War, Economic Strife, Climate Change: Understanding Intersectional Threats to Inclusion and Security

Edited by Mustapha Sheikh, Roland Zarzycki, and Leah Burch

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War, Economic Strife, Climate Change: Understanding Intersectional Threats to Inclusion and Security

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Abstract

When we discuss global security efforts, we must ask whom these initiatives genuinely serve. This volume seeks to address this question by presenting perspectives from scholars around the world on issues of inclusion and security, particularly for those who are marginalised by virtue of their indigenous background, ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality, disability, illness, socio-economic position, and class. We ask why these vulnerable groups are often left to struggle alone. Are they being excluded from existing security frameworks—or are such frameworks even available? Furthermore, how do these global dangers affect their sense of safety, their trust in society, and their ability to access essential services? To capture this complex reality, we invited contributions not only from academics but also from NGOs, barristers, and practitioners with direct experience of these hardships. The resulting collection offers both conceptual analyses and case studies on specific issues affecting ethnic minorities, disabled individuals, and gender minorities.

Keywords

displacement; (in)justice; insecurity; intersectionality; marginalisation; refugee/migrant vulnerability; social crises; violence; war

1. Introduction

At the time of writing this editorial, we are in the midst of a plausible genocide in Palestine, continued war in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, mass displacement of refugees across the globe, and most recently, the end of a US election that has resulted in the re-election of President Donald Trump. Given this

context, the post-World War II optimism for global development, embodied by international organisations and ambitious initiatives, now feels increasingly tenuous. Despite some successes, brought by such programmes as the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, and more recently, their Sustainable Development Goals, wars, economic instability, and climate change continue to undermine prospects for a socially just and equitable world. This disillusionment deepens given past beliefs in the so-called end of history (Fukuyama, 1992), when prosperity was expected to follow the global implementation of neoliberal solutions. Today's most acute anxieties certainly relate to direct experiences of suffering, such as hunger, unrest, violence, and displacement. Equally critical, however, is the instability of value systems, weakened solidarity, eroding trust, the culture of fear as well as shock doctrines implemented in the most vulnerable regions of our planet—phenomena that make our world feel increasingly unwelcoming.

Like prosperity, insecurity is distributed asymmetrically across the world, both within and between the states. As numerous surveys demonstrate (IEP, 2023; Ipsos 2023; Roser, 2017), perceptions, hopes, and expectations are also distributed differently in the world depending on socially and historically conditioned perspectives. For some, especially those who have recently achieved improvements in living standards, the world may still seem full of opportunities. For those in crisis-ridden regions or experiencing even modest economic decline, the outlook often feels far grimmer.

The key conceptual instrument for understanding how multiple subject positions and systems of oppression interact to create obstacles and compound inequality is intersectionality. Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her work on the unique inequalities experienced by women of colour, intersectionality offers a framework for exploring and analysing the collision of threats across multiple dimensions of society (Crenshaw, 1991). The intersection of these threats, as this thematic issue explores, amplifies one another and generates pervasive fear. Much like a weakened organism susceptible to various infections, social and economic structures deprived of the resources to withstand these threats are vulnerable to compounded layers of adversity imposed by external pressures. War and poverty become catalysts for further hardship, which often leads to a sense of hopelessness and a feeling that these issues are insurmountable. Most distressingly, we see populist and exclusivist tendencies developing among those most at risk. Such groups not only face exclusion from stronger states, social groups, and entities that seek to protect their own resources, but they also fall prey to internal divisions. Hatred and mistrust, often rooted in racism, ethnicism, sexism, disablism, or similar, only increase in times of crisis, exacerbating the fragility of these communities.

When we discuss global security efforts, we must ask whom these initiatives genuinely serve. This volume seeks to address this question by presenting perspectives from scholars around the world on issues of inclusion and security, particularly for those who are marginalised by virtue of their indigenous background, ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality, disability, illness, socio-economic position, and class. We ask why these vulnerable groups are often left to struggle alone. Are they being excluded from existing security frameworks—or are such frameworks even available? Furthermore, how do these global dangers affect their sense of safety, their trust in society, and their ability to access essential services? To capture this complex reality, we invited contributions not only from academics but also from NGOs, barristers, and practitioners with direct experience of these hardships. The resulting collection offers both conceptual analyses and case studies on specific issues affecting ethnic minorities, disabled individuals, and gender minorities. The following provides an outline of the contributions that make this thematic issue.

2. Contributions

The complexities of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations and their implications for regional security are examined by Syed Sibtain Hussain Shah, Arshad Mahmood, and Muhammad Kamran in their text, "Resurrection of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan Amidst Afghan Regime's Indifference: Threats to Intersectional Security Strands in the Region." Their analysis explores how terrorism and armed conflict generate intersectional insecurity across multiple dimensions of society.

Katarzyna Maniszewska's analytical study, "Globalization of Security Threats: A Vicious Circle," further examines terrorism's impact, showing how various types of threats—terrorism, violent conflicts, ecological crises, and political and economic instability—intersect and reinforce one another. As the author argues, these problems transcend national borders, demanding coordinated and multi-dimensional solutions at the international level.

Çağlar Akar, Doğa Başar Sariipek, and Gökçe Cerev's piece, "Poverty-Armed Conflict Nexus: Can Multidimensional Poverty Data Forecast Intrastate Armed Conflicts?" highlights how poverty contributes to, and is exacerbated by, internal armed conflicts. As the extensive literature on the subject indicates, these conflicts by the mechanism of coupling feedback lead to a cascading impoverishment of conflict-ridden countries, perfectly illustrating the tragedy caused by the overlapping of these factors. As the authors argue, gender inequality and limited access to education and public services, fuel poverty, which in turn undermines social cohesion, further depriving the community of methods to cope with the crisis.

Three further studies reveal the consequences of these phenomena on the daily lives of people displaced by armed conflict. Yasemin Karadag Avci and Irem Sengul's work, "Navigating Intersectional Complexities: A Narrative Analysis of Syrian Refugee Women With Disabilities in Turkey," offers a layered view of the challenges Syrian refugee women with disabilities face in Gaziantep, Turkey. Their experiences illustrate how intersectional vulnerabilities—disability, displacement, gender—increase exposure to violence, restrict mobility, and limit access to rights and services.

Ana Sofia Branco and Roman Xerez, in "Asylum Seekers' Trajectories of Exclusion: An Analysis Through the Lens of Intersectionality," address the need for robust social integration frameworks. They analyse the situation of migrants in Portugal who face multidimensional discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, sexuality, and social status. This article illustrates the precariousness of social protection for individuals denied asylum and excluded from security networks.

In "Untold Stories of Displaced Rohingya Pregnant Women Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence in Camp Settings," Istiaque Mahmud Dowllah and his co-authors investigate the plight of displaced Rohingya women, highlighting how intimate partner violence compounds the vulnerabilities these women already face in camp settings. While the geopolitical and cultural context of this research is different from the studies of Branco and Xerez and Avci and Sengul, we also observe a number of structural similarities that collectively reveal a multifaceted picture of the violence experienced by individuals exposed to a large number of threats and deprivations simultaneously.

Rakesh Mochahary and Loung Nathan K. K., in "Rise of Populism in Northeast India: A Case of Assam," analyse how social risks and the erosion of solidarity foster exclusivist policies and populism. This study demonstrates

how war, economic instability, and climate challenges intertwine with manipulation and discursive violence, creating particularly adverse hybrid political landscapes, as seen in the case of the Assam region.

Addressing the direct link between war and economic strife, Kamil Matuszczyk and Kamila Kowalska's "Are Labour Markets Inclusive for Ukrainian War Migrants? Perspectives From Polish and Italian Migration Infrastructure Actors" touches on the situation of several million Ukrainians who came to the EU due to the aggression of the Russian Federation, which has created risks not seen in the European area since the conflicts in the Balkan peninsula. The researchers analyse migration infrastructure in its multiple dimensions, which is a key factor translating into the level of inclusiveness and security of those who find themselves in a situation of multi-vectoral risks.

Maria Theiss and Anna Menshenina's "Narrating Solidarity With Ukraine: European Parliament Debates on Energy Policy" scrutinises the actual substance behind diplomatic discourses of solidarity, revealing the hypocrisy within international political discourses oriented towards proclaiming global solidarity and cooperation. Their analysis lays bare the structural power imbalances that perpetuate poverty and suffering, challenging the façade of global cooperation.

3. Conclusion

The range of examples presented in this volume—analysed through diverse lenses and from both theoretical and practical perspectives—aims to reveal the relational connections between different instantiations of injustice while also highlighting the fundamental unsustainability characterising today's world. Simplifying these perspectives by analysing them in isolation would lead to cognitive and analytical inadequacy; it is only through understanding their interconnections that we can appreciate the full scale of global injustices. With this holistic view, we can also see the importance of inclusivity for global security and take steps towards a more resilient and equitable future.

Acknowledgments

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Resurrection of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan Amidst Afghan Regime's Indifference: Threats to Intersectional Security Strands in the Region

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Abstract

As the Afghan Taliban came to power in August 2021, the terrorist attacks by the Afghanistan-based Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) operatives intensified in Pakistan. Despite Pakistan's repeated requests, the Taliban's regime looked the other way and facilitated a renewed spate of TTP-led terrorism in Pakistan, specifically its regions dividing the two countries. This article scrutinizes the multifaceted threats of TTP's brutal resurgence to intersectional security strands in the strategically important region and their impact on the complex relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Drawing on the analysis of historical context and contemporary terrorist growth in Pakistan's territories, the study elucidates the evolving dynamics in the frontier regions and settled areas and bilateral relations in the wake of TTP's resurrection in the period of 2021–2024. The investigation employs a mixed method combining a qualitative approach for the analysis of historical ties, bilateral diplomatic discourse, and measuring intensification of terrorist incidents in Pakistan since 2021 with quantitative data. The study leads to a rational perception of the complicated interplay between states and non-state actors, regional geopolitics, and Pakistan–Afghanistan relations in the era of heightened uncertainty on Afghan soil with a potential to project regional terrorism. Furthermore, intersectionality as a framework of analysis helps in gauging the impact of socio-political, cultural, and economic elements with regard to targeted communities while evaluating the extent of injustices on account of race, gender, class, and ideology (religious belief).

Keywords

Afghanistan; intersectionality; Pakistan; regional terrorism; security; Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan

1. Introduction

The return of the militant group Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) from Afghanistan to Pakistan's terror landscape since the middle of 2021 has severely hampered peace efforts in the country, including its tribal regions bordering Afghanistan. Basically, TTP emerged as an insurgent force in Pakistan, including the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas, commonly known as former FATA, against Islamabad's support to Washington, in the aftermath of the US-led war on terror in Afghanistan. Comprising various combative factions, the group is a joint Pakistani militant organisation that is not only inspired by the ideology and violent activities of the Afghan Taliban, but it was the Afghan Taliban themselves that helped form the group in 2007 (Feyyaz, 2013). Initially fighting against NATO forces in support of the Afghan Taliban in Afghanistan, TTP later initiated a self-justifying fight against the Pakistani security forces by declaring them as infidel forces that were a legitimate target of the terrorist entities—TTP and its affiliates. After the US withdrawal, the void was exploited by TTP, and Afghan Taliban's indifference further complicated the security milieu along the bordering regions.

TTP was misusing Islamic ideology for power politics with the aim of establishing an Islamic Emirate in the country in accordance with the rigid religious ideology through violent means, circumventing existing constitutional arrangements in the country. Their extra-constitutional demands are not only democratically untenable, but, given the dangers to national sovereignty and territorial integrity, they are a non-starter for the State of Pakistan and should not be accepted for a cease-fire with TTP (Akhtar & Ahmed, 2023). Over the years, TTP intensified its terror campaign targeting security forces, religious minorities, and civilians alike, precipitating the death toll of the security forces, adding to the security dilemma of the State of Pakistan and the sense of insecurity for targeted communities, and threatening other elements of intersectionality, already almost non-existent in the terror-stricken zone (National Counterterrorism Center, 2022).

After Pakistan's military "Zarb-e-Azb" operation involving thousands of troops in Waziristan and other Pakistan border areas in 2014–2015, many of TTP's activists escaped to Afghanistan (Javaid, 2016). The group used the Afghan territory as a safe haven and logistical hub for planning and launching attacks into Pakistan. Pakistan had been complaining about a lack of cooperation from the Afghan side. The Afghan authorities not only shrugged off the demarche from the Pakistani authorities but started supporting their ideological conglomerate—the TTP. The Pakistani Taliban group is known for its ideological resemblance to the Afghan Taliban in neighbouring Afghanistan (Hussain, 2023a). A loose immigration apparatus on border crossings between the two countries complicates the separation of civilians crossing into Pakistan and terrorists infiltrating in the guise of refugees (Razvi, 1979).

The mistrust between the two states has persisted since 1947—a chequered history of relations at best. Besides political differences, Afghanistan disputes the British era's (1893) border demarcation, foiling any effort to strengthen border control and immigration processes (Chaudhri, 1955). Afghanistan's claim of absorbing a large area of modern-day provinces of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Balochistan into their traditional homeland "Pashtunistan" can be termed as irrational and unjustified given the legal and political realities (Chaudhri, 1955). Pakistan, as a neighbour of Afghanistan with security and social integration affected by the shared community living on both sides of the borders and whose economic prosperity is partly intertwined with Afghan cooperation, has supported all Afghan governments, especially the Afghan Taliban regime. However, this support has proved to be a futile effort (Hanauer & Chalk, 2012).

After the Taliban group came to power in Afghanistan in 2021, TTP regrouped and strengthened its organisational structure, improved its weaponry systems, and enlarged its local support base on Afghan soil. It relocated its combatants from Afghanistan to Pakistan and demonstrated greater ferocity and lethality in its terror strikes, particularly against the Pakistani security forces (Sayed & Hamming, 2023). The pattern of terrorism substantiates scholarly findings that TTP is expanding its operations from bordering regions to nearby settled districts and towns for political concessions. To support this argument, this scholarly work established that the number of its claimed attacks more than tripled between 2020 and 2022 compared to the previous two years. Additionally, a report confirms that 500 civilians and a similar number of security forces were killed in 2023 alone, marking the highest fatality rate in the country in the last six years (Gul, 2023b).

In the first three months of the year 2024, TTP militants present in Afghanistan continued their deadly attacks against the Pakistani security forces and their installations. After the failure of hectic diplomatic efforts, the Pakistani authorities conducted air strikes against the suspected militants' hideouts in Afghanistan on March 18, 2024, two days after the death of seven Pakistani soldiers, signalling their resolve to not only hunt down the terrorists operating against the State of Pakistan but also making the Afghan Taliban's complicity costly at home and abroad (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a). Pakistan's airstrikes on Afghanistan's soil followed by the Afghan Taliban's retaliatory attacks caused severe tension between the two countries ("Key Afghan-Pakistani border crossing closed," 2023; Roggio, 2024). Due to these stressful events, difficulties have increased for the estimated 1.5 million Afghan refugees residing in Pakistan, in spite of 600,000 Afghan refugees having already been extradited to Afghanistan since 2021 (Gluck, 2023). In addition to emerging trends of terrorist entities, perpetrating the mayhem, the consequent security/ military dimensions are part of the analysis, causing a security dilemma for the State of Pakistan.

However, components of intersectionality, such as race, gender, and class, which face injustices because of distinct individual or group identities, are part of this inquiry. The social and political alienation and economic deprivations cause a sense of insecurity among individuals and groups who unwillingly align themselves with terrorists due to physical harm and other forms of injustice. In the region under review, the oppression and terror as an instrument of coercion are being blatantly used for local support and extortion. It is a complex scenario wherein human security faces dangers as result of aggression by terrorists. The physical harm and destruction of property and business are the outcome of terrorist activism. Concomitantly, injustices on account of race, gender, religious belief (identity), and socio-economic deprivations interlinking intersectionality continue unabatedly. Under this backdrop, the hypothesis set forth is the following: "The TTP-led terrorism is causing a security dilemma for the State of Pakistan besides a sense of insecurity among vulnerable communities, accentuating race, gender, and ideology-based injustices under the key intersectionality concepts." Using this hypothesis, the dependent variable is terrorism, whereas the independent variable happens to be two-fold: the security dilemma for the State of Pakistan; and, secondly, injustices to vulnerable communities on account of race, gender, and ideology. One may also assume two independent variables: terrorism-induced security dilemma and the injustices based on race, gender, and ideology. The study aims at exploring the relationship between variables with a view to testing the hypothesis set forth earlier.

This article conducts an inclusive literature review covering the conceptualization of intersectionality and the impact of terrorism, specifically focusing on the terror activism of TTP, to identify gaps in the

scholarly work. A theoretical perspective and methodological framework are also presented for a better understanding of the topic. The article evaluates emerging dynamics of terrorism, including the resurgence of TTP in Pakistan since 2021, the Afghan Taliban regime's apathy, threats to intersectional security strands, and resultant injustices, all to accomplish the study's objectives based on the research question outlined in the methodological framework.

2. Literature Review

The literature on the subject is found in abundance and various nuances of terrorism have been unveiled by scholars and experts locally and internationally. The evaluation of the literature is divided into two sections, one about conceptualizing intersectionality and security, and the other on the terror involvement of TTP.

2.1. Conceptualizing Intersectionality and Security Impacted by Terrorism

The concept of intersectionality discusses the interaction of social identity arrangements such as race, class, and gender with human practices, especially experiences of freedom and oppression (Gopaldas, 2013). Intersectionality as an approach deals with social and racial discrimination of women, markedly black women in the US; however, it is neither limited to any exceptional race or colour, nor any specific region (Al-Faham et al., 2019). Intersectional security refers to the interconnected nature of various security challenges; for instance, human insecurity, economic insecurity, environmental degradation, and social inequality can intersect and exacerbate one another. Rationalising human security, the prominent Pakistani economist Hafiz A. Pasha argues, "it's a freedom from fear referring to the protection of individuals from direct threats to their safety and physical integrity" (Pasha, 2023, p. 4). The scholar maintained that this involves violence originating from actions by alien states, from the actions of a state against its inhabitants, from the activities of groups against other groups, and from the actions of individuals against other individuals (Pasha, 2023, p. 4). Moeed Yusuf, Pakistan's former national security advisor, who introduced economic security into the national security policy of the country for the period of 2022–2026, assumed that it is more practical to keep economic safety as central and thoughtfully transfer the shares of a strong economy to the strengthening the defence and human security of a country (National Security Division, 2022).

Magnifying the scope of human security, a study highlighted economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security as essential for human security (Maria, 2014). Another academic contribution explains the components of human security by referring to the 1994 report by the UN Development Programme which emphasised a preference for human development and empowerment through ensuring basic needs and the protection of human beings and their values, i.e., assets, norms, traditions, and ideology (Acharya, 2020). Hence, linkage among various elements of intersectionality needs greater emphasis in this region. The question of political empowerment, economic security, health and food security, and societal liberties could only be ensured after defeating terrorism and restoring peace in the territory. In societal studies, an intersection "denotes the crossing, juxtaposition, or meeting point of two or more social categories and axes, or system of power, dominance, or oppression" (Atewologun, 2018). The review of the literature on the concepts of intersectionality and security strands exposes that intersectionality and security concepts have been discussed by many scholars, but there is less academic work related to the concept of various components of security in the light of security threats erupted due to the recent terror engagement of TTP in the area.

Social discrimination is a broader canvas, and scholars have approached this theory in multiple ways. They included factors varying from race, gender, class, ideology, culture, and political-economic rights. Intersectionality is an old concept advocating females' rights in society wherein women were discriminated against on race and colour. Gradually, analysis using intersectionality as a theory or framework was broadened by bringing in all facets of political, economic, religious, and social rights so that individuals and minority communities are not differentiated on exploitable features, as opposed to the majority community availing all such rights. Intersectionality is an interdisciplinary concept, encompassing multiple notions falling in the realm of sociology, psychology, and feminism in the wider context of socio-economic freedom and equal opportunities as part of human security.

Discrimination based on social identities—a particular race, class, or group—is an integral part of the concept of intersectionality, impacted by a spate of terrorism. Terrorism is being used as an instrument of power projection and is usurping the political and social rights of weaker segments of society that are being coerced into supporting the obscurantist ideology of the Afghan Taliban and their conglomerates, especially TTP. The saner voices in the former tribal regions of Pakistan that resist terrorist ideology and support the security forces are eliminated to terrorise the locals. Women are intimidated and their fundamental rights of education and health are denied by the blasting of the facilities that symbolise these rights/institutions in the region. TTP has forced the State of Pakistan to divert maximum resources to bolstering security forces to combat terrorism at the cost of socio-economic uplift of the downtrodden in the terror-infested region.

The core components of intersectionality are violated in Afghanistan by the Taliban regime through a multisectoral approach of systematic denial of rights to women and minorities, whereas in Pakistan, TTP employs a violent extremist strategy by targeting the Shiite Muslim minority and the state security institutions and infrastructure connected with the socio-economic wellbeing of the community. They seemingly pursue the dual aim of demoralising security forces and winning local support for the enforcement of TTP's brand of Islamic Emirate in former FATA and Swat regions, cleared from terrorism after a series of military operations at a high cost of sacrifice in terms of precious lives and economics. Although intersectionality's key concepts remain unchanged, their application is modified to suit local socio-political, ideological, and cultural nuances peculiar to the Afghanistan–Pakistan region.

Although scholars have attempted to explain race, class, and other groups by utilising intersectionality fundamentals, they have also accepted a plethora of theoretical, procedural, and policy questions under this concept of intersectionality (Ferree, 2018). This being a diverse and interdisciplinary subject, it encompasses a vast array of social, political, economic, ideological, and methodological micro and macro structures across the complex social arena. Ferree further argues that intersectionality is not merely a form of inquiry or critical analysis but "praxis that challenges inequalities and opens space" (Ferree, 2018) to politically tackle injustices and discrimination on multiple counts. However, another scholar, Giammarinaro (2022), has described the feminist angle by targeting women migrants who face sexual and other kinds of exploitation. With poor law and order and little economic opportunities, women are forced to work in undesirable environments and are often underpaid and exploited. Many of them are being sexually exploited in the rich Arab states due to their economic miseries and constraints. The inquiry aims at evaluating various factors that impact the local population irrespective of gender; however, the weaker component takes precedence in the analysis (Giammarinaro, 2022).

Yuval-Davis (2015) unveiled another dimension of intersectionality and exploitation by employing situated analysis with a view to explain the different inequalities including social, economic, political, cultural, class-driven inequalities, personal and community rights, and security: "Given its multiple and multi-disciplinary history, intersectionality is not a unified body of theory but more a range of theoretical and conceptual tools" (Yuval-Davis, 2015). However, intersectionality can be suitably juxtaposed with other theoretical paradigms, such as Marxism, neo-liberalism, feminism, let alone sociology (Yuval-Davis, 2015). Exploitation on multiple counts is a contested concept as there is no consensus on the definition of this term, especially legal exploitation of migrants and their rights in a host country. In this article, the focus will remain on political, economic, cultural, and ideological exploitation. This aspect of exploitation is pronounced in the case of Afghan minority communities which are discriminated on belief and race. The Taliban adopted some controversial rules regarding the rights of women, especially their right to education, and some human rights organisations also raised cases related to revenge from political and ethnic opponents and extra-judicial killings after the group came to power in Afghanistan (Shad & Shah, 2024).

2.2. Terror Activism of TTP

TTP, the offshoot of Afghan jihad compatriots in the 1980s and 1990s, has been a significant non-state actor in the region's landscape, particularly in the context of terrorism and insurgency in Pakistan since 2007. Numerous scholarly works have examined the origins, ideology, tactics, and impact of TTP's terror activism, but the violent return of TTP into Pakistan's terror scenario since 2021 is scarcely discussed in the existing literature. For instance, one article illustrates that although Pakistan made important efforts in combating terrorist activism, since 2021, when the Afghan Taliban came to power in Afghanistan, Pakistan has been facing another severe wave of terrorism (Akhtar & Ahmed, 2023).

Exploring the current situation in the region, another author shows that the radicalisation trend has increased alarmingly in Pakistan since the Taliban's return to power, as it encouraged the TTP to increase its involvement in Pakistan (Basit, 2022). Additionally, a book titled *The Taliban Revival: Violence and Extremism on the Pakistan–Afghanistan Frontier* highlights TTP's complex relationship with other militant groups, including Al-Qaeda, as well as its role in fomenting violence and extremism in the two countries' border areas (Basit, 2022). Overall, these scholarly works contribute to a deeper understanding of TTP's terror actions and their implications for normalcy and stability in the region. The literature exemplifies that the Afghanistan–Pakistan border area remains a sanctuary for various militant groups, including TTP, Al-Qaeda, and Islamic State Khorasan Province, and most of these groups concentrate on accomplishing their activities within South Asia, including Pakistan (Cordesman & Hwang, 2020).

The existing literature on the terrorism of TTP offers valuable insights into the group's origins, tactics, and impact on regional security. However, the limited focus on the impact of TTP's recruitment and violent activism on the political, military, human, and socio-economic factors in the aftermath of the Afghan Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan since 2021 is a noticeable gap in the current literature. The analysis of intersectionality strands would help make the study even more interesting for scholars because there is little academic work on the social, cultural, and ideological injustices faced by the communities due to differences in race, gender, and identity, especially in the region under discussion. Further exploration of these dynamics could enhance the understanding of the root causes of terrorism and violent extremism in Pakistan.

3. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

The "security dilemma" in international politics is "a situation in which actions taken by a state to increase its security cause reactions from other states, which in turn lead to a decrease rather than an increase in the original state's security" (Wivel, n.d.). In essence, in the security dilemma, well-intentioned states contest for influence to enhance their security-related interests, but by such action, they reduce the safety of others (Montgomery, 2006). The theory of realism uses this concept of security dilemma, where measures assumed by one state to boost its security can unconsciously provoke insecurity in other states, leading to an arms race, conflict, instability, and mutual distrust. The prominent neorealist Kenneth Waltz assumes that in the anarchic condition of the world, where there is no common government, survival remains the main goal of states (Baylis & Smith, 2005). According to him, states suspect the objectives of other states, and therefore always seek to expand their safety measures. Another renowned scholar, Alexander Wendt, does not consider the security dilemma a result of anarchy or an outcome given by nature; according to him, a social structure consists of intersubjective considerations, where states are so doubtful that they falsely assume each other's intentions (Wendt, 1992). As both count power as a source of safety, they accumulate more and more power. Since the defensive ability will certainly cover some offensive aptitude, many of the measures adopted by one side for its security can frequently threaten or be perceived as aggressive.

Some scholars believe that the world is anarchic by nature, and that states' main concern is their survival in the anarchy of the international system, and for that, they increase their power to protect themselves from any threat. Robert Jarvis articulates that, as the world is anarchic, a state increases its military capability for its defence (Jervis, 1978). However, he believes that because states are not aware of each other's aims, other states may consider their defensive actions as offensive. In such a situation, the possibility of military competition could become stronger. Jervis believes that the technical capabilities of a state and its geographical position are two essential factors in determining whether offensive or defensive action is gainful for it. Charles L. Glaser, on the other hand, claims that Wendt misrepresented the "security dilemma" because "Wendt is using the 'security dilemma' to define the outcome of states' interactions, whereas Jervis and the literature he has developed focus on the material conditions states face, such as geography and prevailing technology" (Glaser, 1997, p. 171).

Attacks on the Pakistani interests by TTP backed by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, and heavy air operations by Pakistan in Afghanistan can be understood in light of the "security dilemma" perspective of international relations, according to which one state takes more effective measures to protect its own security; a stronger response from another state increases the security difficulties of the first state. At first, the Taliban authority of Afghanistan supported the acts of their ideological parasitic group—TTP—in Pakistan for their own interests, but this situation resulted in the Afghan Taliban regime facing a military reaction from Pakistan, a militarily more powerful state in the region. Accordingly, it is surely understood that the non-cooperative attitude of the Taliban regime with Pakistan has been driven by a perceived security dilemma, where Pakistan's exertions to address TTP's threat on its territory are viewed with distrust by the Afghan Taliban authorities, fearing encroachment on their sovereignty.

The research employs a mixed method combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. They include historical and process tracing methods, comparative study, and explanatory analysis for the investigation of historical ties, diplomatic discourse between the two countries, and cross-border violent actions of TTP,

terrorist incidents, and related deaths. The authors used primary and secondary sources along with an examination of quantitative data of terror-related incidents to address the research question "How has the resurgence of TTP since 2021, coupled with the Afghan Taliban regime's apathy, impacted intersectional security strands and contributed to resultant injustices in Pakistan?" Some government reports, formal statements, and official letters are deemed as primary sources in this study. The secondary data available in the form of think tank reports, research articles, books, and official releases by the departments of the Government of Pakistan, such as the National Counterterrorism Authority, has been utilized in the inquiry.

4. Emerging Patterns of Terrorism: Resurgence of TTP in Pakistan Since 2021

TTP aims to establish a puritanical Islamic state in Pakistan through violent means, rejecting the legitimacy of the Pakistani state and its democratic institutions (Akhtar et al., 2023). The period from 2007 to 2014 witnessed ruthless activities of TTP including bombings, assassinations, and kidnappings targeting security forces, government officials, religious minorities, and common civilians in the different areas of Pakistan. In June 2014, the Pakistan Army, with thousands of troops in Waziristan and other areas of the country, launched a comprehensive operation named "Zarb-e-Azb" against TTP and other militant groups. Many of TTP's activists escaped to Afghanistan due to this military campaign, which was followed by another military manoeuvre named "Radd-ul-Fasaad" in 2017; but under a new operational plan, the militant group, TTP, started to use Afghanistan's soil as a safe haven for its attacks into Pakistan. Although TTP's attacks in Pakistan decreased from 2015 to 2020, the intensity of these brutalities has increased since then.

The years 2021 to 2024 witnessed a resurgence in TTP's violent activities as the group conducted numerous significant terrorist attacks across Pakistan, targeting security forces, civilians, and government installations. It is neither possible nor desirable to cover all the occurrences of violence in this study; however, the emerging pattern of terrorism substantiating the resurgence of TTP as a terrorist outfit should suffice. TTP stepped up its terror campaign in 2021 by staging high-profile attacks and killing police officials and military personnel from April 2021 until now. Pakistan conveyed its serious concerns to the Afghan authorities about the increased intensity of attacks at the beginning of the second half of 2024 because, in a daring assault, TTP attacked the military cantonment in Bannu (KPK Province) in the vicinity of South Waziristan, claiming dozens of lives in July 2024 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b). It was a strong message that TTP could make even very secure compounds vulnerable to terrorist attacks.

According to the reports published, TTP mostly targets the Pakistani security forces, as in 2021 the group carried out 282 terror attacks, resulting in the killing of 509 security men and the wounding of 463 others, and in 2022 it executed 367 terror attacks, killing and wounding 1,015 security personnel (Ansari, 2024). In mid-2023, the media verified that Pakistan had seen an upsurge of 73% in terror attacks and a 138% rise in deaths due to terrorist occurrences in the country from August 2021 to April 2023 (Firdous et al., 2023; Missal, 2023; "Shootout between Pakistani troops and insurgents," 2023). The next six months of 2023 also witnessed further TTP attacks on the Pakistani security forces ("Six Pakistan soldiers killed," 2023). Another report published in December 2023 by a Pakistani research institute proclaimed that the first 11 months of the year (2023) witnessed 664 attacks in the country, an increase of 67% in comparison to the same period in the previous year (Hussain, 2023b).

The year 2024 has been even more destructive as the increasing TTP attacks on Pakistan strained Pakistan–Afghanistan relations further ("Two army officers," 2024). The escalation led to an exchange of fire between Afghan and Pakistani security forces, plaguing the bilateral relations even further ("Taliban says it hit back," 2024). During this year (2024), TTP also selected a strategic target by killing five Chinese workers and their Pakistani driver in a suicide bomb blast in the Northwest locality of Bisham in Pakistan on March 26, 2024. Chinese nationals were deliberately targeted to harm Pakistan's strategic interests and force China to react. Although relations were not severed, China strongly protested the killing of its nationals and slowed down work on a significant hydropower project on the Indus River in the Gilgit-Baltistan region (Saifi & Gan, 2024).

5. Afghan Taliban Regime's Apathy

This part of the article specifically aims at exploring the Afghan Taliban regime's indifference to or deliberate ignoring of TTP while it uses Afghanistan's territory for violent activities in Pakistan. The conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan is nothing new in the history of their bilateral relations. Ever since the creation of Pakistan, there have been various ups and downs between the two countries. Pakistan felt offended because it was initially not accepted as an independent state by Afghanistan which opposed the creation of Pakistan as an independent state in the UN. Thus, Afghanistan and Pakistan, despite ethno-linguistic and religious linkages, have had strained relations since 1947, the year Pakistan was officially established. In spite of the 1893 Durand Line agreement between the British Empire and King Abdur Rehman of Afghanistan, the issue of "Pashtunistan" had been haunting the relations between both countries.

It was a sort of delusion on the part of the Afghan ruling elite that Pashtuns on both sides of the divide could be united into a province being carved out of Pashtun-dominated belts in the KPK and Balochistan province of Pakistan. The Afghan jihad of the 1980s and 1990s added fuel to the fire of mistrust between the two countries (Durani & Khan, 2009). Scholars have described a trend of mutual misreading and misunderstanding between the two states as cognitive dissonance over the understanding of the concept of a modern nation-state (Baqai & Wasi, 2021, pp. 6–7). Although the Afghan Taliban's rule was initially a hope for better relations between the two sides, this era did not prove to be conducive to such. After 9/11, the bond between TTP and the Afghan Taliban was further cemented; the Afghan Taliban acted as TTP's mentor for achieving strategic objectives against the US-led forces in Afghanistan. Then, the Afghan Taliban looked the other way and facilitated terrorist strikes by TTP inside Pakistan due to the ideological lineage of the ultra-conservative leadership of the Afghan Taliban (Felbab-Brown, 2023). Since TTP had been supporting the Afghan Taliban against the US, terrorist activities by TTP were condoned by the Taliban regime after seizing power in Kabul in 2021. The Afghan Taliban did not regard Pakistan's security concerns and did nothing to prevent TTP's reorganisation and intensified attacks against the Pakistani security forces (Shinn & Dobbins, 2011).

The political disagreement between the Afghan regime and Pakistan's government was pronounced when the head of Pakistani caretaker setup Anwaar ul Haq Kakar asserted that the Afghan government was not preventing TTP from managing acts of terrorism in Pakistan (Raza, 2023). The new militant faction Tehrik-e-Jihad Pakistan, Baloch separatist groups, and Islamic State Khorasan Province are also to blame for this mayhem (Gul, 2023a). These terrorist organizations, including TTP, frequently collude and engage targets inside Pakistani territory and flee to their sanctuaries in Afghanistan with impunity (Center for

Preventive Action, 2023). Afghanistan is quickly turning into a breeding ground for international terrorism, threatening regional countries and radiating threats to the international community. Pakistan cannot successfully fight either TTP or foreign terrorist entities hiding in Afghanistan on its own. The role of regional stakeholders and major global players is critical in pressuring the Afghan Taliban to rein in TTP and prevent the use of Afghan soil by this group or any other terrorist entity.

6. Threats to Intersectional Security Strands and Resultant Injustices

The concept of intersectionality denotes the interaction of social identity constructions such as race, class, and gender with life practices, especially experiences of opportunity and challenge (Gopaldas, 2013). The strands of intersectional security encompass a wide range of interconnected issues that affect human security, societal well-being, and regional and global stability. In this study, the concept has been employed to evaluate the injustices deliberately meted out to communities living on both sides of the Afghanistan–Pakistan border. Factually, women and religious minorities are the losers and major victims. Paradoxically, a closer examination of the issue reveals it to be a problem of racial and ethnic exploitation, and of the denial of various rights based on the same discrimination and marginalization. If the disparity and extreme injustices are highlighted, the governments may be sensitized on this oft-neglected aspect of the world and consider remedial measures like enacting laws and raising structures that ensure equal rights irrespective of race, gender, and religious identity.

Ethnicity and religious belief are very pronounced elements in one's identity construction given the peculiar security, social, and cultural/religious milieu prevailing in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. In broad academic debate, intersectionality is generally accepted as a theory or paradigm in feminist studies that was introduced to project and protect the social and political rights of black women in the US; scholars have debated whether it should be exclusively a part of feminist rights (Al-Faham et al., 2019) at the cost of a much-desired diversified application of the term to protect the rights of other sexual identities, representing vulnerable races or ethnic affiliations, or broadened to cover all marginalized communities irrespective of sex.

Perceptibly, the literature and scholars' perspective do not prohibit wider application of this concept either in a society that discriminates fellow citizens on race/ethnicity or gender/belief, or in conflicts such as the one under discussion—terrorism—which worsens the already precarious condition of women and minorities, reeling under highly paranoid social/cultural/ideological traditions. Al-Faham gave a broader explanation of the concept of intersectionality that is applied in this study because it covers the aspects being highlighted in the research:

> Various applications of intersectionality [can be made] across a range of topics, including reproductive rights, colonization, religion, immigration, and political behavior. We organize this scholarship into two broad areas: research that focuses on uncovering processes of differentiation and systems of marginalization and research that focuses on categories of difference and between-category relationships. (Al-Faham et al., 2019, p. 252)

Grounding the intersectionality concept with theoretical foundations and operationalisation aligns with the hypothesis; in this inquiry, intersectionality as a framework of analysis has been employed to evaluate multifarious exploitations being meted out to the individuals and communities residing in the troubled Afghanistan–Pakistan region. Understandably, exploitation is a contested term with vague legal

interpretations; however, the focus of the debate revolves around measurable political, economic, cultural, and ideological exploitations of weaker communities with primary emphasis on factors such as race, gender, and class on both sides of the division. Women and religious minorities are facing the brunt of injustices and discrimination due to the obscurantist ideology of extremist forces or the denial of socio-political and economic rights under a misconstrued interpretation of religious obligations. The individuals and communities living along the Afghanistan–Pakistan border are oppressed to such an extent that, in many cases, even if they wish to break free from cultural exploitation and injustices and challenge the denial of their rights—especially women's—through extreme interpretations of religious beliefs by extremist forces, their pleas are not heeded.

Since the security dilemma is the product of structural realism, Pakistan's foreign policy initiatives and (scarce) reciprocity from the Afghanistan side need to be embedded into the debate. Pakistan had long been lobbying in favour of the Afghan Taliban being the dominant force and the beneficiary of the US–Afghan Taliban conflict with muted hopes that the Afghan Taliban would establish good relations with the State of Pakistan and would help curtail terrorist groups operating from Afghan soil. The much-desired reconciliation between the Afghan regime and the government of Pakistan would have facilitated in paving the way for the social inclusion of oppressed communities and the building of social structures helpful both for women's empowerment and the safeguarding of minorities' rights. Disappointingly, yet not bizarrely, the Taliban did the opposite and turned a blind eye to TTP and its affiliates on Afghan soil.

The Afghan regime being a sympathiser of TTP and ideologically averse to women's emancipation and the social inclusion of minorities resisted the change in status quo. Conversely, the Pakistani government merged the former troubled districts of FATA into the mainstream of provincial governance under a constitutional framework for ensuring the rule of law and equitable progress. However, extremist forces hijacked the entire system through terrorism and coercion, impeding the government's efforts. Three distinct features—race, gender, and ideology (religious belief)—are being exploited by the either state institutions of the Afghan regime or TTP, an ultra-extremist entity struggling to impose their so-called emirate in the same region (inside Pakistani territory).

Anarchy and international structures have been at play in this region since the era of the "Great Game" (Czarist Empire vs. British Empire) until the recent US-led War on Terror. Scholars have described intersectionality as a tool to analyse various dynamics of power and to trace structural, disciplinary, cultural, and interpersonal underpinnings (Liu, 2017), thus widening the scope for researchers and practitioners from state- to regional- and systemic-level analysis. The region under review is a typical example of a region that has always experienced some kind of extra-regional influence or interference. Therefore, the current research article encompasses analysis from individual state(s) to regional dynamics and systemic constraints preventing a meaningful inclusion of communities. Terrorism is a securitised phenomenon and is seen by various states differently with a view to extracting political mileage. The region under review is no exception; the role of regional stakeholders and international players is critical in enduring peace and in efforts for social inclusion. In Pakistan, the pervasive impact of terrorism exceeds immediate violent events, undermining the grounds of peace and social inclusion by threatening political stability, military formation, economic development, human security, and cultural integrity.

6.1. Political Security

Political security means political organisational stability, smooth governance, and implementation of the ideologies that give legitimacy and a guarantee of sovereignty to governments and states (Black Trident, 2020). According to research, it is the poor's stakes in political policy formulation, so that they benefit and become stakeholders (OECD, 2007, Chapter 4). The resumption of TTP and other militants' attacks badly influenced the smooth political and democratic process in areas affected by terrorism. For example, it was reported in the media that TTP threatened to attack the leaders of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and Pakistan People's Party, the two political factions in the country in January 2023 (Gul, 2023a). Moreover, as for the parliamentary elections of February 2024, a TTP-affiliated militant group had vowed to sabotage the polling process in the country, particularly the tribal region adjacent to Afghanistan's borders (Farooq, 2024). Terrorising citizens and deterring them from participating in the political process amount to the denial of their political rights at the cost of their voices being heard in power corridors.

6.2. Military Security

Military security can be defined under the traditional definition of national security which is often considered as the ability of a nation to organise its military to protect its borders from any external threat or aggression by any state or non-state actors (Government of Spain, 2013). Although, in the simple description, military security implies the capability of a state to protect itself from aggression, the military could also be called in to assist police and other law enforcement agencies in tackling internal threats, including dealing with terrorism, if the threat is beyond the capacity of the police. This is common in every country; in Pakistan, it has become a norm since 9/11 to deploy the military in volatile regions of the Afghanistan–Pakistan's border to combat terrorist entities, especially TTP. The TTP, assisted by the Afghan Taliban and Al-Qaeda, is a battle-hardened terrorist outfit. The addition of fighters from Central Asian republics and US weapons procured from Afghanistan have further complicated counterterrorist operations by the Pakistan's military (Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, n.d.). The casualty toll in Pakistan has escalated much higher than expected, especially after a series of military operations, to the chagrin of political and military leadership (Gul, 2024). Here military is not only being employed to defeat terrorism, but it is also ensuring security for all irrespective of gender and belief; therefore, by default intersectionality factors are being taken care of.

6.3. Economic Security

Economic security is the ability of individuals, households, or communities to cover their essential needs sustainably and with dignity (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2015). As national security considerations are inextricably tied to economic issues (Dezenski & Rader, 2024), economic security is, thus, taken as an essential part of national security. Economic vulnerabilities intersect with other insecurity strands, contributing to social unrest, conflict, and instability (Bellamy, 2020, Section 5.4.2). FAO has defined food security linked with economics as "when all people in any times [sic], have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food" (FAO, 2008, as cited in Pourreza et al., 2008, p. 113). Protracted military operations in Pakistan drain much-needed funds for economic development, and federal/provincial governments had to divert funds for security actually allocated for socio-economic uplift. Higher security expenditures influence economic security, and the region under review is enduring long

military operations wherein civilian houses, businesses, and public sector infrastructure were destroyed. Rather than rebuilding destroyed social support infrastructure and assisting civilians in restarting their businesses, the meagre resources are funnelled to costly military operations causing economic injustices (Abbasi, 2013). The resurrection of TTP violence again creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and insecurity, eroding investor confidence and deterring foreign investment in Pakistan. Even a Pakistani minister called the assaults on Chinese nationals in Pakistan a major setback for the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor, saying, "The attacks created an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, which is not conducive to investment" (Asfandiyar, 2023).

6.4. Human Security

The concept of security studies is an Anglo-American invention in the post-World War II time frame, as it was explained by Paul D. Williams in his book *Security Studies: An Introduction* while elucidating the background and the ambit of security, encompassing all its aspects (Williams, 2008, p. 3). Since personal security is part of human security, an individual irrespective of gender must feel protected at home, workplace, or place of worship and enjoy the liberty to practice one's traditions, norms, and values under free will. An Islamabad-based research centre testified severe threats to human security by reporting that at least 1,524 violence-related casualties and 1,463 injuries in 789 terror attacks and counter-terror operations were recorded in Pakistan in 2023 alone ("Terrorism-related deaths in Pakistan," 2024). Community security, which is also another dimension of human security, covers security concerns impacting a group of people or community. In Pakistan, some of the marginal communities feel vulnerable as they are occasionally attacked by extremist and terrorist groups. The issue of protection of the Hazara Shiite Muslim community is the obvious example of community security wherein this entire community is targeted and mistreated by violent extremists. Threats to human security could be established by the assessment of a report by the Center for Research and Security Studies (n.d.) revealing that, merely in 2023, terrorist activities directed at religious groups and their worship places resulted in the loss of 203 lives, 88 of them being security personnel.

6.5. Cultural Security

Cultural security is an aspect of security that ensures the unique cultural needs and distinctions of all individuals and groups (University of Notre Dame Australia, n.d.). Therefore, cultural insecurity or threats to cultural security encompass social inequalities, discrimination, and social and cultural injustice. Similarly, socio-cultural marginalisation undermines human values and societal cohesion. Thus, cultural insecurity intersects with economic, environmental, and political factors, contributing to tensions, instability, and violence within societies. Discussing the impact of violent extremism committed by religious militants on Pakistani culture, a piece of a scholarly work outlines that the aggressive competition between contending traditional and religious elements and their aggressive behaviour has made the country hostage to religious intolerance and violence (Hashmi, 2016). Another section of academic work describes how the cultural values of Pakistani society were affected basically through the Islamisation of the country and the Afghan jihad in the 1970s—but religious extremists posed more threats to the cultural security of the state in the post-9/11 and post-Arab Spring eras (Shah, 2022). The literature testifies that militancy has deeply impacted culture, customs, values, and the traditional religious character in former FATA (Khan et al., 2019). TTP's extremist ideology promotes divisions in society and cultural intolerance and desires to impose its rigid interpretations of Islamic law, which can suppress cultural diversity, restrict freedom of expression, and

undermine pluralism in Pakistani society. TTP's attacks on the tribal areas of Pakistan between 2021 and 2024 have also had significant impacts on the cultural values, social inclusion, and cultural integration of these regions.

7. Conclusion

Since the Afghan Taliban came to power in Afghanistan in 2021, TTP's attacks in Pakistan have been adversely affecting various strands of security, including political, military, economic, and human and cultural.

As for *political security*, after ending its ceasefire with Pakistan's government in November 2022, TTP and its associates restarted targeting members and interests of the political parties, posing a very big threat to the political system of the country, in order to impose their brand of the religious political arrangement across Pakistan (Pandya, 2024). TTP's militants have not only threatened the security of the border areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan, but their activities have also damaged the relations between the two countries. TTP's terrorist offensives against Chinese nationals working in Pakistan have also drawn a strong reaction from China. This study shows that the post-2021 timeframe is marred with political instability and poor governance both at the federal and provincial levels, providing a fertile base for TTP recruitment, fundraising, and operational planning. TTP exploited governance gaps, corruption, and lawlessness to establish footholds in remote areas and expand its influence in other areas.

The *military aspect of security*, which refers to the protection of a nation's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and military forces from external and internal threats, has been affected by TTP's attacks on the military forces and their installations. The attacks, particularly on the defence's facilities, undermine the perceived invulnerability of the armed forces. This can embolden terrorist groups and weaken the deterrence value of the military, making the country more vulnerable to further attacks. The persistent threat of TTP's attacks forces Pakistan to prioritize internal security over broader strategic goals. This shift in tactical orientation can limit the military's ability to engage in regional or global defense initiatives, thereby affecting the country's overall strategic posture. No one can deny the fact that the repeated TTP's attacks can erode public confidence in the military's ability to protect the country.

The country's *economic security*, which assures stable fiscal assets, employment, and access to monetary resources necessary for the population's well-being, ensuring protection from economic crises and vulnerabilities, has been severely disrupted by TTP's attacks in Pakistan, especially in the tribal areas neighbouring Afghanistan. The constant threat of violence has deterred investment and development projects, while also damaging infrastructure such as roads, markets, and other communication networks. These disruptions have stifled local businesses, reduced employment opportunities, and increased poverty levels in the affected regions. The attacks have also caused displacement of populations, further straining local economies and exacerbating economic insecurity. Additionally, the heightened security expenses and the diversion of government funds towards counterterrorism efforts have drained the required resources available for economic growth and social services, deepening the economic challenges faced by these regions.

As for personal security as a part of *human security*, the study has substantiated the terrorism-induced security dilemma for the State of Pakistan and a sense of insecurity for citizens living in bordering regions, especially those who are affected either due to terrorist activities or the collateral damage as a result of

military operations against TTP in this region. Besides suicide attacks and bomb blasts, the civilians had been victims of planted improvised explosive devices and systematic demolition of educational institutions and health facilities. The targeted individuals comprise two categories: one includes those who support the state's counterterrorism operations and advocate a peaceful struggle for legitimate constitutional rights; the second includes those who are neutral in the conflict, yet are eliminated due to sectarian differences or racial discrimination. Injustices on account of race, gender, and ideology stand proven because the Hazara Shiite community in particular and the Shiite community in general in Pakistan—which falls under the domain of the community aspect of the human dimension of security—remain the terrorists' prime sectarian target, to terrorize locals and settle their self-proclaimed religious belief-driven scores.

The resurgence of TTP poses significant threats to *cultural security*, social-cultural diversity, religious tolerance, gender equality, and social cohesion in Pakistan, specifically the border regions of the country. As regards gender discrimination, women are exceptionally marginalized in the affected regions; they have no freedom even to visit the market, let alone imagine their right to work and seek higher education. They are brutalised and traumatised to live in a siege. Ideology and local traditions are intermingled in the tribal society and both leverages are utilized by the terrorists to further their political and ideological objectives. Uneducated and unemployed youth is TTP's recruitment pool, in addition to enlistment from a few religious seminaries which act as the militant group's power bayonet to bolster its combat potential and reinforce political influence to negotiate with the government.

The tacit approval of all TTP's terrorist activities by the Afghan Taliban regime emboldens the militant group and complicates Pakistan's counterterrorism operations. The study has also concluded that TTP has utilized terrorism as a tool to coerce locals, irrespective of gender, to further its political, religious, and cultural interests for multifarious exploitations. Although TTP justifies its attacks as retaliation against the Pakistani security forces for counterterrorism manoeuvres, drone strikes, and military offensives targeting its leadership and infrastructure, the support it receives from the Afghan Taliban due to the bilateral ideological convergence plays an important role in this context. Once again, Afghanistan is fast turning into a breeding ground for international terrorism, threatening regional countries and radiating threats to the international community. Considering all these circumstances, it is necessary for the Afghan Taliban to give up their support to TTP and cooperate with Pakistan for regional harmony, community rights, and contributing towards international peace and security. The regional players and major powers should play their role in defeating the terror monster which could transcend borders if allowed to further flourish.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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ARTICLE

Globalization of Security Threats: A Vicious Circle

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Abstract

Statistical data and research suggest a strong correlation between various types of threats, radiating and enhancing each other: terrorism, violent conflicts, ecological threats, and political and economic instabilities. The most affected are the most vulnerable: countries of the Global South, and within those the underprivileged communities and peoples, including Indigenous populations. In this article, the interdependence of various types of threats will be presented based on data from the Global Terrorism Index, the Global Peace Index, the Ecological Threats Report, and the World Bank database. As of November 2023, according to World Bank estimates, over 1 billion people live in fragile and conflict-affected situations. At the same time, violent conflicts are the primary drivers of terrorism (according to the Global Terrorism Index, in 2023, over 90% of attacks and 98% of terrorism deaths took place in countries in conflict). Moreover, data suggest that ecological threats and resource scarcity can contribute to the emergence and perpetuation of violent conflicts and terrorism. Among the case studies, the situation in the Sahel region will be analyzed with a particular focus on Burkina Faso—one of the least developed countries in the world that, as of 2024, is estimated as the country the most impacted by terrorism in the world. The author hypothesizes that the interdependence of security threats requires addressing those threats in a systemic way (with coordinated actions at local, national, and international levels) to effectively counter the negative impact on societies.

Keywords

Burkina Faso; least developed countries; peace; terrorism; the Sahel; war

1. Introduction

In March 2023, the United Nations estimated the number of people living in conflict-affected situations at 2 billion. The numbers are on the rise, and the United Nations stated that the world is experiencing the highest

number of violent conflicts since World War II (United Nations, 2022). The World Bank, on the other hand, estimates the number of people living in "fragile and conflict-affected situations" to be 1 billion (the latest data for the year 2022). The difference lies in the methodologies of calculations. However, based on the data provided by both institutions, we can state that a) the number of people and countries in conflict-affected situations is on the rise, and b) at least one-eighth of the world's population lives in conflict-affected situations.

The statistical data suggest a correlation between various threats that affect human security. In this article, the author hypothesizes that interdependence of security threats requires systemically addressing those threats (with coordinated actions at local, national, and international levels) to counter the negative impact on societies effectively.

In the first part of the article, selected threats to human security will be presented based on statistical data aggregated by the World Bank, the United Nations, and the non-governmental Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) that produces the Global Peace Index (GPI), the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), and the Ecological Threat Report (ETR). Adopting the descriptive and correlational methods of research, the author will analyze violent conflicts, terrorism, and ecological threats, and cross-check with the list of least developed countries (LDCs) in the world as identified by the United Nations.

In the second part of this article, the situation in Burkina Faso will be highlighted. As one of the countries where various types of threats are concentrated, it presents a suitable case study to, on the one hand, analyze the interdependence of security threats and on the other seek sustainable solutions that could be adapted and adopted in various countries.

2. Least Developed Countries

The LDC category was introduced by the United Nations in 1971. Since then, the United Nations has identified LDCs as the "poorest and weakest segment" of the international community. There are three criteria to assess a country as one of the least developed: income (per capita below USD$1,018), a low score on the Human Assets Index (HAI, which takes into account literacy rate, health and education outcomes, under-five mortality rate, maternal mortality, adult literacy rate, and gender parity for secondary school enrolment), and economic and environmental vulnerability (here, the Economic and Environmental Vulnerability Index [EVI] is taken into account; see United Nations, 2024a).

As of 2024, there are 45 countries listed as a LDC:

1. Afghanistan
2. Angola
3. Bangladesh
4. Benin
5. Burkina Faso
6. Burundi
7. Cambodia
8. Central African Republic
9. Chad

10. Comoros
11. Democratic Republic of Congo
12. Djibouti
13. Eritrea
14. Ethiopia
15. Gambia
16. Guinea
17. Guinea-Bissau
18. Haiti
19. Kiribati
20. Lao People's Democratic Republic
21. Lesotho
22. Liberia
23. Madagascar
24. Malawi
25. Mali
26. Mauritania
27. Mozambique
28. Myanmar
29. Nepal
30. Niger
31. Rwanda
32. Sao Tome and Principe
33. Senegal
34. Sierra Leone
35. Salomon Islands
36. Somalia
37. South Sudan
38. Sudan
39. Timor Leste
40. Togo
41. Tuvalu
42. Uganda
43. United Republic of Tanzania
44. Yemen
45. Zambia

The majority (33 out of 45) are located in the African continent. The United Nations estimates that LDCs are home to 40% of the world's poor. At the same time, LDCs account for only 13% of the world population. Among those countries, some are rich in natural resources, including oil, gold, cobalt, lithium, and tantalum—particularly in Africa. In general, the United Nations estimates that the African continent is home to some 30% of the world's mineral reserves, 8% of the world's natural gas, and 12% of the world's oil reserves (UN Environment Programme, n.d.). Examples include the DRC (about 63% of the world's cobalt production), Rwanda (the world's largest producers of tantalum), and Mali, one of the world's top gold

producers (Al Jazeera Staff, 2022). Even though some LDCs are rich in natural resources, foreign direct investments are scarce in LDCs—below 1% FDI. Below 1% is also the share in global trade by those countries. LDC populations are also underprivileged in terms of access to technologies. According to UN estimates, only one-fifth has access to the Internet, leaving millions excluded from access to digital media and services (United Nations Industrial Development Organization, 2021).

Most LDCs share a similar historical background related to postcolonial history and inherited challenges stemming from the colonial period and conflicts fueled by the colonial "divide and rule" policy. Violence cascading into war (and, potentially, terrorism) is one of the consequences (Parashar & Schulz, 2021).

As previously mentioned, the LDC category was created in 1971 during the 26th session of the United Nations General Assembly. In the first list, 25 countries were included: Afghanistan, Benin, Bhutan, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Ethiopia, Guinea, Haiti, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Nepal, Niger, Rwanda, Samoa, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Yemen. The criteria have been expanded over the decades. In 1971, the original criteria were somewhat limited compared to today's multi-dimensional assessments. In 1971, LDCs were defined as countries with deficient levels of per capita gross domestic product facing the most severe obstacles to development; GDP per capita, adult literacy rate, and the share of manufacturing in GDP were considered. Today, the criteria set is more complex. LDCs are defined as low-income countries suffering from the most severe structural impediments to sustainable development. Gross national income (GNI) per capita, the HAI, and the EVI are all taken into account. Within HAI, attention is paid to the following criteria:

- Under-five mortality rate
- Prevalence of stunting
- Maternal mortality ratio
- Lower secondary school completion rate
- Adult literacy rate
- Gender parity index for lower secondary school completion

EVI indicators are as follows:

- Remoteness and landlockeddness
- Merchandise export concentration
- Share of agriculture, forestry, and fishing in GDP
- Instability of exports of goods and services
- Share of population in low-elevated coastal zones
- Share of the population living in drylands
- Victims of disasters
- Instability of agricultural production

Despite the change in the criteria to better reflect the current stages of development, most of the countries included in 1971 are still among the LDCs. From the original list, only four countries graduated from the LDC status in over 40 years: Bhutan (in 2023), Botswana (in 1994), Maldives (in 2011), and Samoa (in 2014). Lao People's Democratic Republic is expected to graduate in 2026.

More countries were included over the past decades. The overall picture is far from optimistic: More countries are joining the LDC group than are successfully overcoming the development barriers. One factor that hampers development significantly is violent conflict (Cortez & Kim, 2012).

3. Conflicts

The second category that is helpful in examining the interdependence of security threats and their impact on societies is "countries in fragile and conflict-affected situations" as defined by the World Bank. The list overlaps with the LDCs to a large extent. Statistically violent conflicts are more common in "poor countries—seven out of ten of the poorest countries in the world are undergoing or have recently experienced some sort of civil war" (Stewart, 2008, p. 4). In the 90s, Auvinen conducted research on a sample of 70 less developed countries in 1981–1989. One of the conclusions was that the extent of political conflict varies directly, among other factors, with poor economic performance and is inversely proportional to the level of economic development (Auvinen, 1997). Jeníček and Grófová (2014) identified a principal cause of conflict in food security in LDCs and saw food security as one of the fundamental requirements for sustainable peace.

Is the conflict situation the factor causing these challenges, or are the severe challenges resulting in conflict? Cortez and Kim (2012) examined whether the inclusion of criteria directly linked to the conflict would be appropriate in better assessing the least developed status of the countries. The conclusion is no. "Adding conflict indicators is unlikely to introduce changes in country classification," they write in the abstract of their report. In addition, they point out the fact that non-conflict LDCs have, on average, higher GNI and HAI scores than conflict LDCs; however, at the same time, those higher scores do not necessarily imply the absence of conflict (Cortez & Kim, 2012). It could be extrapolated to the geopolitical situation: Not all countries in conflict (including countries that are, in fact, at war) are among LDC or developing countries. As Stewart (2007, p. 410) noted, "violent conflict, of course, is not confined to poor countries, even though its incidence is greatest among them."

The World Bank (2024a) maintains a list of fragile countries affected by conflict. Fragile countries are defined as experiencing one or more of the following situations:

- They have the weakest institutional and policy environment;
- There is the presence of a UN Department of Peace Operation, as this reflects a decision by the international community that a significant investment is needed to maintain peace and stability;
- There are flights across borders of 2,000 or more per 100,000 population who are internationally regarded as refugees in need of international protection;
- They are not in medium- or high-intensity conflict, as such countries have moved beyond "fragility."

Countries in high-intensity conflict are defined by the World Bank (2024a) as those with (a) an absolute number of conflict deaths above 250 according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED, n.d.) and 150 according to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP, n.d.), and (b) a number of conflict deaths relative to the population above 10 per 100,000 according to both ACLED and UCDP, reflecting widespread and intense violence across many parts of the country (see also Table 1).

Table 1. List of fragile and conflict-affected situations for 2024.

Conflict	Institutional and social fragility
Afghanistan	Burundi
Burkina Faso	Chad
Cameroon	Comoros
Central African Republic	Congo, Republic of
Congo, Democratic Republic of	Eritrea
Ethiopia	Guinea-Bissau
Iraq	Haiti
Mali	Kiribati
Mozambique	Kosovo
Myanmar	Lebanon
Niger	Libya
Nigeria	Marshall Islands
Somalia	Micronesia, Federated States of
South Sudan	Papua New Guinea
Sudan	São Tomé and Príncipe
Syrian Arab Republic	Solomon Islands
Ukraine	Timor-Leste
West Bank and Gaza (territory)	Tuvalu
Yemen	Venezuela, RB
	Zimbabwe

Source: World Bank (2024a).

According to the Classification of Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations, 20 countries listed by the World Bank are located on the African continent, including most of the Sahel countries. The Sahel is understood here not in geographical terms but as a geopolitical region in Africa where ten countries are located: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, The Gambia, Guinea, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal (United Nations, n.d.-a).

When comparing the categories of LDCs and that of "conflicts and fragile situations," it is already visible that the Sahel region (although not uniform and with significant development differences between some of the Sahel countries) is represented in both: the least developed and conflicts affected. In this article, a closer look is taken at the Sahel as the situation is rapidly deteriorating in the region, as shown by reports by the IEP.

The data supporting the statement that the situation is rapidly deteriorating can be found, among other sources, in the Global Peace Index (GPI). The GPI, issued annually by the IEP, ranks 163 independent states and territories according to their level of peacefulness. According to the findings of the GPI 2023, the least peaceful countries are Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Russia, Ukraine, Somalia, Sudan, Iraq, Mali, and the Central African Republic. In the group of 30 countries with the lowest levels of peacefulness in the world, there are also: Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Eritrea (IEP, 2023a). In addition, the Sahel region has witnessed a rise in violent conflict in the past 15 years, including terrorism. At the same time, the GPI notes that the geopolitical rivalries, foremostly between France and Russia could hamper efforts to address the terrorism crisis in the Sahel (IEP, 2023b).

4. Terrorism

In February 2024, the IEP published its annual Global Terrorism Index (GTI) report. The report provides a comprehensive summary of the key global trends and patterns in the development of terrorism. It assesses the impact of terrorism on a given country, taking into account the total number of terrorist incidents in a given year, the total number of fatalities caused by terrorists in a given year, the total number of injuries caused by terrorists in a given year, and total number of hostages caused by terrorists in a given year. It also includes the dimension of the five-year average, which helps highlight the psychological effect of terrorism over time (IEP, 2024a).

Terrorism is a challenging term to define. In 1984, Schmid analyzed over 100 definitions of terrorism, examining similarities and differences and in 2023 in a report (Schmid, 2023); Polish researcher Jałoszyński (2001) counted over 200 definitions of terrorism. The definition proposed by Hoffman is that terrorism is a deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change (Hoffman, 2006). The psychological effect of terrorism was highlighted frequently in research, with researchers noting the significant role of the media for the terrorists to achieve one of their main goals, which is instilling fear. Jenkins (1974) noticed that phenomenon already in the 70s when he compared terrorism to theatre, stating that terrorist attacks are often staged in order to attract media attention.

Psychological effect with embedded use of media is among the main criteria for defining terrorism (main criteria, called the "sine qua non conditions" that must be met in order to define an act and/or actor as terrorist) identified in this article, next to violence, illegality, and ideological motivation (Maniszewska, 2024). Not underestimating the definitional challenges and elusive character of the phenomenon, this article will adopt the definition proposed by the GTI as the GTI will be the primary source of data analyzed in the research.

The GTI defines terrorism as:

> The systematic threat or use of violence, by non-state actors, whether for or in opposition to established authority, to communicate a political, religious or ideological message to a group larger than the victim group, by generating fear and so altering (or attempting to alter) the behaviour of the larger group. (IEP, 2023a, p. 6)

According to the GTI 2023, deaths by terrorism in the Sahel accounted for 43% of the global total for 2022; for the year 2023, the GTI 2024 assesses that the deaths in the Sahel accounted for 47% of the world total (which represents a rise, despite of the fact, that in the same year, the deadliest terrorist attack was perpetrated by Hamas in Israel, and claimed over 1,000 victims). As a comparison, in 2007, the statistics for the Sahel countries amounted to a mere 1% of terrorism-caused deaths (IEP, 2023a).

The 2024 GTI report shows that terrorism is rising and has become more geographically concentrated (IEP, 2024). The Sahel remained the world's epicenter of terrorism. Burkina Faso was assessed as the country most impacted by terrorism, followed by Israel. Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, was unprecedented in scale and, in fact, could be statistically only compared to the 9/11 attacks on the United States. Here, it must

be underlined that the author of this article understands the pitfalls of judging the risk level posed by terrorism based on statistics only. Terrorism is a complex phenomenon directly affecting societies on various levels and having a lasting psychological impact. However, the statistical data help present and understand trends in the development of terrorism, including its geographical dimension, which may be crucial for a holistic response to today's global and interconnected security threats.

In 2023, the lethality of terrorism grew; at the same time, the number of countries experiencing terrorist attacks, as well as the number of attacks, declined. In total, in 2023, deaths from terrorism rose by 22%: 8,352 people died in terrorist attacks (in 2022, as stated by the GTI 2023, 6,701 deaths were from terrorism).

The top 10 countries most impacted by terrorism identified in the GTI 2024 are:

1. Burkina Faso
2. Israel
3. Mali
4. Pakistan
5. Syria
6. Afghanistan
7. Somalia
8. Nigeria
9. Myanmar
10. Niger

The case of the Sahel, especially Burkina Faso, shows how interconnected terrorism is with other types of threats (political, economic instability, ecological challenges). When the first Global Terrorism Index was published in 2012, covering data for 2011, Burkina Faso was placed at the end of the ranking in the group of countries with the lowest terrorism impact, assessed at 0.0. Burkina Faso went up to the top of the GTI ranking in just 14 years (Maniszewska, 2024).

The GTI 2024 highlights the interdependence of violent conflicts, terrorism, and ecological threats but also fully-fledged links to organized crime visible in the Sahel. Further, instability in the Sahel is fueled by Russia's support of the Wagner Group operating in the region, including Burkina Faso, where the presence of the Wagner Group was identified in November 2023 (Olech, 2024).

5. Environmental Security

The Ecological Threat Report (ETR) analyzes ecological threats in 221 independent states and territories. Like the GPI and the GTI, the ETR is also published by the IEP (2023c). The ETR assesses threats relating to food insecurity, water risk, natural disasters, and demographic pressure. The categories are directly related to drivers of conflicts and are classified by severity from very low to severe. As it does not refer to countries only but to regions, a straightforward comparison is not possible in many countries (where different regions present different levels of ecological resilience). When it comes to the Sahel, however, the comparison is relatively simple. Sub-Saharan Africa has the worst global resilience, and ecological threats are considerably

higher in sub-Saharan Africa than in any other region: 42 countries face severe food insecurity and almost four billion people live in areas with high or severe food insecurity, with the majority in sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, the water risk (measured by the percentage of the population that has access to safe drinking water) is also the highest in sub-Saharan Africa (IEP, 2023c).

The ecological threats, according to the ETR, increase the risk of conflict: A 25% increase in food insecurity, as measured by the ETR, increases the risk of conflict by 36%; a 25% increase in water risk increases the risk of conflict by 18% and natural disasters increase the risk of conflict by 21%. The ETR states that the Sahel is the region with the most significant impact of ecological threats and is especially prone to conflict in the aftermath of a natural disaster. Such impact may rise in the future with climate change. However, the authors of the ETR also state that the impact of climate change on conflict is still under-researched, and many factors can contribute to the development of conflicts. In addition, once conflicts develop, one of the consequences is the forced displacement of people (IEP, 2023c).

Further, it is essential to emphasize that ecological threats and resource scarcity can contribute to the emergence and perpetuation of violent conflicts and terrorism. Climate change, water scarcity, food insecurity, and competition over natural resources can exacerbate existing social tensions, create new ones, and provide favorable conditions for radicalization. Conflict and environmental degradation aggravate each other. The United Nations ("On International Day," 2014) estimated in 2014 that 40% of the internal conflicts over the past 60 years were related to natural resources. Moreover, conflicts related to natural resources and/or environmental degradation are twice as likely to return to violence or become "re-wars" within five years (European Commission—Competence Centre on Foresight, 2020). Furthermore, research indicates that violent conflicts and wars have a significant ecological impact (Weir, 2020), deteriorating the environment, and the vicious cycle becomes evident. It is a security system whose elements need to be addressed systemically. Even if more research is still needed with respect to the links between environmental stress, such as desertification of land in Sahel countries (United Nations, 2022), and mass migrations or conflicts, the data suggest it does lead to increased instabilities.

When we compare 2023 data between the ETR and the GPI, it becomes apparent how security threats amplify each other: Violent conflicts, ecological threats, and terrorism are interconnected. As previously detailed, the epicenter of terrorism shifted in recent years to sub-Saharan Africa (prior to that, South Asia was the most impacted region). The GTI 2024 confirmed that the Sahel countries are among the states most affected by terrorism.

6. Burkina Faso as Case Study

A passage from the Lonely Planet Guide on Africa published in 2013 reads:

> Burkina Faso stands out as a beacon of stability in a region rocked by insecurity. Despite widespread riots in 2011, the country managed to steer itself back on course and held peaceful municipal and legislative elections in December 2012. (Lonely Planet et al., 2013, p. 233)

In just ten years, the country's security situation has deteriorated dramatically.

This landlocked country in the Western part of the Sahel gained independence from France in 1960—the Historical Year of Africa. After several brutal military *coup d'état* and failed democratization efforts, the last coups (two separate coups in 2022) led to the ousting of the democratically elected president Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, and the country is currently ruled by a junta that enjoys the support of the Russian Federation.

Freedom House (2023) also confirms a dramatic deterioration in the security situation in Burkina Faso. In the Freedom House Index, Burkina Faso's status declined from "partly free" to "not free" due to the effects of two successive military coups, including the suspension of the constitution and dissolution of the legislature, and an expanding conflict with Islamist militant groups. The country has over 22 million citizens and is predominantly Muslim (Central Intelligence Agency, 2024). It is one of the LDCs in the world, is highly agrarian, has a low-income economy, and has limited natural resources. Burkina Faso is home to over 60 ethnic groups. Some of the indigenous peoples, especially pastoralists, are subject to discrimination and are targeted by both jihadist terrorists as well as anti-terrorist militias (Diallo, 2021).

In terms of ecologic resilience, the country performs extremely poorly. On a scale of 1 (*low*) to 5 (*severe*), data from 2023 used for the ETR for Burkina Faso registers an overall score of 5—food insecurity: 4.82, natural disasters: 2.7, demographic pressure: 5, water risk: 5 (IEP, 2023c).

Although the country is characterized as having limited resources (World Bank, 2024b), Burkina Faso still has a mining sector with gold production. Also, in 2023, lithium was found by the Australian mining company Red Rock Resources, which invested in Burkina Faso in 2008 and was primarily focused on gold mining (Jalloh, 2023; Red Rock Resources, n.d.). That said, gold production dropped due to insecurity, and the prognosis by the World Bank states that economic growth depends on security reinforcement. If the situation does not deteriorate further, growth could slowly rise, driven by recovering mining, agricultural production, and service sector growth. However, given the circumstances discussed in this article, further escalation of violence is more probable in the upcoming years.

In 2023, Burkina Faso became the country with the highest impact from terrorism for the first time, with deaths from terrorism increasing by 68% to 1,907 (IEP, 2024). Globally, the number of victims is 8,352. In Burkina Faso, an especially vulnerable region is the three-border areas (TBAs) with Niger and Mali—both countries are also struggling with deteriorating security.

Although the case study presented in this article is Burkina Faso, it is worth noting that the security challenges radiated throughout the region and the developments in neighboring Mali played a central role in deteriorating security in Burkina Faso. Operation Barkhane started in 2014 with the primary goal of countering Islamist terrorists in the region and aimed at eventually leading to the self-resilience of Sahel countries (Olech, 2023). The operation did not succeed; moreover, the withdrawal of French troops from Mali in 2022 provided ample opportunity for not only jihadist groups but also other global players. Russian military advisers arrived in Mali in 2021; through the Wagner Group, Moscow was strengthening its military influence in the region, capitalizing on the worsening of relations between the West and Sahelian countries (Stronski, 2023).

Here, it is also important to note that TBAs have been identified as challenging to control and have emerged as centers of the crime–terror nexus. It is not limited to the TBA Burkina Faso–Mali–Niger; other examples

include the maritime border between the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia, a transit hub for illegal goods, including weapons. As the authors of the RAND Corporation's report *Non-Traditional Threats and Maritime Domain Awareness in the Tri-Border Area of Southeast Asia: The Coast Watch System of the Philippines* stated, it presents the "principal logistical corridor for local and transnational terrorist groups" (Rabasa & Chalk, 2012, p. 3). This concept may be extrapolated to other security-sensitive tri-border areas, such as the TBA Paraguay–Argentina–Brazil (US Department of State, 2022).

There are several reasons why TBAs become hubs for criminal and terrorist activities. They include (but are not limited to) topographical factors related to challenging geographical features, overlapping jurisdictions, and the resulting possible legal loopholes, but also the history of conflicts between involved countries and regions and the existent cultural and linguistic diversity, which can complicate law enforcement efforts (Maniszewska, 2024). The GTI 2024 states a clear correlation between the impact of terrorism and the level of organized criminal activity; this correlation is visible in the Sahel, with artisanal gold mining being an example in Burkina Faso. Gold, being difficult to trace and highly valuable, is a profitable business for organized crime and terrorists who look for funding sources, and jihadists getting access to gold mining revenue has been identified as a significant issue by the government of Burkina Faso, which tried in 2022 to limit artisanal gold mines (IEP, 2024).

Research by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) identifies two main issues for Burkina Faso that hamper development, stability, peace, and social cohesion: (a) the exacerbation of conflicts over natural resources and (b) the rapid development of insecurity (FAO, 2021). In addition, high levels of poverty, inequality, unemployment, poor leadership, and illiteracy present favorable conditions for extremists to operate, conducive to recruitment to terrorist organizations (Isilow & Basaran, 2023).

7. Conclusion

LDCs are the most fragile segment of the international community, struggling with economic and societal issues. They are especially prone to violent conflicts and radicalization leading to terrorism. Within LDCs, the Sahel countries emerged in recent years as the epicenter of terrorism, closely related to organized crime. It severely hampers development efforts. However, it is unclear whether the conflicts are the result or the cause of other threats to human security. They are intertwined and interconnected and form a vicious cycle that is challenging to break. Only four countries "graduated" from the LDC list over the past 40 years.

Regarding the practical application of sustainable solutions, the author believes that all the recovery plans should be elaborated in close cooperation with the countries concerned, including representatives of civil society organizations. The plans could be divided into three phases: short-term, medium-term, and long-term.

Short-term solutions that could be implemented relatively quickly involve some of the already existing and discussed proposals, such as sustainable farming innovations, for instance, sustainable shea butter production in Mali (Ellerbeck, 2023), and coordination of existing aid and development programs, such as the UNDP Sahel Resilience Development Project, funded by Sweden (United Nations, n.d.-b). Mid-term solutions could include increasing access to education and digital connectivity and investing in infrastructure (van Trotsenburg, 2021), and should be aligned with actions aimed at strengthening civil society, which can

translate into increased societal resilience. Long-term solutions could include systemic water management and agriculture transformation.

These are only examples of actions that could be undertaken; more research and evidence-based solutions are needed. The main challenge the author sees in ensuring the buy-in from the international community is acknowledging its responsibility towards the LDCs, which should translate into enhanced economic and knowledge-transfer assistance.

The case of Burkina Faso shows how interconnected economic, societal, and security issues are. It is a case highlighting the cross-border character of threats with the TBA Niger–Mali–Burkina Faso discussed in the article. More research is needed on the direct correlations between different types of threats, which could provide valuable insights as to where to put most efforts to leverage and maximize the effect of actions (for instance, international aid efforts). At the same time, the struggles of LDCs to overcome their challenges also support the hypothesis that the issues need to be addressed systemically, involving actors at local, national, and international levels in order to ensure sustainable solutions and protect the most vulnerable groups.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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About the Author

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ARTICLE

Poverty-Armed Conflict Nexus: Can Multidimensional Poverty Data Forecast Intrastate Armed Conflicts?

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Abstract

Poverty is widely acknowledged as a significant factor in the outbreak of armed conflicts, particularly fueling armed conflict within national borders. There is a compelling argument positing that poverty is a primary catalyst for intrastate armed conflicts; reciprocally, these conflicts exacerbate poverty. This article introduces a statistical model to forecast the likelihood of armed conflict within a country by scrutinizing the intricate relationship between intrastate armed conflicts and various facets of poverty. Poverty, arising from factors such as gender inequality and limited access to education and public services, profoundly affects social cohesion. Armed conflicts, a significant cause of poverty, result in migration, economic devastation, and adverse effects on social unity, particularly affecting disadvantaged and marginal groups. Forecasting and receiving early warnings for intrastate armed conflicts are crucial for international policymakers to take precautionary measures. Anticipating and proactively addressing potential conflicts can mitigate adverse consequences and prevent escalation. Hence, forecasting intrastate armed conflicts is vital, prompting policymakers to prioritize the development of effective strategies to mitigate their impact. While not guaranteeing absolute certainty in forecasting future armed conflicts, the model shows a high degree of accuracy in assessing security risks related to intrastate conflicts. It utilizes a machine-learning algorithm and annually published fragility data to forecast future intrastate armed conflicts. Despite the widespread use of machine-learning algorithms in engineering, their application in social sciences still needs to be improved. This article introduces an innovative approach to examining the correlation between various dimensions of poverty and armed conflict using machine-learning algorithms.

Keywords

armed conflict; forecasting models; inequality; poverty

1. Introduction

The connection between poverty and intrastate armed conflicts is not straightforward. On the one hand, poverty can lead to conflicts; on the other hand, conflicts can exacerbate poverty. To effectively address the root causes of poverty and armed conflicts, it is crucial to understand the complex interplay between them. While poverty is often defined in monetary terms, it is essential to note that the poverty that fuels armed conflicts is multidimensional and stems from inequality that leads to grievances. Grievances are better understood as multidimensional poverty, affecting all aspects of life.

Although it is widely perceived that grievance is a significant factor contributing to the outbreak of intrastate armed conflict, there are numerous instances where, even though the level of grievance was high, it did not escalate into armed conflict. Hence, it is essential to understand the circumstances under which a state may experience armed conflict due to poverty. Cederman et al. (2010) suggest that when large ethnic groups with high mobility are excluded, the likelihood of civil war increases. Additionally, the history of previous conflicts within the country can negatively affect the potential for future conflict (Cederman et al., 2010, p. 88). Lindemann and Wimmer (2018) studied the Ethnic Power Relations dataset. Not all politically marginalized groups experience armed conflict due to ethnopolitical exclusion (Lindemann & Wimmer, 2018, p. 1). According to their research, when the dissatisfaction related to ethnopolitical inequality is aggravated by state violence that targets members of a specific group, conflicts can turn into armed rebellions. This is more likely to happen when the state's repressive institutions have limited control over the territory or if a neighboring state provides refuge. In such circumstances, leaders of the excluded groups may seize the opportunity to organize an armed rebellion (Lindemann & Wimmer, 2018, p. 13).

Grievances in society are one of the significant contributors to deteriorating social cohesion. The grievances arising from the political context demonstrate a feeling of political unrest and populism. This occurs when public officials make unstable policies and regulations for the state. This uncertain situation frustrates the public, making it difficult for them to make decisions regarding economic, social, and daily aspects of life. When a government is politically unstable, it cannot meet public demands and provide successful services. It is discussed that an unstable government can negatively impact a state's political situation and the country's economic and social systems (Abbas et al., 2023, pp. 1–2). It can be assumed that the structural form of exclusion can impact the outbreak of conflicts within a state. This study aims to better understand the root causes of intrastate conflicts by exploring how different types of exclusion and societal grievances affect the likelihood of armed conflict. Instead of focusing solely on the kind of government system in place, this article will attempt to identify a systematic relationship between societal grievances and the probability of intrastate armed conflict occurring.

At this point, an important question must be addressed: What type of grievance are we discussing? If we assert that the grievances enhance the likelihood of intrastate conflict, measuring which type of grievances can cause the outbreak of intrastate armed conflict is of utmost importance. Grievance resulting in the armed conflict outbreak can be over the economy, cohesion, political rights, or different factors affecting each other. Grievances can arise for various reasons and can be linked to multidimensional poverty. Individual well-being is linked to multidimensional poverty, characterized by monetary, educational, and living standards (Oxford Poverty and Human Development Institute, 2023). Multidimensional poverty is also closely related to fragility in social well-being. Fragility in one aspect of social well-being can negatively impact an individual's well-being

and, in many instances, can lead to societal grievances. Measuring fragility across different dimensions of well-being can help us better forecast the decline in social cohesion. This research aims to create a forecasting model using machine-learning algorithms.

Using suitable fragility metrics in different areas of social life, we can forecast the likelihood of the outbreak of intrastate conflict.

2. Poverty and Armed Conflict Relationship

History has demonstrated the inexorable intertwining of conflicts and poverty, emphasizing the imperative for enhanced understanding to combat their profound repercussions on humanity. While traditionally approached within separate academic domains—poverty within development studies and economics and armed conflict within security and peace studies—it is increasingly apparent that these phenomena are not isolated but interconnected facets of global challenges. This realization is underscored by empirical evidence indicating that some of the world's poorest nations have been ravaged by major civil wars, with a significant likelihood of relapse into armed conflict within the first five years of peace (United Nations Development Programme, 2005).

Understanding the relationship between conflict and poverty is complex, given the intricate feedback mechanisms between these phenomena. Academic inquiry has predominantly focused on elucidating how poverty can catalyze conflict and vice versa, with recent attention primarily directed towards exploring poverty's role in instigating war (Justino, 2011). The complex interplay between violent conflict and poverty manifests through various channels, including conflict as a cause of chronic poverty, insecurity exacerbating poverty, and poverty serving as a trigger for conflict.

Examining the impacts of military institutions and armed conflict on economic development unveils a critical nexus between conflict and poverty. Notably, civil wars precipitate a sharp increase in military expenditure relative to GDP, often at the expense of social spending, thereby perpetuating stagnation and underdevelopment (Collier & Hoeffler, 2006; Loayza et al., 1999). Moreover, conflicts weaken governance institutions and impede service provision, amplifying immediate and long-term human costs, particularly among vulnerable groups (Stewart & FitzGerald, 2000).

While there is consensus on the transmission mechanism validating poverty as a trigger for conflict, modern conflicts are recognized as multi-causal phenomena influenced by various short- and long-term factors beyond economic deprivation (Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Goodhand, 2001).

Conflict-induced disruptions in agriculture and investment contribute to increased economic uncertainty, leading to reliance on informal markets and elevated production costs (Justino, 2011). Furthermore, weakened social networks diminish informal risk mitigation mechanisms, exacerbating the economic toll of conflict on households.

In addition to its economic ramifications, armed conflict inflicts profound capability deprivations, undermining society's ability to realize valuable functions (Sen, 2011). The atrocities perpetrated during conflicts—ranging from massacres to forced displacement—result in severe freedom deprivation, limiting individuals' prospects for leading dignified lives.

In conclusion, the intricate relationship between conflicts and poverty necessitates a holistic approach integrating political, economic, and social strategies to address root causes and mitigate their impacts. By fostering greater understanding and implementing targeted interventions, societies can aspire to break the cycle of violence and poverty, paving the way for a more equitable and prosperous future.

3. Research Methodology

This study utilizes fragility metrics based on the Fragility State Index, published annually by the Fund for Peace. This index evaluates countries based on cohesion, political stability, economic stability, social stability, and cross-cutting groups. The evaluations are based on 12 indicators within these groups and have been published yearly since 2007. We created a machine-learning algorithm that utilizes an open-source dataset provided by the Fund for Peace to forecast future outbreaks of intrastate armed conflicts. Regression analysis is frequently used in our machine-learning models to forecast a dependent variable y based on independent variable x (Kassambara, 2017, p. 6). This statistical method can also explain the interaction between dependent and independent variables that affect dependent variables (Bulut, 2018, p. 219). Our algorithm assumes a statistical relation between fragility indicators and the outbreak of armed conflict within a state. This study uses fragility data from 2007 to 2012 to measure the relation and make forecasts. The indicators and grouping of the Fragile State Index are described in Table 1.

To forecast intrastate armed conflicts, we used the Fragile State Index dataset indicators as independent variables and the data derived from the ACLED dataset as a dependent variable. It is considered an occasion of intrastate armed conflict if the country has experienced armed conflict and had more than 250 conflict-related deaths within about ten years, from 2012 until 2022. In the dataset, the case of intrastate armed conflict is marked as "1," and no intrastate conflict case is marked as "0" (ACLED, 2024). Cockayne et al. (2010) have set the threshold for conflict-related deaths at 250 within ten years, and for a civil war to be considered active, there must be at least 25 conflict-related deaths within a year (Cockayne et al., 2010,

Table 1. Fragile State Index and indicators.

Fragile States Index main groups	Sub-indicators	Description of indicator in the model
Cohesion indicators	Security apparatus	C1
	Factionalized elites	C2
	Group grievance	C3
Economic indicators	Economic decline	E1
	Uneven economic development	E2
	Human flight and brain drain	E3
Political indicators	State legitimacy	P1
	Public services	P2
	Human rights and the rule of law	P3
Social indicators	Demographic pressure	S1
	Refugees and IDPs	S2
Cross compliance indicator	External intervention	X1

Source: Fund for Peace (n.d.).

p. v). Therefore, 250 deaths in a country indicate that "armed conflict has occurred" when conducting a logistic regression model over ten years. Under these criteria, it is found that between 2012 and 2022, 57 out of 177 countries experienced intrastate armed conflict, based on the ACLED dataset.

The Fragile States Index includes 177 countries; all fragility data between 2007 and 2012 are available. Since the data on South Sudan started to be published in 2012, South Sudan was not included in the model to protect the integrity of the forecasting model, and the model was built in 177 countries. In the forecasting model, the fragility data, the model's independent variables, are taken from the Fragile States Index data (2007–2012) and used to forecast. Armed conflict status, determined as the dependent variable, is obtained from the armed conflict data between 2012 and 2022. Between 2012 and 2022, the occurrence of armed conflict in the specified country is indicated in the dataset as "conflict status" and marked as "1" or "0."

To ensure accurate results in machine learning, it is essential to consider the proportional difference between the categories of the dependent variable. This study created the training set based on category "1," which had the least number of categories. The dataset was divided into two sets—the training and test sets. To maintain balance, the training set comprised 114 data, of which 57 were from category "0" and 57 were from category "1." The test dataset was used to evaluate the accuracy of the trained data and was tested on all data, with 177 data points—equal to the total number of countries in the dataset. The data distribution of the dataset used in the model is presented in Table 2.

The formula for multiple linear regression accounts for the effect of several independent variables on a dependent variable, assuming linear relationships is shown as equation 1:

$$y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \cdots + \beta_m x_m + \varepsilon \tag{1}$$

Where y is the dependent variable, X_m is the mth independent variable, $\beta_0, \beta_1,..., \beta_m$ are the model parameters, ε is the error term, and m is the number of explanatory variables in the model (Bulut, 2018, p. 233). Based on equation 2, the forecasting equation for the multiple linear regression model can be expressed as:

$$\hat{y} = \hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_1 x_1 + \hat{\beta}_2 x_2 + \cdots + \hat{\beta}_m x_m \tag{2}$$

In this forecasting equation, the difference between the forecasted dependent variable $\hat{y}$ and the actual y value is characterized as the residual value (ε), and the residual value (ε) can be formulized as in equation 3:

$$\varepsilon = y - \hat{y} \tag{3}$$

Table 2. Data distribution in the model.

Characteristics of the dataset used in the model	
Total amount of data	177
Amount of data in category "1"	57
Amount of data in category "0"	120
Training set data distribution	"0" category: 57 "1" category: 57
Test set data distribution	"0" category: 120 "1" category: 57

To convert this forecasting equation into a probability value, equation 4 is applied:

$$P(Y = A) = \frac{e^{\left(\beta_0 + \sum_{j=1}^{m} \beta_j X_j\right)}}{1 + e^{\left(\beta_0 + \sum_{j=1}^{m} \beta_j X_j\right)}} = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-\left(\beta_0 + \sum_{j=1}^{m} \beta_j X_j\right)}} \tag{4}$$

Transformation is applied. In the multiple linear regression model equation, the dependent variable y values can change in the range $(-\infty, \infty)$. After transforming into a probability equation, probability values are between 0 and 1.

However, since a categorical dependent variable is needed in the logistic regression model, the formula is transformed again, and the binary logistic regression formula is used in this research. This conversion can be formulated as in equation 5:

$$\ln\left(\frac{P(Y = A)}{1 - P(Y = A)}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \cdots + \beta_m X_m \tag{5}$$

This conversion is described as "logit conversion" (Bulut, 2018, pp. 275–276). Depending on these multivariate sub-factors (independent variables), the model is created to forecast a categorical dependent variable.

4. Results

The logistic regression model was created with the "glm()" function in the "glmnet" statistical package, which is used to create linear regression models in the R programming language. The categorical dependent variable was chosen as *family = "binomial"* for the first model. The training set used to create the model is called "trainSet" and is specified in the programming code as "data = trainset." In the data obtained from the first model called "modelLogit," the weight coefficients for each independent variable were specified as "coefficients," and since the number of data used in the test set was 114 (consisting of 57 "1" and 57 "0"), "degrees of freedom" was determined as $n - 1 = 113$ (number of data used -1).

When the results are analyzed, it is observed that the "null deviance" is 158 and the "residual deviance" is 92.91. It can be interpreted that the model, which was initially at the "null deviance" value, decreased to the "residual deviance" value with the addition of independent (also called explanatory) variables, and its explanatory feature increased. The results for the first model created are shown in Table 3. Based on the assessment, it can be concluded that the independent variables positively impact the model. Although the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) is essential for comparing different models, it cannot be considered significant.

When we analyze the values presented in Table 3 for the first model, it becomes apparent that the coefficients "C1.Median," "E1.Median," and "E3.Median" are crucial for the model. Only three out of the 12 independent variables are vital for the logistic model that was initially created. Less effective coefficients should be removed to simplify the logistic model.

The presence of multicollinearity in a forecasting model negatively affects its performance. Unforecastable relationships between independent variables can cause this issue (Pennsylvania State University, 2018). To eliminate the problem of multicollinearity between independent variables and indirectly reduce variance inflation, we can examine variance inflation values (VIF). This issue can be mitigated by removing the model's independent variables with high VIF values. To remedy this problem, a correlation matrix can be created for

Table 3. Significance of coefficients in the R programming language code written for the first model.

Call
glm(formula = ConflictStatus ~ C1.Median + C2.Median + C3.Median + E1.Median + E2.Median + E3.Median + + P1.Median + P2.Median + P3.Median + S1.Median + S2.Median + X1.Median, family = = "binomial," data = trainSet)

Deviance Residuals				
Min.	1Q	Median	3Q	Max.
−2.41760	−0.74549	0.06158	0.64610	2.36154

Coefficients				
	Estimate	Std. error	z value	Pr(>|z|)
(Intercept)	−8.65723	2.60603	−3.322	0.000894 ***
C1.Median	0.61425	0.34242	1.794	0.072833 ++
C2.Median	−0.01670	0.36016	−0.046	0.963006 +
C3.Median	0.03447	0.36100	0.095	0.923941 +
E1.Median	−0.61018	0.34550	−1.766	0.077381 ++
E2.Median	0.29474	0.43401	0.679	0.497071 +
E3.Median	0.57828	0.26495	2.183	0.029066 *
P1.Median	−0.64488	0.53206	−1.212	0.225503 +
P2.Median	0.01898	0.39746	0.048	0.961913 +
P3.Median	0.43700	0.39039	1.119	0.262971 +
S1.MediaN	0.62155	0.45800	1.357	0.174756 +
S2.Median	0.04799	0.22193	0.216	0.828811 +
X1.Median	−0.04312	0.31579	−0.137	0.891386 +

Notes: Significant codes = 0 ***; 0.001 **; 0.01 *; 0.05 ++; 0.1 + (dispersion parameter for binomial family taken to be 1); null deviance = 158.04 on 113 degrees of freedom; residual deviance = 92.91 on 101 degrees of freedom; AIC = 118.91; number of Fisher Scoring iterations = 6.

the model and R programming language to examine the correlation values between the independent and dependent variables, which generate a correlation matrix. Figure 1 presents the correlation matrix created. According to Alpar, variables in a model should have a correlation value between 0.30 and 0.90. Variables outside this range should be adjusted (Alpar, 2013, p. 291).

As can be seen in Figure 1, which was created with the "corrplot" code in the "corrplot" package used to visualize the correlation between the specified variables in the R programming language, the correlation values between some variables are above 0.9.

Creating a new logistic regression algorithm is necessary to remove the independent variables with multicollinearity problems from the model. To create a new model, VIF values are checked one by one, and the process is repeated until the most appropriate model is found by removing the variable with the most significant value from the independent variables with VIF values above 5.

The "step" function in the R programming language considers the AIC in the forecasting model. Forward selection, backward elimination, or stepwise approach methods were selected, and the coefficients with low
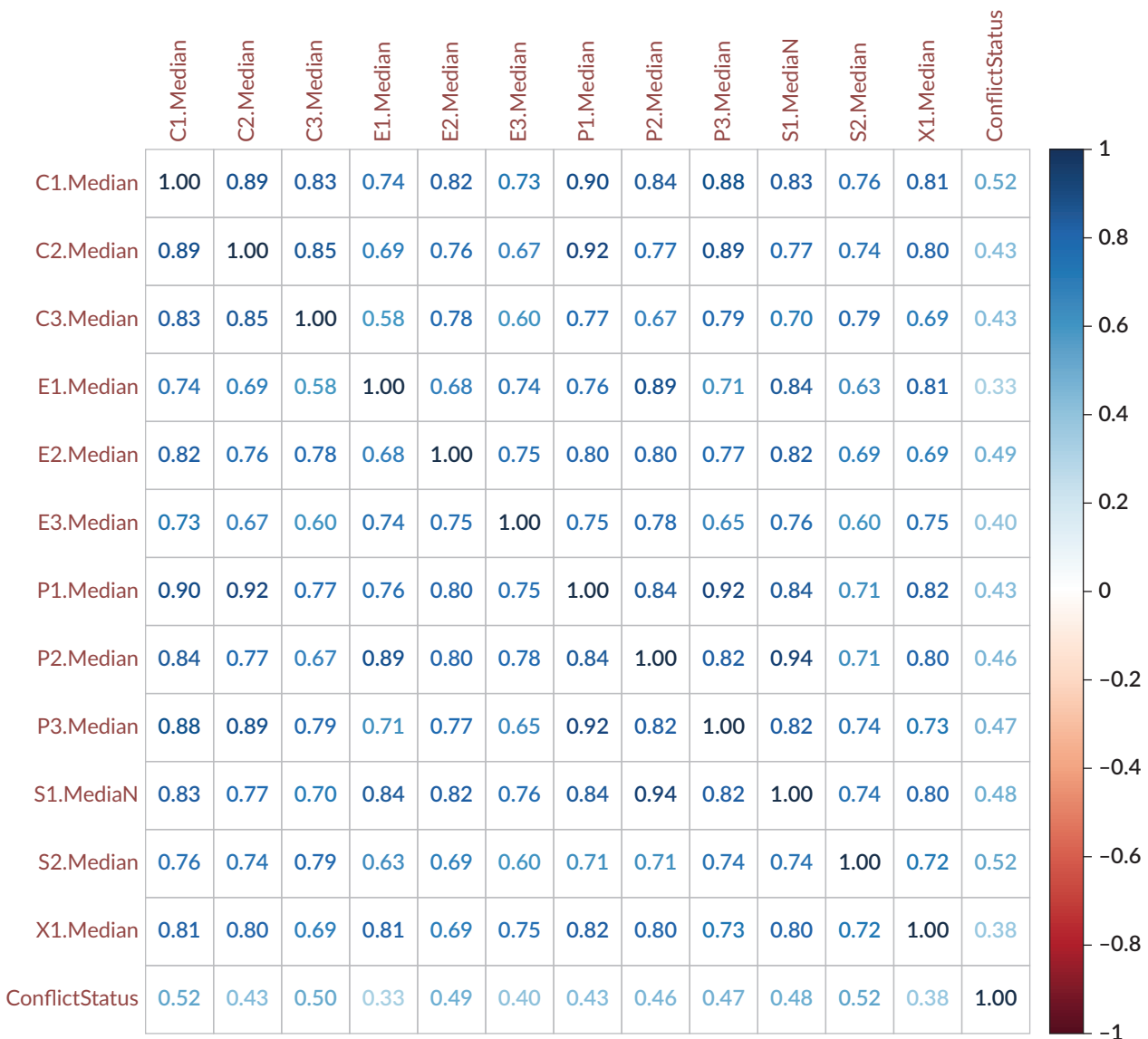
Figure 1. Correlation matrix showing the relationship between coefficients.

significance were removed from the model. As a result of these experiments, the stepwise approach was determined to be the most appropriate method. The R programming codes for creating the final logistic model are given in Table 4.

The final model, created by removing the independent variables with low significance, has only four independent variables (*C1.Median*, *E1.Median*, *E3.Median*, and *S1.Median*) compared to the 12 independent variables at the initial stage. This reduction in the number of independent variables has reduced the complexity of the model. When comparing the AIC of both models, it is noted that the AIC value of the initial model is 118.9, while the AIC value of the final model is 106.3. This decrease in the AIC value indicates an improvement in the model. In the summary information of the models provided by the R program, it is stated that the final model developed in terms of the importance levels of the independent variables is better than the initial model created at the beginning. This is indicated by the symbols following the coefficients in the model summaries.

Table 4. Appropriate model selection with the stepwise method call.

glm(formula = ConflictStatus ~ C1.Median + E1.Median + E3.Median + S1.Median, family =
    = "binomial," data = trainSet)

Deviance residuals				
Min.	1Q	Median	3Q	Max.
−2.26032	−0.74419	0.07685	0.70477	1.99009

Coefficients				
	Estimate	Std. error	z value	Pr(>|z|)
(Intercept)	−7.8423	1.9105	−4.105	4.05e-05 ***
C1.Median	0.6206	0.2018	3.076	0.00210 **
E1.Median	−0.7554	0.2902	−2.603	0.00923 **
E3.Median	0.5290	0.2456	2.154	0.03122 *
S1.Median	0.7667	0.2934	2.613	0.00897 **

Notes: Significant codes = 0 ***; 0.001 **; 0.01 *; 0.05 ++; 0.1 + (dispersion parameter for binomial family taken to be 1); null deviance = 158.038 on 113 degrees of freedom; residual deviance = 96.267 on 109 degrees of freedom; AIC = 106.27; number of Fisher Scoring iterations = 6.

4.1. Tests for Model Fitness

When examining goodness-of-fit tests for logistic regression models, it is observed that opinions are divided into two. One view suggests that logistic regression models should be evaluated based on their forecasting success percentages. This is because the test methods for logistic regression models with categorical dependent variables are less successful than those for linear regression models. On the other hand, some believe that the application of tests is crucial in determining the success of logistic models, and many alternative test methods are available (Allison, 2014, p. 1). A meaningful way to evaluate the goodness of fit of a model is by examining the scatter plots of the residual values. In Figure 2, the residuals vs. fitted graph displays the relationship between the residual and forecasted values but does not yield a significant result. This is because logistic regression results are binary (0 or 1), so it is normal not to obtain significant results as in linear regression. The Normal Q-Q plot in the upper right corner of Figure 2 shows the concentration of residual values on the normality line, which supports the model fit. The "scale-location" plot in the lower left corner displays the relationship between the square root of the residual values and the forecasted values. If the square root of the residual values is distributed horizontally equidistant from the line indicated on the graph and does not follow a specific pattern but is homogeneously distributed over the entire graph, it is considered an indicator of co-variance (Bobbitt, 2020; Moreno, 2019). The "scale-location" plot shows that the covariance hypothesis cannot be accepted. Although the square root values of the residual values are equally above and below the red horizontal line, they are not homogeneously distributed on the graph and form a distinct pattern. Therefore, the "binned residual plot" method, which provides good results in controlling model fit in logistic regression models for categorical variable estimation, is used to determine the model fit.

In the "Residuals vs Leverage" graph shown in Figure 2, each observation is represented as a point. The acceptable limits, or "Cook's distance," are marked by a dashed red line. Based on the graph, we can conclude that all observations fall within Cook's distance limits, indicating no extreme values in the model.
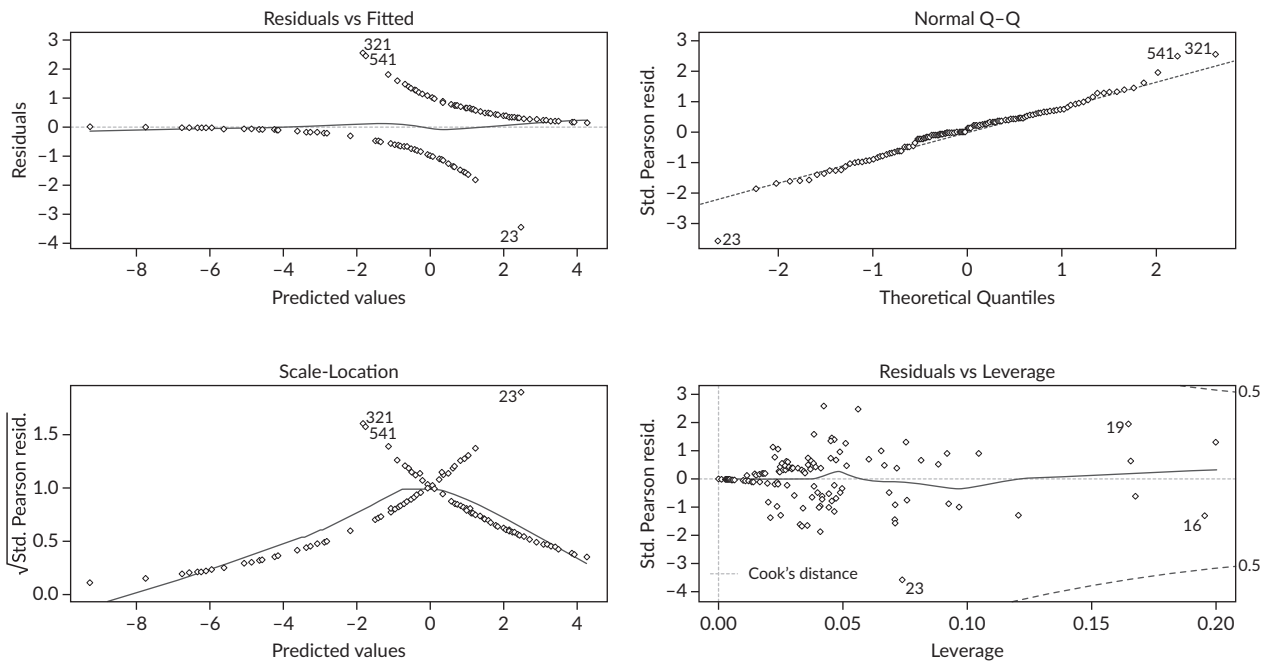
Figure 2. Scatter plots of residual values.

In the "binned residual plot" graph shown in Figure 3, the fact that most of the observations are within the limits indicates the appropriateness of the model (Kasza, 2015). As seen in the "binned residual plot" graph of the final model, most observations are within the specified boundaries. Although a few observations are outside the limits, the values outside the limits do not form a specific pattern; therefore, the model is acceptable.

Other methods that can be applied for model compatibility are the Hoslem Lemeshow goodness of fit test, checking the values of McFadden R2 statistic, and testing the normality of the residual values by drawing a
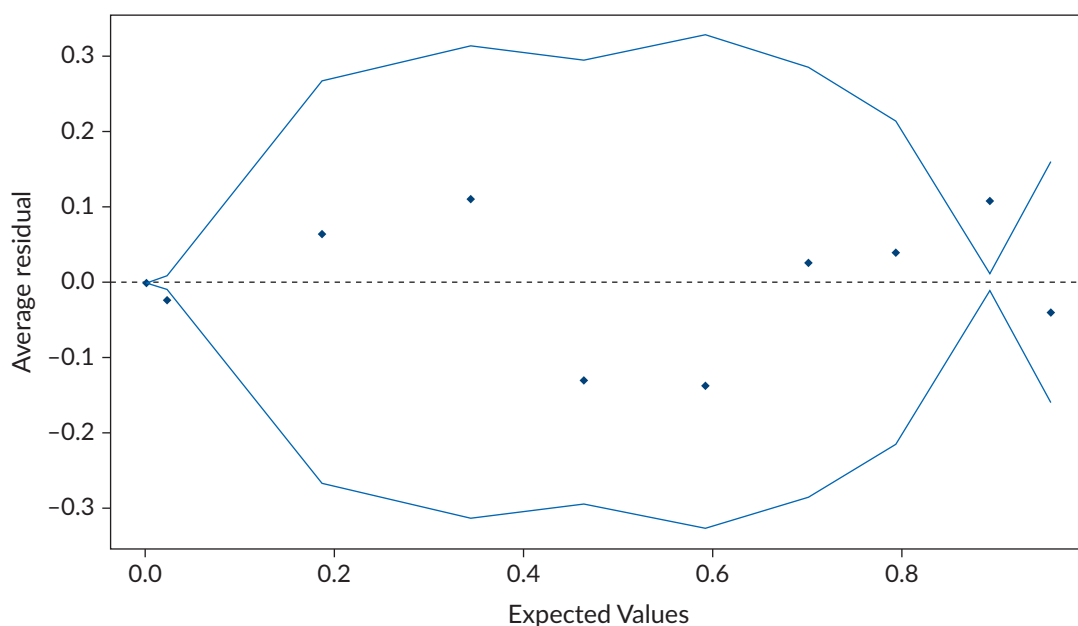
Figure 3. Binned residual plot.

histogram graph. In the Hoslem Lemeshow goodness of fit test, the hypotheses for the final model are:

H_0: There is no discrepancy between values forecasted and values observed.

H_a: There is a discrepancy between values forecasted and values observed.

Since the *p*-value obtained as a result of the Hoslem Lemeshow goodness of fit test is 0.5137 according to the $p > 0.05$ criterion, at a 95% confidence interval, the hypothesis H_0 cannot be rejected, and there is no discrepancy between the observed and forecasted values. Acceptance of the hypothesis H_0 is the expected result in the Hoslem Lemeshow goodness of fit test, and the model is appropriate according to this test.

Thanks to "PseudoR2," a function in the "DescTools" package, the McFadden test can be easily implemented in the R programming language. The McFadden test is compatible with measuring logarithmic values and testing the appropriateness of logistic regression models (Bartlett, 2014).

The results of the McFadden test between 0.2 and 0.4 indicate that the model is good (Bartlett, 2014). The value of this test for the final model was determined as 0.3908607 and provided model suitability. When the histogram graph of the residual values is analyzed, Figure 4 shows a distribution close to normal.

In analyzing the final model, it is helpful to examine how the independent variables interact with the dependent variables. To do so, we can visualize the "alleffects" function in the R programming language's "effects" library, as shown in Figure 5. From the graph, we can see that the independent variables *C1.Median*, *E1.Median*, *E3.Median*, and *S1.Median* have a linear relationship with the dependent variable *ConflictStatus*, which is categorical and represented by 1 and 0. Specifically, there is a positive linear relationship between *C1.Median*, *E3.Median*, *S1.Median*, and *ConflictStatus*, while *E1.Median* has a negative linear relationship. In analyzing the final model, it is helpful to examine how the independent variables interact with the dependent variables.
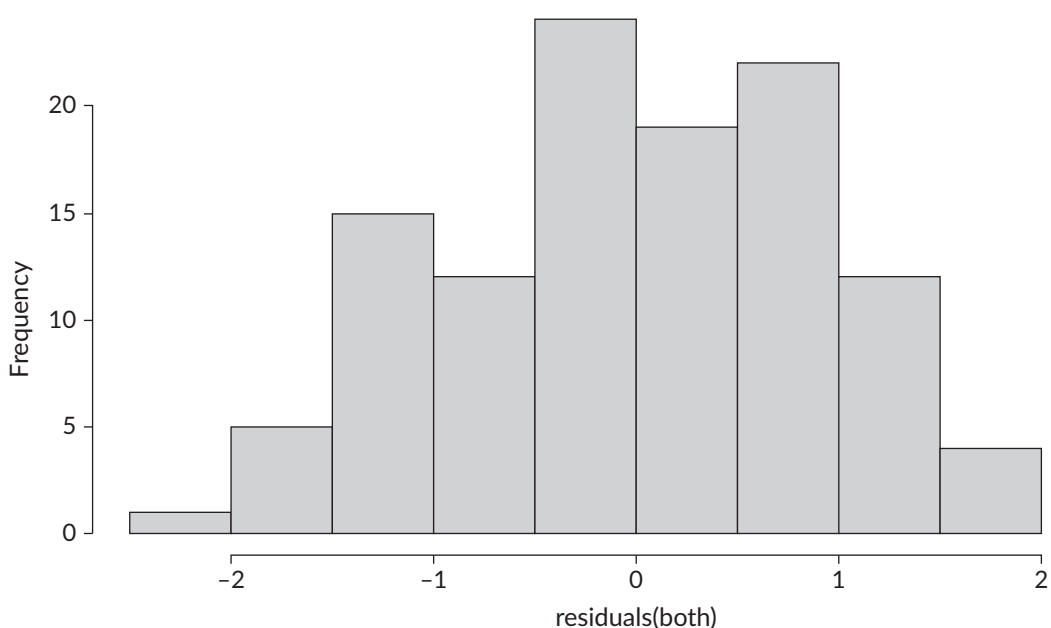

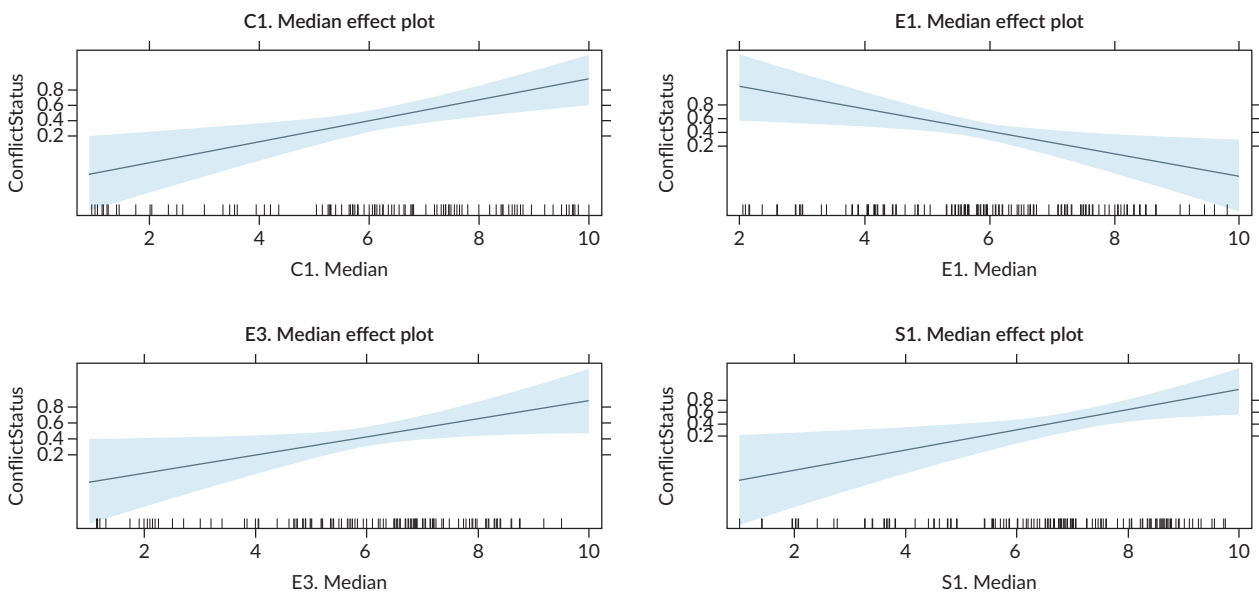**Figure 4.** Histogram plot of residual values.

Figure 5. Effects function graphs.

After conducting the fit tests for the model, the necessary codes were generated to make forecasts. The model's forecasts are based on probabilities ranging from 0 to 1. These probabilities were converted to binary values. These probabilities can also be converted to percentages to determine the likelihood of intrastate armed conflict in percentages. However, this methodology cannot determine which countries are likely to experience intrastate armed conflict. For this reason, binary logistic regression is a better method for this research. Using binary values for forecasting is more appropriate for determining the names of the countries.

In the R programming language, the standard threshold value for generating the results as "1" and "0" is set as 0.5. However, utilizing the "OptimalCutoff" function within the "InformationValue" library makes it possible to determine the most appropriate threshold value, resulting in better forecasting by the model. The model was created using a threshold value of 0.736755.

Out of the 120 values in the data with "0" (no armed conflict), 115 were correctly forecasted. However, out of the 57 values with "1" (armed conflict), only 32 were correctly forecasted.

4.2. Tests for Forecasting Performance of the Model

The ROC curve and AUC values are used to measure the ability of a model to make accurate forecasts. This is done by comparing the forecasted values to the actual values. According to El Khouli et al. (2009), models with an AUC value between 0.9 and 1 are considered excellent, those between 0.8 and 0.9 are good, those between 0.7 and 0.8 are normal, those between 0.6 and 0.7 are poor, and those between 0.5 and 0.6 are unsuccessful (El Khouli et al., 2009, p. 1001). The ROC curve graph is presented in Figure 6. The final model's AUC value is 0.8642, which is classified as good.

When the forecasts of the final model are evaluated, approximately 83% are correct, and 17% are incorrect. When the data specified in the Confusion Matrix regarding the model's forecasting performance is analyzed,
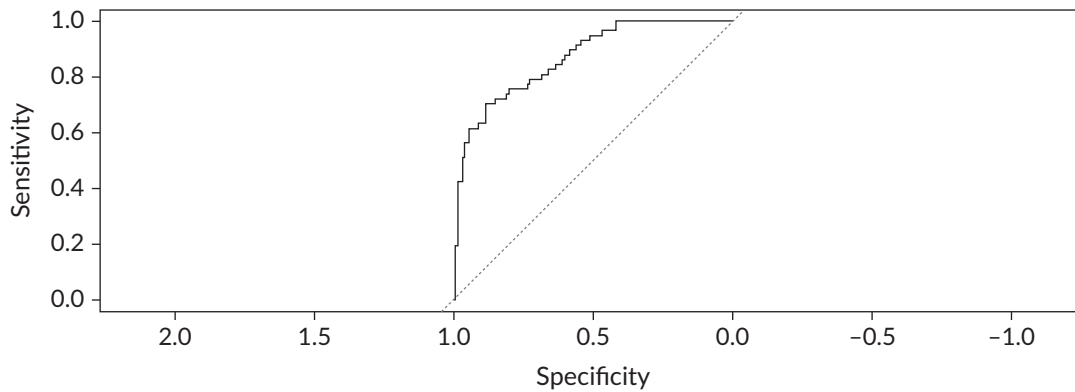
Figure 6. ROC curve graph.

the correct forecasting rate is observed with the "accuracy" parameter. The "accuracy" value for the suitability of the model's performance in forecasting should be greater than the "no information rate" value. The accuracy value varies between 0.767 and 0.8826 at a 95% confidence interval. Since the probability value of "P-Value [ACC > NIR]" is less than 0.05 and below 0.01, it can be evaluated that the criterion for the suitability of the model's performance is met with a probability of over 99%.

In addition to these values, the Kappa statistic in the Confusion Matrix is a test used to evaluate the similarity between forecasted and actual values. As an evaluation criterion, there is no similarity for values less than 0, values between 0.2 and 0.4 are characterized as low similarity, values between 0.4 and 0.6 as moderate similarity, values between 0.6 and 0.8 as good similarity, and values between 0.8 and 1 as excellent similarity (McHugh, 2012). The Kappa statistic value was found to be 0.57 for the final model. The similarity success between the model's forecasted and actual values can be evaluated as moderate based on the result obtained according to the Kappa statistic.

The model was developed using the R programming language. Based on the model, it was observed that the category "0" can be forecasted with 82% accuracy. This value represents the proportion of correct forecasts for the desired category. Additionally, the sensitivity value of the final model was calculated using the R programming language, and the result obtained was 0.9583333. The sensitivity of the final model for the "0" category was found to be 96%.

A good model should have sensitivity/precision values evaluated together, with both values approaching 1. This can only be accomplished if the model does not misforecast both "1" and "0" values. The F1 score, which can evaluate both values simultaneously, is widely used to measure the model's success. The Confusion Matrix indicates the precision, recall, and F1 scores. In this study, the F1 score for the final model is 0.8846154. When the number of positive and negative forecasts differs in datasets similar to the ones used in this study, it is more appropriate to check the F1 value instead of the precision and recall values.

When analyzing the final model's forecasting performance for the value "1," representing the occurrence of armed conflict, it was found that the model's precision value is 0.8649, sensitivity value is 0.5614, and F1 score is 0.6809 while forecasting the value "1." The "balanced accuracy" value, which considers both categories and evaluates the overall forecasting performance of the model in both categories simultaneously, is observed to be 0.7599.

After conducting tests to evaluate the model's accuracy and forecasting capability, codes were developed to monitor the forecasted values within the model. This allowed for comparing the forecasted and actual values for a specified country. The overall steps for the model creation are described in Figure 7.
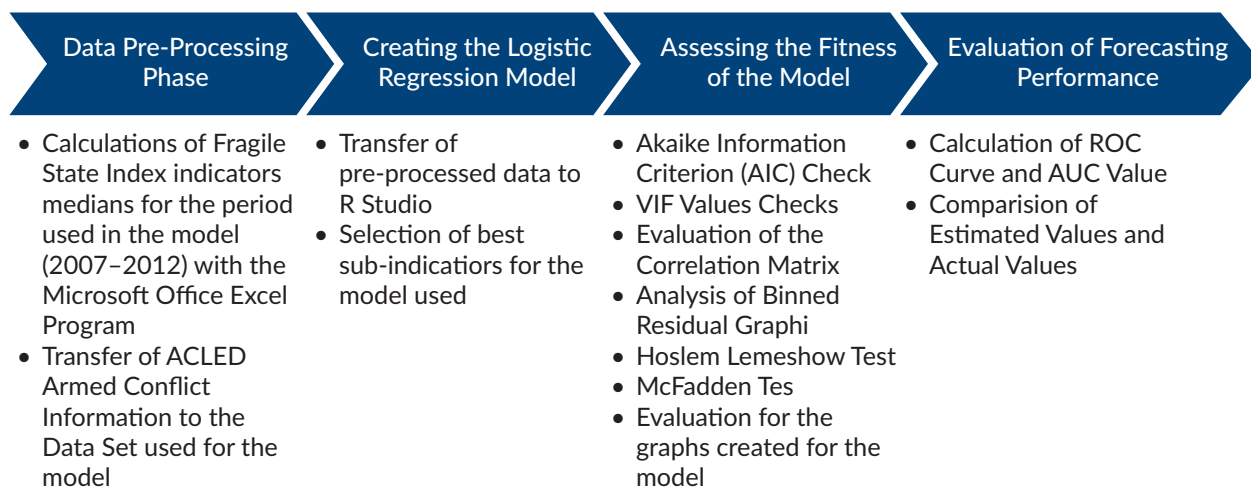
Data Pre-Processing Phase	Creating the Logistic Regression Model	Assessing the Fitness of the Model	Evaluation of Forecasting Performance
• Calculations of Fragile State Index indicators medians for the period used in the model (2007–2012) with the Microsoft Office Excel Program • Transfer of ACLED Armed Conflict Information to the Data Set used for the model	• Transfer of pre-processed data to R Studio • Selection of best sub-indicatiors for the model used	• Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) Check • VIF Values Checks • Evaluation of the Correlation Matrix • Analysis of Binned Residual Graphi • Hoslem Lemeshow Test • McFadden Tes • Evaluation for the graphs created for the model	• Calculation of ROC Curve and AUC Value • Comparision of Estimated Values and Actual Values

Figure 7. Steps of the research.

5. Discussions and Conclusions

This study has created a binary logistic regression model that forecasts a country's likelihood of armed conflict. The forecast is based on the median average of the country's fragility data from the previous ten years. The fragility data uses twelve sub-indicators, each tested in the machine-learning model. These models are based on the relationship between the median value of the annual fragility data between 2007 and 2012 and the occurrence of armed conflict from 2012 to 2022. The logistic regression method is used to create the model in the R programming language. With this model, it is possible to forecast the likelihood of armed conflict in the future by adding new fragility data.

As explained in detail in the research methodology review, graphical evaluations and model goodness-of-fit tests are conducted to assess the model's accuracy. After these tests, it can be concluded that the model is appropriate. The logistic regression model has been improved with these tests and methods to enhance the goodness of fit. It has an 86.42% explanatory power, as indicated by the AUC value, using only four of the 12 fragility indicators. Upon analyzing the forecasting performance of the final logistic regression model, it was observed that the model forecasts the category "0" (representing "no armed conflict") in the forecasted country with better efficacy. At the same time, it obtains relatively unsuccessful results in category "1" (representing "armed conflict will occur") in the forecasted country.

The final logistic regression model for forecasting armed conflict uses "security apparatus" (C1.Median), "economic decline" (E1.Median), "human flight and brain drain" (E3.Median), and "demographic pressure" (S1.Median) as sub-indicators of fragility. Other indicators are not included due to multicollinearity, negatively affecting overall performance. The sub-indicators impact each other when forecasting an armed conflict. Hence, the adjustment was implemented in the logistic regression model. The four selected indicators (out of the 12 sub-indicators) significantly affected the occurrence of armed conflict. However, it

would be a mistake to assume that the excluded indicators do not affect the occurrence of armed conflict. The identified indicators are just the most successful ones in explaining the model. Adding more indicators to the model may make it more complex and reduce its forecast power.

The R programming language was used to create a logistic regression model that can forecast whether an armed conflict will occur in a country as "armed conflict occurs" and "armed conflict does not occur," with the representation of "1" and "0." As a result of the fit tests for model suitability, it was concluded that the model had an 86% explanatory value and was successful based on this value.

According to the evaluation of the model's forecasting performance, the model correctly forecasted 105 out of 120 values for the category "0," representing "armed conflict does not occur." In comparison, it could correctly forecast only 32 out of 57 values for the category "1," representing "armed conflict occurs." Based on these results, when the overall forecasting accuracy of the model is evaluated for a total of 177 countries, it can be assessed that the model is quite successful in the "0" category with a correct forecasting rate of around 95% and relatively unsuccessful in the "1" category with an accurate forecasting rate of about 56%. It is forecasted that this difference in performance between categories is because the available data is limited to only 16 years and that better performance results can be achieved with increased data over the years. In addition, since the number of countries with armed conflicts is considerably lower than the number of countries without armed conflicts in the distribution of the available data, it is determined that more data is needed to make more successful forecasts in both categories.

In social sciences, many models that utilize data science are used due to the increasing amount of data. However, most of these are linear and explanatory models aiming to determine the relationship between variables. Non-linear models that aim to forecast are generally used in limited areas, such as forecasting election results (Grimmer et al., 2021, p. 398). The binary logistic regression model created in this research includes a method rarely used in the field of social sciences in terms of using data science to forecast categorical data. The study is expected to constitute a starting point for the models to be created since it can create a model with the R programming language that forecasts the occurrence of armed conflict in a country with poverty and fragility data. To improve the model, it would be helpful to increase the amount of data over the years and add new independent variables to explain the outbreak of conflict better.

By transferring the median values of the fragility data between 2016 and 2022 to the model, countries with a high probability of armed conflict between 2022 and 2032 were identified. Based on this calculation made with the model, it is forecasted that 43 of the 177 countries included in the calculation worldwide may experience internal armed conflict between 2022 and 2032. Note that these results are statistical calculations. Although it is impossible to make a concise judgment, it would be helpful to consider it as a risk assessment for the specified countries. As a result of the calculation made with the logistic regression model, the countries with a high risk of armed conflict between 2022 and 2032, according to the values of fragility indicators in the specified countries, are indicated in Table 5.

Table 5. Countries at high risk of armed conflict between 2022 and 2032, according to the model.

Afghanistan	Angola	Bangladesh
Burkina Faso	Burundi	Cameroon
Central African Republic	Chad	Democratic Republic of Congo
Ivory Coast	El Salvador	Eritrea
Ethiopia	Guatemala	Guinea
Guinea Bissau	Haiti	India
Indonesia	Iraq	Kenya
Madagascar	Mali	Mexico
Mozambique	Myanmar	Nepal
Niger	Nigeria	Pakistan
Papua New Guinea	Peru	Philippines
Somalia	South Sudan	Sudan
Syria	Tanzania	Thailand
East Timor	Uganda	Yemen
Zimbabwe		

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

This article's Fragile State Index data has been derived from the official website of the open-source Fragile State Index, which is available online at https://fragilestatesindex.org/indicators

Intrastate armed conflict data in this article is derived from the open-source ACLED official website, which is available at https://acleddata.com/data

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ARTICLE

Navigating Intersectional Complexities: A Narrative Analysis of Syrian Refugee Women With Disabilities in Turkey

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Abstract

Refugee women with disabilities experience a multiplicity of insecurities before, during, and after their displacement, including exposure to violence during conflicts, barriers to their mobility, challenges along their routes to safety, difficulties in accessing rights and services in the host state, and hardships while navigating the means of survival in the host community. Despite the intertwined convergence of gender and ableism in exile affecting refugee women's experiences, international and national laws and policies fail to address this intersectional reality. This study examines the lived experiences of Syrian refugee women with disabilities in Gaziantep, Turkey. Through an analysis of qualitative data with a narrative approach, the study not only depicts the interactions of gender, disability, and displacement that shape Syrian women's lives but also contests the traditional discourse on their vulnerabilities. Through specific stories of Syrian women, this study highlights their strategies for survival and their future plans within the context of the intersectionality of the challenges they face.

Keywords

intersectionality; refugees with disabilities; Syrian refugee women; Turkey

1. Introduction

Heba, a 42-year-old Syrian woman living in Turkey for 14 years, recounted how she had managed to escape the war in Syria, clearly illustrating the intersectional insecurities that refugee women with disabilities face during conflict and displacement. Unlike many other Syrians, she could not cross the border into Turkey through irregular means; her wheelchair made that impossible. Instead, she waited a month for a temporary ceasefire in her neighbourhood in Aleppo that would allow her to go home to collect her passport and medical reports.

She took a taxi and, with the help of the taxi driver who carried her upstairs, she packed her documents. That was just the beginning of Heba's long journey to the border together with her sister:

> I took my little sister with me because I had to protect her. There was news of sexual violence against women, little girls being kidnapped and raped….When I left Aleppo, I rented a bus and hired a group of military men. I rented them as security guards. My sister was already traumatised by the war, and it got worse during our journey. Whenever a door slams or someone talks loudly, she still panics. (Heba, 15 May 2019)

Despite many challenges, "disabled people migrate too," as Pisani and Grech (2015, p. 422) assert, and many experience further impairment during conflicts and harsh journeys. However, their needs are often neglected and their protection is typically gender- and disability-blind in their host countries. Refugee women with disabilities struggle with a multiplicity of disadvantages throughout their displacement, including the breakdown of the healthcare system within the country of origin, the disintegration of family/community support systems, hardships of transportation while crossing international borders, increased levels of sexual and gender-based violence during and after displacement, loss of citizenship rights, barriers to access to services in host countries, and the socio-economic difficulties of living in exile (Rohwerder, 2017).

This study examines the intersection of gender, displacement, and disability by focusing on the lived experiences of Syrian women in the Turkish city of Gaziantep, located near the Turkish-Syrian border. Turkey currently shelters among the largest refugee populations worldwide, including approximately 3.1 million Syrians (Presidency of Migration Management, 2024), nearly half of whom are women and girls (3RP, 2023, p. 5). Syrians in Turkey are under a temporary protection regime and do not hold official "refugee status," but they are considered "refugees" in this study, using that term in a sense broader than its conventional legal definition (UNHCR, 1994). As a bordering country providing Syrians with access to healthcare, treatment, and protection, Turkey has also become a feasible destination for many Syrians with disabilities. UNFPA Turkey (2021) estimates that 450,000 Syrians "live with disabilities" in Turkey.

A substantial number of studies have adopted an intersectional approach in analysing refugee women's experiences during displacement. These studies have highlighted how intersecting forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, religion, and social class contribute to human rights violations against refugee women, particularly in the context of sexual violence, and how these issues are perpetuated by structural and institutional practices in various settings, including during armed conflict, in refugee camps, and in resettlement countries (Ayoub, 2017; Paz & Kook, 2021; Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2001). There is also a growing body of literature on the various challenges faced by refugees with disabilities worldwide (Crock et al., 2017; Dew et al., 2021; Pisani & Grech, 2015; Wells et al., 2020), including the Turkish context (Cantekin, 2019; Crock & Smith-Khan, 2015a; Tascioglu, 2022). However, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding refugee women and gendered understandings of disability in host countries. Extensive research has separately examined the challenges faced by refugee women or by refugees with disabilities, but the compounded experiences of refugee women with disabilities during displacement remain largely unrecognised, with few exceptions (Crock & Smith-Khan, 2015a, 2015b; Dossa, 2009; Fiske & Giotis, 2021; Rohwerder, 2017; Scheer & Mondaca, 2022). This is particularly important given that 80 percent of individuals with disabilities live in the Global South (WHO, 2022).

The present study contributes to the growing literature on intersectional approaches to gender, disability, and displacement through a case study of Turkey. We aim to provide a nuanced and context-specific analysis of how these intersecting identities shape the experiences of Syrian refugee women with disabilities. Central to this research are questions about how international and domestic laws and policies shape the challenges faced by Syrian refugee women with disabilities in Turkey and how their agency is impacted in the context of aggravated and multidimensional disadvantages. Thus, the study brings together legal and political analyses of international and domestic policies and examines the implications of those policies in practice in the everyday lives of Syrian women based on empirical research.

We argue that the intersection of gender, displacement, and the power dynamics of ableism, which encourages an "institutional bias towards autonomous bodies" and "normatively privileges able-bodiedness" (Goodley, 2014, p. 21), deeply affects the lives of disabled Syrian refugee women in Turkey. By failing to consider this intersectionality, international and national laws and policies fail to acknowledge the agency of disabled refugee women or address their needs and aspirations. This study offers novel insights into the lived experiences of disabled Syrian refugee women in Turkey by adopting a narrative approach. We primarily focus on instances in which the three main factors of (a) traditional patriarchal norms of Syrian society that confine Syrian women to the home, (b) gender- and disability-blind refugee protection policies, and (c) the gap between Turkey's official adaptation of a social model of disability, as reflected in its legislation, and the prevailing medical model in practice combine to shape Syrian women's lives. We begin by mapping out the international and national regulations and available protection mechanisms for Syrian refugee women with disabilities in Turkey. We then introduce the narrative approach as a method for achieving a deeper understanding of the experiences of Syrian refugee women with disabilities in Gaziantep through interviews. Subsequently, we explore how the power dynamics of gender and ableism intersect in the context of displacement and how women assert their agency, focusing on the narratives of Amina, Leyla, and Heba.

2. Intersecting Challenges for Refugee Women With Disabilities: International and Turkish Contexts

> I'm not only Syrian, but I'm also a woman, a disabled woman. (Heba, 15 May 2019)

The quote above from Heba reflects the insights of intersectional approaches to studying the experiences of refugee women with disabilities. Pioneered by Black feminists in the late 1980s and early 1990s, scholarship on intersectionality focuses on the mutually reinforcing powers of gender, class, race, sexuality, poverty, and other factors in constituting the subjectivity of women (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2020; Nash, 2008). However, the convergence of gendered and ableist structures in the context of displacement is a relatively new avenue of research.

In the context of disability and forced migration, a growing body of literature explores the aggravated hardships faced by refugees with disabilities worldwide. Such research can be broadly categorised into three main areas. First, in some studies, the challenges encountered by displaced individuals with disabilities are discussed regarding access to humanitarian services in different displacement settings, such as refugee camps or urban areas, due to physical inaccessibility, lack of specialised services, and systemic exclusion (Elder, 2015; Mirza, 2011; Reilly, 2010). Second, the inadequacy of policy and legal frameworks for

resettlement and integration is examined in some studies with an emphasis on the need for more inclusive systems providing holistic approaches to effectively address the unique problems experienced by refugees with disabilities (Crock et al., 2017; Duell-Piening, 2018; Korntheuer et al., 2021; Mirza, 2012). Finally, intersectional perspectives have been applied by some scholars to explore the experiences of refugees with disabilities (Dew et al., 2021; Elder, 2015; Wells et al., 2020) and to critique the dominant Eurocentric and ableist frameworks in the context of disability and forced migration, which often leave the experiences of non-citizens with disabilities unrecognised (Pisani & Grech, 2015; Pisani et al., 2016).

Fiske and Giotis (2021) examined the intersections of gender, disability, and forced migration, arguing that the dominant discourse overlooks the agency and capacity of refugee women with disabilities and fails to grasp the intersectionality of social and biological factors such as impairments, gender, legal status, and physical environment, all of which deeply influence their experiences and opportunities for resilience and empowerment during displacement. Scheer and Mondaca (2022) conducted a longitudinal ethnographic study of five refugee women with disabilities in Sweden, revealing that gender, ableism, religion, and ethnicity significantly impacted their social participation and integration. Finally, in her ethnographic study of a group of four Muslim refugee women with disabilities living in Canada, Dossa (2009) conveyed the experiential knowledge and insights of the women regarding disability, gender, and race, showing that they faced aggravated forms of marginalisation due to the intersection of race, gender, disability, and Islamophobia. Significantly, however, the intersecting forms of disadvantages that these studies highlight are "rarely put together" in legal and practical responses to displacement (Pisani & Grech, 2015, p. 422; see also Fiske & Giotis, 2021).

The Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities (CRPD) of 2006 was the first binding human rights document to adopt an intersectional approach to the protection of fundamental rights. Until the adoption of the CRPD, international regulations failed to address the experiences of refugee women with disabilities. The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol adopted a gender- and disability-blind approach in defining the legal grounds for someone to be recognised as a refugee and in framing the protection accorded to refugees (Peterson, 2014, pp. 729–734; see also Adjin-Tettey, 1997). The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which bolstered feminist aspirations by framing women as agents of human rights, did not acknowledge the "cumulative disadvantage of disability and gender-based discrimination" (Mykitiuk & Chadha, 2018, p. 173). That striking omission was later addressed by the General Recommendations, albeit in legally non-binding documents (p. 177).

Starting from its preamble, the CRPD underlines its intersectional approach by acknowledging "multiple or aggravated forms of discrimination" from various vectors, including but not limited to sex, language, nationality, and ethnicity. Article 6 recognises the "multiple discriminations" faced by women and girls with disabilities, while Article 11 calls for the protection of individuals with disabilities during humanitarian emergencies, armed conflicts, and natural disasters. Motz (2018, p. 337) rightly suggests that Article 6 and Article 11 should be read together to ensure the protection of women and girls with disabilities in cases of displacement.

Turkey ratified the CRPD in 2009 and amended the relevant national legislation, the Turkish Disability Act, Law No. 5378 (Republic of Turkey, 2005), shifting from a medical approach to a rights-based perspective (Tascioglu, 2022, p. 199). In contrast to the traditional understanding that equates disability with impairment

requiring medical identification and response (Peterson, 2014, pp. 701–702), the social model of disability also considers how disabilities are socially constructed by systemic barriers that lead to isolation and exclusion (Buettgen et al., 2023, p. 288). In line with the CPRD, the domestic legislation in Turkey and various national action plans have included rights and services specifically available for women and girls with disabilities (UNCRPD Committee, 2019a, pp. 6–7). However, despite the introduction of legal norms and policies, practical implementation remains limited, with accessibility and the enforcement of anti-discrimination measures being major issues (Tascioglu, 2022).

The shift in terminology towards adopting "people with disabilities" as a "people-first language," as seen in the CRPD, reflects a shift towards a social understanding of disability (Shakespeare, 2018, p. 3). In the lively debate on the appropriate use of terminology, the term "disabled people" is taken by some to reflect a similar understanding, as it acknowledges that people are "disabled by society" due to societal barriers (Shakespeare, 2018, p. 3). Thus, we use these terms interchangeably in this study. Despite the shifts occurring in legal and political discourse in both international and Turkish contexts, the intersecting patterns of displacement, gender, and disability continue to be disregarded in refugee protection responses. An oft-cited report by the Women's Refugee Commission in 2008 underlined the invisibility of refugee women with disabilities and their neglect in international humanitarian responses. Data as fundamental as the number of people with disabilities often remain unknown to the states and organisations that supposedly address their needs (Women's Refugee Commission, 2008, p. 2). Nearly two decades later, reports by international organisations still lack information on disability among displaced women (CMW & CRPD, 2017; UNDRR & UNHCR, 2024). Turkey, where a large number of displaced people reside on a global scale, is no exception, as data on disability among refugees in Turkey are unavailable and laws and policies overlook the needs and aspirations of this population (UNCRPD Committee, 2019b).

Syrians in Turkey are under a temporary protection regime, initially adopted as an emergency response to the large-scale movement of Syrians. It was formally integrated into domestic legislation with the implementation of Turkey's first asylum law, the Law on Foreigners and International Protection, in 2013 and the adoption of the Temporary Protection Regulation in 2014. It provides a lesser package of rights compared to the Refugee Convention, awaiting repatriation of Syrians when conditions become suitable for their return. The temporary protection scheme was designed in line with the EU model; however, in its Turkish implementation, it does not have a time limit and does not provide meaningful access to the right to work. Access to work permits for Syrians under temporary protection is conditional upon employers applying for the work permits and they are often reluctant to do so (Republic of Turkey, 2016). According to the latest official statistics, 91,500 Syrians obtained work permits in 2021 and only 5,355 of them were women (Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2021). In contrast, temporary protection provides access to public services such as education and health, including rehabilitation services for people with disabilities on equal terms with nationals (Republic of Turkey, 2014, Art. 26; UNCRPD Committee, 2019a).

However, even when refugee women with disabilities are included in policy responses, they are not recognised as active agents but are mainly depicted in terms of their "vulnerabilities." In Turkey, domestic legislation on refugee protection refers to people with disabilities, pregnant women, single mothers, and women who have been subjected to violence as "persons with special needs" (Republic of Turkey, 2013, Art. 3(l); Republic of Turkey, 2014, Art. 3(l); see also Kivilcim, 2016). While it is crucial to recognise and identify the special needs of disabled women and extend services and support accordingly, focusing solely on their "vulnerability"

and "dependency" disregards their agency. The relationship between gender and disability should not centre merely on finding "common grounds" of vulnerability, preventing attempts to formulate alternative policies (Fiske & Giotis, 2021, p. 448). As leading international organisations have clearly stated (UNDRR & UNHCR, 2024, p. 13), the agency of disabled refugee women and their participation in decision-making remain among the least discussed topics in current humanitarian and refugee responses.

3. Methodology

Qualitative research was conducted in Gaziantep, a city located near the Turkish-Syrian border, in 2019 and 2024. The first fieldwork was undertaken by the first author for a previous research project, during which four semi-structured interviews were conducted with Syrians with disabilities. One of the participants, Heba, who later became a good friend of the first author, inspired the present work. As a Syrian refugee woman with severe impairments, she was inspiring in her struggle to be an active member of society despite the challenges she faces at many levels, including various forms of discrimination, restricted access to rights, and financial hardships. Together with her experiences, the way she engaged in conversation, presenting herself by sharing additional information and thereby enriching her narrative while addressing open-ended questions, motivated both this study and its methodology.

In the second round of fieldwork, the first author conducted open-ended interviews with ten disabled Syrian women and an expert on disability as a key informant. The author suggested some topics to be discussed but primarily encouraged the participants to share their own stories. Participants were reached through one of the major NGOs in Turkey. The key informant, who worked at that NGO, guided us in understanding the complex system of refugees' access to disability rights and services in Turkey. All participating Syrian women self-identified as disabled; some had also obtained medical reports to be officially recognised as individuals with a disability. Except for Heba's interview, which was conducted in Turkish in her workplace, all interviews were conducted in Arabic in the participants' homes, preferred by the participants as the most suitable location considering their experiences of restricted mobility. During these interviews, another Syrian woman accompanied the author as an interpreter. Before beginning the interviews, all participants were informed about the scope and aim of the research, and their written consent was obtained. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the participants' identities.

The adoption of narrative analysis allowed us to explore the ways individuals make sense of their lives through storytelling, providing a deeper understanding of their personal and social realities (Riessman, 2008). Narratives were co-constructed during the interviews, with participants actively shaping their stories in response to their interactions with the author, thereby offering insights into their lived experiences. In this way, the narrative approach helped uncover the multi-layered and contextually situated nature of Syrian women's experiences (Czarniawska, 2004). This approach was particularly beneficial for the present study as the research involved refugee women with disabilities, who are considered to be one of the most "difficult-to-reach" groups, particularly by external researchers (Harris & Roberts, 2006, p. 155). The gendered power structures in Syrian society, which may lead women to refrain from entering public spaces, make it challenging to reach out to refugee women with disabilities (Curtis & Geagan, 2016, p. 6).

Adopting the narrative approach enabled us to focus on the complex experiences of Syrian women, including their experiences of disability, being a refugee, and being a woman with a disability in exile, and helped us

reveal the moments when our participants most strongly experienced the discrepancy between "ideal and real, self and society" (Riessman, 2002, p. 219). For instance, Amina, who left Syria when she was 17 years old, described her struggle to navigate between the expectations of her husband's family that she be a "good wife" and her own aspirations for agency, autonomy, and becoming an active member of society, thus underlining the conflict between her ideal self and various societal constraints. Uncovering these moments is crucial as they provide deep insights into how individuals negotiate their sense of self within the context of societal constraints and expectations, offering a richer understanding of their agency in the face of adversity (Riessman, 2008, pp. 105–112).

Although we conducted fourteen interviews in total, we ultimately decided to focus on the stories of Amina, Leyla, and Heba for our narrative analysis. Their stories were particularly rich, offering in-depth insights into the common themes that emerged from our research (Oliver, 1998). We incorporated other participants' experiences into the study as needed, but by concentrating on three main narratives, we were able to explore the nuances and complexities of lived experiences in greater detail, resulting in a more vivid and focused analysis. All interviews with Syrian women aimed at the interactive creation of knowledge and focused on the women's experiences and agency. However, in four interviews, participants were accompanied by another person from the family, which potentially hampered what the women could discuss. In three instances, their relatives jumped into our conversations and spoke on behalf of the participants. In the presence of relatives, we avoided discussing sensitive topics such as relationships within the family unless the interviewees initiated such a conversation themselves. While the presence of relatives posed a challenge to sustaining the "active participation" of disabled refugee women (Dew et al., 2021, p. 2868), it simultaneously reflected the complex dynamics of power in the everyday lives of these women. Following all interviews, we followed up with our participants through the NGO to ensure their well-being.

4. Amina's Story: Intersecting Forms of Exclusion

At the time of our interview, Amina, a 26-year-old Syrian woman, had been living in Gaziantep for 11 years with her husband and daughter, her husband's brother and his family, and another single brother of her husband. Her story is a vivid expression of how traditional gender norms, the insecurities of living in exile, and the complexities of navigating bureaucratic systems for access to support for disabled people lead to intersecting forms of exclusion. Her life in Turkey, Amina explained, is largely confined to the tiny home she shares with her "husband's crowded family" (Amina, 21 March 2024). Due to their financial hardships, they cannot live independently. However, life in the extended family is not a comfortable one:

> We are always together, eating together, spending the whole day together. They are *non-mahram* to me [i.e., a person to whom marriage is permissible, with a Muslim woman required to cover herself in the presence of such a person], so I can't even take off my hijab at home—they should not see me without it.

Amina came to Turkey when she was 15. Her father was afraid to send her to school in a foreign country and arranged a marriage to keep her "safe," but that safety meant home confinement. She melancholically recalled how she was happy and successful in school back in Syria. After her marriage, her husband and his family did not permit her to leave the home. In her own words: "I don't leave home at all. In our culture, women do not go out, attend classes outside, or do anything outside" (Amina, 21 March 2024). It was impossible for her, she explained, to learn Turkish, attend classes, and get to know Turkey and Turkish people.

She has had an impairment of her foot since birth. An operation in Syria was unsuccessful, and a subsequent surgery in Turkey six years ago was only partially successful. She still cannot wear shoes and cannot stand for long, and on some days, she experiences intense pain that prevents her from walking. However, she does not have an official disability report since she cannot leave home readily and finds hospital procedures too complicated to manage. Samira, 37 years old, and Rana, 40 years old, made similar comments, supporting Amina's view that the process of obtaining a disability report as a Syrian refugee woman in Turkey is complicated. Both Samira and Rana had been living in Gaziantep for seven years with their families.

Samira lives with her husband and three children. She struggles with pain in her feet, which makes it nearly impossible for her to stand or walk on her own. She explained that she is "always dependent on family members in everyday activities" (Samira, 20 March 2024). Rana was a teacher in Syria and now lives with her mother and two sisters in Gaziantep. She has a vision impairment and struggled to find a suitable job in Turkey (Rana, 20 March 2024). Like Amina, both Samira and Rana spend most of their time at home, making it impossible for them to learn Turkish. Samira pointed to the traditional understanding in the Syrian community that public spaces are not safe for women, while Rana underlined the inaccessibility of public spaces for people with disabilities (Tascioglu, 2022, p. 200). Home confinement due to traditional gender roles, the language barrier, the hardships of navigating the bureaucratic system in a foreign country, and the lack of disability-inclusive facilities have been the main obstacles preventing them from obtaining medical reports. Since they are not officially identified as disabled, they do not meet the institutionalised "vulnerability" criteria; accordingly, they cannot benefit from major humanitarian aid programmes. Amina explained:

> I can't work since my husband's family finds it shameful for women to work. I can't get humanitarian aid. I never buy anything for myself or for my 5-year-old daughter. I can never spare money for my personal needs….My life is all about raising my children in this home. (Amina, 21 March 2024)

"If I had the chance," she added, "I would continue my education and have a profession….If I had been asked, I would not have gotten married."

She was eager to complete her application for resettlement in a third country, which has been in process for the last three years. For Amina, resettlement is a strategy to overcome intersecting forms of exclusion: to get away from her husband's extended family, be able to go to school or work, and be seen and recognised for her needs, aspirations, and abilities.

5. Leyla's Story: The Medical Approach to Disability Reports—"Am I Disabled Enough?"

When we visited Leyla's house, she welcomed us at the door. We entered a large, very dark room with no furniture except for a television and a stove, which was not lit. Leyla's mother-in-law was lying on a floor mattress in the corner, and her four children—the youngest was 3 and the oldest was 11—were playing together. There were many plastic pieces lying on a cloth spread out in the middle of the room, which we only understood after Leyla explained what they were. After inviting us to sit, she said, "If you don't mind, I'll continue making slippers while we talk," and then she began working (Leyla, 22 March 2024). During our conversation, we learnt from her mother-in-law that Leyla had worked making slippers all night without sleep. She was working extra hours to buy new clothing for her children for the upcoming Eid.

Leyla was 42 years old at the time of our interview, living with her husband, four children, and mother-in-law. Her narrative opens new insights into rethinking the identification of disabilities in medical assessments. For Leyla and her husband, who both self-identify as disabled, the already limited opportunities of living in exile are further exacerbated by their exclusion from institutional care and support systems since they are not recognised as "disabled enough." Leyla had come to Turkey with her family 11 years ago from Aleppo. She had a stroke when she was a child, leading to a loss of sensation in her right foot. Walking is difficult; she cannot walk or stand for long periods. Her husband has similar challenges in walking and standing because one of his legs is shorter than the other. Before the war, he worked as a state employee in Syria with medical recognition as a disabled person. Leyla fondly remembers their life in Syria, where her family was happy before their home was destroyed by a bomb during the war.

When they first came to Turkey, they went to a state hospital, where their medical expenses were covered, for medical examinations. They were highly satisfied with the health services, and Leyla even recalls giving birth in the same hospital as a pleasant memory. Since her mother-in-law is a Turkmen Syrian, she accompanies Leyla to hospital appointments, allowing them to navigate the health system without facing language barriers. However, Leyla explains: "They told us that neither my husband nor I have the required percentage of impairment [i.e., 40 percent] to be officially recognised as a person with a disability."

Reestablishing their lives in Turkey has been complicated for Leyla and her husband due to their impairments. Since they could not obtain official disability reports, like Amina, they have been excluded from humanitarian aid and social care schemes. Leyla's husband has attempted several times to work irregularly in tailoring workshops, since obtaining a work permit is nearly impossible for Syrians under the temporary protection regime (see Section 2). Unfortunately, these attempts all failed; each time, he was asked to work faster, which is impossible for him since he cannot stand easily. When the already limited options for viable employment for Syrians intersect with invisible or disregarded disabilities and exclusion from humanitarian aid and social care schemes, it results in aggravated precarity. For Leyla, this means assembling slippers through the night at home, in alignment with traditional gender norms, to earn a very small income. It also means not being able to leave home except for hospital visits and lacking opportunities to participate in social life.

6. Heba's Story: No Benefits of Recognition

Heba's story not only vividly shows the agency of disabled Syrian women but also signifies the urgent need and failure to recognise their agency:

> Everything is still the same. I use a card on the bus just like you [implying that she still cannot benefit from the discounted fare for disabled individuals]. In fact, some things have gotten even harder….The living conditions have become very harsh, but let's hope things will get better. (Heba, 20 March 2024)

This is how the conversation with Heba began when we asked her what had changed in her life in the last five years, since our first interview in 2019. Her reflections underscored the persistent and evolving challenges she faces, offering a poignant entry point into her broader narrative.

Heba has an official disability report indicating over 80 percent impairment. A spinal impairment as a child confined her to bed until she was 12 years old, preventing her from "living her childhood." After years of traumatic treatments, she began using a wheelchair. She described her life as nice before the war in Syria; she was very satisfied with her job as a designer in the textile industry. When the war broke out, she was in Aleppo, while her family was outside the country. The family reunited in Gaziantep after her harsh journey to Turkey, where she has been looking after her family for the last 14 years. Her father and mother are dependent on her, she explained; she is the only breadwinner in the family as her 30-year-old sister stays home to take care of their parents. When their savings were depleted in their first year in Turkey, Heba started working at textile industry fairs. She was later hired by a textile firm thanks to her previous experience and Turkish language skills (Heba, 15 May 2019).

Heba has been eager to help others with disabilities and hoped to find a job as a translator where she can support disabled Syrians. She has spent her weekends volunteering for international organisations, NGOs, and the local municipality. However, in her search for jobs, she has faced various forms of discrimination:

> I applied to hospitals for jobs, but they rejected me. Once, a doctor told me they were looking for a disabled translator, but one who could walk. I asked him how he got to the third floor; he said by elevator. I told him I do the same, I slammed the door, and I left....I worked at a real estate agency. It's not seen as a job for a woman. I had to quit after eight months because they were not applying for my work permit. I was working there illegally....I was volunteering at an international organisation as a translator, but they kept me waiting for years for a paid opportunity. I asked them: "Why don't you hire me, why do you only benefit from my services for free?"...Finally, I started working as a translator for an NGO. But they made me wait as a volunteer for two and a half years. They said they didn't have the physical capacity to hire someone like me. Later on, they made modifications, and I started working. I'm quite happy here; it's my dream job. (Heba, 15 May 2019)

While she struggled to find a job, Heba also faced difficulties in finding suitable housing due to discrimination against Syrians in the housing market, the challenge of finding a home suitable for her wheelchair, and her need for a secure flat as an unmarried woman. Everything had worsened, she explained, when we met again for the second interview in 2024. Due to the worsening economic conditions in Turkey, it had become even more difficult to obtain or extend work permits. The only options she could foresee were either obtaining Turkish citizenship or resettling in a third country.

Heba's experience underscores a broader issue: Syrians with disabilities cannot benefit from the advantages provided to Turkish citizens with disabilities, such as free bus tickets and employment quotas. This sentiment was echoed by 37-year-old Reem, who described how her life had improved significantly after obtaining Turkish citizenship in 2018. Reem was injured in a bombing in 2016, which led to her leg being amputated after she was transferred to Turkey. Her family followed her to Turkey. After obtaining Turkish citizenship, official identification as a person with a disability was much easier and she found it easier to secure a job. She also registered for the state's social benefits. Additionally, her son, who has an intellectual disability, was able to enrol in a special private school thanks to her citizenship. None of these opportunities were possible with a Syrian ID, she emphasised (Reem, 28 May 2019).

7. Discussion

These narratives of Syrian women reflect exclusion resulting from the interaction of traditional gender norms, ableist structures, and the discrimination they face in exile. Amina's story is a depiction of such intersectionality, entailing gendered norms that have prevented her from going to school, working, engaging in social life in Turkey, or learning Turkish (Körükmez et al., 2020, p. 3) together with the hardships of navigating the bureaucracies of the healthcare system with a language barrier and the disadvantages of living in exile with experiences of disability without officially being recognised as a disabled person. Her strong narrative reveals that when such different grounds of discrimination intersect, the exclusion is greater than the sum of its parts (De Beco, 2020, p. 593). The experiences of exclusion among Syrian refugee women with disabilities are varied, including but not limited to exclusion from public spaces, everyday life, social and economic domains, and humanitarian aid or social care schemes.

Nevertheless, the "intersectionality of complex lived experiences" is often ignored in policymaking (Wells et al., 2020, p. 394). Syrian women are not supported in their struggles, particularly in the identification of their disabilities and the accessibility of public services and spaces. Despite the alignment of domestic legislation with the CRPD and its human rights approach, Turkey still follows a medical approach in practice regarding the issuance of disability reports (Confederation of the Disabled of Turkey, 2018, p. 5). The assessment of disability is not merely a bureaucratic process; it has a "verdictive character" (Davis, 2005, p. 157). Medical reports are crucial for accessing disability rights and services, including medical support such as wheelchairs, diapers, or prosthesis implants (Key Informant Interview, 21 March 2024).

Applications for the recognition of disability are assessed by a disability health committee, which is not present at every hospital. In such cases, referral to other hospitals with disability health committees is possible (Key Informant Interview, 21 March 2024). Jennet, a 28-year-old Syrian woman, indicated that it was only at the fourth hospital that she was able to access a committee to obtain her medical report (Jennet, 21 March 2024). After completing various medical tests and physical examinations, the degree of disability in the medical report must be 40 percent or more for adults to gain access to rights and services for disabled individuals (Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2023). Leyla's story underlines the risk of failing to capture actual experiences of disability with the medical model (Smith-Khan et al., 2014, p. 59). Both Leyla and her husband have impairments and experience disabilities that prevent them from fully participating in daily activities or working without reasonable accommodations. However, the contextual, gendered, and environmental factors that disabled Syrian women face, especially in the context of displacement, are ignored.

Official medical reports do not necessarily help overcome the exclusion of Syrian women. Access to particular rights and services, such as discounted bus tickets, provided to disabled individuals requires disabled identity cards, which are provided for Turkish citizens or former Turkish citizens by birth who acquired other nationalities and their descendants, and are subject to apostille procedures (Republic of Turkey, 2023, Art. 4.). In short, Syrians under temporary protection are further excluded from the already restricted social and welfare systems as Heba repeatedly mentioned in her narrative. Moreover, the Turkish care regime for people with disabilities is based on a gendered, family-oriented structure. Public social services prioritise family support and "officially assessed" neediness. For Turkish citizens, care is commodified within the family, with caregivers being financially supported through a cash-for-care scheme

(Atasü-Topçuoğlu, 2022, pp. 71–72). For Syrians, the only advantage of being identified as having a disability is access to humanitarian aid. The European Union-funded Emergency and Social Safety Net (ESSN) and complementary ESSN schemes provide cash-based financial assistance to nearly two million displaced people in Turkey (3RP, 2023, p. 6). The eligibility criteria include a vulnerability assessment based on factors such as the number of children, elderly individuals in the family, and so on. Having certified disability of 50 percent or more results in additional financial support (Türk Kızılay, 2024). Amina, who cannot obtain a disability report because she cannot readily leave her home, and Leyla, who is not considered "disabled enough" by medical assessors, are unable to access this financial assistance. Humanitarian aid can be lifesaving for people in desperate situations. However, it also reinforces gendered and ableist power structures. Like the cash-for-care scheme for Turkish citizens, the care regime for Syrian refugee women with disabilities resorts to dependence on family care in the absence of institutional support. This leads to disabled Syrian women being dependent on their families, reinforcing the patriarchal power relations within the family.

The exclusion of self-identified Syrian refugee women with disabilities from institutionalised "vulnerability" criteria when they fail to obtain disability reports coupled with their inclusion in only humanitarian aid schemes results in "structural vulnerability," which is created by the positionality of the individual within "diverse networks of power relations" (Quesada et al., 2011, p. 341). In other words, the precarity of disabled Syrian women is not inherently related to their impairments; rather, it is produced by intersecting power relations. Depictions of disabled women as "dependent," "vulnerable," and "in need" in legal regulations (see Section 1), the humanitarian sector, and everyday life clearly ignore the agency of Syrian women. On the one hand, the exclusion of women with disabilities as a result of the intersection of disability and gender becomes normalised, as it is extremely common in the Syrian community (for a similar discussion in the Indian context see Thompson et al., 2023). On the other hand, the agency of Syrian women and their strategies of participation are clearly ignored.

Intersecting identities—such as being a refugee, unaccompanied, an adolescent, and a mother—create significant challenges while also offering opportunities for empowerment and resilience (Vervliet et al., 2014). Heba's story significantly unsettles the dominant discourse on the dependency and vulnerability of disabled women, as she takes care of her entire family, including her elderly parents and her traumatised sister. However, this does not mean a story as vivid as Heba's is always needed for the recognition of the agency of Syrian refugee women with disabilities. These women adopt a variety of strategies in dealing with intersecting exclusions: working from home, working as volunteers, striving to obtain disability reports to access (limited) benefits, planning for resettlement, struggling to obtain citizenship, taking care of their loved ones, and planning for the future. In the absence of institutional support mechanisms and due to various discriminations, however, they most often focus on obtaining citizenship or resettlement to third countries among their future plans. Unlike humanitarian aid, which reinforces gender roles and the dominant discourse on dependency, resettlement is seen as a tool to escape such power structures. It is framed as a means to realise aspirations, such as access to education, institutional care systems, and work in suitable conditions, but it is also significantly regarded as a strategy for escaping traditional gender relations within the women's community.

Since resettlement also depends on an assessment of vulnerabilities, obtaining disability reports is crucial not only for access to humanitarian aid but also for resettlement programmes. In practice, the Presidency of

Migration Management in Turkey approves candidates for resettlement either through its own referral system or by approving referrals from NGOs. The files of resettlement candidates are submitted to UNHCR, which also runs its own vulnerability assessment process. Finally, the resettlement cases are submitted to the relevant third countries. UNHCR's institutional vulnerability criteria include "medical needs or disabilities" and "women and girls at risk" as priorities. This is why nearly all participants of the present study who had disability reports believed that they were automatically on the waiting list for resettlement. However, as Welfens and Bekyol (2021) discuss in detail in the context of EU countries, which are among the top countries for resettlement from Turkey, resettlement and admission programmes operate on a discretionary basis. The gendered bias, for instance, led to an understanding that "women and girls at risk" means a "lack of effective protection normally provided by a male family member" in the UNHCR Handbook until recently (Welfens & Bekyol, 2021, p. 5). Those like Amina who married in line with traditional gendered norms to be secure in exile might be seen as having protection and therefore not at risk, despite the insecurities they constantly face in their everyday lives. When it comes to admission countries, among the candidates for admission, all of whom have been deemed vulnerable, those with "integration potential" are prioritised (Welfens & Bekyol, 2021, p. 5). In terms of being self-reliant for integration, "medical needs or disabilities" may be a barrier rather than an advantage for resettlement. The very small resettlement quotas and the complex procedures of vulnerability assessments also explain why, despite being on the list for years, none of our participants have secured resettlement yet.

8. Conclusion

This study has argued that we must adopt an intersectional lens in identifying the societal and structural barriers to the inclusion of disabled refugee women, focusing on the interaction of gender and ableism in the context of displacement. The Turkish case shows that even in a country where refugees are relatively satisfied with their access to health services, disabled refugee women suffer from aggravated disadvantages and exclusion. Through three main narratives, this study has revealed the triple jeopardy facing disabled Syrian women. First, gender-blind approaches to addressing disabilities and displacement deeply affect Syrian women's lived experiences and their access to rights, services, and humanitarian aid. The traditional patriarchal norms in Syrian society dictating that women should not leave their homes, work outside the home, or engage with the wider society deepen in exile due to both real and perceived insecurities that refugee women face in public spaces. Home confinement prevents Syrian women from navigating the bureaucratic processes of being identified as individuals with disabilities and benefiting from the associated rights and humanitarian aid. Second, empirical data reveal the pitfalls of the medical approach and the requirement of a certain percentage of impairment for the issuance of a disability report, particularly for refugee women. This epitomises how exclusion from the already restricted institutional care systems leads to aggravated precarity in refugee women's lived experiences when they struggle to overcome societal and structural barriers to their inclusion in social and economic domains on their own. Third, our findings uncover failures that arise in addressing disabilities when the dynamics of displacement are ignored. Even when Syrian refugee women overcome gendered barriers and the shortcomings of the medical approach to be officially recognised as individuals with disabilities, they still struggle to rebuild their lives in the context of restricted inclusion in society as non-citizens. They lack equal access to rights and services while they embark on strategies of survival in exile. Therefore, we argue that it is the intersection of gender, disabilities, and displacement that shapes the particular and aggravated exclusions of refugee women with disabilities.

However, the narratives presented here also show that these intersecting exclusions do not mean that Syrian women in Turkey lack agency in rebuilding their lives. On the contrary, they can turn the traditional understanding of dependency upside down, adopt roles as breadwinners, take care of their families, volunteer for other disabled refugees, and resist stigmatisation. They not only find ways to navigate gendered and ableist structures to participate in economic and social domains but also strategise to rebuild their futures, for instance by pursuing resettlement. This study has argued that despite the introduction of intersectional approaches, particularly after the adoption of the CPRD, practices of refugee protection in Turkey and beyond do not sufficiently support disabled refugee women. The international and national protection policies have not been aligned to consider the particular needs and agency of refugee women with disabilities, often leading to the provision of only (limited) humanitarian aid or leaving these women to fend for themselves. We conclude by arguing that institutional care and support mechanisms acknowledging the intersectionality of exclusions (gendered power relations, ableism, and displacement) must be put in place, recognising the particular needs and aspirations of refugee women with disabilities and significantly recalibrating international and national discourses on the protection of refugees by enhancing their agency and participation.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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ARTICLE

Asylum Seekers' Trajectories of Exclusion: An Analysis Through the Lens of Intersectionality

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Abstract

The recent increase in asylum seekers in Portugal has drawn attention to the need for effective social integration. The experiences of asylum seekers reveal the existence of social exclusion before migration and the need for them to be included to participate in host societies. This research employs a qualitative methodology, analysed through the lens of intersectionality. In 2021, twenty-six semi-structured interviews were conducted with asylum seekers, detailing their trajectories to Europe from their countries of origin in the Global South. The interviews explored their experiences and the reception they encountered in their final or intermediate destinations. The findings indicate that the departures from the countries of origin are associated with contexts of human rights violations—discrimination and persecution due to respondents' religious, social, ethnic, or sexual orientation. The routes to Europe involved long and perilous journeys by land or sea facilitated by smugglers who charged exorbitant amounts without ensuring protection. The results also reveal that the exclusion asylum seekers experience continues even after requesting international protection in a European country. The findings of this empirical research are important because Portugal has been identified as a safe alternative for the secondary movements of asylum seekers. However, structural issues associated with a struggling welfare state push migrants into new contexts of social exclusion. Our analysis helps to identify trajectories of exclusion among new waves of asylum seekers with implications for decision-makers and policy actors.

Keywords

asylum seekers; intersectionality; Portugal; social policy

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1. Introduction

The increasing number of migrants and requests for international protection received by Portugal in recent years has raised new issues that should be addressed by scientific research. Immigration has become a politicized issue in Portugal, with a political impact, mainly on far-right politics. Although Portugal hosts fewer asylum seekers than many other European countries, requests for asylum have risen sharply, going from 1,750 in 2017 to 2,115 in 2022 (Oliveira, 2022). There was a record number of requests for temporary protection (56,599) in 2022 in part due to the displacement of people as a result of the war in Ukraine (Oliveira, 2022).

The recent increase in asylum seekers in Portugal has drawn attention to the need for effective social integration. Intersectionality emerged from different theories and was first applied in the late 1980s by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality goes beyond examining individual factors such as biology, status, sexual orientation, gender, and race. It focuses on the interactions between such factors across many levels of society, shining a light on important differences within population groups like migrants and explaining how inequities are shaped by interactions between multiple factors.

The aim of theories of intersectionality is to facilitate multifaceted analyses of diverse experiences, acknowledging fluid and context-dependent identities. The theories illustrate how these identities intersect to generate both disadvantages and privileges for individuals (Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 2013). Collins (2015) stated: "Race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but rather as reciprocally constructing phenomena" (p. 41). The use of an intersectionality framework enables the identification of systematic discrimination within refugee reception policies and programs, highlights disparities in accessing sustainable solutions, underscores the dual impact of oppression and emancipation resulting from refugee status, and challenges rigid labels and classifications (Hill, 2023). Indeed, intersectionality has been integrated into policy initiatives in an acknowledgment of multiple intersecting inequalities (Anthias, 2012, 2013; Savaş et al., 2021; Taha, 2019).

Asylum seekers find themselves in a contentious position; on one hand, they have exercised their legal right under the 1951 Geneva Convention to apply for asylum, and yet they remain noncitizens while awaiting the outcome of their case. They face stringent immigration regulations influenced by deterrence policies (Williams, 2006). This legal framework creates a hierarchical system of social entitlements that limits asylum seekers' access to public services, marking them as a distinct group in need, separate from the broader societal context and with uneven access to welfare (Sales, 2002).

The vulnerability felt by each asylum seeker is often exacerbated by a migratory experience and this can be further accentuated by a combination of factors. In other words, each individual has a different response to vulnerability and the levels of vulnerability can vary even more following a migratory experience, which can be further accentuated by a combination of factors in a continuum process. In this context, Baumgärtel (2020) defines migratory vulnerability as "a cluster of objectives, socially induced and temporary characteristics that affect persons to varying extents and forms" (p. 28). Based on this, he concludes that migratory vulnerability should not be defined solely as belonging to a group or as an individual characteristic.

Each asylum seeker may experience a qualitatively different situation of vulnerability due to the intersection of the different vulnerability factors they face (Flamand et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the diverse profiles of asylum seekers reveal that their experienced vulnerabilities often surpass pre-existing vulnerability categories, as they consist of intersectional vulnerabilities created by the interaction of various personal, situational, and administrative factors (Flamand et al., 2023). It is also important to emphasize that these vulnerabilities are accompanied by the attribution of specific characteristics that combine to form stereotypes reflecting attitudes towards immigrants, which can be ambivalent, and vary according to time and context (Ceobanu & Escandell, 2010). Discussions about immigrants and immigration often trigger strong public reactions, particularly when politicized or intertwined with other urgent matters, such as concerns about globalization and terrorism (Ceobanu & Escandell, 2010; Hill, 2023).

The literature review emphasizes migration and refugee research employing intersectionality as a crucial framework that challenges the homogenization of experiences and categories in the global refugee context. Intersectionality aims to facilitate the analysis of diverse experiences and to acknowledge multiple and fluid identities that are context-dependent; it illustrates how these identities intersect to create both disadvantages and privileges for different individuals (Aberman, 2013; Crenshaw, 2013; Vervliet et al., 2014) and gives voice to the oppressed and invisible groups (Vervliet et al., 2014). An intersectionality framework not only has the potential to uncover systematic discrimination in refugee and migration policies and systems, but also to identify disparities in accessing durable solutions; it highlights both the oppression and emancipation resulting from the refugee status and questions rigid labels and categories (Joseph, 2015; Vervliet et al., 2014).

2. The Lens of Intersectionality Matters

The lens of intersectionality gives us a better understanding of how a combination of different factors can create and increase vulnerability in the experience of asylum seekers on their migratory journey (origin country, transit country, and destination country). These elements may be personal (such as ethnic origin or certain forms of disability), situational (due to experiences related to persecution in the country of origin or during the migratory journey, for example), or administrative (linked, for example, to procedures for obtaining legal status in the host country; see Flamand et al., 2023).

Research shows that asylum seekers have escaped perilous circumstances in their country of origin, including oppression and violence (Neumayer, 2005). Moreover, they have frequently endured traumatic events such as the loss of family members through murder, instances of sexual violence, rape (Goodman et al., 2014), and torture (Benham, 2004).

Other vulnerabilities besides those associated with gender, age, and nationality are difficult to systematize as they are likely to overlap and accumulate. Therefore, an intersectional approach is crucial to a comprehensive assessment of vulnerabilities and to glean a better understanding of the condition and needs of asylum seekers (Anthias, 2013; Flamand et al., 2023; Savaş et al., 2021).

The intersectional approach can also help deconstruct stereotypes. For example, single adult men may not be perceived as vulnerable individuals and are therefore expected to react differently, but they may also

receive less favourable treatment, such as accommodation in hostels with limited access to amenities and catering conditions (Flamand et al., 2023). Thus, the intersectionality lens allows us to deconstruct the homogeneity within a group generally considered vulnerable, notably that of asylum seekers. Examining vulnerabilities through the intersectionality lens allows a case-by-case approach and a more complex and comprehensive individual analysis, highlighting possible intersections that may be invisible at first glance. It is also important to note that vulnerability is not static and can naturally arise or intensify depending on time and space, that is, the context and situation in which each applicant finds themselves (Flamand et al., 2023; Vervliet et al., 2014).

On their physical entry into a member state, asylum seekers are subjected to racialized and gendered border processes that compound pre-existing positions of disadvantage, resulting in conditions of socioeconomic impoverishment as well as diminished rights and opportunities. Decolonial theorists have emphasized the enduring significance of race as a primary organizing factor in the accumulation of violence and disadvantage experienced by asylum seekers, but other systems of oppression and hierarchical structures also lead to distinct consequences for asylum seekers based on their gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity (Grosfoguel et al., 2015; Hill, 2023). Moreover, the judicial systems of member states examining asylum cases are not neutral and can be influenced by various political and constitutional factors, racialized logic, gender dynamics, and other vulnerabilities. Research by Hamlin (2014) and Spijkerboer (2018) demonstrates that asylum adjudications are often impacted by the geopolitical interests of the host countries, perceptions of the asylum seekers' countries of origin, and existing racial and gender biases. For example, asylum seekers from countries deemed "safe" are more likely to have their claims discounted, regardless of individual circumstances (Hill, 2023).

The number of rejected applications for asylum is increasing; not only do individuals in this situation receive no form of protection but they are unlikely to be returned to their country of origin. Some of this group try to move to north-western Europe (Germany, Sweden, Denmark, and other countries), to France or the Iberian Peninsula (Fontanari, 2018; Kofman, 2019; Vianelli, 2017), while others choose to remain in Italy, facing situations of profound vulnerability, and experiencing social, residential, and employment marginalization. In the vast majority of cases, those choosing to stay put reside in precarious, informal, and unhealthy housing (Bolzoni et al., 2015; Netto, 2011), and work under conditions of extreme labour exploitation, largely in the primary sector (Talani, 2019). This means that access to refugee protection becomes more circumscribed; as a result, some potential or rejected asylum seekers may choose to go underground and become invisible (Czaika & Hobolth, 2016).

This article responds to the research question: What can we learn from asylum seekers' trajectories in Portugal? Following the above presentation of the theoretical context of intersectionality and asylum seekers, the methods and ethical procedures adopted in this research are described. The findings underscore the non-homogeneous paths and experiences of asylum seekers, highlighting the interconnection of various identities and hierarchies. The study advocates for an intersectional approach to refugee policies as well as for programs to address the diverse experiences and needs of asylum seekers, rather than applying a single universal approach.

3. Method

This article is based on research conducted for a doctoral thesis at the University of Lisbon, adhering to the institution's chart, code of ethics, and research integrity guidelines (ALLEA, 2017; ESRC, 2015). The study employs a qualitative methodology to capture the complexity of the experiences of asylum seekers. It involved 26 semi-structured interviews with asylum seekers of sixteen nationalities recruited through service providers. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were informed about the research aims and assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

Approval for the research was obtained from the university's Institutional Board before data collection. The interviews, conducted between May and October 2021 during the Covid-19 pandemic, were recorded and transcribed. No safety, health, or ethical concerns arose during the research.

3.1. Materials Used

The study comprised 26 interviews conducted in two phases: the first between May and June 2021 (12 interviews), and the second between September and October 2021 (14 interviews). The interviews lasted approximately 18 hours and 30 minutes in total, amounting to around 93,092 words. An informed consent document was used to ensure the authorization of the asylum seekers and compliance with ethical research standards.

3.2. Procedures

Prior to the interviews, the research objectives were verbally explained and interviewees were informed of their freedom to refrain from answering any questions. Although an informed consent form was translated into the language of the interview (Portuguese, English, Spanish, or French), interviewees had the opportunity to ask questions and for clarification. The freedom to refuse to discuss specific topics was reiterated during the interviews (Allmark et al., 2009; Hugman et al., 2011).

The interviews were recorded in the participants' preferred language and were all conducted without the need for an interpreter. The transcripts were translated into Portuguese for better analysis and discussion of the data. However, it is acknowledged that some information may have been lost as the interviews were not in the respondents' native language and due to the subsequent translation process.

3.3. Participants' Sociodemographic Characteristics

Table 1 provides detailed information on the gender, age, civil status, and country of origin of the 26 participants. This demographic overview offers insights into the diverse backgrounds, which is crucial for understanding their unique experiences and challenges. Although the sample includes both males and females, male participants predominate. The age range spans from 22 to 53 years but the majority are in their early to mid-30s. Most participants are single. The asylum seekers come from a wide geographical area, encompassing countries from the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and South America. This diverse sample reflects the broad spectrum of asylum seekers' backgrounds, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of their social and demographic profiles.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characterization of interviewees.

Interview	Gender	Age	Civil Status	Country of Origin
I1	M	33	Single	Palestine
I2	M	36	Single	India
I3	M	34	Single	Sierra Leone
I4	M	29	Single	Iran
I5	F	25	Married	Gambia
I6	F	27	Married	Angola
I7	M	31	Married	Sierra Leone
I8	M	27	Single	Senegal
I9	M	37	Single	Iraq
I10	M	22	Single	Guinea-Conakry
I11	F	31	Single	Sierra Leone
I12	F	28	Single	Nigeria
I13	M	35	Single	Pakistan
I14	M	30	Single	Nigeria
I15	M	34	Single	Gambia
I16	F	34	Single	Morocco
I17	M	25	Single	Gambia
I18	M	24	Single	Senegal
I19	M	42	Single	Ukraine
I20	M	34	Single	Gambia
I21	M	34	Married	Guinea-Bissau
I22	F	33	Married	Angola
I23	M	31	Single	Angola
I24	M	26	Single	Afghanistan
I25	M	35	Married	Afghanistan
I26	M	53	Married	Venezuela

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis of narratives from 26 asylum seekers uncovered three central themes in their experiences: the occurrences of exclusion within their countries of origin, the obstacles and living conditions encountered during their journey to Europe, and the challenges and experiences of reception when applying for international protection. The trajectories of asylum seekers in Portugal reveal how asylum seekers confront exclusion predicated on intersecting identities that encompass race, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, and social class within their countries of origin. The experiences of asylum seekers on their journeys are moderated by intersecting factors such as gender, age, socioeconomic status, and physical ability. Gender, age, nationality, language proficiency, and socioeconomic status are some of the influential factors shaping asylum seekers' access to resources, interactions with host communities, and overall experiences within reception systems. The focus of the data analysis is on the emergent themes from their narratives about

trajectories that provide insights into the following topics and how these individuals coped and overcame difficulties through personal resilience.

4.1. Experience of Social Exclusion in Their Home Countries

The experiences of exclusion endured by asylum seekers in their countries of origin are often linked to political positions and opposition movements against the incumbent power. The reasons for departure are directly correlated with the political and/or wartime contexts of the countries of origin, as evidenced by interviewees from Palestine, Venezuela, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Ukraine, Nigeria, Guinea-Bissau, Iraq, and the Indian region of Kashmir, and analysed in approximately ten interviews. The next interview quotes explore the political and religious exclusion and reasons for departure.

> Interviewer: Why did you have to leave your country?
>
> Interviewee: Because I had a problem with some people there who were against the government, against human rights. They were against people from all countries; they worked against the country. And I worked with the government. (I25)

One of the decisive reasons cited for choosing to leave the country of origin was persecution based on religion, ethnic group, sexual orientation, or membership of certain social groups, notably opposition movements, political parties, or governments in countries considered less democratic. Some interviewees mentioned leaving their country of origin because they belonged to movements that undertake organized social and political protests or simply because they refused to cooperate with practices imposed by dictatorial regimes. For example, a 26-year-old single man from Afghanistan explained:

> Interviewee: We would move from city to city. There has always been war in Afghanistan. I had a problem with my father and with the Taliban. That's why it was very...very....It's not possible to live in Afghanistan without religion. If the Taliban knew or someone else knew, they would kill me.
>
> Interviewer: You were very young when you left Afghanistan.
>
> Interviewee: Yes, because I didn't want to be like the Taliban, I wanted to be someone else. My religion wasn't good, it killed people, did wrong things, and everything was wrong. (I24)

4.2. Gender Exclusion in the Country of Origin

A gendered element is superimposed on this debate. The women interviewed spoke of situations of severe discrimination or other inhuman treatment, equivalent to persecution, due to their non-conformity with rigid social codes, some of which had religious origins. Out of the five interviewed women, three left their countries of origin due to family pressures to enter into marriages not of their choice:

> Interviewee: Yes, I knew a girl who decided to commit suicide because she wasn't allowed to marry the man she wanted. She said: "If they won't let me marry the man I want, I won't stay with the man I don't want."

Interviewer: She committed suicide. But you don't think about doing that?

Interviewee: Sometimes the situation makes me feel like it, but when I see my children, I forget about it. (I5)

Another interviewee, who originated from Sierra Leone, was placed under the care of her stepmother after the death of her mother, and compelled to marry a much older man. She flew to Europe while pregnant:

I am from Sierra Leone. I left Sierra Leone because they wanted to force me to marry an older man, 60 years old. I lived with my family....She [the stepmother] wanted me to marry someone older than me. My mother had already passed away. I did not accept it and left home, sleeping on the streets. (I11)

Another woman left her Muslim country of origin in search of greater emancipation and liberation from practices and customs that deny women the possibility of social and financial autonomy. A 27-years old married woman from Angola stated:

There were political conflicts and then I had to leave in a hurry....He (referring to her husband) had been kidnapped at the time and I don't know where he is. (I6)

In the case of Angola, the women interviewed had left the country due to political issues associated with their husbands and the need to protect the entire family.

From the analysis of the interviews, it emerges that vulnerabilities are accentuated by the interviewees' female status and experiences in the countries of origin. Similarly, their escape from the country of origin was hampered because they were women, often already mothers, without financial autonomy, and dependent on family or a husband. The women reveal in the interviews that the decision to flee was painful and that they were afraid of the challenges they would encounter both on the journey and upon arrival in an unfamiliar country.

4.3. Sexual Orientation and Exclusion in the Country of Origin

The interviews also identified asylum seekers who left their countries of origin due to offenses, inhumane treatment, or severe discrimination suffered as a result of their homosexuality, and whose governments were unable or unwilling to protect them. A 31-year-old man from Angola testifies to this:

It was for other issues related to my sexual orientation and also my serological status because I am HIV positive. So, it was all related because I started dating someone whose family was from a very hostile background. It was during that time that I found out, and he also found out, and then I started receiving threats from his family. (I23)

A large majority of the interviewees recount traumatic events from their past, including experiences of war, persecution, forced marriage, sexual violence (rape, circumcision, forced prostitution), physical abuse, poverty, and involuntary separation from family and friends. These historical occurrences remain vivid, engendering substantial concern and distress. The following interview quotes exemplify this:

Interviewee: Yes, I was forced into a marriage, so I...my wish was to continue my education, so I refused to agree to a marriage I did not want. First, he was older than me, his wife was older, he had daughters my age, I would not be well treated, and I felt that if I stayed there my abilities would....I wanted to continue my studies. I had to flee. (I5)

Interviewee: I was tortured by bandits; they would find us walking on the street, capture us, and take us away to torture us....There were people who saw us walking on the street, chased after us and, when they caught us, forced us into hard labour in the fields [agriculture] without paying us, they would yell at us, insult us. (I10)

4.4. Facing Restricted Accommodation Conditions

Italy has become one of the main entry points into Europe for seekers of international protection. This geographical position poses a series of internal challenges for Italy in its response to the phenomenon and in reaching a consensus with other member states for the relocation of these individuals. Among the 26 interviews, six international protection seekers had entered Italy from Libya on boats operated by trafficking networks.

Interviewees who went through Libya speak about the precarious conditions in the country and the human rights violations. A 22-years-old male interviewee, who arrived in Libya as a minor in 2016, describes a perverse range of human rights violations in this country, from abuse and violence to slavery:

No, I was not detained there [Libya], but I was subjected to torture....I was tortured by thugs who saw us passing on the street, they caught us and took us, and tortured us....They forced us to do heavy work in the fields [agriculture] without paying us, they would shout at us, insult us. That's how I lost contact with my brother....I never heard from him again. (I10)

The Western Mediterranean is another route commonly used by irregular migrants to reach Spain. This can involve crossing the Mediterranean Sea to the mainland of Spain or using land routes to the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in North Africa. Migration movements also traverse Morocco and Algeria to reach Spain. Four interviewees had taken this route with the "help" of smugglers to enter Spain.

The financial capacity of each asylum seeker is also a vulnerability factor as it determines the country where they will seek international protection:

But I didn't choose Portugal, it was the trafficker. I paid him $3,500 for Germany, instead of the usual $5,500. When the boat stopped at the port in Spain, he the smuggler said: "Here we are in Portugal, you take a taxi and go; your money only gets you this far." And I said: "Really?" He said: "Take a taxi and go to Portugal, Portugal is good." (I2)

Various European countries, especially those facing high influxes of asylum seekers and migrants, have hotspots where the initial registration, identification, and processing procedures take place. These facilities serve as the first point of contact for individuals seeking asylum or irregular migrants arriving in Europe. Hotspots aim to streamline the asylum application process, conduct security screenings, and provide

essential services such as medical assistance, shelter, and food. Under current procedures, individuals should remain in centres for the shortest time possible but, in practice, they stay there for days or weeks. This was revealed in six interviews and is described in the following testimony:

Interviewee: I stayed in an emergency camp, a camp with tents. So, I stayed there for about three months, but it was too cold.

Interviewer: Were your fingerprints taken?

Interviewee: Yes, when I got off the boat, at the port. Then I went to the tents, I was there in October, November, and December, but it was very cold, I couldn't stand it, so I left. (I7)

The interviewees reported that it is common for individuals applying for asylum in France to spend their first nights sleeping on the streets, having to find accommodation on their own. They emphasized that financial resources are not always sufficient to cover the cost of accommodation, leading to intermittent periods between housing and nights spent homeless: This situation is mentioned by seven of the interviewees who had crossed French territory. For example, this interview explained:

Sometimes on the streets [in France], they provide some financial support, but it's not easy to find accommodation, so sometimes I slept on the streets. But I never got anything, it's the same everywhere, they take your fingerprints, you go to court, they open a case, you appeal, and you can't go back, it's this and that. (I13)

In Portugal, some entities provide accommodation free of charge but it is always a temporary solution; the goal is for asylum seekers to find housing autonomously in the free rental market. However, it was found that some asylum seekers frequently change accommodation over a short period; eleven of the interviewees reported doing so. In Portugal, there are currently no provisions for asylum seekers to be granted separate accommodation due to their sexual orientation:

I first went to a hostel because I didn't have a Covid test, and then I went to the Portuguese Council for Refugees [CPR]. I stayed at the CPR for two or four weeks and then I moved to Alameda; these are apartments with links to CPR. I think I stayed there for about a month or almost two months, and then I came here [a hostel of the Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa]. (I6)

The conditions currently found in reception centres to accommodate asylum seekers can exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities, both personal and those resulting from their journey. Applicants report that there is often a non-peaceful outcome when asylum seekers from different backgrounds and ethnicities are lodged in the same space. Many participants state that asylum centres are unable to meet their needs. Consequently, the transition to a European country does not guarantee a secure environment; asylum seekers continue to face obstacles that may exacerbate mental health issues and can trigger feelings of despair:

Interviewer: Have you seen anyone commit suicide?

Interviewee: Yes. Yes. People destroying the camp out of hatred, grabbing hammers, or punching windows and everything. You wake up to police and ambulances. Fights, especially among Arabs,

Palestinians, and all nationalities. You wake up to fifteen or twenty police cars inside the camp because someone punched someone and hurt them. That's the asylum world, it wasn't easy. (I6)

4.5. Experiencing the Black Labour Market

Asylum seekers often gravitate towards entry zones to Europe such as Greece, Italy, and Spain, yet this trend is not the sole explanation for their concentration. Typically, countries in Southern Europe (including Portugal) have more opportunities for irregular work in poorly regulated sectors of the informal economy (such as agriculture and construction). The research underscores that asylum seekers frequently find themselves in precarious working conditions upon arrival in Southern Europe. For instance, asylum seekers in Italy often engage in clandestine agricultural work, where they face exploitative practices and live in substandard accommodation, such as makeshift housing in fields or derelict buildings (Dimitriadis, 2023; Dines et al., 2014).

The following interviewee reports staying in Spain for about one year in Andalusia, specifically in Lepe:

> In Lepe, I worked in agriculture….I lived in a room in a container in an open field….I worked clandestinely in agriculture. (I8)

Similar dynamics are observed in Portugal, where asylum seekers often face barriers to accessing formal employment due to legal restrictions and bureaucratic hurdles. This forces many into informal sectors where labour standards are lax and oversight is minimal, exacerbating their vulnerability (Triandafyllidou & Spencer, 2020). There are still entities in Portugal that illegally employ workers in an irregular situation. This makes asylum seekers potentially easy targets for work on the black market, exploitation, and precarious conditions.

The following testimony from an Indian national reveals he is aware he can work in the Portuguese informal economy:

> Interviewer: But with this document, can you work?

> Interviewee: No, but you don't need documents to work in Portugal. (I2)

4.6. Facing Discrimination From Host Societies/Language and Cultural Difficulties

Participants also spoke of the challenges they faced on arriving in a European country. They experienced distrust, hostility, and discrimination from host societies, be it openly or subtly. Such experiences have a detrimental impact on their well-being, often triggering feelings of helplessness, anger, frustration, and general distrust:

> In Germany, they don't even let you approach them. But here [Portugal], it's not quite like that. Here, you can, especially because the language is also easier. People are more open here; you can socialize more. I've never experienced a direct act of racism here. (I6)

The narratives of the interviewed asylum seekers generally reveal a more positive adaptation to Portugal compared to their experiences in other European Union Member States. They feel more integrated and supported in Portugal than in other EU countries. They describe the favourable reception and social connections established with the general population. The welcoming attitude of the Portuguese population is a facilitator even though a lack of fluency in the host country's language poses a constraint for some asylum seekers, as can be seen from the following quote:

> Yes, yes, I feel accepted. I don't experience racism in Portugal, for example, if I'm on the street and need to find a destination, I approach a police officer and they help me find the place using a mobile phone. They try to help me, turn right or left, I feel comfortable here. (I8)

The sense of illegitimacy in the host country affects daily mobility and the way asylum seekers perceive and access public services and housing. Although asylum seekers are in a legal situation during the asylum application process, the accommodation they can access and their easy entry into informal labour markets without social protection are the same as for undocumented and irregular migrants:

> No, it wasn't easy at all. People don't want to rent houses to refugees. I was struggling because many people don't want to help refugees. Most landlords prefer to rent houses to those who are working. (I1)

Discriminatory attitudes and behaviours within society may deter asylum seekers from seeking out legal, social, and health services, even when they are needed, and this can make them project their negative sentiments onto assisting professionals. A young man explained:

> Every time I asked to go [to the doctor], for example, when I had a dental problem, it didn't lead to anything. Once, I had a tooth pulled out, I was in pain, and they didn't even give me medication to calm down. That's why I say that even though I had the right to go to the doctor, when I did go, it didn't amount to anything. (I10)

In the European context, the lengthy asylum procedure and its unpredictability mean asylum seekers constantly struggle with a sense of uncertainty about their legal status and feel trapped in limbo. The lack of information about the asylum procedure and limited support are also sources of distress.

In the following interview quote, the asylum seeker describes receiving a letter from his lawyer with information about his asylum process, which he could not understand due to the language and legal terms used:

> They gave me a lawyer, but my lawyer recently wrote to me [he takes the letter out of his pocket and reads]: "We are awaiting the final decision of the Court, the last movement in your process, the process is ongoing, but the SEF contested the decision of the Court." I do not understand this. (I3)

For a balanced picture of asylum seekers, it is important to highlight not only their victimization but also their agency, courage, and strength. Many asylum seekers refuse to give up on finding a country that will offer them refuge despite the risks they face. Research by McAuliffe and Jayasuriya (2016) shows that asylum seekers often exhibit remarkable resilience and determination, actively seeking and often securing

employment despite facing numerous barriers. They navigate complex bureaucracies, learn new languages, and adapt to new cultures, all of which demonstrate their agency and proactive efforts to rebuild their lives. This approach ensures that asylum seekers are not viewed as a homogenous group of victims but as individuals with diverse experiences and capabilities. The testimonies of the trajectories of these asylum seekers revealed great courage, strength, and optimism as well as the resilience to overcome adversities encountered along their migratory journey. This is exemplified by the following quote:

> If it's denied, I will insist yet again. I know a solution will come one way or another, maybe I'll even work, I don't know what I'll do with my children, but I know a solution will come. Finding a job to get residency....I will fight until I succeed, I will not give up, no, I will not give up, I will keep fighting until I succeed. (I22)

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The article has given an in-depth picture of asylum seekers' narratives and experiences on their journey to Europe and the reception system on arrival. When we analyse the interviews in terms of vulnerabilities, we find that the asylum seekers' paths and experiences are not homogeneous and that the different identities and hierarchies related to gender, age, country of origin, and financial resources are interconnected. Thus, intersectionality contributes not only by drawing attention to multiple forms of oppression but also by challenging the idea of homogeneous and essential social identities, categories, or labels (Anthias, 2012).

The generalized nature of exclusion within asylum seekers' countries of origin, driven by intersecting factors such as political affiliation, ethnicity, religion, and social class is a key finding of this study. The narratives reveal how individuals face persecution and discrimination, often stemming from their alignment with opposition movements or their non-conformity with rigid social norms. Importantly, the experiences of exclusion are gendered, with women often facing severe discrimination, forced marriages, and limited autonomy over their lives.

The journey to Europe presents its own set of challenges, marked by perilous land or sea crossings, exploitation by smugglers, and harsh living conditions in transit countries. The analysis underscores how intersecting factors like gender, age, and financial capacity influence the migration routes chosen by asylum seekers and their experiences along the way.

The study also sheds light on the conditions within reception systems, where asylum seekers continue to face exclusion and marginalization. Asylum seekers encounter numerous obstacles ranging from inadequate accommodation and limited access to essential services to discriminatory attitudes and behaviours within host societies, all of which exacerbate their vulnerabilities and contribute to feelings of uncertainty and despair.

This study highlights the importance of an intersectionality framework to an understanding of asylum seekers' experiences and the design of responsive refugee policies and programs. By recognizing the intersecting identities and social structures that shape asylum seekers' journeys and reception experiences, policymakers can develop more inclusive and holistic approaches that address the diverse needs and vulnerabilities of this population. For instance, tailored support programs that consider gender-specific

needs or provide language and vocational training can enhance the integration prospects of asylum seekers in Portugal.

Furthermore, this study underscores the need to pay greater attention to the voices and experiences of the asylum seekers themselves as they are often marginalized and excluded from decision-making processes that directly affect their lives. By amplifying their voices and placing their experiences at the center of policy discussions, policymakers can develop more effective and humane responses to the global refugee crisis.

Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities of asylum-seeking and underlines the importance of refugee research and policymaking seen through an intersectional lens. This article strives to offer insights when thinking through diverse approaches to asylum seekers. This knowledge contributes to a more evidence-based view of asylum seekers and the process of integration; it raises important issues that can lead to evidence-informed policy developments of relevance to civil society, local communities, academia, and the private and public sectors.

Moving forward, it is essential to continue interrogating the intersecting factors that shape refugee experiences and to develop strategies that promote equity, dignity, and social inclusion for all asylum seekers.

Conflict of Interests
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability
The data used in this article are available in the appendices of the first author's doctoral thesis, which can be accessed through the repository of the University of Lisbon at http://hdl.handle.net/10400.5/27538. The authors are open to correspondence with interested parties and encourage further research utilizing the available qualitative data.

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Untold Stories of Displaced Rohingya Pregnant Women Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence in Camp Settings

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Abstract

Intimate partner violence (IPV) strongly impacts the physical, sexual, social, and reproductive health of women, causing an array of psychological and behavioural problems. During pregnancy, the detrimental effects of violence extend to both the mother and the child. Rates of IPV are frequently higher among those in conflict-affected and displaced communities, most of whom live in low and middle-income countries. IPV against Rohingya women is common due to relocation, family breakups, patriarchal norms, and deep-seated gender roles. Despite the high prevalence of IPV in Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, the matter is often under-examined. This qualitative study aims to explore and understand pregnant IPV victims' unique experiences and hardships among the displaced population in a camp setting. A sample of six pregnant homemakers with no formal education was recruited from a healthcare service provider in Leda Camp 24, a remote camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted. Participants reported diverse manifestations of IPV victimisation. Physical abuse, emotional abuse, economic abuse, sexual abuse, pregnancy-related consequences, and impact on mental health were commonly experienced by participants of this study. The current research investigates the recurrent abuse experienced by this demography, providing detailed narrative information beyond quantitative descriptions of IPV experiences. This article contributes to the existing knowledge on the intersection of IPV, pregnancy,

and mental health among displaced populations. Governmental and non-governmental stakeholders must contextualise these findings in policies and practices by integrating IPV and violence screening, prevention, and treatment protocols into refugee camps and healthcare service providers.

Keywords

displaced population; domestic abuse; domestic violence; intimate partner violence; pregnant women; refugees

1. Introduction

This article contains details that some readers may find distressing.

Violence against women and girls has been increasingly recognised as a significant international human rights and public health problem and global concern (Ellsberg & Emmelin, 2014; Garcia-Moreno et al., 2006). From overt abusive behaviours such as punching, kicking, or pushing (Campbell, 2002; Devries et al., 2014) to mental health consequences—depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, drug addiction, and low self-esteem (Devries et al., 2014; Ellsberg & Emmelin, 2014)— intimate partner violence (IPV) can affect women irrespective of their socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, or religion. In high-income countries, the likelihood of substance abuse and alcoholism among female survivors of IPV is higher (Fowler, 2007). Antoniou (2020) underlines that substance abuse and low socioeconomic status during pregnancy are the primary risk factors for violence against women.

During pregnancy, the detrimental effects of violence extend to both the mother and the foetus (Antoniou, 2020). Perinatal IPV refers to violence by an intimate partner that happens within the first twelve months after conception, throughout pregnancy, or within the initial year after birth (Hahn et al., 2018; Sharps et al., 2007). Inadequate prenatal care, induced or spontaneous miscarriage, and intrauterine restriction were the most typical unfavourable maternal health-related outcomes after IPV during pregnancy (Martin et al., 2006; Rodrigues et al., 2008; Tiwari et al., 2008). Barez et al. (2022) discovered that the majority of abused women did not reveal instances of violence, even though they were regularly screened for perinatal IPV throughout prenatal care.

In the context of displaced populations in low- and middle-income countries, IPV is often under-examined. Studies highlight that the process of displacement may lead to isolation, disruptions in relationships and families, and less communication during vulnerable periods (Alghamdi et al., 2021; Dowllah & Melville, 2023; Falb et al., 2014; Mishkin et al., 2022). Past quantitative research conducted with different refugee women (Feseha et al., 2012; Hadush et al., 2023; Islam et al., 2021; Sipsma et al., 2015) reported a higher level of the lifetime prevalence rate of IPV. Studies among Rohingya in Malaysia, Palestinians in Jordan, and Syrians in Lebanon underscore alarmingly high rates of IPV, particularly severe physical violence experienced by a significant portion of women (James et al., 2021). Moreover, research across various camp settings like South Sudan, Kenya, and Iraq identified factors like disrupted social roles, exposure to war-related violence, economic hardships, and limited access to essential services significantly heighten the susceptibility to IPV among displaced populations (Ondeko & Purdin, 2004; Strang et al., 2020; Wachter et al., 2017).

The Rohingya, a Muslim ethnic community, have experienced numerous atrocities in Myanmar and discriminatory laws that endangered close to one million people who are now stateless (Akins, 2018; Zahed, 2021). With no legal status and facing numerous human rights violations, the Rohingya have been left with little choice except to migrate or die (Faulkner & Schiffer, 2019). The Rohingya had been forcibly displaced in Cox's Bazar, one of the poorest areas in Bangladesh, struggling with numerous challenges, including extreme poverty, dense population, frequent natural catastrophes, and climate change (Ahmed, 2010). Pregnancy rates among Rohingya women and girls are high, which may be a sign of a rise in sexual abuse and violence associated with conflicts (Hutchinson, 2017).

IPV against Rohingya women is common due to relocation, family breakups, patriarchal norms, and deep-seated gender roles, which aligns with studies exploring Muslim women's experiences with IPV, highlighting the intersection of cultural and religious factors in shaping these experiences (Ammar et al., 2013; Milani et al., 2018). Statistics from the International Rescue Committee show that 81% of gender-based violence in a camp setting is committed by partners or husbands, with 56% of incidents including physical abuse. Islam et al. (2021) and Gerhardt et al. (2020) found that 72% of partnered women among Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh had suffered IPV. Despite the high rate of IPV in this demography, few studies have examined IPV in Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

To the best of our knowledge, no qualitative studies have yet been conducted on this topic among the displaced Rohingya population in Bangladesh. The current study aims to explore through Rohingya women's voices a more in-depth exploration of the unique experiences of pregnant women who are abused. This study will try to answer three research questions:

1. What are the different forms of IPV experienced by displaced Rohingya pregnant women?
2. How does IPV impact pregnant women living in a camp setting?
3. How do various forms of IPV experiences affect their mental health?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Design

A qualitative approach was used for this study, as very little is known about this developing area of interest.

2.2. Participants Recruitment

This study was performed in Leda (Camp 24), one of the makeshift refugee settlements in the vicinity of Teknaf, a tiny town in southern Bangladesh that shares a border with Myanmar. The colony is home to an estimated 26,793 individuals (UNHCR, 2021).

The participants were recruited from the IOM Hospital in Leda Camp 24. This facility was chosen to engage with the participants because it offers essential obstetrics healthcare services and provides assistance to women who are victims of domestic violence. Between March and April 2023, participants were recruited during their medical appointments through purposive sampling (Polit & Beck, 2006). Pregnant women over 18, of refugee status, living in a camp setting, and who have been victims of IPV in the last 12 months

were selected. Patients who met the above criteria were contacted, and the research and interview procedures were explained to them. Patients who had indicated interest in participating ($N = 6$) were invited into the research.

2.3. Ethical Considerations

This original qualitative study protocol was approved by the Holy Family Red Crescent Medical College's Institutional Ethical Review Board (Ref. IERC/35/Res/JAN/2023/26/Ex). The Bangladesh Red Crescent granted institutional permission, and verbal informed consent to conduct the research was obtained from the Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner of Cox's Bazar. All research was conducted in compliance with safety guidelines for researching domestic violence, refugees, and vulnerable populations (Bailey & Williams, 2018; Ellsberg et al., 2001; Jewkes et al., 2000).

Before gaining consent, the research participants were provided with information about their entitlement to refuse participation or withdraw from the study at any point. They were assured that their decision to reject or terminate participation would not affect their ability to receive services in the camp. The authors acknowledge the participants' unease in a situation where they have no prior experience with research or lack of legal standing in the country. Moreover, researchers understand that participants might agree with the expectation that the researcher will be able to support them and their families. This is why the study's participants were thoroughly informed of our objectives and procedures.

Each participant was given a unique identification to guarantee confidentiality and privacy and mitigate any potential risks related to the sensitive content of the interviews. All participants were offered a pre-packaged lunch and travel expenses. This study followed the highest ethical standards and was steadfastly committed to participant safety and well-being, ensuring a secure research environment.

2.4. Data Collection

Semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted (see also the Supplementary File). Open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview approach enable participants to react, and the interviewer may follow up on their comments (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Questions were developed based on previous research on IPV (Balogun & John-Akinola, 2015; Feder et al., 2006; Kyegombe et al., 2022; Showalter & McCloskey, 2021; Thomas et al., 2008). Furthermore, the authors (IMD and AKB) drew upon extensive expertise and knowledge gained from working with Rohingya refugees for more than five years. They designed questions that were culturally appropriate to the research population. The questions focused on the type and frequency of IPV experienced, coping mechanisms, access to resources and support, and mental health outcomes.

A trained female research assistant, with a graduate degree, administered the questions in person. The interviewer received training on qualitative methods, interviewing techniques, safeguarding participants, risk mitigation, and handling unanticipated emotions from two authors (AKB and MKF). Pre-testing was done to ensure the interviewer's credibility (McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

Before the interview commenced, the interviewer introduced herself, explained the research purpose and procedure, assured participants of confidentiality, informed participants of their option to take breaks if they experienced discomfort, and reaffirmed their right to withdraw at any moment. This facilitated the interviewer in fostering a connection and establishing comfortable interactions. The face-to-face interviews lasted an average of 30 minutes. All participants indicated that family and childcare commitments limited their ability to participate for a longer period of time. The interviews were conducted in a private setting to ensure confidentiality.

2.5. Data Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis guidelines and methodical procedures were used to analyse the data and provide answers to our three research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). Recorded audio interviews were transcribed semi-verbatim by two authors (IMD and AKB) and reviewed by one of the authors (MKF) for accuracy (Saunders et al., 2018). There was some variation in the quantity of material provided in responses by participants; some of the respondents decided to provide detailed descriptions of their experiences, while others chose to give relatively brief answers.

The researchers (IMD and AKB) meticulously analysed the qualitative data on a per-item basis to establish the credibility of the collected data. This analysis began by comprehensively examining all participants' responses to a particular question. After repeatedly reading the transcripts to familiarise themselves with the content, both the authors adhered to standard coding procedures by underlining keywords or phrases and creating marginal notes to emphasise significant elements in each response, as per McIntosh and Morse's (2015) methodology. Disagreements were discussed until a consensus was achieved. The coding process was executed using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12. Afterwards, one author (MFK) reviewed the codes to ensure the reliability of the data.

After completing the coding process, codes were allocated to potential themes, encapsulating the statements' fundamental attributes. The text describes extracting and categorising coded passages related to "the different forms of IPV experienced by participants," "how this experience impacts their lives in a camp setting," and "how it affects their mental health." The themes were established through an iterative categorisation, discussion, and categorisation process for the codes and passages. The themes were rigorously reviewed to ascertain their relevance to the data and their ability to represent it accurately. Ultimately, a selection of extracts was made to serve as representative examples of the themes identified in the research for reporting.

3. Results

This study included six pregnant refugee women aged 18–30, with an average age of 26. All participants are housewives with no formal education and have direct experience with IPV. Significantly, of the six participants, only two are now living with their spouses, while three are separated due to abandonment, and one is divorced. Regarding family demographics, the participants reported having between one to three children. The severity of the IPV experienced is highlighted by the health complications reported, including miscarriage, attempted forced abortion, burns, and hospitalisation.

We explored the lives of pregnant Rohingya women marked by a harrowing confluence of displacement, vulnerability, and violence. While the world has borne witness to the plight of this marginalized population, the specific experiences of those enduring the brutality of their husbands remain largely obscured. This section delves into the heart of this darkness, offering a raw and unfiltered account of the abuse suffered by pregnant Rohingya women in a refugee camp. The data analysis for this article was broadly separated into five main themes. Each theme will be discussed alongside the sub-themes chosen and supported with reference to participant quotes. In the following section, we will discuss various kinds of assault, including sexual misconduct, that some readers may find distressing.

3.1. Physical Abuse—A Brutal Reality

The lives of these women were marred by a pervasive and insidious darkness: physical abuse. It was a constant, cruel companion; its presence felt acutely during and after their relationships. Their experiences progressed from a gentle warmth of early fondness to a brutal intensity of violence, unfolding as a terrifying journey into a world of agony and terror. The following accounts illuminate the diverse and devastating forms this abuse took, offering a chilling portrait of lives shattered by brutality.

The physical abuse endured by these women often escalated into acts of extreme and ruthless violence that shattered their sense of safety and security. These brutal assaults left indelible marks, not just on their bodies but on their souls. Five out of six participants reported severe forms of physical assault. One participant described a deeply distressing and abusive relationship with her partner:

> He used to hit me with sticks in front of my children. He used to keep beating me till I fell on the floor senseless. He never stops. I wouldn't remember anything, just my children crying in the background, and he continued beating me. (P1)

Two of the participants talked of being hospitalised because of serious physical assault. These instances also explain the magnitude of the violence. One participant whose relationship was initially positive but deteriorated significantly over time recounted:

> My neighbours rescued me and took me to the hospital. I was there in the hospital and he spent his time in the brothel. My parents took care of me. And he was enjoying himself with his friends and other girls. (P6)

Another participant explained:

> One time, he crossed every line and slapped me. That time I felt like I lost all respect for him. I went to my father's home and decided I would never return to him. (P4)

While the initial acts of physical abuse often manifested as less severe forms, such as slapping, the experiences shared by some of the women reveal a terrifying escalation of violence.

The following testimony reveals the depths of cruelty perpetrated upon the victim, with profound and lasting impacts on their mental health: While carrying a third child, this participant fights for the survival and

well-being of her two girls on her own. She described a particularly horrific form of violence when her partner assaulted her by throwing boiling water. This act of extreme aggression and scalding terror underscores the terrifying reality these women faced:

> I was bruised so badly I tried to hide my blackspot with a cotton cloth in the bruised area. He saw that and took the boiling water and threw it in my hand. I was in so much pain. I always tried to conceal it in front of everyone. I always kept it to myself. I used to curse my fate and complain to Allah for giving me this life. That was so painful. I thought I would die. I can't explain to you the pain I had that day. Even now, you can see the scar mark. Now I have to bear this through the rest of my life. (P5)

The physical abuse endured by these women extended beyond their suffering, casting a long shadow of fear and pain over their children, feeding into a cycle of violence. Participants reported witnessing, and in some cases experiencing first-hand, their partners' violent behaviour towards their children:

> He used to beat our children as well. He once kicked my son just to show his anger. I cried a lot and begged him to show mercy. But he didn't listen to me. (P3)

3.2. Emotional Abuse—A Prison of the Mind

Beyond the physical brutality, these women were trapped in a psychological prison constructed by their partners. Their experiences were characterised by anxiety, uncertainty, and emotional torment. The next section discusses the tactics used to lower their self-esteem and manage their life. The participants' accounts provide a vivid glimpse into the emotional damage caused by violent relationships.

Verbal abuse, a tool of control and intimidation, was a common experience for these women. The constant barrage of insults, criticisms, and threats eroded their self-esteem and impacted the victim beyond herself, with children often bearing the brunt of the mothers' emotional turmoil. One participant spoke of her experience of public humiliation:

> I got really scared of him. I have never seen this side of his. My daughter was only three months old, and she was breastfeeding. I begged him not to create any scene as my daughter started crying. But he was someone else at that time. (P4)

The constant unpredictability of their partners' behaviour created a climate of fear for these women and their children, who lived under a constant shadow of uncertainty. The weight of this unpredictability, as well as the worry of what the future could contain, compounded their already traumatic experiences:

> [I kept thinking] about when he would come back and start shouting and arguing about god-knows-what. I always thought of that. Always. [And] with that, the uncertainty about my children's future. How to educate them. How to give them a good life. How to feed them. Provide them with clothes. It always makes me worried....I always thought about how he was going to react if he beat me again. What will happen to my kids? A lot of things are going through my mind. These make me helpless and weak. Also, alone. (P1)

3.2.1. The Illusion of Dominance

Controlling behaviour is more than just a series of actions; it's a covert form of psychological warfare perpetrators utilise to erode their partners' sense of self and independence. Societal norms and expectations can contribute to the insidious exercise of power by one partner over another. Half of our participants described enduring domination within their marriages:

> I didn't get a chance to talk about my problem. He didn't allow me to share [anything] with my parents and brother. He threatened me many times, so many times, about not talking about it. He also threatened to harm my children, which made me so concerned I kept my mouth shut for the whole time. (P2)

3.2.2. The Pain of Neglect

Neglect manifested in various ways, including emotional withdrawal and a disregard for their needs and those of their children. As one participant described, infidelity can be a catalyst for this neglect, as the partner retreats into a shell of indifference:

> We passed through the worst relationship when [another] girl came between us. We were arguing day and night, all the time. He never listened to me. He never asked for any opinion. I felt very valueless in any family issues and decisions. (P3)

3.2.3. Betrayal and Toxic Influences

Infidelity was a recurring theme among most of the participants ($N = 5$), often perceived as a form of psychological abuse. One participant's experience highlights how the revelation of her husband's infidelity marked a turning point in their relationship, ushering in a new era of fear and control:

> He started a relationship with a woman, and that was the moment that changed my whole marriage. After the relationship, he starts ignoring me. He wanted to marry that woman. (P2)

A single mother of two facing financial hardship described how external relationships, particularly those of her partner, had a detrimental effect on their lives:

> He then starts going to brothels. His friends were a really bad influence. He even starts seeing other girls. I didn't have any clue at the time. But soon I realised something was wrong. I found out about his [other] relationships. (P6)

3.3. Economic Abuse—A Crushing Dependency

The female participants in this research encountered a widespread and consistent pattern of financial authority imposed by their partners. The societal norm dictating that women should rely on males for financial support has resulted in an unequal distribution of power, enabling the potential for exploitation and manipulation.

Food deprivation and withholding of basic means was reported by the majority of participants in this study; however, the potential for this form of abuse underscores the degree to which fundamental necessities can be weaponised within these detrimental dynamics. For example:

> He restrained me from having food while I was pregnant. He didn't let me eat. He stopped supplying us with food. Even if I borrowed it from someone else, he deliberately threw it away so that I couldn't have it, since he didn't want me to have it. (P6)

"Financial shackles" are a prevalent phenomenon among undereducated women residing in refugee camps who depend on their spouse's economic assistance. The interdependence between partners is frequently manipulated in cases of IPV:

> He doesn't want to send my kids to school. The relief we regularly get from the NGOs, he sells it to the local market and takes away all the money and spends it on that girl. (P3)

In the absence of financial assistance, victims are compelled to endure a highly challenging circumstance wherein they are incapable of maintaining their family and must rely on others' assistance:

> I had to beg others for food, but not many helped us because no one wants to help the one whose husband is not with them. (P5)

The trauma of abandonment, especially during pregnancy, heightened the hardships faced by these already displaced women, leaving them to navigate life's challenges with increased vulnerability:

> One day when I was pregnant with the third one, I heard he married another girl somewhere. He left us and the camp, went to Chittagong, and started his new family. He wasn't with us for over a month. He didn't come back. Then I decided to chase him, and I went to Chittagong with my daughters, where he was living with another woman. I tried to convince him but he harassed me in front of everyone. He told us he would not come back. Then I asked him to divorce me and give me alimony, and also take responsibility for my children. He refused and kicked us out. Now I am back in the camp with my children and have no guarantee of their future. (P5)

3.4. Sexual Abuse—Pregnancy-Related Consequences

For victims of IPV, pregnancy can be a traumatic ordeal, despite its status as a time of optimism and anticipation. The vulnerabilities of pregnancy are cruelly exploited by abusers, resulting in a range of health-related consequences.

One participant stated that her relationship evolved over time. The maltreatment escalated following the birth of their first child, a daughter. Her spouse has neglected to support their family, has engaged in sexual misconduct, and has subjected her to physical and emotional abuse. In one particularly distressing narrative, she recounted how her spouse attempted to terminate her pregnancy forcibly. This chilling account sheds light on the extreme measures of control and violence that can manifest within intimate relationships:

During this turmoil, I was pregnant with my second child. One night we had a big argument that I can't forget. He kicked my belly and tried to abort my child. He got so mad, and he was furious at that time. (P2)

Another participant shared a similar story of facing adversity after giving birth to a girl. The harrowing event of suffering a miscarriage was a direct consequence of the brutal abuse inflicted upon her. This tragic outcome underscores the extreme violence experienced by many victims and the devastating, long-lasting consequences that extend far beyond physical injuries. The physical toll of IPV is often devastating, but its impact can be even more profound when it results in the loss of life:

But it all suddenly changes after the birth of my first child. It was a girl. He was so unhappy that I didn't give birth to a boy....Once, my husband beat me so bad I had a miscarriage. I was three months pregnant. I can't describe it. It was [such] a horrific experience...I actually can't remember it properly. (P1)

3.4.1. A Battleground of Intimacy

During the discussion, participants revealed disturbing patterns of sexual exploitation and coercion. From being blamed for their partner's sexual dissatisfaction to enduring forced sexual encounters, these women's bodies became battlegrounds for power and control. Their experiences highlight the complex and insidious nature of sexual abuse within the context of IPV. One participant's existence was once filled with optimism; however, it had since transformed into a desolate landscape characterised by dread and despair. The man she had once cherished was transformed into a tormentor, his physical arousal casting a lengthy shadow over her life:

When I was pregnant with his child, that time he started mistreating me. It is because he was not enjoying the physical relationship with me. (P3)

3.5. The Psychological Aftermath

IPV devastates not just the body but the soul, leaving deep emotional and psychological scars. Victims often endure severe mental health struggles, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder, long after the abuse ends. The constant wearing down of one's self-esteem and overwhelming fear can trap survivors in a relentless cycle of trauma, profoundly impacting their well-being and ability to lead fulfilling lives.

Half of the women we interviewed explicitly described feelings of unease and uncertainty. This constant state of heightened arousal is a hallmark of life under the shadow of abuse. Fear of the unknown, dread of the next violent outburst, and the overwhelming sense of being trapped can create a debilitating level of anxiety that profoundly impacts daily life:

So much uncertainty came in front of me. I didn't have any food to feed my child. Then I started working as a domestic household worker. That way, I start providing food. But I had no peace of my mind. I was so worried all the time. (P2)

Their stories reveal a collective experience of emotional upheaval, marked by feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, and a profound sense of isolation:

> I was sad. I didn't like it at all. He used to beat me whenever I tried to tell him using that drugs was not good for him. It broke my soul. I was devastated. I had to go through a lot of pain. And I was so distressed. (P6)

IPV creates a suffocating sense of isolation. Over half of the participants in our study described profound feelings of loneliness during their abusive relationships:

> I was so helpless and alone. I cried a lot. I cried alone. And I lost every hope, but my children were the reason I was still going on. I can only trust Allah. No one else. I just blame my luck. (P5)

Their stories reveal how the absence of meaningful connection can amplify the pain of their experiences:

> I wasn't in good health. My mental health wasn't good at all. How can I be in a good mood when so much turmoil is happening in my domestic life? (P1)

4. Discussion

The present investigation describes the abuse encountered by participants as a recurrent sequence of abusive conduct, as opposed to singular occurrences. The study highlighted the significant impact of IPV exposure during pregnancy and how individuals found solace and strength by redirecting their attention and efforts towards securing a bright future for their children. This research contributes to the expanding body of literature that explores the experiences of pregnant women who face significant and ongoing abuse, including psychological, physical, and economic hostility.

During in-depth interviews, all the participants disclosed experiencing moderate to severe physical abuse perpetrated by their respective spouses, thus signifying a prevalent occurrence within this community. Participants even stated episodes of hospitalisation due to the high severity level. This is consistent with the findings from past quantitative research conducted on different refugee women (Feseha et al., 2012; Hadush et al., 2023; Islam et al., 2021; Khawaja & Barazi, 2005; Sipsma et al., 2015). Protective mechanisms and adaptive techniques, which are believed to enhance resilience, are still being implemented by these women in the aftermath of these incidents.

The stories shared by the participants reflect recurring patterns often found in individuals who have experienced emotional and psychological mistreatment. The themes are consistent with prior scholarly works on psychological consequences in non-refugee victims (Karakurt et al., 2014; Radell et al., 2021; Tiwari et al., 2008). Mishkin et al. (2022) discovered that IPV victims among displaced pregnant women living in Iraq express concerns about causing harm to their children. The findings of this study are in line with the information discussed in this article regarding physical abuse and threats towards children. Participants in this current research demonstrated a strong determination to provide a better future for their children, despite the challenging conditions of the camp setting. They focused their attention and efforts on securing a promising outcome.

The current study highlighted the impact of infidelity on the development of aggressive reactions. Participants discussed how their once positive relationships took a turn for the worse when their partners became entangled with drugs and other women. In their qualitative study among Somali refugees in Ethiopia, Abudulai et al. (2022) highlight the impact of romantic jealousy on relationship conflict and IPV in a society where polygyny is common.

According to previous studies (Hadush et al., 2023; Sanders, 2015), individuals subjected to economic control by their partners often experience restricted access to financial resources. The present investigation also exhibited these phenomena women who made a lower financial contribution than their husbands were likely to experience violence in their relationships (Hadush et al., 2023).

Previous studies underscore the critical role of social support in mitigating IPV during pregnancy, particularly within the context of displacement and camp settings (Alhusen et al., 2015; Da Thi Tran et al., 2022; Mishkin et al., 2022). Narratives from the participants in this research confirm the intersection of limited resources, inadequate support networks, and the overarching humanitarian crisis resulting in heightened vulnerability.

Participants highlighted how displacement amplifies existing gender inequalities and power imbalances, making women more vulnerable to violence. The participants' expressions of fear of abandonment and uncertainty about the future of their children shed light on the deep psychological distress experienced by women in these circumstances. This concern, along with limited economic prospects and reliance on male partners for support, can contribute to a situation of dominance and manipulation, which in turn raises the chances of experiencing IPV.

5. Limitations

The current study has offered significant new insights into the lives of IPV victims; however, this research has limitations. Firstly, mental health literacy among this population is relatively low, so this format may be unable to capture the full scope of victims' experiences. The study focused on capturing a snapshot of the participant's experiences during a specific time. Longitudinal data would have provided a better understanding of the dynamic nature of IPV and its impact on mental health over time. The study's sample size was restricted to six participants with comparable attributes, and the results may not be generalizable. Lastly, the interviews lasted around 30 minutes, as participants expressed their limited ability to engage in interviews for a prolonged duration due to their responsibilities in providing care and fulfilling family commitments. This constraint was a factor in determining the interview length. So, this format may not be able to capture the full scope of the victims' experiences. Nevertheless, this study was able to capture meaningful and insightful data that shed light on the challenges faced by participants.

6. Conclusion and Policy Implication

This research presents empirical evidence of IPV experienced by women during pregnancy, as well as their remarkable resilience in overcoming this adversarial situation. The finding demonstrates recurrent abuse experienced by pregnant IPV survivors in a displaced camp setting and their distinctive physical, psychological, sexual, and financial victimisation and perpetration.

Stakeholders such as the UNHCR, the IOM, the Government of Bangladesh, and various non-governmental organisations must contextualise these findings within their policies and practices. This includes enhancing security measures and enforcing existing legal penalties. Additionally, there is a critical need for instructional sessions targeting both the displaced community and the general public to raise awareness regarding the detection of abuse and the implementation of effective mitigation strategies. Health and social education should focus on encouraging victims of physical violence to report incidents to legal authorities. Employment opportunities, skill development, and education will assist them in attaining financial independence, which may reduce violence.

Allocating personnel with expertise in mental health or social work to address various manifestations of violence can address the unique circumstances encountered by displaced populations in camp settings. Our recommendations underscore the necessity for refugee camps and healthcare service providers to integrate IPV and violence screening, prevention, and treatment protocols into their operations. Consequently, interventions and support services must be tailored to address these multifaceted dynamics and deliver comprehensive care to individuals navigating such complex circumstances.

Conflict of Interests
The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability
The authors are open to correspondence with interested parties and encourage further research utilising the available qualitative data.

Supplementary Material
Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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Cogitatio

Rise of Populism in Northeast India: A Case of Assam

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Abstract

A blend of historical and contemporary forces has shaped populism in India. The Congress government's shortcomings (2004–2014), marked by dynastic politics and corruption, paved the way for the rise of populism, particularly under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which capitalized on anti-elite sentiment. Narendra Modi's leadership, characterized by Hindu nationalism and a development agenda, has significantly altered India's political landscape. This study focuses on the rise of populism in Northeast India, specifically in Assam, where populist movements and leaders have increasingly influenced the socio-political environment. It explores the socio-economic conditions and identity politics that have driven the growth of populist ideologies, often leading to the marginalization of ethnic minorities. By analyzing key political events, movements, and policies, the research seeks to uncover the root causes of populism in Assam and its impact on democracy, social cohesion, and regional stability. Employing a qualitative methodology that includes political speeches, media analysis, and empirical evidence, the study examines how political leaders in Assam have mobilized regional and ethnic sentiments for electoral gains, further exacerbating ethnic marginalization. The article aims to understand the catalysts and consequences of populist governance in Assam, offering insights into the broader trend of populism in Northeast India and its future trajectory.

Keywords

Assam; economic constraints; ethnic politics; marginalization; populism; Northeast India

1. Introduction

Populism is gaining traction across various disciplines within the social sciences and humanities (Möller, 2024), and it has been a political buzzword of the 21st century (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). In the 1960s, "populism" primarily referred to movements focused on decolonization and debates concerning the future of peasantism (Müller, 2017). However, with the success of Brexit in the United Kingdom and Donald Trump's

2016 presidential campaign in the United States, the term has entered mainstream political discourse and daily conversation. Political figures like Donald Trump, Norbert Hofer in Austria, and Marine Le Pen in France, among others, have been labelled populists. Despite being one of the few billionaires in the US, Trump crafted an image as a "man of the people" (Cox, 2018). Similarly, leaders like Bolsonaro in Brazil or Narendra Modi in India, have ascended to power by adopting a populist discourse that opposes "self-interested elites," who control the levers of socio-political power and appeal to nationalist sentiments (P. Singh, 2021). De Cleen (2017) refers to the elites as certain powerful groups within the nation, such as national politicians, intellectuals, and artists. The people against the various elites have been at the core of the populist movements. Modern populism encapsulates two primary tenets: a focus on "the people" and a rejection of elitism (Akkerman et al., 2014). These two concepts are manifested in a broad critique of representative democracy and a demand for a more central role for the populace in decision-making processes (Pilet & Gherghina, 2024). In recent years, charismatic leaders, so-called "strong men," and populists have won elections (Kaul & Vajpeyi, 2020), e.g., Narendra Modi in India.

India's political landscape has been profoundly shaped by charismatic leaders, who are elected by the populace either directly or indirectly to establish a governing authority. Charisma is an elusive concept (Jaffrelot, 2015), defined as "the quality of an individual personality, by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities" (Ake, 1966, p. 4). Charisma can function as a tool within populist movements (Jaffrelot, 2015), providing political leaders the capacity to establish a direct connection with the people, thereby enhancing their appeal and widespread support. In the Indian context, the roots of charismatic leadership are closely linked to the Hindu nationalist ideology of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), commonly known as Hindutva. Narendra Modi effectively mobilized this ideology to create a cohesive and exclusive political community of Hindu adherents and supporters (Subedi & Scott, 2021). Jaffrelot (2015) notes that Modi's campaign under the BJP focused on tried and tested tactics and themes, including anti-corruption, caste politics, and some Hindu nationalist overtones where and when required. Leaders like Modi have a strong influence on the political landscape, and make a palpable impact on their audience, attesting to the importance of charisma in Indian politics. Despite the region's tribal and ethnic diversity, populist charismatic influence has also made its mark in Northeast India. Modi's influence has touched the indigenous people of the northeast, especially emerging leaders like Sarbananda Sonowal and Himanta Biswa Sharma in Assam.

This article prioritizes populism in Northeast India, focusing on the case of Assam. The existing literature on nationalism and populist politics in India, as examined by scholars such as Rajagopal (2016), Chacko (2018), McDonnell and Cabrera (2018), and Saleem (2021), provides critical insights into the broader national landscape. In the context of Northeast India, recent works by Jha and Chakrabarty (2023), Padmapati and Borthakur (2024), Borah (2024), and G. A. Sharma (2024) have explored the dynamics of identity politics and the rise of populism in the region. The focus here will be how the BJP has maintained its dominance in Assam since the rise of charismatic leaders like Modi in India, using different strategies on various fronts.

Political strategies have been greatly influenced by digital media in Indian politics, particularly in the 2016 and 2019 elections (Mehta, 2019). Social media has become a key means of political communication, being eagerly utilized by parties and politicians (Gilardi et al., 2022). Indian political parties employ various media and campaigning strategies to reach a diverse audience and gain support (Banerjee, 2017; Saikia & Bhattacharyya, 2022). This article attempts to examine the rise of the BJP under local leaders who sought to

consolidate indigenous communities under a singular religious identity. We ask: What strategies and tactics are used by these populist leaders among the marginalized communities? To address this question, the article adopts a qualitative methodology centered on political oratory, journalistic accounts, media portrayals, and empirical evidence. This investigation scrutinizes the nuanced methods driving the rise of populism in the region. The dialogue among the electorate regarding competing messages and narratives articulated in leaders' rally speeches is a crucial factor for understanding campaigns (Kumar, 2022). By thoroughly examining these sources, our study aims to unravel the complexities of populism in Assam and its impact on the region's political and socio-economic dynamics.

2. Conceptual Framework

Populism, as defined by Mudde (2004, p. 544), is a "thin ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite,' and holds that politics should represent the general will of the people." De Cleen (2017) notes that populists discursively construct and claim to represent "the people," allowing their parties and movements to turn to populism as a strategy to acquire power even when they were originally not populist—and even if they do not necessarily remain populist once they are in power. De Cleen et al. (2018) have put forward nine rules of engagement in critical research on populism, drawing a formal understanding of the concepts of populism from Mudde (2004), Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017), and Stanley (2008), and certainly sharing some affinities with the "thin ideological" approach to populism now rather dominant in mainstream political science and political communications research. Populist politics embody an articulatory pattern—a formal reason or logic—whose elements (grievances, demand, identities, etc.) can have as their source any number of ideologies (De Cleen et al., 2018).

Populist politics claim to speak for "the ordinary people," "the little man," "the common man," and "the man in the street" as an up-grouping for not representing "the people" and endangering its interests (De Cleen, 2017). Populism is often analyzed through vertical and horizontal dimensions: Vertically, it pits "the people" against the supposedly corrupt elite; horizontally, it distinguishes between "insiders" and "outsiders," emphasizing the division between those who share a common way of life and those perceived as threats to it (Falki, 2022). However, Jansen (2011) warns against overgeneralizing the term, as it can encompass any entity that claims legitimacy by appealing to the common populace, often excluding elite strata (Tarragoni, 2024). Populist leaders typically seek to rally support from the common people to gain political power, often emphasizing democracy solely as the authority vested in the people (Mény & Surel, 2002). Cox (2018) argues that populism arises as a strategy to acquire and maintain power—a strategy in which communication plays a vital role, with social networks and media being largely utilized to disseminate both true information and false propaganda (Araújo & Guazina, 2024; Ferreira, 2022; Recuero & Soares, 2022). Falki (2022) highlights populism as the contemporary political rhetoric, framing the opposition between "us" and "them." While populism is crucial for understanding political dynamics, De Cleen (2017) warns against overloading the concept with excessive meanings, urging precision in its application.

Ernesto Laclau defined populism as "a way of constructing the political on the basis of interpellating the underdog to mobilize against the existing status quo" (Hansen, 2018, p. 2). In this study, populism is conceptualized as a political ideology strategically constructed and articulated by a charismatic leader with the primary aim of mobilizing and garnering support from marginalized communities. This framework

emphasizes the leader's role in tapping into the grievances, aspirations, and sentiments of those who feel excluded, or indigenous communities, by existing political structures.

3. Ideological Constructs and Political Strategies

Corruption has been a key topic for populist rhetoric in India, mobilizing ordinary people who are weary of the Congress government's failure to sustain growth and development because of dynasticism and corruption (Sinha, 2021). Termed "the elite" and deemed "corrupt," the Congress Party is often described as pandering to minorities for votes and standing in the way of "development" due to their ineptitude, corruption, and self-interest (Yadav & Kirk, 2023; see also Chacko, 2018). The BJP emerged against them as the anti-corruption alternative for India (Chacko, 2018).

In India, populism is seldom associated with notions of popular sovereignty or moralistic views of the innocence of the masses and the corruption of the elite. It does not typically entail majoritarian politics based on race, religion, or ethnicity (Varshney et al., 2021). Earlier instances of "strong leader politics," like Jawaharlal Nehru's tenure (1947–1962) and Indira Gandhi's State of Emergency (1975–1977), set the stage for India's current authoritarian populism (Sinha, 2021). Indira Gandhi's "Banish Poverty" (*Garibi Hatao*) campaign aimed to rally support from the common people (Varshney et al., 2021). However, the Congress-led governments from 2004 to 2014 oversaw a period of slower-paced development, leading to disillusionment among the masses. Against this backdrop, Narendra Modi emerged as a prominent figure in the BJP, using his charismatic leadership effectively. Since 2014, the BJP under Modi has risen as a prominent populist force (Jakobsen et al., 2019). Kaul and Vajpeyi (2020) note India's unique trajectory in electing the nationalist BJP despite being the world's largest democracy, installing Modi as Prime Minister. Modi's populist rhetoric—illustrated by slogans like *acche din aane wale hain* (good days are coming) or *vikas purush* (man of development)—embodies a moral authority that seems to align with the majority's interests while discrediting the opposition as morally and financially corrupt.

Modi's role in steering the BJP's right-wing politics at the national level exemplifies his extraordinary charismatic leadership, which has been validated by his successive election victories in 2014 and 2019, and the formation of the government in 2024 (Subedi & Scott, 2021). The BJP's nationalist agenda seeks to redefine India through its Hindu cultural heritage, an ideology known as Hindutva (Flåten, 2017). Central to this agenda is the party's effort to frame its nationalist policies around Hindutva, exploiting both real and perceived conflicts between Hindus, whom it claims to represent, and Muslims, whom it portrays as the primary adversaries of both Hindus and the Indian state (G. Singh, 2019). This approach has sometimes led to social tension and violence, creating new political dynamics for the BJP to navigate (McGuire, 2002). Hindutva and Hindu populism have been integral to Modi's political success from the beginning (Saleem, 2021). Since its inception, Hindutva—or "Hindu-ness"—has been a core element of the BJP's platform, essential to its ideological mission to transform India into a Hindu Rashtra, modeled after the mythic kingdom of the god-king Rama, which the BJP venerates (Copland, 2002). The BJP's objective extends beyond mere governance to affirm that its vision of Hinduism is natural and indisputable (McGuire, 2002). For instance, Modi's rhetoric often invokes cultural and religious symbols deeply rooted in Hindu tradition, resonating with large electorate sections. The Ram Janmabhoomi movement and the Ram temple's construction in Ayodhya are critical examples of how the BJP's policies align with this vision of a Hindu Rashtra, reinforcing the narrative of reclaiming India's Hindu past.

Modi's authoritarian populism is committed to the construction of a trope of economic growth and development that seeks to address frustrated subaltern aspirations in the context of rising unemployment while also opposing elitism and promulgating individualism (Dutta & Nielsen, 2021). Jha and Chakrabarty (2023) assert that India provides one of the most recent but vigorous examples of populism enacted through electoral democracy. This populism operates within a Hindu nationalist milieu, which seeks to construct a unified Hindu identity. Through policies, political rhetoric, and cultural symbolism, the BJP promotes a Hinduised notion of indigeneity, framing Hindus as the rightful inheritors of the nation.

Historically, the states of northern India have been relatively important for the BJP; however, recently, it has inroads into the south with Karnataka and Goa, Maharashtra, and Gujarat, as well as Bengal and the Northeastern states (Kumar, 2022). Modi's fusion of nationalism with the campaign slogan "Together with all, development for all, trust of all" (*sabka saath*, *sabka vikas*, *sabka vishwas*), which gained public traction in 2019, formed a prevalent narrative (Kumar, 2022). Under Modi's leadership, India saw a shift towards a Hindu authoritarian state, prioritizing Hindus as primary citizens and marginalizing Muslims with fewer rights (Sinha, 2021). The BJP-led central government's Ministry of Environment banned the slaughter and sale of beef in 2017, citing the protection of cows under the Gao Rakhshaw ideology, emblematic of contemporary Indian far-right populism that marginalizes minority communities (Masood & Nisar, 2020). Due to its ideologies, Modi and the BJP give expression to xenophobia and Islamophobia resulting both from Modi's own commitments and certain facets of the national and global political environment (Basu, 2020). Leveraging on the public discontent, the BJP government conducted mass gatherings and rallies against elite corruption, fostering antagonism between the "Hindu people" and a "corrupt elite" perceived as catering to minorities. Similar ideologies and political strategies have been enforced in various states, such as Assam. D. P. Sharma et al. (2019) assert that one of the key strategies to gain support in Assam is referring to Assam and "Bharat" in Vedic Puranic and epic texts, and creating a strong sense of belonging to Hindu identity.

4. Regional Mobilization and BJP's Strategic Victory in Assam

The political mobilization of parties in India is significantly shaped by the country's regional diversity, with ethnic and linguistic identities such as Kannada, Tamil, Marathi, and Punjabi serving as critical factors in this (Bijukumar, 2023). This mobilization is particularly evident in the Northeast, where various ethnic groups assert their regional interests. Bordering Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, and China, the Northeastern states are hubs of ethnic diversity and mobilization (Ziipao, 2020). With just 2% of its borders shared with other Indian states, the region comprises eight states connected by the Siliguri Corridor, famously dubbed the "Chicken's Neck" (Middleton, 2023). The "chicken's neck" refers to the narrow 21 km corridor connecting Northeast India to mainland India, established by the Radcliffe Line, the boundary drawn by the British colonial administration before their departure in 1947 (Kalita, 2011). Each state harbors distinct ethnic groups like Bodos, Nagas, and Mizos, influencing electoral politics with their unique cultures (Hausing, 2022). Regional politics in the Northeast is shaped by social, ethnic, and geographical factors, alongside conflicts over land use and language issues (Riamei, 2022). Traditionally dominated by the Congress Party, the region has seen a surge in support for the BJP, which has strategically used Hindutva ideology alongside issues of "development" and "security" in its agenda. BJP's strategy involves reaching diverse communities through cultural icons and alternative narratives, solidifying its regional presence.

Assam, a strategically located state in the Northeast, has emerged as a key hub for the BJP and its populist leader. Its strategic geography, connecting all other Northeastern states, plays a crucial role in politics and culture. The rise of populist leaders in Assam can be attributed to various factors, including historical grievances, economic challenges, and the manipulation of ethnic sentiments. These leaders often position themselves as champions of the indigenous Assamese population, pledging to address issues such as illegal immigration, unemployment, and underdevelopment. By tapping into the fears and insecurities of the local population, these leaders have been able to mobilize widespread support and secure electoral victories. This populist surge can be traced back to the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985, which emphasized the importance of "self-identity" and the deportation of "illegal migrants."

The present government acquired a landslide victory in Assam in 2014, 2019, and 2024, including certain developmental initiatives combined with hyper populism, the success of its long-term strategy bringing the tea plantation workers and tribal communities into the Hindutva fold (Sufian, 2022). In the general elections of 2014, the BJP emerged victorious and appointed Sarbananda Sonowal and Kiran Rijiju as ministers in the central cabinet, which changed the political landscape in the Northeastern region. Prominent leaders in Assam were Himanta Biswa Sarma, Chandra Mohan Patowary, Manoj Baruah, Tapan Gogoi, etc. Himanta Biswa Sarma became the Chief Minister of Assam on May 10, 2021, under the BJP. These local leaders have garnered widespread support based on the belief that they bring transformative change to the region while preserving its cultural heritage, traditions, and identity.

4.1. BJP's Economic and Developmental Agenda

The BJP campaigned on economic growth, development, and good governance (Boruah et al., 2023). The BJP 2014 election manifesto prioritized infrastructure development in the region, focusing on addressing Assam's recurring flood issues through integrated river water management (Bharatiya Janata Party, 2014). It emphasized combating illegal migration into Assam, strengthening border security through fencing, ensuring the safety of students from the region studying in other parts of the country, and taking a firm stance against insurgent groups (Bharatiya Janata Party, 2014; M. A. Singh, 2016). In general, Northeast region perspective, India has been focused on Look East Policy to upgrade its infrastructural development to connect neighboring international countries. Despite improved communication within the Northeast states, challenges in achieving effective connectivity and infrastructure persist due to geographical constraints. This allowed the BJP to leverage its regional influence. Notably, the connectivity between Meghalaya and Assam was enhanced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's inauguration of the first train on November 29, 2014 (E. Bureau, 2014).

It is unsurprising to see local or tribal leaders in Assam supporting the BJP as they fielded local candidates from the marginalized sections to gain strong support at the grassroots level (Sonowal belonged to the Kachari tribe). The BJP capitalized on impending illegal migration issues, the question of tribal lands, and conflict to draw the attention of the electorate, and joined hands with the Bodoland People's Front party of the Bodo tribe as well as Assam Gana Parishad (Tripathi et al., 2018). Prior to the 2014 Lok Sabha election, Narendra Modi highlighted the issue of "illegal immigrants," asserting that, if elected, they would deport these individuals back to Bangladesh (Boruah et al., 2023). In Assam, populist leaders frequently make grand promises of economic development and prosperity, tapping into the aspirations of the local population for a better future (J. Singh, 2023; Sinha, 2024). Nevertheless, the region's economic constraints and challenges

often impede the realization of these promises. Consequently, populist leaders may resort to divisive tactics or scapegoating to deflect attention from their inability to deliver on economic commitments.

4.2. Ethnic Politics and "Otherness"

One of the critical features of populism in Assam is its reliance on ethnic politics. Right-wing populist politics has been able to construct people's religion as an "elite" or "otherness." Falki (2022) asserted that "religious sentiments primarily associated with divine purposes aid populist leaders in mobilizing communities of similar faith, irrespective of their individual, ethnic, regional, or racial identities in support of populist narratives." The claim by right-wing populist leaders of their allegiance to nationalist ideals serves to delineate their envisioned community within a broader framework encompassing civilizational and cultural dimensions. The utilization of religious sentiments within right-wing populist politics indirectly undermines the political and socio-economic demands of minority religious groups residing within the nation's borders. Right-wing populism intertwines ethnonationalism with specific religious identities, concurrently propagating exclusionary narratives (Yilmaz & Morieson, 2021).

The BJP embraced a strategy of co-option, resulting in the acquisition of allegiance from various communities (Riamei, 2022). The challenge of illegal migration by Bangladeshi Muslims has been promptly employed as a tool for vigorous campaigning to capture the hearts of the people in Assam aggressively. The BJP strategically leveraged the ethnic and communal tensions and schisms existing between the Bodo community and the Muslim minority within Bodo regions to achieve electoral supremacy. Its commitment to tribal interests through an electoral coalition with the Bodoland People's Front and by extending assistance to other tribal groups, such as the Rabhas and the Tiwas, was demonstrated by the BJP. Sarbananda Sonowal, the tribal leader, assumed a populist role in galvanizing the Kachari tribal community residing in the tribal plains of Assam.

Reports attributing the rise in vegetable prices in Assam to Muslim vendors have circulated widely. These vendors, often referred to as "Miya" (a term for Bengali-speaking Muslims believed to have migrated from Bangladesh), have been criticized for allegedly being "highly communal" (Kumar, 2023). Despite efforts towards inclusivity, such as the decision to convert government-operated Madrasa schools into general educational institutions, discontent has arisen within the Muslim minority community, perceiving it as a violation of their religious and cultural rights (Balaji, 2022; S. Kashyap, 2023). Christians, a minority religious group, face threats from Hindu groups who are demanding the removal of religious symbols from Christian schools and offering severe consequences to those who do not oblige (W. T. Staff, 2024b). Additionally, the Assam government plans to introduce a bill promoting prayers for the sick, labelled as "magical healing," targeting tribal communities (Kaur, 2024). On February 10, 2024, the Assam Cabinet approved the Assam Healing (Prevention of Evil) Practices Bill to address such concerns (H. T. Bureau, 2024a). Populist leaders exploit ethnic divisions to strengthen their power base, presenting themselves as protectors of the indigenous Assamese against perceived threats from migrants. However, this emphasis on ethnicity can marginalize minority communities in Assam, particularly Muslims and Christian tribals, intensifying regional tensions and divisions.

4.3. Illegal Migrants—A Threat?

The rise of populism in Assam in recent years can be attributed to several interconnected factors. Illegal migration and the infiltration of immigrants have fueled populist sentiment, with leaders advocating for the deportation of migrants to preserve Assamese culture. Jha and Chakrabarty (2023) note that the case of Bangladeshi migrants in India shows how figures of migrants can be invoked for economic, cultural, and political grievances. They further argue that these politics of grievances and insecurity provide fodder for the rise of right-wing populism. Historical figures such as Gopinath Bordoloi and Bimala Prasad Chaliha championed the cause of Assam's excluded and partially excluded areas, as well as the rights of tea planters under the Assam Plantations Labour Act. Furthermore, leaders like Prafulla Mahanta and Bhrigu Kumar Phukan gained popularity by addressing the pressing issue of rising illegal migration in the region. Former Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi acknowledged the seriousness of the issue, emphasizing the government's commitment to detecting and deporting illegal migrants (G. S. Kashyap, 2015). Himanta Biswa Sarma, present Chief Ministry of Assam, tweeted: "It is our moral obligation to ensure that our land remains with us and we do not sell it to illegal immigrants" (Sarma, 2023). Populist leaders, in their role as public representatives, have been instrumental in addressing these concerns.

However, in recent times, attempts have been made to extend citizenship to Hindu Bengalis who migrated to India post-1971. These actions have been seen as a profound threat to the indigenous people of Assam, raising concerns over the potential disruption of the region's demographic balance and marginalization of indigenous communities. Lurinjyoti Gogoi, president of the Assam Jatiya Parishad party and former leader of All Assam Students' Union (AASU), stated that such a decision disregards the strong sentiments of the indigenous Assamese people against illegal migration and only benefits political parties of vote bank from the illegal Bangladeshi (Karmakar, 2024). Jha and Chakrabarty (2023) argue that the binaries of "migrant" and "native," "settler" and "indigenous," "foreigner" and "citizen," as well as "outsider" and "insider," are strategically constructed and actively maintained within political discourse. These constantly reinforced dichotomies acquire new meanings closely intertwined with politico-electoral motivations. Assam has experienced migration-related conflicts for the past four decades, often resulting in large-scale violence against indigenous communities. Political actors have played a central role in exacerbating these conflicts by exploiting concerns over cultural preservation, illegal migration, and tribal land rights, which remain at the heart of Assam's political discourse and are frequently used to mobilize support (Gogoi, 2023). The dichotomy of "indigenous and legitimate settlers" and "illegal migrants or outsiders" has been used to fuel sentiments of danger and threat among "legitimate settlers," who are persuaded to fear land occupation and cultural assimilation. For political leaders, the word "illegal migrants" acts as a tool to awaken the indigenous people to move against the migrants.

4.4. Social Media Strategy and Campaign Tactics

Populism, a concept centered on charismatic leaders having direct, unmediated access to the masses, has found a new playground in social media. Social media platforms, which immediately connect parties to the people, have become the preferred means of communication for populist leaders today (Varshney et al., 2021). Social media has empowered these leaders to disseminate their messages, rally support, and, most importantly, shape public opinion (Mazzoleni, 2014). In the present day, political activities that involve political communication are largely conducted via the media, including social media (Kumar, 2022).

The portrayal of famous leaders online can significantly impact their popularity among the masses and their supporters. Modi, a popular leader, has been praised by international media on several occasions: An article on China's *Global Times* praises India's strides under Prime Minister Modi, who they call "indeed, a major power"; Russian President Putin also praised Prime Minister Modi, saying that "India is making progress under Modi's leadership" (Now, 2024). Such favorable and sympathetic portrayals frame these leaders as the people's champions against entrenched elites, or as defenders of regional interests.

Modi and his supporters have strategically utilized social media to gain people's support. Saikia and Bhattacharyya (2022, p. 341) assert: "One of the crucial features of the election campaign [led] by the BJP, the party that won political office in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections, was its reliance on digital data and professionally informed campaign strategies." In an interview, Modi (2024) said: "Today, the Northeast is neither far from Delhi nor far from the heart" (*aaj northeast na Delhi se door hai aur na dil se door hai*). Social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, and X (former Twitter) are used during campaigns to garner backing during the elections, along with more conventional media—one such example is *Mann ki Baat* (which translates to "words from the heart" or "heartfelt words"), a radio show where Modi often addresses the nation and shares his thoughts on various issues. In 2019, the BJP campaign anthem, advocating for nation-building under the leadership of the Modi government, featured the slogan: "Let's once again form a Modi government, Let's move forward together and advance the nation" (*chalo phir ek baar hum, Modi sarkaar banate hai, chalo milke saath, aage desh ko badhate hai*; Bharatiya Janata Party, 2019).

Similar tactics were used in Assam, exemplified by the BJP campaign under Himanta Biswa Sharma, "Once again Modi's government" (*Akou Ebar Modi Sarkar*). The Chief Minister's X account, *Himanta Biswa Sharma (Modi ka parivar)*—translating to "family of Modi" or "Modi's family"—illustrates the close relationship and shared political strategies between Himanta Biswa Sarma and Narendra Modi. In his most recent campaign, Modi inaugurated several road upgrade projects valued at over Rs. 3,400 crores. These projects include enhancing 43 roads and 38 bridges as part of the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) Corridor Connectivity. Additionally, the Maa Kamakhya Divya Pariyojana (Maa Kamakhya access corridor) was approved under the Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North Eastern Region (Modi, 2024). The lure of development for political gain has been a common strategy in the region. Such economic development projects were inaugurated during the election campaign to gain media attention. Political figures like Modi and Rahul Gandhi have employed victimhood narratives to resonate with audiences. Modi, presenting himself as a low-caste tea seller, claims his opponents dislike him for his humble background, while Gandhi portrays himself as a victim of Modi's vengefulness towards his family. However, exploiting religion and minority status for populist gains is problematic. In Assam, Bangladeshi migrants have become symbols of economic, cultural, and political grievances, fueling right-wing populism and insecurity among settled Bengali-speaking Muslims. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) exacerbates exclusionary politics, neglecting Muslims and reinforcing Hindu–Muslim segregation. This undermines the idea of religious diversity and promotes the notion of a Hindu-exclusive India.

5. Challenges of Inclusive and Exclusive Politics

Historically, religion has never served as a basis for citizenship in India before 2016. For obvious reasons, utilizing religion as a criterion for citizenship not only constitutes discrimination but also exacerbates communal tensions, fundamentally undermining the principles of secularism and democracy (Connah, 2021).

The CAA, recently employed by the BJP, aims to grant citizenship to persecuted minorities from neighboring countries, including Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh, provided they entered India before December 31, 2014 (Connah, 2021; A. Sharma, 2024). However, the CAA's enactment in December 2019 triggered widespread protests across India, as it exclusively benefits Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsees, and Jains while explicitly excluding Muslims (Saxena, 2023; A. Sharma, 2024). Yogendra Yadav, a political scientist and activist, said that this move (relating to CAA) of voter polarisation by the BJP before elections is "unsurprising" (J. A. Staff, 2024).

The Northeastern states of Assam and Tripura, which share borders with Bangladesh—263 km and 856 km, respectively—are significantly impacted by migration. Although the migrant population includes some Muslims, the majority are believed to be Bengali-speaking Hindus (Baruah, 2024a). In Assam, the BJP has been accused of regarding Bengali Hindus, tea tribes, and Scheduled Castes as a dependable electoral base while perceiving Muslims as potential electoral threats (Sufian, 2022). The CAA has faced criticism for its exclusion of Muslims, India's second-largest religious group: The United Nations, for instance, has denounced the bill as "fundamentally discriminatory" ("New citizenship law," 2019; see also Saxena, 2023), and the US State Department has voiced its concerns by underscoring the necessity of religious freedom and equal treatment for all communities (W. T. Staff, 2024a).

The National Register of Citizens (NRC), initially compiled in 1951, aims to list Indian citizens in Assam based on electoral rolls up to March 24, 1971 (Ranjan, 2021). Residents must provide documents or proof of lineage to be included. However, many residents are discontented with exclusions, prompting the BJP to label the NRC a sham, alleging wrongful exclusion of Hindus and inclusion of Muslims (Kajla & Jahan, 2023). Populist politics in Assam intersects with issues of legality and nativist sentiments, evident in initiatives like the NRC, which excluded 1,906.657 individuals, and the CAA, both focusing on residency (Jha & Chakrabarty, 2023). Despite claims of inclusion, the NRC may exclude genuine citizens, including Hindus, due to inadequate documentation, such as land deeds or birth certificates (Connah, 2021). Assam's protests have led to perceptions of Muslims as marginalized, with slogans like "Ali" for Bengali Muslims, "Kuli" for Adivasis, "Bongali" for Bengali Hindus, and *Naak Chyapta Nepali* ("flat nose Nepali") for Nepali individuals (Jha & Chakrabarty, 2023).

The implementation of the CAA and the NRC has emerged as a divisive factor in Assamese politics, with BJP's ethnocratic policies prioritizing the interests of "non-registered Hindu migrants" while legalizing the anti-Muslim 2019 CAA to safeguard its geopolitical and electoral interests (Sufian, 2022). Populist politics, characterized by exclusionary tendencies, prompt critical scrutiny alongside widespread support. This trajectory ostracizes individuals deemed outside the purview of "the people," subjecting them to blanket denials of citizenship. Religion, ethnicity, and economic factors are strategically leveraged against "non-natives" (Jha & Chakrabarty, 2023). The politics of exclusion (Siam, 2023) and the utilization of authoritarian populist tactics by the current Indian regime undermine fundamental rights and privileges for certain groups. The protest erupted soon after the first CAA beneficiary—Dulon Das, a Bangladesh-born— was granted citizenship in Assam (H. T. Bureau, 2024b).

The dynamics of inclusion and exclusion have never been restricted to a single political party in India. Assam, situated at the core and bordered by states such as Meghalaya, Mizoram, and the predominantly Christian Nagaland, presents significant political challenges for the right-wing party. While primarily serving as a hub for community services, the Church also exerts considerable influence on the political landscape.

The pastoral commitment of priests and the leadership of church figures often drive them to actively engage in the diverse struggles their congregants face, including those within the political arena (Lon, 2024). Tikhir (2024) argues that Christianity has become one of several instruments used to articulate pan-tribal identity and contestation in Nagaland. In Meghalaya, Congress candidate Saleng Sangma, while addressing the audience, cited a biblical verse, drawing a parallel to other political parties: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?" (Hills, 2024). Similarly, political leader Timothy D. Shira remarked that the BJP's treatment of Christians has consistently been questionable, referencing an incident where tourists attending church gatherings in Assam were forcibly accused of attempting conversions (Hub, 2023). In an interview concerning the 2024 general election in India, one individual candidly stated: "Christians will vote for Christians" (Today, 2023). The tendency to align with one's religious ideology and cultural identity is a common feature in politics, providing political leaders with a strategic advantage in appealing to voters during elections. This phenomenon is not limited to Hindu populist leaders but is observable across other religious communities as well. The challenge of accommodating diverse ideologies, cultures, and populations within party politics is particularly pronounced in the Northeastern region.

6. Conclusion

The rise of populism in Assam exemplifies a complex interaction of ethnic politics, economic constraints, and socio-cultural factors. Populist leaders initially build their support base by addressing local grievances and aspirations. In the 2024 parliamentary elections, the BJP secured nine out of fourteen seats in Assam, while the INC won three seats. The BJP's influence extended beyond Assam, winning two seats each in Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh. The preceding analysis highlights how politicians leverage issues of development, migration, and exclusionary politics to secure electoral advantages in the region. Simultaneously, the exclusion of Muslims from acquiring Indian citizenship through the NRC and CAA underscores significant flaws in the implementation of the CAA. Additionally, the potential granting of citizenship to Bengali Muslims is perceived as a threat by the indigenous Assamese communities, which could potentially trigger renewed unrest in the region. A recent statement concerning the floods in Guwahati, Assam, attributed responsibility to the University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya (USTM), labelling the situation a "flood jihad" due to the institution's private ownership and Muslim affiliation (Baruah, 2024b). While development issues and social grievances have traditionally driven populist politics in the region, religion has increasingly become a potent force for mobilizing marginalized communities. The current context reveals a clear erosion of secular politics. Social media platforms have emerged as critical instruments for populist leaders, facilitating both inclusive and exclusionary political strategies. It underscores the intolerance towards other religions and communities, necessitating engagement for fostering peaceful co-existence and nation-building rather than perpetuating exclusionary ideologies. To mitigate the risks posed by populism and uphold the principles of liberal democracy, citizens play a crucial role in safeguarding their interests and fundamental rights. By comprehensively understanding the drivers and ramifications of populism in Assam, policymakers and researchers can formulate strategies to address underlying issues and foster inclusive and sustainable development in the region.

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Are Labour Markets Inclusive for Ukrainian War Migrants? Perspectives From Polish and Italian Migration Infrastructure Actors

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Abstract

The arrival of several million Ukrainians in the EU since February 2022 has posed new challenges to migration infrastructure. In this article, we pay particular attention to the determinants of labour market entry and its inclusiveness for war migrant women in countries with a history of Ukrainian labour migration. According to Xiang and Lindquist (2014), migration infrastructure consists of five overlapping dimensions: regulatory, commercial, social, technological, and humanitarian. These dimensions influence the position and behaviour of migrants in their host countries. Using this lens, we investigate how the actors within the migration infrastructure in Poland and Italy have played their part in facilitating the newcomers' access to quality paid jobs as well as the biggest barriers they face in this process. Our analysis is based on the results of original field research carried out in 2023, when, apart from other methodological approaches, 37 in-depth interviews with key infrastructure actors were conducted. The findings reveal large-scale collaboration among migration infrastructure actors with overlapping commercial, social, and humanitarian dimensions in both countries. The text contributes to the growing stream of research on the so-called infrastructural turn in labour migration in Europe, especially in terms of changes triggered by crises.

Keywords

inclusiveness; Italy; labour market; migrant women; migration infrastructure; Poland; Ukrainian war migrants

1. Introduction

The EU's extraordinary activation of the 2001 Temporary Protection Directive (TPD; Council of the European Union, 2001) has created opportunities for the urgent economic integration of Ukrainian war migrants. In this article, we use the term "war migrants" to refer to Ukrainian citizens who were forced to flee their homeland as a result of full-scale Russian aggression in February 2022. These individuals, equipped with (temporary) residence status and other forms of financial and non-financial support, have gained full access to the labour market (Andrejuk, 2023; Welfens, 2022). Unlike non-European asylum seekers, they were allowed to use labour market institutions and services (such as training, job placement, and social security) and were able to immediately enter legal employment (IOM, 2024). However, access to the labour market does not equate to "inclusiveness" in the labour market. An inclusive labour market is one where all individuals of working age, in particular vulnerable and disadvantaged groups like the elderly, women, and migrants, can participate in decent, quality work that is paid. Inclusive labour markets remove barriers to employment, invest in fair pay and benefits as well as promote skill-building and qualification acquisition for anyone seeking to join or re-join the workforce (European Commission, 2024). In this context, the European Commission (2024) also emphasizes the importance of entrepreneurship development and the need to remove any obstacles to full labour market access. In her concept of inclusive labour markets, Rubery (2017) highlights the role of different labour market actors, in particular employers or trade unions, who should strive to provide workers with standard employment relations that are stable, compliant, and decent.

In the case of temporary protection beneficiaries, the provisions and measures involved a subpopulation of war migrants, exposed to structural barriers or exploitation. Due to their caring responsibilities, special needs, and traumatic experiences (Kuzmuk, 2024), these individuals faced particular challenges in acquiring jobs. Numerous studies confirm a fairly consistent picture of those who arrived in Europe after February 2022: In most cases, these were women of working age, with limited host country language skills. For instance, a Eurofound study showed that 71% of migrants in Italy (Eurofound, 2023) had little or no knowledge of Italian, while 54% in Poland faced similar language challenges. Moreover, many of these women had little or no previous migration experience (for the Germany case see Brücker et al., 2023). These women were often responsible for caring for children and elderly family members (UNHCR, 2022). Various surveys show that at least half of Ukrainian war migrants have a university degree, which makes them highly skilled workers (Duszczyk et al., 2023). Most of them were previously employed in professional positions, earning above the national average in their home country. Research conducted among Ukrainians across 10 countries after February 2022 clearly indicates that the need to obtain and maintain employment ranked as a top priority for 29% of respondents surveyed in 2022 (IOM, 2024).

Despite the EU's inclusive special regulations and welcoming stance towards Ukrainian war migrants, the degree of integration, including labour market participation, varies significantly across member states (Bassoli & Campomori, 2024; Luyten, 2024). According to OECD estimates of 2023, Poland boasts the highest employment rate among Ukrainians covered by temporary protection (65%), while Switzerland and Italy report the lowest (19%). It should be emphasised that the scale of labour market entry of Ukrainian war migrants far exceeds the one previously observed with refugee arrivals in Europe (NIBR, 2023; Sobczak-Szelc et al., 2023). Nevertheless, a burgeoning literature strand in this area fails to fully answer the question of the determinants of labour market access for Ukrainians covered by temporary protection and the reasons behind the disparities across countries. We therefore argue that such marked differences stem

from the varying efforts of state and non-state actors involved in labour market, migration, and integration policies in the two countries. To further understand these disparities, we raise questions about the elements of infrastructure embedded at the interface between the labour market, migration policy, and the broader social, economic, and political environments. Due to the numerous changes in the law governing the stay or labour market access of Ukrainian war migrants in both countries, the time perspective of our article is limited to December 2023.

This article aims to fill the knowledge gap regarding the varying labour market engagement of Ukrainian war migrants and the role of host countries' infrastructures in this process. Employing on a comparative diverse case study method (Yin, 2018), we elucidate the underlying reasons for significant discrepancies in the labour market entry process in Poland and Italy. While both countries have established channels of labour migration for Ukrainians, Poland and Italy adopt different approaches to managing migration. They differ in terms of (a) the institutional environment of their labour market, (b) varieties of capitalism (e.g., role of social partners in policy-making, industrial relations mode, or vocational training and education), and (c) their political-historical relations with Ukraine. Furthermore, (d) these countries have had different experiences when it comes to receiving asylum seekers, which includes a different degree of infrastructural development for their reception and integration of migrants into society or the economy (Ambrosini, 2018; Narkowicz, 2018). Therefore, we argue that, despite a shared demand for foreign workers in both countries, it is the varied responses of labour market actors and the social, historical, and political context that have ultimately shaped migrants' opportunities to find, enter, and maintain paid employment shortly after their arrival in 2022. To explore these dynamics, we employ the analytical lens of migration infrastructure (Düvell & Preiss, 2022; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). This framework allows us to capture the complexity and inclusiveness of formal and informal actors that interact with war migrants as they navigate the opportunities to enter their host country's labour market. Our analysis is grounded in qualitative document analysis, grey literature, empirical research findings and, most importantly, 37 individual expert interviews with actors of the migration infrastructure in Poland and Italy. While our research is exploratory in nature, we believe that the cases of Poland and Italy provide valuable lessons for other countries that have experienced the presence of immigrants covered by temporary protection regulations

This article makes an original contribution to the so-far limited debate on the economic inclusion of war migrants in EU countries and labour market response to the specific needs of this group (Brücker et al., 2023; Górny & van der Zwan, 2024; Kubiciel-Lodzińska et al., 2024; Welfens, 2022). Theoretically, we advance research on the concept of migration infrastructure in countries with varying labour migration regimes and propose the application of this lens in future labour market studies. Empirically, our comparative case studies provide a unique Polish-Italian perspective on the reception of war migrants from Ukraine in European countries, effectively bridging a significant gap in the literature.

2. Theoretical Considerations: Migration Infrastructure in an Inclusive Labour Market

Our theoretical considerations are situated within the debate on migration infrastructure and its impact on the inclusiveness of migrants in the labour market of the host country. Over the past two decades, a dynamic body of research has emerged around the infrastructural turn in international mobility (Düvell & Preiss, 2022; Wessendorf & Gembus, 2024; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). This research exemplifies a neoliberal approach to migration governance, characterized by the increasing commercialisation of mobility, the dominance of

technocratic migration management strategies, and the growing importance of non-state actors in shaping the scale, direction, or conditions of migrants within transnationals spaces (Ambrosini, 2018; Martin, 2017). It is a new approach in migration research, emphasising the mechanisms driving transnational mobility and the conditions that shape it within a systemic framework (Faist, 2014; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). While the concept of migration infrastructure has been developed in the context of managing temporary mobility in Asia, particularly regarding theoretical reflections on the mediation between macro-level determinants and micro-level processes (Düvell & Preiss, 2022), it is gaining recognition in European contexts (Lubberhuizen, 2024; Matuszczyk et al., 2022; Sigona et al., 2021). In examining the reception of asylum seekers and forced migrants in EU countries, a significant body of research has emerged around arrival and/or social infrastructures (Wessendorf & Gembus, 2024), with a focus on local social organisations, civic engagement, faith-based groups, as well as welfare brokers (Haase et al., 2024; Narkowicz, 2018).

Düvell and Preiss (2022, p. 85) define "migration infrastructure" as a set of tangible and intangible resources, structures, and actors (both formal and informal) designed to facilitate international mobility. Access to this infrastructure is essential; without it, would-be migrants would have limited access to information or material resources, which could hinder or even prevent them from acting on their mobility decisions. A different view is proposed by Spijkerboer (2018, p. 455), who uses the term "global mobility infrastructure," which is co-created by various components, including physical structures (e.g., airports, railways, hotels), services (e.g., travel agencies, consular officials, visa brokers), and laws (e.g., liberalisation of international passenger transport or visa regulations). Within the most commonly adopted framework of migration infrastructure, Xiang and Lindquist (2014) identify its five basic dimensions:

1. Regulatory: This primarily encompasses the state apparatus and various procedures, including rules governing entry, residency, access to employment, and their enforcement mechanisms.
2. Commercial: This includes fee-based agencies and other labour recruiters or intermediaries responsible for facilitating, organising, and accelerating international mobility.
3. Technological: This dimension comprises communication channels (such as social media platforms) but also means of transport that enable physical border crossings.
4. Humanitarian: This primarily involves non-governmental, non-profit organisations, such as local NGOs, migrant advocacy groups, but also trade unions, and international organisations.
5. Social: This includes migrants' networks, which are particularly important when newly arrived migrants are looking for work.

The usefulness and innovation of the migration infrastructure concept are based on the simultaneous consideration of the five dimensions that make up this type of infrastructure in the study of migration or migrant behaviour. It is important to emphasise that there may be different interactions between actors in the different dimensions of the infrastructure, as they are characterised by different interests, adopted strategies of action, or driving forces. Each of these dimensions is equally important, although the literature tends to focus on the role of private intermediaries, including their efforts to establish partnerships with other actors (e.g., public–private partnerships between state institutions and intermediaries; see Ambrosini, 2018; Martin, 2017; Matuszczyk & Bojarczuk, 2024).

To the best of our knowledge, the concept of migration infrastructure has yet to be applied to study the labour market inclusion of migrants in the host country, with the exception of the work by Sigona et al.

(2021). Research within this framework has highlighted practices of exclusivity embedded in migration regimes, revealing, among other things, states' selective approaches to admitting foreign workers (Ambrosini, 2018). In discussing citizenship-based discrimination in the context of the global mobility infrastructure, Spijkerboer (2018, p. 469) points out the disproportionate use of facilities and privileges derived from international migration by wealthy, white, male individuals. Paradoxically, these disparities are exacerbated by the activities of commercial actors (Martin, 2017). On the one hand, their activities enable migration plans and accelerate the global movement of people; on the other hand, through the financial dependency of migrants (mainly before debt bondage and other financial obligations), they lead to exploitation, increased social inequalities, and diminished agency for vulnerable populations (Faist, 2014).

3. Context: Polish and Italian Migration Infrastructure and Migrant Workers

The labour market conditions in Poland and Italy differ significantly, which determines the degree of inclusion and the ease with which migrants can secure legal paid employment in each of these countries. For example, according to the EU Labour Force Survey, the unemployment rate in Poland was 3.4% in 2021, while in Italy it was 9% (10.6% among women). Both countries show a relatively high share of temporary employment, reaching 16.6% in Italy and 14.9% in Poland in 2021. Moreover, Poland has been experiencing a growing problem of labour shortages and record vacancy rates in many sectors and regions for several years, facilitating access to both permanent and temporary employment (Rollnik-Sadowska et al., 2024). Conversely, Italy has an above-average share of informal employment and seasonal labour demand, particularly in industries such as tourism and agriculture (Dimitradis, 2023). Another striking feature of the Italian labour market is the low level of economic activity rate among women, which stood at just 49.4% in 2021, compared to 64% in Poland.

Poland and Italy play distinct roles in European mobility due to their differing migration patterns and management approaches (Ambrosini, 2018). Poland is considered a new destination country, with a homogeneous group of immigrants, favouring temporary labour migration policies while adopting a more hostile approach toward asylum seekers (Fiałkowska & Matuszczyk, 2021; Narkowicz, 2018). In contrast, Italy has a longer history both as a receiving and, to some extent, a transit country, characterised by a diverse migrant population, including a significant number of irregular and refugee immigrants. This diversity contributes to the existence of a large grey zone within the labour market, which may lead to criminogenic situations such as the *caporalato* system in agriculture (Dimitradis, 2023). So, while both countries have developed arrival infrastructure to accommodate migrants (Bassoli & Campomori, 2024), this does not necessarily guarantee inclusiveness in the labour market. Typically, migrants in both Poland and Italy find employment primarily in low-skilled niches including domestic work, agri-food sector, construction, and services.

Since the early 2000s, workers from Ukraine have been present in Poland and Italy, although their migration paths and experiences differed (Fedyuk & Kindler, 2016). In Italy, there was strong evidence of feminization within this community, which has influenced their roles and performance in the labour market. The motivations and strategies for choosing Italy or Poland as a migration destination differ. Due to the geographical distance, Ukrainian arrivals in Italy have been more sedentary, although some have been circular. Regarding the regulatory framework, Ukrainian workers could not count on special provisions for accessing the labour market in Italy; instead, they were covered by the general laws applicable to third-country nationals, which required them to apply for work permits. Nevertheless, Italy had the highest

number of Ukrainians living long-term (12 months or more) among EU member states in 2021, with more than 236,000 individuals residing there.

In contrast to Italy, Poland has been dominated by a model of temporary migration of Ukrainians, made possible by a well-developed transportation infrastructure (through regular bus services and private shuttles between countries) and liberal employment policies for foreigners (Fiałkowska & Matuszczyk, 2021; Kindler & Szulecka, 2022). Since 2006, Ukrainians (along with Russians, Belarusians, then Georgians, and Armenians) have benefited from a simplified procedure that allows them to work legally without the need for a labour market test (official information from the local labour market confirming the employer's need for additional labour, in this case, a migrant worker). In 2021, over 1 million Ukrainians were covered by this procedure and 666,000 work permits were issued to this group. Within a few years, Poland became the leading EU country attracting workers from third countries, with a strong dominance of migrants from one country (Ukrainians accounted for 70–90% of the various categories of foreign workers in Poland; see Górny & van der Zwan, 2024). This was made possible by, among other things, a rapid growth of private labour market intermediaries (employment agencies and temporary work agencies), which have responded to the growing demand for labour in various sectors across Poland (Kindler & Szulecka, 2022). At the same time, migrant workers have had limited access to the welfare state system in Poland, including labour market services, and may hesitate to report issues such as exploitation or non-compliance to the appropriate monitoring institutions (Pawlak & Lashchuk, 2020).

Comparing Poland and Italy, the influx of war migrants from Ukraine after 24 February 2022 differed significantly (Duszczyk et al., 2023; Fedyuk et al., 2023). While Poland immediately became the primary destination for these migrants, despite lacking previous experience in receiving forced migrants, Italy was considered one of the possible EU destinations. Importantly, the governments of the two countries responded differently to the needs of the arriving population. In early March, Poland adopted a special reception law for Ukrainian citizens, while Italy was the last EU state to adopt the 2001 TPD. Nevertheless, on 4 March 2022, the Italian Council Presidency issued Order 872–2022, granting Ukrainians access to the labour market (Protopapa, 2024). However, as it stands, the temporary protection status cannot be converted into a work residence permit, which means that the future of forced migrants in Italy depends on the decision of the state once the temporary protection is over (Fedyuk et al., 2023).

4. Methods and Data

This article draws on the results of comparative research on the labour market situation of Ukrainian migrant women in Poland and Italy. Using the case study method (Yin, 2018), simultaneous field and desk research was carried out by a team of researchers from Poland and Italy. The main empirical component consists of in-depth structured individual interviews with key labour market actors who form the migration infrastructure in both countries. In addition, we also drew on the data from in-depth interviews with migration intermediaries, central administration representatives, and academic experts in Poland and Ukraine, carried out between 2022 and 2024 by one of the authors of this article. A total of 37 expert interviews were conducted between January 2023 and May 2024 (27 in Poland, 10 in Italy). The uneven distribution of interviews was mainly due to the high number of refusals from potential interviewees and the generally lower willingness of private or public actors to share knowledge with researchers. The selection of interviewees was purposive, guided by the migration infrastructure perspective. The research targeted

central government agencies, national labour market organisations (both commercial and non-commercial), and social dialogue partners across different regions of Poland and Italy. Due to differences in the institutional environments of the labour market in Italy and Poland, specific categories of interlocutors varied slightly. Interviewee selection criteria included the length of their experience, involvement in labour migration issues before and after February 2022, as well as their position in their organisation (mainly directors or heads with extensive knowledge of their organisation's activities). Through prior research projects, developed networks, and involvement in the support of war refugees, the research team was able to reach out to key representatives of the institutions that constitute the migration infrastructure in both countries.

Each interview lasted an average of one hour. With prior consent, all interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. The interviews were coded and analysed thematically, focusing on the main themes that emerged, both common and distinct for Poland and Italy. Key issues raised during the interviews included: changes in the labour market due to the war in Ukraine, actions taken by respondent organisations, the needs of Ukrainian war migrants, and recommendations for further measures to improve the inclusion of these workers in the labour market.

In addition to the interviews, we incorporated materials gathered through the research team's participation in conferences and seminars organised by various labour market actors (for example, the European Labour Mobility Congress in Cracow in 2023; a congress on labour market organised by the employers' association Lewiatan in Warsaw in February 2024). Moreover, through their active and practical involvement in labour migration issues, the authors had a unique opportunity to gain expert knowledge and follow the implementation policies affecting Ukrainians in the two countries. To complete the picture of the functioning of the migration infrastructure in both countries after February 2022, a qualitative content analysis of documents produced by organisations within the institutional environment of the labour market (such as trade unions, employers' associations, central administration, or local employment offices) is also included.

5. Empirical Analysis

To structure and elaborate on the collected empirical material and emerging topics, we categorized our findings into five thematic dimensions, following the classification proposed by Xiang and Lindquist (2014). In what follows, we focus on the broad actions and instruments that directly targeted a new category of workers from Ukraine, namely those covered by the temporary protection.

5.1. Regulatory Dimension

The regulatory framework governing access to the labour market for Ukrainians fleeing the war in Poland and Italy is primarily shaped by the law on assistance to citizens of Ukraine in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of that country and the 2001 TPD (see also Sejm, 2022). Poland's adoption of the law, which de facto put Ukrainians arriving after February 2022 on an equal footing with Polish citizens in terms of labour market rights, reflected a policy of openness to war migrants from that country (Andrejuk, 2023). The approach continues a liberal labour market access policy for migrants from Ukraine, aimed at addressing labour market gaps, but without explicit measures for integrating and settling foreign workers (Duszczyk et al., 2023; Kubiciel-Lodzińska et al., 2024). Our fieldwork and participation in conferences on this

topic confirm that from the very first days of the war in Ukraine, the Polish government adopted an approach aimed at granting quick access to the labour market to the largest possible number of newly arrived immigrants. The Italian government's response has been less proactive in this regard, and Ukrainian war migrants have not been able to count on such comprehensive labour market assistance.

One of the first solutions to facilitate labour market navigation for both war migrants and potential employers involved an extensive digitalisation process in the central administration and the creation of online tools. For example, the employer's notification within 14 days (the 2024 amendments reduce this period to seven days) was submitted only via the Polish government portal (https://www.praca.gov.pl/eurzad/strona-glowna). Thus, administrative procedures have been significantly reduced to a minimum. It is worth noting that, before 2022, migrants from Ukraine (and other countries) wishing to work legally in Poland faced waiting times of up to twelve months for visas and work permits. In a short period, the government and various ministries launched dedicated websites to provide reliable and credible information on, for instance, employment opportunities and skills enhancement in Poland. These websites also became spaces where individuals or employers were able to advertise their offers of support and employment (e.g., https://www.pomagamukrainie.gov.pl./potrzebuje-pomocy/praca). A strategic role was played by the Ministry of Family and Social Policy (in particular the Labour Market Department), which was responsible, among other things, for the creation of the website "Work in Poland" (www.pracawpolsce.pl), which has the largest database of verified job offers (250,000). According to this website, Ukrainian migrants can fill in a form and contact a helpline worker to receive new job offers every week, where the offers are tailored to his or her qualifications, expectations, and, most importantly, place of residence. In addition, war migrants in Poland and Italy can make use of publicly available databases (in Ukrainian, English, and Russian) of job offers, as well as the support of district labour offices in their job search, retraining or professional activation.

The Italian model of assistance to war migrants from Ukraine was based on a multi-level governance system, where the Department of Civil Protection operated in close connection with the other central state administrations involved, as well as with the Regions and the Autonomous Provinces, the Prefectures Territorial Government Offices, the Municipalities, and third sector subjects. Respondents from small aid organisations highlighted the extensive collaboration with a range of large NGOs and local authorities, describing it as an innovative approach to crisis management:

> At that time we certainly started more institutional collaborations than before, in the sense that we had never yet, how to put it, done any work with them. We also started to work with Refugees Welcome, which is a very large NGO, to put it briefly, one that has a lot of resources. (I_NGO_2_08.06.2023)

In these optics, the services and guarantees for TPD beneficiaries became more accessible. Similarly to Poland's model, Italy established specific websites (mainly on a regional basis), for submitting requests for contributions, accommodation and various administrative matters (see also Bassoli & Campomori, 2024). From the labour market perspective, applying for temporary protection allowed Ukrainian war migrants to work in Italy immediately whether as employees (including seasonal workers), self-employed individuals, attender participants in vocational training courses, internships, and other active employment policy measures, under the same conditions as Italian citizens. For recruitment purposes and other related procedures it was sufficient to present a residence permit for temporary protection or the application receipt, along with an Italian tax code that was assigned while applying for the permit. The job search

process was facilitated by a vast network of Employment Centres, Employment Agencies or other public and private entities accredited to assist with employment services.

A popular way for Ukrainian women to enter the labour market was to set up their own businesses. In both Poland and Italy, migrant women can rely on extensive institutional support to start, develop, and run their own businesses. In Poland, for example, the Polish-Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce continues to be particularly active in this field, providing comprehensive services for Ukrainian entrepreneurs (these include advisory services, assistance in obtaining financing, filing documents, or representation before authorities). In Italy, the entrepreneurial ecosystem is also well-developed and offers various microfinance programmes for third-country migrants (European Investment Bank, 2024). However, it is worth noting that while entrepreneurship is promoted as part of an inclusive labour market by the European Commission, our research shows that for many, this entrepreneurial path was a necessity dictated by the need to find paid work. Our research has only partially addressed the issue of forced self-employment among immigrant women, for whom, self-employment (sole proprietorship) is a form of precarious employment expected by the employer.

However, the opening of the labour market for Ukrainians under temporary protection did not mean that all migrants with higher education or specific professional qualifications quickly found jobs that matched their qualifications. Some professionals, including medical staff, could use fast-track procedures for diploma nostrification, both in Poland and Italy. The Polish government offered a non-refundable loan of PLN 3,000 to cover the costs of completing the formalities (such as diploma translation), whereas teachers from Ukraine were allowed to work in Polish public schools where there was a need to support Ukrainian-speaking pupils. Nevertheless, these specific measures addressed to some groups of war migrants cannot be considered a guarantee of inclusive labour market conditions for all.

5.2. Commercial Dimension

Thanks to the boom in in the employment mediation system in Poland before 2022, many private labour market intermediaries had the resources to respond quickly to the emergence of a new category of migrants. Through interviews with over a dozen migration intermediaries in Poland, we found that most representatives of these actors were actively involved in multidimensional support. This engagement stemmed from concerns about the outflow of male labour, increasing competition for workers in Poland, and the emergence of new challenges in labour-intensive sectors. Both large corporations recruiting thousands of workers and smaller, family-run intermediaries responded to the needs of war migrants by contributing intensively to their economic activities. This was partly made possible by the involvement of Ukrainian recruiters, who were able to reach and communicate with war migrants more easily. As reported by several nonstate actors, the main challenge faced by women seeking employment was their caring responsibilities, which some agencies tried to address by providing essential support:

> The problem of care, that they are here alone with these children....Some groups organise themselves to take care of these children internally in a group of Ukrainians, so that someone can work. Well, this, this was certainly reported as a problem. The employment agency in Opole, which wanted to recruit these people for work, began offering private kindergartens and childminders to Ukrainian women for the duration of their work hours for a fee. (PL_COM_5_ 23.03.2023)

However, the response of Polish commercial actors to the emergence of a new category of Ukrainian workers did not fully embrace the concept of an inclusive labour market. Although the "package deals" offered by temporary work agencies included arrangements for legal work found quickly, often with guaranteed accommodation and transport, these jobs often lacked stability and quality. Typically, temporary work agencies provided jobs in the so-called secondary segment of the labour market (e.g., food processing, production, or industry), mainly based on fixed-term contracts (in Poland these are civil law contracts), without a full guarantee of employment rights or retraining opportunities. Nevertheless, many women with no access to social networks or migration experience in Poland decided to take their first job in Poland with the help of temporary work agencies.

It should be emphasised that not all intermediaries focused solely on integrating war migrants into the Polish labour market. In recent years, an infrastructure has been established for posting workers from Poland to other EU countries (Matuszczyk et al., 2022), and this framework is now being increasingly utilised for the posting of third-country nationals, including Ukrainian citizens. As our research and participation in events focused on this issue revealed, those who post Ukrainian workers for contracted services outside Poland have intensified their efforts to recruit and prepare war migrants for cross-border labour markets. A representative of one of the interviewed care agencies sending workers to Germany pointed to the high absorptive capacity of European markets for mobile care workers. She added that temporary employment in Germany is available to war migrants without knowledge of the German language, prior work experience, and, above all, to individuals aged 50 and over, who are particularly sought after in this sector.

Based on TPD provisions, war migrants from Ukraine could enter the labour market in Italy immediately, but the newly adopted legislation did not ensure access to quality employment opportunities. To some extent, the private labour market intermediaries involved in facilitating inclusion of newcomers after February 2022, implemented various ad hoc strategies to respond to their special needs. The interviews with representatives of employment agencies evidenced, among others, setting up special programmes for Ukrainian women looking for work, where their skills were linked to specific industries and professions (e.g., Ranstad for Ucraina). Our desk and field research mapped projects, internet platforms, and apps designed to profile and match professionals with their potential employers while ensuring protection and guarantees for both parties. One respondent described its company strategy as follows:

> Our first point of contact with all candidates is our institutional website where there are structured information paths on our services, candidate management, orientation and training….We have information and recruitment policies and campaigns that target individuals registered in our databases through mass mailing offers and special projects. (I_COM_1_ 09.06.2023)

Some Italian agencies also focused on empowerment pathways to develop the employability of Ukrainian war migrants, stimulate their autonomy and work awareness, promoting personal and professional growth. Specific mentoring initiatives were targeted at university students and young Ukrainians entering the labour market for the first time. A notable example of a comprehensive programme to support the inclusion of Ukrainians into the labour market was the Hospitality and Work programme initiated by the Italian Association of Employment Agencies (Assolavoro). Employment agencies offered Italian language courses and vocational training to beneficiaries of temporary protection, for which participants were reimbursed for food, accommodation, and a lump sum of EUR 3.5 per hour of participation. Nevertheless, it can be

concluded that while the arrival of Ukrainian war migrants did not significantly change the Italian labour market's ability to absorb foreign workers, it is essential to consider the shifts resulting from this specific influx. These include the characteristics of candidates, particularly their higher average qualifications, the predominance of female applicants, and the complexities of their family situations.

5.3. Social Dimension

Both Poland and Italy had Ukrainian migrant communities at the onset of Russia's full-scale aggression in Ukraine, consisting mainly of economically active migrants. For many war migrants, connections with fellow nationals provided the first and only way to enter the labour market, often leading them to occupational niches. For example, research by Kubiciel-Lodzińska et al. (2024) shows that one in three Ukrainian war migrants in Poland found their first employment through family or friends. However, our research nuances the importance of (potential) cooperation among Ukrainians concerning labour market integration. One of the interviewees, a Ukrainian woman involved in the regional migrant community, pointed out mutual resentment and lack of support, stating that the introduction of the special law created a clear divide among Ukrainians and a differentiated socio-economic situation. This divide largely stems from circumstances under which individuals crossed the border and their subsequent coverage by special regulations. Pre-war migrants are critical of the widespread support for newly arrived refugees from Ukraine, which also translates into a limited commitment to helping them. In particular, the differences between the position and job opportunities of migrants from Ukraine and migrants from other countries present in Poland are widening:

> There is free access to the labour market, so all Ukrainian citizens have free access to the labour market, provided their stay is legal. In fact, no documents are required, apart from registration with the labour office, and Ukrainian citizens can be employed more quickly. This puts Ukrainian citizens in a different situation from other migrants. An employer will hire a Ukrainian citizen more quickly because he does not need a work permit. This creates jealousy in the migrant community. (PL_NGO_1_12.03.2023)

However, most Ukrainian community networks (formal and informal) make efforts to integrate all Ukrainians by organising thematic meetings (e.g., sharing Orthodox holidays). Although these activities are more indirect regarding labour market inclusion, their organisers aim to enhance the social capital of war migrants, making it a valuable resource in their job search efforts. The Italian context, where the reception took place based on the EU directive, did not experience the same dichotomy, which translated into very strong support for newcomers by Ukrainians already living in Italy. As confirmed by one of the migration infrastructure actors:

> [The first ad hoc hospitality was] the spontaneous process of word of mouth, especially in the community....Getting in touch with the sense of community that was gathering in St. Sophia Church. That is where this word-of-mouth support began that we continue to see to this day. (I_NGO_1_12.04.2023)

It is worth noting, however, that in the case of Ukrainians, potential support networks extended beyond their fellow citizens. In the first weeks after the Russian aggression in Ukraine, we witnessed, especially in Poland, but also in Italy (Bolzoni et al., 2023), a national social mobilisation and the involvement of thousands of host country citizens in the hospitality offered to newly arrived Ukrainians:

> A lot of citizens have been engaged in hospitality efforts, supporting families through associations or other initiatives, stated the respondent from one of the Italian NGOs specialising in refugee reception. (I_NGO_1_ 12.04.2023)

Driven by a variety of motivations, Poles and Italians not only welcomed refugees from Ukraine into their homes, but also became involved in sharing information, helping them to obtain financial support or benefit from the available local and state programmes (Cwalina et al., 2023). During the expert interviews in two countries, we learnt of instances where migrants from Ukraine provided paid or unpaid household services (cleaning, cooking, or caring) as a form of hospitality.

5.4. Humanitarian Dimension

Our research confirms that both national and international NGOs in Poland and Italy provided parallel services to help migrants find and take up work, alongside humanitarian aid (Bassoli & Campomori, 2024). Key activities and measures with a bearing on the professional situation and employability of war migrants focused on offering language courses (online and on-site, free of charge or with grants for participants), legal and psychological support as well as guidance on housing and access to employment. In Italy, it led to a particular type of horizontal cooperation (small and large organizations, national and local, worked together to provide comprehensive services (virtual and onsite) in line with their overlapping competences). An example of this type of cooperation and the project that grew out of it was the initiative "My Colf Ucraina," a digital course platform in Ukrainian featuring vocational courses for women seeking employment in the domestic sector. The project was run by a small Italian NGO, with the support of Caritas Italiana and Ebin Colf–National Bilateral Agency for Employers of Family Workers. It should be noted that in both countries many migrant organizations were active before 2022, so this previous experience helped them to be active immediately after the outbreak of the war.

When discussing the significance of migration infrastructure in ensuring adequate employment standards or countering exploitative and non-compliant practices, attention should be paid to labour organisations. However, the level of their activity and development seems to be different in Poland and Italy. In Italy, many more organisations are working on migrant workers' rights (e.g., ActionAid), providing direct support to workers in the workplace placed in different sectors (e.g., domestic care, agriculture) and regions (including rural areas). The only example of a nationwide workers' organisation in Poland is the Inter-Union of Ukrainian Workers, which has been active since 2016 in the largest trade union, the All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ). Based on field research, it was found that this body became actively involved in supporting war migrants interested in professional activation in Poland. In addition to helplines, employment counselling, and CV writing assistance, this organisation offered tailor-made language courses, taking into account the caring responsibilities and workload of migrant women. The second organisation that Ukrainians could count on for support was the newly established Commission of Domestic Workers (established in 2021). In addition to worker empowerment activities, regular meetings, and community integration, this organisation serves as a resource for job placement in the personal services sector (Fedyuk et al., 2023).

Recent scholarship highlights that universities (or higher education institutions) increasingly serve as important entry points for highly skilled migrants in host countries (Pawlak & Lashchuk, 2020), becoming a relevant part of migration infrastructure. A similar trend could be observed in Poland and Italy after February

2022, when many public and private universities implemented their own programmes to support researchers from Ukraine. For example, the University of Warsaw launched a scholarship and ran a one-year programme for Ukrainians under temporary protection who had a university degree. As part of the comprehensive programme, participants had the opportunity to learn the Polish language, get to know the higher education system in Poland, or develop ideas for their own research projects, among other things. One of the authors of this article was actively involved in providing training in Polish and English for those planning to apply for research grants and pursue academic careers in Poland or other countries. Similarly, Italian universities prepared dedicated language programmes to facilitate better integration into the host society (i.e., Unitelma Sapienza in Rome) and numerous Ukrainian scholars were involved in research activities.

5.5. Technological Dimension

The material collected clearly indicates that humanitarian assistance in the reception and integration phases for war migrants in the host countries was made available through new technologies. As highlighted earlier, the high speed of job search and labour market navigation procedures was made possible by the introduction of government-run websites and job vacancies databases. However, not everyone chose these official sources of knowledge when seeking information about the labour market access and offer. As we found, in both countries the first choice for war migrants was social media, which, from the very onset of the conflict in Ukraine, became a platform for cross-border information exchange and a space to offer or seek support (Andrejuk, 2023). Among the most frequently mentioned platforms were Facebook and Telegram, where thematic groups were created ad hoc in response to job demand for people with specific needs (for example, based on specific qualifications, language skills, place of residence, and caring responsibilities). Similarly to pre-war migrants, individuals under temporary protection also sought job opportunities on publicly accessible websites, such as OLX in Poland or website "Pracuj" (www.pracuj.pl). The NGO representatives we interviewed confirmed the relevance of this type of communication channels but warned of the risks arising from the lack of control over the quality and reliability of the information shared. One solution to mitigate these risks is, for example, the website "Mapuj Pomoc" (www.mapujpomoc.pl), where those seeking support on the labour market can find verified institutions providing support in different parts of Poland. In Italy, social media platforms, particularly Telegram and WhatsApp groups, phone applications, and websites were used, which also helped to bypass the important language barrier particularly evident in contexts of face-to-face recruitment. An example of this kind of support for Ukrainian female refugees was described by an infrastructure actor from Milan in the following way:

> We moved on createour own specific proprietary app, which is an app that allows people who are registered…to see what all the job offers are in a very concise way and to give a minimum of information on what the job offers are and what is required. This is a tool through which one can apply for the job position, but can also update his or her profile or change availability as first it was possible to do one schedule and now it has changed and you can do another one. This is a road we will have to travel because the future is made of tools that allow for continuous real-time interaction between job providers and job seekers. (I_NT_2_29.06.2023)

Access to public transport has been considered essential for full active participation in the labour market and its inclusiveness. However, little attention has been paid to this dimension of migration infrastructure, so knowledge of activities and actors in this area remains limited (Lubberhuizen, 2024). Thanks to expert

interviews and the collection of knowledge and materials in both countries, we were able to identify, among other things, initiatives by some local governments (e.g., Warsaw and Kraków) that decided to address the needs of war migrants: (Temporary) free travel projects for new residents became popular, especially in the first months of 2022. Legislation has also been introduced in Italy to provide newly arrived Ukrainians with complimentary rail travel within the country (for the first five days) and 30 days of free car insurance (Integrazione Migranti, 2024). Although this solution was not aimed at those employed or those seeking a job, it can be seen as an important step towards facilitating active labour market participation. Labour market experts highlighted a wider problem of transport exclusion in both countries, especially outside urban areas. Many Ukrainians have settled in rural areas or small towns where regular passenger transport services do not operate or do not coincide with working hours.

6. Conclusions

The main objective of the article was to map the practices and instruments of migration infrastructure actors in response to the emergence of a large population of war migrants from Ukraine in 2022 in Poland and Italy. Particular attention was paid to the inclusiveness of labour markets in these two countries, which exhibit different migration regimes and different approaches to receiving Ukrainian migrants. Going beyond previous studies (Górny & van der Zwan, 2024; Kubiciel-Lodzińska et al., 2024), we have adopted an infrastructural perspective, which allows us to examine the mechanisms underlying the inclusion of newly arrived migrants into the labour market. Despite the limitations of our study and its conclusions (i.e., a small sample size, the specific context of the study, limitation of the time horizon of the analysis to the end of 2023), we believe that this analytical approach will be replicated in other countries, and in comparative studies.

The possibility of immediate access to the labour market for Ukrainian war migrants under the 2001 TPD (Italy) and Polish law (Sejm, 2022) was certainly a new solution and a strong advantage. However, the relatively weak inclusiveness of the labour markets in Poland and Italy, in terms of the low percentage of quality paid job offers and the general persistence of barriers to employment and skills development for these migrants, pointed to significant cons. It should be emphasised that the openness of the various state and non-state actors to the Ukrainians after February 2022 was unprecedented, also in terms of rights and opportunities to navigate labour markets.

The material collected allowed us to identify several key findings to enrich the rapidly growing body of research on the economic integration of migrants under temporary protection:

1. Difference in labour activity: The variance in labour activity levels among Ukrainian war migrants can be attributed to the scale of pre-war labour migration to both countries, which implies the degree of sophistication of the different actors in the migration infrastructure. In contrast to Italy, Poland introduced immigration policy instruments much earlier, facilitating the arrival of Ukrainians. Moreover, the degree of openness of Polish authorities—both national and local—towards Ukrainians and the virtual equalisation of war migrants' rights and privileges with those of Polish workers was not seen in other EU countries (NIBR, 2023).
2. Role of commercial actors: Our research has shed new light on the role of commercial actors, who have become one of the most important entities actively supporting the rapid entry of war migrants into the labour market. Consistent with previous research (Ambrosini, 2018; Matuszczyk & Bojarczuk,

2024), private migration intermediaries in both countries organised humanitarian aid, provided language courses, and, above all, tailored their offerings to meet the specific needs and challenges faced by the new category of migrants.

3. Importance of digitisation: The accelerated digitisation of government processes and the availability of translated labour market websites played crucial roles in helping migrants navigate the labour markets in Poland and Italy. Due to labour shortages, centralised databases of job offers for Ukrainians were much more widely developed in Poland than in Italy.

4. Workers initiatives in Italy: Italy noted a greater significance of workers' initiatives aimed at helping migrants protect their labour rights (but mostly in low-wage sectors). On the other hand, only two young organisations focused on migrants' labour rights were identified in Poland. In both countries, national and international NGOs play a complementary and substitute role in this regard and have stepped up their activities after February 2022 to support migrants' entry into paid employment.

To sum up, it should be noted that despite their inclusive nature, the solutions put in place in both countries are primarily temporary in character. This is a direct consequence of the legal provisions introduced in both countries, which will expire in 2025. However, the measures taken in 2022 and 2023 are expected to lead to positive outcomes, such as increased labour force participation among Ukrainian war migrants. As a result, the many solutions introduced in Poland and Italy have only partially fulfilled the vision of an inclusive labour market for newly arrived Ukrainians. Despite the efforts and investments made, as well as the resources allocated, neither country has yet achieved the inclusion of Ukrainian women migrants with different backgrounds (e.g., skills, age, caring responsibility). Although the employment rate of Ukrainians in Poland is several times higher than that in Italy, a significant proportion of women are engaged in low-skilled jobs with low wages and precarious working conditions (Rollnik-Sadowska et al., 2024). Future studies should pay more attention to the context of the matching of migrants' skills with the positions they occupy, as well as the role of migration industry actors in this area. Researchers and policymakers should pay particular attention to the situation of mature migrants (over 50) who have received the least attention in terms of labour market integration policies.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Narrating Solidarity With Ukraine: European Parliament Debates on Energy Policy

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Abstract

The article aims to improve our understanding of the politics of energy policy in the EU in the context of the war in Ukraine. It shows how the energy policy debate is contextualised by the suffering of Ukraine and the country's efforts to resist Russian aggression and full-scale war. An abductive qualitative content analysis of 10 European Parliament debates on economic sanctions against Russia between March 2014 and October 2022 is used to reconstruct four narratives of the EU's transnational solidarity with Ukraine. The following solidarity narratives are compared in terms of underlying notions of solidarity, proposed policy solutions, and their temporal aspects: "solidarity based on the common enemy," "solidarity as mutual sacrifice," "solidarity based on shared independence," and "solidarity based on our resilience." We find that despite the prominence of the solidarity frame in all four narratives, there were latent relevant differences in the urgency of the proposed solutions. Moreover, the references to suffering in these narratives tend to contrast "their" and "our" suffering, rather than calling for help for Ukraine.

Keywords

economic sanctions; energy policy; energy poverty; European Parliament; political discourse; solidarity frame; Ukraine

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1. Introduction

Since the annexation of the Crimean peninsula, and especially after Russia started the war in Ukraine, manifestations of solidarity with Ukraine have been taking place worldwide (Kovalevska & Braun, 2023; Kuzemko et al., 2022, p. 3; Moallin et al., 2023; Szabó & Lipiński, 2024). They included actions of the EU, countries, and peoples in support of Ukraine, as well as various symbolic gestures. The upsurge of sympathy

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for Ukraine also opened up discussions about what the help to Ukraine should actually entail, to what extent more tension in relations with Russia is justified, and how much the costs and burdens of supporting Ukraine should be borne by the citizens of the EU countries.

Given the growing energy problem resulting from the EU's heavy dependence on Russian oil and gas, the question of the consequences of the war in Ukraine and the impact of the EU's policy responses to this conflict has become increasingly relevant (Kovalevska & Braun, 2023; Osička & Černoch, 2022; Żuk et al., 2023). In particular, the extent to which rising energy costs (Guan et al., 2023) and the risk of energy poverty for EU citizens as a result of cutting off imports of Russian fossil fuels and imposing sanctions on Russia are justified, has become even more contentious. The opinions of politicians, business elites, and societies differed significantly on whether to impose more economic sanctions on Russia and accept that their costs would be passed on to European societies (Portela et al., 2021). These controversies were fuelled by actions and statements made in the public debate. On the one hand, acts of civic transnational engagement became widespread. On the other hand, the public debate in the EU raised concerns such as "freezing in our homes won't help Ukraine" (Rujevic, 2022).

This article provides an exploratory analysis of the political discourse on transnational solidarity with Ukraine in the field of energy policy. Contrary to dominant stances, where energy solidarity is applied to EU countries and extra-European energy relations are focused on Russia (LaBelle, 2024; Ryś, 2022), we zoom in on how references to Ukraine's suffering and fighting since 2014 are made in the European Parliament (EP) debate. In particular, we are interested in how concerns about EU (countries') energy issues and energy policies are contextualized by Ukraine's struggle and suffering. We take a look at discursively constructed solidarity beyond the EU in the politics of energy policy, as a domain in which relations, comparisons, and the willingness of "us" in the EU to bear some costs in the face of Ukrainians' struggle are debated. Our analysis is based on transcripts of EP debates on economic sanctions against Russia between March 2014 and October 2022.

There is already a large body of literature discussing the EU's responses to the Russian invasion of Ukraine through the prism of solidarity (Kuzemko et al., 2022; LaBelle, 2024; Prontera, 2024). Against this background, our focus on the EP's discourse is justified for two reasons. First, despite the non-binding nature of EP resolutions, their impact is undeniable, including in terms of the imposition of economic sanctions (Meissner, 2021). Second, this approach allows us to uncover, under the overarching framework of solidarity, a variety of notions of solidarity and associated policy solutions that are more indirectly related to aid to Ukraine.

2. Transnational Solidarity in the EU Politics of Energy Policy

Transnational aspects of energy politics have been relevant in Europe for decades. However, their importance has gradually increased since 2014, as European countries' dependence on fossil fuels imported from Russia has become increasingly threatening (Guan et al., 2023; Herranz-Surrallés, 2016; Osička et al., 2023). The notion of energy solidarity is well present in this context, but in the EU it is closely linked to mutual relations between EU countries (LaBelle, 2024; Ryś, 2022).

In this article, we understand transnational solidarity as tied to an imagined community or group whose members are expected to support each other in fulfilling mutual rights and obligations (Hund & Benford,

2004). This perspective supports a political understanding of solidarity and recognises its discursive construction and contestation (Lahusen & Grasso, 2018; Szabó & Lipiński, 2024). Given the discursive nature of solidarity, we conceptualise transnational solidarity in energy politics as a domain where solidarities are manifested but also challenged, and where their character and level are contested. As further elaborated, we consider "solidarity discourse" as acts aimed at identifying and regrouping actors, in which the speaker unites some objects (Alharbi, 2018). However, a discursive construction of "us" is not enough to constitute a solidarity discourse. A "commissive act of support" in the form of "policy support" (Alharbi & Rucker, 2023) is essential. We also recognise different types of solidarity as described in sociology and political science. Typologies of factual understandings of solidarity in politics (Zschache et al., 2021) and political frames of solidarity show how these notions are reflected in political discourse. For instance, Thijssen and Verheyen (2022) argue that solidarity frames can be grouped according to whether they focus on homophily or heterophily. Thus, solidarity frames built on homophily or in-group focus include group-based solidarity and compassionate solidarity. Solidarity frames built on different actor profiles or out-group solidarity involve exchange-based solidarity and empathic solidarity (Thijssen & Verheyen, 2022). Consequently, solidarity discourse allows for ambiguity, as it can involve very different notions of "us" or "us"–"them" relations, as well as types of "policy support" (Alharbi, 2018).

Given the political nature of the solidarity discourse, its contestations, and its ambiguities, in this article we embed our understanding of the solidarity discourse in the field of energy policy in a global social policy perspective (Deacon & Stubbs, 2013). This perspective also helps us to situate the politics of energy policy in the broader context of European and global interdependence. The global social policy framework thus points to important moral principles that underpin the politics of energy policy and its discursive construction. Although the ethical aspects of energy policy-making have already been well addressed in the academic literature (Sovacool & Dworkin, 2015; Szulecki, 2020), their conceptualisation refers to the issues within energy policy (such as the equitable distribution or governance of energy, as addressed by the notions of energy poverty, energy justice, or energy democracy). The added value of the global social policy framework is that it emphasises not the globalisation of policies, but the globalisation of policy domains. This means that there are relevant issues beyond energy itself, such as human rights, the suffering of others, or political injustice, which should be taken into account in energy policy.

Solidarity discourse towards Ukraine after the attack by Russia has already been studied, but from the perspective of moral political claims rather than political support. For instance, Szabó and Lipiński (2024) analyse the sympathetic discourse towards Ukraine as discursively constructed in performative moral claims made by political leaders in Poland and Hungary. They find that this discourse includes the bonding dimension, according to which Ukraine is bound to Poland and Hungary by humanity, destiny, or togetherness, in which Ukrainians are perceived as "our friends" representing European values. The authors also discuss the supportive dimension, which focuses on the provision of material and symbolic support and assertions, and the antagonistic dimension, which is mostly conveyed through the attribution of guilt to Russia and moral-cultural divisions between the good coalition and the aggressor.

The ambiguity of the solidarity discourse is also recognised in the field of energy policy. Some authors show the relevance of "symbols and myths" of transnational solidarity in the EU. For example, Manners (2020) stresses that the notion of cosmopolitan solidarity beyond the EU is enshrined in the Treaty on European Union, according to which the Union should contribute to "peace, security, the sustainable development of

the Earth, solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights" (Treaty on European Union, 2012, Article 3). Energy policy changes in response to the war in Ukraine, analysed through the lens of solidarity, mostly refer to the programmes launched by the EU with the explicit aim of supporting Ukraine through collective weaning from Russian fossil fuels. The REpowerEU programme is discussed in this context as an example of solidarity with Ukraine (Kuzemko et al., 2022; LaBelle, 2024). Similar conclusions are reached in the analysis of the EP's resolutions (Grądzka, 2023; Zheltovskyy, 2022) or politicians' stances, as visible in Ursula von der Leyen's "ideational perspective" expressed through the declaration of Ukraine's "belonging to the European family" (Baracani, 2023). However, different findings, based, among others, on in-depth interviews with politicians, lead other scholars to conclude that the EU's position towards Ukraine is rather pragmatic (Härtel, 2023).

Approaching the energy discourse from a global social policy perspective draws our attention to the broader discursive context of EU energy policy. For example, Dubský and Tichý (2024) prove that energy security is the dominant frame in this field. Similarly, Kovalevska and Braun (2023) show how the European narrative of the Green Deal has shifted from a focus on green policies and sustainability to the threat posed by Russia's war on Ukraine, allowing the EU to merge the discourse of the EU as a climate and peace leader. Accordingly, the distinction between green Europe and anti-green Russia was introduced. The intertwining of war and energy policy thus led to the notion of "reinventing Europe" because "energy transition is not only a technical issue, but also a political and social one" (Kovalevska & Braun, 2023, p. 114).

On the one hand, as shown by numerous studies, the EU's solidarity with Ukraine, including in the field of energy, is evident. On the other hand, the aforementioned focus on energy security, together with its "geopolitical" narratives (Dubský & Tichý, 2024) and the pragmatism of EU policy, opens the possibility for superficial displays of solidarity, where the relationship with Ukraine is framed as supportive, while EU member states pursue their own political and economic interests.

3. Historical and Political Context of the Issue

In February 2014, Russian armed forces, wearing uniforms with no recognisable insignia, began the occupation of the Crimean peninsula. They proceeded to seize control of government buildings, as well as army and security structures in Ukraine. On 16 March 2014, an illegal referendum on the status of the Crimean peninsula was held, accompanied by various instances of fraud, culminating in the signing of the Treaty on Accession of the Republic of Crimea to Russia on 18 March 2014. This event marked the commencement of the Russian military intervention in Ukraine. The annexation of Crimea was followed by the subsequent stage of escalation, as Russian special forces and Russia's proxy groups invaded the Donbas region in April 2014. In 2021, the limited military actions conducted between the Ukrainian Armed Forces and the Russian Armed Forces on the occupied territory in Donbas evolved into a new phase of escalation. This resulted in a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, representing the largest armed conflict in Europe since WWII. The invasion has been marked by a series of troubling incidents, including missile attacks and shelling of civilian facilities, atrocities against civilians, the kidnapping of Ukrainian children, the occupation of parts of Ukrainian territory, and a range of war crimes committed by Russian Armed Forces personnel. These include the illegal seizure of Ukrainian territories in the regions of Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk, and Luhansk and their incorporation into the Russian Federation.

In response to Russia's unprovoked military aggression in Ukraine, the EU has taken unprecedented measures, including condemnations, the provision of direct financial and military aid to Ukraine, and the imposition of economic sanctions. These measures have been employed by the EU institutions since the illegal annexation of Crimea. On 17 March 2014, the first set of sanctions was imposed, targeting 21 officials responsible for actions threatening Ukraine's territory. These sanctions were subsequently strengthened over time. The first round of unprecedented condemnation of Russian actions against Ukraine, which led to the imposition of economic sanctions, was in response to the downing of flight MH17 with a missile in July 2014 over Russia-controlled Donbas.

This resulted in the implementation of economic sanctions across four key sectors, including the energy sector. The measures taken by EU institutions were designed to achieve several key objectives. Firstly, they were intended to respond to Russian aggression in light of its annexation of Crimea and the subsequent unleashing of war in eastern Ukraine. Secondly, they were aimed at preventing the outbreak of a full-scale war in Ukraine. Prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the European political approach to addressing Russian aggression towards Ukraine was primarily focused on diplomatic efforts and the implementation of limited individual and economic sanctions. This approach was designed to avoid the loss of diplomatic channels with Russia. Prior to the full-scale invasion, the Minsk agreements, as ceasefire agreements, facilitated by the Trilateral Contact Group with mediation from France and Germany, represented an attempt to halt the conflict in Donbas. However, in practice, these agreements remained unimplemented, as Russia refused to acknowledge its military presence in Donbas.

On 24 February 2022, it became evident that previous restrictive measures against Russia were insufficient to restrain armed aggression against Ukraine as a sovereign state. The motives behind the EU's strong solidarity with Ukraine have been analysed from a number of perspectives. These include the moral obligation to protect a victim (Bosse, 2022), the fact that Ukraine shares EU values and is seeking EU membership (Bosse, 2023), and the EU's commitment to observing international law norms such as territorial integrity and sovereignty of states (Bosse, 2023). Other considerations include geopolitical and security issues in response to potential threats to Europe posed by possible direct Russian aggression against Europe (Cardwell & Moret, 2022; LaBelle, 2024).

The economic sanctions imposed in response to Russia's military actions have marked the beginning of a new era of economic warfare, according to Ursula von der Leyen:

> It will have maximum impact on the Russian economy and the political elite. It is built on five pillars: The first is the financial sector; second, the energy sector; the third is the transport sector; fourth are export controls and the ban of export financing; and finally, visa policy. (von der Leyen, 2022)

By February 2024, the EU had accepted 13 packages of sanctions against Russia, making it the most sanctioned state in the world. The debates in the EP on sanctions against Russia provide insight into the challenges and complexities of navigating solidarity in the energy domain amidst the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

4. Research Methodology

The presented state of the art in the research field and the global social policy framework (Deacon & Stubbs, 2013) led us to ask the following questions: In the context of the war in Ukraine, how is transnational solidarity in the energy policy domain narrated in MEPs' speeches? How is the suffering and strain of people in Ukraine relevant? Whose agency is emphasised? What policy solutions are proposed?

To address these questions, we have selected textual data from the EP's debates about the sanctions against Russia. Ten debates were selected for analysis in the period between 12 March 2014 and 5 October 2022. The dates and titles of the debates are listed in the references list. Purposeful choice of the debates was applied—they preceded the implementation of major EU economic sanctions against Russia which were relevant to the field of energy. Six debates are on the sanctions before the full-scale aggression on Ukraine. Four debates preceded the implementation of the fourth, fifth, sixth, and eighth packages of economic sanctions on Russia, which included bans on new investments in its energy sector and on imports of coal and other fossil fuels, crude oil, and refined petroleum products, and a price cap on maritime transport of Russian oil for third countries. The transcripts of the debates were retrieved from the EP's website and the non-English sections were translated into English.

A qualitative content analysis of the collected textual data was carried out using an abductive approach (Vila-Henninger et al., 2022) with the aim of identifying surprising and theory-developing phenomena. The first stage involved indexing MEPs' statements that contained words such as "energy," "oil," "gas," and "coal," while also implying support for sanctions or more specific policy solutions. This indexing was carried out inductively, through line-by-line reading, with the aim of eliminating false positive text fragments.

The retrieved textual data was coded inductively according to expressed support for sanctions against Russia, the policy solutions, and solidarity understandings. This procedure resulted in the definition of 198 statements totalling approximately 31,000 words. We considered as discourse on solidarity with Ukraine those statements that simultaneously expressed support for sanctions, called for some kind of political action, and made a more or less direct reference to Ukraine. These statements, as specified below, often included words such as "solidarity," but also, for example, "help," "support," or "stand for." This is an example of an attitude that meets the above criteria:

> The answer to all these questions...is given in the small town of Bucha, where *survivors are coping with the atrocities committed against civilians by Russian soldiers*....Today, we are presenting our *sixth package of sanctions....My final point...is sanctions on oil*. When the leaders met in Versailles, they agreed to phase out our dependency on Russian fossil fuels....Today, we are addressing our dependency on Russian oil. Let's be clear: It will not be easy because some Member States are strongly dependent on Russian oil. But *we simply have to do it*. So today we will propose to ban all Russian oil from Europe....Putin *wanted to wipe out Ukraine from the map and he will clearly not succeed*. (EP, 2022c, emphasis ours; Ursula von der Leyen, DE, EPP group)

As stated in the quotation, there is a clear reference to Ukraine, including an acknowledgement of the challenges faced by the Ukrainian people, along with a decisive call for political action in the form of the introduction of a new package of sanctions. This quotation illustrates our conceptualization that solidarity is not only about

identifying, regrouping, and uniting objects (Alharbi & Rucker, 2023), but above all, it is a commissive act of support—a "policy support" (Alharbi, 2018) that we regard as constitutive of solidarity discourse.

All but 21 statements in the rudimentary category of positions against sanctions (mostly due to expressed opposition to the war as a whole and proposals for immediate withdrawal) formed the basis for the reconstruction of four narratives of solidarity presented in the next section. Within each narrative, we attempted to inductively reconstruct the notion of transnational solidarity itself, the proposed policy solutions, and the relevant rhetorical figures in order to gain a deeper understanding of the linguistic constructions of solidarity.

We have generally expected solidarity to be an overarching frame of analysed debates, as found in past studies on EP debates on energy policy (Herranz-Surrallés, 2016). Moreover, although we inductively coded the contested notions of solidarity, we have also expected solidarity frames to clearly differ along the axes of homophily vs. heterophily and structural vs. social integration, as described by Thijssen and Verheyen (2022) and supposed that these differences will be parallel to the variety of policy solutions. Our expectations also included the link between the discursive focus on suffering and the sympathetic notions of solidarity (Szabó & Lipiński, 2024). The surprising aspect of notions of solidarity, as presented in the following sections, refers to the temporal characteristics of the proposed solutions. We refer to the notions of solidarity as narratives, recognising the different "story" which lies behind each of them. This entails a concept of the past, characteristics of "us" as Europeans, either in one imagined community (Hund & Benford, 2004) or two communities linked by reciprocal relations, features of "the evil," and future directions.

5. Findings: Four Narratives of Solidarity

The solidarity frame, both in relation to Ukraine and within the EU, was overarching in the analysed debates. Figure 1 illustrates the frequency of solidarity and solidarity-related words according to the presented conceptualisation (Alharbi, 2018) in analysed debates.

Given the dominant solidarity frame, the very use of this word was also applied to internal energy solidarity within EU countries. Transnational solidarity with Ukraine was often discursively linked to the need for solidarity within EU member states. However, since our study used a qualitative approach based on line-by-line coding, for the analysis presented in the following section we have only considered those chunks of text that directly refer to solidarity with Ukraine and its citizens and meet the mentioned criterion of a declared "policy support" (Alharbi, 2018).

5.1. Solidarity in the Fight Against a Common Enemy

Within the MEPs' statements which we qualified as solidarity discourse, we reconstructed a narrative that emphasised the need to take action against Putin, who is creating threats and exercising violence in Ukraine. Here, Putin is portrayed as someone who wants to "conquer (independent) Ukraine" (EP, 2014a, 2015, 2022d), who violates Ukraine's integrity, who threatens (in 2014) Ukraine, Moldova, and the Baltic states, and who pursues an "imperial policy" (EP, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2022b). There is explicit talk of "Putin's political game" (EP, 2021, 2022b), "Putin's bloody regime" (EP, 2022b), or Putin "continuing to murder" in 2022 (EP, 2022b).
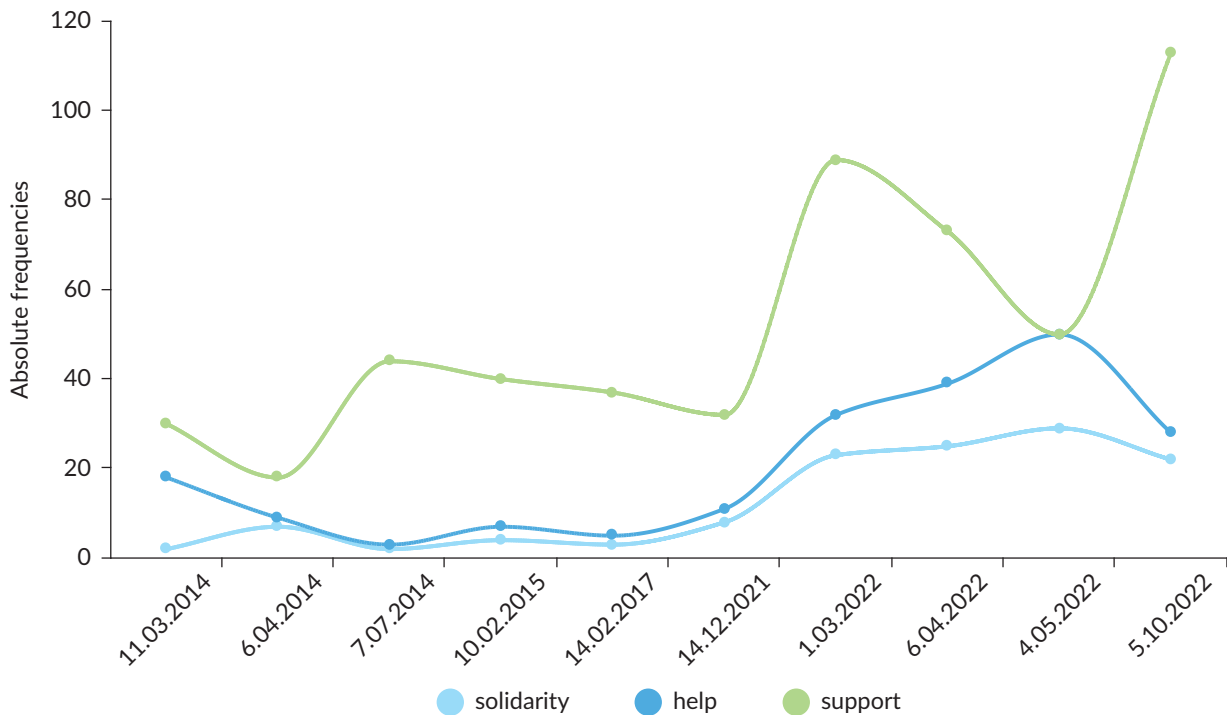
Figure 1. Frequency dynamics of solidarity-related words in analysed EP debates.

Ukraine is presented in this narrative as "our neighbour, partner and friend" (EP, 2021), and it is emphasised that "Ukraine is not Chamberlain's 'far away land'" (EP, 2021). Key references in this narrative are to Ukraine's courage, heroism, and determination rather than suffering, although in 2022, MEPs also spoke of "Ukrainians being killed fighting for democracy" (EP, 2022b) and of "massacres" and war crimes taking place in Ukraine (EP, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d).

The EU's solidarity in this narrative is thus focused on supporting Ukraine in standing up to the aggressor. This includes "punishing Russia" (EP, 2021, 2022a) or "hitting Putin where it hurts the most" (EP, 2014a, 2022b, 2022c) because "Putin understands power [and thus] financial damage to Moscow [must be done by us]" (EP, 2021). Such a construction is expressed in this statement:

> After the annexation of Crimea, the Eastern regions of Ukraine are threatened….So Russia must be stopped now. Europe needs to review its relations with Russia, rapidly reduce its dependence on Russian energy resources, and this can be done in a couple of years. Europe must immediately agree on *effective sanctions that hit Russia where it hurts the most.* (EP, 2014a, emphasis ours; Sandra Kalniete, LV, EPP group)

This construction also includes the need to stop any energy cooperation with Russia, since Putin's oil and gas revenues finance the war. Thus, the metaphors of "blood flowing through the pipeline" (EP, 2022b) or "Nord Stream 2…pumping millions of euros into the pockets of Russian oligarchs" (EP, 2021) are salient here, as in the following example:

> Cut Putin off from the Euro. Every Euro is the Euro for the army and criminals. *Blood flows through the pipeline.* And we must be clear: Stop. Let's stop this! Full embargo, embargo today, now, immediately.

I'm calling you to be in solidarity, to be united. (EP, 2022b, emphasis ours; Andrzej Halicki, PL, EPP group)

Policy proposals are relatively vague in this narrative. However, they include immediate and strong sanctions, including a complete embargo on all Russian energy sources. In the statements we have used to reconstruct this narrative, there are no references to any costs borne by EU countries or their citizens. However, the need to pay these costs seems to be taken for granted and to be the only moral choice associated with rescuing people in Ukraine, as argued here:

Ukrainians have only one choice, either to stand up for themselves or die as a nation. We too have a choice. We either betray Ukraine by watching frozen in fear, or *we do everything possible to save this brave nation* and also bolster our security….Economic sanctions must escalate. We need to embargo Russian oil, coal, nuclear and also Russian gas. *Every cent going to Putin's bloody regime is a cent too much*. We cannot bring back thousands of brutally murdered civilians in Bucha, Irpin or Mariupol, but if we act immediately and decisively, *we can save millions from the same horrific fate*. (EP, 2022b, emphasis ours; Viola Von Cramon-Taubadel, DE, Verts/ALE group)

The temporal dimension of the proposed solutions is based on the juxtaposition of the past and the present situation. Speaking of the past, the MEPs accuse the EU of mistakes in energy policy, especially Germany for its policy of appeasement and increasing cooperation with Russia. Against this background, they argue for immediate action to support Ukraine. MEPs urge that "Ukraine has no time, Europe has no time" (EP, 2022b), plead for a quick reaction as "people are dying" (EP, 2022b), and emphasise that "one child per minute leaves Ukraine" (in early 2022; EP, 2022b). The urgency is clear in the following passage:

The sanctions have been adopted, and Putin continues to murder. They don't work. *Now, now, important decisions must be made immediately*. The entire civilised democratic world must close its borders to Putin. There's *no time. Ukraine has no time. Europe has no time*. Since our previous session, Bucha, Irpień happened, Mariupol was destroyed. There should be a European Council *immediately*….Coal is not enough. We must *immediately abandon oil, gas and all contacts with Russia*—only this will stop this aggressor. Once again I say and I will say it all the time: Europe, courage! *It really is a moment* when we have to show that we are in solidarity. (EP, 2022b, emphasis ours; Beata Szydło, PL, ECR group)

5.2. Solidarity as Mutual Sacrifice

Within textual data that we classified as solidarity discourse, a narrative is visible in which solidarity is presented as standing with Ukraine and being willing to bear the cost of assistance. There are three differences from the notion of solidarity described in the previous section. First, solidarity here is understood as a mutual relationship in which people in Ukraine suffer and fight for "our" freedom. This mutual relationship is explicitly stated in Marek Belka's statement:

As Russian troops rape Ukrainian women and girls, some have the audacity to mention the unprofitability of moving away from Russian fossil fuels. While the Russians loot Ukrainian houses and shops, trying to take even frying pans out of the country, there are those in Europe for whom

> European prosperity is still more important and, of course, [prosperity] on the Russian market [as well]. While the Russians are trying to murder a European nation, there is one country leader in Europe whose true enemy is the Ukrainian president....*Let's stand firm for those who fight for us and our values, for the future of our children, so that our sons don't have to die! This is not THEIR war, it's OUR war that THEY must fight*. (EP, 2022b, emphasis ours; Marek Belka, PL, S&D group)

Belka's speech contrasts the suffering of the Ukrainian people with the complacency of some EU political groups. Such an attitude is condemned and attention is drawn to what we morally owe to the people of Ukraine.

Second, a prominent category in this narrative is the sacrifice or moral necessity of bearing the costs of sanctions and aid to Ukraine by the EU and its citizens. This is explicitly stated:

> We must not think that the energy crisis is the worst thing to hit Europe this winter. *It's the war. And our sisters and brothers in Ukraine are paying the ultimate price every day*. (EP, 2022d, empahsis ours; Jakop G. Dalunde, SE, Greens/EFA group)

Similarly, terms such as "courage and sacrifice" (EP, 2022a), the need to "protect the European model, which has a price" (EP, 2022a), "freedom is not free" (EP, 2022a), and no victory being possible "without unity and sacrifice" (EP 2022b, 2022c) are typically used in this narrative. In addition, strong historical references are made and the solidarity of fate between Ukraine and e.g., Poland is pointed out. Polish MEPs emphasise that "the Ukrainian nation is showing great courage and heroism like the Poles in the past" (EP, 2022a).

At the same time, what distinguishes this discursive construction of solidarity from the previous one is the willingness to act in the long term. MEPs argue that "we should be prepared [to act] for a long time" (EP, 2014a, 2015) or "the crisis will be long and hard, but we must persevere" (EP, 2022b). The notion of patience, perseverance, and resistance is presented here as a relevant aspect of standing in solidarity with Ukraine.

5.3. Solidarity as Shared Independence

In the statements of the MEPs which we have qualified as transnational solidarity discourse, a narrative is visible that is based on the strong assumption that the EU's economic ties with Russia in the field of energy have been used by Putin's regime to blackmail the EU. As such, they threaten both the EU's energy security and its ability to provide aid to Ukraine. The rhetorical figures of Putin's blackmail and the use of energy as a tool of political pressure are prominent in this narrative:

> We *cannot afford to blackmail aid to Ukraine*, but we must prevent the further collapse of society. Otherwise, Russian pressure will have the desired effect. (EP, 2022b, emphasis ours; Nikola Vuljanić, CR, GUE/NGL group)

The references to the suffering of the Ukrainians and the construction of solidarity within this narrative are based on the idea of being on the same side of the political conflict with Ukraine and thus defending sovereignty, democracy, and freedom together. The call to cut off Russian influence and energy cooperation,

to stop the construction of Nord Stream 2, to ban the import of Russian fossil fuels, and the plea for energy independence are often raised, as in this quote:

> At this very moment, in the streets, in their homes, Ukrainians are heroically defending freedom. They defend their democracy, they defend their territorial integrity....Let us therefore massively sanction Putin and the oligarchs....Let us support the resistance in Ukraine....Let us launch a major investment plan for climate and energy security, to put renewable energies at the heart of our mix, because they are energies of peace, and to *get out of energy dependencies and political complacency that are killing democracy and kill the climate*. (EP, 2022a, emphasis ours; Yannick Jadot, FR, Greens/EFA group)

The quoted speech shows the entangled discursive relationship between the Ukrainians' struggle, the shared mission of the EU and Ukraine in defending freedom, and the need for a transition to green energy. As is typical of speeches in the EU parliament that refer to the war in Ukraine, the rhetoric of death is widely present—it's spoken of past policies that simultaneously "kill democracy and the climate" (EP, 2022a).

Consequently, in terms of proposed policy solutions and their timing, there's talk of an immediate halt to cooperation with Russia on energy policy, but even more of "speeding up the energy efficiency/climate action" (EP, 2022c), "accelerating the transition in energy independence [through REPowerEU]" (EP, 2022d), "seeking alternative sources of energy supply" (EP, 2021), and "accelerating the Green Deal and concluding international partnerships and energy trade agreements" (EP, 2022a). The terror of war is explicitly used as a rhetorical tool to push for change:

> *We cannot see more Buchas* before we take decisive measures to stop imports of gas and oil from Russia as soon as possible. (EP, 2022a, emphasis ours; Simona Bonafè, IT, S&D group)

5.4. Solidarity as Our Resilience

The fourth narrative that we have reconstructed within general transnational solidarity discourse argues that EU countries and societies need to control the level of their own burden in the energy domain in order to maintain their resilience to help Ukraine. Despite the overarching frame of transnational solidarity with Ukraine "against Putin's criminal war" (EP, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d), the refusal to accept that the costs of the war should be borne by EU citizens and companies is the core stance of this narrative.

Thus, there is a rhetoric of "effects of war hitting every European" (EP, 2022c) and the "effects of war being devastating for European families" (EP, 2022b), as "citizens are carrying the financial burden" (EP, 2022b), "households can no longer pay their bills, horrendous electricity and gas prices are driving companies to bankruptcy" (EP, 2022d), and "families are suffocating economically" (EP, 2022c, 2022d). The economic consequences of the war on energy discussed by MEPs included rising energy prices, reduced purchasing power of EU citizens, loss of competitiveness of businesses, expensive shopping baskets, tripled energy costs for companies, and many people not being able to afford energy. This diagnosis highlights, firstly, the multi-level vulnerability of the EU as a result of the war. There are energy-related problems for the EU as a whole, for the countries, for the companies or economies, for the citizens, and especially for the households of people living in poverty.

Secondly, it was underlined that the multi-level effect mentioned above is unevenly distributed across the EU. Differences between countries were pointed out, e.g., the specific case of the "energy island" of Spain. Inequality in the distribution of the energy costs of war was also linked to social groups—it was argued that those citizens who already suffer from poverty are particularly affected by the increase in energy prices and threatened by energy poverty. Overall, this situation was presented not only as an economic issue, but also as a major political problem, potentially affecting social stability in the EU. Consequently, MEPs argued that the costs of sanctions on "our side" "mean much more than turning down the heating by two degrees" (EP, 2022b) and that there is a "need to be responsible to their constituencies" (EP, 2022a) as these costs are also politically dangerous.

The discursive construction of the solidarity link between Ukraine and the EU and its citizens lies here in sharing the burdens of war, as visible in this quotation:

> The biggest *cost is obviously carried by the people who have lived and who still live in Ukraine*. Those who died, whose close ones were killed, those who were injured and are being injured at the moment....There is so much sorrow and so much despair in this suffering. When we are debating...we need to keep in mind that us here in the Chamber are not the ones who will be most hit by [the sanctions]. Rising energy costs are a nuisance to some and an existential threat to others. *We need to support those most in need— the families with small or no income.* (EP, 2022b, emphasis ours; Ska Keller, DE, Greens/EFA group)

As visible here, the links are being established between the suffering of people in Ukraine and the citizens in the EU, as well as some degree of similarity—namely the torment being shouldered on highly vulnerable groups, that is, people in Ukraine "being injured now" (EP, 2022b) and the families with no income in the EU.

However, as mentioned, the so constructed solidarity relationship is assumed to need the EU's ability and capacities to take that action, as underlined by Jörg Meuthen in this statement:

> *If we want to provide help and solidarity, then we must actually be able to do so*. We don't do that by ruining ourselves economically. I can tell you expressly: I think the sanctions that have been taken are correct and fully support their content—including what is now being initiated. But I strongly oppose the demand—which we have here—for a total embargo on energy from Russia at this time. We have to do this gradually. (EP, 2022b, emphasis ours; Jörg Meuthen, DE, non-attached)

As stated by an MEP, "not ruining ourselves" (EP, 2022b) is needed to take solidaristic action towards Ukraine. Two specific policy solutions result from that notion of solidarity. First, it is argued that the EP needs to oppose too-strong sanctions "that hit us stronger than Russia" (EP, 2022b, 2022c). In particular, a complete gas embargo is considered as too heavy a burden on economies and the citizens, as several branches of the economy would collapse and massive unemployment would occur. Moreover, as MEPs argued, "we" need to guarantee well-being to vulnerable citizens of the EU, "we must prevent Vladimir Putin's war from creating social damage in the European Union...and develop its social policies in order to protect the most vulnerable" (EP, 2022c). Second, the vocabulary of the need to cushion (EP, 2022b, 2022c), protect, and alleviate the costs of war was used when suggesting protective measures to lower energy bills. Introduction of "compensatory measures and alternative supplies of goods and energy sources" (EP, 2022b), and the "need to protect citizens against energy crisis and food insecurity" (EP, 2022d) were debated.

Temporal aspects of proposed solutions include the difference of timing in the policy towards accepting the burdens on the EU citizens' shoulders and any support to Ukraine. As stated in the quotations above, it was argued the EU needs to "gradually" withdraw (EP, 2021) from the import of Russian fossils, and "we have to build our resilience in the long-term" (EP, 2022d). Future-oriented protection was often associated with the EU's need to "make it through the winter" (EP, 2022d). Simultaneously however, it was pleaded that immediate action needs to be taken to cushion the negative impact of war on the EU citizens—"an urgent response must be made [or] we don't make it until the end of the month" (EP, 2022d).

Table 1 provides an overview of the reconstructed narratives of solidarity with Ukraine.

Table 1. Four narratives of solidarity with Ukraine in the energy domain.

	Type/source of solidarity	Notion of solidarity	Policy solutions	Rhetorical figures (verbatim expressions emphasised)
1	Common enemy	Fighting together with Ukraine against one enemy; Punishing Putin for his deeds; Rescuing people in Ukraine; Not allowing Putin to earn for warfare on energy selling.	Immediate stark sanctions against Russia; Immediate full embargo on gas, oil, and coal from Russia; High costs of the EU countries and societies implicitly accepted.	Need to stop *blood flowing through the pipelines* (EP, 2022b); Need to *hit (Putin) where it hurts* (EP, 2014a, 2022b, 2022c); *Moral duty* of opposing Putin (EP, 2015); Need to cut the *strings/leash* of Putin (EP, 2022b); Shared fate of fighting with Russia.
2	Mutual sacrifice	Moral obligation to reciprocate "their fight in our war."	High costs of sanctions/energy the EU countries and societies explicitly accepted; Condemning those in the EU for whom their own comfort is more important than solidarity.	Our *courage and sacrifice* is needed (EP, 2022a); Protection of our model *has a price* (EP, 2022a); Freedom is *not for free* (EP, 2022a); We will *face the confrontation* (EP, 2022a); It won't be easy, but *there is no alternative* (EP, 2022b).
3	Joint independence	Standing together with Ukraine in the fight for independence; In order to be able to stand in solidarity with Ukraine, we have to be immune to Putin's energy blackmail; Not allowing Putin to earn for warfare on energy selling.	Rather quick withdrawal from cooperation with Russia, stop import of oil and gas, cease Nord Stream 2 construction; Speed up energy transition and transformation to own green energy; Invest in alternative energy sources.	Need to *free ourselves* from dependency (EP, 2014b, 2022b, 2022d); *Energy independence* (EP, 2014b, 2015, 2017, 2022a, 2022b, 2022d); Not to allow to be *blackmailed* by Russia (EP, 2014b, 2021, 2022a, 2022d).

Table 1. (Cont.) Four narratives of solidarity with Ukraine in the energy domain.

	Type/source of solidarity	Notion of solidarity	Policy solutions	Rhetorical figures (verbatim expressions emphasised)
4	Our (EU) resilience	In order to be able to stand in solidarity with Ukraine, we must not ruin ourselves economically; We need to strengthen our defence capacity.	Oppose total gas embargo "that would ruin us"; Need for affordable and reliable energy sources; Introduce gas price ceiling, decrease taxes; Prevention of energy poverty; Immediate support to those in the EU who are in (risk of) energy poverty; Need to save energy, joint storage, and purchase of gas; Need to invest in renewables and transition, energy efficiency, redistribution of windfall profits.	We can't *ruin* ourselves economically (EP, 2022a, 2022b, 2022d); Total embargo on oil and gas is *economic suicide* (EP, 2022b); *Asymmetric* impact of sanctions (EP, 2022b, 2022c); Need to *cushion/alleviate* the impact of war (EP, 2022b, 2022c); Sanctions *hit us* (EP, 2022b, 2022c). Acting *in stages* (EP, 2022b).

6. Conclusions and Discussion

The presented analysis of 10 debates of the EP on sanctions against Russia between March 2014 and October 2022 helped us to understand how, in the context of the war in Ukraine, transnational solidarity in the field of energy policy is narrated in MEPs' speeches, and how the suffering of people in Ukraine is a context of policy-making in this field.

As expected (Herranz-Surrallés, 2016), we found that the reference to the war in Ukraine led to a wide use of solidarity frames in the EP's discourse—both with Ukraine and within the EU. In doing so, MEPs drew on the symbolic repertoire of the EU, which pursues transnational solidarity through networks of relationships, shared goals, empathy with distant others, and concerted action in support of others (Manners, 2020). Only a few exceptions were made in the speeches, such as refraining from sanctions and a lack of direct solidarity with Ukraine due to the need to guarantee peace.

Thus, the overarching framework of transnational solidarity with Ukraine was dominant. It included emphasis, recognition, and appreciation of the struggle, courage, and suffering of Ukrainians. Emotional and compassionate statements were typical in the debates analysed. This discursive construction of transnational solidarity in the politics of energy policy is in line with previous work that emphasises how the politics and change of energy policy are simultaneously of technical, political, and social relevance (Kovalevska & Braun, 2023), but also highly value-laden and moral. It also proves the usefulness of the global social policy framework (Deacon & Stubbs, 2013), which shows that in order to understand policy-making, we need to consider how not only the policies themselves, but much broader policy areas are globalised.

For example, the terror of war, cruelty, and the suffering of others are issues that are indeed taken into account in the EU's domestic policy debates.

However, our analysis shows that underneath the overarching transnational frame of solidarity with Ukraine experiencing Russian aggression, several very different notions of this solidarity were discursively constructed, proving the differentiation of specific solidarity frames in line with existing studies (Thijssen & Verheyen, 2022; Zschache et al., 2021). We have reconstructed four dominant specific notions of transnational solidarity in the speeches of the MEPs.

The notion of "solidarity based on the common enemy" assumes that the EU stands together with Ukraine against Russia and is ready to help or even "save" the Ukrainians. It also urges that Putin must be punished for his actions. An immediate total embargo on all Russian fossil fuels is proposed, backed up by such rhetorical figures as "blood flowing through the pipelines." Domestic energy policy remains implicit here, presupposing the acceptance of high costs resulting from immediate and far-reaching sanctions. The construction of "solidarity as mutual sacrifice" emphasises the reciprocal relationship between Ukrainians "fighting for us" and "us" morally obliged to sacrifice for "them." Terms such as "sacrifice" and "willingness to pay the price" are typical in this narrative. The political solutions here involve an explicitly stated willingness to bear the long-term costs of energy policy, which is the manifestation of acting in solidarity with Ukraine.

The notion of "solidarity based on shared independence" from Russia, like the first narrative, places the emphasis on the common enemy. Here, however, the focus of action is on freeing oneself from Russian influence rather than on fighting. A similar discursive construction has already been described as the "securitisation narrative" in EU energy policy (Dubský & Tichý, 2024) or as the shift from the perception of Russia and the EU as rivals to the need to reduce the EU's energy dependence on Russia (Tichý, 2020). The underlying idea in this narrative is that the achievement of independence is shared by Ukraine and the EU, but the emphasis is more on "us" needing to break away from energy ties with Russia. The proposed policy in this construct of solidarity involves "our" rather gradual withdrawal from energy links with Russia and speeding the green transformation to achieve a higher degree of energy independence.

The fourth narrative emphasises "solidarity as our resilience." It assumes that in order to show solidarity with Ukraine, we, the EU countries and societies, should not allow ourselves to be "ruined." Thus, only a gradual withdrawal from Russian energy sources is suggested here, while immediate policy solutions are proposed to cushion the negative impact of sanctions.

When we asked how the context of Ukrainians' struggle and suffering is narrated in the process of policy-making within the EU, we expected that the distinction between in-group and out-group solidarity with Ukraine would shape different policy proposals (Thijssen & Verheyen, 2022). However, this distinction turned out to be of little relevance. Although in the first narrative (solidarity based on the common enemy) and the third (solidarity based on common independence) in-group solidarity and being in the European community together with Ukraine is somewhat more emphasised than in the other two narratives, this distinction is not clearly reflected in policy solutions.

We add to the existing theoretical reflection on solidarity frames in politics, first by highlighting the dimension that turned relevant in our analysis. Namely, although all four narratives were very clear in

pointing to the relevance of Ukraine's freedom and well-being, these narratives were very different in how they presented Ukraine's situation, and, accordingly, policy solutions, as requiring an urgent response. The response to the question of the optimal immediacy of actions directed at different actors better reflects the nature of the solidarity-based relationship. There is a clear difference between the first, "common enemy" narrative, which calls for urgent maximum aid to Ukraine in the context of human death and suffering, and the "resilient solidarity" narrative, which argues for the gradual introduction of sanctions and the immediate alleviation of energy poverty for EU citizens. The insight into the temporal aspect of "policy support" (Alharbi, 2018) in solidarity discourse is relevant, as some of the presented solidarity narratives in fact cover the appeal of EU's self-oriented action or the desire to uphold international law rather than to stand in solidarity with Ukraine. This is particularly evident in the fourth narrative, where the rhetoric of solidarity with Ukraine prioritises investing in one's own resilience in order to be in a position to stand in solidarity. This mechanism is analogous to the political strategy of "conceptual flipsiding" that is typically employed in illiberal contexts (Krzyżanowski & Krzyżanowska, 2024).

The very reference to hardship and suffering, especially in contrast to courage and resistance, worked differently than we had expected. Contrary to our anticipation that it would be the strong reference to the suffering of others that would evoke sympathetic solidarity and a strong supportive dimension of solidarity narratives with Ukraine (Szabó & Lipiński, 2024), the opposite actually happened. In the second narrative (solidarity based on mutual sacrifice) and in the fourth (resilient solidarity), where the suffering of Ukrainians due to the war was salient, references to this suffering were often followed by an emphasis on the hardship of EU citizens. "Our" (EU citizens') and "their" (Ukrainians') burdens and costs were compared. It was suggested that "in the past we were brave too," or that in the present "we are freezing in our houses." In this context, a reciprocal relationship of courage and exchange of suffering is also visible. This, in turn, is consistent with policy solutions that strengthen "us" rather than focusing on helping Ukraine.

Applying the global social policy perspective (Deacon & Stubbs, 2013) to our findings helps us to unveil the discursive work of the EU, and more specifically of the MEPs, in constructing the EU as a moral political actor. This actor is constructed as one that takes into account transnational connections and issues beyond energy policy itself, thus encompassing the policy domain that includes issues such as ecology, global power asymmetries, but also war, military threat, and the suffering of others. The focus on these issues is reflected in how the rhetorical figures of war, death, and suffering are linked to the technicalities of energy policy. The figure of "blood flowing through the pipeline" is an example of this. In these highly emotional and committed narratives, the very agency—a litmus test of power relations (Deacon & Stubbs, 2013)—is clearly attributed to the EU, which arranges international connections, organises the transition to green energy, or builds resilience, while there's explicit talk of Ukraine having "only one choice," as quoted in the previous section.

Our analysis points to the need to expand our theoretical conceptions of transnational solidarity to include positions that take into account the temporal dimension and the implied urgency of policy proposals. Links to theories of justice or collective narcissism (de Zavala et al., 2009) could be helpful in understanding why it is actually "their suffering" that opens up reflection on "our suffering," rather than a stark political response. One of the issues that remained beyond the scope of this article, but would shed more light on our understanding of the discursive construction of solidarity, is to add changes in time to our analysis and see which narratives presented become increasingly salient.

The relevance of the study lies in the finding that underneath the transnational solidarity discourse, which according to the conceptual assumptions (Alharbi, 2018) we understood as explicit support for sanctions against Russia in the energy sector with reference to support for Ukraine, different specific narratives are developed by MEPs. They combine various reasons for this solidarity, different types of proposed policy solutions, and different levels of willingness to bear the costs of sanctions by EU citizens and countries. The factual willingness to bear those costs, as shown, is particularly visible in the proposed speed of introducing given measures and who exactly should benefit from them. This perspective adds to publications that have researched the EU response to Russian aggression against Ukraine, but mostly by analysing accepted documents. Our study contributes to this stream of research by demonstrating the contested nature and ambiguities of solidarity narratives. Regarding the relevance of these narratives, on the one hand, our findings are only applicable to 10 selected debates on energy sanctions; on the other hand, we assume that this discursive field reflects political strategies to reshape global relations (Deacon & Stubbs, 2013) and strengthen the EU.

Among the limitations of this study is the exclusive use of the content-oriented perspective, which does not allow us to analyse cleavages between EP groups and their members in terms of the development of different solidarity narratives. Changes in the salience of the narratives presented over time could also be further analysed. As shown (see Figure 1), the frequency of solidarity-related words used in the debates increased sharply in the period when the full-scale war began. At the same time (see Table 1), the core words belonging to the "resilient solidarity" narrative, in fact focused on "policy support" (Alharbi, 2018) out of which EU citizens benefit foremostly, only started to be used in and around 2022, suggesting that the longer the war lasted, the stronger the focus on "our ability" to show solidarity.

Conflict of Interests
The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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