

Politics, Strategy, and State Responses to Conflict Generated Migration:

Evidence from India

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Abstract:

Why do states respond differently to conflict-generated migration crises across space and time? Building on valuable existing literature, this article offers a new conceptual typology of 'situational strategic contexts' (SSC). It hypothesises that the interactions between the host state's domestic political and international strategic priorities generate different situational strategic contexts that shape policy responses. These contexts favour either accommodation, toleration, or repatriation of migrants and are implemented with or without support from the UNHCR. Sensitive to the history and future ambitions of a country, this framework demonstrates how an interplay between domestic and international strategic logics at specific historical moments influence state behaviour towards conflict-generated migration. The SSC framework is developed inductively using evidence from India, a democracy in the Global South that hosts conflict-evading migrants from many neighbouring countries.

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Introduction

Why does state responses to conflict-generated migration vary across space and time? Some states are more open to migrants whereas others are not (Salehyan and Rosenblum 2008; Boucher and Gest 2018). Similarly, one state may be more accepting of some migrants than others, or it may be more accepting of migrants in general at one point in time than at a different point in time.² There is a large and growing literature that helpfully addresses aspects of this question. Despite a bias in this literature around cases from the Global North, there is an increase in studies examining state decision-making on conflict-generated migration in the Global South (Betts 2009; Tsourapas, 2017; Klotz 2013). This is not surprising as four out of the top-five host nations in 2021 are in the Global South (UNHCR 2021). These studies identify the role of domestic and international factors that inform state responses towards conflict-generated migration Weiner 1995; Rudolph 2003; Jacobsen 1996; Rudolph 2006; Posen 1996; Adamson 2006; Teitelbaum 1984; van Selm & Guild 2005).

Building on this literature the article offers a new conceptual typology developed by the author that illustrates how the interaction between domestic political and international strategic priorities influence state responses towards conflict-induced migration. It does so inductively by using evidence from India. A non-Western democracy that houses migrants from seven different countries, has responded differently in each case, and has not signed international refugee conventions, India's response to conflict-generated migration remains surprisingly under-studied. Bridging insights from literatures on migration and international security, the article argues that states have incentives to either accommodate, tolerate, or repatriate migrants displaced due to conflicts (Weiner 1995, 199-216). To understand why and when they adopt a particular policy approach, it is critical to understand the 'situational strategic context' (SSC) in which the decision is made. Combinations of international strategic and domestic political priority of different migration crises determine the SSC for a host state.

The article assumes that presence of third parties such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), has limited influence in determining a state's response towards a crisis (Hyndman 2000; Betts 2009, 1-17). This is because the operational scope of such organizations is determined by the host state and is linked to the latter's international relations and ambitions (Loescher 2001).³ It also assumes that states, whether in the Global North or the Global South, despite differing historical and sociological contexts and regime-types, and regardless of whether they are signatory to international refugee conventions, respond to migration crises in keeping with their changing domestic politics and international strategic interests (Aaron and Castillo 2020). This allows scope for testing the proposed framework across regime-types despite

² Terms forced migration, forced displacement, and refugee/migrant inflows/outflows are used inter-changeably. On distinction between refugees and migrants see (Mourad and Norman 2019)

³ The UNHCR can help a state implement policies and facilitate transition to citizenship or allow the migrants to stay temporarily, even indefinitely.

its inductive development using the case of India. This article, then, seeks to go beyond filling a gap in the literature, and advance a globally important research agenda by offering a compelling explanation for why states' response to conflict-generated migration varies over time and space.

Migration has become a major domestic and foreign policy issue worldwide. Since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, there has been a hike in forcibly displaced people, with the total figure standing at 82.4 million in 2020 (UNHCR 2021).⁴ Of those displaced, nearly 86% are hosted by developing countries (UNHCR 2021). If economic deprivation as a causal factor is included, this figure is likely to increase substantially. Feeding into a global wave of nationalist backlash, migration has become central to debates surrounding the seeming collapse of the so-called liberal order (Ikenberry 2017; Porter 2018). To develop this explanatory framework, the next section outlines arguments in existing literature that explain state responses to migrant flows. The section thereafter delves into the situational sources of a state's response to conflict-generated migration. The fourth section introduces a novel small-N dataset on India's response to such migration and outlines the research design and scope conditions of this framework (including an enclosed supplemental appendix). The fifth section analyses evidence from four different migration crises to which independent India responded differently. This is followed by a sixth section that highlights the key takeaways from the empirical case studies. The conclusion reflects on how this framework can be tested, developed further, and its alignment with recent emerging scholarship on state responses to conflict-generated migration.

Explaining State Response to Conflict Generated Migration

Subject to structural inequities of the international system, regional geopolitical realities, and domestic politics, the issue of forced migration is deeply linked to identity, power, sovereignty, and security (Loescher 1992). Within this context, the first dominant line of inquiry in existing literature places migration at the centre of analysis within a system of states. It explains how the (geo)politics of migration affects state policies (Steele 2009; Chimni 2009; Steele 2011; Salehyan and Rosenblum 2008). It identifies 'internal stability and international security' as essential determinants of migration policies (Weiner, 1992, 94-5). Once migrants who are viewed as threats are identified, the policy response to a mass migrant influx is guided by the host state's control over its entry points, absorption capacity, relations with the sending state, support, or lack of thereof from international regimes and institutions, and moral considerations given the expected plight of migrants (Weiner 1995). The final policy output may not be a solution contributing towards a 'rationally evolved refugee

⁴ Nearly 68% of these refugees originated from under-developed and/or conflict-ridden countries such as Syria (6.7 million), Afghanistan (2.6 million), South Sudan (2.2 million), Myanmar (1.1 million), Venezuela (4.00 million). Of the total, 39% are hosted in Turkey (3.7 million), Colombia (1.7 million), Pakistan (1.4 million), Uganda (1.4 million), and Germany (1.2 million). (UNHCR 2021)

policy’ (Jacobsen 1996, 655-78).⁵ It depends, according to some scholars, not just on domestic and international political pressures, and the perception of the situation by the host state, but also on factors such as bureaucratic politics, policy inertia, and other unknown factors that can only be ‘teased out at the empirical level’ (Ibid, 655).

In security studies, concepts of deterrence and compellence help laying out the types of military options host states must stem ‘refugee disasters’ (punishment, safe-zones, safe-havens, enforced truce, and offensive war) (Posen 1996, 72-111). It is argued that the “threat or use of force for humanitarian purposes is as much an act of strategy as is the threat or use of force to achieve geostrategic goals” (Ibid, 79). What such strategic goal(s) may be is left unsaid. An inevitable byproduct of such analytical focus on (especially forced/illegal) migration is the quest to understand the securitisation of this issue (Waeber et al. 1993; Doty 1998/9). Questions such as when, why, and how certain states securitize migration, and whether this is an ethical, optimal, or viable response, dominates scholarship (Ibrahim 2005; Borbeau 2011; Tsoukala 2011, 179-200). The assumption remains that forced displacement is a problem that requires solving, either by an individual state or a group of states, with or without support of the UNHCR.⁶ The 9/11 attacks gave a fillip to these debates, as even voluntary migration came to be viewed from a security-centric lens.

Over the last decade, new lines of inquiry have highlighted how migration is used as a strategic tool by home and host states and rejected the idea of a single dominant factor shaping state responses to conflict-generated migration (Adamson & Tsourapas 2018; Greenhill 2010; Boucher and Gest 2018; Cook-Martin and FitzGerald 2010; de Haas et al. 2019; de Haas, Natter and Vezzoli 2018). Building on the observation that “both sending and receiving countries have employed mass migration movements as tools of their foreign policies”, this literature underlines the opportunity quotient of migration (Teitelbaum 1984, 437). It identifies mass migration as a widely deployed but largely unrecognized tool of coercion and shows that instead of being passive recipients of migrants, states can intentionally create, manipulate, and exploit the so-called ‘weapons of mass migration’ to serve national interests (Greenhill 2010). Recent studies further broaden the conceptual boundaries of such ‘migration diplomacy’ (Adamson & Tsourapas 2018; Tsourapas 2017, Tsourapas 2018). Drawing on realist approaches, it identifies “how the interests and power of state actors are affected by their position in migration systems, namely the extent to which they are migration-sending, migration-receiving, or transit-states” (Adamson & Tsourapas 2018). State responses to migration in the Middle East and Latin America complement these lines of inquiry to better understand how states in non-Western contexts address this issue (Aaron and Castillo 2020; Tsourapas 2015; Tsourapas 2017). This literature explains why many states either refuse to sign international conventions, or disregard international treaty obligations when faced with migrant

⁵ This literature was accompanied by liberal interventionist arguments proposing armed intervention as an ethical policy response to refugee crises: (Hoffman, 1981; Dowty & Loescher 1996)

⁶ For a historical overview of how (mostly Western) states shifted their policy from resettlement to repatriation during and after the Cold War see (Toft 2007)

inflows. But it does not offer a historically sensitive framework that weaves together the international and domestic logics shaping policy responses to mass migration flows (Kleist 2017).

This article develops upon these valuable studies to show how domestic and international aspects interact to generate different SSCs that favour accommodation, toleration, or repatriation of migrants.

Situational Sources of State Response to Conflict Generated Migration

Two critical, if somewhat obvious, variables interact to generate specific situational strategic contexts that shape a state's response to conflict-generated migration: the issue's domestic political priority, and its international strategic priority. These factors work in tandem to shape state responses to cross-border migration (Tsourapas 2015; Hollifield 2012). Even if domestically important, decision-making on an international migration crisis push governments to balance domestic interests and international relations. Similarly, assuming that the number of incoming migrants is not inconsequential i.e., it is mass migration, the migrants may be ill-suited to the sociocultural mores of the host society and difficult to integrate. Or they may have strong linkages and familiarity with the host society and be easy to integrate. At times, they may not be welcome by certain sections of the host society but integrated nonetheless for strategic reasons. Differing state capacities further complicate this question of integration. Even if the refugees are easy to integrate, the host state may not have the capacity to support them on a sustained basis, or the host society may not accept them due to intra-community politics.⁷

Domestic Political Priority

The domestic political priority of a conflict-generated migrant crisis varies across time and place. It is informed by three conditions: *party ideology*, *centre-state relations*, and the host state's *absorption capacity*. Of these three, party ideology and state absorption capacity are more important (i.e., *sufficient* conditions) in shaping policy responses, in comparison with *centre-state relations* (which is a *necessary* condition) (George & Bennett 2005, 189-92). If the ruling political party views migrants with aversion, or if the host state's absorption capacities are low, then the domestic political priority of the issue will be high. This is because parties ideologically opposed to the migrants are unlikely to let them enter and are likely to whip up public sentiment against the migrants for domestic political gains. In the case of limited or low state absorption capacities, the impact of mass migration would risk altering domestic politics of a state as it fails to manage

⁷ These independent variables require certain conditions to be met to be politically important and determine policy. This methodological aspect draws on 'the congruence method' that means a conceptual framework "posits a relation between variance in the independent variable and variance in the dependent variable". A deductive approach, it allows space for inductive reasoning and "take the form of empirical generalizations" (George & Bennett 2005, 181-204).

pressures generated by the migrants. In contrast, if the ruling party is welcoming of migrants, and the state has capacity to absorb them, then the domestic political priority of the issue is likely to be low.⁸

Centre-state relations may or may not be in simultaneous play with the abovementioned two conditions to determine the domestic political priority of a case. This is because while centre-state relations can evolve depending on changing situational realities, a state's overall absorption capacity is unlikely to change radically in a short period. The magnitude of a crisis, its consequences on societal well-being (connected to state capacity), and the social composition of the migrants are critical for *any* government to consider regardless of centre-state political dynamics. The following paragraphs unpack these three conditions.

The first condition is the *ideological tenets* of the ruling party. The government could be accommodative of or opposed to migrants for ideological reasons. Often reflecting diversity of public opinion, variance in political outlooks is linked to the underlying economic structures and social make of a country (Poulantzas 1968). Moreover, the state of democracy itself can vary, and the nationalism a state espouses could be civic or ethnic in nature (Lecours 2000, 153-66; Brubaker 1999, 55-72). The ideological mooring of the ruling political party is important in democracies as it affects their electoral strategies. If one assumes that elections are free and fair, and the state is multicultural even with evident majorities, then the electoral strategies become important in shaping a state's response to migration crises.

The electoral strategy could be inclusive or divisive. The ruling *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) in India, for instance, adopts a complicated exclusionary electoral strategy especially in relation to Muslims during state and national elections (Jha 2017). In Germany, the far-right party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) gained electoral salience while playing up incidents of violence that involved refugees (but had little to do with cultural differences as such) (Mounk 2019). Critical of Chancellor Angela Merkel's decision to allow over a million Syrian refugees into Germany, AfD shaped the political agenda around the refugee crisis. Though AfD failed to unseat Merkel during the 2017 federal elections, it generated enough pressure to make Merkel step-down as leader of the *Christian Democratic Union of Germany* and announce her intention to not stand for Chancellorship in 2021 (BBC 2018a). Soon after, Germany halted entry of more refugees, and repatriated some (Traub 2017). Similarly, the Rohingya crisis was exploited by Hindu right-wing groups in India to strengthen the BJP's electoral plank (Sofi 2018).

The second aspect is *centre-state relations*. This holds forth in the case of federal republics but is equally relevant for non-federal multinational states. There can be political, legal, and constitutional divergences between how a central government view and reacts to migrants with that of the state/provincial government(s).

⁸ If the refugees are from a particular religious group that the host society is unwelcoming of, then the issue may feed into a divisive politics. Even a secular and accommodative government will need to calculate the political pushback in this case, put a cap on refugee number, and carefully decide the locale where they can be rehabilitated, if at all.

Despite Merkel's decision to accommodate Syrian refugees, reaction in states differed radically. In Chemnitz, a city in Saxony, the issue was deeply polarizing, whereas in Wiesbaden, a city in Hesse, despite AfD attempts, refugees were welcomed (Mounk 2019). In India, concerns surrounding 'illegal' migration from Bangladesh and the prospect of mass inflow of Rohingya is huge in the northeastern states (Saikia et al. 2016; BBC 2018c). Even the relatively small Chakma-Hajong communities from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh, rehabilitated in Arunachal Pradesh, attracted local antipathy that led state political parties to (unsuccessfully) pressure the central government into relocating or repatriating them (Sammadar 2003, 249-80). In both India and Germany, the central government reserves the right to decide how to react to migrants, but their power-balance with states is important.

The third condition is the host state's *absorption capacity*. A state's ability to absorb refugees varies over time and is linked to the broader concept of 'state capacity' (Acemoglu & Robinson 2013). In addition to structural aspects such as availability of land and infrastructure, emergency provisions of food, housing, and medical care, the strength of public institutions is important. Recent research shows that only 8 out of 102 'historically developing' states were able to develop 'high capacity' governments (Andrews et al. 2017, 1-9). This means that the state can provide for sustained economic well-being of its citizens and, if one stretches the definition, enjoys a healthy social contract wherein the citizens willingly pay taxes and obey laws 'without expensive enforcement' (Crabtree 2018). In context of providing for refugees, this definition is different from the contention that a state's economic capacities and social receptiveness compose its capacity quotient (Jacobsen 1996, 666-7). Rather, it means that the host state has a strong and independent judiciary that can protect the rights of refugees according to the constitution of the land (regardless of whether the state is signatory to international treaties). It has strong financial institutions and favourable economic environment to absorb the new labour force without incurring heavy economic disruptions, and bureaucratic and infrastructural support to facilitate social integration of the refugees. The state must have sufficient policing and intelligence capacities to prevent the militarisation of refugees, and diplomatic capabilities to recruit international support to address a refugee crisis (Lischer 2008, 107-9).

It is unlikely for any state to be able to deliver on all these aspects on a sustained basis. Even if it has adequate measures and resources to support the inflow of refugees, there is no guarantee that the society will readily accept migrants. It is equally possible that a government opposed to accommodating migrants underplays state capacity to justify restrictive policies. For this article, high absorption capacity implies that the host state can cater to the immediate humanitarian requirements of the migrants and integrate them socioeconomically in the long term. This does not mean there will be no pushback against such a process. Similarly, low absorption capacity means that the state does not have resources to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe by catering to the basic refugee requirements. Public backlash against refugees in such

circumstances is likely to put pressure but is not a defining characteristic of state capacities. Such capacities could differ across geography as well.

Differential in state absorption capacity brings in the role of *third parties* such as the UNHCR. Invested in safeguarding the interests of migrants as well as home and host states, the UNHCR offers material support to host states to better integrate migrants (UNHCR 2021). The presence of UNHCR can play a supportive role for host states with low absorption capacity but the necessary political will to act. The complicating aspect here remains the relationship between the UNHCR and the host state, especially if the state is not a signatory to international refugee treaties or seeks to politically manipulate the refugee crises. Despite UNHCR's vision of governments as 'partners', its operational autonomy and institutional agenda on the ground is limited by the host state's interests (UNHCR(a)). If the two are unaligned, then state interests supersede UNHCR's requirements given the primacy of the sovereign state in the international system (Loescher 2001).

Based on a combination of the above-mentioned conditions, and given the context specifics, the domestic political priority of a refugee crises could be *high* or *low* at different points in time. Though not a binary metric, high domestic political priority implies that the central government is likely to factor-in domestic political sensitivities in decision-making. Low domestic political priority means that the issue may be politically relevant but is not electorally potent (or is non-threatening for authoritarian leaders). In such situations the government has more space to decide upon a policy response of choice without necessarily incurring political costs.

International Strategic Priority

The international strategic priority of migrant crises (for the state) also varies and is determined by three conditions: host state's *global power aspirations*, relations between the *host and home state*, and *migrant composition*. Amongst these conditions, migrant composition and relations between the host and home states are more important (*sufficient*) in determining whether international strategic priority of an issue is low or high which in turn enables a hostile or welcoming environment. Unlike global power aspirations, migrant composition resonates deeply with domestic politics of the host state and has the potential to create societal friction. Similarly, relations between home and host state are of immediate strategic relevance and can limit or enhance the host state's global rise. This is because the likelihood of home and host states being immediate neighbours is high (according to the UNHCR (2021) 73% of all refugees are hosted in neighbouring countries). Not a binary construct, high international strategic priority implies (a) that the host government will pay more attention when formulating a policy towards the crisis, and not leave it up to regular bureaucratic channels to deal with it; (b) will not easily succumb to domestic pressures of accommodating or repatriating migrants without considering its international consequences; (c) calculate the security costs and benefits associated with the refugee community especially if it has a stake in the conflict. In contrast, low international strategic priority

implies that despite the political relevance of the crisis, the host state's decision to either accommodate, tolerate, or repatriate refugees is unlikely to change its normative or material power quotient, or substantially influence its bilateral relations with the home state. The following paragraphs unpack these conditions in detail.

The first condition is the host state's *global power aspirations*. Highly complex in its own right, this aspect plays a role in influencing a state's response to conflict-generated migration. If 'states have the capacity to design and implement effective policies that harness the power of migration, international migration flows can enhance, rather than detract from or compromise, state power' (Adamson 2006, 185). Migrants can enhance the host state's power in the economic, military, and diplomatic realm. If the host state has a shortage of skilled or unskilled labour, migrant inflow may prove to be a strategic windfall (Ibid). This calculation played a role in Merkel's decision to allow Syrian refugees (Economist 2016). From a security and diplomatic perspective, migrants can prove to be excellent intelligence assets, humanitarian ambassadors, and be recruited into the military. This is important if the host state has a stake in the conflict that led to refugee outflow in the first place, and if its relations with the home state are strained. For India, this was visible in the case of Tibetan refugees who are entrenched in India's military institutions and have played a pivotal role since the 1971 India-Pakistan War (Swami 2011).

The second condition is *relationship between the host and the home state* (Jacobsen 1996, 661-6). This could range from being cooperative, competitive, or conflictual. If the relationship is competitive or conflictual, then, 'sending and receiving countries can manipulate refugee flows to embarrass or pressure each other' (Ibid). Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon's responses to the Syrian migrant crisis are indicative of this feature. Jordan and Lebanon engaged in a 'back-scratching strategy based on bargains, while Turkey deployed a blackmailing strategy based on threats' (Tsourapas 2019). In 2004, Libya coerced the EU into removing sanctions against Tripoli by threatening to open the floodgates of migration from North Africa to Europe (Greenhill 2010, 6-8). Recently, Pakistan threatened to repatriate millions of Afghan refugees to pressurize Kabul into clamping down on the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan sanctuaries on Afghan soil (Saifullah & Riaz 2018). The West encouraged refugees from the communist to the 'free world' and routinely tapped into these communities for intelligence recruits. A telling example of this was the CIA's use of Cuban émigrés to launch a failed coup attempt against Fidel Castro in the April 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion (Jones 2010, 45-94).

Conversely, if bilateral relations between the host and home state are cooperative or aspirational, then the host state is likely to address the sending country's interests and sensitivities. In 2017-18, India not only halted the influx of Rohingya, but also repatriated seven Rohingya men despite threat to their lives in Myanmar (Boben & Siddiqui 2018). This issue becomes important if the host state is not a signatory to international refugee conventions. Then, the nature of inter-state relationship becomes pivotal in determining whether the migrant crisis is of high or low international strategic priority. If the host state has stakes in the conflict that generated the crisis, then the strategic priority of the issue will be high (Weiner 1996). This was the case during

the 1971 India-Pakistan war where the magnitude of migrants entering India pushed it to war. In cases where the host and home states ‘share’ a conflict, the risk of migrant manipulation and radicalization remains equally high – ensuring high priority of the crisis both from a national security and international relations perspective (Lischer 2008).

The third condition is *migrant composition*. Linked to domestic politics as well, the number of migrants, their demographic composition, and prior linkages to host society shapes the SSC of a state’s response. The sociopolitical composition of migrants lies at the heart of what James Rosenau terms the “domestic-foreign” frontier of governance (Rosenau 1997, 3-24). There is rich literature on how diaspora politics and inter-state ethnic linkages shape the foreign and security policies of home and host states (King & Melvin 1999). If the number of migrants is substantial and cannot be dealt using regular bureaucratic, diplomatic, and policing channels, then identity politics becomes influential. These could range from ethnic, kinship, religious, and racial to linguistic links. For example, it was relatively easy for Sri Lankan Tamil migrants to become socially integrated in Tamil Nadu. Rather than attributing high analytical value on cultural similarities or dissimilarities, this article focuses on the history of relations between the incoming group and the host society, as well as the cultural meaning attached to the idea of a migrant (Jacobsen 1996, 668-72).

After all, cultural similarities or kinship networks do not guarantee a sustained welcome if migrants are perceived to be a threat by host society. Such intra-community politics and hierarchies can either *spoil* or *enable* the implementation of the host government’s policy response. What is critical, then, is how the host society views incoming migrants at the moment when the host state faces the challenge to formulate a policy response. They could be welcomed for humanitarian reasons or met with hostility. Though subject to change, existing perceptions and beliefs about migrants shape the environment for the host state’s leadership during which a policy response requires formulation. None of this means that the host government will act solely based on these evolving community reactions. Costa Rica refused to entertain public backlash against Nicaraguan migrants during 1980-89 because of its relationship with Nicaragua, and the US. But it just about tolerated Salvadorian migrants in response to public backlash and national security concerns (Basok 1990, 743-5).

Explaining Variance in India’s Response to Conflict Generated Migration

This section introduces a novel small-N dataset of thirteen cases of conflict-generated migration to which India responded differently (see Table 1). An inductive exercise, the section uses empirical evidence from these cases to identify four different types of situational strategic contexts that favour accommodation, toleration, repatriation, each of which can be undertaken with or without UNHCR’s support.

An *accommodative* response implies that the host state is likely to protect and support displaced persons and offer them the option of citizenship or third-country resettlement with or without UNHCR support. *Toleration* of conflict-generated migrants means the host state is unwilling to offer long-term asylum but is

unable to repatriate (Norman 2019). If it is not a signatory to international treaties, then it can decide whether to seek UNHCR support. The host state may create a case-specific refugee-card regime wherein migrants are allowed to stay for a finite period but must renew their refugee-cards. Such an arrangement allows the host state to maintain control and utilise migrants as diplomatic cards. Indefinite toleration can change to repatriation or accommodation in changed circumstances and affords the host state time and space to decide its favoured course of action. It may also slide into indecision and negligence wherein the renewal of refugee cards becomes an unending ritual. As for the third response favouring *repatriation*: this could be done voluntarily or forcibly, and the state may introduce security measures to prevent the migrants from entering.

To be clear, these terms don't indicate precise strategies a state adopts when facing crises. They demonstrate how different SSCs incentivise states to act in different ways towards incoming migrants. *How* they accommodate, repatriate, or tolerate conflict-generated migrants (barring their engagement/non-engagement with the UNHCR in doing so) is beyond the scope of this article.

Scope Conditions

The SSC framework is limited in scope. It offers a typology of host state response at the moment of the conflict-generated migrant's arrival i.e., when the crisis is pressing enough for the central government to formulate a policy response, however dynamic this process itself may be. As is often the case, migrants do not always come in a single wave. The inflow can begin as a small stream and then increase in numbers or occur in temporal bursts. Without defining a set number of days, weeks, or months the SSC focuses on evident policy responses of the host state to a fresh inflow of migrants. How long the formulation of such a response takes (even if it is a decision to do nothing) is inconsequential analytically. The framework doesn't predict changes in policy responses in the long term either. Migrants that are initially welcomed may eventually come to be viewed with disdain or hostility (and vice versa) if there is a change in any of the affecting structural variables. The framework does not delve into the success or failure of policies adopted by host governments.

State response to voluntary legal migration such as labour movement, general asylum policies of different governments, tourism, business, or education and medical travel are also beyond the framework's purview – like Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and those fleeing economic deprivation. If the presence of IDPs shapes host state responses to migrant inflows, then that is considered as a domestic political variable. As for the interpretation of the term 'forced', the framework restricts itself to violent conflicts only.⁹ In terms of applicability, the framework is suitable to study responses of states regardless of regime-type i.e., along the

⁹ To expand the causal category to any type of forced migration will make the analytical scope of this article unmanageable. Even the term refugee is used liberally but without its legal undertones. This is because the term is malleable itself. A refugee fleeing persecution at one moment could become an economic migrant at another moment (and vice versa) (Adamson 2006, 168-81; Mourad & Norman 2019)

democratic-authoritarian spectrum. But this would require further testing.¹⁰ But, given that the framework is inductively developed using evidence from a non-Western democracy that is non-signatory to the 1951 convention and 1967 protocol, it is likely to offer better estimates of state responses for similar contexts.

Research Design

Table 1 lists thirteen cases of conflict-generated migration and India's responses thereto. Focus on a single country's responses to different migrant crises allows to hold several structural variables constant. It helps preventing the risk of tautology by highlighting mis-predictions and enabling scope for falsifiability. In Table 1, then, the timing category indicates the period wherein most migrants arrived in India and compelled New Delhi to decide on its preferred policy course. The number of migrants crossing within this period are approximates given the methodological difficulty to gauge exact numbers. These numbers are based on multiple sources listed in the supplemental appendix, and the Determinants of International Migration (DEMIG) database. The centre and state categories list the governments in power at both levels at the time of the crisis. This allows better understanding of the political ideology and/or preference of the ruling party on the issue of migration and to assess whether the centre and state governments were on the same page on the listed migration crises. It is also possible that the central and state governments have different preferences on the issue despite being led by leaders belonging to the same political party. These aspects are unpacked in the case-study section and help assess whether the issue is high or low priority domestically. The UNHCR category is straightforward as it lists whether India sought UNHCR support or not to address the listed crisis.

The last three coding categories of international strategic priority, domestic political priority, and the decision taken by New Delhi are analytically complex. As discussed in the previous section, a migrant crisis is of high domestic political priority if it has widespread public resonance, goes against the ideological tenets of the ruling dispensation, and/or risks overwhelming the state absorption capacity. It is of low domestic political priority if the numbers are small, the ruling dispensation is welcoming of migrants, and has the capacity to absorb them. Similarly, high international strategic priority means that the issue holds the potential to impact bilateral relations between host and home states, impact the security landscape of the region in question, and reshape the international standing and global aspirations of the host state. In such a situation, the host would not leave decision-making on migrant crises just to domestic political factors. Low international strategic priority, conversely, offers more space to the host state to decide whether to accommodate, tolerate, or repatriate migrants

¹⁰ There is a growing research agenda around autocracies' use of migration, refugee, and diaspora policies in ways that differentiate them from liberal democracies. Natter offers an interesting two-dimensional classification of immigration policies i.e., 'issue-specific' and 'regime-specific' and explains the 'illiberal paradox' wherein autocratic states may enact liberal immigration policies (Natter 2018).

(with or without UNHCR support) without worrying about a negative or positive overhaul in its international relations.

Why India?

There are various aspects that make the case of India compelling. It is a non-Western federal democratic republic that faced multiple conflict-generated migration crises since 1947 and reacted differently to almost each of them, thereby offering a rich and rigorous comparative context. Though its institutional capacities have varied over time, it has had an independent judiciary, a small but effective diplomatic corps, sizeable security apparatus, and growing economic capacities. Importantly, it witnessed indiscriminate violence at the time of its inception when India and Pakistan exchanged populations during partition. This experience impacted India's definition of citizens, migrants, and refugees (Roy 2013). At odds with the Cold War driven definition of a refugee being a person escaping the Communist bloc, India refused to sign the 1951 convention and 1967 protocol out of principled disagreement (Oberoi 2006, 11-43). What makes India a relevant case study for SSC is its emphasis on dealing with migrant crises on a *bilateral* level with the home state. Such a stand puts any regional migration crisis at the heart of India's domestic politics and international relations and allows India space to manipulate such issues.

As for the selection of cases from within India, the article lists thirteen conflict-generated migration crises that India faced *after* 1947 (Table 1). This temporal qualification is critical as it means that migration during partition is not included in the study. There are two reasons for this. One, the population exchange was considered an inevitable consequence of partition whether the leadership of the two countries foresaw violence (Roy 2013). These displaced communities were considered citizens, and repatriation or even temporary toleration was not an option. Acceptance of partition migrants raised the question whether those displaced were truly refugees or not (Oberoi 2006, 45-8). According to Indian and Pakistani leaders, these people were refugees who required international protection. For most developed countries grappling with the issue of how to define a refugee, the South Asian case was unconvincing. If those being displaced by partition were being accepted as citizens, then they were not refugees. Only those escaping communist dictatorship to live in the 'free world' were considered worthy of refugee status (Ibid).

Two, such differing viewpoints created serious contention at the 1951 Geneva Convention where Indian representatives argued for a broader definition that includes anyone who is displaced for reasons beyond their control and could no longer live in their country (Ibid 22-8). India's disillusionment with Cold War realpolitik on this issue was visible in foreign secretary R K Nehru's statement to the UNHCR's Far East representative in 1953: 'You help refugees from the so-called non-free world into the free world. We do not recognize such a

distinction' (Ibid 26).¹¹ In this context, partition of the subcontinent becomes important in a structural sense i.e., it not only shaped the political and moral compass of independent India's response to conflict-generated migration, but also distanced it from international refugee regimes.

¹¹ Oberoi interviewed former Indian foreign secretary J N Dixit in 2000 on this subject, he said, '... artificial definitions are applied, because strictly legal criteria are applied which have nothing to do with our way of life, because most UN interventions are politically motivated'. p. 34

Crisis	Timing	Number	Centre	State	UNHCR	International Strategic Priority***	Domestic Political Priority***	Decision
East Pakistan	1950	~1 million	Congress	Congress (West Bengal, Assam)	No	High (HHR, MC)	High (SAC)	Tolerate
*East Pakistan/ Bangladesh	1971	~10 million	Congress	President's Rule (West Bengal), Congress (Assam, Tripura)	No	High (HHR, MC)	High (SAC)	Tolerate
*Sri Lankan Tamils	1983-87	~134,000	Congress	AIADMK (Tamil Nadu)	No	High (HHR, MC)	High (C-SR)	Tolerate
*Sri Lankan Tamils	2006	~22,000	Congress	AIADMK, DMK (Tamil Nadu)	No	High (HHR, MC)	High (C-SR)	Tolerate
*Tibetans	1959-60	~80,000	Congress	Congress (Assam), Union Territory (Himachal Pradesh)	No	High (HHR, MC)	Low (PI, SAC)	Tolerate
Afghans	1980-87	~10,000	Congress	Union Territory (Delhi), CPIM (West Bengal)	Yes	High (HHR, GPA)	Low (PI, SAC)	Tolerate
Burmese (Bamar, Kachin, Chin)	1988-90	~70,000	Congress, Janata Dal	MNF (Mizoram), Congress (Manipur)	Yes	High (HHR)	Low (PI, SAC)	Tolerate
Myanmar (Chin)	2018, 2021	~16,000	Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	MNF (Mizoram), BJP (Manipur)	**NA	High (HHR)	Low (C-SR, SAC)	Tolerate
Myanmar (Rohingya)	2017-20	~40,000	BJP	BJP (Manipur, Assam), Congress, AAP (Delhi), TRS (Telangana), Governor's Rule/PDP (Jammu & Kashmir)	No	Low (HHR, MC)	High (PI)	Repatriate

Burmese Indians	1950s-60s	~300,000	Congress	Not applicable	No	Low (MC)	Low (PI, SAC)	Accommodate
Sri Lankan Indians	1949-54	NA	Congress	Congress (Tamil Nadu)	No	Low (MC)	Low (PI, SAC)	Accommodate
Ugandan Indians	1972	~80,000	Congress	Not applicable	No	Low (MC)	Low (PI, SAC)	Accommodate
Bangladesh (Chakma-Hajong)	1975-78	~20,000	Congress, Janata Party	Congress, CPIM (Tripura), Janata Party (Arunachal Pradesh)	No	Low (HHR)	Low (PI, SAC)	Tolerate

Table 1. Indian Responses to Conflict Generated Migration (see supplemental appendix for more details/full forms)

*Those cases that are listed in the Determinants of International Migration (DEMIG) database

**The situation is evolving, and it is too early to say whether India will seek UNHCR support or not

***The abbreviations denote home-and-host-state relations (HHR), migrant composition (MC), global power aspirations (GPA), party ideology (PI), center-state relations (C-SR), and state absorption capacity (SAC). They indicate which condition was crucial in determining the domestic political and international strategic priorities of the listed crises.

Comparative Cases from India

This section empirically unpacks four types of responses that are visible from Table 1. Toleration with or without UNHCR support, repatriation without UNHCR support, and accommodation without UNHCR support (Table 2). It shows that when Indian policymakers are determined to either repatriate or accommodate migrants, they have the capacity to do so unilaterally without seeking help for the UNHCR. But, when India is forced into tolerating the presence of migrants for whatever reason, it has tried to exploit availability of the UNHCR on a selective basis.

Instead of examining all thirteen cases, this section delves into a limited number of cases per situational strategic context i.e., the Tibetan migrants in 1959 (toleration with UNHCR), the Sri Lankan Tamils case (1983-87) and 1971 creation of Bangladesh (toleration without UNHCR), the Rohingya crisis 2012-19 (repatriation without UNHCR), and the combined case of expelled Indian diaspora from Burma, Sri Lanka, and Uganda (accommodation without UNHCR). These cases are analytically compelling for three reasons. One, apart from demonstrating diversity of India's response to conflict-generated migrants from different contexts, these cases offer a contrasting picture of how centre and state governments viewed these crises. Two, they offer a historically rich, longitudinal comparative picture of India's evolving response to conflict-generated migration. Three, the composition of migrants (in terms of their ethnic background and numbers) also varies in each case. Such diversity in both the migration and India's responses makes them valuable for theory-testing purposes.

	High International Strategic Priority	Low International Strategic Priority
High Domestic Political Priority	Toleration without UNHCR support	Repatriation without UNHCR support
Low Domestic Political Priority	Toleration with UNHCR support	Accommodation without UNHCR support

Table 2. Situational Strategic Contexts & State Response to Conflict-Generated Migration

High International Strategic Priority, Low Domestic Political Priority (Tibet/China)

Of the thirteen conflict-generated migration crises that India faced after 1947, four are within the category of low domestic political and high international strategic priority. India's response in this situational strategic context is to tolerate migrants with a propensity to seek UNHCR support. India's response to Tibetan migrants fleeing China is a prime example, and similar in its logic to how India responded to conflict-generated migrants from Burma/Myanmar and Afghanistan during the 1980s. Here, we examine the conditions that shaped India's policy on this crisis and the how this case fits the listed situational strategic context.

India opted for a policy of tolerance vis-à-vis the Tibetans when they began arriving in 1959. Driven by its desire to support oppressed minorities, an idea that was central to India's democratic credentials enshrined in the constitution and its postcolonial nation-building project, New Delhi adopted a relatively open approach towards the Tibetans migrants. This was buttressed by the fact that the migrants were Buddhists and had strong sociocultural linkages with India both before and during the colonial period. In this context, when the Communist Party of China cracked down in 1959, the goodwill that the Tibetans enjoyed in India made it easy for the Congress-led government to tolerate their presence on an indefinite basis (Ibid 77-9; Sammadar 2003, 281-320). The Dalai Lama's entry cemented this perception.

Why identify this case as being of *low* domestic political priority then? The low domestic political priority of this cases does not mean that the issue was politically irrelevant; far from it. It means that it did not have direct electoral implications that required India's policymakers to reconsider their response, and the numbers could not overwhelm India in terms of its absorption capacity. Though the government was aware of the public sympathy for the cause, there is no evidence that it would cost the Congress electorally had Nehru

decided to reject asylum requests from exiled Tibetans. In fact, the central government allocated land and resources for the Tibetan exiles to settle in the then north Indian Union Territory (governed directly by New Delhi) of Himachal Pradesh (now a full-fledged state) without political pushback.

But this case has *high* international strategic priority for two reasons: one, India's hosting of the Dalai Lama provided Beijing reason to use military force against India in 1962 to unilaterally solve the border dispute; and two, arming of the Tibetans and allowing their government-in-exile to operate from Indian soil gave India a diplomatic/security 'card' against China (Garver 2001, 32-78). Tolerating the Tibetans was a political statement against China that didn't go unnoticed in Beijing. To be sure, in terms of state absorption capacity, India did not have extra resources at hand to support the migrants. But it had the institutional strength to adequately capitalize and exploit existing resources. Just like it had instituted the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation to offer relief to partition refugees in Bengal and Punjab, the government instituted a deputy secretary (Tibetan Refugees) at a newly created Tibetan Refugees Desk within the Ministry of External Affairs which became responsible for their welfare (Oberoi 2006, 90-1).

The existence of this position and desk within the MEA (and not the Ministry of Home Affairs) was a sign that India continued to view Tibetan's presence from a foreign policy lens. It was an assertion of the fact that, in a bid to balance relations with Beijing, India had stopped short of full accommodation of these refugees even if it intended to tolerate their presence indefinitely (Kapoor 2019). In further testimony of its high strategic priority, India accepted UNHCR's support to rehabilitate the Tibetans (Ibid, 92-4). Though such collaboration with the UN did not last long for bureaucratic and political reasons (especially after India's defeat in the 1962 war with China), India's intent of engaging with the international refugee regime on a case-by-case basis was evident. Tibetan migrants were offered land, jobs, and sustenance if not citizenship (Ibid). After 1962, many Tibetan youth were trained in guerilla combat and became an integral part of India's covert military outfit, the Special Frontier Force that operates under the command of India's external intelligence chief till today (Swami 2011).

High International Strategic, High Domestic Political Priority (Sri Lankan Tamils & Bangladesh)

Of the nine other conflict-generated migration crises, four lay within the SSC of high domestic political and high international strategic priority. These were the 1950 East Pakistan, 1971 East Pakistan/Bangladesh migrant crises and the forced migration of Sri Lankan Tamils after the 1983 anti-Tamil riots, and in 2006. Given the social linkages of these communities with those residing in India's border states of West Bengal, Tripura, Assam, and Tamil Nadu, and their substantial numbers, the crises had high domestic political priority. Equally, any reaction from India to settle these crises at the source of the problem was bound to have consequences on its bilateral relationships with Pakistan and Sri Lanka – and repercussions on the strategic geography of the region. Unlike partition refugees, the Tibetans, and exiled Indians from Uganda, Sri Lanka, and Burma (different

from Sri Lankan Tamils and Burmese dissidents; see supplemental appendix) wherein India accepted their arrival as a long-term feature, in these cases New Delhi sought eventual repatriation to a safe and secure environment at home.

But, till conditions on the ground stabilized, India was ready to tolerate the presence of these migrants. By late-1960s, for instance, the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation was shut down, and the experience of 1971 propelled a departure in India's political stand on migrants. Whereas India successfully repatriated most East Pakistani refugees in 1951 after the Nehru-Liaquat Pact (Raghavan 2020) and the 1971 war, it continues to tolerate Sri Lankan Tamils till today. The difference in these outcomes is a function of the success of India's strategy to ensure such repatriation. India's military victory against Pakistan in 1971 aided repatriation. But in Sri Lanka India's military intervention (1987-90) failed to alter the political conditions. Despite the Congress-led national government's preference for repatriation, regional parties (especially the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, DMK) in Tamil Nadu pressed for accommodating the migrants thereby forcing India to tolerate their presence. Such differences on the Sri Lankan Tamil issue between New Delhi and Tamil Nadu became a huge political problem in 2009-10 when New Delhi supported Colombo's use of force against Sri Lankan Tamil insurgents.

The case of Sri Lankan Tamils does not fit the theoretical framework neatly. This is because India did eventually seek UNHCR support to facilitate repatriation. Both the UNHCR and the Government of India eventually repatriated almost 100,000 Tamils back to Sri Lanka (DEMIG) by 1995. But this occurred after India's accord with Colombo in 1987, and the military failure of Indian peacekeeping forces in Sri Lanka. Though the framework helps explaining India's response towards the migrant crisis for the 1983-87 period, it fails to account for subsequent developments after India took initial measures to stem the flow of migrants by using military force, and deliberately distancing the UNHCR. Involvement of the UN, during these early years, would have exposed India's covert operations to arm and finance Sri Lankan Tamil rebels who were fighting Colombo.

The 1971 Bangladesh war deeply impacted India's approach towards conflict-generated migration. Having adopted (for most part) an open-door policy towards conflict-generated migrants till then (i.e., accommodative, or tolerant), the shock of 1971 altered India's take on the issue. In early 1971, tensions between East and West Pakistan exploded into a civil war leading to mass repression by the Pakistan army in its eastern wing (Raghavan 2013). Within a span of weeks, nearly ten million refugees crossed over into India, overwhelming the demographic balance and state capacities in West Bengal and other Northeast states, especially Tripura (McGill, 2014). Despite attempts to recruit international political and material support, India's increasing disillusionment with the international community led to a decision to militarily intervene in East Pakistan to ensure safe repatriation of all refugees.

This was a transformative moment. Instead of accepting the migrant inflow as *fait accompli*, India maintained that the crisis was induced by Pakistan's political intransigence and needed reversal. Pakistan's military was targeting political and intellectual elite as well as religious minorities in its more populous eastern wing. India refused to accept the situation as a domestic issue of Pakistan and wanted these migrants to return to safety. Moreover, given the US's support for Pakistan, India viewed the UNHCR with suspicion and restricted the agency's access to the refugee camps. The UNHCR was considered a political tool exploited by big powers for their own agenda (Oberoi 2006, 26). Such restrictions on UNHCR suited India's security establishment once the decision to use military force was reached. It was of high international strategic and domestic political significance. Internationally, it offered India an opportunity to establish itself as a regional power in South Asia; and domestically such intervention (in high demand) promised to strengthen then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's political appeal.

What made this issue particularly important in the domestic context was the massive size of the refugee population. India did not have the capacity to absorb them, either materially or institutionally, both in the short term and the long term. Moreover, sustained presence of migrants promised to complicate the violence prone and ethnically divided northeast. There were concerns that the migrant camps may become recruitment grounds for communist hardliners and exacerbate the Naxalite (Maoist) insurgency that had begun in May 1967 (Murshid 2011, 53-60). Such fear of communists was pervasive in states directly affected by the crises i.e., West Bengal (which saw President's Rule i.e., no elected state government for most of 1971), Assam (Congress-led), and Tripura (Congress-led), as well as the Congress-led central government. By mid-1971, India had decided that the migrants had to return to safety. It responded by covertly training and arming Bangladeshi rebels and initiated a full-scale military invasion in December 1971 (Raghavan 2013, 34-53). The war led to a decisive Indian victory on December 16. Soon after, most, not all, migrants returned voluntarily.

Low international strategic, Low Domestic Political Priority (Indians in Burma, Sri Lanka, & Uganda)

Of the five other conflict-generated migration crises, four lay within the SSC of low domestic political and low international strategic priority. These include the Chakma-Hajong communities fleeing Bangladesh before and after the 1971 war (supplemental appendix), and flight of Indians living in Sri Lanka, Burma, and Uganda. India accommodated these refugees without UNHCR support. From a historical standpoint, it viewed the persecution of Indian communities in Sri Lanka (different from the above-mentioned Sri Lankan Tamils), Burma and Uganda with disdain but took responsibility of their safe return, relief, and rehabilitation. In the case of Burma and Sri Lanka, Indian leadership sympathised with Colombo and Rangoon's narrative that most Indians residing in these countries were remnants of the empire i.e., brought in as plantation workers,

agriculturalists, service-people, and businesspersons by the British (Kozicki 1959, 190-224).¹² In early 1940s, for instance, nearly 50 per cent of Rangoon's population was Indian (Chakravarty 1971, 18-9). Accommodating these people was seen as a decolonising act. That there were xenophobic undertones against Indians in these countries was largely overlooked, even when General Ne Win came to power in 1962 and systematically pushed Indians out of Burma (Bhatia 2016, 89-120). Ugandan dictator Idi Amin used similar rhetoric of colonial exploitation to expel South Asian workers in August 1972. The Indian government, however, refused to accept the line, even though it did little to pressurize Amin into changing his policy (Mehta 2001).

In all these cases, the migrant composition was positive, the domestic political priority of these issues remained low, and there were hardly any consequential political differences between the central and state governments. The public's attention span was limited and generally sympathetic towards the migrants. Even the international strategic priority of these cases was low. India saw little value in escalating the issues with home states and introduced various rehabilitation measures. Limited migrant numbers ensured that resources were available for immediate relief, even though the lack of legal guidelines restricted their movement and opportunities to work. They were resettled in different parts of the country and offered monetary allowances, housing support, and in some cases jobs (GoI 1965).

High Domestic Political Priority, Low International Strategic Priority (Rohingya)

The one case that marks a huge shift in India's response towards conflict-generated migration is the recent Rohingya crisis. Neither did India accept fleeing Rohingya on humanitarian grounds, nor intervened with the government of Myanmar to stop their persecution in Rakhine state. Instead, the BJP-run government preemptively erected barriers, and forcibly repatriated some Rohingya migrants in 2018, despite valid concerns about their safety in Myanmar. Given the international outcry against Myanmar and the limited numbers of Rohingya that entered (or tried entering) India (most Rohingyas are in Bangladesh), one would expect this SSC to be composed of high international priority and low domestic political priority. Paradoxically, however, India viewed the issue as being of low international strategic priority and high domestic political priority. Kiren Rijju, the union minister-of-state for Home Affairs, stated on September 2017, 'I want to tell the international organisations whether the Rohingyas are registered under the United Nations Human Rights Commission or not, they are illegal immigrants in India ... as per law they stand to be deported' (Indian Express 2017).

¹² In 1954 the Nehru-Kotelawala Pact was signed which allowed Sri Lankan Tamils to become Indian citizens if they so wished. In 1964 the Sirimavo-Shastri Treaty was signed wherein India agreed to take 525,000 Sri Lankan Indians and Sri Lanka agreed to settle 300,000. A subsequent treaty between Bandaranaike and Indira Gandhi in 1974 increased India's share to 600,000 and Sri Lanka's share to 375,000 (Weiner 1993, 1738).

India threatened to deport the approximately-40,000 Rohingya (who had entered at various points in time over the last four decades) living across the country (mostly in Jammu & Kashmir, Telangana, and Delhi).¹³ It forcibly repatriated seven Rohingya men despite international concerns about their safety. Given that most Rohingya are Muslims, poverty-ridden, and thus seen as susceptible to radicalisation (also given the creation of and attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army against Myanmar's military) they were portrayed as 'criminals' and/or 'potential terrorists', especially in the Hindu-dominated parts of Jammu and Northeastern states such as Manipur and Assam from where they often enter the country (Shafi 2014). This made the issue domestically important, and it fit with the ruling party's divisive politics. Though people generally support the presence of Rohingya in Jammu, the more organised sections of the Hindu-right decisively shape political opinion on this issue (presence of Rohingyas in Delhi and Hyderabad has not generated local communal anxieties given their limited numbers).

Unsurprisingly, BJP-led states such as Assam, Tripura, and Manipur, issued directives to 'pushback' Rohingyas entering India via land-routes (Singh 2017). Conversely, non-BJP states such as the Aam Aadmi Party-led Delhi, and the Telangana Rashtra Samithi-led Telangana were more tolerant of those Rohingya who are already residing in these states. What makes India's preemptive security measures and forcible repatriation (without UNHCR support) possible is its increasingly, and intendedly, warm ties with Naypyidaw. Despite the global outcry to support the Rohingya on humanitarian grounds, India saw little international strategic sense in accommodating them and risk undermining relations with Myanmar. As Rijiju's statement demonstrated, India did not even see much positive-propaganda value in offering humanitarian support to the Rohingya. Though India signaled Naypyidaw unofficially that the latter's actions in Rakhine state are counterproductive, it did not undertake any coercive measures against the *Tatmadaw*. Instead, it signed an MoU to develop Rakhine state, offered humanitarian aid to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh as part of Operation *Insaniyat*, and tried (unsuccessfully) to negotiate a deal between Dhaka and Naypyidaw to allow phased repatriation of Rohingyas regardless of security concerns (GoI 2017). The endeavour was too little, too late, and had little impact.

Key Takeaways

There are three key takeaways from these empirical case studies and Table 1 that lists India's response to different conflict-generated migrant crises. One, relations with home states and the migrant composition are central in defining each crisis' international strategic priority for New Delhi. India's global power aspirations, though important, played a limited role in select cases such as Afghan migrants during the 1980s, when India

¹³ Many Hindu-nationalist groups, and some members of the government, equate the Rohingya refugees in India as potential 'terrorists' because of their Muslim faith. In secret testimonies to the Supreme Court of India, the Ministry of Home Affairs offered 'evidence' that some Rohingya in India had links with 'terror' organisations (Al Jazeera 2017).

sought to exploit Afghan diaspora for intelligence gathering and security-strategic reasons in relation to Pakistan (Paliwal, 2017, 236-246). For migrants from other neighbouring countries, New Delhi's immediate relations with Colombo, Dhaka, Beijing, Yangon, and Islamabad were more consequential than its broader global power aspirations. These case studies explain why high international strategic priority of a crisis makes the host state tolerate migrants with/without UNHCR support: the international costs or accruing benefits are too important to overlook for domestic political reasons.

Two, in terms of an issue's domestic political priority, party ideology and state absorption capacities are critical in shaping India's response. For most part of India's postcolonial history, its ruling party i.e., the Indian National Congress, was not ideologically opposed to conflict-generated migrants. This does not mean they were willing to host all such displaced persons or were beyond politically manipulating these crises, but their ideological moorings permitted tolerance. When migrant numbers were too huge, as during the 1971 war, and risked overwhelming state absorption capacity, India militarily intervened to secure repatriation of migrants despite initial tolerance. The Sri Lankan Tamils case stands out for being driven by center-state relations. Herein, Tamil Nadu-based regional parties with parliamentary stakes in national Indian politics shaped New Delhi's response towards Colombo and incoming migrants from north Sri Lanka.

Three, forcible repatriation or outright hostility towards conflict-generated migrants, regardless of their numbers, is a relatively new phenomenon in India. It is, for most parts, driven by party ideology i.e., the rise of Hindu nationalism led by the BJP, which has dislocated the Congress' post-independence political hegemony. To be clear, it's not that the Congress is by default more accepting of migrants in comparison to the BJP. But the lurch of India's politics toward the Hindu-right means that New Delhi is less willing to accept Muslim migrants than ever before. This is visible in the religiously partisan Citizenship Amendments Act, CAA (2019) that seeks to protect non-Muslim minorities from persecution in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh (all Muslim-majority countries), but says nothing about persecuted Muslims within these countries.

Such a political shift in India raises two questions: Is India's domestic politics beginning to overshadow its international strategic priorities? Can just a single listed case of the Rohingya migrant crisis that corresponds to high domestic political and low international strategic priorities help draw general conclusions that the SSC has to offer? The answer to the first question is a tentative, and counterintuitive, yes. India's global power aspirations remain high despite the rise of exclusionary Hindu nationalism. But on the question of conflict-generated migration, religious illiberalism implies increased selectivity on migrant composition based on the ideology of the ruling party.

India's failure to support Afghan migrants fleeing the Taliban in August 2021 is a case in point (not listed in Table 1). The CAA-2019 offered India legal provisions to support Afghan Sikh and Hindu communities (which it did) but nothing on how to deal with Afghan Muslim migrants (across ethnic lines) with whom India built comprehensive links over the years (Mitra, 2021). To prevent a total loss of allies who had supported India,

the Ministry of External Affairs established an emergency e-visa regime for Afghans wanting to escape Kabul and enter India *regardless* of their religion. But these measures were undermined by the more powerful and ideologically inclined home ministry, which cancelled even previously issued visas for Afghans (Ibid). Failure to protect its allies stands in contrast with India's desire to project power in its neighbourhood and demonstrates the importance of party ideology in shaping the domestic political priority of a regional migrant crisis. Such an aversion to Afghan Muslims and the repatriation of Rohingyas to Myanmar indicates a trend wherein religious politics is becoming more important in determining India's decisions towards regional conflict-generated migration crises.

In this altered domestic Indian political context, these recent cases, though few, are analytically valuable for general theorizing. That policy in such cases is primarily guided by party ideology and migrant composition makes the role of UNHCR highly, and expectedly, unwelcome. These cases highlight the validity of the core conditions that inform domestic political priorities (party ideology) and international strategic priorities (home-and-host-state relations and migrant composition) of a state in relation to conflict-generated migration crises. But the paucity of similar cases in the high-domestic-political and low-international-strategic priorities category (that corresponds with repatriation without UNHCR support) also shows the need for further testing, which could reveal expected or counter-intuitive results.

Conclusions

This article offers a new conceptual framework –situational strategic contexts– to explain why states react differently to conflict-generated migration crises. Inductively developed using evidence from India, the framework unpacks how different migrant crises figure in the matrix of domestic political and international strategic priorities of the host state. The domestic political priority of a crisis is determined by party ideology, state absorption capacity, and centre-state relations. Similarly, the international strategic priority of a crisis is informed by global balance-of-power considerations, bilateral relationship between the host and the home state, and migrant composition. Different combinations of these two critical, if obvious, variables generate different situational strategic contexts that favour accommodation, toleration, or repatriation of migrants by the host state with or without the UNHCR's support.

The SSC opens new avenues for future research within international security and forced migration studies. It has the potential for further testing and generalisation. From within South Asia, case studies such as Bangladesh's response to the Rohingya crisis (high domestic political and international strategic priorities: toleration of migrants), or Pakistan's response to Afghan migrants (high domestic political and international strategic priorities: toleration of migrants) help exploring the framework's potential beyond democracies such as India. Both Bangladesh and Pakistan face huge migrant crises, have undemocratic polities with phases of military rule, and are non-signatories to international refugee conventions. Beyond South Asia, Costa Rica's

response towards Nicaraguan refugees (high international and low domestic priorities: toleration of migrants), or that of Turkey and Lebanon towards the Syrian refugees (high domestic political and international strategic priorities: toleration leading to strategic rent-seeking), are cases, among others, that can help test this framework.

Whether the SSC framework holds true for *any* migrant crisis and at *any* point in time requires testing. Limited in scope, the framework does not explain long term shifts in state responses to migration crises. For example, in 2018, India declared that it would offer citizenship to Chakma migrants who have been residing there since 1980s (Chandran 2017). The SSC does not offer predictions about such policy evolution. This is visible in the case of Sri Lankan Tamils during the 1980s and 1990s when India sought UNHCR support after it failed to ensure repatriation using military means and an accord with Colombo. Equally, what if a host state pursues repatriation instead of accommodation (as the framework posits), despite the issue being of *low* domestic political and *low* international strategic priority? The framework offers room for such falsifiability tests. Regardless of these aspects, it has value as a typology that helps understanding how states may react to such crises.

The article advances an important research agenda on refugee rent-seeking in the Global South in context of weakening of global refugee regimes. The core argument of this article aligns with the assertion that host states in the Global South may use their “geopolitical position as leverage to extract revenues from other states in exchange for maintaining refugees within their borders” (Freier, Micinski, & Tsourapas, 2021, 1-2; Kelberer, 2017). According to the SSC, the emphasis here is on how domestic and international priorities of a migrant crisis shapes rent seeking. Rentierism is effectively a strategy that is operationalised *after* the state has decided to tolerate refugees with or without UNHCR support. This is because as the international significance of the crisis remains high regardless of its domestic political value for the host state (and there are enough third-countries willing to pay the host state to maintain the refugee status quo). Similarly, weakening of global refugee regimes (Betts & Milner, 2019; Loescher, 1994) is reflected in how the host state utilises the UNHCR’s support mechanisms based on its reading of the institution in context of evolving domestic and international political environments.

Another strength of the framework is its sensitivity to historical context. Both domestic and international priorities are dynamic variables informed by history. Without shoehorning history as an explicit conditioner that determines the priority of these two independent variables, the SSC identifies the importance of history in aspects such as migrant composition, bilateral relations between the host and home states, and party ideology. None of these factors are ahistorical in nature and determined solely by futuristic utilitarian calculations by governments. These are subjective issues that have resonance in national and international histories, regardless of the case under study. The reason why India viewed Tibetans positively and the Rohingyas negatively, for example, has to do with the differing state of the republic in the 1950s and 2010s (Komireddi 2019).

India's approach towards international migrants evolved considerably since 1947. Driven by a desire to decolonize institutions domestically and be non-aligned internationally, India viewed accommodation of migrants as a secular state-building exercise. This perception underwent a shift in 1971. The Pakistan military's crackdown in East Pakistan and the international community's nonchalance instilled a propensity towards use of force. This was visible in India's aggressive response to the various migrant crises in the 1980s – Sri Lanka, Bangladesh (Chakma-Hajong), and Burma. It was the failure of coercive diplomacy in most cases that morphed India's hope of securing safe return of these migrants to their homelands into resigned toleration. By 2019, the domestic political situation evolved to such extent that India began to forcibly repatriate Rohingyas regardless of apparent threat to their lives in Myanmar and was averse to hosting Chin migrants fleeing the February 2021 military coup (but is tolerating their presence due to pressure from the Mizoram state government). Such responses, coupled with the passage of the 2019 Citizenship Amendment Act underlines the evolution of India's approach towards migrants and its conception of citizenship.¹⁴

Therefore, the SSC cannot be applied without appreciating historical detail, even if it is valid across regime-types. To this extent, it agrees with an observation that the final policy outcome must be 'teased out at the empirical level' (Jacobsen 1996, 655). How a host state interacts with the UNHCR is also a matter of such empirical consideration. India refused to sign the 1951 convention and 1967 protocol because it viewed these international frameworks as biased and feeding partisan politics. Though it adheres to UNHCR guidelines (for prestige purposes among other reasons), it exercises sovereign authority by choosing to either include or exclude the international agency based on political judgement. The framework allows to assess whether and when the state will recruit the UNHCR's support in addressing a migrant crisis – depending on what policy approach it opts in each situational strategic context.

¹⁴ The act offers citizenship to Hindu, Sikh, and Christian migrants persecuted along religious lines in neighbouring countries while excluding Muslim migrants (Gazette of India, 2019)

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Supplemental Appendix

Indian Responses to Conflict Generated Migration (Table 1)

This table offers a small-N overview of India's responses to conflict generated migration since independence in 1947. It is not a comprehensive table and doesn't cover migrants from various African and Middle Eastern countries given their very small numbers (a few hundreds) – making them low priority both from international strategic and domestic political perspectives. The state category in this table lists those states where the migrants entered and impacted local politics of. The state governments listed in this category could be more than one given the timeframe of migration under consideration for each case. In Tamil Nadu, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) are the two powerful regional parties that have dominated in state politics. Both have supported the cause of Sri Lankan Tamils to varying degrees, but the DMK has been relatively more accommodative of the Sri Lankan Tamil migrants. In West Bengal, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPIM) was in power for over thirty years, whereas the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have dominated the political scene in both centre and state (especially in Assam and Manipur) at different points in time.

In Mizoram, which hosts a large number of Chin refugees from Myanmar, the Mizo National Front (MNF) dominates state politics and has historically been welcoming of the Chins and Rakhine migrants from Myanmar given ethnic and cultural ties. Union Territories (UT) in India are governed directly by the central government, and thus, don't have direct electoral impact on national politics, even if there are strong public attitudes (in either accommodative or rejectionist direction) towards incoming migrants. Himachal Pradesh, a state of India, was a UT when the Tibetan migrants began to pour in, and New Delhi decided to relocate the Tibetan Government-in-Exile and the Dalai Lama in Himachal Pradesh. The 'not applicable' state category for Burmese, Ugandan, and Sri Lankan Indians means that these incoming migrants were settled across the country, or went to states where they had ancestry, without negative political and social ramifications.

The Determinants of International Migration (DEMIG) database prepared by the International Migration Institute (IMI) at the University of Amsterdam offers details on India's policy towards some (*ed in Table 1) cases of conflict-generated migration. The details (numbers, policy response, support sought from UNHCR or not etc.) of cases not listed on the DEMIG database can be found in the links offered below. Given the opacity of data collection methods by the government of India on actual number of migrants, the figures in most cases are approximate.

Afghan and Burmese Refugees (1980s): Similar to the Tibetans, India decided to tolerate migrants fleeing war in Afghanistan during 1980s/90s and a military crackdown in Burma/Myanmar in 1988. Limited in numbers,

these migrants had *low* domestic political salience in India. Though some Afghan refugees were Hindus and Sikhs, many of them were Muslims from Pashtun-dominated regions of south and east Afghanistan (Bose 2004). The Burmese were mostly democracy activists from the Yangon University, and members of armed ethnic groups fighting for separatism (or equal representation in a federal democracy) against the mostly-Bamar *Tatmadaw*.¹⁵ Their limited numbers meant little public pushback at the moment of their arrival. Many Chin refugees, who have kinship links with India's Mizo community, crossed over into Mizoram (McConnachie 2018). Other Burmese migrants are settled in west Delhi, whereas Afghans are settled in south Delhi. Though they face discrimination from authorities and corrupt government officials, the presence of these migrants did not cost politically.

But both these cases were of *high* international strategic salience. Supporting Burmese dissidents was meant to signal Yangon that India took a dim of *Tatmadaw's* actions. Importantly, Indian intelligence agencies trained and armed Burmese militants to exert pressure on the home state. The Afghans, though not trained militarily, were used as intelligence-gathering assets to augment India's presence in and awareness of Afghanistan's ground situation (Paliwal 2017, 244-5). Such interventionism peaked under Rajiv Gandhi's leadership. The *Tatmadaw* reacted strongly against India's support for the democracy movement, and in particular for the National League for Democracy and its leader Aung San Suu Kyi. On its part, New Delhi did little to stop the formation of a parallel Burmese government-in-exile and allowed the then-famous All India Radio to openly criticize the *Tatmadaw* (Malik 2016, 72-3).

India found it expedient to recruit UNHCR's support in both these cases. A refugee-card regime was introduced wherein the displaced persons were to renew their status as asylum seekers every year, on an indefinite basis (Sammadar 2003, 182-210). The lack of institutional, legal, and material support offered to these refugees restricted their movement and livelihoods. Unlike the Tibetan case where India realized that it would have to support the communities on a permanent basis, such was not the case with the Afghans and the Burmese migrants. India wanted to deal with these cases at the source of the problem i.e., within the home state, and never accepted permanent accommodation. There was the expectation that they will return once the situation in the home state settle – an aspect that also offered India an opportunity to recalibrate its regional policy. The limited number refugees aided India's decision to seek UNHCR support and utilize these cases to mend relations with the refugee agency (Oberoi 2006, 117-24). Today, most of these refugees continue to live in India on an ad hoc basis because of the state's negligence, a slow and corrupt bureaucracy, and costly (in time and money) legal procedures.

¹⁵ Myanmar's military is called *Tatmadaw*

Sri Lankan Tamils (1983-87; 2006): Though the movement of Sri Lankan Tamils began in the 1960s, it became a mass inflow after the July 1983 anti-Tamil riots across Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka Project, 1999). By 1986 nearly 125,000 migrants had moved to the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu (Weiner 1993, 1739). India sought to repatriate them all, akin to the Bangladeshi refugees. The success of 1971 had a deep impact on New Delhi's thinking on regional migration crises and took a secular-ideological undertone wherein India refused to accept the persecution of minorities in the region. The first reaction, then, was to arm Tamil separatists, including the Liberation of Tamil Tigers Eelam (LTTE) to generate military pressure on Colombo (Gunaratna 1993, 27-54). It was classic coercive diplomacy. Then, in order to end the conflict, India offered arbitration between the Tamil militants and the Sri Lankan government. This led to the infamous deployment of the Indian Peacekeeping Forces (IPKF) in 1987. Instead of welcoming its patron, the LTTE declared war on the IPKF (Ibid, 229). Literature on this subject highlights the disastrous course of India's military engagement for the next three years, but it does not explore the effect it had on India's stand on the migrant crises itself i.e., India came to tolerate migrants without UNHCR support, knowing that many of these migrants may never return (Oberoi 2006, 220-1).

This case had high international strategic salience for India's relations with Sri Lanka, and high domestic political salience in south India. Many people and most political parties in Tamil Nadu were critical of Colombo's targeting of Tamils and wanted the central government to support the minorities. Such pressures and his own ideological inclinations pushed prime minister Rajiv Gandhi to intervene and seek a negotiated settlement between the two sides. However, these pressures were not generated because India could not resettle the migrants. Given the relatively low number (in comparison to the 10 million in 1971), India put them in heavily surveilled government-run camps without UNHCR's support (Valatheeswaran & Rajan 2011). Though repatriation over a period of time was part of the 1987 Indo-Sri Lankan Peace Accord, it did not form a causal driver for the IPKF intervention. Some migrants returned to Sri Lanka in 1990s, but many continue to live in camps in Tamil Nadu. The positive reception of these migrant came temporarily under strain after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 by an LTTE suicide bomber. It brought them under increased police surveillance and various restrictions were imposed on their movements. However, such issues have eased over the years (especially after the end of the Sri Lankan civil war in 2009) and many of them have been promised citizenship by the government of Tamil Nadu.

Chakma-Hajong: Similarly, all Chakma-Hajong refugees who came before 1971 were granted citizenship. Again, India's postcolonial state-building imperative played a significant role in Indira Gandhi's acceptance of the Chakmas who had fled East Pakistan. None of these cases were of high domestic political or high international strategic salience. Even those Chakma migrants escaping persecution by Bangladeshi authorities

in the 1980s were accommodated in Arunachal Pradesh despite local protests. This was done after an initial period of temporary toleration wherein New Delhi tried to arm them and exert pressure on Dhaka.

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