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The “Poster Child” of Refugee Policy

What factors explain Uganda’s integrative, long-term refugee policies?

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Introduction

As of 2017, the developing world currently hosts 84% of the 22.5 million people forced to seek refuge from violent conflict, political instability and persecution (Edmond, 2017). This statistic reflects two key interpretations: first, the majority of refugee-inducing conflicts are taking place in the developing regions of the world. Second, that the international community appears to be demonstrating a weakened resolve towards global refugee protection and management (Crisp, 2003). Most states, particularly in the West, have imposed strict quotas and reinforced their borders, despite many having sufficient capacities, infrastructures and available funds (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Tan, 2017). Refugee response is equally a problem in Africa, a continent experiencing unprecedented conflict, instability and migration, where refugee policies remain basic and dysfunctional (Zamfir, 2017). With so much violence, there are few countries in Africa who are considered 'destinations' which are stable enough. African states that do accept refugees, have shown a preference for restricting their freedoms through containment in camps, as in Kenya (Amnesty, 2012).

There is a considerable difference in national refugee policies from one country to another, and this extreme disparity in burden sharing exposes the lack of international consensus on how to deal with rising numbers of refugees (Thielemann, 2006). In recent years, the approach of most host countries has focused on short-term emergency relief, thereby creating dependencies that have contributed to unfavourable perceptions, and extortionate costs of hosting refugees (Betts et al, 2014). This has fuelled growing intolerances of refugees in general, supporting numerous arguments against accepting a 'fair share' of the world's refugee population, much less integrating them into domestic society (Ignatieff et al, 2016). Arguments

claiming the economic, political and security risks associated with accepting large influxes of people continue to justify restrictive policies.

Out of this bleak appraisal emerges the surprising case of Uganda as the cornerstone of progressive and inclusive refugee policy and attitude. For decades, the developing nation has provided refuge to its neighbours through policies of integration and long-term sustainability. Since August 2016, events in South Sudan have brought Uganda into the spotlight for its response to “Africa’s biggest human exodus since the Rwandan genocide” (Pilling, 2017). In 2016 alone, more people entered Uganda than crossed the Mediterranean Sea (NRC, 2017). Aside from simply accepting refugees without question on such a numerous scale, Uganda’s pragmatic strategy offers a unique integrative model with promising outcomes for long-term self-reliance of refugees. Such policies have earned Uganda international acclaim, affording it the bemusing title of “The best place to be a refugee” (BBC, 2017). It certainly offers a lesson to other regions in better positions to provide refugee assistance, but do not, that it is possible and even beneficial to accept large influxes of people. This dichotomy prompts us to ask, *What factors explain Uganda’s decision to adopt integrative, long-term refugee policies?*

This research paper will investigate the underlying realities that have driven Uganda’s refugee policies. The academic debate identifies the threats to government authority and national security, in addition to the pressures on economic resources and host communities as providing the most salient barriers to forming largescale and integrative refugee policies. In the case of Uganda, we see that these main arguments against liberal policies are in fact the driving forces behind them. The following section details an appraisal of the current theoretical debate on concerns of states surrounding refugee management policy, which will provide the most salient influential factors that will serve to guide the analysis in the qualitative case study of Uganda. The research undertaken to answer this question will use process-tracing to identify the (historical and contextual) causal dynamics inherent to Uganda, that have led to the

adoption of progressive refugee policies. The outcome of this research aims to contribute new insights into the contentious debate on refugee management, as the global crisis intensifies.

Literature Review

The current academic debate on why states appear to prefer restrictive refugee policies has been focused disproportionately on the choices and preferences of industrialised Western states (Taylor et al., 2016). It is the aim of this research paper to contribute to this gap that has so far failed to address in detail the refugee policies of developing countries. Crisp (2003) identified that this gap has emerged because most of the regions that have experienced refugee management challenges have not been geopolitically salient, and therefore have been overlooked. Moreover, though the theoretical and empirical literature on refugee response is plentiful, scholars and policymakers alike comment that it is often ‘refugee-centric’ in nature, with comparatively little focus on the host governments dealing with large-scale refugee populations, and the corresponding effects on host communities (Chambers, 1986, p.247). This is in part due to the varying experiences between refugee hosts, which depend on the scale of the influxes, the type of conflicts causing them, and the domestic capacities to host refugees, which often represents the difference between developed and developing countries (Jacobsen, 1996).

There are a number of popular explanations as to why states (both developed and developing) have sought restrictive policies in response to refugee management. ‘Restrictive’ here refers to both the number of refugees accepted and the nature of the policy i.e. the availability of services and levels of freedom afforded to refugee populations. This is particularly regrettable to those who support Crisp’s (2003) accusations that the international community itself is responsible for setting a dangerous example through its historical endeavours to keep refugees contained to their native continents. This behaviour, Crisp reasons,

has indirectly led developing countries to emulate similar preferences, to the detriment of international humanitarian assistance.

There are a few factors, often perceived as threats or risks, that governments are preoccupied with minimising, and thus shape refugee response policies. The literature has revealed that the most pressing policy concerns are the perceived economic and societal impact of refugee influxes, and the corresponding threats to national security, underpinned by the influence of the political context of the state in question (Jacobsen, 1996). Wright and Moorthy (2018) summarize the repressive refugee policies adopted by states as a way to ensure regime security, justified by the actual or perceived economic consequences, and the potential for dissatisfaction leading to protests against the government. By elaborating further on the concerns influencing policy choices and intended outcomes, it becomes clear that states have used them to effectively justify policies that reduce the numbers of refugees and their ability to integrate into local communities.

The history of a state's response to past influxes can prove a strong influence as the precedent set often informs new policies (Jacobsen, 1996). The historical responses and methods of management contribute to the host community's perceptions and social understanding of refugees (Jacobsen, 1996). Kunz (1981) attributes attitudes, historical experience and the perceived permanence of refugee populations to levels of willingness and the receptiveness of host communities. This is also affected by the understanding (or lack thereof) of the cause of the origins of the influx, the socio-cultural meaning of 'refugee', and what motivations they might have (i.e. economic or protection). The economic impact and cultural differences that refugees are thought to represent can lead a host community to 'otherize' refugees, consequently hindering prospects for successful integration (Wright & Moorthy, 2018, p.133). Particularly in the West, this has affected the definitions of refugees and their ability to integrate. Crisp's (2003) appraisal of the history of refugee management in

developing countries shows that developing states have an inconsistent approach. Crisp found that the independence struggles across the African continent created numerous refugee situations, which encouraged a mutual acceptance of refugees given their shared experiences and difficulties. However, the 1980s saw escalating conflict and new forms of exacting violence in the post-Cold War era, thus changing the approach of refugee management in the face of increasing refugee situations (Crisp, 2003). Additionally, post-independent socio-economic problems such as unemployment, environmental disasters and HIV pandemics have led to host communities resenting the aid focussed on refugee populations (Crisp, 2003).

The political context within a state is crucial in shaping the policy options available (Jacobsen, 1996; Phuong, 2005). Alexander Betts, a prominent scholar on refugee economies, explains that the process of creating refugee policy is complicated in Western democracies, where policy makers represent opposing sides of the debate on refugee management, which often results in a “race to the bottom in terms of political standards” across regional, municipal and local authorities (PBS, 2016). This, Betts argues, shows how problematic it can be for democracies to produce policies on such divisive matters successfully. Another important determinant of the kind of refugee response chosen is often dependent on the incentives at the institutional level, which vary greatly (Robinson, 2002). Herbst (2014) found that sub-Saharan African countries share the same inherent problems when it comes to consolidating and projecting power over their respective territories, both during and after independence. However, the overall failure of weak governments to control resources and society, particularly in Africa, has had crucial consequences that have led to civil conflict and dysfunctional policies, which has increased the number of refugee situations across the continent (Herbst, 2014). Crisp’s (2003) earlier research confirms the popular opinion that as post-independent authoritarian governments evolved into pluralistic systems, refugee responses became inconsistent as dictators could accept influxes when it was in their political interest to do so

with little opposition. However, as mentioned in the case of western democracies, the way policy is formed is very different for the majority of African states.

There has been little research into the real economic impact of hosting refugees, and even less undertaken on the disparities between developed and developing countries (Maystadt & Verwimp, 2014; Taylor et al., 2016). This is a puzzling occurrence when one considers that the economic capacities of host communities is one of the major concerns that shape the type of policies adopted. A number of scholars who have tried to address this gap explain that the actual impact of refugees on a host country is difficult to measure in any case, and it is certainly problematic to apply learnings or outcomes from one case in a way that can be generalised for other cases (Taylor et al, 2016).

Phuong (2005) alleges that developing countries suffer greater damage to their economic prospects due to the struggle to meet humanitarian and domestic needs. This is compounded by the fact that historically, international aid rarely satisfies the refugee response budget (Miliband & Gurusurthy, 2015). The opinion that refugees are drains on national and local economies has endured until today, especially for richer industrialised countries that qualify for less international aid. Taylor et al. (2016) explore the origins of this position and find that because of the dependent positions refugee populations are confined to, as a result of restrictive policies that forbid freedom of movement and employment, refugee management has become synonymous with economic strain and long-term financial commitments. There are those who accuse governments who proclaim economic reasons for rejecting refugee populations, are using the language of economics to hide the real reasons, that of nationalistic beliefs and fears for national security (Parsons, 2016).

In the African context, the most evident barriers to accepting refugees are the risks associated with instability of infrastructure in heavily populated areas and the impact on land availability. Equally in rural regions, lack of basic infrastructure places a different strain on

local communities already struggling. Indeed, Whitaker's (2002) extensive study on the impact of refugees on host communities found that sudden influxes of refugees and aid resources had both positive and negative effects on host communities. There are scholars who argue that the inevitable environmental impact of a refugee influx, especially in rural regions, leads to social unrest due to the increased strains on natural resources (Martin, 2005). There are others who claim that refugee populations bring new social and economic opportunities to the area, while conceding that on average, employment opportunities will not match the influx of people (Whitaker, 2002). This Whitaker (2002) found, ultimately incites frustration and aggression in an already emotionally unstable situation.

Wright & Moorthy's (2018) research has led them to the conclusion that the presence of a refugee population will cause the host state to enact repressive policies even when they are from neighbouring countries. Lischer (2005) supports earlier claims that the lack of economic opportunity offered to refugees makes protests more likely, hence, the state adopts repressive policies to mitigate this risk. This reinforces the popular finding that the lack of opportunities keep refugees dependent on the state, which has negative consequences for both refugee populations and host communities. Jacobsen (1996) warns that national security encompasses more than just militaristic notions of threats. This is an extension of Ullman's (1983) theorisation that threats to environmental and socio-economic stability also pose risks to a national government's ability to control both the population and its availability of policy choices. Indeed, scholars agree that restricting refugees to camps is the preferred option of states as it affords governments the ability to monitor and control the population, and keep it separate from host communities, due to the fear of ethnic divisions and economic disturbances (Jacobsen, 1996).

State concerns of this nature are easily presented as a significant risk to the population and the overall stability of the state, reinforcing the sovereign right to make decisions to protect

national security interests over providing protection to vast numbers of refugees (Murillo, 2009). Murillo links the September 11 terrorist attack in 2001 to the rise in national security concerns surrounding terrorism, which has threatened to undermine international refugee protection (Murillo, 2009). The threat of terrorism in the West is perceived as inherently foreign in its origins, thus creating irrational fears of ‘foreign’ people fleeing their own domestic terrorism (Jacobson, 2003). Murillo (2009) claims this misunderstanding feeds into negative perceptions of refugees as unfamiliar groups of people who threaten cultural identities and ways of life. Crisp (2003) reminds us that in both industrialised and developing states, populations are mobilised through the state’s promotion of nationalistic and sometimes xenophobic rhetoric, often through placing responsibility for a society’s problems on refugee populations. Messages of this kind are particularly compelling in poorer societies in developing countries.

Theoretical expectations

The explanations uncovered in the the current literature can be translated into four theoretical expectations that represent the most salient concerns of states in creating refugee management policy, which to date have been used to create restrictive refugee policies. To explore the unique case of Uganda, and to identify where Uganda diverges from the norm, the following expectations can be explored to find which one or ones can account for Uganda’s response:

- E 1: The history of a state’s past response and the host communities’ social receptiveness to refugees will influence how integrative the policy will be.
- E 2: The specific political context of the state will influence refugee policy creation.

- E 3: The perceived economic impact on the capacity of the host community justifies restrictive policies.
- E 4: Perceived threats to national security influence states to adopt obstructive policies to limit the numbers and integration prospects of refugees.

Research Design

The Uganda Case

Despite such obstructive attitudes dominating the international discourse, there are some cases where a different attitude prevails. By investigating the factors behind the world's most progressive refugee policies, it can invite valuable new insights into global refugee management. The case of Uganda offers a unique approach to integrating refugees into society and providing long-term alternatives, increased development and mutual benefits for host and refugee communities (Betts et al., 2014). This is despite the fact that Uganda is one of the poorest countries in the world, with basic services and infrastructure, questionable democratic credentials and a history of corruption and violence (Wawa, 2008). Moreover, Uganda has a long domestic history of enforced displacement, most recently from the terror unleashed by the Lord's Resistance Army in the north of the country. Uganda's exceptional policies have evolved since the late 1990s to become concerned with finding permanent solutions for unlimited numbers of refugees from neighbouring countries to spend the coming years in Uganda peacefully, contributing to society and the economy, and benefiting from equal access to public services.

Due to the growing number of protracted conflicts in Africa and Asia in the 1990s, international agencies and humanitarian donors have been prompted to refocus refugee

strategies to a more long-term model, finding that the “care and maintenance” programmes of camps were indeed wasting limited funds and offering entirely inadequate assistance (Kaiser, 2006, p.352). Offering a sustainable approach to refugee management, the concept of Refugee Aid and Development (RAD) was realised by the UNHCR as a promising opportunity to redefine refugee management in the 21st century. One of the earliest manifestations of this is the UNHCR’s pilot programme in cooperation with the Ugandan government, which employed a ‘Self-Reliance Strategy’ (SRS), initiated in 1999. The strategy was founded on two major principles that sought to empower refugees and host communities to be able to support themselves, and to develop the capacity to integrate refugee populations into society through offering equal access to services (Malik, 2003).

The strategy has since been updated to the Refugee and Host Population Empowerment (ReHOPE) strategic framework in 2016 that compliments national legislation on refugee management. The UNHCR and World Bank have funded this project that integrates the development needs of the community with the needs of the refugees as part of a growing global recognition that, as conflicts last longer, refugees and hosts can mutually benefit from such protracted situations (Betts et al, 2014). It encourages refugees to become ‘self-reliant’ through equal employment, health and education opportunities, in addition to each family receiving a plot of land and the necessities to rebuild their lives. By enabling refugees to work, the goal is to enable families to become less reliant on aid, integrate into the local community and boost local economies. Uganda has accepted exceptional numbers of people regardless of origin, even giving persons from South Sudan prima facie asylum (The World Bank, 2016).

The most recent example of Uganda’s progressive policies under investigation in this research project are concentrated on the response to the recent influx of refugees fleeing South Sudan since the summer of 2016. Uganda has accepted and processed more than one million refugees from the conflict at its northern border (UNHCR, 2018). All refugees fleeing civil war

have the option to reside in refugee settlements (where international agencies are operating), or they are free to seek employment and residence anywhere in Uganda. The Ugandan ethos of acceptance is visible in the absence of a single refugee camp, preferring to place the emphasis on the long-term alternatives of the eighteen ‘settlement areas’.

Despite the predictable strains resulting from poor funding, basic infrastructure and the sheer number of refugees, the policies so far have achieved incredible success in integrating and encouraging self-reliance in other long-term settlements in the west of the country. In 2014, Betts et al. conducted research in two older settlements in the West of Uganda, where they found that 60% of refugees were self-employed, 39% were employed by others, and only 1% was fully dependent on humanitarian aid (Betts et al, 2014). Such a relaxed border policy contradicts policies implemented elsewhere even within Africa, (despite Uganda facing comparable security fears and intense strain on funding and infrastructure in the north).

Methodology

The aim of the research project is to identify the factors that have influenced Uganda’s decision to implement refugee management policies that differ from the approaches favoured by most other states. To find the most complete explanations to the research question, the strategy is to establish (from the literature) the most salient theoretical explanations for why states choose not to accept and integrate influxes of refugees. Such explanations have been drawn from the current academic literature explored above and are formalised as ‘expectations’ that will guide the following qualitative case study of Uganda. The four expectations can be operationalised to represent four key significant factors, which can be tested to reveal its influence on Uganda’s policy choices. The four key areas of influence that can be applied to the Uganda case are:

- The history of response and social receptiveness,
- Political context

- Economic impact on the host community
- National security fears

This will welcome an investigation through a system of process tracing to identify which of the main factors or ‘causal dynamics’ have driven Uganda’s unique policies, by essentially asking the question: “Was X a cause of Y in case Z?” (Mahoney, 2012, p.571). Where case Z is Uganda, Y is the national refugee policy, and X is each of the four main factors found in the literature review.

Given the lack of research on the responses and capacities of developing countries, a preliminary ‘causal process observation’ approach is justified, in order to find the explanatory factors for Uganda (Beach, 2017). This approach investigates the causal dynamics within the context inherent to the case which have contributed to the particular outcome. Falleti and Lynch refer to the contextual conditions as the “relevant aspects of a setting (analytical, temporal, spatial, or institutional) in which a set of initial conditions leads ... to an outcome” (2009, p.1160). This approach requires an in-depth understanding of Uganda, in order to find the sources of its uniqueness. By defining expectations drawn from the current academic debate, explanations can be interpreted from the Uganda case, to offer tentative explanations to the research question. The investigation will explore the structures, histories and relationships in the Ugandan context to identify where and how Uganda diverges from the norm. The outcome of the research will offer interpretations of the available evidence about the context and conditions behind the policies, that could be significant for similar cases in future research. By doing this, potential shortcomings in the current theories might be illuminated, which would invite further research and perhaps revision of certain theories. It will also seek to illuminate other factors not yet identified to deepen the explanations for Uganda’s exceptionalism, and contribute new considerations that influence refugee policy.

In order to conduct the research, information gathering from a wide variety of sources that will inform diverse explanations is necessary. First-hand research is impossible to conduct in this case, meaning that the research is mostly secondary, though some primary data can be obtained through transcripts of interviews and speeches. Efforts will be made to triangulate this primary data with secondary sources derived from academic, historical and public documents to establish the historical and contextual explanations for Uganda's policies. Information published by both national and local Ugandan news media in conjunction with international press will offer another opportunity to gather first-hand information and accounts. The official documents and reports from the Ugandan government, the UNHCR and the Worldbank are also valuable sources of reliable information when combined. Academic literature and anthropological studies on Uganda will also provide historical perspectives on Ugandan politics, people and history. The use of this secondary data can prove invaluable for providing context in the absence of primary data that cannot be obtained in this case.

The following sections explore how these four factors, derived from the expectations, have influenced Uganda's policies by interpreting the available information. Each of these sections will investigate the available evidence to either support or refute the predictions offered by the expectations in the case of Uganda. The investigation will conclude with a discussion that adjudicates between the proposed explanations to articulate which are the most compelling explanations in the Uganda context, and a discussion on the strengths and limitations of this approach.

Investigation of the Ugandan case

History and social receptiveness

The simple fact of geography renders Uganda a likely destination for refugees to seek sanctuary in the Great Lakes region of East Africa. Uganda is landlocked in the middle of a region that

has seen violent conflict, ethnic and religious persecution, political instability and environmental disasters (Kanyangara, 2016). For this reason, Uganda is often the most logical and immediate place of refuge for people in neighbouring countries. Uganda has offered considerable political and economic stability, compared to its neighbours, since the mid-1980s when current president Yoweri Museveni assumed power in a military coup. The Great Lakes' violent shared history has ensured that much of the population within the region has experienced life as refugees themselves and accepted neighbours for hundreds of years (Kanyangara, 2016). Uganda itself is "a country of refugees and exiles" says Ugandan historian and journalist, Charles Onyango-Obbo (2017).

In fact, Uganda's most recent civil conflict with Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) destroyed the Northern territory of the country and created thousands of refugees. This same region is where the current influx from South Sudan are currently sheltered and might contribute to a stronger sense of understanding the meaning of what it is to be a refugee. Several journalists working in the region have captured this mutual understanding when a local living in the Bidi Bidi settlement area explained, "People here are very hospitable because at one time we were refugees in South Sudan. They hosted us until there was peace in Uganda" (Byaruhanga, 2017). Another refugee from South Sudan revealed, "I call Uganda my second home" (Rwakaringi, 2017).

The Great Lakes region in East Africa was once a mass of land, lakes and rural communities until the 20th century when it was divided between British, French and German colonists. The countries of Burundi, Tanzania, Sudan, Kenya and Rwanda shared tribal, religious and ethnic identities with Uganda, and a strong sense of community remains within the region (Kanyangara, 2016), which is most tangibly demonstrated by the economic union of the East African Community. In a speech at a fundraising event held in Kampala in June 2017, entitled the Refugee Solidarity Summit, President Museveni summarises the interlinked

histories and identities by referring to East Africans as: “We the indigenous people of the Great Lakes Region” (State House, 2017). Museveni makes frequent reference to the fragmentation of the entire region by colonial rule, which without those arbitrary lines, might still resemble one region of a diverse population. The Great Lakes region has been undergoing a project of integration since the beginning of the 20th century, creating an East African Community with a customs union, free trade area and freedom of movement. In fact the ultimate goal of the EAC is political integration to form a “super-state under a single political authority/government” (East African Community, 2017). This wish for a united region stemming from the political level might influence states to protect and integrate their neighbours to both encourage a sense of belonging and start to weaken borders dividing nations.

In the same speech referenced above, Museveni describes the long tradition of East Africans traversing the Great Lakes region, either fleeing tyrannical kingdoms, environmental issues, or seeking employment. The region was characterised as having freedom of movement, protection in new kingdoms, and the right to return home. This tradition stemmed from the shared experience of violence and enforced migration, and the recognition of the mutual benefits of sharing the new skills or capital brought by refugees (State House, 2017). He explained to his international audience that “This was the concept of managing refugees before the onset of colonialism” (State House, 2017). He attributes this to their ‘dynamic’ concept as opposed to the ‘static’ perception of refugees that international law favours.

Museveni has mentioned in a number of speeches, both to international and African audiences and interviewers, that of the four main linguistic families on the African continent, the Great Lakes region is home to both Niger-Congo (Bantu) and Nilo-Saharan groups, which has helped local Ugandan communities to “absorb or co-exist” with refugees (State House, 2017). Naturally, such groups encompass hundreds of dialects, but does reflect the shared

history and tribal interconnectedness of the region and may reflect shared linguistic trends between Northern Ugandan and South Sudanese regions specifically. This statement on shared linguistic identity is reinforced by repeatedly referencing the “pan-Africanist ideological orientation” of Uganda, which is the idea that Uganda is part of a wider interconnected region, which shouldn’t rely on tribal divisions, rather recognising their shared identities and interests (State House, 2017). In light of this, Uganda is clearly offering asylum to refugees who are more than just geographical neighbours.

Museveni regularly extolls his pan-African ideology, speaking of protecting the interests of the African people at large which include development, wealth creation, market access, education and health (State House, 2017). Museveni is a vocal advocator for accepting refugees and capitalising on the skills they bring. Unsurprisingly, his openness towards hosting refugees might stem from his own experience as a youth forced to seek exile in Tanzania (Official Website of Yoweri Museveni, 2016). In the following section, the importance of the personal experience of the president becomes evident as an investigation of Uganda’s domestic politics deepens our understanding of Uganda and its policy choices.

Political context

The academic debate reviewed in the previous sections produced the ‘political context’ as an influential factor and an important determinant in the types of policies implemented. Investigating Uganda’s political climate and the key decision-makers involved in national policy offers an interesting uniqueness. In the case of Uganda, the most logical first line of enquiry is the president Yoweri Museveni himself. Museveni, considered a “presidential monarch” by many, has presided over the Ugandan government for the last thirty-two years in what is deemed an increasingly undemocratic government (Tangri & Mwenda, 2010). Uganda’s aforementioned political stability is owed in part, to the ‘no-party’ system implemented in the 1990’s, which claimed to eradicate the damaging effects of tribal and

religious divisions that had previously fuelled conflict (Tangri & Mwenda, 2010). A political system such as this allowed for a greatly reduced opposition, which has endured until today despite introducing a multi-party system in 2005. Moreover, the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party is considered to be exceptionally weak, with little organisation or opportunities to act independently (Izama & Wilkerson, 2011).

Museveni is conspicuously the single person who makes the crucial decisions of government, makes appointments and dismissals and controls the disbursement of public resources (Wilkins & Vokes, 2017). His control has been demonstrated through his interference in the military, parliament, and even the Supreme Court (Tangri & Mwenda, 2010). This is significant when we consider that all refugee management policies are conducted through the Department of Refugees in the Office of the Prime Minister, located in the State House, directly under the supervision of the “over-bearing” president (Tangri & Mwenda, 2010). Betts explains that Uganda differs from other democratic states as the decision to adopt integrative refugee policy concerns a very small number of people, who are fiercely loyal to the president and the ruling NRM party (PBS, 2017).

Uganda’s policies have been possible to create because there are lower standards of accountability, as Museveni is a president with little opposition. This is compounded by the fact that, (according to Uganda’s opposition members), much of Museveni’s close ministers, military commanders and supreme judges, owe their careers, and therefore their fortunes, to the president (Tangri & Mwenda, 2010). Such patronage politics have enabled Museveni to achieve his political goals relatively unhindered. Such goals include amending the constitution by removing age limits on presidential eligibility, thereby extending his eligibility for a sixth term in the 2021 elections. Interestingly, the amendment included an extension to parliamentary membership from five to seven years (News24, 2017). This has raised more questions about the democratic credentials of Uganda’s domestic politics. A survey of public

opinion conducted by two independent Ugandan civil rights bodies found 85% of Ugandans did not support the notion of Museveni fulfilling a lifetime presidency (Goitom, 2017).

Another reason for Museveni's waning domestic support is that after thirty-two years in power, Uganda has seen very little development, economic or democratic progress, despite these goals being promised as a ten-point programme in the late 1980s. The northern region, currently hosting the refugee influx from South Sudan, has suffered the most in recent years. Civil war wrought by Joseph Kony destroyed the region and displaced more than two million people, leaving much of the region with recent memories of being forced to seek protection elsewhere (Bavier, 2009). The marginalisation of the Northern peoples continued after the conflict, leaving the region disproportionately underrepresented in government as Museveni has consistently appointed cabinet ministers and officials from the South and Central regions (Perkins, 2008). This reality has historically affected support for Museveni and the NRM, reflected in poor voting patterns in the north (Juma, 2011). As will be explored in the following section, the current focus of service delivery and infrastructure (by both international agencies and the government) in the region is improving the host community's quality of life, and perhaps influencing new support for Museveni in the North.

[Economic capacity](#)

Most states justify restrictive policies by claiming the economic demands and strains on infrastructure are too great. Uganda's policies however, appear to use their limited capacities to their advantage. The economic incentive for a developing country such as Uganda is underpinned by its openness to refugees; Betts claims, "Uganda's historical advocates for refugee rights have been "progressive" not just because of their support for refugees but also as a means to access and allocate resources towards their refugee hosting constituencies" (The Conversation, 2017). Uganda has developed its policies from 2001 to present in conjunction with various joint-strategies and national programmes to make refugee management and

national development mutual beneficiaries. In the wake of the most recent influx of refugees from South Sudan, host communities in the north of Uganda are experiencing improved service delivery and new infrastructure as a result of refugee assistance policies and international funding.

The first national refugee policy introduced in 2006 focused on the rights of refugees, freedom of movement and the initiation of a ‘development-based approach’ to refugee management (Refugee Regulations, 2006). This was driven by the results of the Self-Reliance pilot programme and at its conclusion, the Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR) strategy was implemented to “address some of the problems of poverty and under-development in refugee hosting districts which could promote further peace, security and stability in the region” (Malik, 2003, p.6). This called for further UNHCR assistance to fund burden-sharing between host communities and government, and to improve the quality of life for both refugees and host communities. The 2010 Refugee Regulations Act furthered this through Art. 61 ‘Integration of refugee matters in development plans’, which incorporated refugee maintenance into Uganda’s national development plan for the years 2015 to 2020 through integrating the SRS framework. By absorbing the SRS strategy, Uganda has been able to combine refugee management and national development projects; a shrewd move given the government’s poor delivery of development projects and the large scale of refugees entering the country.

By 2016, the ReHOPE strategy by the UNHCR and Worldbank introduced the recommendation that 30% of all humanitarian response programmes and expenses should be spent in the interest of local host communities, and local Ugandans be employed by international NGOs conducting work in the field (UNHCR, 2016). In last two years since the crisis, the Northern Acholi region on South Sudan’s border has seen large-scale projects to improve infrastructure, such as building borehole water points, new roads, schools and hospitals, not to mention creating local energy provision thanks to Uganda’s policies

(WorldBank, 2016). The new infrastructure and services implemented in the refugee region to the North is providing the services the NRM has not to date.

In light of this, Museveni's 1996 campaign pledge to orchestrate mass liberalisation of various policies and the privatisation of major public services could be interpreted as a move to reduce the pressure on his government to deliver the promised development and infrastructural projects across the country. He has been transparent on this, claiming, "we would like the burden of funding infrastructure development to be borne partially by private funding so that the state does not have to borrow too much from abroad" (Museveni, 1996, p. 39). However, by 2003 Uganda's entire development budget was financed by international aid, not to mention half of all public expenditure came from international donors (Tangri & Mwenda, 2010). We can interpret from this that Museveni and the NRM are finally achieving their goal of unburdening the government from the responsibility to deliver public services.

National security threats

The outcome of the literature review produced the expectation that states favour restrictive refugee policies that reduce the number of people entering their territory and limit integration with host communities, for fear of risking national security. Uganda in this respect appears not to subscribe to this line of thought. National policies and frameworks to date have not mentioned concrete plans to anticipate or react to threats to national security, although there is a heavier national army presence along South Sudan's border.

The chaos wrought for three decades by the LRA in the north is still fresh in Uganda's collective memory, and the official termination of the search for Kony and his closest allies just one year ago, despite beliefs they are still in hiding, has terrified communities in the north (Burke & Mwesigwa, 2017). We could interpret the international presence in the northern settlements as beneficial for national security. It might offer some form of indirect protection from Kony's forces, as LRA militants might be less likely to target areas near the border with

such international presence, particularly because the International Criminal Court still has arrest warrants out for at least four LRA leaders with one (Dominic Ongwen) currently standing trial (ICC, 2005).

Uganda would appear to diverge even from its African neighbours regarding fears about the potential for militants or terrorists to cross national borders seeking ‘sanctuary’. In East Africa, the fear that camps and settlements provide fertile ground on which to recruit or radicalise individuals, is a recognised concern which almost saw Kenya’s Dadaab and Kakuma camps shut down in 2017 (World Vision, 2016). However, Uganda’s policy of welcoming all who enter has never wavered. Uganda has certainly invested in its image as an equal partner in the global war on terror and US’s most important partner in Africa, thus gaining a strong status in both the region and abroad, which has earned it favourable military training and resources (Fisher, 2012). However, this belies the fact that Ugandan forces have been controversially involved in South Sudan’s conflict from 2013 to 2015 (The East African Monitor, 2015). Uganda’s early involvement in South Sudan’s conflict has caused the UN to accuse it of escalating the violence, even though troops withdrew in 2015 (The East Africa Monitor, 2018).

Discussion

Findings

- **E 1: The history of a state’s past response and the host communities’ social receptiveness to refugees will influence how integrative the policy will be.**

After interpreting the historical factors that might influence Uganda’s policies, it is clear that the diverse Great Lakes region, with its strong history of movement and interconnectedness, appears to offer a fertile ground on which to implement liberal policies that welcome refugees from neighbouring states. That migration has happened for hundreds of years prior to the border construction of colonial times, has encouraged liberal socio-cultural attitudes towards refugees.

The strong sense of a shared history and mutual experiences of life as refugees, not to mention language similarities and ancestries pre-dating the colonial era, suggest that integrating neighbours into Ugandan society is a much simpler task than for Western societies. In light of this, initial assumptions reveal that in Uganda, providing for one's neighbours is to uphold historical and political traditions, not to mention contributes to maintaining stability in a fragile region.

Uganda thoroughly satisfies the first expectation that the history of state responses and the level of social receptiveness in host communities will influence how integrative refugee policies are, and proves that similarities between host communities and refugees is a genuine influence. Consequently, this finding also confirms the inverse, that Western states may restrict refugees from different cultural origins because peaceful integration is less likely.

- **E 2: The specific political context of the state will influence refugee policy creation.**

The domestic political situation in Uganda has enabled its liberal and generous refugee policies to be enacted, thus confirming the expectation provided by the current debate. The significant position president Museveni holds in government allows him to make key decisions with guaranteed support from his party, and limited avenues for opposition party members to obstruct them. Much of his support is owed to the fact that though he is a strong leader, his NRM party is weak, not to mention that high-ranking officials risk their jobs and livelihoods if they oppose him. If a new president was elected, or indeed took control, the likelihood that Uganda's political, judicial and military elite would be investigated for crimes such as fraud, corruption, incitement of violence (to name a few) is great. Museveni's ambitions to hold a lifetime presidency cannot be confirmed as fact, however, his recent actions to remove age limits on his eligibility are strong evidence.

Museveni has been accused of increasingly autocratic behaviour in the last decade, including election fraud and state-sponsored violence. There is a growing opinion that Museveni is “a dictator with nothing left to promise Uganda” (Akumu, 2014). In light of this, his refugee policies are attracting international recognition that could be a useful strategy to deflect attention from his shortcomings and ambitions for a lifetime presidency. As he continues to campaign for weakening national divides and diluting ethnic identities, he is simultaneously encouraging a more regional support base, and strengthening his position as a progressive leader on a continent suffering from questionable leaderships.

Much of Uganda’s refugee policy is informed by Museveni’s personal experience as a refugee, and his ambitions to spread a new ‘pan-African’ ideology that dilutes borders and tribal identities. In light of this, perhaps explanations of influential factors on refugee policy should be widened to encompass the ideologies of the governments and personalities responsible for making refugee responses. The case of Uganda would reflect Crisp’s (2003) claim that many African leaders have historically accepted refugees when it has served their political interests.

His other ambition to oversee the creation of an “East African Federation”, has also invited suspicions about his desire to become its first leader (Warungu, 2011). Museveni has proclaimed his ambitions for deeper integration of the region since the 1996 election campaign, and to, “Work towards ending the balkanisation of Africa” (Museveni, 1996, p.13). Those ambitions have endured, as evidenced when he claimed; “together with our partners we want East Africa to become one country” (Al Jazeera, 2017). We can interpret Uganda’s policy of accepting refugees from all neighbours in the region, integrating them, investing in their health and education, not to mention encouraging employment, as a step in the direction of breaking down national barriers, and solidifying Museveni’s position as the most capable and progressive pioneer fit to lead a united East Africa.

The findings within the political context of Uganda do confirm that this factor can influence the refugee policies depending on the style of leader and inherent political structures. In the African context, the theories offered by Betts and Crisp regarding the relative ease with which more authoritarian governments can pass otherwise contentious legislation, and that African leaders often accept refugees to serve political agendas are confirmed in the Uganda case.

- **E 3: The perceived economic impact on the capacity of the host community justifies restrictive policies.**

Uganda's policies show quite unequivocally that this expectation is unfounded in this case, where the progressive policies are clearly a beneficial strategy for national development. The generous acceptance of refugees has allowed Uganda to accumulate international assistance beyond that of simple material aid. International funds directed at service delivery and building new infrastructure that benefit host communities too, have created renewed markets and new employment in the northern territory of Uganda. Beyond this commendable and progressive policy, it can be argued that such benefits to the north of the country will be useful for a president seeking to stay in power, or improve a legacy that has until now been marred by poor development in the country's poorest region. This is strategic for more than the obvious improvements to development and financial assistance, by capitalising on the hospitable culture of the locals and finally bringing opportunities, infrastructure and emerging markets, Museveni might have turned public support for him in the region around, if indeed he seeks a seventh term in office to secure a life presidency.

Indeed, the preferred policy of containing refugee influxes to camps ensures that refugee populations will be perpetually reliant on aid. This is a strong argument for not accepting refugees in the first place. Uganda's different approach calls into question the premise of this

expectation that so deftly describes the popular response of governments. Especially for developing economies, Uganda shows that refugee policies and populations can be hugely beneficial. This offers an interesting avenue for further research on the future of refugee management. This is of particular importance for developing countries, not least because they host the world's majority of refugees and might also benefit from increased infrastructure and service capacity.

- **E 4: Perceived threats to national security influence states to adopt obstructive policies to limit the numbers and integration prospects of refugees.**

Uganda's refugee policy clearly contravenes the argument that concerns for national security, so salient in the West, always influence repressive and isolationist policies. Instead, the policies appear to favour ensuring human security surrounding the settlement areas, over national security. The integrative nature of the strategies ensures mitigated conflict by providing both the host community and refugees with what they need. By respecting the skills and freedoms of refugees and offering shared access to services and infrastructure for entire settlement areas, the policy seeks to both ease the plight of refugees, by allowing them to be independent from aid, and pacify host communities. This should reduce the potential grievances that might otherwise cause host or refugee communities to protest or indeed clash with each other.

Moreover, issues of national security in other regions, particularly in the West, centre on the 'foreign' origins of refugee populations, which encompass racial and religious differences. In Uganda, as aforementioned, such arguments are less significant in a region as interconnected as the Great Lakes in terms of language and the shared experience of being refugees themselves. However, as resources and funds continue to decrease, social insecurity and discontent is becoming more likely.

There is little available evidence to suggest that issues of national security have influenced Uganda's refugee policy. This is a fundamental divergence with much of the popular debate surrounding refugee policy. It could be interpreted that the economic and political benefits far outweigh the risk to national security, or it might suggest that a developing country such as our case, lacks the ability or capacity to enforce national security measures in response to refugee influxes or any other perceived threat.

A Fifth Explanation

Building on the suggestion that ideologies and individuals be considered in refugee policy decisions, another explanation could be drawn from Uganda's case. There is strong evidence investigated in this paper to suggest that president Museveni is the central figure behind Uganda's refugee policies. Beyond using policies as a strategy to manage his international image and deflect attention from his domestic activities, they could also be used to serve a regional agenda that seeks to enhance his position as the evident regional stabiliser with liberal values. Undeniably, the links between advocating for a pan-African ideology, accepting and integrating scores of citizens from the Great Lakes region and seeking to create a single East African state are compelling. We can also interpret offering long-term residency, unrestricted opportunities to participate in the Ugandan economy and attend university as a step in the direction of breaking down the borders currently separating peoples in the East African region.

If Museveni is to achieve a life presidency then the international support of world leaders and organisations will be important, for a reliable image on an international scale might reduce the likelihood of an international backlash or pressure to resign, particularly in response to his more controversial domestic activities. The current refugee situation presents a precarious position for the international community: if Museveni were indeed able to secure an extended tenure, there might be significant protests, and Uganda's Western supporters would be expected to apply the necessary pressure on him to resign. However, regime change in a

notoriously unstable region, amid the refugee crisis in the north, might risk the smooth provision of services and the destabilization of the region.

The altruistic and generous image Uganda is currently enjoying in the eyes of the international community is also enhancing its position as the regional stabiliser in East Africa. Museveni appears to relish his status as “the most powerful and significant pro-Western leader in the region remaining” (Okwir, 2012). The policies do not only contribute to the favourable views of Uganda and Museveni, but also strengthen his case for a united region that he is the most capable of leading. Viewing Uganda’s refugee policies in light of president Museveni’s political interests, we are prompted to view them as a useful bargaining tool for Museveni, for greater financial assistance, for elevating his position both in the region and internationally, and for securing his place as Ugandan president in the years to come.

Alternative explanations could infer from the Uganda case that authoritative regimes are more likely to be able to manage crises by implementing policies that reflect the political will of a select group, who are free of the accountability obstacles inherent in liberal democracies. There is also significant evidence to warrant further investigation into the influence of prominent personalities and leadership styles on refugee policies, for though authoritarian governments might indeed implement policies more effectively in response to crises for example, it does not mean that this will be the preference of all states with authoritative rulers. Thus, this alternative answer is still underpinned by the new finding of this research paper, that key figures within the political context might have considerable influence on the types of policies made.

A final alternative explanation might argue that Uganda has been able to implement progressive refugee policies because it has received more funds and strategic assistance by international agencies such as the UNHCR, than other countries. However, as this investigation has established, it is the historical context of Uganda and society’s understanding of what it

means to be a refugee, that has allowed such progressive policies to be implemented and indeed, successful.

Conclusion

This research paper has identified that the most influential factors behind Uganda's liberal and progressive refugee policies are the socio-cultural understandings of refugees resulting from the shared history of the region, the improved services and infrastructure implemented by international bodies, and the political incentives for its ruling elite. It has shown that in the case of Uganda, the humanitarian challenge has been transformed into a development opportunity (Betts, 2014). It also shows that by recognising the plight of refugees and their situations, offering them protection and respecting their potential to contribute to the local and national economy, refugee policy can be a tool for mutual benefit. The research conducted has not been sufficiently able to interpret concerns for national security as a strong influential factor, though this may be due to its sensitive nature, which might affect the amount of information available. The outcome of this research paper has contributed another valid explanation inherent to the Uganda case that interprets president Museveni's designs for a potential lifetime presidency, or indeed securing regional hegemony by leading an East African Federation, as influential factors driving Uganda's liberal refugee policies. This new finding might invite further research and consideration of the influence that political ambitions and personalities of heads of states have in relation to refugee responses. This would have particular relevance for developing countries with semi-democratic or indeed authoritarian systems of government.

Investigating the solutions to mass influxes in host countries, and the benefits it can offer, can contribute to changing harmful perceptions of refugees and their effects on host communities. If Uganda's policies withstand the current pressure of South Sudan's exodus into its northern territory, then its example could help to begin deconstructing the popular

arguments against accepting and integrating refugees, and advocate for policy change on a global scale. Learning from the case of Uganda might reveal lessons for future progressive refugee policies on how refugee management can be a particular benefit to developing countries. Whether or not Uganda's policies will be able to withstand growing pressures and underfunding, the fact remains that Uganda is a shining example of how a state can offer refuge to neighbours in need without question, by respecting rights, accepting the skills they have to offer, and investing in their future. However, the results of this investigation finds that Uganda's policies are driven in large part by the machinations of its less than altruistic president, leaving us questioning whether Uganda really can be considered the 'poster child' of refugee policy.

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