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Encampment policy and public perception: a cross-country analysis of host community responses to Rohingya refugees

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of encampment policies on host community perceptions towards Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and Nepal, with an emphasis on how these perceptions shape the future of the refugees. Bangladesh, which has implemented an encampment policy, contrasts with Nepal, where no such policy exists. The research employs ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis to evaluate host community attitudes towards government policies, citizenship for newborns, and access to essential services like healthcare, jobs, education, and social security. The findings reveal that in Bangladesh, wealthier community members perceive less economic competition from refugees, particularly in job markets, due to the restrictions imposed by the encampment policy. However, social media in Bangladesh exacerbates negative perceptions, particularly concerning citizenship for Rohingya newborns, potentially hindering social cohesion. In Nepal, the absence of an encampment policy correlates with more negative perceptions among younger and economically vulnerable groups, who view refugees as competitors for limited resources. The study concludes that while encampment policies may mitigate immediate economic tensions, they risk deepening social divisions. Conversely, the lack of such policies in Nepal may lead to heightened resource competition and social tension. The research highlights the need for adaptive policy strategies that balance economic integration with social cohesion, ensuring sustainable refugee-host relations in both countries.

Keywords Rohingya refugees, Host community perceptions, Encampment policy, Bangladesh, Nepal, Comparative study, Social integration

Introduction

The Rohingya crisis, triggered by ethnic and religious conflicts in Myanmar's Rakhine State, has forced over 740,000 Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh, creating the world's largest refugee camp in Cox's Bazar (Sasakawa Peace Foundation, 2020). A smaller group of around 400 Rohingyas resides in Nepal, where they face unique challenges due to the lack of official refugee recognition (Mahat, 2020; Onlinekhabar, 2019). Bangladesh has enacted an encampment policy to manage this influx, concentrating refugees in

designated camps to minimize strain on local resources and reduce conflicts (Jacobsen, 1996). In contrast, Nepal, not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, does not recognize the Rohingya as refugees and offers no encampment policy, leading to informal settlements (UN Digital Library Nepal, n.d).

Encampment policies, while intended to manage refugees effectively, have been debated in the literature. Some argue these policies provide controlled environments that ease resource distribution and reduce local tensions (Betts, 2013; Milner, 2009). However, critics like Harrell-Bond (1986) and Malkki (1995) highlight that camps often become overcrowded, exacerbating vulnerabilities and creating divisions with host communities. Research from Kenya's Kakuma and Dadaab camps illustrates such tensions, where resource competition led to local resentment (Ali & Ocha, 2018). Similarly, in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar, perceptions of preferential aid to refugees have fueled host community dissatisfaction (UNHCR, 2024).

Despite these insights, limited research has focused on how encampment policies shape long-term host community perceptions, which are crucial for refugee integration. Existing studies primarily address the immediate humanitarian response and economic impacts, with less attention to how these perceptions evolve and influence refugee futures. This research aims to fill this gap by comparing the effects of encampment policies in Bangladesh with the absence of such policies in Nepal, providing a novel perspective on the socio-political dynamics between host communities and refugees.

The paper is structured as follows: Sect. "Theoretical foundations and Long-Term effects of encampment policies on refugees future" provides a literature review on how encampment policies impact the perceptions of host communities. Section. "Study Design, data used in this study, and the results of the questionnaire survey, which describe respondents' perceptions towards the Rohingya refugees. The empirical model and results are discussed in Sect. "Discussion", and the conclusion is presented in Sect. "Conclusion".

Theoretical foundations and long-term effects of encampment policies on refugees' future

Encampment policies, which restrict refugees to designated camps, have long-term implications for their futures, particularly in protracted situations. These policies shape not only the daily lives of refugees but also host community perceptions, which, in turn, influence the opportunities available to refugees and their future prospects.

This study draws on diverse theoretical perspectives to explore the socio-political dynamics of refugee management and host community relations, crucial for understanding the long-term effects of encampment policies. Central to this analysis are Hannah Arendt's insights on statelessness, which highlight the existential plight of refugees who, lacking national protection, often face hostility (Arendt & May, 1958). James C. Scott critiques state-centered governance, arguing that top-down policies may overlook the complex interactions between refugees and host communities, creating oversimplified narratives (Scott, 2020).

Social Identity Theory by Turner and Tajfel (1986) further enriches our framework. It suggests that host communities categorize refugees based on ethnicity, religion, and perceived economic threat, which shapes their perceptions. Encampment policies, which segregate refugees, exacerbate alienation and negative perceptions (Hossain, 2022),

limiting refugees' access to jobs, housing, and services. Betts (2009) and Crisp (2003) argue, such policies may reduce competition but foster resentment, as host communities perceive preferential treatment for refugees, further alienating them.

Encampment policies have a multifaceted impact on refugees' futures, particularly by creating barriers to integration and fostering perceptions of economic dependency. These policies often lead to social isolation, as refugees are confined to camps, reinforcing their outsider status and stigmatization. Malkki (1995) notes that physical separation limits refugees' access to education, employment, and social services. Harrell-Bond (2002) suggests that these policies portray refugees as dependent and helpless, reducing the likelihood of support for integrative policies and severely limiting their long-term prospects.

Economic dependency is another outcome, where refugees rely on aid rather than contributing to the local economy. Jacobsen (2005) and Werker (2007) discuss how this dependency is viewed negatively by host communities, often leading to resentment and hostility. When refugees are confined to camps and barred from participating in the local economy, it reinforces negative stereotypes and diminishes the likelihood of their integration into the broader society.

Security concerns tied to encampment policies also play a critical role. Landau (2003) highlights how refugees are often associated with insecurity, crime, and violence, leading to long-term restrictions on their movement, limited access to services, and ongoing surveillance. These perceptions hinder refugees' ability to build stable futures, affecting access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

Encampment policies also impact the psychological well-being of refugees. Agier (2011) discusses how prolonged confinement can lead to a loss of hope and motivation, particularly when refugees are aware of the negative perceptions held by host communities. This can create a cycle of despair, trapping refugees in a situation with limited prospects for social and economic mobility.

In Bangladesh, where a large number of Rohingya refugees are concentrated in camps, local infrastructure has been strained, exacerbating job competition and contributing to environmental degradation, particularly around the camps (Kamruzzaman, 2024). While the encampment policy was implemented to manage the massive influx of refugees, it has led to resentment among host communities, who perceive refugees as receiving preferential access to services such as healthcare and education. This has created significant tensions, particularly among local residents who feel that their resources are being stretched thin.

In Nepal, where the government does not officially recognize the Rohingya as refugees and lacks an encampment policy, socio-economic tensions have emerged despite the smaller number of refugees. Rohingyas in Nepal live in informal settlements with limited support, and perceptions of competition for resources have led to negative host community sentiments (UNHCR, 2024). While Nepal's lack of an encampment policy allows refugees greater mobility, it has not been accompanied by sufficient integration support, resulting in tensions around access to jobs, healthcare, and housing.

Both Bangladesh and Nepal highlight how perceptions shape the long-term integration of refugees. In Bangladesh, the encampment policy has led to physical segregation and reinforced divisions between refugees and host communities, fostering competition rather than cooperation (Kamruzzaman, 2024). In Nepal, the absence of a formal

encampment policy has led to economic competition, particularly among vulnerable groups, further exacerbating social tensions.

Proximity to refugee settlements is another key factor. Betts and Collier (2017) suggest that closer proximity increases resource competition and can either mitigate or amplify tensions, depending on existing community dynamics (Nyambedha et al., 2023; Whitaker, 2002). In Bangladesh, communities near Rohingya camps often perceive refugees as a burden due to strained resources (Mahmood et al., 2017). Encampment policies further isolate refugees, hindering social integration and fostering resentment (Wamara et al., 2022).

This framework guides our analysis of how encampment policies in Bangladesh and Nepal shape host community perceptions, focusing on the interplay of economic, social, and policy factors. Through this lens, we hypothesize:

- **H1:** In Bangladesh, wealthier individuals will perceive Rohingya refugees as less of an economic threat due to encampment restrictions.
- **H2:** In Nepal, negative perceptions will be stronger among younger and lower-income groups due to direct economic competition.
- **H3:** Social media use in Bangladesh will correlate with stronger anti-refugee sentiment.
- **H4:** Proximity to refugee settlements will influence host community perceptions, with varying effects based on country-specific policies.

Data collected in 2023 reveals that respondents in Bangladesh were between 0.3 km and 14 km from the camps, while in Nepal, respondents were between 0.06 km and 10 km from settlements.

Study design

With the encampment policy being adopted in Bangladesh and not in Nepal, the two countries were selected as the research locations. To calculate the target size required for sufficient statistical power, with the premise that the sample size does not change much for populations larger than 20,000 (RAOSOFT, 2020), a total of 998 individuals were interviewed (494 Nepalese and 504 Bangladeshis) in August 2023. This study utilized a stratified random sampling technique to ensure a representative cross-section of host community perceptions. Respondents were selected from both urban and rural settings proximate to refugee settlements to understand varying local dynamics. This approach acknowledges that urban and rural communities may experience different impacts from and reactions to the presence of refugees. Additionally, stratification was performed based on income levels and employment status, as economic factors are pivotal in shaping attitudes towards refugees. This division ensured the inclusion of both economically vulnerable and more stable segments of the population. Age and gender were also used as stratification variables to capture diverse viewpoints across different demographic groups, considering that perceptions may vary significantly across different age groups and between genders.

The survey was conducted through face-to-face interviews using questionnaires. Although the questionnaires were drafted in English, the interviews were conducted in Nepali and Bengali at the respondents' residences. It was noted that the respondents had a good understanding of the Nepali and Bengali languages. The purpose and background

of the research were explained to the participants, and they were informed that the data collected would ensure their anonymity. The respondents were also made aware that they had the right to refuse participation or withdraw their consent at any time.

Given the current policy frameworks in Bangladesh and Nepal, which do not provide pathways to citizenship for Rohingya children born in these countries, our survey questions exploring host community perceptions towards government policies and citizenship for newborns are based on hypothetical scenarios. This approach helps gauge public opinion against a backdrop of potential policy shifts.

The questionnaire consisted of five primary sections. The first section focused on gathering the respondents' sociodemographic characteristics. The second section delved into understanding the view of the host communities towards the Rohingyas segregated by the refugees gender and age. The third section aimed to assess the perceptions of the host communities towards the Rohingyas having access and rights. The fourth section looks into the extent of interactions between the host communities and the Rohingyas. Finally, the fifth section looked into the perceived positive and negative impacts of the Rohingyas.

Empirical analysis

Analytical frameworks

Given the study's focus on analyzing variations in perceptions, based on the encampment policy at the host country, across multiple demographic and socio-economic variables, OLS regression was employed. We estimate the following equation:

$$Y_n = \beta_{10} + \beta_{11}\text{Respondent Characteristics} + \beta_{12}\text{Rohingya interactions by age} \\ + \beta_{13}\text{Information sources} + \beta_{14}\text{Rohingya Interactions by place} \\ + \beta_{15}\text{Distance from camp} + \gamma \quad (1)$$

Here, Y_n represents the host community's view of government policies, citizenship for new born Rohingyas and access to healthcare, jobs, education and social security for the Rohingyas. Table 1., represents the descriptive statistics for variables relating to variables used in an Estimation model concerning views on government policies and access to resources of host respondents towards the Rohingya population settled in Nepal and bangladesh. The dependent variables were recorded as a 3-point likert scale. The mean view of government policies towards Rohingyas is 2.28 in nepal, with a standard deviation of 0.83, while in bangladesh. the mean is lower at 1.61 with a standard deviation of 0.70. Regarding citizenship for newborn rohingyas, respondents in Nepal have a mean score of 2.28 (standard deviation of 1.08), compared to a lower mean of 1.46 (standard deviation of 1.08) in bangladesh. The mean view of access to healthcare for Rohingyas is 1.96 in Nepal (standard deviation of 0.83), whereas it is slightly lower in bangladesh.at 1.61 (standard deviation of 0.83). In terms of access to jobs, respondents in Nepal have a mean score of 2.10 (standard deviation of 0.84), while in bangladesh. the mean is 1.40 (standard deviation of 0.84). The view of Rohingyas having access to education has a mean score of 1.97 in Nepal (standard deviation of 0.84) and 1.58 in bangladesh.(standard deviation of 0.84). For access to social security, the mean is 2.09 in Nepal (standard deviation of 0.85) and 1.57 in bangladesh.(standard deviation of 0.75).

The average age of respondents is 36.75 years in and 35.23 years in Bangladesh. Respondents in Nepal have an average of 9.27 years of education, compared to 4.65

Table 1. Description of variables used in estimation

Variable	Definition	Nepal		Bangladesh	
Dependent variables		Mean	Sth. Dev.	Mean	Sth. Dev.
View of Government Policies	View of government policies implemented	2.28	0.83	1.61	0.70
Citizenship for New Born	View of new born Rohingyas having citizenship	2.28	1.08	1.46	1.08
Access to Healthcare	View of Rohingya having access to healthcare	1.96	0.83	1.61	0.83
Access to Jobs	View of Rohingya having a job	2.10	0.84	1.40	0.84
Access to Education	View of Rohingya having access to education	1.97	0.84	1.58	0.84
Access to Social Security	View of Rohingya having a social security	2.09	0.85	1.57	0.75
Explanatory variables					
Age	Age (years)	36.75	12.48	35.23	12.48
Education	Years of Education	9.27	5.02	4.65	5.08
Muslim	Take 1, if respondent is a Muslim	0.01	0.08	0.97	0.08
Christian	Take 1, if respondent is a Christian	0.02	0.16	-	-
Hindu*	Take 1, if respondent is a Hindu	0.89	0.30	0.03	0.16
Buddhist	Take 1, if respondent is a Buddhist	0.04	0.21	-	-
Kiranti	Take 1, if respondent is a Kiranti	0.01	0.13	-	-
Income					
Income 1	Take 1, if respondents' income is below 150,000 NPR	0.30	0.46	0.10	0.48
Income 2	Take 1, if respondents' income is between 150,000 to 250,000 NPR	0.34	0.47	0.17	0.46
Income 3*	Take 1, if respondents' income is between 250,000 to 350,000 NPR	0.19	0.39	0.40	0.47
Income 4	Take 1, if respondents' income is between 350,000 to 450,000 NPR	0.11	0.31	0.28	0.31
Income 5	Take 1, if respondents' income is above 450,000 NPR	0.03	0.17	0.02	0.17
Family Migrants	Take 1, if respondent has a family member/colleague/friend from another country	0.19	0.39	0.46	0.49
Migrated Family Members	Take 1, if respondent's family member/friend/colleague has migrated.	0.29	0.45	0.74	0.45
Interactions by Age					
Below 18	Take 1, if respondent interacts with refugees below 18 years of old	0.64	0.47	0.03	0.47
19-35	Take 1, if respondent interacts with refugees between 19 years –35 years of old	0.78	0.41	0.57	0.41
36-50*	Take 1, if respondent interacts with refugees between 36 years- 50 years of old	0.23	0.42	0.58	0.42
51-70	Take 1, if respondent interacts with refugees between 51 years- 70years of old	0.03	0.17	0.06	0.17
Above 70	Take 1, if respondent interacts with refugees above 70 years of old.	0.02	0.14	-	-
Information sources					
Newspapers	Take 1, if information source is Newspaper	0.04	0.20	0.23	0.35
Surroundings	Take 1, if information source is Surroundings	0.06	0.24	0.14	0.24
Television	Take 1, if information source is Television	0.06	0.24	0.18	0.24
Social Media	Take 1, if information source is social media	0.85	0.34	0.69	0.34
Relatives/Friends	Take 1, if information source is Relatives/Friends	0.85	0.35	0.36	0.48
Interactions by Place					
At home	Take 1, if interactions mostly happen at home	0.01	0.07	0.20	0.40
In public spaces	Take 1, if interactions mostly happen in public spaces	0.58	0.49	0.79	0.40
In shops	Take 1, if interactions mostly happen in shops	0.26	0.44	0.08	0.28

Table 1 (continued)

Explanatory variables					
Camp	Take 1, if interactions mostly happen in camp	-	-	0.02	0.14
Distance from Camp	Distance of home from camp (in metres)	1155.30	2145.54	6157.70	2145.64

Source: Own Survey, 2023 Note: *: base category

years in Bangladesh. A very small percentage of respondents in Nepal are Muslim, while almost all respondents in Bangladesh are Muslim. A small percentage of respondents in Nepal are Christian, with this not applicable in Bangladesh. The majority of respondents in Nepal are Hindu, whereas in Bangladesh, a small fraction are Hindu. The mean score for respondents identifying as Buddhist is 0.04 in Nepal and 0.03 in Bangladesh. A small percentage of respondents in Nepal identify as Kiranti, with this not applicable in Bangladesh.

Income levels show that 30% of respondents in Nepal have an income below 150,000 NPR, while in Bangladesh, this figure is 10%. For income between 150,000 and 250,000 NPR, the mean is 0.34 in Nepal and 0.17 in Bangladesh. The mean for respondents with an income between 250,000 and 350,000 NPR is 0.21 in Nepal and 0.47 in Bangladesh. For income between 350,000 and 450,000 NPR, the mean is 0.11 in Nepal and 0.28 in Bangladesh. Only 3% of respondents in Nepal have an income above 450,000 NPR, compared to 17% in Bangladesh. The mean score for respondents with family members who have migrated is 0.19 in Nepal and 0.46 in Bangladesh. In terms of migrated family members, the mean is 0.29 in Nepal and 0.74 in Bangladesh.

Regarding interactions with refugees by age group, the mean for interactions with refugees below 18 years old is 0.64 in Nepal and 0.03 in Bangladesh. For interactions with refugees aged 19–35 years, the mean is 0.78 in Nepal and 0.57 in Bangladesh. The base category for interactions with refugees aged 36–50 years has a mean of 0.23 in Nepal and 0.58 in Bangladesh. For interactions with refugees aged 51–70 years, the mean is 0.03 in Nepal and 0.06 in Bangladesh. The mean for interactions with refugees above 70 years old is 0.02 in Nepal, with this not applicable in Bangladesh.

In terms of information sources, the mean score for newspapers is 0.04 in Nepal and 0.23 in Bangladesh. The mean for information sourced from surroundings is 0.06 in Nepal and 0.14 in Bangladesh. For television, the mean is 0.06 in Nepal and 0.18 in Bangladesh. Social media is a primary source of information, with a mean of 0.85 in Nepal and 0.69 in Bangladesh. Information sourced from relatives or friends also has a high mean of 0.85 in Nepal compared to 0.36 in Bangladesh.

Lastly, the mean score for interactions mostly happening at home is 0.01 in Nepal and 0.40 in Bangladesh.

Estimation results

In our regression analysis, we use the term favorability to denote the degree of supportive or positive sentiment that host community respondents hold toward granting Rohingya refugees various rights and services. These perceptions were captured through Likert-scale survey questions on issues such as citizenship for Rohingya children, the right to work (jobs), access to education and healthcare, and inclusion in social security benefits. Higher Likert scores correspond to more favorable (more supportive) views toward refugees receiving these rights and services, whereas lower scores indicate less favorable (more negative or oppositional) attitudes. This clarification is important for

interpreting the results that follow: a positive regression coefficient implies an association with increased favorability (stronger support for refugee rights), while a negative coefficient implies an association with decreased favorability (weaker support or more restrictive views).

Tables 2 and 3 present the results of an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analysis. In Nepal (Model 1), older respondents tended to have slightly less favorable views on government policies toward Rohingyas, with age showing a coefficient of -0.01 (significant at the 1% level). Education also had a negative impact in Nepal (coefficient = -0.04 , 1% significance), indicating that more educated respondents held less favorable views on these policies. Religious affiliation did not show a significant effect in this model; the coefficients for Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, and Kiranti respondents were all statistically insignificant. Income played a role: the lowest income group (Income 1) showed less favorable views (coefficient = -0.32 , significant at 1%), and Income 2 displayed a similar trend (coefficient = -0.20 , significant at 10%). Conversely, having friends who were migrants was linked to more favorable views (coefficient = 0.28 , significant at 1%), whereas having migrated family members correlated with less favorable views (coefficient = -0.20 , significant at 5%). Positive interactions with refugees under 18 and those aged 19–35 were associated with more favorable views (coefficients = 0.17 at 5% and 0.15 at 10%, respectively). Obtaining information from newspapers was strongly linked to more favorable views (coefficient = 0.56 , significant at 1%), while obtaining information from one's immediate surroundings correlated with less favorable views (coefficient = -0.28 , significant at 10%).

In Bangladesh (Model 1), age did not significantly affect respondents' views on government policies (coefficient = 0.00). Education, however, had a positive impact (coefficient = 0.01 , significant at 5%), indicating that higher education was associated with more favorable views. The lowest income group (Income 1) held more favorable views (coefficient = 0.25 , significant at 5%), while Income 4 showed less favorable views (coefficient = -0.17 , significant at 5%). Having friends who were migrants was linked to less favorable views in Bangladesh (coefficient = -0.16 , significant at 5%), and interaction with refugees under 18 was associated with less favorable views (coefficient = -0.38 , significant at 5%). Additionally, obtaining information from social media was associated with less favorable views (coefficient = -0.56 , significant at 1%), and greater distance from the camp had a small but significant negative effect on favorability (coefficient = -0.00 , significant at 10%). These results for Model 1 reflect how demographics and information sources relate to the favorability of views on government policy toward Rohingyas in the two countries.

In Nepal (Model 2), which examines support for granting citizenship to Rohingya newborns, older respondents were less supportive of this right. Neither education nor religious affiliation had a significant effect on favorability in this case. The lowest income group (Income 1) again showed less favorable views. Meanwhile, having friends who were migrants was associated with more favorable views on granting citizenship, and getting information from newspapers was also linked to more favorable views.

In Bangladesh (Model 2), age did not significantly affect views on citizenship for Rohingya newborns. Higher education was associated with more favorable views, suggesting educated respondents in Bangladesh were more supportive of granting citizenship. Religious affiliation and higher income groups did not show significant effects.

Table 2 Estimation results for view of government policies and citizenship for new born

Variables	View of Government Policies (Model 1)		Citizenship for new born (Model 2)	
	Nepal	Bangladesh	Nepal	Bangladesh
Age	−0.01 (0.00***)	0.00 (0.48)	−0.01 (0.00***)	0.00 (0.08*)
Education	− 0.04 (0.00***)	0.01 (0.04**)	−0.01 (0.38)	0.01 (0.00***)
Hindu	0.36 (0.38)	0.02 (0.91)	0.11 (0.83)	−0.17 (0.34)
Christian	0.50 (0.28)	-	0.74 (0.22)	-
Buddhist	0.35 (0.43)	-	0.19 (0.74)	-
Kiranti	0.41 (0.41)	-	0.42 (0.51)	-
Income1	− 0.32 (0.00***)	0.25 (0.02**)	−0.41 (0.00***)	0.17 (0.17)
Income 2	− 0.20 (0.05*)	−0.07 (0.39)	−0.19 (0.14)	0.01 (0.81)
Income 4	0.07 (0.56)	−0.17 (0.02**)	0.15 (0.37)	−0.13 (0.14)
Income 5	−0.57 (0.01**)	−0.27 (0.21)	−0.11 (0.69)	−0.31 (0.21)
Friend Migrants	0.28 (0.00***)	−0.16 (0.03**)	0.31 (0.01**)	0.04 (0.07*)
Migrated Family Members	− 0.20 (0.01**)	−0.04 (0.57)	−0.11 (0.32)	−0.15 (0.07*)
Below 18	0.17 (0.02**)	−0.38 (0.02**)	0.11 (0.27)	−0.16 (0.35)
19–35	0.15 (0.10*)	−0.09 (0.14)	−0.03 (0.80)	−0.09 (0.20)
51–70	0.07 (0.76)	−0.21 (0.10*)	−0.45 (0.17)	0.77 (0.00***)
Above 70	−0.34 (0.29)	0.11 (0.17)	0.76 (0.06*)	-
Newspapers	0.56 (0.00***)	0.11 (0.17)	0.40 (0.10*)	−0.00 (0.98)
Surroundings	−0.28 (0.08*)	0.09 (0.45)	−0.48 (0.02**)	0.09 (0.53)
Television	0.18 (0.26)	−0.12 (0.29)	−0.26 (0.21)	−0.16 (0.15)
Social Media	−0.21 (0.65)	−0.56 (0.00***)	−0.05 (0.93)	−0.72 (0.00***)
Relatives/Friends	0.15 (0.75)	0.09 (0.26)	0.09 (0.87)	0.07 (0.39)
At home	0.08 (0.77)	−0.01 (0.84)	1.04 (0.00***)	0.16 (0.07*)
In public spaces	−0.07 (0.32)	−0.11 (0.16)	0.24 (0.59)	−0.02 (0.72)
In shops	0.07 (0.38)	−0.05 (0.59)	0.05 (0.93)	−0.32 (0.00***)
Camp	-	0.39 (0.07*)	-	−0.11 (0.51))
Distance from Camp	2.69e (0.88)	−0.00 (0.10*)	−1.89e (0.96)	0.00 (0.22)
_Cons	2.71 (0.00)	2.16 (0.00)	2.89 (0.00)	1.62 (0.00)

Table 2 (continued)

Variables	View of Government Policies (Model 1)		Citizenship for new born (Model 2)	
	Nepal	Bangladesh	Nepal	Bangladesh
Adjusted R-squared	0.09	0.19	0.10	0.28
Number of Respondents	494	506	494	506

Source: Authors survey, 2023. Note: * = $p < .10$, ** = $p < .05$, *** = $p < .01$

Having friends who were migrants was slightly associated with more favorable, but having family members who had migrated showed a negative association. Notably, interaction with refugees over 70 years old correlated with more favorable views on citizenship, whereas obtaining information from shops correlated with less favorable views. The statistical findings reveal varying degrees of favorability towards government policies and the rights of Rohingya to citizenship, with distinct differences between the host communities in both countries. This variance is particularly significant given that neither Bangladesh nor Nepal currently offers a legal framework for granting citizenship to Rohingya children born within their borders.

In Nepal (Model 3), which focuses on views about Rohingya access to healthcare, age did not significantly influence favorability. Education also showed no significant effect on these views. Income had some influence: the highest income group (Income 5) exhibited less favorable views on healthcare access for refugees. Social connections had mixed effects — having family members who were migrants was linked to more favorable views, while having migrated family members (perhaps indicating family who moved away) correlated with less favorable views. Interaction with refugees under 18 and those aged 19–35 was associated with more favorable views on healthcare access. However, obtaining information from social media was associated with less favorable views, and distance from the camp had a very small but significant positive effect, meaning those farther from the camp were slightly more favorable.

In Bangladesh (Model 3), age likewise did not significantly affect views on healthcare access for Rohingyas. Higher education was linked to more favorable views, indicating education tends to increase support for refugee healthcare access. Christians (a very small minority in the Bangladesh sample) showed marginally more favorable views than Muslims. The highest income group (Income 5) was associated with more favorable views on healthcare, in contrast to Nepal's pattern. Having family members who had migrated was also linked to more favorable views. Interaction with refugees under 18 was associated with more favorable views. On the other hand, obtaining information from social media was associated with less favorable views, and being farther from the camp had a significant negative effect on favorability (indicating that greater distance slightly reduced supportive views).

In Nepal (Model 4), addressing views on Rohingya access to jobs, age had a negative influence on favorability, meaning older respondents were less supportive of refugees working. Education and religious affiliation did not significantly affect these views in Nepal. Certain income groups showed less favorable attitudes: both the lowest and one of the higher income groups (Income 1 and Income 5) expressed less favorable views on job access for refugees. Having family members who were migrants was linked to more favorable views on refugees' job access, whereas having migrated family members corresponded to less favorable views. Positive interactions with younger refugees (under 18)

Table 3 Estimation results for host community's view on access

Variables	Access to Healthcare (MODEL 3)		Access to Jobs (MODEL 4)		Access to Education (MODEL 5)		Access to Social Security (MODEL 6)	
	Nepal	Bangladesh	Nepal	Bangladesh	Nepal	Bangladesh	Nepal	Bangladesh
Age	−0.00 (0.34)	−0.00 (0.36)	−0.01 (0.00***)	0.00 (0.36)	−0.00 (0.28)	−3.86e (0.99)	−0.00 (0.00***)	0.00 (0.81)
Education	−0.01 (0.02**)	0.00 (0.55)	−0.02 (0.00***)	0.00 (0.33)	−0.−1 (0.11)	0.00 (0.85)	−0.02 (0.00***)	0.01 (0.05)
Hindu	0.36 (0.37)	−0.34 (0.05*)	0.43 (0.30)	−0.06 (0.68)	0.36 (0.38)	0.43 (0.01**)	−0.01 (0.96)	−0.22 (0.23)
Christian	0.32 (0.49)	-	0.65 (0.17)	-	0.21 (0.65)	-	−0.26 (0.58)	-
Buddhist	0.60 (0.18)	-	0.47 (0.29)	-	0.56 (0.21)	-	0.08 (0.86)	-
Kiranti	0.45 (0.36)	-	0.47 (0.35)	-	0.39 (0.43)	-	0.00 (0.98)	-
Income1	−0.15 (0.13)	0.09 (0.34)	−0.31 (0.00***)	0.12 (0.17)	−0.13 (0.19)	0.00 (0.94)	−0.31 (0.00***)	0.17 (0.09*)
Income 2	0.00 (0.95)	−0.07 (0.34)	−0.14 (0.16)	0.03 (0.63)	0.00 (0.92)	−0.20 (0.00***)	−0.07 (0.48)	−0.05 (0.58)
Income 4	−0.22 (0.10*)	−0.21 (0.00***)	−0.09 (0.48)	0.02 (0.68)	−0.28 (0.03**)	−0.11 (0.08*)	0.06 (0.64)	0.04 (0.57)
Income 5	−0.61 (0.00***)	−0.53 (0.00***)	−0.74 (0.00***)	−0.18 (0.31)	−0.65 (0.00***)	−0.13 (0.48)	−0.66 (0.00***)	−0.49 (0.01**)
Family Migrants	0.33 (0.00***)	−0.21 (0.00***)	0.34 (0.00***)	−0.14 (0.092**)	0.31 (0.00***)	0.03 (0.62)	0.29 (0.00***)	−0.18 (0.01**)
Migrated Family Members	−0.32 (0.00***)	0.16 (0.04**)	−0.16 (0.06*)	0.12 (0.09*)	−0.31 (0.00***)	0.19 (0.00***)	−0.16 (0.07*)	−0.09 (0.22)
Below 18	0.23 (0.00***)	0.19 (0.22)	0.15 (0.05*)	−0.09 (0.54)	0.22 (0.00***)	0.13 (0.30)	0.08 (0.29)	−0.00 (0.98)
19–35	0.15 (0.08*)	−0.09 (0.12)	0.13 (0.16)	−0.09 (0.10*)	0.14 (0.12)	0.00 (0.74)	0.04 (0.60)	−0.21 (0.00***)
51–70	−0.14 (0.55)	0.16 (0.17)	0.00 (0.97)	0.08 (0.48)	−0.18 (0.47)	0.19 (0.24)	0.21 (0.41)	0.04 (0.73)
Above 70	−0.49 (0.12)	-	−0.91 (0.00***)	-	−0.48 (0.13)	-	−0.82 (0.01**)	-
Newspapers	0.12 (0.49)	0.04 (0.55)	−0.01 (0.95)	−0.10 (0.17)	0.16 (0.38)	0.00 (0.95)	0.38 (0.04**)	−0.01 (0.86)
Surround- ings	−0.56 (0.00***)	−0.11 (0.30)	−0.28 (0.08*)	0.11 (0.28)	−0.51 (0.00***)	0.19 (0.05*)	−0.61 (0.00***)	0.25 (0.03**)
Television	−0.15 (0.32)	−0.10 (0.36)	−0.13 (0.41)	−0.07 (0.46)	−0.24 (0.13)	0.19 (0.06*)	0.00 (0.96)	−0.06 (0.58)
Social Media	0.30 (0.53)	−0.49 (0.00***)	0.16 (0.74)	−0.56 (0.00***)	0.18 (0.69)	−0.02 (0.81)	0.13 (0.78)	−0.32 (0.01**)
Relatives/ Friends	−0.56 (0.24)	−0.12 (0.09*)	−0.34 (0.48)	0.11 (0.11)	−0.47 (0.33)	−0.11 (0.11)	−0.29 (0.55)	0.10 (0.20)
At home	0.14 (0.61)	0.17 (0.02**)	−0.15 (0.59)	0.14 (0.05*)	0.10 (0.72)	0.04 (0.57)	0.39 (0.17)	0.13 (0.10*)
In public spaces	0.10 (0.16)	−0.00 (0.92)	0.00 (0.99)	0.04 (0.55)	0.06 (0.43)	−0.05 (0.45)	0.11 (0.17)	−0.07 (0.32)
In shops	0.12 (0.14)	−0.18 (0.06*)	−0.06 (0.45)	−0.24 (0.01**)	0.11 (0.17)	0.09 (0.31)	0.04 (0.57)	−0.11 (0.29)
Camp	-	−0.32 (0.10*)	-	−0.10 (0.58)	-	−0.41 (0.02**)	-	0.05 (0.79)
Distance from Camp	−0.00 (0.01**)	−1.46e (0.83)	−9.35e (0.60)	−3.03e (0.65)	−0.00 (0.02**)	−3.97e (0.55)	−0.00 (0.18)	8.89e (0.23)
_Cons	1.97 (0.00)	2.21 (0.00)	2.54 (0.00)	1.63 (0.00)	2.02 (0.00)	1.50 (0.00)	2.85 (0.00)	1.95 (0.00)

Table 3 (continued)

Variables	Access to Healthcare (MODEL 3)		Access to Jobs (MODEL 4)		Access to Education (MODEL 5)		Access to Social Security (MODEL 6)	
	Nepal	Bangladesh	Nepal	Bangladesh	Nepal	Bangladesh	Nepal	Bangladesh
Adjusted R-squared	0.12	0.18	0.09	0.17	0.11	0.11	0.09	0.15
Number of Respondents	494	506	494	506	494	506	494	506

Source: Authors survey, 2023 Note: * = $p < .10$, ** = $p < .05$, *** = $p < .01$

were associated with more favorable views, but interactions taking place mainly in the respondents' homes were linked to less favorable views on refugees working. Relying on information from one's surroundings was also associated with less favorable views.

In Bangladesh (Model 4), age did not show a significant effect on favorability toward Rohingya job access. Higher education corresponded to more favorable views on this issue. Being Hindu (a minority in the sample) was associated with more favorable views on refugees working. Income effects differed from Nepal: the lowest income group in Bangladesh showed more favorable views on refugee job access, while middle-income respondents (Income 3) were less favorable. Social ties mattered as well—having friends who were migrants was linked to more favorable views, and having family members who had migrated was also associated with more favorable views. Frequent interactions with refugees in general were associated with more favorable attitudes toward their employment, but if those interactions occurred primarily in the camp setting, they were linked to less favorable views. Obtaining information from newspapers was related to more favorable views on job access, in contrast to information from social media, which showed a negative (though not statistically significant) association.

In Nepal (Model 5), concerning views on Rohingya access to education, age had a small but significant negative effect on favorability, again suggesting older individuals were slightly less supportive of refugees accessing education. Education level did not significantly influence these views in Nepal. Hindus (the majority in Nepal's sample) tended to have more favorable views on refugee education access compared to others. However, the highest income group (Income 5) was associated with less favorable views. Having family members who were migrants was linked to more favorable views on education access for refugees, while having family members who had migrated out was correlated with less favorable. Interaction with refugees under 18 was positively associated with favorability toward refugee education. By contrast, obtaining information from social media in Nepal was associated with less favorable views, indicating that social media may have contributed to negative sentiments.

In Bangladesh (Model 5), age did not significantly affect views on access to education for Rohingya refugees. Education was linked to more favorable views, consistent with the pattern that more educated respondents are more supportive of refugee rights. The highest income group (Income 5) in Bangladesh was associated with less favorable views on refugee education, mirroring Nepal's trend for high income. Having family members who were migrants was associated with more favorable views. Meanwhile, information obtained from social media correlated with less favorable views on refugees' access to education, suggesting a negative influence similar to the Nepal findings for social media use.

In Nepal (Model 6), which examines views on Rohingya access to social security benefits, age had a significant negative effect on favorability, indicating older respondents were much less supportive of extending social security to refugees. Education did not significantly influence these views. Hindus in Nepal tended to have more favorable views on refugees' social security access. Both the lowest and the highest income groups (Income 1 and Income 5) showed less favorable views, suggesting that very low and very high income respondents were more opposed than middle-income respondents. Having family members who were migrants was slightly associated with more favorable views, while having family members who had migrated was correlated with less favorable views. Interaction with refugees under 18 was associated with more favorable views on social security access, but interactions occurring in camp settings were linked to less favorable views, perhaps reflecting that casual, outside interactions foster sympathy whereas encounters in camps reinforce negative perceptions.

In Bangladesh (Model 6), neither age nor education had a significant effect on favorability toward refugees' access to social security (not significant). The highest income group (Income 5) also did not show a significant influence on these views. Having family members who were migrants was slightly associated with more favorable views. Interaction with refugees under 18 was positively associated with supportive views on social security access, indicating even in Bangladesh, positive experiences with refugee children can increase support. However, interactions in commercial settings (e.g., shops) were linked to less favorable views. Overall, these estimation results highlight how demographic factors, personal connections, and information sources relate to the favorability of host community perceptions in each country, with higher Likert scores reflecting more positive attitudes toward Rohingya refugees' rights and services, and lower scores reflecting more negative attitudes.

Discussion

Our analysis reveals the complex ways in which encampment policies in Bangladesh, and their absence in Nepal, shape host community perceptions towards Rohingya refugees. These perceptions not only reflect current societal attitudes but also influence potential future interactions between host communities and refugees. In Bangladesh, the encampment policy mitigates some economic tensions by physically segregating refugees and limiting their access to local job markets. This policy aligns with our findings that wealthier segments perceive less economic competition from refugees, suggesting that the policy may protect local jobs and reduce direct economic threats. However, this protective measure fosters a physical and psychological distance between the communities, exacerbating misconceptions and prejudices against refugees, as highlighted by the negative sentiments fueled by misinformation through social media.

In contrast, Nepal's non-encampment approach, while allowing greater refugee mobility and proximity to host populations, has not been accompanied by sufficient integration support. This leads to heightened perceptions of competition for jobs, services, and housing—particularly among economically vulnerable host groups. Our findings show that younger individuals and those with lower incomes tend to hold more negative perceptions, indicating the urgent need for economic and social policies that promote shared prosperity and cohesion.

While economic competition is an important factor influencing host community perceptions, it is essential to recognize that the dynamics between hosts and refugees are also deeply influenced by cultural and historical factors. These factors, such as ethnic and religious prejudices, play a significant role in shaping the perceptions and interactions between the two groups. For instance, in both Bangladesh and Nepal, historical tensions and religious differences between the Rohingya refugees and local populations can exacerbate negative attitudes towards refugees, irrespective of their economic impact.

In Bangladesh, the majority Muslim population's perception of Rohingya refugees, also predominantly Muslim, could still be influenced by local ethnic divisions or historical conflicts, which may complicate the integration process. Similarly, in Nepal, the lack of formal refugee recognition combined with a predominantly Hindu population may contribute to cultural and religious misunderstandings that further alienate the Rohingya refugees, despite the absence of encampment policies.

However, this binary comparison—between encampment and non-encampment—oversimplifies the spectrum of refugee policy options available. A critical gap in current practice in both countries is the lack of exploration of alternative or hybrid models that have shown promise elsewhere. For example, Uganda's self-reliance model offers a promising alternative to encampment policies by allowing refugees to move freely, access public services, and engage in economic activities. This model has helped refugees contribute to local economies, reducing dependency on aid and fostering better integration with host communities (Betts et al., 2019). Given the large refugee population, Bangladesh could adapt Uganda's model by creating designated zones where refugees can work and access livelihoods. Providing refugees with land or employment opportunities in sectors like agriculture or trade could reduce economic tensions and improve local perceptions of refugees. However, this would require careful management of resources and coordination between the government and international organizations to balance economic integration with infrastructure limitations. Similarly, Ethiopia's Out-of-Camp Policy (OCP) enables refugees to live outside camps if they can support themselves or have sponsors, which fosters integration and relieves pressure on host communities (Asabu, 2018).

Both countries could also learn from Turkey's temporary protection regime, which provides legal status, access to work permits, and education, helping integrate Syrian refugees into urban settings while maintaining national control over migration policy (Çorabatır, 2016). In Nepal, formalizing refugee registration, expanding access to vocational training, and fostering local partnerships could reduce informal labor market tensions and facilitate more harmonious coexistence. These models illustrate that legal recognition, mobility rights, and structured economic participation can enhance integration and mitigate host resentment more effectively than either strict encampment or unmanaged informal settlement.

Demographic factors such as age and income also significantly shape these perceptions. Across both countries, younger and economically vulnerable groups tend to view refugees more negatively, likely due to perceived economic threats from refugees competing for limited job opportunities and social services. This demographic pattern underscores the need for targeted community engagement and economic support programs to address specific fears and challenges faced by these groups.

The results from Models 1 and 2, focusing on views of government policies and citizenship for newborns, further illustrate these differences. In Nepal, younger individuals and those with lower incomes are more likely to hold negative views of government policies regarding refugees. This reflects a broader sense of frustration among these groups who may feel that the government is not addressing their needs amidst growing competition with refugees. In contrast, in Bangladesh, the significant role of social media in shaping negative perceptions is evident, likely exacerbated by the physical and social segregation created by the encampment policy.

Models 3 through 6, which examined access to healthcare, jobs, education, and social security, further illustrate how different policies shape local attitudes toward refugees. In Bangladesh, the positive association between higher income and access to jobs for refugees suggests that wealthier members of the host community feel less threatened by refugee competition, likely due to the economic restrictions imposed by the encampment policy. This finding aligns with Betts and Collier's argument that encampment policies can reduce tensions by limiting refugee access to local labor markets. In contrast, in Nepal, where no such policy exists, refugees are seen as direct competitors for scarce social services, significantly straining relations between the host community and refugees, especially among economically vulnerable groups.

This differentiation in perceptions can be attributed to the economic buffer that encampment creates. Wealthier individuals often have less direct dependency on the sectors where refugees would typically find employment, which are more often tapped by lower-income locals. Moreover, perceptions of economic threat are not solely influenced by actual job competition but are also shaped by the socio-economic integration policies or lack thereof. For instance, Jacobsen (2005) discusses how encampments can lead to economic stagnation for refugees but can protect local jobs, which might explain the lesser threat felt by wealthier groups in encamped settings. This perspective is supported by research from Werker (2007), who noted that encampment policies could reduce negative stereotypes among host communities by limiting refugees' economic activities.

The findings highlight that encampment policies may exacerbate pre-existing economic disparities in perceptions towards refugees. In Bangladesh, such policies shield wealthier individuals from the economic impacts of refugees by limiting their access to the local job market. This reinforces the economic security of wealthier individuals, who are generally less dependent on sectors likely to employ refugees. Conversely, in Nepal, the absence of encampment policies exposes all societal segments to direct competition with refugees for jobs and resources. This disproportionately impacts lower-income individuals who rely more on the same job markets as refugees, illustrating a critical point: while encampment policies affect perceptions, the underlying economic status of individuals is a key factor in shaping these perceptions. Wealthier individuals may inherently feel less threatened by refugees, benefiting from broader economic security—a situation that policy measures restricting refugee economic participation tend to amplify.

Further research (Verme, 2023; Taylor et al., 2016) supports that wealthier individuals often feel less economically threatened by refugees, attributed to their minimal reliance on sectors where refugees find employment, such as informal labor markets, and their reduced dependence on strained public resources. Comparative studies across various contexts, both with and without encampment policies, demonstrate that the economic

impact of refugees can significantly vary based on local economic conditions and the nature of the host community's engagement with refugees. In some instances, the presence of refugees has spurred economic expansion and created new opportunities for local businesses, which can mitigate perceptions of economic threat among wealthier individuals.

Moreover, the negative impacts, such as increased competition for jobs and downward pressure on wages, tend to be more acutely felt by lower-income individuals. These individuals often find themselves in direct competition with refugees for jobs, aligning with theories that suggest economic threats from refugees are more pronounced among economically vulnerable groups. These insights indicate that while encampment policies may influence the visibility and direct economic impact of refugees, the broader economic status significantly shapes perceptions towards them.

Conclusion

This research provides significant insights into how the adoption of encampment policies shapes the perceptions of host communities towards Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and Nepal and offers implications for the future of these refugees in both countries. By providing empirical evidence from less-studied regions like Bangladesh and Nepal, the study enriches the discussions initiated by scholars like Betts and Collier, who have largely focused on more generalized frameworks of refugee and host community interactions.

In Bangladesh, where an encampment policy is implemented, the study finds that wealthier segments of the host population perceive less economic threat from refugees, particularly in the job market. This suggests that the encampment policy may help to alleviate economic tensions by restricting refugees' participation in local economies, thereby reducing direct competition with locals. However, the study also highlights the negative role of social media in amplifying anti-refugee sentiments, particularly concerning a hypothetical issue of granting citizenship to refugee newborns. This points to significant challenges in social cohesion and integration, as negative perceptions continue to be fueled by media narratives. If these trends persist, the future of the Rohingyas in Bangladesh may be marked by ongoing social polarization, despite the economic stability perceived by wealthier host community members. The key to improving long-term relations may lie in carefully crafted policies that gradually allow for economic integration while addressing the concerns of the host community and mitigating the negative influence of social media.

In Nepal, the absence of an encampment policy is correlated with negative perceptions among younger and economically vulnerable groups, who view government policies towards refugees more critically. This suggests that, in the absence of spatial and economic separation, refugees may be seen as direct competitors for scarce resources, leading to increased tensions within the host community. The future of the Rohingyas in Nepal may involve growing challenges related to access to social services and economic opportunities if these perceptions are not addressed. Potential friction could arise, particularly if economic conditions worsen or refugee populations grow. To prevent such outcomes, Nepal might need to implement policies that focus on reducing competition for resources between refugees and host communities, particularly by providing targeted support to vulnerable groups within the host population.

Our study significantly contributes to the discourse on refugee integration and host community relations by providing comparative insights from Bangladesh and Nepal. It highlights the complexity of policy impacts on local perceptions and calls for a more nuanced approach that considers both economic and social dimensions. While the quantitative data has revealed important trends, future research could benefit from a mixed methods approach to capture the contextual and experiential dimensions of refugee-host interactions more comprehensively. We acknowledge that variables such as perceptions of social integration and economic competition are inherently multi-dimensional and that representing them through single survey items may not capture the full complexity of these constructs. However, given the scope of this study and the constraints of field-based survey research in refugee-host contexts, we adopted a parsimonious measurement approach to enable broader comparative analysis across diverse demographic groups. These proxy indicators were carefully designed and pilot-tested to reflect the dominant dimensions of community perceptions. Nonetheless, we recognize the value of employing composite indices or qualitative dimensions in future studies to unpack the nuanced interplay between economic concerns, identity, and integration sentiments among host communities. Future policies should aim to mitigate the negative perceptions fostered by encampment policies while enhancing the potential for economic and social integration of refugees. Additionally, this research opens avenues for further studies to explore the role of digital information dissemination in shaping public opinions about refugees, which could be pivotal in designing effective communication strategies. Thus, our findings not only add depth to the academic understanding of refugee-host dynamics but also offer practical guidance for enhancing the effectiveness of refugee management policies. Hence, the future of the Rohingyas in both Bangladesh and Nepal will likely depend on how well each country manages the economic and social integration of the refugees.

Author contributions

All authors have accepted responsibility for the entire content of this manuscript and consented to its submission to the journal, reviewed all the results and approved the final version of the manuscript. MK contributed to the conception and design of the study, data collection, analysis, and interpretation of results. She also drafted the initial manuscript and served as the corresponding author, overseeing all stages of the revision process. NK contributed to the design of the study, assisted with data analysis, and provided critical revisions to the manuscript. She also reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript for submission.

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Data availability

Data to be made available upon request.

Declarations**Ethics approval**

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from Tohoku University.

Consent to participate

The online survey included a consent statement at the beginning of the questionnaire, providing participants with a clear explanation of the study's purpose and their rights. It specified that by proceeding with the survey, participants were providing their consent. For instance, the statement clarified, 'If you do not agree, please do not continue with the survey.' This ensured that participation in the survey was understood as consent.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests in relation to this research paper.

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