

BOOK REVIEW

Lamis Elmy Abdelaaty. *Discrimination and Delegation: Explaining State Responses to Refugees*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. 223 pp. List of Abbreviations. Appendices. References. Index. \$82.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9780197530061.

Although approximately 85 percent of refugees are hosted by developing countries, most scholarship on refugee and asylum policy focuses on Western liberal democracies. Notwithstanding the value of the insights generated by this literature, *Discrimination and Delegation* is a welcome contribution to our understanding of how states respond to the demand for refugee protection. Lamis Elmy Abdelaaty provides a rigorous, multi-level study that includes in-depth analysis of refugee policy changes in Egypt, Turkey, and Kenya, within a wider international context. Her skillful use of quantitative data, alongside analysis of interviews, archival sources, and parliamentary debates offers readers an empirically and theoretically rich study of refugee policy that has implications far beyond her case studies.


Abdelaaty begins with the observation that states are often inconsistent in their response to refugees; some refugees are welcomed with generous policies, whereas others encounter deterrence and restriction. Furthermore, in many countries across Africa and Asia states give the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) authority over refugee status determination (RSD) procedures. RSD procedures determine whether a refugee claimant is granted rights and protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention. These two puzzles—why states discriminate between refugee populations, and when they choose to delegate authority over RSD procedures—form the core problematic of the book.

The book's central argument is that discrimination and delegation are often linked. These are two dimensions of a state's asylum policy, or "the set of measures adopted by a national government to regulate the entry, exit, and conditions of residence of foreign asylum seekers and refugees" (16). Abdelaaty posits that a state's asylum policy will be fundamentally shaped by two variables: affinity with the refugee group and sending country relations (22). Stated differently, states make decisions about discrimination and delegation depending on domestic identity politics and diplomatic relations, in what is characterized as a "two-level game" (when states must manage both

international and domestic politics in relation to a particular policy area). When the refugee population is a co-ethnic group coming from a hostile state, we are more likely to see an inclusive asylum policy. When there is no ethnic tie to a group coming from a friendly state, there is often a restrictive policy. In cases where these domestic and international factors conflict, RSD processes are likely to be delegated to the UNHCR in order to shift political responsibility from the receiving state.

Abdelaaty's theoretical argument is parsimonious and intuitively compelling. Her third chapter tests the predictions of her model against a global dataset gathered between 1996 and 2005, and the results are robust. There are other factors that matter as well, but ethnic politics and foreign policy exert a significant influence on discrimination and delegation. We get a better sense of how they influence asylum policy in the subsequent chapters on Egypt, Turkey, and Kenya. Egypt hosts a significant number of refugees, but it is not typically among the top 20 countries hosting the largest refugee populations. While it does not have an explicit asylum policy, there are patterns in its response to refugee populations that are consistent with Abdelaaty's model. Egypt's changing relations with Israel influenced its policy toward Palestinian refugees, shifting from inclusion toward delegation. Similarly, its changing response to Sudanese refugees can be explained by changing diplomatic relations. The chapter on Turkey—a country host to a far larger refugee population—tells a similar story, although there are some refugee groups whose treatment does not align with Abdelaaty's predictions. Turning to Kenya, we get a better sense of the political mechanisms responsible for the patterns observed in Egypt and Turkey. An impressive analysis of parliamentary debates reveals that legislators often push for generous policies toward refugees who share an ethnicity with their voters, and diplomats exert pressure on decision-makers in accordance with foreign policy.

Abdelaaty's book is a remarkable accomplishment, which has something to teach political scientists and area studies experts alike. It derives insights about asylum policy from the experience of developing countries, which can also illuminate our understanding of decisions by Western liberal democracies (just contrast asylum policies toward Ukrainians with policies toward those arriving from Africa). It also reveals patterns in the policies of African countries that can help to frame future in-depth country case studies.

Geoffrey Cameron 
 McMaster University
 Hamilton, Canada
 camerg3@mcmaster.ca

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