Political Regimes and Refugee Entries: The Preferences and Decisions of Displaced Persons and Host Governments

Masaaki Higashijima [ID]
University of Tokyo, Japan

AND

Yujin Woo [ID]
Hitotsubashi University, Japan

What drives refugee movements? Focusing on host countries' domestic political institutions, we argue that refugee entry is determined by the political regimes that shape the incentives of both host governments and displaced persons. Specifically, we theorize that there is an inverted U-shaped relationship between political regimes and the volume of refugee entries. When the host country is autocratic, refugee volume becomes smaller due to displaced persons' unwillingness to risk the high uncertainty of life under such regimes, and when the host country is democratic, refugee volume is similarly curbed due to democratic constraints on the host government. Consequently, a majority of refugees are clustered into anocratic regimes. Using a global dataset, a series of statistical analyses found strong evidence in support of our theoretical expectations regarding not only the hypothesized correlation between regime type and refugee movements but also the preferences of host governments and displaced persons that we theorize underlie this relationship.

¿Qué es lo que impulsa los movimientos de refugiados? Argumentamos, centrándonos en las instituciones políticas nacionales de los países de acogida, que la entrada de refugiados está determinada por los regímenes políticos que dan forma a los incentivos tanto de los Gobiernos de acogida como de las personas desplazadas. En concreto, teorizamos que existe una relación en forma de U invertida entre los regímenes políticos y el volumen de entradas de refugiados. Cuando el país de acogida es autocrático, el volumen de refugiados se reduce debido a la falta de voluntad de las personas desplazadas para arriesgarse a la gran incertidumbre de vivir bajo esos regímenes. Cuando el país de acogida es democrático, el volumen de refugiados se reduce de manera similar debido a las limitaciones democráticas del Gobierno de acogida. En consecuencia, la mayoría de los refugiados se agrupan en regímenes anocráticos. Partiendo de un conjunto de datos globales, realizamos una serie de análisis estadísticos mediante los cuales encontramos pruebas sólidas que respaldan nuestras expectativas teóricas con respecto, no solo a la correlación hipotética entre el tipo de régimen y los movimientos de refugiados, sino también a las preferencias de los Gobiernos de acogida y de las personas desplazadas que, según la teoría, subyacen a esta relación.

Quels sont les facteurs qui favorisent les mouvements de réfugiés ? En nous concentrant sur les institutions politiques nationales des pays d'accueil, nous affirmons que l'entrée de réfugiés est déterminée par les régimes politiques qui façonnent les motivations des gouvernements du pays d'accueil et des personnes déplacées. Plus précisément, nous théorisons qu'il existe une relation en U inversé entre les régimes politiques et le volume d'entrées de réfugiés. Quand le pays d'accueil est autocratique, le volume de réfugiés s'amoindrit parce que les personnes déplacées ne souhaitent pas risquer de vivre dans l'incertitude d'un tel régime. Quand le pays est démocratique, le volume de réfugiés connaît une courbe similaire à cause des contraintes démocratiques qui pèsent sur le gouvernement du pays d'accueil. Par conséquent, une majorité de réfugiés se concentrent dans les régimes anocratiques. À l'aide d'un ensemble de données mondiales, une série d'analyses statistiques a trouvé des éléments solides pour étayer nos attentes théoriques, non seulement concernant la corrélation hypothétique entre le type de régime et les mouvements de réfugiés, mais aussi les préférences du gouvernement des pays d'accueil et des personnes déplacées qui, selon notre théorie, sous-tendent cette relation.

Introduction

Over the last thirty years, refugee issues have become increasingly politicized due to the rapid expansion of migrant flows to the global North by asylum-seeking individuals. This phenomenon, however, is neither new nor restricted to developed democracies only (UNHCR 2018, 3). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), approximately 68,000 refugees on average arrived in mature democracies between 1951 and 2016, whereas their counterparts, particularly in the Global South, received more than 110,000 (UNHCR 2018, 34–45).[1] What explains these cross-national tendencies in contemporary refugee movements?

This paper explores the impact of host countries' domestic political institutions on refugee flows. We define refugees as persons who leave their home countries out of fear for their lives and safety, and who are recognized as such by

Masaaki Higashijima is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Tokyo. He studies comparative political economy and dictatorships. His articles appeared in the *British Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*, and *World Development* and his book, *the Dictator's Dilemma at the Ballot Box* (University of Michigan Press), won several book prizes.

Yujin Woo is an Associate Professor of Political Science at Hitotsubashi University. She studies international political economy focusing on international migration, refugees and East Asia. Her articles appeared in the *Journal of East Asian Studies* and *Social Science Japan Journal*. Her article on immigrants in Japan won the 2023 ISS/Oxford Prize for Modern Japanese Studies.

[1]While there is no definite cut-off point, Polity scores above eight are commonly considered an indication of a mature democracy.

host governments, either through permanent or temporary protections.[2] We argue that refugee movements are the result of an interaction between the preferences of refugees and those of recipient countries' political elites and that the preferences of these two groups of actors are in turn a function of the political regimes governing receiving countries. Specifically, we contend that displaced persons, both temporary and permanent, prefer to flee to a country that will ensure human rights protection and equality (Bertocchi and Strozzi 2008; Czaika 2009), thus preferring to settle in democracies instead of autocracies, which tend to breed high uncertainty regarding post-entry treatments (Hatton 2016). At the same time, host governments' own incentives regarding refugee in flows depend on the extent to which their policy decisions are accountable to public opinion (Neumayer 2004). We thus expect democratic leaders to seek to minimize the volume of refugees in response to public apprehension about migratory inflows. In contrast, autocratic leaders who are less constrained by public opinion (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2018) have fewer incentives to do so. These countervailing preferences of (potential) refugees and political elites lead to our main theoretical expectation: *When a country is highly autocratic or democratic, refugee volume tends to be small, whereas countries whose political regimes fall closer to the middle of the spectrum will receive a larger number of refugees.*

To test this hypothesis, we applied two-way fixed effects (FE) models on panel data of refugees and political regimes that span the period from 1951 to 2016. We confirmed that the size of refugee entries exhibits an inverted U-shaped relationship with respect to host countries' political regimes. The results are robust to a battery of sensitivity analyses. We then directly tested the aforementioned preferences of both refugees and host governments by examining how the type of political regime affects the number of asylum applications as well as the approvals. We found the expected linear relationships: democracies are more likely to attract larger numbers of refugee-status applications from asylum-seekers than autocracies, and at the same time, democracies are less likely to confer formal refugee status upon asylum-seekers than autocracies.

Stressing the impact of host countries' political regimes, the goal of this paper is to realize a more comprehensive and unified scheme that bridges the incentives and decisions of the main two groups of actors, whose interaction eventually constructs the global refugee movement. So far, the literature on the refugee movement has identified various factors, such as geographic or cultural proximity of various kinds (e.g., Rüegger and Bohnet 2018), as contributors when refugees select destinations. Recently, policy openness has been discovered to be another significant factor that attracts refugees (e.g., Blair, Grossman, and Weinstein 2022a, b; Holland and Peters 2020). What needs to be accounted for here is the fact that the direction of a country's refugee policies is significantly influenced by its domestic decision-making structure, which indeed hinges upon its political regime type (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Frantz and Ezrow 2011). However, little theorizing and empirical exploration have been done thus far on the manner in which political regimes of recipient countries shape the incentives of both refugees and host governments in a way that systematically compares democracies with authoritarian countries.

Thus, we aim to demonstrate that the political institutions of host countries are the fundamental driving force that formulates the interplay between refugees and host governments.

This paper advances the understanding of refugee and migratory movements in several ways. First, the field of international relations stresses national-level factors as one of the core determiners of interstate interactions. Particularly, domestic political regimes have been applied in international political economy in an effort to understand state behavior in buttressing the transnational movement of goods and capital. The common claim is that political regimes shape individual preferences, and this aggregated public opinion is more successfully translated into policy outcomes in democratic settings due to its subsequent institutional characteristics and constraints (e.g., Milner and Kubota 2005). Studies on foreign direct investment, flows of which are channeled based on not only interstate decisions but also those between countries and firms, further show the powerful impact that the political regime of a host country yields on the incentive formation of both host governments and (potentially) entering foreign corporations (e.g., Li, Owen, and Mitchell 2018). Our logic aligns with the literature and broadens the discipline's scope by applying domestic political regimes in depicting flows of people. Our theoretical framework also contributes to the scholarly literature of comparative politics by newly adding refugee entries to the list of various consequences of political regimes, such as civil war, state repression, or economic and human development (e.g., Przeworski et al. 2000). Furthermore, we refer to the literature that stresses the curvilinear impact of political regimes (e.g., Fjelde, Knutsen, and Nygård 2020) on refugee entries to demonstrate that such a nonlinear effect is also generated by the combined preferences of host governments and displaced persons.

Second, our findings contribute to various debates surrounding refugees, including how to differentiate between refugees and economic migrants, as well as distinguishing them from irregular migrants. Our analysis also suggests the importance of the distinction between *de jure* refugee policies and *de facto* policies. Acknowledging the distinctive nature of refugees, such as the imminent threats to their lives, scholars have examined the ways in which this category of migrants differs from general migration (e.g., FitzGerald and Arar 2018). Similarly, we endeavor to comprehend the motivations of refugees and host governments, drawing upon the existing body of international migration literature, while also theorizing on the impact of the unique characteristics inherent to refugees. Lastly, we propose future research tasks that are crucial for accurately portraying refugee movements and the development of refugee policies cross-nationally.

Political Regimes Affecting the Preferences of Displaced Persons and Host Governments

This section theoretically shows that the political regime of host countries not only impacts the motivations of refugees but also those of host governments themselves. We develop a stylized two-stage, rationalist account of the preferences of the two main classes of actors. In the first stage, we theorize how political regime type impacts displaced persons' preferences for where to seek refuge. In the second stage, we explore how regime type influences host country leaders' preferences concerning refugee admission and recognition. We develop our theoretical expectations by distinguishing political regimes into three types: democracies (fully abid-

---

[2]Following the UNHCR's definition, we conceptualize refugees as individuals under both a refugee-like situation and a formal refugee status determination process (UNHCR 2015, 18). We distinguish individuals with recognized refugee status (formal refugees) from those with asylum-seeking status or refugee-like status (displaced people) where relevant.

ing to the democratic principle), anocracies (partially abiding), and autocracies (not abiding).

Preferences of Displaced Persons

In general, migrants' decisions are based on a cost–benefit analysis informed by both origin country push (deterring) factors and recipient country pull (attractive) factors (Ferwerda and Gest 2021). This push and pull framework is also applicable in the context of refugees. People in distress tend to be pushed away by violence or political coercion of their homelands (Schmeidl 1997) and pulled by such factors as economic disparities (Bohra-Mishra and Massey 2011), geographical proximity (Schmeidl 1997), and cultural determinants, including ethnic composition (Schmeidl 1997; Rüegger and Bohnet 2018), historical ties (ECRE 1995; Neumayer 2004), and colonial relationships (Böcker 1998). Among them, the political regime type of a host country impacts migrants' cost–benefit calculus (Bertocchi and Strozzi 2008). We suspect these tendencies would be found among distressed persons especially since they have often experienced human rights violations at the hands of their home governments. In this sense, closed autocracies with firmly centralized governments dictating the use of their coercive power would not appear to be attractive destinations. Thus, we expect refugees to prefer settling in democracies while avoiding autocracies, all other factors being equal.

Specifically, the characteristics of democracies, such as free and fair elections as well as respect for civil liberties, provide asylees and refugees more diverse routes to voice and protect themselves. For instance, migrants frequently make up a significant percentage of the electorate, functioning as immigrant voters (e.g., Soysal 1997). An increasing number of countries in Western Europe and North America have begun granting local and regional voting rights to non-citizens or permanent residents (Howard 2009). Also, minorities are better equipped in forming interest groups to publicly raise their concerns. These channels indicate a higher probability that migrants and displaced persons' voices can be heard more audibly by the executives under democracies. Meanwhile, because democracies generally recognize and protect individual rights, asylees and refugees may feel safer moving to democratic countries to ensure economic prosperity through stable and secure labor, welfare, and political rights (Rüegger and Bohnet 2018: 815). Recent migration literature shows that migrants are attracted to countries that provide more rights (Czaika 2009), for example, rights to employment (Holland, Peters, and Sánchez 2019), free movement (Betts et al. 2017), and citizenship (Fitzgerald, Leblang, and Teets 2014) while avoiding restrictive policy environments (Hatton 2016).

Furthermore, democratic destinations provide strong institutional constraints. Robust checks and balances make it difficult for the government to infringe minority rights. Special interest lobbies tend to powerfully contribute to protecting minority rights (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003). Such an environment also provides an opportunity for refugees themselves to function as a veto player by enhancing chances to mobilize to obtain more political, social, and economic rights (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003, 762).

Our theoretical expectation is advanced under the assumption that displaced persons have a fairly sophisticated understanding of political institutions and their subsequent effects on post-entry lives. Of course, the urgent situation of distressed persons forced to leave their home countries often denies them the luxury of choice (Day and White

2002). Nevertheless, many studies have also demonstrated that distressed persons frequently make complex strategic choices even under the most highly constrained circumstances (Rüegger and Bohnet 2018). Furthermore, growing evidence suggests that poor conditions, such as poverty and violence in origin countries, stimulate people in distress to seek information about policy openness elsewhere, and therefore, asylum and refugee policies of host countries factor into their decision-making (Blair, Grossman, and Weinstein 2022a, b; Holland and Peters 2020). Hence, it seems reasonable to assume that they engage in utility-maximizing behaviors as they seek to obtain a sustainable and secure life elsewhere. In other words, their desire to reach democracies becomes prevalent throughout their journeys.

Preferences of Host Governments

Previous research has consistently demonstrated that individuals often perceive migrants as a threat, stemming from their prejudiced and hostile attitudes toward members of different groups (Lutz and Bitschnau 2023). This negative perception of migrant and refugee inflows continues to persist in public opinion today (Hangartner et al. 2019), with many considering them a potential risk to their economic well-being, cultural cohesion, and/or national security (Quillian 1995). Importantly, the extent to which leaders must account for public opinion depends upon the political regime under which they operate. We suggest that democratic leaders are more likely to demonstrate reservations about accepting refugees through the following three possible mechanisms. First and foremost, leaders are unable to easily ignore the negative public perception of refugees, because deviation from public opinion is likely to be punished through free and fair elections. Indeed, migration issues tend to be highly salient matters on which voters have strong opinions (Dustmann, Vasiljeva, and Damm 2019). Because the existence of competitive elections serves to directly transmit popular opinion into electoral results, incumbents are reluctant to pursue open refugee policies for fear of electoral losses.

Second, citizens can outspokenly express their fears concerning refugees through associations and interest groups, often accompanied by public demonstrations or even riots (Neumayer 2004). Due to the respect for civil liberties, governments in democracies may thus find it difficult to subdue or suppress popular demands through coercive measures. As a result, democratic leaders may be hesitant to enact policies accepting a large number of refugees in contravention of broad public preferences. Third, political leaders' reservations about refugees and the restrained refugee policies to which these give rise may in turn secure path-dependent stability through the institutional checks and balances governing these countries. Democratic leaders tend to face a larger number of veto players from whom they need consent in making decisions, as seen in the separation of powers between legislative bodies and the executive, or the existence of partisan divisions within (and between) those bodies (Tsebelis 2002). The presence of those veto players implies that decision-making procedures are likely to involve much time and compromise, leading to hard-won and relatively stable policy outcomes. This fundamental feature of democratic political systems thus imposes crucial checks on refugee policy decisions and on the swift implementation of changes thereto.

In contrast, we expect political leaders in autocracies to be less constrained by these mechanisms. Autocratic

elections, if they exist, tend not to be sufficiently free or fair (Higashijima 2022). They often do not render leaders accountable to citizens but rather serve as tools that help them hold on to power in many occasions (e.g., Magaloni 2006; Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2018). Furthermore, individual rights and civil liberties are severely circumscribed, and state repression is ubiquitous, which makes it difficult for citizens to publicly express their dissent in the first place (Davenport 2007). Finally, autocrats are generally less constrained by institutionalized checks and balances. Autocrats thus pursue decision-making by themselves or rely exclusively on support from small groups of ruling elites (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003), which entails a small number or even an absence of veto players (Frantz and Ezrow 2011).

Under such conditions, autocrats are less likely to seriously consider public opinion. Instead, labor markets, social welfare systems, or political voices in non-democracies are more flexible and manageable, because leaders in these countries are able to grant fewer and unequal rights to their own people allowing them to make increased use of immigrant labor at will (Mirilovic 2010). They may not regard refugees as burdensome, insofar as refugees may contribute to lower labor costs while providing skills (Jacobsen 2002), which benefits the economic elites (i.e., employers or capital owners), who tend to be close allies of the political leadership (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Shin 2017). Thus, unlike democratic regimes, which have to respond to public xenophobia by strengthening border controls and deportation capacity, autocratic leaders may suppress public opinion while adopting a combined strategy of open-entry policies and adjusting provisions of rights, such as instituting flexible labor markets (e.g., functioning of guest worker programs: Ellermann 2009).[3]

In the meantime, however, we also need to note that this general tendency toward refugees may not be followed by all autocracies in a uniform manner. In particular, the national demand for labor may fluctuate depending on host countries' economic competencies. Oil-rich countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council, for example, do not recognize "refugee" as a legitimate migrant category, thereby imposing the same regulations as labor migrants (e.g., requirements for visas or work permits). This non-recognition raises burdens on displaced persons, and this deterrence reflects the countries' non-reliance on foreign labor. In other words, while it is reasonable to assume that autocratic leaders most often may not be reluctant to accept displaced persons, they may become more exclusionary as they accumulate wealth, thereby becoming less subject to international pressures. Either way, the important outcome is that poor post-entry rights or nonrecognition is not attractive from displaced persons' perspective, and thus, displaced persons are expected to be hesitant moving to autocracies. We also address this possible heterogeneity of autocrats' preferences in the empirical section.

Anocracies as Frequent Destinations of Refugees

The above discussions suggest that both refugees and host governments have countervailing preferences according to the political regime: democratic governments are disincentivized to recognize refugees due to their democratic features, whereas such features attract displaced persons. The opposite situation occurs in autocratic settings. As a result, anocratic regimes, which tend to be, despite substantial variations, more democratic than closed autocracies and more autocratic than full-fledged democracies, are expected to end up receiving a larger number of refugees compared to closed autocracies and full-fledged democracies.

Anocracy is commonly regarded as a hybrid regime possessing characteristics of both democracies and autocracies (Fearon and Laitin 2003). On the one hand, because anocracies exhibit a relatively more democratic nature than closed autocracies do, displaced persons, whose first priority lies in advanced democracies, are expected to choose anocracies rather than autocracies as a sub-optimal destination. On the other hand, the most imminent concern for anocratic leaders is how much they are constrained by the public. Their susceptibility to public opinion increases as the three mechanisms on democratic governance, individually or in combination, become profound. As a result, variation even within anocracies can be observed depending on the functioning of elections, civil liberties, and institutional checks and balances, all of which work along a continuum. Thus, we expect that even within the range of anocracies, those that fall in the middle of this range will end up receiving the largest number of refugees compared to those that possess stronger autocratic or democratic features.

Furthermore, anocratic regimes may also have their own rationales for accepting refugees. While anocracies are not completely closed regimes, they also do not have sufficient institutions and practices of democratic governance. This unique feature breeds a distinct incentive among their leaders, seeking to be recognized as a sound country before the international community (Levin et al. 2021). Indeed, anocratic governments tend to actively join international human rights institutions by paying high sovereignty costs (Hafner-Burton, Mansfield, and Pevehouse 2015). Thus, we expect that anocratic leaders are likely to open their borders to displaced persons as a means to signal their humanitarian attitude to the international community.[4]

In sum, our main theoretical expectation can be formalized as follows:

> **H1–Political Regimes and Refugee Entries:** *When a country is highly autocratic or democratic, refugee volume turns small. Countries with intermediate levels of political competition, freedom, and participation become the recipients of a larger number of refugees.*

In other words, we expect an inverted U-shaped relationship between regime types and refugee inflows, in which the volume of refugees is speculated to reach its peak in the middle between democracy and autocracy. Furthermore, the discussions also lead us to the following two hypotheses about the linear relationship between host countries' political regime and the preferences of displaced persons and host governments:

> **H2a—Preferences of Displaced Persons:** *The more democratic a host country is, the more likely displaced persons are to seek refugee status in the country.*
> **H2b—Preferences of Host Governments:** *The more democratic a host country is, the less likely the host government is to recognize displaced persons as refugees.*

---

[3]Many scholars point out a correlation between open attitudes toward refugees in developing countries and their need for foreign aid (Bermeo and Leblang 2015). However, it is difficult to identify the causal effect of aid on asylum policies while recent studies (e.g., Blair, Grossman, and Weinstein 2022a) demonstrate a weak link between aid and autocracies.

[4]Some may be concerned whether anocratic leaders receive a large volume of refugees out of true willingness or their inability to respond to them (e.g., Betts 2011). We perceive anocratic leaders as strategic actors who implement refugee policies that most aptly meet their domestic and diplomatic needs by utilizing as few state resources as possible (e.g., Norman 2020).

The case of Sudan serves as a good illustration of our hypotheses and mechanisms. The country functions as both a source country, due to its long-lasting civil conflicts, and a host country of refugees and asylum seekers from its neighboring countries. Its average annual number of incoming refugees after World War II is, based on annual country means, approximately 390,000, which is higher than the global mean (93,000) or those of regional powers such as Kenya (180,000) and Nigeria (9,800). This large volume of refugees is surprising given Sudan's political and economic struggles. Because the country has long suffered from serious economic difficulties due to civil conflict, economic development has not proceeded smoothly even compared to other possible destinations for refugees in the region. Sudan's economic prosperity throughout the postwar period, measured in terms of annual country means of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita (2,000 USD), has lagged behind Kenya (2,100 USD) or Nigeria (4,200 USD). Moreover, the country shares relatively weak ethnic ties with many of the refugees it has admitted or recognized. According to Rüegger and Bohnet (2018)'s data, only half of the eight native ethnic groups in the country shared ethnicity with incoming displaced persons recognized as refugees and only 1.1 percent of approximately 2,600 pairs of native ethnic groups and year in the country had ethnic ties with those persons, which is far below the global mean (13.7 percent). A more detailed description on Sudan as an anocratic regime vis-à-vis its neighboring countries, based on political regimes and various covariates, is presented in Online Appendix C.

We suggest that the key to explaining this situation lies in the Sudan's anocratic features. Sudan has been neither a full democracy nor a completely closed autocracy, implying that not only does the government have incentives to accept displaced persons to some extent but also displaced persons are not completely discouraged from entering the country in search of protection. Indeed, as of 2018, tracking the movement of displaced people flowing into and from Sudan, we observe that the country receives the largest population from South Sudan and its neighboring countries that suffer from even less democratic institutions. Meanwhile, Sudanese refugees reach countries that are more politically stable (e.g., Chad, Ethiopia, Egypt, or France).

From the refugees' point of view, one of their ultimate goals, besides repatriation, is resettlement in countries of the global North that are industrialized and guarantee equality. According to many interviews with Sudanese refugees, diffused information from Western democracies strengthens the desire of people for resettlement in such countries. They use the phrase, "life or knife," meaning resettlement or suicide, to describe the perceived outcomes of their displacement (Horst 2006). This suggests that although refugees may have chosen destinations near their home countries as a way to gain security in the early stages of their displacement, they continue to look for new means to improve their standard and quality of living. Consequently, Western democracies naturally become the most desired destinations because they are expected, from the refugees' perspectives, to provide safe and humanitarian environments where they will be protected and able to improve their lives through greater economic opportunities and access to better public services.

At the same time, displaced persons cannot easily seek refuge in these Western democracies due to various entry restrictions these countries impose. Thus, despite suboptimal economic conditions and relatively weak ethnic kinship, a significant number of displaced people have cho-

sen Sudan as the second-best destination (Schmitt 2014). This refugee movement can be explained by several factors rooted in the country's hybrid regime. On one hand, the country has adopted a relatively generous refugee entry policy compared to neighboring countries whose regime characteristics are less autocratic like Ghana and Kenya.[5] On the other hand, while the Sudanese government has adhered to the principle of non-refoulement, its refugee policies are not terribly generous toward displaced persons with respect to the betterment of their post-entry lives (Mudawi 2019). Instead, refugees remain to be one of the weakest groups in the host society. Under such circumstances, it becomes difficult for displaced persons to publicly or politically mobilize and voice their concerns. Therefore, its refugee policies resemble what we expect based on its anocratic regime: open refugee policies on entry with minimal or unstructured provisions or guarantees of post-entry rights and equality.

## Quantitative Analysis I: Refugee Movements

Dependent Variable

To measure refugee volumes to test Hypothesis 1, we followed a previous study (Rüegger and Bohnet 2018) and used refugee population data compiled by the UNHCR. The refugee population data records the number of refugees in the country-year basis for the period of 1951–2016. The UNHCR compiles the data based on their definition of refugees: individuals recognized or granted permanent or temporary forms of protection by host governments. This definition of refugees fits squarely within the purview of our theoretical interest in understanding the movement of displaced persons and their recognition as refugees by host governments. After 2007, the UNHCR began to add people in "refugee-like situation" to their list of refugees. However, this change in the definition does not significantly alter the data's relationship to our theoretical interest. Figure 1 plots the annual total number of refugees around the world. After the end of World War II, which generated the highest peak of refugees in the twentieth century, the world faced another wave throughout the 1970s–1990s due to a series of large-scale civil and international wars (e.g., the Bosnian war, the Kosovo conflict, and the Gulf war) and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. We can observe another peak since the mid-2000s due to a series of conflicts in Iraq, Syria and South Sudan. Importantly, figure 1 also shows that the number of refugees did not drastically fluctuate in 2007, indicating that the change in the definition of refugees does not produce significant discontinuities within the data.

Independent Variables

To measure political regime types, we employed two measures, the Polity V score and the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)'s Polyarchy Index. First, we used the Polity V score, a conventional and widely used one, especially in refugee studies (e.g., Moore and Shellman 2006), which records a continuous measure of democracy on a twenty-one-point scale (recoded to a scale from 0 [most autocratic] to 20 [most democratic] to ease interpretation) by Marshall and

---

[5]Under the legacy of Pan-Africanism, which is embedded into the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (1969), relatively democratic Ghana and Kenya both continue to host a large asylum-seeking and refugee population. However, their approaches also show notable differences from Sudanese ones. Ghana's refugee policies put a great emphasis on local integration programs, and Kenya's stance toward refugee entry has been consistently negative in recent years.
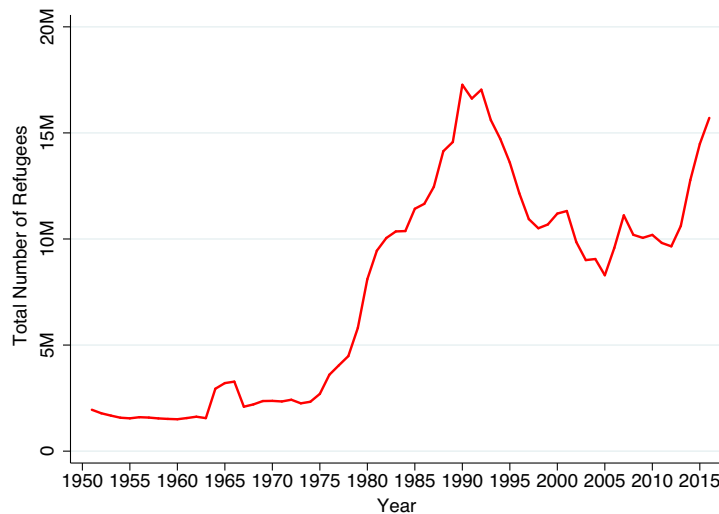
Figure 1. Annual total number of refugees (1951–2016)

Gurr (2020). In measuring political regimes, the Polity project centers on democratic principles:

(1) the presence of institutions and procedures through which citizens can express effective preferences about alternative policies and leaders (electoral fairness and civil liberties) and

(2) the existence of institutionalized constraints on the exercise of power by the executive (political constraints).

Along these two dimensions, the Polity V score includes the following five sub-components to measure autocracy and democracy, which squarely fit with our conceptualization of political regimes: competitiveness of executive recruitment (XRCOMP), openness of executive recruitment (XROPEN), executive constraints (XCONST), regulation of participation (PARREG), and competitiveness of participation (PARCOMP).[6] Since the Polity V score codes country years where a complete state collapse occurs as 0, we treat them as missing values to accurately measure "democraticness" of political regimes.[7]

To ensure that the results are robust,[8] we also employed an alternative measure, the Polyarchy Index. This indicator adopts a minimalist definition of democracy (Dahl 1971) and includes five sub-components from the V-Dem data: freedom of association (frassoc), clean elections (frefair), freedom of expression (freexp), elected officials (elecoff), suffrage (suffr), and the five-way multiplicative interaction between these indices (V-Dem version 9.0; Coppedge et al. 2019; Pemstein et al. 2020). Adopting the Bayesian Item Response Theory technique to aggregate these indices, the original variable takes values between 0 and 1. To ease an interpretation of statistical findings, we re-scaled the original variable to the 0–100 scale, with a higher score indicating a more democratic regime.

As the first step toward investigating the curvilinear relationship between refugee volume and political regime type, we estimate non-parametric lowess curves by using national means of refugee volumes and democracy indices. To remove the influence of important confounders affecting both political regimes and refugee volumes, we regressed logged refugee numbers and political regime type on GDP per capita and population size, producing the residuals of refugee volume and political regime type, respectively. We then plotted both residuals to draw lowess curves. The horizontal axis represents the residuals of the levels of democracy, and the vertical axis represents the residuals of the volume of refugee entries. As expected, scatter plots and lowess curves in figure 2 exhibit inverted U-shaped relationships, consistent with our theoretical expectations.

To more rigorously test our hypothesis on the inverted U-shaped flow of refugees, we conducted panel data analysis. To do so, we introduced a squared term of host countries' political regime variable (*Democracy∗Democracy*). We expected the squared term to be negative, meaning that the number of refugees reaches its peak in the middle of the indicators and decreases as a country becomes either more authoritarian or more democratic.
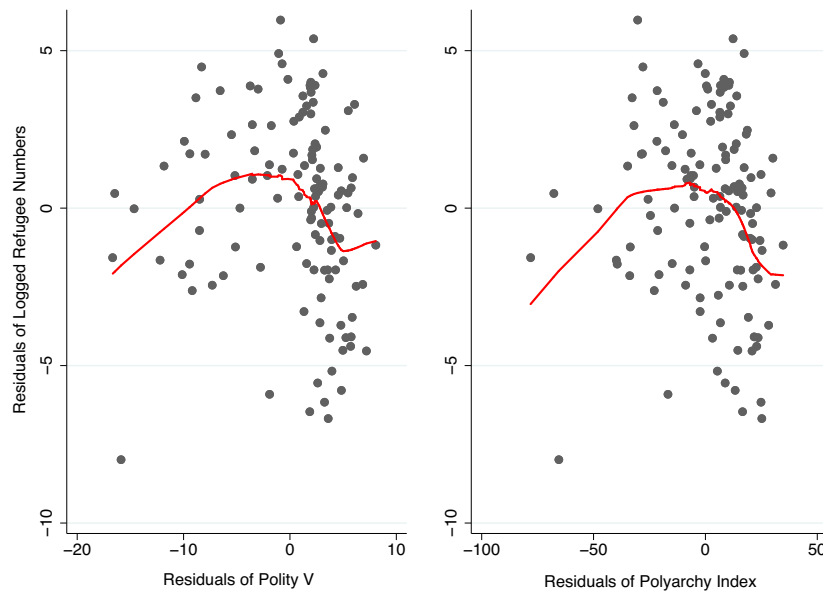
Data Structures, Estimators, and Control Variables

DATA STRUCTURES

We adopted two data structures, monadic and dyadic. The primary data structure is monadic, which sets the host country year as the unit of analysis (1951–2016). The monadic data structure is the most suitable for investigating our theoretical expectation because it enables modeling of the effect of the host country's political regimes on its refugee volume with robust statistical modeling (two-way FE).

That said, dyadic data structures which record bilateral relationships between two countries may also be useful in directly modeling the relationships between sending and receiving countries. Therefore, we also tested our hypothesis using dyadic data of refugees constructed by Rüegger and Bohnet (2018). The unit of analysis of this dataset is ethnic group-country dyad-years and records refugee movements from each ethnic group in a country of origin to host

---

[6]PARCOMP and PARREG tend to be lower when political violence and civil war occur. Vreeland (2008) recommends researchers to use the aggregated score of XRCOMP, XROPEN, and XCONST (XPOLITY measure) to avoid tautology between political regime and civil war. Although our interest is refugee entries, this alternative measure of the Polity score does not affect our main conclusions (Online Appendix B3-2).

[7]Even if we use the measure as it is, the estimation results do not change.

[8]For heteroskedastic measurement errors of the Polity indicators, see Treier and Jackman (2008).

Figure 2. Scatter plots and lowess curves of political regimes and refugee volumes. The horizontal axis represents residuals of political regime type (higher values indicate more democratic regimes), whereas the vertical axis represents residuals of logged refugee size. The unit of analysis is national means.

countries over time (1975–2009). Although this data structure significantly inflates host country-level observations and applies less conservative test settings to our hypothesis, it also enables us to directly include variables capturing pertinent dyadic relationships between the countries of origin and arrival, including transnational ethnic networks and geographical distances, in addition to political regime and economic disparities.

MONADIC DATA: ESTIMATOR AND MODEL SPECIFICATION

Refugee volume is a count variable and its distribution is highly dispersed across observations. This means that the variable takes non-negative values and that counts of refugees higher than one observation are not, in theory, independent of one another. Therefore, we used a Negative Binomial (NB) estimator (Hilbe 2011). The natural logarithm of the recipient country's total population was included as an offset variable in all models to account for varying levels of exposure to refugee entries across country years. For instance, 500,000 refugees in a country with a relatively small population (e.g., the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1975) should be expected to yield a different impact compared to the equivalent number of refugees in a country with a large population (e.g., the United States in 2000).

It is not difficult to imagine that there are numerous unobservable country-specific and time-specific factors that confound the relationship between host countries' political regimes and refugee entries. To mitigate the influence of confounding variables, this study utilizes two-way FE models by introducing both country and year dummies, which correspond to a generalized version of the Difference-in-Differences (DiD) analysis. Importantly, two-way FEs control for several important country-level confounding factors that, according to previous studies on refugees, are very likely to affect refugee movements. For instance, a country's ethnic configuration, which does not usually change drastically over time, determines ethnic kinship between (most

often neighboring) countries, which is a variable that significantly influences refugees' choices of destination (Rüegger and Bohnet 2018). The country's geographical location, which may affect the extent to which displaced persons find it easy to move to the country and therefore should be another time-invariant confounding factor.

Additionally, previous flows of refugees significantly affect subsequent refugee movements through the construction of ethnic, family, and religious networks, and it is therefore extremely important to account for the temporal dependency of refugee flights. In modeling this path-dependent nature, we addressed non-constant error variance and autocorrelation by using country-clustered robust standard errors. Robustness checks that directly model first-order autocorrelation through generalized estimating equations (GEE) and Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) with the lagged dependent variable find that the main results remain unchanged.[9]

To control for other confounding factors that are associated with both refugee flows and political regimes, we introduced the following control variables. The country's level of economic development is likely to be a pertinent confounding factor (Schmeidl 1997; Bohra-Mishra and Massey 2011). Economic prosperity is associated with the likelihood of democratic transitions and consolidation, and high-income countries have a greater tendency to attract displaced persons (Moore and Shellman 2006). Furthermore, rich autocracies may not need foreign labor and thus are less willing to accept refugees. To consider these possibilities, we used GDP per capita (logged) from the Maddison Project (Bolt and van Zanden 2014). At the other extreme, countries in the midst of political conflict are unlikely to be a desirable destination for displaced people, and this factor may also impact regime outcomes in turn (Moore and Shellman 2006). Therefore, we controlled for whether a country was experiencing civil war, which was taken from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program's Armed Conflict Dataset

---

[9]Regarding the GEE framework for NB regressions, see Hilbe (2011).

([Gleditsch et al. 2002](#)). As additional socio-economic controls, following [Neumayer (2004)](#), we included economic growth (annual percent, the Maddison Project), under the assumption that growing countries may be attractive for refugees and may also have governments that are more willing to accept those refugees.

As refugee inflows are clustered spatially around the country of origin, it is highly pertinent to carefully consider determinants of refugee movements from neighboring countries. We thoroughly consider the likely spatial effects in the following three ways. First, refugees often flee to certain host countries while avoiding neighboring countries where violent conflicts are present ([FitzGerald and Arar 2018](#)). To incorporate the conflict intensities of neighboring countries, we introduced two variables as controls. To directly consider conflict severity, we controlled for the number of battle-related deaths (logged) in civil wars occurring in neighboring countries by using data provided by [Lacina and Gleditsch (2005)](#).[10]

Furthermore, to control for the impact of civil conflict on civilians in neighboring countries, we also included the estimated annual number of civilian casualties in those countries. This indicator is measured by the summation of the genocide/politicide indicator from the Political Instability Task Force (PITF), which consists of eleven categories, with high scores indicating severer civilian fatalities ([PITF 2019](#)).

Second, if neighboring countries already harbor a significant number of refugees, potential refugees may be more likely to arrive in the host country through established networks between the two ([Schmeidl 1997](#); [Rüegger and Bohnet 2018](#)). To take into account the spillover of refugees, we controlled for the total number of refugees in neighboring countries (logged).

Third, democratization often diffuses from geographically close countries (e.g., [Huntington 1991](#)) and neighbors' political regimes may also affect refugee inflows and outflows. Thus, considering neighbors' political regimes is crucial in pinpointing the association between political regimes of host countries and refugee inflow. To address this issue, we followed previous studies by controlling the average score of the political regime variables in neighboring countries ([Moore and Shellman 2006](#)).[11]

Dyadic Data: Estimator and Model Specifications

In the dyadic data, our estimator and model specifications were built upon [Rüegger and Bohnet (2018)](#)'s, which provides a systematic global analysis of movements by refugees from particular ethnic groups in countries of origin to specific host countries. In the dyad data, the refugee volume variable includes an excessive number of zero observations because few dyads experience refugee movements. Therefore, following [Rüegger and Bohnet (2018)](#), we employed hurdle models, which assume that the binary zero and non-zero observations and the count of non-zero observations are treated by two different data-generating processes. Specifically, logit models were used for the binary outcome of whether any refugees are present whereas zero-truncated NB models were used for the count of refugees. To consider country- and time-specific heterogeneity, we included dummies of home country and host country along with year

dummies. Standard errors were clustered by both country and year to consider the spatial and temporal dependence of refugee movements. The natural logarithm of the host country's total population was included as an offset variable to account for different levels of exposure to refugee volumes.

Our model specifications thus extended [Rüegger and Bohnet (2018)](#)'s by including our own variable of interest: host countries' political regimes.[12] As discussed, the most useful feature of dyadic data is that we can directly model bilateral relationships. In particular, transborder ethnic ties and the spatial distance between the two countries are seen as strong predictors. The variable of transnational ethnic linkage measures whether a country-dyad has ethnic ties for a particular ethnic group (1 is coded if such ethnic ties exist and 0 if otherwise). The spatial dimension of refugee movements was also considered by controlling for the minimal distance between an ethnic group's territory within the country of origin and its potential area of settlement within host countries. Besides these two variables, models included the following variables as controls: the size of ethnic kin groups, differences in levels of democracy, GDP per capita (log), the population of ethnically excluded groups between host and home countries, the existence of conflict in host countries, the number of battle deaths in home countries, the number of civilian deaths in home countries, and whether transnational ethnic kin groups are involved in these conflicts. Lastly, the number of years elapsed since prior refugee entries were controlled to take the path-dependent nature of refugee movements into account.

Results

[Table 1](#) summarizes the key results for Hypothesis 1.[13] The upper section of the Table reports the results of the monadic data analysis (Models 1–3). Model 1 includes the Polity score and its squared term without controls. The squared term is negative and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), suggesting that the number of refugees increases toward the midpoint of the Polity scores and then decreases as the scores become smaller or larger. Models 2 and 3 introduce control variables while using different measures of political regimes (the Polity score in Model 2 and the V-Dem's Polyarchy index in Model 3), and again the squared terms of the regime variables are negative and statistically significant at the one percent and five percent levels, respectively.[14] In the lower section of [table 1](#) (Models 4 through 6), we employed dyadic data to test the same hypothesis.[15] Again, the squared term of the political regime variables is negative and statistically significant across all three models ($p < 0.01$).[16]

---

[10]Their dataset (1946–2008) is complemented with battle-related deaths from the World Development Indicators to cover more recent times (2009–2016). Following [Rüegger and Bohnet (2018)](#), we used the high estimate of annual battle fatalities, because refugees flee not only from direct violence but also from the threat of violence.

[11]Descriptive statistics of the variables used in these analyses are available in [Online Appendix A](#).

[12]The replication data of their analysis is available from https://icr.ethz.ch/data/epr/er/.

[13]For the entire estimation results, see [Online Appendix B1](#).

[14]To evaluate model fitting, we inspected the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) for Models 1 through 3 and the same model specifications without the squared term of democracy. Models with the squared term yield 44–152 lower BIC than those without it. Given that a BIC difference of more than six is judged to be strong evidence in favor of the model with the lower BIC ([Raftery 1995](#)), the model fitting with the squared term (*Democracy∗Democracy*) is better than that with only *Democracy*. This also holds for the dyadic data analysis.

[15]Here, we report the results of zero-truncated NB models, as our hypothesis is concerned primarily with the number of refugees, and not with whether a country accepts any refugees. The results based on logit analysis are very similar, and the details are provided in [Online Appendix B1-2](#).

[16]Furthermore, disaggregated types of democracies and autocracies (e.g., presidential-parliamentary and personalist-military) did not yield statistically meaningful differences.

Table 1. The inverted U-curve relationship between political regime and refugee volumes

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Dependent variable	Refugee volume	Refugee volume	Refugee volume
Regime variable	Polity	Polity	V-Dem
Data structure	Monad	Monad	Monad
Democracy	**0.186***	**0.220**	**0.03***
Democracy*Democracy	(0.071)	(0.07)	(0.017)
	−0.013***	−0.013***	−0.0005**
	(0.0034)	(0.0035)	(0.0002)
Controls	No	Yes	Yes
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of countries	143	133	136
Number of observations	5,125	4,696	4,840
Log pseudolikelihood	−54,442	−49,488	−51,081
Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC)	109,474	99,586	102,774
	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Dependent variable	Refugee volume	Refugee volume	Refugee volume
Regime variable	Polity	Polity	V-Dem
Data structure	Dyad	Dyad	Dyad
Democracy	**0.069**	**0.109**	**0.02**
Democracy*Democracy	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.0086)
	−0.004***	−0.005***	−0.0004***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.0001)
Controls	No	Yes	Yes
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of host countries	161	153	153
Number of observations	39,243	33,094	34,351
Number of non-zero observations	4,177	3,404	3,571
Log pseudolikelihood	−45,183	−36,310	−38,268
Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC)	92,000	74,183	78,107

Note: Clustered robust standard errors in parentheses. $*p < 0.1$, $**p < 0.05$, and $***p < 0.01$.
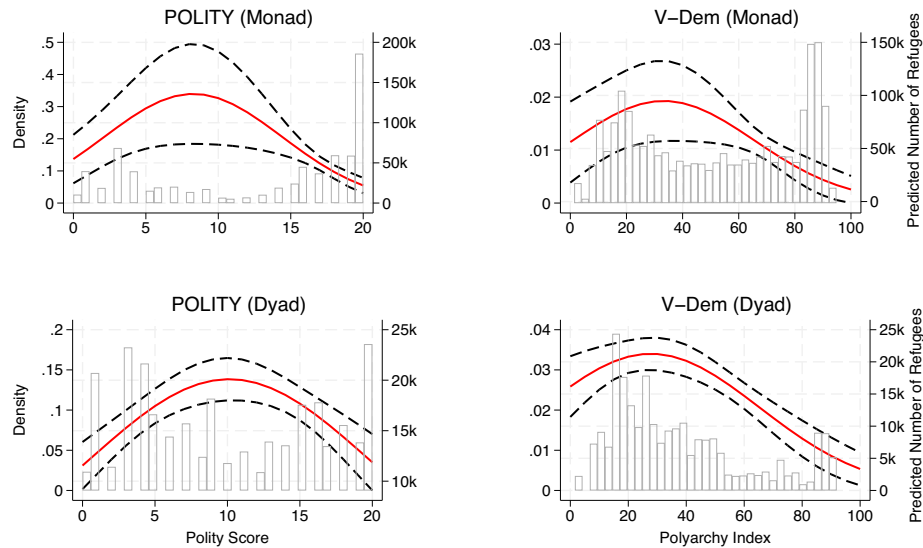
Figure 3. Political regimes and predicted number of refugees. The straight lines indicate the predicted numbers of refugees. The dotted lines show the 95 percent confidence intervals. The graphs are produced based on the estimation results of Models 2 and 3 (for monadic data) and 5 and 6 (for dyadic data), respectively.

Using the estimation results of Models 2 and 3, figure 3 shows the predicted numbers of refugees based on the Polity score (upper left) and the Polyarchy Index (upper right). As

shown, the impact of political regimes follows an inverted-U curve. In the case of the Polity score, the predicted numbers of refugees maximize (approximately 140,000 people)

when the Polity score is roughly eight and then decreases when the score becomes larger (i.e., as a country becomes more democratic; 22,000 refugees at the largest Polity score) or smaller (i.e., more authoritarian; 64,000 refugees at the lowest score of the Polity). Using the Polyarchy index, the empirical pattern is highly similar: the predicted number of refugees reaches a peak when the score is about thirty (96,000), and the predicted refugee population tends to decrease when a host country becomes more authoritarian (59,000 refugees at the lowest score of the Polyarchy Index) or more democratic (20,000 refugees at the highest score of the Polyarchy Index). Given that the within-country standard deviation (SD) of the refugee variable is 150,000 and changes in refugee volumes across political regimes range between 76,000 (50 percent of SD in the case of V-Dem) and 118,000 (80 percent of SD in the case of Polity), its effect size is substantively large. We also find very similar patterns in the case of the dyadic data analysis, using the Polity score (lower left of figure 3) and the Polyarchy index (lower right).[17]

We found wider confidence intervals in the case of authoritarian regimes (i.e., lower scores of the Polity score and the Polyarchy index), especially in the monadic data analysis. As the confidence intervals suggest, the point estimates are slightly less certain in predicting refugee volumes across autocratic countries. The primary reason for this is the lower number of observations in those ranges, which are indicated by the bars in the graphs. This might also reflect the fact that autocratic countries exhibit more variability in their approaches to displaced persons. As discussed earlier, for example, oil-rich countries in the Middle East, most of which are not signatories of the UNHCR Convention or Protocol, do not recognize the concept of refugees. The denial of this migrant category may result in an inflated number of irregular migrants and underrepresentation of refugees as defined by the UNHCR. Moreover, natural resource abundance is, in general, positively correlated with authoritarian durability (Wright, Frantz, and Geddes 2015) and thus might be a possible confounder. To deal with these concerns, we conducted several additional analyses. First, we excluded autocracies in the Middle East from our analysis to ensure that the results remained unchanged (Online Appendix Table B9-1). Second, we controlled for logged oil and natural gas value per capita to reflect the assumption that natural resources might be an important confounder (Online Appendix Table B9-2). Third, we conditioned democracy's inverted U-shape relationship with refugees upon the amount of natural resources to see whether there is a significant difference between the relationship between oil-producing and non-oil-producing countries (Online Appendix figures B9-1 and B9-2). The differences do not turn out to be statistically significant across different scores of the democracy indices.

To ensure that our overall results remain robust, we conducted a battery of sensitivity analyses. Specifically, we (1) used different estimators (Online Appendix B2), (2) adopted different measurements of regime effects (Online Appendix B3), (3) conducted data imputation (Online Appendix B4), (4) included refugee policy as an additional control (Online Appendix B8), (5) included state capacity as an additional control (Online Appendix B10), and (6) carried out Jackknife analyses by excluding country and

year one by one (Online Appendix B11). While most of the tests are rooted in methodological concerns, the tests in the fourth and fifth sets are based on theoretical concerns. While we stress democratic governance as the essential mechanism, it is possible that it also functions as an underlying force that influences refugee policies accordingly, for example, (non)democracies imposing more restrictive (liberal) policies. In this sense, we should expect the statistical significance of the political regime variable to disappear once the refugee policy variable is introduced as a control. Additionally, there tends to be a high correlation between anocracy and state capacity, implying that anocracies may be simply unable to prevent refugees from entering, instead of willingly accepting them. We suspect that the significance of the regime variables remains robust even when controlling the state capacity. The overall results are not sensitive to these robustness checks while some of them provide nuanced interpretations. The detailed explanations and full results of each analysis are presented in Online Appendix B.

Quantitative Analysis II: Preferences of Displaced Persons and Host Governments

While the results thus far confirm our core hypothesis, we further tested whether they are ultimately driven by the mechanisms we propose. We suggested that displaced persons are more inclined to move into countries where democratic institutions are established. In other words, we expect democracies to have a positive, linear relationship with the number of refugee status requests made by displaced persons (Hypothesis 2a). In contrast, governments of advanced democracies are reluctant to open their doors to refugees because incumbents are heavily constrained by democratic institutions. This theoretical expectation leads us to suspect a negative linear relationship between democracies and refugee acceptance: as countries become more democratic, governments are less likely to formally recognize displaced persons as refugees (Hypothesis 2b). To assess the validity of these mechanisms and theoretical expectations, we utilized additional analyses.

Displaced Persons' Motivations (Hypothesis 2a)

To measure displaced persons' desired destinations, we used the annual number of asylum-seekers' applications for refugee status in host countries as reflected in the UNHCR's dataset on asylum-seekers' refugee status determination.[18]

The dataset covers the time period of 2000–2016. By regressing political regime and other control variables on the number of applications for refugee status, we expected democracies to be positively correlated with the number of refugee status applications by asylum-seekers. As this time series (16 years) is far shorter than the cross-section (138 countries) and the models include sluggish variables such as the Polity score or the Polyarchy index, a country-FE estimator may yield high variance, meaning that estimates are extremely sensitive to a random error in the data (Clark and Linzer 2015). Therefore, we adopted a random effects NB

---

[17]Although the results using the Polyarchy index are slightly more right-skewed than the other models, its BIC score indicates that the assumption of a quadratic relationship yields a better model fit than the assumption of a linear relationship.

[18]The data can be accessed through the following link: http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/asylum_seekers. According to the UNHCR's website, asylum-seekers are defined as "individuals who have sought international protection and whose claims for refugee status have not yet been determined, irrespective of when they may have been lodged" (http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/overview).

Table 2. Determinants of asylum-seekers' applications to refugee status

Dependent variable	Model 7 Refugee status application	Model 8 Refugee status application	Model 9 Refugee status application
Regime variable	polity	polity	V-Dem
Democracy	0.113***	0.0812***	0.0213**
	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.005)
Controls	No	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of countries	139	130	133
Number of observations	2,165	1,967	2,045

Note: Country-clustered robust standard errors in parentheses. *$p < 0.1$, **$p < 0.05$, and ***$p < 0.01$.

regression with country-clustered robust standard errors to deal with unobserved country-level heterogeneity.[19]

Table 2 presents the key results of refugee status applications.[20] In all models, democracy is positively associated with the number of asylum-seekers' applications for formal refugee status to a statistically significant degree, consistent with our theoretical expectation.[21] Figure 4 illustrates the predicted numbers of refugee status applications by asylum-seekers according to our two different measures of democracy: the Polity score and the Polyarchy index. In both graphs, the predicted numbers of refugee status applications in authoritarian regimes (for example, less than ten in the Polity IV score and less than forty in the Polyarchy index) are less than 10,000. As countries become more democratic, the number of applications exponentially increases. When they become the most democratic (ten of the Polity IV score and 94.8 of the Polyarchy Index), the number of asylum-seekers applying for formal refugee status exceeds 20,000. The results provide supporting evidence for Hypothesis 2a.

Host Governments' Motivations (Hypothesis 2b)

To test our hypothesis on host governments' incentives, we focused on decisions that host governments have made regarding asylum-seekers by again relying on the UNHCR's dataset on asylum-seekers' refugee status determination, which documents (1) how many asylum-seekers in a country-year are officially granted formal refugee status by the host government and (2) how many refugee status applications of asylum-seekers in a country-year are rejected by the host government. We acknowledge that the decisions on recognition and rejection are not identical to actual policy outcomes. Under the current scholarship where there is no global dataset measuring refugee policies, however, the UNHCR indices are the most proximate and available that enable us to examine our causal mechanism on motivations of host governments arising from their political regime types.

We use the numbers of refugee recognition and rejection in a given year as our outcome variables. We adopt a NB regression with country-clustered robust standard errors.[22]

Table 3 reports the estimation results.[23] Democracies are negatively correlated with the likelihood of according asylum-seekers formal recognition as refugees in all models (Models 10–12) to a statistically significant degree.[24] Figure 5 visually represents the predicted values of acceptance numbers according to the two different measures of democracy. In the most authoritarian countries (where the Polity score is 0 and V-Dem's Polyarchy index is 8), acceptance numbers stand at around 4,300 (Polity) and 3,800 (V-Dem). These scores, however, decrease as countries become more democratic. When countries reach the most democratic status (where the Polity score is 20 and V-Dem's Polyarchy index is 94.8), the acceptance numbers drop to 2,100 (Polity) and 1,800 (V-Dem), respectively. These results support Hypothesis 2b.[25]

Interestingly, when we set the number of rejections as the dependent variable (Models 13 through 15), the negative effect of democracy becomes statistically insignificant even at the 10 percent level. One possible interpretation for these results is that, although democratic governments are not eager to accept many asylum-seekers as refugees, they may also be reluctant to actively reject refugee status applications due to humanitarian concerns and a perceived duty to abide to the non-refoulement clause of the 1951 Refugee Convention. Nonetheless, the results suggest that democracies limit the number of refugees, not by rejecting the applications for refugee status, but rather by not recognizing the submitted applications and thereby prolonging the decision-making period for refugee status recognition.

Conclusion

This paper has examined important factors impacting the direction and volume of refugee flows. Displaced persons prefer to seek refuge in a country that has a robust batter of democratic institutions. They would thus naturally prefer to settle in democracies. Preferences of host countries' political leaders with respect to refugee admittance depend on how strongly they are constrained by public opinion. Democratic leaders would prefer to minimize the volume of refugees, while this tendency would be less visible among autocratic leaders. Consequently, we observe a smaller volume of refugees in both mature democracies and closed autoc-

---

[19]Year dummies are included to account for year-specific confounding factors. The detailed results of random effects models are shown in Online Appendix Table B6.

[20]For the entire estimation results, including those with control variables, see Online Appendix B5-1.

[21]As for refugee status applications, the squared term of political regimes, *Democracy*Democracy*, is not statistically significant, suggesting that the relationship between regime type and refugee status applications is linear.

[22]Year dummies are included to account for year-specific confounding factors. Random effects OLS regressions lead to similar estimation results (Online Appendix Table B7).

[23]For the entire estimation results, see Online Appendix B5-2.

[24]The squared term of political regimes, *Democracy*Democracy*, is not statistically significant for this dependent variable, suggesting that the relationship between regime type and acceptance rates is linear. The same holds for rejection rates.

[25]When we control for the restrictiveness of host governments' refugee policies, the linear correlation between democracy and refugee recognition becomes statistically insignificant (Online Appendices B8-3 and B8-4).
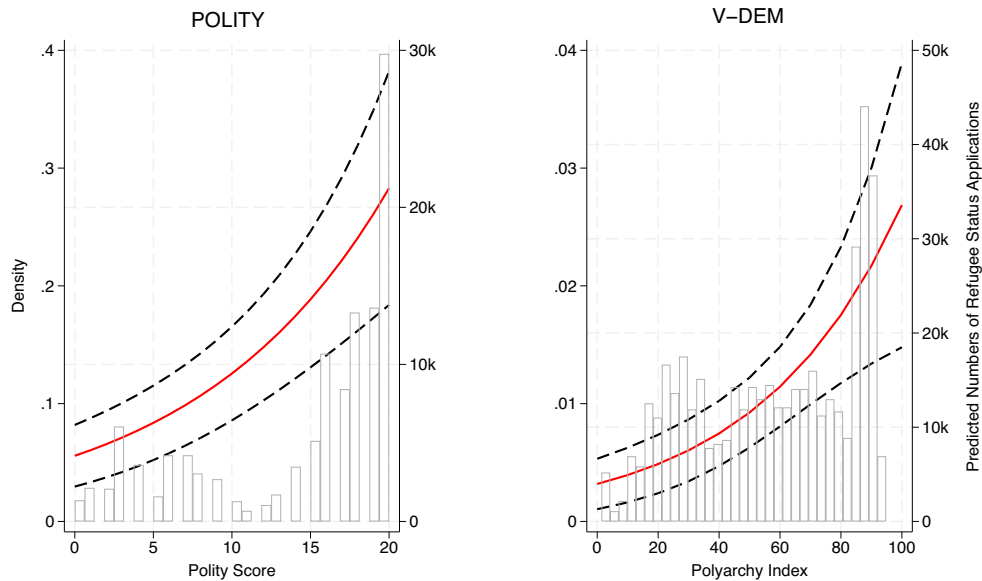
Figure 4. Democracy receives more refugee status applications. The straight lines indicate the predicted numbers of refugee status applications. The dotted lines show the 95 percent confidence intervals. The graphs are based on the estimation results of Models 8 and 9 of table 2.

Table 3. Determinants of governments' responses to refugee status applications

|	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
Dependent variable	*Recognition numbers*	*Recognition numbers*	*Recognition numbers*
Regime variable	*Polity*	*Polity*	*V-Dem*
Democracy	**−0.811***	**−0.036****	**−0.0071***
	(0.017)	(0.015)	(0.004)
	Model 13	*Model 14*	*Model 15*
Dependent variable	*Rejection numbers*	*Rejection numbers*	*Rejection numbers*
Regime variable	*Polity*	*Polity*	*V-Dem*
Democracy	**−0.014**	**−0.023**	**−0.001**
	(0.014)	(0.018)	(0.004)
Controls	No	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of countries	141	131	134
Number of observations	2,183	1,968	2,046

Note: Country-clustered standard errors in parentheses. *$p < 0.1$, **$p < 0.05$, and *$p < 0.01$.

racies, with the greatest volume falling in anocracies. Global statistical analyses confirmed that political regime types indeed exhibit an inverted U-shaped relationship with the size of refugee inflows. Our analyses also find that democratic governments receive a greater number of asylum applications than autocracies, yet, they accept many fewer of these in comparison to their non-democratic counterparts. At the same time, however, they do not explicitly *reject* them at a statistically higher rate.

An important question thus arises here: What happens to those asylum-seekers in democracies whose applications continue to be under a pending status? In the case of rejected asylum-seekers, they must leave the host country of their own accord (if they already reside in the host territory), either to look for another country for resettlement or to return to their home country (repatriation). Many advanced democracies, however, take the principle of non-refoulement seriously, which prevents them from forcefully expelling or repatriating these individuals. Since many matured democracies are constrained by this international commitment, they may be hesitant to publicly reject asylum applications to save face before domestic and international audiences. Nevertheless, this suggests that many asylum-seekers in democratic countries will be left with an undefined status (Dustmann et al. 2017, 504).

The ambiguous legal status of these displaced persons leaves them unable to gain access to the various rights to which those accorded formal refugee status are entitled, such as rights to economic activities and family reunification, as well as international movements. As a result, this fragile status may increase their probability of becoming undocumented migrants in their efforts to escape from their home country conflict while surviving in the host country. In turn, however, it raises their likelihood of becoming victims of illegal and dehumanizing activities, such as human trafficking. Undocumented migrants are the type of migrants least favored by both governments and the general public in many democracies. Thus, while these restrictive policies may ironically produce a greater number of undocumented migrants, this tendency may exacerbate public vilification,
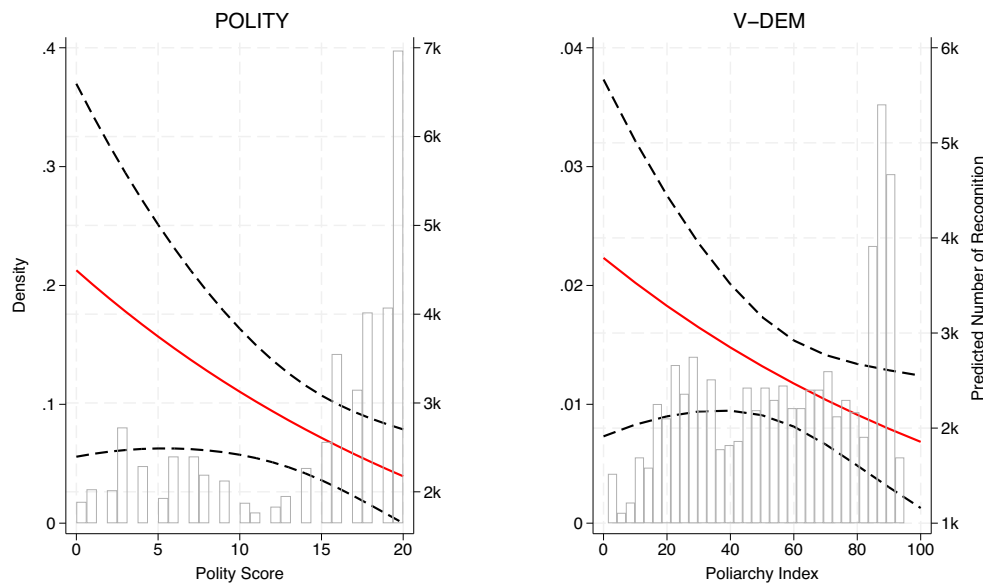
Figure 5. Democracies recognize fewer refugees. The straight lines indicate the predicted number of refugee status recognition. The dotted lines are the 95 percent confidence intervals. The graphs draw from the estimation results of Models 11 and 12.

which may further threaten already distressed displaced persons (Carlson, Jakli, and Linos 2018). This grim reality leaves us with both practical and scholarly implications. For practical implications, in order to avoid the tragic and counterproductive outcomes refugees experience, international burden-sharing and monitoring mechanisms must be reinforced and more robustly developed, so that presently prevailing ad hoc approaches toward displaced persons may be supplanted by a system that is more effective, more secure, and more just.

There are largely two scholarly implications. First, most of readily available datasets place a heavy weight on written *de jure* policies and rules on refugees. While those in democracies may be relatively more credible and binding, these written rules may not capture how refugees are actually treated in non-democratic settings. There have been efforts to create a dataset that measures *de facto* implementation of policies (e.g., the DARA Refugee Response Index); however, it is still in progress. Second, the imminent task is to construct a comprehensive dataset measuring refugee policies covering both developed and developing countries to further elaborate on the causes and consequences of refugee movements. The current stage of social science scholarship on refugee policies faces a serious data limitation. The publicly available datasets either focus on the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) democracies (e.g., Helbling et al. 2017) or developing countries (e.g., Blair, Grossman, and Weinstein 2022a, b) under distinctive conceptualization and operationalization of refugee policies. Thus, they are not easily comparable to one another while severely limiting the samples, causing selection biases. To overcome these problems, it would be useful to find a solution by unifying policy measures across developed and developing countries in a consistent manner (review: Higashijima and Woo 2023). This compilation will allow for a more rigorous investigation of the relationship between a variety of political institutions and refugees' entries and rights.

Acknowledgments

Supplementary Data

Supplementary information is available at the *International Studies Quarterly* data archive.

References

Acemoglu, Daron, and James Robinson. 2006. *Economic Origins of Democracy and Dictatorship*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bermeo, Sarah Blodgett, and David Leblang. 2015. "Migration and Foreign Aid." *International Organization* 69 (3): 627–57.

Bertocchi, Graziella, and Chiara Strozzi. 2008. "International Migration and the Role of Institutions." *Public Choice* 137 (1): 81–102.

Betts, Alexander. 2011. *Global Migration Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Alexander, Betts, Louise Bloom, Josiah David Kaplan, and Naohiko Omata. 2017. *Refugee Economies: Forced Displacement and Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Blair, Christopher W., Guy Grossman, and Jeremy M. Weinstein. 2022a. "Forced Displacement and Asylum Policy in the Developing World." *International Organization* 76 (2): 337–78.

———. 2022b. "Liberal Displacement Policies Attract Forced Migrants in the Global South." *American Political Science Review* 116 (1): 351–58.

Bohra-Mishra, Pratikshya, and Douglas S. Massey. 2011. "Individual Decisions to Migrate during Civil War." *Demography* 48 (2): 401–24.

Bolt, Jutta, and Jan Luiten van Zanden. 2014. "The Maddison Project: Collaborative Research on Historical National Accounts." *The Economic History Review* 67 (3): 627–51.

Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, Alastair Smith, Randolph Silverson, and James Morrow. 2003. *The Logic of Political Survival.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Böcker, Anita. 1998. *Asylum Migration to the European Union: Patterns of Origin and Destination.* Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

Carlson, Melissa, Laura Jakli, and Katerina Linos. 2018. "Rumors and Refugees: How Government-Created Information Vacuums Undermine Effective Crisis Management." *International Studies Quarterly* 62 (3): 671–85.

Clark, Tom, and Drew Linzer. 2015. "Should I Use Fixed or Random Effects?" *Political Science and Research Method* 3 (2): 399–408.

Coppedge, Michael, John Gerring, Staffan I. Lindberg, Svend-Erik Skaaning, Jan Teorell, David Altman, and Michael Bernhard et al. 2019. "V-Dem [Country-Year/Country- Date] Dataset v9.0." *Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project.*

Czaika, Mathias. 2009. "The Political Economy of Refugee Migration." *Journal of Economics and Statistics* 229 (6): 803–21.

Dahl, Robert A. 1971. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Davenport, Christian A. 2007. *State Repression and the Domestic Democratic Peace.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Day, Kate, and Paul White. 2002. "Choice or Circumstance: The UK as the Location of Asylum Applications by Bosnian and Somali Refugees." *GeoJournal* 56 (1): 15–26.

Dustmann, Christian, Francesco Fasani, Tommaso Frattini, Luigi Minale, and Uta Schönberg. 2017. "On the Economics and Politics of Refugee Migration." *Economic Policy* 32 (91): 497–550.

Dustmann, Christian, Kristine Vasiljeva, and Anna Piil Damm. 2019. "Refugee Migration and Electoral Outcomes." *Review of Economic Studies* 86 (5): 2035–91.

ECRE. 1995. *Positions of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles on Sharing the Responsibility: Protection of Refugees and Displaced Persons in the Context of Large Scale Arrivals.* Brussels: European Council on Refugees and Exiles.

Ellermann, Antje. 2009. *States against Migrants: Deportation in Germany and the United States.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Fearon, James D., and David D. Laitin. 2003. "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War." *The American Political Science Review* 97 (1): 75–90.

Ferwerda, Jeremy, and Justin Gest. 2021. "Pull Factors and Migration Preferences: Evidence from the Middle East and North Africa." *International Migration Review* 55 (2): 431–59.

FitzGerald, David Scott, and Rawan Arar. 2018. "The Sociology of Refugee Migration." *Annual Review of Sociology* 44: 387–406.

Fitzgerald, Jennifer, David Leblang, and Jessica C. Teets. 2014. "Defying the Law of Gravity: The Political Economy of International Migration." *World Politics* 66 (3): 406–45.

Fjelde, Hanne, Carl Henrik Knutsen, and Håvard Mokleiv Nygård. 2020. "Which Institutions Matter? Re-Considering the Democratic Civil Peace." *International Studies Quarterly* 65 (11): 223–37.

Frantz, Erica, and Natasha M. Ezrow. 2011. *The Politics of Dictatorship: Institutions and Outcomes in Authoritarian Regimes.* Boulder, CO: Rienner.

Geddes, Barbara, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz. 2018. *How Dictatorships Work: Power, Personalization, and Collapse.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Gleditsch, Nils Peter, Peter Wallensteen, Mikael Eriksson, Margareta Sollenberg, and Harvard Strand. 2002. "Armed Conflict 1946–2001: A New Dataset." *Journal of Peace Research* 39 (5): 615–37.

Hafner-Burton, Emilie M., Edward D. Mansfield, and Pevehouse Jon C.W. Pevehouse. 2015. "Human Rights Institutions, Sovereignty Costs and Democratization." *British Journal of Political Science* 45 (1): 1–27.

Hangartner, Dominik, Elias Dinas, Moritz Marbach, Konstantinos Matakos, and Dimitrios Xefteris. 2019. "Does Exposure to the Refugee Crisis Make Natives More Hostile?" *American Political Science Review* 113 (2): 442–55.

Hatton, Timothy J. 2016. "Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Policy in OECD Countries." *American Economic Review: Papers and Proceedings* 106 (5): 441–5.

Helbling, Marc, Liv Bjerre, Friederike Römer, and Malisa Zobel. 2017. "Measuring Immigration Policies: The IMPIC Database." *European Political Science* 16 (1): 79–98.

Higashijima, Masaaki. 2022. *The Dictator's Dilemma at the Ballot Box: Electoral Manipulation, Economic Maneuvering, and Political Order in Autocracies.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Higashijima, Masaaki, and Yujin Woo. 2023. "Measuring National Refugee Policies: Recent Trends and Implications for Future Development." *Interdisciplinary Information Sciences* 29 (2): 109–17.

Hilbe, Joseph. 2011. *Negative Binomial Regression*, 2nd ed. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Holland, Alisha C., and Margaret Peters. 2020. "Explaining Migration Timing: Political Information and Opportunities." *International Organization* 74 (3): 560–83.

Holland, Alisha C., Margaret E. Peters, and Thania Sánchez. 2019. *The Dignity of Humanitarian Migrants: Explaining Migrants' Destination Preferences.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Horst, Cindy. 2006. "Buufis among Somalis in Dadaab: The Transnational and Historical Logics behind Resettlement Dreams." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 19 (2): 143–57.

Howard, Marc Morjé. 2009. *The Politics of Citizenship in Europe.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Huntington, Samuel P. 1991. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late 20th Century.* University of Oklahoma Press.

Jacobsen, Karen. 2002. "Can Refugees Benefit the State? Refugee Resources and African Statebuilding." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 40 (4): 577–96.

Lacina, Bethany, and Nils Peter Gleditsch. 2005. "Monitoring Trends in Global Combat: A New Dataset of Battle Deaths." *European Journal of Population* 21: 145–66.

Levin, Jamie, Joseph Mackay, Anne Spencer Jamison, Abouzar Nasirzadeh, and Anthony Sealey. 2021. "A Test of the Democratic Peacekeeping Hypothesis: Coups, Democracy and Foreign Military Deployments." *Journal of Peace Research* 58 (3): 355–67.

Li, Quan, Erica Owen, and Austin Mitchell. 2018. "Why Do Democracies Attract More or Less Foreign Direct Investment? A Metaregression Analysis." *International Studies Quarterly* 62 (3): 494–504.

Lutz, Philipp, and Marco Bitschnau. 2023. "Misperceptions about Immigration: Reviewing Their Nature, Motivations and Determinants." *British Journal of Political Science* 53 (2): 674–89.

Magaloni, Beatriz. 2006. *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Marshall, M. G., and T. R. Gurr. 2020. *POLITY V: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800–2018.* Center for Systemic Peace, George Mason University.

Milner, Helen V., and Keiko Kubota. 2005. "Why the Move to Free Trade? Democracy and Trade Policy in the Developing Countries." *International Organization* 59 (1): 107–43.

Mirilovic, Nikola. 2010. "Explaining the Politics of Immigration: Dictatorship, Development, and Defense." *Comparative Politics* 42 (3): 273–92.

Moore, Will H., and Stephen M. Shellman. 2006. "Refugee or Internally Displaced Person? To Where Should One Flee?" *Comparative Political Studies* 39 (5): 599–622.

Mudawi, Hassan Ali. 2019. "Refugees and Forced Migration from Eritrea and Ethiopia to Sudan." In *Refugees and Forced Migrants in Africa and the EU*, edited by Ulrich Becker, Elisabeth Wacker and Katharina Crepaz, 151–59. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Neumayer, Eric. 2004. "Asylum Destination Choice: What Makes some West European Countries More Attractive than Others?" *European Union Politics* 5 (2): 155–80.

Norman, Kelsey P. 2020. *Reluctant Reception: Refugees, Migration and Governance in the Middle East and North Africa.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Pemstein, Daniel, Kyle L. Marquardt, Eitan Tzelgov, Yi ting Wang, Juraj Medzihorsky, Joshua Krusell, Farhad Miri, and Johannes von Römer. 2020. "The V-Dem Measurement Model: Latent Variable Analysis for Cross-National and Cross-Temporal Expert-Coded Data." *V-Dem Working Paper No. 21.* 5th ed. University of Gothenburg: Varieties of Democracy Institute.

PITF. 2019. "Genocide and Politicide Problem Set." Accessed September 25, 2023. http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html.

Przeworski, Adam, Michael E. Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi. 2000. *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and*

Well-Being in the World, 1950–1990. New York: Cambridge University Press.

QUILLIAN, LINCOLN. 1995. "Prejudice as a Response to Perceived Group Threat: Population Composition and Anti-Immigrant and Racial Prejudice in Europe." *American Sociological Review* 60 (4): 586–611.

RAFTERY, ADRIAN. 1995. "Bayesian Model Selection in Social Research." *Sociological Methodology* 25: 111–63.

RÜEGGER, SERAINA, AND HEIDRUN BOHNET. 2018. "The Ethnicity of Refugees (ER): A New Dataset for Understanding Flight Patterns." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 35 (1): 65–88.

SCHMEIDL, SUSANNE. 1997. "Exploring the Causes of Forced Migration: A Pooled Time-Series Analysis, 1971–1990." *Social Science Quarterly* 78 (2): 284–308.

SCHMITT, CELINE. 2014. "UNHCR Completes Challenging Repatriation of Al-most 120,000 Congolese Refugees." *UNHCR.* Accessed August 19, 2020, https://www.unhcr.org/news/makingdifference/2014/8/53e0ac5f9/unhcr–completes– challenging–repatriation–120000 –congolese–refugees.html.

SHIN, ADRIAN J. 2017. "Tyrants and Migrants: Authoritarian Immigration Policy." *Comparative Political Studies* 50 (1): 14–40.

SOYSAL, YASEMIN NUHOGLU. 1997. "Changing Parameters of Citizenship and Claims-Making: Organized Islam in European Public Spheres." *Theory and Society* 26: 509–27.

TREIER, SHAWN, AND SIMON JACKMAN. 2008. "Democracy as a Latent Variable." *American Journal of Political Science* 52 (1): 201–17.

TSEBELIS, GEORGE. 2002. *Veto Players: How Institutions Work.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

UNHCR. 2015. *Statistical Yearbook 2014.* Geneva: UNHCR.

———. 2018. *Global Appeal 2018–2019.* Geneva: UNHCR.

VREELAND, JAMES. 2008. "The Effect of Political Regime on Civil War: Unpacking Anocracy." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52 (3): 401–25.

WRIGHT, JOSEPH, ERICA FRANTZ, AND BARBARA GEDDES. 2015. "Oil and Autocratic Regime Survival." *British Journal of Political Science* 45 (2): 287–306.

ØSTERGAARD-NIELSEN, EVA. 2003. "The Politics of Migrants' Transnational Political Practices." *International Migration Review* 37 (3): 760–86.