


Book Reviews

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Abdelaaty, Lamis Elmy. 2021. *Discrimination and Delegation: Explaining State Responses to Refugees*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 233 pp. \$74.00.

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Nearly 6 million people have been displaced from Ukraine since the start of Russia's invasion in February 2022, marking one of the largest and swiftest displacement crises in history. In major host countries like Poland and Romania, Ukrainian refugees have been met with open arms. Many observers have contrasted welcoming sentiments toward Ukrainian refugees with the much harsher response Central and Eastern European countries have staked against refugees from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and sub-Saharan Africa. What explains these divergent state responses toward refugees? This is the question that political scientist Lamis Elmy Abdelaaty grapples with in *Discrimination and Delegation: Explaining State Responses to Refugees*.

The book begins by outlining two central puzzles overlooked in most extant scholarship, and which bear crucially on the question of how host countries react to forcibly displaced people. First, states respond in different ways to different groups of refugees, affording some extensive freedoms while restricting the rights enjoyed by others. Abdelaaty calls this the “discrimination puzzle.” Although a growing literature traces variation *across countries* in the liberality of displacement policies (Blair, Grossman, and Weinstein 2022a, b), much less attention has been paid to systematic variation *within countries*. Second, many states delegate responsibility for managing refugee affairs to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), despite jealously guarding their sovereignty in other domains. This is the “delegation puzzle.”

The solution to these puzzles hinges on host countries' considerations about international and domestic pressures. At the international level, interstate relations shape refugee reception. Host countries typically welcome refugees from rival states, since these flows are reputationally costly for sending countries, providing “evidence that people are ‘voting with their feet’” (p. 10). At the domestic level, policy makers have incentives to favor refugees with whom they share ethnic kinship ties. Combining

these insights into a unified theoretical framework yields three predictions. First, states respond generously to co-ethnic refugees from rival countries. Second, states pursue policy restrictions against non co-ethnic refugees from friendly countries. Third, when international and domestic incentives contravene—for example, co-ethnic refugees originate from friendly countries or non co-ethnic refugees originate from rival states—host policy makers circumvent sensitive political decisions by delegating responsibility to the UNHCR.

This theory is rich, intuitive, and parsimonious. It underscores the “second image reversed” dynamic woven throughout Abdelaaty’s research by highlighting the ways foreign political considerations impact domestic migration policy making. Further, by linking international political and domestic, identity-based explanations, the theory also provides a useful bridge between classical scholarship on the politics of refugee reception (e.g., Barnett and Finnemore 2004; FitzGerald 2019; Weiner 1993) and recent political debates over asylum policy making.

In the empirical chapters of the book, Abdelaaty offers a wealth of evidence from a tripartite research design. She combines cross-national quantitative evidence, qualitative case studies of refugee response in Egypt, Turkey, and Kenya, and a content analysis of Kenyan parliamentary speeches. One particularly notable contribution of the quantitative chapter is new data on the UNHCR’s role in individual status determination across countries over time. There is a surprising degree of variation in the decision to delegate, and the choice is not driven solely by state capacity. For instance, even wealthy and administratively capable countries like Saudi Arabia and South Korea sometimes allow the UNHCR a role in refugee status determination (p. 44). The chapter on Egypt makes the important point that even in countries with thin *de jure* national policy frameworks, important *de facto* asylum policies operate behind the scenes, structuring life in different ways for refugees from different origins. Another thought-provoking insight emerges from the chapter on Turkey, where Abdelaaty explains how states manipulate the very category of “refugees.” Political expedience has led Turkish authorities to reclassify some individuals who otherwise meet the legal definition of refugees as “guests.”

Overall, the text makes a compelling case that foreign policy dynamics, along with identity-related considerations, impact state responses to refugees. The theory and evidence challenge dominant paradigms that view asylum policies as a function either of humanitarianism or of resources and state capacity. The book also raises key questions for future research. For example, while Abdelaaty considers elements of *de jure* and *de facto* asylum policies in tandem, it would be interesting to chart gaps within hosting countries between what refugees are entitled to under the law and how they are treated in practice. Does delegation give room for UNHCR officials to advocate for better treatment of displaced people? Additional research should also consider how the theory operates in emergency situations when refugees are recognized *prima facie* (i.e., without individual status determination).

This book should be of interest to a diverse audience, including policy practitioners and lawyers working on refugee rights, scholars of migration or foreign policy,

and students studying migration from an international relations or comparative politics perspective. In advanced undergraduate or graduate-level courses, the text could be paired with news articles to chart whether and how the theoretical framework explains current responses to displacement from Ukraine, Ethiopia, Syria, and elsewhere. And of course for those who have themselves been displaced, the manuscript may illuminate important aspects of their lived experience.

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Angie Ngọc Trần. 2022. *Ethnic Dissent and Empowerment: Economic Migration Between Vietnam and Malaysia*. University of Illinois Press. xv + 278 pages. \$30 paperback.

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Ethnic Dissent and Empowerment by Angie Ngọc Trần offers an in-depth analysis of the migration of five ethnic groups (Kinh, Hoa, Hrê, Khmer, and Cham Muslims) in Vietnam, focussing on their migration patterns to Malaysia, spaces of resistance, empowerment and return. The book shows that these ethnic groups respond differently to risks, precarity, and opportunities depending on their economic and cultural capital. The central argument of the book is that inequalities resulting from ethnic hierarchies in Vietnam are perpetuated in the state-sponsored migration system—known as the labor brokerage state (LBS) system—and thus impact Vietnamese migrants from predeparture to return migration.

Drawing upon rich fieldwork, *Ethnic Dissent and Empowerment* effectively joins key scholarly and policy questions on “migration in the global South”; particularly on why migration policies fail migrants, how migration policies perpetuate inequalities created by ethnic hierarchies, and how migrants from different ethnic groups overcome the inequalities and empower themselves based on their unique economic