

"Why do some countries admit refugees and others don't?"

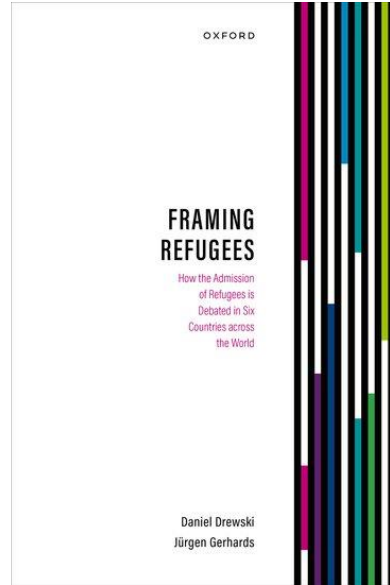
On the importance of frames and cultural repertoires

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I. Introduction

1. Presentation of the main findings of a study coauthored with Danial Drewski and published with OUP



<https://fdslive.oup.com/www.oup.com/academic/pdf/openaccess/9780198904724.pdf>

2. Type of study

- * comparative and macro-sociological study: countries and political parties
- * cultural sociological study: focus on interpretations and frames
- * qualitative study: discourse analysis of parliamentary debates)

II. Philosophical and Legal Background

1. Political philosophy

Tension between states' right to control borders and individuals' right to move across borders

- In the case of refugees: right to life trumps state's right to limit access
- In the case of economic migrants: states have the right to decide whom to admit

2. International law

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) & Geneva Refugee Convention (1951)

- Countries are obliged to admit refugees (principle of non-refoulement), but not economic migrants

3. However, states differ in their refugee policies

- a. Turkey: open doors for Syrians
- b. Poland: closed doors for Syrians, but open doors for Ukrainians
- c. Singapore: closed doors for Rohingya
- d. Uganda: open doors for South Sudanese

III. Research question and main argument

1. **Question:** How can we make sense of refugee admission policies of different countries?
2. **Core argument:** Frames (schemata of interpretations) and cultural repertoires shape refugee policies
3. **We look at differences**
 - a. between countries
 - b. within countries (political parties)

IV. Methods

1. Selection of countries

- a. Chile, Germany, Poland, Singapore, Turkey, Uganda
- b. All six countries are confronted with the question of whether to accept refugees, but differ in their admission policies

2. Qualitative discourse analysis

- a. Critical discourse moments
- b. Focus on parliamentary debates, covering all parliamentary debates

3. Expert interviews and interviews with politicians

V. Contribution to the literature

1. Explanatory/quantitative approaches (Abdelaaty et al)

- a. Economic factors
- b. Ethnic/cultural similarities between refugees and receiving society

→ **But:** All supposedly objective factors must be interpreted (“Thomas” theorem)

2. Qualitative studies

- a. Usually focus on one country / one actor only
- b. “Thick” description, no attempt to “explain” differences

→ **But:** Max Weber’s idea of “Verstehendes Erklären”. Combining qualitative discourse analysis with an “explanatory” perspective

VI. Core argument and core dimensions of the discourse analysis

1. Immigration (including the admission of refugees) triggers the question of "*Who are we?*" and "*Who are they?*".
2. Policy preferences are shaped by the answers given to the two questions:
 - a. Who are “we” (national identity)?
 - b. Who are “they” (refugees) in relation to “us”?
3. When framing “we” and “they” governments and political parties draw on “cultural repertoires”.

VI. Six frames on the admission of refugees

	Framing national identity (“we”)	Framing refugees (“others”)
Economic	Economic development, labor market performance	Skills and resources of refugees
Cultural	“Invented” history and cultural characteristics of the nation	Ethnic and cultural distance between refugees and host population
Legal	Laws that bind the nation	Rights and obligations refugees have
Moral	Values that define the nation (e.g., humanitarian principles, religious values, historical obligations)	Refugees’ neediness & vulnerability
Security	A nation’s public safety	Security threats associated with refugees (e.g. terrorism, crime, human trafficking)
International	Relationship with the country from which refugees come	Refugees as political allies or enemies

VII. Turkey: AKP's policy of „open doors“

1. Background

1. Syrian civil since 2011: 6.6 million Syrians forced to leave the country
2. President Erdoğan's AKP in power since 2002
3. Open refugee policy: admission of 3.7 million Syrian refugees (Temporary Protection Regulation)
4. 2016: announcement that Syrian refugees can obtain Turkish citizenship
5. However, clear majority of Turkish citizens are against admitting Syrian refugees

VII. Turkey: AKP's policy of „open doors“

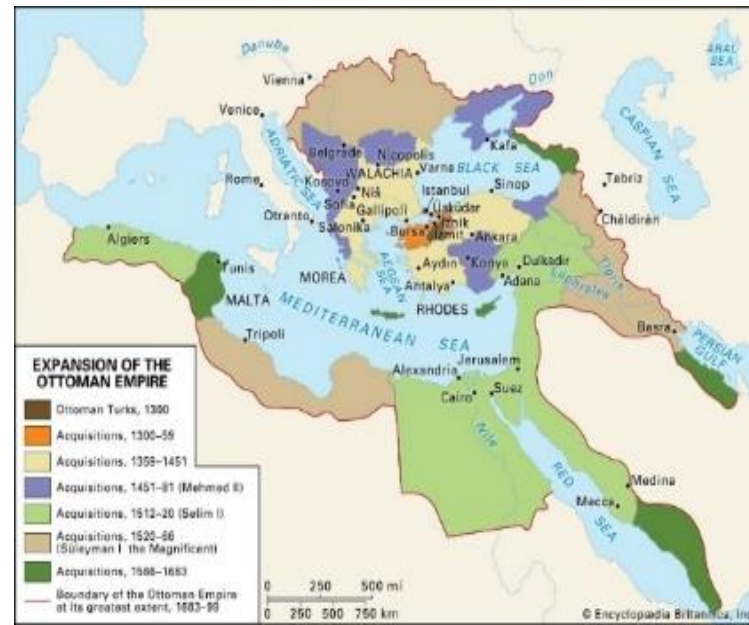
	Framing national identity (“we”)	Framing refugees (“others”)
Economic	---	---
Cultural	Turkey's identity transcends the boundaries of the Turkish nation-state: (1) Roots lie in the Ottoman Empire (2) Turkey is an Islamic country	(1) Syrians have similar historical roots as Turks as both belonged to the Ottoman Empire (2) Syrian refugees are Muslims as Turks are
Moral	Turkey is a humanitarian country in contrast to the hypocritical West	Refugees are people in need escaping a civil war
Legal	---	---
Security	---	---
International	Turkey as regional power in the Middle East	---

VII. Turkey

AKP: Open Door Policy

“What we call Syria at present, were geographies no different to us than Mardin, Gaziantep and Hatay just a century ago. Drawing a line between our citizens and those living in Syria and Iraq would make us embarrassed in the eyes of history, our ancestors and especially our martyrs.”

(R.T. Erdoğan, AKP, 1.10.2015)



VII. Turkey: CHP's policy: sending them back as soon as possible

	Framing national identity ("we")	Framing refugees ("others")
Economic	Turkey is facing severe economic problems	Refugees as an economic threat to Turkish citizens'
Cultural	Rejection of AKP's extended conception of Turkey, and referring to the Kemalist, secular Turkish Republic	Refugees as a cultural threat
Moral		
Legal	---	No all refugees are real refugees
Security	---	Refugees as a security threat
International	Turkey belongs to the West	---

VIII. Poland: PiS' refusal to admit Syrian refugees

1. Background

1. Law and Justice party (PiS) forms the government from 2015-2023
2. PiS's success in 2015 election can be partly explained by PiS position on the refugee issue
3. PiS government refuses to accept Syrian refugees : Rejecting the redistribution mechanism suggested by the EU.
At the same time Poland admits refugees from Ukraine

VIII. Poland: PiS' refusal to admit Syrian refugees

	Framing national identity ("we")	Framing refugees ("others")
Economic		
Cultural	Poland is a Christian Catholic nation	Refugees as Muslims, that do not fit
Moral	---	---
Legal	---	Refugees are „economic migrants“ (no claim to asylum)
Security	---	Refugees are criminals and terrorists
International	Poland as a „victim“ of big European powers; Poland defends its sovereignty against the EU	---

IX. Germany: Openness to the admission of refugees from Syria

1. Background

1. Government in power: Conservative party (CDU/CSU) and social-democratic party (SPD) headed by chancellor Angela Merkel
2. Open borders for refugees from Hungary
3. 2015: 400,000 applications; 2016: 700,000 applications
4. Main countries of origin: Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq

IX. Germany: Openness to the admission of Syrian refugees

	Framing national identity (“we”)	Framing refugees (“others”)
Economic	Germany has a strong economy, but faces labor market shortage	Refugees can bring human capital
Cultural	---	Not mentioned
Moral	Germany’s identity is based on humanitarian values	Refugees are people in need
Legal	Germany is bound by human rights and the German Constitution (reference to German history – Holocaust)	Refugees have a right to be admitted (in contrast to economic migrants)
Security	---	---
International	Germany is committed to the unity of the EU	---

X. Uganda's open door policy

1. Background Information

1. Uganda is one of the poorest countries of the world
2. Since 1986, Uganda is governed by Yoweri Museveni, an autocrat
3. Uganda pursues a very open refugee policy: It hosts the most refugees of all African countries; 6th place worldwide; no discrimination between different refugee groups
4. Most refugees are from South Sudan & Democratic Republic of Congo

X. Uganda's open door policy

Framing national identity ("we")

Framing refugees ("others")

Economic

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Cultural

Pan-Africanism: Uganda is an African country sharing cultural similarities with other African countries

Africa's national borders are artificial and the result of colonialism

Refugees as our African brothers and sisters

Moral

As a former refugee generating country, Uganda owes gratitude to other countries

Refugees are people in humanitarian need

Legal

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Security

Armed refugees are a security risk

International

Uganda's international reputation is built on the

XI. Singapour: No admission of refugees at all

1. Background

1. One of the most successful countries in terms of development (Human Development Index, Results of PISA-Study)
2. Semi-authoritarian regime: 'People's Action Party' permanently in power
3. Multi-ethnic composition (Chinese, Malays, Indians) and many immigrants
4. Strict refusal of all refugees: Rohingya refugees from Myanmar
(Muslim minority that is persecuted. Approx. 980,000 refugees, 880,000 of them in Bangladesh)

XI. Singapore: No admission of refugees at all

	Framing national identity (“we”)	Framing refugees (“others”)
International	The principles of sovereignty of states and of non-interference in internal affairs are core features of Singapore's <i>postcolonial</i> identity.	-----
Economic	Singapore is portrayed as an enormously successful country; this success is solely based on the skills of its people.	Migrants are seen as a human capital and commodity. Refugees are interpreted as people who bring no gain to Singapore.
Cultural	Singapore is a multi-ethnic society. This diversity is always precarious.	Refugees might threaten Singapore’s multiracial balanced identity.
Moral	-----	-----

XII. Summing up

- 1) The issue of whether a country should admit refugees triggers the question of
 - * what characteristics make up the identity of a country and
 - * what characteristics do those who want to be admitted have?
- 2) These characteristics are not objectively given; they are framed by political actors
- 3) In their framing, political actors draw on country-specific cultural repertoires
- 4) A detailed reconstruction of the frames used in public debates helps us to understand
 - * why countries differ in their refugee policies and
 - * why government and opposition parties differ in their refugee policies.
- 5) However, frames and nation-state specific cultural repertoires are not the only factors that matter.

Max Weber: *„Interests, and not ideas, directly govern men’s conduct. Yet very frequently the ‘world images’ that have been created by ‘ideas’ have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamics of interest.*

Thank you for your attention!

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