton 2016, 2020).

Beyond refugee policies in the aggregate, states often discriminate between refugee groups, providing generous benefits to some and not others. Chu (2020) argues that rivalry between sending and receiving countries influences not only admissions policies but integration policies as well; refugees from rivals are afforded better human rights protections, to undermine the legitimacy of the rival regime. Abdelaaty (2021) contends that a mix of foreign and domestic concerns shapes policies toward refugees, depending on their country of origin. While rivalry with the sending country predicts refugee admissions, coethnicity between refugees and hosts tends to predict liberal integration policies. She finds that ethnic kin refugees from rivals are allowed generous access and integration rights; however, when domestic and international pressures conflict, states are more likely to delegate refugee care to international agencies such as the UNHCR in order to avoid policy blame. Also analyzing the interplay between states and international aid agencies, Norman (2020) uses rich case evidence from the Middle East and North Africa to demonstrate that host states are often in a difficult position—if they violate the rights of refugees, they face international condemnation, but if they adopt generous policies, they face fiscal and other domestic costs. Therefore, states often adopt a posture of "strategic indifference," allowing aid agencies and civil society groups to step in and undertake the task of providing for refugees.

As discussed above, concerns about security and competition between refugees and locals shape integration policies in significant ways. Countries that are fearful that refugee influxes will cause negative security or economic repercussions often limit refugee mobility or access to employment and social services. Kenya, for instance, has largely confined Somali refugees to camps out of concern about security threats posed by groups such as Al-Shabaab and the spread of militancy among its own marginalized Somali population (Lindley 2011). Comparing Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon, Krafft et al. (2022) find that while Jordan provided some educational and employment opportunities for refugees, Lebanon offered far fewer rights and erected high legal hurdles to incorporation. Security and economic fears among the Lebanese population (Braithwaite et al. 2019a) and Lebanon's sectarian political cleavages, along with its troubled history of hosting Palestinian refugees (Fakhoury 2017), help to explain such differences.

Wealthy, democratic nations in the Global North tend to offer greater integration to migrants and refugees, even as they have sought to restrict entry through enhanced border enforcement and legal barriers to movement (FitzGerald 2019). Once asylum or refugee resettlement has been granted, countries in the Global North typically encourage enrollment in public schools and access to employment, and a host of governmental and nonprofit refugee service providers offer temporary assistance. Most studies conducted in the United States, Canada, and Europe suggest that while refugees may initially be dependent on government benefits, over time, they become self-sufficient and become net contributors to public funds, although this varies considerably among refugee communities and destination countries (Donato & Ferris 2020). In the United States, studies demonstrate that refugees and asylees have a net positive fiscal impact and better labor market outcomes than other immigrants (Clemens 2022, Cortes 2004). Refugees also acquire citizenship at higher rates than other migrants (Mossaad et al. 2018). Comparing the United States and Canada, Bloemraad (2006) argues that a greater focus on multiculturalism and community involvement in Canada produces even higher levels of migrant political engagement. Even European nations such as Germany, which once restricted citizenship based on ethnicity, have expanded citizenship rights to migrants and refugees (Joppke 2010). Thus, while nativist

movements and far-right political parties have pushed for greater controls over the volume of migration, wealthy democracies grant refugees relatively generous access to rights and benefits once they are admitted, although even this has been scaled back recently (Hatton 2016, 2020).

Building upon the work of Thielemann & Hobolth (2016),[4] we posit that there is an inherent tension between admission and integration. Larger numbers of admitted refugees are more likely to strain social services and have greater impacts on the labor market, creating calls to restrict integration rights. Countries in the Global South, particularly those that neighbor major refugee-sending states, are often limited in their ability to seal borders and expel refugees. This is not only because of lack of capacity to manage cross-border flows but also because of international norms regarding *refoulement.* Therefore, while Global South nations host a large number of refugees, they are more likely to restrict integration rights such as free movement and the right to work, while depending on international aid agencies and NGOs to provide essential services. Countries in the Global North, however, generally provide broad access to the labor market and social services for the relatively few asylum seekers who successfully gain entry. Many, such as the United States, Canada, France, and Germany, also offer a path to citizenship to refugees and/or their children, while political integration is rare in the Global South (Arar 2017). Yet, due to distance from conflict zones and the ability to restrict access through land and sea, Global North countries have erected ever higher legal and physical barriers to entry. Moreover, wealthy nations are often content to fund the UNHCR and deliver humanitarian aid to keep refugees where they are, preventing onward journeys to their territory (Arar & FitzGerald 2022).

As Arar & FitzGerald (2022) cogently argue, the current refugee system entails a tacit bargain between the Global North and the Global South. Countries in the North have erected high barriers to entry for asylum seekers, fueled by populist parties and politicians. They have offered various inducements and pressure on Southern hosts and migrant transit countries to keep refugees where they are. Developing countries, with poor capacity and resources, depend on humanitarian aid agencies and donors to manage the costs of refugee care. Refugees are often trapped in a precarious position—they may remain in host states for decades, with little prospect of full integration into the community or resettlement opportunities elsewhere. However, the plight of refugees cannot be attributed solely to the Global South's inability or lack of resources to facilitate refugee integration. In fact, host states may have incentives to impede local economic integration (Arar 2017). The notion that states exploit their roles as hosts for material gain is not novel (Greenhill 2010). Host states such as Libya, Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Afghanistan have routinely engaged in what Tsourapas (2019, p. 465) refers to as rent-seeking behavior, via "blackmailing—threatening to inundate a target state(s) with refugee populations within its borders, unless compensated—or via back-scratching—promising to maintain refugee populations within its borders, if compensated." Recognizing such incentives, OECD countries have recently advocated for local economic integration as a prerequisite for the continuation of aid and concessions, with the assumption that creating a more hospitable environment in developing countries will discourage refugees from seeking asylum in the North (Arar 2017, p. 305).

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There are several promising new directions in the study of forced migration and policy responses, which can address remaining gaps in our knowledge. While topics such as the security implications of refugee hosting, attitudes toward asylum seekers, and the impact of coethnicity on refugee reception have been the subject of extensive research, especially in the Global North context, more

[4]For similar work on labor migration, see Ruhs & Martin (2008).

work needs to be done to fully comprehend the complexities of such processes. Scholars should explore complex relationships between different dimensions of policy, the balance of international and domestic factors, and endogenous relationships between policy and migration patterns. In this section, we discuss a few avenues for future research, although by no means is this an exhaustive list.

First, existing literature has primarily focused on the immediate effects of a sudden influx of refugees, typically measured over a period of months or years. However, little attention has been paid to the long-term consequences of protracted refugee situations that can persist for generations. As discussed above, some literature suggests that the short-term economic cost of refugee hosting can be mitigated by longer-term benefits to the host economy (Verme & Schuettler 2021). Likewise, many of the security implications of refugee hosting may take years or decades to unfold. For instance, Palestinian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon did not contribute to violence in these countries immediately upon arrival but only after they had become long-term fixtures of society. Other refugee groups, such as Rohingyas in Bangladesh, have lived in precarious conditions for years, but their presence has not led to extensive violence in their host countries. Public perception of refugees may also shift over time. Margalit & Solodoch (2022) find that the US public is more supportive of immigrants who have already established themselves in the country than of new arrivals at the border. In other cases, the initially warm reception of refugees may turn sour as conflicts in the home country persist. There is evidence that Polish attitudes toward Ukrainian refugees is starting to become more negative (Eur. Comm. 2023). As such, differentiating between new refugee inflows and existing refugee stocks would be a useful next step in investigations of optimal host state policies governing the refugee groups.

Second, researchers should pay greater attention to conflicting priorities in policymaking and how these are mediated by decision makers. We noted above that there may be an inherent tension between refugee admissions and integration policies, with countries seeking to deny benefits as admissions numbers increase. Beyond work in Europe by Thielemann & Hobolth (2016), more work needs to be done to examine these trade-offs more generally. In addition, there may be conflicting international and domestic pressures to admit and integrate refugees. For instance, there may be important geopolitical incentives to accept refugees from rival regimes, despite domestic backlash against new arrivals. In other scenarios, states may have strong foreign and domestic incentives to shut their borders to refugees but face pressure from major powers and donors to offer refugee protection (Arar 2017). Abdelaaty (2021) notes that receiving states must also bargain with international agencies such as the UNHCR in determining refugee status and the basket of rights afforded to refugees. Policy decisions are easy to analyze when factors align, but future research should explore additional ways in which leaders balance conflicting priorities.

Third, the numerous endogenous relationships and feedback loops between refugee policies and migration outcomes are poorly understood. Clearly, restrictions on the types of work refugees can seek, coupled with the benefits they may be entitled to, will inevitably alter the nature of net fiscal and labor market effects. For instance, refugees who are unable to work are less likely to become productive economic actors and contribute to the fiscal health of the country. In addition, policies designed to streamline and control migration may enhance public support for the asylum system overall. Solodoch (2021) demonstrates that stringent immigration control measures in Germany and Sweden improved public confidence in the asylum system and increased support for admitting refugees. Finally, generous admissions policies and integration rights can potentially increase the number of migrants seeking refugee status (Blair et al. 2022b); this, in turn, may create pressures to roll back liberal policies. Refugee policies affect migration and integration patterns but are also shaped by them, and recognizing this reciprocal causation is crucial for future studies.

Fourth, aside from detailed case studies and data on a small set of countries, we lack systematic, cross-national data on de facto refugee policies. While there have been recent, laudable efforts to

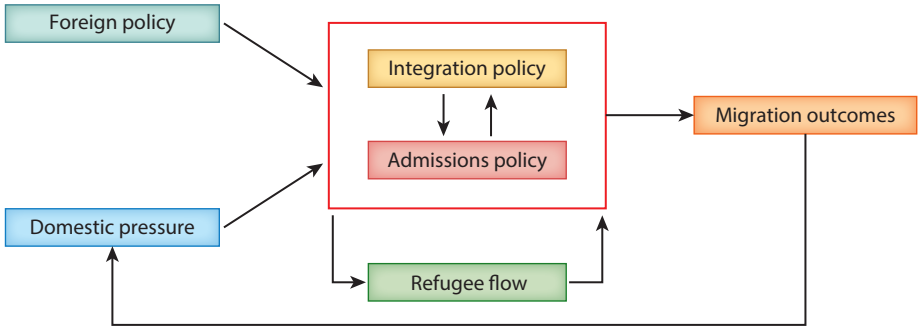

Figure 1

The complexity of the refugee policymaking process and how it affects migration outcomes.

collect information on de jure refugee policies (Blair et al. 2022a, Hatton 2016, Savun 2022), laws on paper may differ markedly from those put in practice. In addition, states may vary systematically in how they treat certain refugee groups, offering generous protection measures to some over others (Abdelaaty 2021). Indeed, countries often fail to implement their own refugee statutes by refusing to acknowledge that some migrants are indeed refugees. For example, the United States, despite having a comprehensive asylum adjudication process, has long dismissed the claims of Central Americans fleeing violence by contending that most of them are "bogus refugees" (Stanley 1987). While knowing the stated refugee and asylum policies of countries is certainly valuable, it is essential to comprehend the implementation of these policies, as well as disparities in their application.

We summarize the policymaking process in **Figure 1**, which serves as a theoretical framework for analyzing strategic humanitarianism in the refugee arena. Refugee flows, and the humanitarian concerns they entail, certainly affect both integration and admissions policies; however, potential migrants also respond to host country policies in deciding whether and where to flee (Blair et al. 2022b, Moore & Shellman 2007). In addition, foreign policy concerns, such as relations with the sending state and pressure from international agencies, affect the policymaking process. Domestic pressure to admit refugees—perhaps out of concern for coethnics—or to control borders and restrict access to jobs and services must be balanced against foreign policy considerations. Integration policy and admissions policy also shape one another; for instance, if the sheer number of refugees would overwhelm local schools and medical facilities, refugees may be confined to camps, and service provision may be delegated to NGOs and the UNHCR. Ultimately, the interplay between integration and admissions policies will significantly impact various migration outcomes, such as the economic productivity of refugees, their net fiscal impact, migrant political incorporation, and violence by and against refugees. These outcomes will subsequently influence local communities' perception of refugees and their support for government policies, ultimately affecting future policies. Although extensive literature exists on this topic, much of it tends to focus on only one aspect of policy. As such, there is a pressing need for additional research to fully explore the intricacies and complexities of refugee policymaking.

CONCLUSION

The growing academic interest in the global politics of refugees and forced migration (see Braithwaite et al. 2019b) has been a welcome development for both normative and practical reasons. Ethically, ensuring that refugees are allowed to live in safety and have access to meaningful livelihoods and fundamental human rights, while at the same time addressing the legitimate concerns and aspirations of local populations, should be of paramount importance. Practically, the

international community has thus far failed to implement comprehensive, durable solutions to achieve these ends for many of the world's refugees. Rather than viewing refugee crises as simply a humanitarian issue requiring an emergency response, policy makers must prepare for the long-term integration of refugees while tapping into the skills and opportunities they provide.

These challenges are likely to intensify as refugee numbers continue to rise, and states face populist pressures and xenophobic calls to restrict access and integration. Although not systematically discussed in this review, migration stemming from climate change and natural disasters is also likely to increase, and aside from laudable public statements, the global community has yet to develop an international regime that can adequately step up to the task of integrating these migrants (Ferris 2020). It should be clear from this article that the challenge of forced migration in an interdependent world is far too great for countries to manage on their own. Rather, robust and sustained cooperation between states that fairly distributes responsibility for refugees is sorely needed. The global public good of refugee care has too often entailed free riding, buck passing, and finger pointing. Revitalizing the international refugee regime to meet the current realities of forced migration is urgently needed.

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