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IN REFUGEE PROTECTION AND ASYLUM RECOGNITION

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ABSTRACT

In considering the role and impact of political regime types on migration and refugee policies and outcomes, migration scholars have largely argued for either a "liberal paradox" – whereby democratic states are theorized to end up hosting more refugees and upholding the right to asylum – or an "illiberal paradox", whereby autocratic regimes are more likely to shoulder the international burden of refugee and asylum management. In order to test which proposition had more empirical support, I compiled and analysed a unique panel dataset of 162 countries covering a period of 1951 to 2018, constructed primarily with data from the UNHCR and Polity 5. The results of applying a fixed effects panel regression model on the data revealed that neither democracies nor autocracies performed particularly well in hosting refugees or approving asylum applications. Rather, it was anocracies, or hybrid regimes, that hosted the most refugees and approved more asylum applications, suggesting that both the liberal paradox and the illiberal paradox are overly simplistic as paradigms. Therefore, the relationship between refugee protection and political regime type is characterized by an "anocratic hump", rather than the linearity predicted by either existing theory.

INTRODUCTION

Does the political regime type of states matter in relation to refugee protection and asylum recognition? Do democracies host higher levels of refugees and approve asylum applications at a higher rate than non-democratic, or autocratic, states? Going beyond the simplistic democratic-autocratic binary, what is the impact of anocracies or hybrid regimes – states whose polity type lie between democracy and autocracy and mix elements of both? In addition to examining the impacts of socio-economic conditions and factors on international migration outcomes and policy (Brettell and Hollifield 2015; Massey et al. 2005; De Haas et al. 2020), sociologists of migration and migration scholars have also interrogated on the role of political conditions and institutional arrangements on migration, including forced migration (Hollifield 1992; Freeman 1995; FitzGerald and Cook-Martín 2010; Norman 2020; Natter and Thiollet 2022).

The leaders of prominent liberal democracies themselves promote the view that democracy as a polity type is morally superior due to its historical and normative association with universal human rights, including the right to asylum and protection from persecution (Chimni 1998; Chimni 2000; Barnett 2001). During the 2015 refugee migration of Syrians, Angela Merkel, the then-Chancellor of Germany, defended her decision to admit over a million Syrian refugees into Germany by connecting the "Europe we want" with "the question of refugees" and "universal civil rights" (Al Jazeera 2015). Across the Atlantic, in an official statement released May 3rd, 2021 on reversing the Trump-era's refugee policy and raising the US' annual refugee intake back to 125,000, the Biden Administration referenced the country's ideological duty to welcome the persecuted and forcibly displaced: "The United States Refugee Admissions Program embodies America's

commitment to protect the most vulnerable, and to stand as a beacon of liberty and refuge to the world. It's a statement about who we are, and who we want to be."

A notable body of scholarship largely supports this discourse, that democracies will end up admitting and protecting migrants at higher levels than non-democratic states, albeit for different, more pragmatic reasons. Freeman (1995) and Hollifield (1992) noted a 'liberal paradox' in democracies, whereby, even in the context of official government policy to restrict or reduce the numbers of immigrants admitted, these states experienced increased levels of immigration. They attributed this to the influence and lobbying pressure of business interests reliant on cheap, foreign labor, as neoliberal considerations overrode domestic constituents and interests opposed to immigration or concerned with state sovereignty. Joppke (1998) also pointed out that the legal systems, predicated on political independence, the rule of law, and the overall prioritization of the rights of the individual vis-à-vis those of the government, worked to protect foreigners from arbitrary expulsion and conferred the ability to remain on-territory. Political sociologists have further written on the mainstreaming and diffusion of Western liberal democratic institutions and norms, including human rights norms, in inter-state relations through international organizations (Meyer et al. 1997; Simmons et al. 2006; Doyle 1986). The reputational capital generated by respecting these norms (or being perceived to do so) pressures states to comply with even non-binding human rights treaties (Simmons 2010; Tsutsui 2017). And with the continued influence of globalization, the rights of migrants gain ever more prominence as the importance of state-based citizenship rights and legal nationality diminish in favor of a growing emphasis on rights based on universal personhood (Soysal 1994; Glick Schiller 1999).

Other scholars, however, have argued for something akin to an 'illiberal paradox'. Upon examining the conduct and policies of host countries, primarily through the lens of the Global North-Global South divide, they contest the notion that democratic states of the Global North are more liberal in their admission and recognition of the externally displaced (FitzGerald 2019; Zolberg 1999; Norman 2020; Abdelaaty 2021b; Torpey 1997). According to this body of research, democratic states are – and historically have been – less liberal toward refugees than illiberal regimes, except in particular politico-historical circumstances of ideological competition when it is in their geopolitical interest to adopt a more generous policy stance. This most notably happened during the Cold War, when Western democracies had incentive to be more accepting and liberal toward refugees from the Communist East (FitzGerald and Cook-Martín 2014; Zolberg 1999). The illiberal paradox thesis thus stands diametrically opposed to the liberal paradox and to the argument that liberal democracies are institutionally conditioned to accept and host more migrants, including forced migrants, than non-democratic states due to the dynamics of pluralism, organized capitalist interests, and the normative pressure of the discourse of universal human rights.

Using data sourced primarily from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Polity 5 time-series data from the Center for Systemic Peace, I constructed a comprehensive panel dataset that recorded the political regime type and refugee and asylum data of 162 countries covering the period 1951-2018, in order to test the validity of both the liberal paradox and the illiberal paradox as they relate specifically to the reception outcomes of refugees and asylum seekers. The dataset includes host democracies in the Global South, a category that is often overlooked in relevant analyses of migration and asylum policy. A lack of academic enquiry into Global South contexts in general has already been noted (Natter 2018), relative to the research and

dedicated databases on countries of the Global North (Hatton 2009, 2020; Mayda 2010; Ortega and Peri 2013; Haas et al. 2015; Beine et al. 2016; Helbing et al. 2017; Peters 2017; Solano and Huddleston 2020). The studies that do examine countries or regions in the Global South rarely concentrate on political regime type specifically as an explanatory variable or primary focus (but see Natter and Thiollet 2022; Abdelaaty 2021a, 2021b; Norman 2020; Blair et al. 2022), or leave the impression that the Global South is the domain of various shades of autocracies, authoritarianisms, and non-democracies. This study seeks to contribute to expanding the existing theoretical and empirical literature related to the correlation between political regime type and refugee protection, refugee reception, and asylum outcomes. It provides a large-N perspective on the subject in a field dominated by single-country case studies and regional small-N investigations, as well as on a time horizon spanning several decades. It goes beyond the Global North-Global South divide and incorporates undertheorized or commonly overlooked categories such as Global South democracies and Global North autocracies in the analyses.

I find support for the argument that there is a correlation between political regime type and refugee reception outcomes. There is also a correlation between democracy as a political regime type and refugee reception outcomes. Even as the number of democracies rose dramatically during the period covered, and former autocracies moved toward democracy, democracies consistently hosted refugees at lower levels than non-democracies. Results were similar for asylum recognition rates, with non-democracies recording higher rates than democracies. Analysis including an intermediate category of 'anocracy', defined as a polity type that combines elements of both

democracy and autocracy[1], revealed the outsized role played by hybrid regimes in hosting refugees. In the regression outputs, the coefficient for anocracy was statistically significant and positive, while it was negative for both democracy and autocracy. This was even the case for the data before 1991 as well as for after, challenging the theory (more prevalent in the illiberal paradox literature than in that of the liberal paradox) that during the Cold War democratic states were more generous toward migrants, especially toward those from the Soviet bloc. This suggests that there is something specific about anocracies as a political regime type or arrangement, rather than the peculiarities of a time period or historical circumstances, that inclines them to admit and host more refugees than either democracies or autocracies. In the case of asylum recognition rates, the importance of political regime type receded. Instead, economic and inequality indicators – i.e., GDP per capita and GINI – and the population of host countries displayed significance. Democracies did, however, record a positive coefficient, although it was not statistically significant, tentatively suggesting that democracies perform better in the area of asylum recognition.

Altogether, these findings suggest that the current dominant paradigms of the liberal paradox and the illiberal paradox that characterize the debate on democracy, political regime types, and forced migration – and the relationship between them – are overly simplistic. Rather than the positive

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[1] Anocracies are often referred to as, and used interchangeably with, the term "hybrid regimes" in other social sciences literature (see, for example, Wullert and Williamson 2016; Diamond 2002; Colomer et al. 2016; Dimitrova et al. 2022). This paper will also treat the two terms as synonymous and use them interchangeably.

linear trend line posited by the liberal paradox or the negative linear slope put forth by the illiberal paradox, the findings of this study reveal an "anocratic hump". In other words, the action is in anocracy, and not democracy or autocracy. Yet, anocracy remains a relatively undertheorized regime type. Future research should therefore seek to unpack and better understand anocracy and how and why it shapes refugee and asylum policies and outcomes, in order to account for the anocratic hump.

The rest of the article is organized as follows. The next section reviews the relevant multidisciplinary research on refugee protection, asylum policies of the Global North, political regime type and migration and sets up the debate between the liberal paradox and the illiberal paradox camps: whether democracy or autocracy is more conducive to a liberal refugee and asylum policy. This is followed by a section on data and methodology, which describes the construction of the dataset, the variables selected and the rationale for the selection, and finally the modelling approach adopted for the regressions. The paper then presents the notable results, before closing with a discussion on the implications of the findings, its limitations, and opportunities for further research. Before proceeding, a word on terminology and definitions: a "refugee" is an individual who has been recognized as having fled across borders for the reasons and stipulations in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, either by the UNHCR or the destination state. The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees will henceforth be referred to as the "1951 Refugee Convention". An "asylum seeker" is an individual that requests for refugee status from the host or destination government. This paper refers to "migrants" as refugees and asylum seekers together, and therefore forced migrants, unless otherwise stated as labor migrants or general immigrants.

THE LIBERAL PARADOX VS. THE ILLIBERAL PARADOX

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union unleashed an optimistic diagnosis and discourse on the normative and institutional strength of liberal democracy and an optimistic prognosis about its future prospects for expansion (Fukuyama 2006[1992]; Huntington 1991). The Third Wave of democratization identified by Samuel Huntington (1991) had by 2003 made democracies of 121 countries, according to the metrics of Freedom House (Diamond 2003:6). The proliferation of democracies coincided with the rise of globalization and was reinforced by the multilateralism already implemented since the end of World War II. Scholars at the time observed that consequently nation-states were ceding sovereignty and rendering borders more flexible in order to benefit from the flow of global capital and trade and to participate in "world society" (Meyer et al. 1997). Compliance to international human rights instruments, whether legally binding or not, became a way for states to signal legitimacy and boost reputational capital (Simmons 2010). The balance of power between the individual and the state shifted in favour of the individual and their rights, regardless of national origin, over the interests of the state (Soysal 1994; Sassen 1996). These developments were especially evident in Western liberal democracies, whose constitutions had already laid the foundations for prioritizing individual rights and protecting the activities of civil society. Political sociologists noted how civil society actors in democratic nations leveraged international human rights norms and forums as well as their unique democratic legacies to win or expand rights for immigrants and ethnic minorities (Tsutsui 2017; Chung 2020). Other researchers working in liberal democratic settings proposed that the post-Cold War, globalized world order was de-territorializing formal citizenship and de-coupling national belonging from country of birth, such that there was now a new model of "post-national"

citizenship based on international human rights principles of universal personhood (Soysal 1994), and a new generation of immigrants were choosing a "transnational" lifestyle (Glick Schiller 1999).

Democratic states are thus normatively oriented to adopt a liberal disposition with regards to migrants' rights and admissions, but they are also institutionally hard-wired to do so. Even where key politicians, members of government, or even the national electorate oppose more immigration, democracies would be characterized by steady and increasing immigration, a situation and theory referred to in the literature as "the liberal paradox". Freeman (1995) notably found that liberal democratic states ultimately adopted expansive immigrated policies, even in the face of opposition from the domestic voting public and formal anti-immigration positions adopted by the government, mainly due to the lobbying of business interests reliant on immigrant labor – which he termed "client politics". There would also be additional pressure applied by ethnicity-based associations and advocacy organizations that deployed the legal provisions and discourse of universal and fundamental human rights. This would create a dynamic whereby the interests of the state would be toward exclusion and immigration restriction, but the interests of global capital and world society would re-orient practical governance in the direction of border and immigration liberalization (Hollifield 1992).

Joppke (1998) similarly noted the gap between the anti-immigration rhetoric or policy of democratic governments and the reality of immigration management on-the-ground in these countries. He mainly attributed the liberal paradox to the constraints on arbitrary exercises of executive power that democratic states place on themselves through legal mechanisms – principally the institutionalization of the rule of law and apolitical court systems – in order to

prioritize the exercise of individual rights, including by non-citizens. It is therefore harder for democracies to arbitrarily expel unwanted foreigners, leading to a gradual and inexorable build-up of immigrants and immigrant-origin residents. The liberal paradox theory applies equally to asylum seekers in democracies, including those whose applications for refugee status are ultimately rejected, as they can appeal on the basis of domestic laws protecting civil rights, as well as the international customary norm of *non-refoulement* (Article 33 of the 1951 Refugee Convention). Other non-nationals that present grounds for humanitarian protection, such as victims of human trafficking, also benefit. Consequently, Thielemann and Holboth (2016) found that OECD countries retained relatively high and stable asylum recognition rates over the long run, even in years of acute refugee crises. Moreover, after the various anti-racism, anti-colonialism, and civil rights-oriented social movements of the 1960s, democratic states became further constrained in their ability to select certain groups for eased admissions and settlement: "the principles of public neutrality and equality that underpin modern democracies render overt ethnic selection impossible in contemporary, democratic migration systems" (Gest and Bucher 2021:441; see also Joppke 2005).

On the demand side, it is well-established in the literature that refugees and asylum seekers are disproportionately drawn to liberal countries. Blair et al. (2021) show that the legal protections and rights accessible to asylum seekers and recognized refugees associated with democracies are a significant factor in the decision-making of forced migrants when it concerns where to apply for asylum. This was demonstrable even for destinations in the Global South. Other studies point to the relatively open labor markets in developed democracies as a major draw (Miller and Peters 2018); still others imply that emigrants (forced or otherwise) from autocratic countries of origin

seek out democratic destinations to enjoy the political and economic freedoms they are routinely denied at home (Peters et al. unpublished). In conjunction with the liberal paradox – the client politics of democratic states and the legal constraints against arbitrarily infringing the civil rights of foreigners to expel them – the attractiveness of democratic states works to ensure that these states admit a growing number of migrants. Therefore, this side of the debate predicts that democratic states would be hosting a higher proportion of refugees and recognize asylum seekers at a higher rate than autocratic states:

Hypothesis 1 (Liberal Paradox): *Democratic states host a higher proportion of refugees than autocratic states.*

Hypothesis 2 (Liberal Paradox): *Democratic states recognise and approve asylum applications at a higher rate than autocratic states.*

The other side of the debate is represented by an "illiberal paradox" (Natter 2018), which contests the notion that democratic nations, by dint of their democracy, perform better than autocracies in hosting and protecting refugees. Rather, despite lacking a formal commitment or institutional mechanisms to recognize human rights, autocracies have been found to adopt more liberal policies toward migrants in many instances. Upon conducting a historical comparative study of immigration law and policy in North and South America, FitzGerald and Cook-Martín (2010, 2014) found that the flagship democracies of the region (the United States and Canada) were the first to enact racist immigration laws in the region and the slowest to rescind them. These laws could equally be considered refugee and asylum laws, given the historical context of the time, whereby refugees and asylum seekers weren't recognized as separate legal categories or definitions.

Autocratic and communist regimes in the region, on the other hand, adopted similar discriminatory legislation in emulation of the US, but then took the lead in dismantling them. Similarly, Blair et al. (2022) noted that the *de jure* asylum and forced displacement policies in the Global South became more liberal on average over time, whereas they became more restrictive in the Global North.

The United States and Canada eventually abolished their race-selective immigration policy (FitzGerald and Cook-Martín 2010, 2014). However, this was done due to the exigencies of foreign policy after the Second World War, and not out of any essentialist adherence to democratic values. Entering the Cold War, the United States needed to gather allies to counter Soviet influence on all fronts, including in the arena of moral and political ideology. Thus, the US' refugee resettlement and asylum systems were leveraged to highlight Soviet oppression, in contrast with America's alignment with universal rights and democratic values (FitzGerald and Cook-Martín 2014; Jackson and Atkinson 2019; Zolberg 1999). This implies that during the Cold War years, democratic states were doing a better job of protecting refugees and respecting the 1951 Refugee Convention than after the Cold War; I test for this later on in the paper. More generally, there is a growing literature that emphasizes the predominant role of geopolitics and strategic interests in inter-state relations in shaping national refugee policies and decisions (Zolberg 1999; Jackson and Atkinson 2019; Moorthy and Brathwaite 2019; Greenhill 2002). These studies argue that states, in a continuation of the strategic plays of the Cold War, still instrumentalize refugees against ideologically opposing states. Through such tactics, states also seek to reward regional allies as well as the neighbors of allies (Micinski 2018).

Beyond the Americas and the West, the policy context of the Arab Gulf states uncovered a "numbers versus rights" theory (Ruhs and Martin 2008; see also Breunig et al. 2012), which predicts that states with robust protection of individual rights will limit the number of immigrants – specifically foreign workers – that they admit. The immediate implication is that governments engage in a trade-off calculation between rights and number of admissions. Democratic states, due to their higher standards for and prioritization of individual rights, will therefore more likely enact restrictionist immigration policies and seek to keep migrant numbers on their territories low. When this model was applied to asylum seekers, however, Thielemann and Hobolth (2016) found that there was no conclusive evidence of a trade-off or a restriction of access to asylum in liberal democratic states. There was more corroborative support with regards to access to visas, with the consulates of major democratic destination and resettlement countries significantly restricting access to visas – and therefore access to territory and rights – when conflict levels or other stressors were high in migrants' origin countries.

Focusing on the refugee and asylum policies of the liberal democracies of the Global North in the present day, FitzGerald (2019) argues that the norms and institutional safeguards of democracies themselves become incentives to subvert the humanitarian spirit on which they were built. The states in his study were engineering an elaborate system of "remote control" in order to prevent asylum seekers from physically reaching their territories and thereby having access to the panoply of rights and legal due process that make it impossible to remove them, as Joppke (1998) observed. Thus, the very values and principles that define democracy and compel democratic nations to host more refugees may become the very incentives to hinder and obstruct refugees from making a claim on those values and rights. Scholarship in the fields of nationalism and populism similarly

point to the electoral procedures of democracies to explain the rise of anti-migrant political discourse and xenophobia in the Global North (Brubaker 2020; Brubaker 2017; Kaufmann 2019). Unlike autocratic governments, political elites and leaders in democratic states eventually have to be attentive to their constituents, including the anti-refugee ones, exposing a systemic vulnerability in democratic polities that can be exploited by political entrepreneurs and elected populist leaders to exclude and repress refugees.

The empirical evidence base and thus the theoretical insights thereby derived are fragmented and context-specific along regional lines and on a case-by-case basis. The learnings, conclusions, and implications deduced from one regional or single-case research may not be transportable to another geographical or historical context. Perhaps that is why the most recent development among scholars in the illiberal paradox camp is to suggest that there is no significant relationship between political regime type and states' migration policies – including their refugee and asylum policies – at all (Natter and Thiollet 2022). This position finds some support in the specific area of asylum outcomes. In a quantitative study that examined whether the rights that host countries conferred on their nationals had any relationship to the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers, Abdelaaty (2021a) found that, rather than respect for human or civil rights, it may be the economic conditions in the receiving states that better determine and explain the asylum and reception conditions for refugees. Altogether, the current main iterations of the illiberal paradox yield the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3 (Illiberal Paradox): *Democratic states do not host a higher proportion of refugees than autocratic states.*

Hypothesis 4 (Illiberal Paradox): *Democratic states do not recognise asylum seekers at a higher rate than autocratic states.*

Hypothesis 5 (Illiberal Paradox): *Democratic states hosted more refugees and had higher asylum recognition rates than autocratic states during the Cold War (before 1991); they hosted fewer refugees and had lower asylum recognition rates than autocratic states after the Cold War (after 1991).*

Hypothesis 6 (Illiberal Paradox): *There is no significant relationship between political regime type and refugee protection and asylum outcomes.*

DATA AND METHODS

The analysis and findings in this paper are based on an original merged panel dataset produced from various sources. It encompasses a total of 162 countries and covers a maximum period of 1951-2018. The primary data sources were the online public database of the UNHCR and the Polity 5 time-series data published by the Center for Systemic Peace. The UNHCR gathers and publishes data on the number of registered refugees in over 100 host countries and recognized territories, often referred to by the agency as "[refugee] population data", as well as information related to asylum processes and decisions. The data from Polity 5 allows researchers to derive countries' political regime types across time. The time period covered by the dataset was largely dictated by the parameters and limitations of these two sources: UNHCR data starts from 1951, and Polity 5 goes up to 2018 for most countries[2].

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[2] The comprehensiveness of the data depends not only on the availability and depth of coverage in the original sources. Many countries, for example, did not exist before 1991. The UNHCR

Other data sources consulted in the construction of the dataset and for the derivation of additional variables include the UN Population Division, the World Bank, the Standardized World Income Inequality Database (SWIID) (Solt 2009), and the Correlates of War (COW) database (Sarkees and Wayman 2010). The variables derived from these sources for each available country-year were refugees per thousand, total national population, the GDP per capita, and income inequality in the form of the GINI coefficient.

Polity 5 and the Polity Score

As an index of standardized factor inputs pertaining to political features and governance characteristics of states, Polity 5 relies on information from both historical and contemporary sources that yield measures of institutional arrangements or codifications and governance structures (Marshall and Gurr 2020). These include categorical scores pertaining to the openness and competitiveness in the selection of executive leadership (XRCOMP, XROPEN) and the transfer of executive power (XRREG); the constraints on arbitrary executive power, which implies the existence, independence, and strength of external advisory, judicial, or legislative bodies (XCONST); and the levels of political participation from non-political elites (PARREG) as well

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didn't exist 1951 and therefore could not record refugee and asylum data before that year, and due to the strictures of its original mandate, the agency did not systematically track displaced populations originating outside Europe until after 1967. Nonetheless, there is refugee population data from 1951 on. For asylum decisions, however, the UNHCR did not collect data until the year 2000. Altogether, these circumstances unavoidably produced an unbalanced panel dataset.

as competitiveness among citizen or civil society groups (PARCOMP). These measures are weighed to determine levels of democracy (DEMOC) and/or autocracy (AUTOC), which are then combined to give the "polity score" of a country in a given year. The most updated and accurate iteration of the polity score included exclusively for Polity 5 is, in fact, the "polity2 score"; the analysis of this paper will therefore be based on the polity2 scores. Thus, all references to "polity score" henceforth will be understood to be the polity2 score.

The polity score is part of a categorical scale that runs from -10 to 10. A score of -10, the lowest possible score, indicates complete autocracy, while conversely, a score of 10 designates a country as fully democratic. A polity score in the negative range (-10 to -1) indicates a political regime as non-democratic, while a positive polity score (1 to 10) places a country's regime type within the category of democracy. The polity score scaling system also provides a way to include and recognize anocracy, a polity type falling between democracy and autocracy and exhibiting elements of both: anocracies occupy scores of 5 to -5. This rearranges the scale accordingly: countries with a polity score between -10 to -6 are autocracies, those between -5 and 5 are anocracies, and democracies have a score from 6 to 10. This paper utilizes both the binary democratic-autocratic (non-democratic) scale and the tripartite scaling of democracy-anocracy-autocracy.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables for this study are 1) refugees per thousand (log) and 2) asylum recognition rate.

Refugees per thousand (log). Log of a continuous variable, the number of refugees per 1,000 host-country nationals in a country in a given year, which was calculated by dividing the total number of refugees in countries by their national population, as provided by the World Bank and the UN Population Division, and then multiplying by a thousand. The total number of refugees includes the Palestinian refugees recorded by UNRWA, where applicable. The resulting proportion was then logged to address the high level of skewness in the distribution. Moreover, it is important to note that, at the time of this research, the UNHCR recorded the total number of refugees in countries as stocks: the count of refugees present within the territory of a country or recognized territory at the end of each year. This differs from refugee flows data, which is the additional number of refugees that entered a country compared to the baseline of the year before.

Asylum application recognition (or approval) rate. Continuous proportion variable between 0 and 1, calculated from the asylum decisions data provided by the UNHCR by dividing the number of approved asylum applications by the total number of asylum applications received by a country in a given year, that indicates the proportion of asylum applications approved.

Independent and Control Variables

Below is the analytical breakdown of the independent variable of interest – political regime type – and the control variables used for this study.

Political regime type:

Democratic political regime. Binary variable indicating that the political regime type of a state is categorized as democratic according to the binary polity score scale of Polity 5, and thereby 1 if the score lies between 1 and 10 (inclusive) and null if otherwise.

Non-democratic political regime. Binary variable indicating that the political regime of a state is categorized as non-democratic according to the binary polity score scale of Polity 5, and thereby 1 if the score lies between -10 and -1 (inclusive) and null if otherwise.

Democracy. Binary variable indicating that a state is a democracy according to the tripartite polity score scale of Polity 5, and thereby 1 if the score lies between 6 and 10 (inclusive) and null if otherwise.

Anocracy. Binary variable indicating that a state is an anocracy according to the tripartite polity score scale of Polity 5, and thereby 1 if the score lies between -5 and 5 (inclusive) and null if otherwise. Strictly speaking, neither the liberal paradox nor the illiberal paradox theory contribute hypotheses on the effect of anocracy, focusing rather on the democracy-autocracy opposition (in other words, the binary scaling of Polity 5). However, as anocracy adopts elements of democracy, anocratic states should display the same pattern as democratic states in restricting the number of refugees hosted on their territories and having lower asylum recognition rates than autocracies, according to the more recent findings of the illiberal paradox.

Autocracy. Binary variable indicating that a state is an autocracy according to the tripartite polity score scale of Polity 5, and thereby 1 if the score lies between -10 and -6 (inclusive) and null if otherwise.

Country population (log). Count variable of the estimated total population of countries for each year of the dataset period, provided by the World Bank and the UN Population Division, which has been logged to correct for its high-level of skew. As, in general, states with a larger population have a higher capacity to absorb foreigners and new arrivals, it is expected that this variable will be positively correlated to the dependent variables.

Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and GDP per capita (log). Continuous variable to measure the economic wealth of countries and test whether this is a stronger explanatory variable than political regime type in relation to the dependent variables. There is an established literature in the study of general migration that migration flows are primarily determined by the level of economic development of prospective destination countries (Brettell and Hollified 2015; Massey et al. 2005; De Haas et al. 2020), although this is contested when it comes to refugee migration (Fransen and De Haas 2022; Miller and Peters 2018). This variable is also logged to correct for the high-level of skewness.

GINI coefficient of income inequality after taxes and transfers. Continuous proportion variable between 0 and 100 which measures the level of income inequality in countries after distribution or redistribution of taxes and social benefits, with a figure closer to 100 indicating

higher inequality. This variable is sourced from the SWIID database, which is included in the Harvard Dataverse and includes GINI coefficients for countries outside the OECD.

GINI coefficient of income inequality before taxes and transfers. Continuous proportion variable between 0 and 100 that measures income inequality in countries before taxes and transfers of social benefits, with 100 designating complete inequality and 0 designating complete equality. This variable is also sourced from the SWIID database and was included to test whether inequality as opposed to simply high per capita national income would better explain host countries' refugee hosting and asylum outcomes. There is a dearth of research on the effect of inequality on refugee admissions and asylum policy (but see Lidén and Nyhlén 2014 for the case of Sweden), but the general expectation is that states burdened with high inequality, even if wealthy in GDP terms, would seek to restrict the number of forced migrants they admit.

Host country is next to a country involved in armed conflict. Binary variable designating that a host country is next to a country in which there is armed conflict as 1 and null if not, which is derived from the COW database, a database that categorizes and curates wars and conflicts around the world. This variable was included because of established empirical evidence that people displaced by war and violence will first seek refuge and residence in a neighboring country, if they cross an international border (Gomez and Christensen 2010; Hatton 2020). In 2018, 80 percent of forced migrants did so (UNHCR 2018), and in 2021 that figure was 72 percent (UNHCR 2021). However, as the slight decline in this figure hints, there is growing evidence that forced migrants are leveraging personal and community social networks to seek refuge in countries beyond the immediate conflict zone (Fransen and De Haas 2022).

Table 1. Summary statistics

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Year	11,016	1984.5	19.629	1951	2018
Polity score	9,079	1.102	7.339	-10	10
Democracy	9,079	0.412	0.492	0	1
Anocracy	9,079	0.256	0.437	0	1
Autocracy	9,079	0.332	0.471	0	1
Democratic	9,079	0.527	0.499	0	1
Non-democratic	9,079	0.473	0.499	0	1
Country pop.	9,169	34,172,717.00	121,486,640.00	119,413.00	1,427,647,789.00
Country pop. (log)	9,169	15.922	1.559	11.69	21.079
Refugee pop.	6,140	110,093.00	316,177.10	5	4,404,995
Refugees per thousand	6,138	10.625	47.13	0.0001	820.176
Refugees per thousand (log)	6,138	-0.339	2.668	-9.246	6.71
Asylum received	2,576	1,752.02	7,964.54	0	263,571
Asylum rejected	2,576	3,294.26	13,195.00	0	279,426
Asylum rate	2,435	0.481	0.362	0	1
GDP per capita	7,665	6,586.15	12,796.58	22.795	118,823.60
GDP per capita (log)	7,665	7.436	1.686	3.127	11.685
GINI (post-dist.)	5,022	38.474	8.978	19.5	67.1
GINI (pre-dist.)	5,022	45.725	6.731	21.9	72.4
Conflict zone	7,881	0.293	0.455	0	1

Table 2. Variables and expectations in relation to dependent variables

Variables	Expectation (Liberal Paradox)	Expectation (Illiberal Paradox)
Number of registered refugees per 1,000 nationals *Rate of asylum applications approved/recognised*		
Democracy as political regime type	Positively related to the dependent variables	Negatively related to the dependent variables
Anocracy as political regime type	Positively related to the dependent variables	Negatively related to the dependent variables
Autocracy as political regime type	Negatively related to the dependent variables	Negatively related to the dependent variables
Political regime type is democratic	Positively related to the dependent variables	Positively related to the dependent variables
Political regime type is non-democratic	Negatively related to the dependent variables	Negatively related to the dependent variables
Population of host country	Positively related to the dependent variables	Positively related to the dependent variables
Gross domestic product (GDP) of host country per capita	Positively related to the dependent variables	Positively related to the dependent variables
GINI coefficient after taxes, transfers, redistribution	Negatively related to the dependent variables	Negatively related to the dependent variables
GINI coefficient before taxes, transfers, redistribution	Negatively related to the dependent variables	Negatively related to the dependent variables
Host country is neighbours with a country in armed conflict	Positively related to the dependent variables	Positively related to the dependent variables

Analytical strategy: multivariate fixed effects panel regression

This study applies a multivariate panel regression model with fixed effects on country and year, as summarized below, where y is the dependent variable – refugees per thousand (log) or asylum rate – for host country i in year t, with $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$, etc. being the coefficients of the explanatory variable of interest – polity regime type – and the various control variables for the reasons elaborate upon in the previous section. a_i designates any unobserved effect and u_{it} is the error term.

$$y_{it} = \beta_1 x_{it1} + \beta_2 x_{i2} + \cdots + \beta_k x_{itk} + a_i + u_{it}, \ t = 1,2,\dots,T.$$

A fixed effects model was selected over random effects, because the explanatory variables to be deployed in these regressions are not constant over time, and there is little reason to assume that the unobserved effect is uncorrelated with the independent variables (Wooldridge 2019: 471). In addition, the results of the Hausman test did not compel the exclusive use of a random effects model, and thus fixed effects was selected as it is generally accepted to be more convincing when examining panel datasets of aggregated data related to policy analysis (Wooldridge 2019: 474).

The regression models with refugees per thousand (log) as y tested positive for heteroscedasticity, cross-sectional dependence, and serial correlation. Thus, panel-corrected standard errors according to the estimation techniques of Beck and Katz (1995) were applied. The regressions with asylum recognition rate as the dependent variable needed to be corrected for heteroscedasticity and serial correlation, and therefore the covariance estimation techniques of Newey and West (1987) were applied. The regression tables in the following Results section have all been corrected for these distortions and reflect the corrections in their standard errors.

RESULTS

The distribution of political regime types throughout the years in the dataset reveals a gradual increase of democratic regimes in the world since 1951, until they represent the majority, in support of the Third Wave of Democratization thesis of Huntington (1991). Table 1 below summarizes the distribution of political regime types in the dataset.

Table 1. Summary of political regime type distribution

|	Democratic	Non-democratic	Democracy	Anocracy	Autocracy
Total	4,293	3314	3,284	1,892	2,427
Mean	82.6	63.7	63.2	36.4	46.7
Min.	41	38	32	18	20
Max.	122	93	95	51	83
Standard deviation	30.58	17.85	24.04	12.20	22.60

Democracies were outnumbered by autocracies and anocracies in the early years of the dataset. The positive incline in democratic regimes started in the mid-1970s, as predicted by Huntington (1991), and there is a notable acceleration after 1989, the year of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The percentage of democracies goes above 50 percent for the first time in 1991, the year that marked the end of the Cold War. By 2018, the last year of the dataset, almost 3 out of 4 states were democratic rather than autocratic (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Political regime types in the world (percentage)
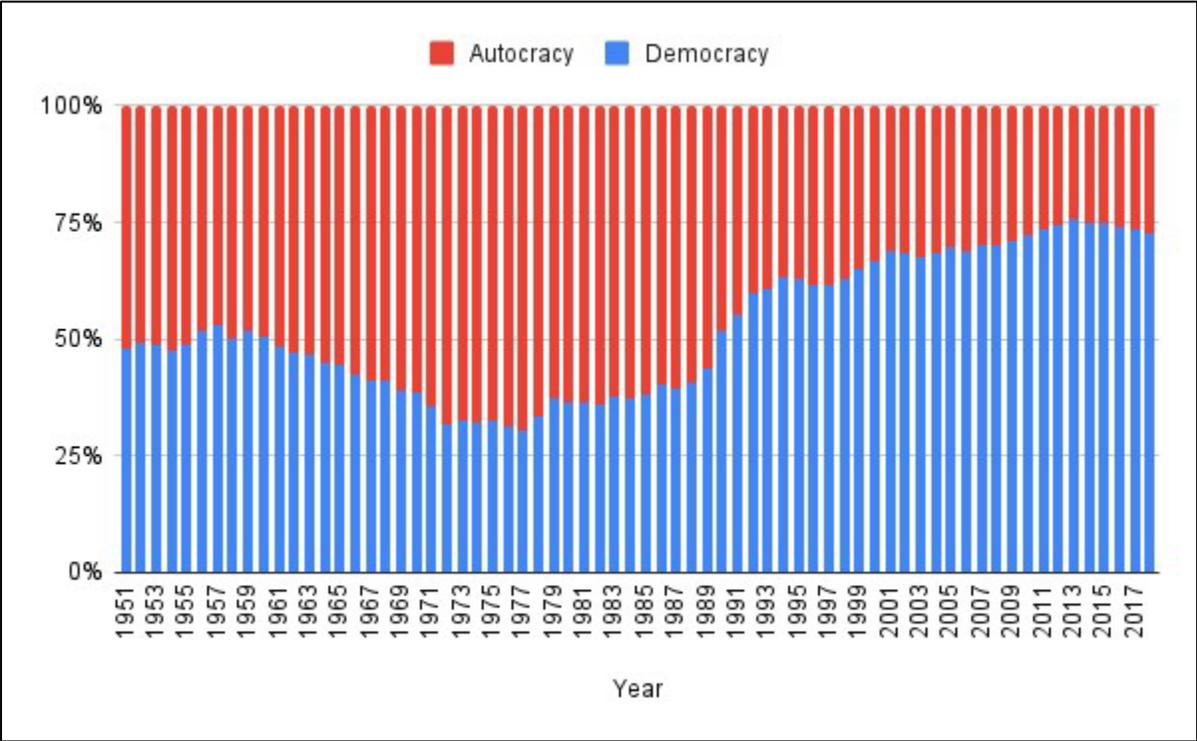
After including anocracies, the rise in democracies becomes slightly less dramatic, and democracies comprise more than half of all regime types in the world only after the year 2000. However, the share of autocracies decreases noticeably after 1989, showing the clear orientation to democracy toward the end of the Cold War, and by 2018, most countries are democracies (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Political regime types in the world, including anocracy (percentage)
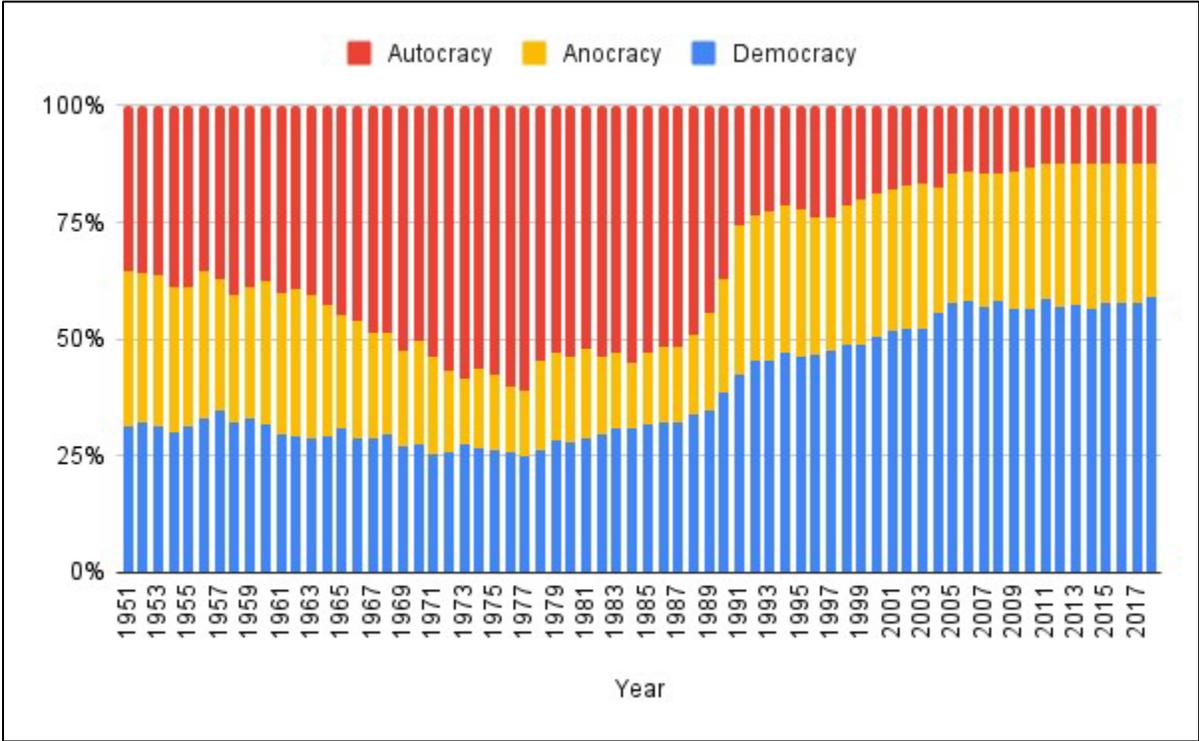
Because the liberal paradox and the challenger illiberal paradox both set up the world's political regimes as either predominantly democratic and autocratic (as proxies for the Global North and the Global South), the regression analyses based on the binary division of polity types – democratic versus non-democratic – are first presented in Table 2 (for refugees per thousand (log)) and Table 3 (for asylum rate).

Table 2. Regression analysis of refugees per thousand in host countries (binary scale)

	Dependent variable:
	Refugees per thousand (log)

Polity Type:

Democratic	-0.356[*]
	(0.209)
Non-democratic	
Country pop. (log)	-0.570
	(0.552)
GDP per capita	0.00002[**]
	(0.000)
GDP per capita (log)	-0.308[*]
	(0.166)
GINI (post-dist.)	-0.178[**]
	(0.088)
GINI (pre-dist.)	0.138[*]
	(0.082)
Conflict zone	0.438[***]
	(0.135)
Observations	3,272
R^2	0.074
Adjusted R^2	0.029
F Statistic	5.40862[***] (df = 7; 144)
Note:	[*]$p<0.1$; [**]$p<0.05$; [***]$p<0.01$

These initial results show that states that qualify as democratic admit and host fewer refugees than those that are considered autocratic or non-democratic. The coefficient for the democratic political regime type, which is negative and statistically significant, indicates that a one-unit move toward democracy by a host state reduces the refugees hosted in the country by over 35 percent. This is in support of **Hypothesis 3** and the illiberal paradox more generally. Of note, the association between the number of refugees hosted per thousand and the economic variables – GDP per capita and GDP per capita (log) – and income inequality are also statistically significant, although in the case of

GDP per capita the size of the effect is small, and the relationship appears to reverse from positive to negative at a certain point of economic development. At that point, a 1% increase in GDP per capita is associated with a 0.31% decrease in levels of refugees hosted. The results pertaining to the GINI coefficients suggest that host countries and societies that have high income discrepancies before, or without, government intervention via taxation and transfer of social benefits tend to host more refugees, whereas countries and societies with high inequality even after government redistribution efforts – and thus, states with more liberal tax regulations and/or weaker social benefit transfer programs – tend to host fewer refugees. Finally, vicinity to a conflict zone is positively correlated to the level of refugees hosted by countries and statistically significant. This lends support to the research that finds that the vast majority of individuals externally displaced by war and violence will seek refuge or asylum in a neighboring country, at least initially (Puerto Gomez and Christensen 2010; Hatton 2020).

Table 3. Regression analysis of asylum recognition rate in host countries (binary scale)

	Dependent variable:
	Asylum rate
Polity Type:	
Democratic	0.047
	(0.055)
Non-democratic	
Country pop. (log)	0.419***
	(0.152)
GDP per capita	0.00000***
	(0.000)
GDP per capita (log)	-0.079***
	(0.026)
GINI (post-dist.)	0.027
	(0.016)
GINI (pre-dist.)	-0.004
	(0.014)
Conflict zone	0.008
	(0.032)
Observations	1,259
R^2	0.028
Adjusted R^2	-0.1
F Statistic	6.81057*** (df = 7; 18)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Concerning the asylum recognition rate, the regression outputs (Table 3) support the prediction that democratic states achieve higher rates compared to their non-democratic counterparts. A move by a host state from non-democratic to democratic is associated with an increase in the asylum recognition rate by 4.88 percent. The coefficient for the democratic variable is positive, although it isn't significant. On the other hand, the total population of host countries and the GDP variables displayed statistically significant results at the 0.01 p-level. Accordingly, countries with larger national populations are associated with higher rates of asylum recognition, as well as counties with higher per capita economic wealth. Thus, in the case of asylum approval, the results tentatively support **Hypothesis 2** and thus some of the assertions of the liberal paradox.

The results thus far provide more empirical support for the illiberal paradox, especially in relation to refugee protection via hosting. However, upon including anocracy and categorizing regime types according to the tripartite scale and taxonomy of Polity 5, the picture changes dramatically and unexpectedly. Table 4 presents the results of the panel regression for refugees per thousand and Table 5 presents the results pertaining to asylum approval rate.

Table 4. Regression analysis of refugees per thousand in host countries (tripartite scale)

Dependent variable:

	Refugees per thousand (log)
Polity Type:	
Democracy	-0.907***
	(0.198)
Anocracy	
Autocracy	-0.736***
	(0.223)
Country pop. (log)	-1.021*
	(0.552)
GDP per capita	0.00002*
	(0.000)
GDP per capita (log)	-0.207
	(0.161)
GINI (post-dist.)	-0.175**
	(0.086)
GINI (pre-dist.)	0.136*
	(0.080)
Conflict zone	0.403***
	(0.132)
Observations	3,272
R^2	0.102
Adjusted R^2	0.058
F Statistic	7.83643*** (df = 8; 144)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

In comparison to anocracy, democracy has a statistically significant impact of -0.907 on the logged values of refugees per thousand, meaning that a move to democracy is associated with an over 90 percent decrease in refugees per thousand in host states. Moreover, autocracy also produced a statistically significant negative coefficient when compared to anocracy: autocratic host states were associated with a 74 percent decline in hosting refugees. However, compared to democratic host states, autocratic states overall were associated with higher levels of admitting and hosting refugees.

Table 5. Regression analysis of asylum recognition rate in host countries (tripartite scale)

	Dependent variable:
	Asylum rate
Polity Type:	
Democracy	-0.087[*]
	(0.046)
Anocracy	
Autocracy	-0.078
	(0.08)
Country pop. (log)	0.459[***]
	(0.149)
GDP per capita	0.00000[***]
	(0.000)
GDP per capita (log)	-0.080[***]
	(0.026)
GINI (post-dist.)	0.030[*]
	(0.017)
GINI (pre-dist.)	-0.005
	(0.014)
Conflict zone	0.007
	(0.032)
Observations	1,259
R^2	0.033
Adjusted R^2	-0.095
F Statistic	6.7011[***] (df = 8; 18)
Note:	[*]$p<0.1$; [**]$p<0.05$; [***]$p<0.01$

The results for the asylum recognition rates across different political regime types (Table 5) highlights the positive correlation of this dependent variable with anocracy, as both democratic and autocratic states approved asylum applications at a lower rate compared to hybrid regimes. However, only the democracy variable is statistically positive at the 0.1 significance level, with an almost 9 percent decrease in the approval rate when a state is democratic than when it is not, when the reference is anocratic or hybrid-regime states. As with the regression results based on the binary categorization and scaling (Table 2 and Table 3), the results in Table 5 show the importance of host countries' economic indicators even when the anocracy variable is included in the model. Both GDP per capita and GDP per capita (log) are significant at the 0.01 p-level, although the size

of the coefficient for the raw GDP per capita variable proved to be very slight. Again, with the GDP per capita (log) coefficient being negative, it appears that while GDP per capita and asylum recognition rates are positively related, at a certain point the relationship reverses, such that a one-unit increase in GDP per capita is associated with an 8 percent decrease in the asylum recognition rate. Thus, wealthier states recognize asylum seekers at a lower rate than less wealthy host states. This may also partially explain the negative coefficient of the democracy variable, since the majority of the states that score 6 or higher in polity score are in the economically wealthy Global North. What's somewhat surprising is the coefficient of the GINI (post-dist.) variable, which suggests that a unit increase in income inequality, even after government correction for it through taxes and transfers, is associated with a 3 percent increase in the asylum recognition rate. Lastly, countries with larger populations approve asylum requests at a higher rate. Overall, the inclusion of anocracy lends some support to **Hypothesis 4** and the illiberal paradox.

A major implication of the illiberal paradox theory is that democratic states and societies, in particular Western liberal democratic countries, were more generous and willing in their hosting and protection of refugees and asylum seekers during the Cold War than afterward. This is because the strategic geopolitical interests and competition between the liberal West and the communist Soviet bloc – rather than any genuine commitment to liberal democratic values – incentivized governments and societies in democratic states to show themselves to be exemplar hosts and humanitarians. Therefore, once the Cold War ended in 1991, the strategic stakes for upholding the terms and principles of the 1951 Refugee Convention likewise receded, which leads to the expectation that after 1991, democratic countries have been restricting their admission and hosting of refugees, whereas before 1991 they were liberal in these areas (**Hypothesis 5**). In order to test

this prediction, I examined the data before 1991 and after 1991 and ran the panel regression model on each[3]. The results of this analysis – essentially, a structural break analysis – are shown in Table 8 below.

Table 8. Regression analysis of refugees per thousand before and after the Cold War

Dependent variable:	
Refugees per thousand (log)	

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[3] Unfortunately, an identical structural break analysis could not be undertaken for asylum recognition rate, because UNHCR"s data for this variable only starts in the year 2000.

	(Before 1991)	(After 1991)
Polity Type:		
Democracy	-0.700***	-0.733***
	(0.247)	(0.211)
Anocracy		
Autocracy	-0.281	-0.641**
	(0.224)	(0.267)
Country pop. (log)	2.127***	-1.600**
	(0.742)	(0.72)
GDP per capita	0.0001***	0.00001
	(0.00002)	(0.00001)
GDP per capita (log)	-0.554**	-0.104
	(0.223)	(0.122)
GINI (post-dist.)	-0.098*	-0.093
	(0.055)	(0.105)
GINI (pre-dist.)	-0.048	0.097
	(0.047)	(0.103)
Conflict zone	-0.237	0.153
	(0.164)	(0.129)
Observations	961	2,311
R^2	0.105	0.066
Adjusted R^2	0.015	-0.0003
F Statistic	8.53865*** (df = 8; 31)	3.77552*** (df = 8; 144)
Note:		*$p<0.1$; **$p<0.05$; ***$p<0.01$

Contrary to the expectation set up by the illiberal paradox, the coefficient for democracy before 1991 is negative, and the value is not too different from the coefficient for democracy after 1991. Moreover, both values are statistically significant. What's more surprising, however, are the results for anocracy. Compared to anocracy, the coefficients for both democracy and autocracy are negative for refugees per thousand (log), both before and after 1991, which means that anocratic states admitted and hosted more refugees than either democracies or autocracies, both before and after the Cold War. Therefore, these results do not fully support **Hypothesis 5** and suggest instead that democratic states did not host more refugees or approve asylum applications at a higher rate than autocratic states, either before the Cold War, or after. In both time periods, democratic states

behaved similarly to autocratic states, in favor of accepting fewer forced migrants. At the same time, the magnitude of the autocracy coefficient shows that autocracies admitted refugees at a higher rate than democracies both before and after the Cold War.

In addition, several indicators of socio-economic conditions, such as host country population and GDP per capita, which are within the classic purview of migration scholarship, mattered both before and after the Cold War, although in perhaps interesting and unexpected ways. The positive valence of the population variable before 1991 suggests that during the Cold War it was the more populous countries that hosted a larger share of refugees. However, the relationship reverses after 1991. Before 1991 and during the Cold War, national economic wealth and income inequality were statistically significant, while the significance disappears after 1991, even if the valence of the relationship to the dependent variable remains the same. The statistical significance of the conflict zone variable also disappears when the dataset is split and analyzed in this manner.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study, which took advantage of a large, global dataset that could generalize beyond narrow geographic and historical contexts, strongly suggest that, in combination and interaction with conventional socio-economic variables, the political regime type of host states is associated with key outcomes of refugee and asylum protection, namely levels of refugees hosted and asylum recognition rates. All iterations of the fixed effects panel regression models bore this out, with one or more – and, more often, all – of the political regime types found to be statistically significant to at least the 0.1 p-level, in particular in relation to hosting refugees. Ultimately, this

study finds greater support that there is a significant relationship between political regime type and refugee protection and asylum outcomes, refuting **Hypothesis 6**.

However, I have also shown that it is equally important how the research questions or theories being tested theoretically frame polity types, including their relations to each other. When the binary, dichotomous and more oppositional division of regime type of democracies and autocracies (non-democracies) was used, in conformity to the underlying assumptions of the liberal paradox and illiberal paradox, the results suggested that the illiberal paradox has greater empirical support, especially in relation to the willingness of states to admit and host greater or fewer numbers of migrants. Concerning asylum protection, proxied here as asylum application status recognition rates, applying a binary understanding of regime types led to inconclusive results on the impact of regime types but did seem to corroborate the finding by Abdelaaty (2021a) that economic conditions played a decisive role in determining the extent of the protection of refugee rights in host countries.

However, once this dichotomous framing of political regimes was modified by the addition of anocracy, or hybrid regime, a more complex and interesting picture emerges, complicating the predictions and underlying assumptions of both the liberal paradox and illiberal paradox. For both dependent variables – refugees hosted per thousand native inhabitants and asylum recognition rate – anocracies exceeded both democracies and autocracies. If the liberal paradox had greater empirical validity, the results would have shown that anocracies hosted fewer refugees per thousand and recognized asylum at lower rates than democratic states but hosted more refugees per thousand and recognized asylum at higher rates than autocracies. If the illiberal paradox had

greater empirical validity, anocracies would have hosted fewer refugees per thousand and recognized asylum at lower rates than autocracies but hosted more refugees per thousand and recognized asylum at higher rates than democracies. Whereas the liberal paradox envisions a positive linear relationship between the polity score of host countries and the number of refugees they host or to whom they grant asylum, and the illiberal paradox envisions a negative linear relationship between the two, the findings of this study strongly suggest that anocratic host states turn this relationship into a negative parabolic one – in other words, into what can be referred to as an "anocratic hump". This is summarized in Figure 3 below, where (a) visually represents the liberal paradox, (b) the illiberal paradox, and (c) the anocratic hump.

Figure 3. Stylized representations of the liberal paradox, illiberal paradox, and anocratic hump
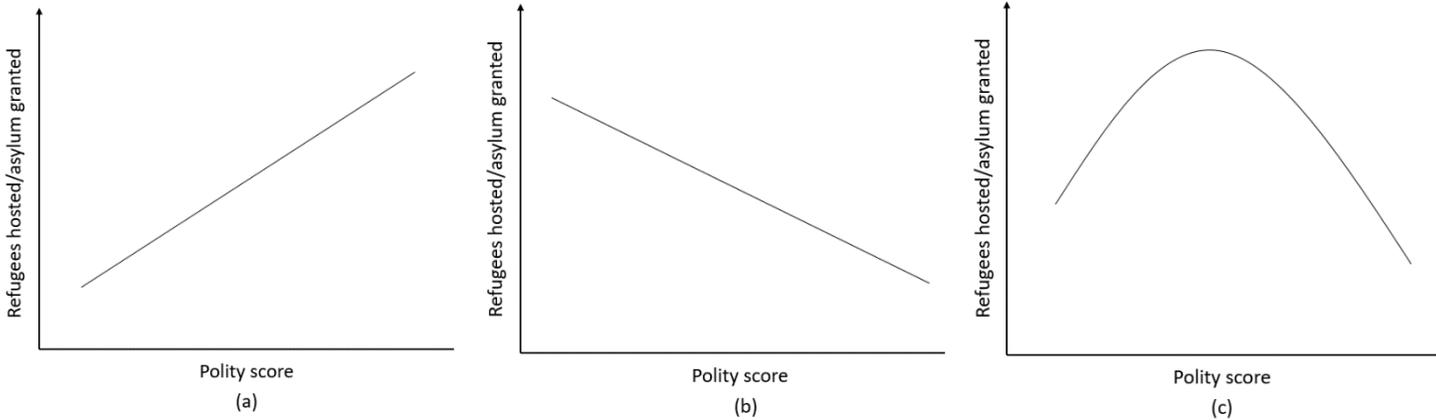

The anocratic hump suggests that it isn't the most politically repressive or unstable states bordering war zones that are hosting the majority of the world's forced migrants. The shirking of international obligations by democratic states and societies isn't compelling autocratic or fully authoritarian

states to pick up the slack. However, the illiberal paradox finds more support than the liberal paradox insofar as autocratic states are less restrictive than democratic states in the key areas of refugee protection of hosting refugees and recognizing asylum requests. The inclusion of anocracies simply exposes them both as consistently less liberal than conventionally thought. Relative to anocratic regimes, both democracies and autocracies consistently pursue less liberal policies, regardless of relevant discourse, traditions, or even prioritized interests in the political culture. The findings of the structural break analysis, or testing the Cold War hypothesis (**Hypothesis 5**) – modelling the data before 1991 and comparing it to the data after 1991 – which shows this dynamic persisting in both time periods, challenges the argument that the anocratic hump is a reflection of the quite recent practice of rich democracies paying off 'soft' democracies and authoritarian regimes to host the migrants that want to reach, or had even successfully reached, the West and process their asylum petitions (FitzGerald 2019; see also the UK government's planned deal to transfer asylum seekers from the UK to Rwanda in BBC 2022). It appears that even before this trend of liberal democratic states outsourcing refugee protection and asylum management to the Global South, anocracies and hybrid regimes were shouldering the burden of international refugee protection. Thus, there appears to be something that is time-invariant and specific or exclusive to anocratic host states that is producing and reproducing this pattern; conversely, the reason for this may lie in democracies and autocracies – or perhaps in something shared in common between them, in spite of their supposedly oppositional nature.

Perhaps the relative liberality of anocracies with regards to refugee hosting and recognition of asylum can be attributed to the fact that, as hybrid regimes, they are characterized by weaker electoral institutions and transparency than consolidated democracies and thus their governments

are more "more insulated from public pressure" (Blair et al. 2022: 345). This makes it easier for more illiberal regimes to paradoxically adopt and implement more liberal policies vis-à-vis forced migrants, since they have larger margins and maneuverability to disregard popular opinion, which might have mobilized to oppose any show of generosity to migrants (Blair et al. 2022; Natter 2018). However, if this were entirely the case, one would have expected to see a positive coefficient for the autocracy variable, as autocratic governments are even more insulated from public opinion, enjoying even weaker (if not the absence of) electoral institutions. Instead, the coefficient of the autocracy variable was negative and significant in relation to anocracy, suggesting that a higher degree of illiberalism in and of itself is not predictive of a more liberal stance in refugee protection. In fact, anocracies already host refugees at higher levels per capita on average than either autocracies and democracies, and their share has been increasing over the years, according to the dataset of this study (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Median refugee per capita in democracies versus in anocracies versus in autocracies
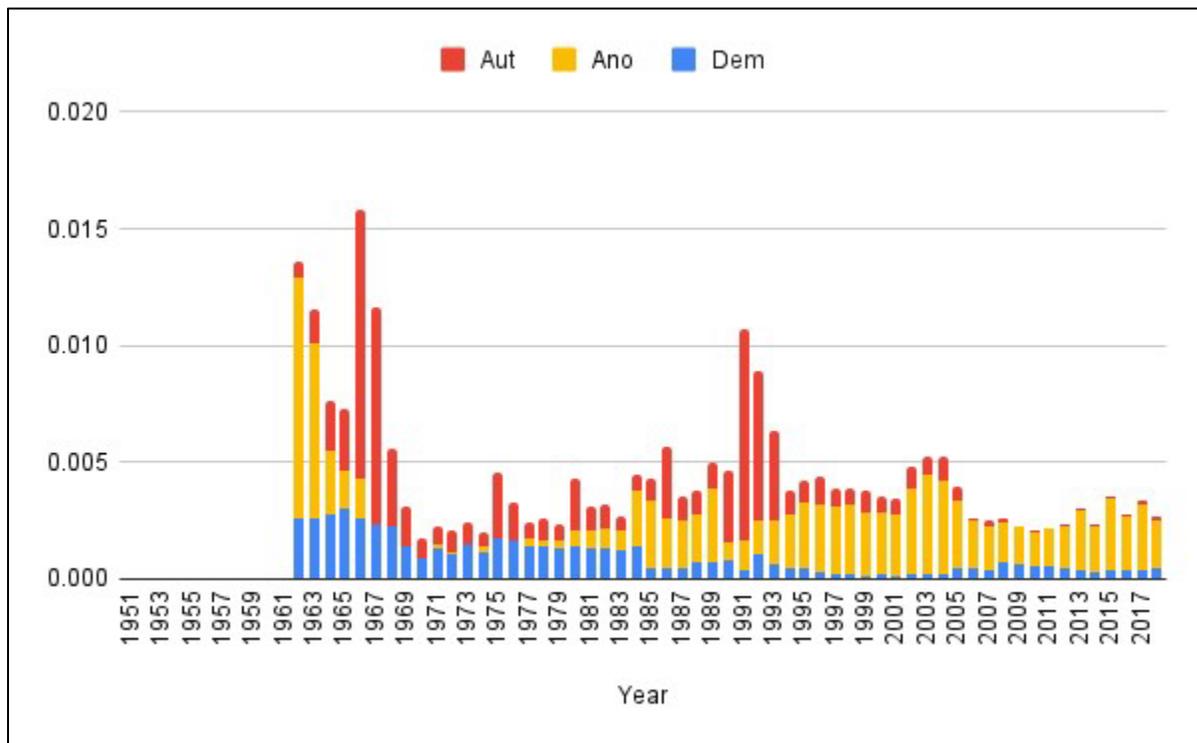
Recent work examining the impact of ethnic identity or kin affiliation in migration and asylum policy (Abdelaaty 2021b; Blair et al. 2022) suggest that this factor largely determines the strategic direction and decision of host governments. States that share a border with countries that are in conflict – especially in civil conflict – are likely to be developing countries with mixed-regime governments and populations that share ethnic or kin connections with the neighboring country in conflict. Blair et al. (2022) found that countries in the Global South are more likely to liberalize their asylum policy if their governmental elite identify ethnically with a politically persecuted minority group in a neighboring state, and this likelihood increases in the more liberal host countries. This implies that the anocratic hump may be driven by a convergence of developing country status, proximity to civil war, and – especially – co-ethnicity. However, there are prominent examples of anocratic host states, principally in Latin America, with national founding

narratives and immigration laws that valorized ethnic ambiguity or ethnic miscegenation (FitzGerald and Cook-Martín 2014), and one wonders how applicable this theory is in such cases.

Data Limitations

There are limitations associated with this study, most notably in the data that was not or could not be recorded. As previously mentioned, the data from the UNHCR on refugee populations only goes back as far as 1951, thus precluding a more sophisticated big-data analysis even if the Polity 5 data went back much further. The data on asylum decisions, and thus asylum approval rates, was even more limited, as nothing was recorded before the year 2000. Moreover, UNHCR data before the 1960s is biased toward Western Europe and North America, reflecting the geographic prioritization in the mandate of the 1951 Refugee Convention, which wouldn't be expanded officially until 1967 through the Optional Protocol.

It was also previously mentioned that UNHCR's population data for refugees is in the form of stock data and not flows data – more precisely, it is count data of the number of registered refugees in a given country at the end of a given year. The UNHCR very recently published flows figures on refugees and asylum seekers, but they were not available at the time of this research. Several attempts were made to derive flows figures from other UNHCR data, such as returns, naturalizations, and resettlement figures. However, the time coverage was either too low or their definitional parameters were unclear for these other variables. Equally, it proved impossible to derive satisfactory flows data from taking the difference in the refugee population in a year from the year before, as it wasn't clear if the resulting difference included refugees that had left of their

own volition in the interim, in which case the resulting figure wouldn't be an accurate reflection of additional intake or flow of refugees.

There were gaps in other data sources as well. In Polity 5, there were certain country-years that did not have the polity2 score recorded. The COW databased only yielded information up to the year 2007, which at times could be logically stretched up to 2010. As a consequence, the final panel dataset for this study could only be an unbalanced dataset. Ultimately, however, these limitations had little effect on the findings and implications of this study, given that a sufficient number of observations could be gathered for a quantitative analysis of this nature.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to uncover the relationship of political regime type and the reception outcomes of refugee host countries on a global scale, using a unique merged panel dataset comprising of 162 countries and covering the years 1951-2018 that was constructed from several data sources but primarily data from the UNHCR and the Center for Systemic Peace's Polity 5 dataset. It sought to contribute quantitative and global-level insights into research questions that traditionally had been explored through historical or qualitative analysis and on a one-N or small-N scale. The academic literature that interrogates the relationship between political regime type and international migration, refugee migration, or asylum can generally be divided into two camps: 1) the liberal paradox, which predicts that democratic countries will host and recognize increasing numbers of refugees due to the interaction of economic interests, social activism leveraging liberal norms, and key institutions, and 2) the illiberal paradox, which predicts that autocratic countries end up admitting and hosting more refugees than democratic states, because of the way democracies are

incentivized to prevent asylum seekers from reaching their territories, outside of specific geopolitical contexts and conditions. As a result, this paper also represents a test of the defining hypotheses associated with each theory.

Applying a multivariate panel regression model with fixed effects on country and year on the dataset, with the number of refugees hosted per one-thousand host-country citizens (logged) and the asylum recognition rate as dependent variables, the results revealed greater support for the illiberal paradox when the polity types of country-years were categorized as either democratic or autocratic ("non-democratic"). This was especially the case for the number of refugees hosted, but the impact of political regime type was inconclusive for asylum recognition rates. However, when political regime type was categorized according to Polity 5's trichotomous criteria that includes anocracies or hybrid regimes, the outputs of the regressions reinforced the importance and statistical significance of political regime types. They also revealed that, while there was degree of support for the illiberal paradox, both theories were too simplistic and ultimately inadequate. Compared to anocracies, both democracies and autocracies hosted fewer refugees and recognized them at a lower rate, although autocracies were marginally more liberal. Therefore, the correlational picture that emerges is neither the positive linear relationship of the liberal paradox nor the negative linearity of the illiberal paradox, but a parabolic anocratic hump, whereby movement away from autocracy toward democracy corresponds to countries and societies that host and recognize more and more refugees, until at a certain point, it corresponds to states that host and recognize fewer and fewer refugees. Moreover, the findings of this study also challenge the idea that the anocratic hump is merely a reflection of the current global trend of wealthy, Global North democracies paying off and outsourcing refugee protection and asylum management to

poorer semi-democracies and soft authoritarian states, since splitting the data into years before

1991 (during the Cold War) and after 1991 (after the Cold War) revealed that the anocratic hump

dynamic existed before 1991 as well. The fact that the anocratic hump existed prior to the end of

the Cold War – in a different geopolitical, world-cultural, and ideological environment to today –

is strong evidence that there is something specific about anocracy as a regime type that is driving

this pattern.

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