Strangers and Settlers: Migration politics in a local's world

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Do people have special rights in a place if they are one of the locals? The belief that they do is common worldwide. Yet, entitlement to place has little role in most accounts of migration politics. Instead, accounts of migration politics are a showdown between culture and economics, in-group identities and material incentives. *Strangers and Settlers* moves past that stand-off by considering domestic and international migration simultaneously. Being local is normative even within national and ethnic groups. It also cuts across political ideologies. Both domestic and international migration politics takes place within that pro-local status quo. Normal migration politics is locals arguing among themselves over stranger management. Destabilizing migration politics is the struggle to refound what local means. Using information from censuses, public opinion, mobility laws, and political parties, *Strangers and Settlers* describes a world of nested hierarchies of locals, offering new insights about migration patterns, mobility restrictions, and the origins of anti-migrant populism.

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ALL POLITICS IS LOCALS

After all the success that anti-immigration populists have had—Donald Trump back in the White House, Brexit a reality—it would be easy to conclude that people care a lot about who has lived where and for how long. Most commentators on migration politics are pretty sure they don't, though. Not really. People care about mobility across lines of identity and political affiliation, especially national and/or ethno-racial lines. "If there were no borders, there would be no migration—only mobility."[1]

Since people do not really mind migration, anti-immigration politics must be about something else. The prime suspects are "economics" and "culture."[2] "Some denounce the upsurge of populism as little more than a racist, xenophobic reaction against immigrants and multiculturalism. Others see it mainly in economic terms, as a protest against the job losses brought about by global trade and new technologies."[3] Is anti-globalization sentiment anger at the cosmopolitan, knowledge-economy elite,[4] with traditional parties of the left splitting between their "beer drinkers" and "wine drinkers"?[5] Or is that populist rhetoric little more than "a euphemism for a racialized [White] identity politics?"[6]

Academics are on the case, asking is anti-immigration politics "culture or economics?"[7] Are "the main drivers of [populism's] recent (and past) rise mostly economic or cultural?".[8] "Could it be that populism is rooted not in economics but in a cultural divide?"[9] Of course, economics and culture might be in league: "desires for a welfare state and desires for a nation-state are not easy to distinguish in everyday life."[10]

1 De Genova 2017, p. 6.
2 Hainmueller and Daniel J Hopkins (2014) label the options "political economy" or "sociopsychological."
3 Sandel 2018.
4 Calhoun 2016; Gusterson 2017, p. 210.
5 Bale 2014.
6 Bhambra 2017, p. 227.
7 Alesina and Tabellini 2024.
8 Guriev and Papaioannou 2022, p. 755.
9 Rodrik 2021, p. 133.
10 Brković 2016, p. 497.

Research shows that attitudes about both nation-states and welfare states inform popular views on immigration. Those patterns should not obscure another truism: being local is normative.

This book is about the political implications of a belief: the conviction that places belong to locals who have rights there that newcomers and would-be migrants do not have. This belief is not reducible to nationalism, ethnocentrism, racism, or concern for state sovereignty. It is compatible with them. But pro-local beliefs are older than all of those ideas and lend them plausibility.

1.1 CATEGORIES OF MIGRATION POLITICS

I have a migration commentary pet peeve. It is a US pundit or academic marveling at the "cognitive dissonance"[11] of American descendants of immigrants opposing further immigration. I do see the contradiction. The trope irks me because it overestimates the uniqueness of American hypocrisy. It is common for people to claim a special right to a place that they also believe their ancestors migrated to—and I am not just referring to Canadians. Peter Geschiere (2009) begins his monograph *The Perils of Belonging* with this point:

> In Cameroon, for instance, Beti and Bulu people now proudly proclaim to be *autochtones*—"born from the soil"—of the forest area in the south of the country. Yet the same Beti/Bulu may clinch arguments over to whom the forest "really" belongs with the simple statement . . . "the forest is ours because we conquered it," referring to their epic immigration from the savannah southward into the forest 150 to 200 years ago. . . . [In the Netherlands], genealogy has become a favorite pastime, leading often to the proud discovery of some Huguenot ancestor who entered the country fleeing French "Papists" in the seventeenth century. Despite these roots, today many Dutch identify themselves as *autochtonene*.[12]

There are scores of examples of anti-migration movements among people who believe their ancestors were some combination of migrants, refugees, and conquerors. The cognitive dissonance is apparently tolerable.

Marveling at immigrant-descended nativists is a symptom of how both popular and academic thinking about migration politics is organized. Mobility is sorted relative to what kind of political or cultural line someone crosses and episodes of migration politics are siloed accordingly. Movements across lines of nationality are a category of

11 Foley 2022, p. 296.
12 Geschiere 2009, pp. ix–x.

their own; backlash against international migrants is almost never compared to rancor over domestic migration.[13] Domestic anti-migration movements are called "separatism" or "sub-nationalism" if the locals seem nation-like, as in Quebec or Catalonia. If anger over migration involves indigenous identity, that is a separate category. Anti-migration activism that involves non-indigenous people in a poor country is a "sons of the soil" movement. In a rich country, rancor over internal migration is, depending on the groups involved, anti-gentrification politics, segregationism, or nimbyism.

Within the narrow range of cases that the US is routinely juxtaposed against, its immigrant-descended population seems unique. Indeed, reading the reams of commentary on populists in the US and Europe, it would be easy to get the idea that anti-migration movements never involve domestic mobility, impoverished economies, non-democracies, or, really, anything but the US/Mexico border and the Mediterranean Sea.

Every episode of migration politics touches on the belief that places belong to locals who have rights to benefit from those places that non-locals do not have. Localness, like ethnicity, race, and nationality is a socially constructed category. It is, admittedly, not a literal record of who has lived where and for how long. It is tempting to go back to where we usually start: divide the concept of localness up based on what it is that the locals say makes them the locals, which is never the mere fact of their physical presence in a place. By dividing localness up we would likely recover the organization of migration politics by categories of social and political identity.

This book is an experiment in not dividing localness up. I do not aim to prove that it does not matter how locals define themselves, either empirically or normatively. But the existing siloing obscures patterns that hold across the silos. The differences may outnumber the similarities, but the similarities challenge what we think we know about migration politics.

1.1.1 *How do we know identity matters?*

We have extensive evidence that people care about mobility that transgresses lines of identity. How do we know, however, that there are no similar objections to mobility across lines of localness where identity is not particularly strong? After all, people could dislike foreigners *and* newcomers.

The literature suggests two ways to know that mobility is politically unproblematic. First, we can observe the contrast between the unquestioned acceptance of immigration enforcement and the public's belief in equal rights to domestic spaces:

13 For an exception, see Fitzgerald (2018) who documents the European radical right's roots in railing against internal migrants.

> The entire immigration apparatus is . . . based on some unquestioned assumptions about *countries*. It is not OK for a public park, a town, a county, or a state to discriminate regarding who is allowed to enter its space. But it's OK for a country to do that.[14]

Inside a zone of shared national culture, people do not believe governments can restrict migration:

> The people of California wanted to keep out poor Oklahomans during the Depression. Now the people of Oregon would like to keep out the Californians. . . . Despite all this, we do not think these political communities should be able to control their borders.[15]

Migration "goes unremarked if it takes place within the borders of the state, but immediately raises moral questions when it involves crossing an international border."[16]

Such is the confidence that national identities are the last remaining parochialisms that when scholars complain about "methodological nationalism" in the study of migration, they mean that there is not enough attention to "common identity from supranational groups [or] effective coercive legal institutions [that] transcend the boundaries of the nation state."[17] The idea that migration politics might be shaped by pro-local ideals within nation-states is not even worth a mention.

Second and similarly, we know people are indifferent to mobility because they have no objections to migration by in-group members. For instance, in the EU, "the only 'foreigners' who pose a problem are those from non-Western countries."[18] The classic definition of nativism is antipathy to an "internal minority on the grounds of its foreign" character.[19] Nativism is not concerned about migration—the objectionable minority is already internal. Nativism is preoccupied with foreignness. In fact, all anti-migrant politics is feelings about the Other in relation to the Self:

> "We" must secure our centrality and "they," those who disrupt our homely space, must be pushed out from the centre. . . . Our ambivalence towards strangers expresses both fear and fascination, which is also desire (including erotic desire) fused into one, and is thus doubly unsettling.[20]

There is no reason to object to the mobility of people within our homely space of shared identity.

14 Chomsky 2014, p. 206, original emphasis.
15 Carens 1987, p. 267.
16 Sager 2016, p. 46.
17 Sager (2016, p. 53). See also Faist (2010) and Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002).
18 Fassin 2012, p. 154.
19 Higham 2002, p. 4.
20 Sandercock 2002, p. 206.

1.1.2 *Mobility politics*

Is it really true that most people think discrimination against migrants is wrong if the migrants share the locals' nationality and/or ethnoracial identity? That contention is a bit surprising given that migration-related discrimination is the way most countries run their internal affairs. Spatially homogeneous national citizenship is a myth. "With the exception of Monaco (which consists of a single municipality) and Vatican City (a peculiar 'state' of less than 900 inhabitants), every state in the world contains multiple administrative divisions."[21] Subnational political jurisdictions use time-in-residence to govern political participation, eligibility for public services, tax rates, and property rights.

Internal mobility is not severely regulated in most wealthy democracies but older and newer residents are treated differently. Subsidized housing in Britain uses local connection tests; so does public housing in New York City.[22] Non-locals can only buy limited amounts of land in Prince Edward Island, Canada. Germany's Basic Law allows restrictions on free movement within federal territory if "the absence of adequate means of support would result in a particular burden for the community."[23] You do not need to be a US citizen to be a Delaware state senator—provided you have lived in Delaware for three years.

Or take the EU, where the only foreigners who are thought to pose a problem are non-Westerners. Unproblematic though they might be, even EU citizens do not have fully portable access to public funds: "a person is free to *move* if they are an EU citizen, but they are not free to *stay* for longer than three months unless they are a worker, a student or of independent means."[24]

These restrictions are typically only nuisances for people of means. Yet, they imply that pro-local discrimination is hardly taboo in domestic and in-group contexts. In US state politics, discrimination against domestic migrants is a rare by recurrent feature of both major parties' platforms.[25] The ideas in these platforms echo themes familiar from

21 Maas (2013a, p. 10). Sources differ slightly on this. In the V-Dem dataset (Coppedge et al. 2024; Michael et al. 2024; Pemstein et al. 2024), there are three countries with more than five hundred thousand residents and no subnational political divisions, which are Kuwait, Qatar, and Singapore.

22 Freund 2018, p. 847.

23 Maas 2013a, p. 15.

24 Bridget Anderson (2021, pp. 306–307). Other international labor integration treaties also limit use of public services; e.g., on the Eurasian Economic Union see Osadchaya and Yudina (2016).

25 I reviewed state party platforms, 1900 to 2017, compiled by Daniel J Hopkins et al. (2022). In 139 out of 1908 platforms (7%) a party discusses adding, eliminating, or changing the length of a state residency requirement for voting, welfare benefits, in-state tuition, civil service jobs, state contracts or elected and appointed state offices. (This count does not include proposals regarding what proofs of state residency should be required.) State residency requirements feature in 8% of Democratic state party platforms and 7% of Republican state party platforms. Republican party mentions of state residency requirements are 71% in favor of increasing the

immigration politics. For instance, the Minnesota Republicans in 1996 suggested limiting welfare to new state residents to "amounts to the equivalent of those afforded by the recipient's state of origin during the first year." In 2012, the Kansas Democrats noted that "instead of sending millions of dollars of work to out-of-state firms . . . contractors or subcontractors working on state contracts of a certain size will have to ensure that at least 70 percent of the employees working on the contract are Kansas residents." Obviously, domestic migration in the US is not a major political issue and these are not particularly vitriolic proposals. Yet, discrimination against internal migrants is hardly beyond the pale.

In a domestic context, opposition to migration is often associated with the political left. A pro-immigration activist, Harsha Walia, recounts being "bated" by a radio caller who asked "how can you say gentrifiers aren't welcome when you believe no one is illegal?"[26] Her rejoinder is to contrast immigrants who move to Vancouver's low income neighborhoods in order "to secure social housing, care for their aging family, and knit kinship networks in a vibrant oasis of low-income residents, Indigenous matriarchs, Chinese Canadian seniors, artists, drug users, sex workers, and cacophonous dissidents" with "rapacious hipster colonists."[27] The implied standard seems to be that newcomers should conform to the existing residents' values and political views, which sounds fairly nativist. In fact, philosophers struggle with whether arguments in favor of freedom of migration leave room for indigenous or minority rights.[28] The existence of these debates alerts us to the fact that there is something about locals' rights that cuts across the ideological spectrum.

1.2 DO LOCALS STILL EXIST?

The first two chapters of this book build the case that being local is normative even within national, ethnic, and racial groups. I also refute the idea that pro-local thinking is nationalism on behalf of a nation that is not yet sovereign. Far from being hostile to nationalism, the norm of locals' rights lends plausibility to nationalism.

Domestic migration politics is the only arena where we can examine the widespread assumption that modernization and nationalism convinced most people—or at least most people in the West—that national space is to be equally shared among nationals.

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requirements as are 59% of the planks in Democratic manifestos. Democrats' lower rate of restrictive proposals reflects many more platforms urging voting rights for out-of-state post-secondary students.

26 Walia 2021, p. 1.

27 Walia (2021, p. 1). For more on anti-gentrification movements and migration, see Owusu (2008) and Freund (2018).

28 Blackwell, Boj Lopez, and Urrieta 2017; Fujikane and Jonathan Y Okamura 2008; Kukathas 1992; Kymlicka 2011; Mayblin and J. Turner 2021; Sharma 2020.

That turns out to be wrong. Almost no one believes that nationals have equal place rights anywhere they go. In the US, people with the strongest national identities and immigration hawks are also the most likely to endorse the idea of discrimination among Americans based on sub-national localness. Pro-local discrimination cuts across the political space. People who support affirmative action for underprivileged minorities are also especially likely to endorse sub-national place-based discrimination.

Locals' rights win similar levels of approval from people with very different concepts of the nation and even in contexts where national identity is weak, fragmented or controversial. I show that pattern with evidence from India, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Northern Ireland. Meanwhile, in Europe and in the United States, the only thing rarer than a cosmopolitan is a classical nationalist, i.e., someone who believes in national place rights but not sub-national place rights.

If the belief in locals' rights is so widespread, we need to ask some new questions. How can these norms have survived our age of mass migration? If people do not believe in equal rights to domestic places, why is domestic migration politically uncontroversial in most wealthy countries? What makes laissez faire internal migration acceptable but international immigration fraught? But, before any of that, what does being local even mean if it is not in-group affection and out-group antipathy?

1.3 LOCALS, STRANGERS AND SETTLERS

"Place identity answers the question—Who am I?—by countering—Where am I? or Where do I belong?"[29] Localness is both an identity[30] and a claim about rights. Identity and status cannot be fully disentangled in practice. However, thinking about one rather than the other can be more or less helpful. Considering localness as a status unlocks new perspectives on migration politics.

The thinnest possible definition of the locals is that they are the people who successfully claim the right to special benefits from a place,[31] just as a sovereign is an organization that successfully claims

29 Cuba and Hummon 1993, p. 112.

30 Bonnett 2016; Casey 1993; Hillier and Rooksby 2002; C. Wong et al. 2020; Wood 2003.

31 "The exclusive link between a group of people and portion of the Earth is, in fact, not only activated in identity terms, but also in terms of exclusive territorial 'possession' or 'ownership."' (Antonsich 2010, p. 649). In liberal philosophy a "right to property . . . incorporates claim rights (that confer duties on others not to trespass), liberty rights (that allow proprietors to do what they want on their property), powers (to sell or give away property), and immunities (from state confiscation)" (Attoh 2011, p. 671). Most versions of locals' rights are, in this nomenclature, claim rights, which confer a duty on non-locals to not impinge on the locals' place benefits without permission. Traditions of locals' rights frequently exclude the power of giving away or selling place rights. See A. Mills (2017) on Wauzhushk Onigum political philosopher Fred Kelly. For additional descriptions of prohibitions on alienating locals' rights see Bennett (2014), K. Frost (2019), Haaland (1969), and Siverts (1969).

sovereignty. You know that you are one of the locals because the locals say you are, just as sovereigns are sovereign because other sovereigns acknowledge them. The advantage of being one of the locals is that it entitles you to certain benefits of a place, which has value even if you do not like the other locals. In fact, even if you have never met them.

Ideas about what makes the locals the locals and the nature of their special place rights are culturally specific. Norms about hospitality and guest obligations are culturally determined as well. However, we can use concepts from anthropology and sociology to sketch the bare minimum of what locals' rights entail.[32]

A claim to localness has two parts. First, it is a belief that locals have more right than non-locals to certain benefits of a particular place. Second, it is a claim that locals have the prerogative of defining who is local and how, if ever, strangers can become locals.

Locals believe that they are some combination of descendants of the founders of the prevailing order of localness and people whose ancestors joined the community with the locals' permission.[33] In the quote above, the Beti and Bulu believe they are the descendants of the local founders. The Dutch Huguenot descendants believe their ancestors joined the local community in one of the locals' prescribed ways—specifically, being heroically expelled from France for Protestantism.

The founders may not have been the first inhabitants of the place. Kopytoff (1987, p. 54) describes two general approaches to the founders' predecessors: "claim to have displaced them [or] recognize their early presence but redefine its significance." People who found—or try to found—a regime of localness are settlers. Settlers redefine who the locals are. Typically, they move the starting moment against which localness is measured closer to the present.

Unlike settlers, migrant strangers are a normal and largely benign feature of locals' lives, whatever confusing fears and desires they might provoke.[34] Strangers can be helpful or harmful, highly sought

32 This description leans heavily on anthropology of Africa and Central Asia. See Barth (1969a), Benmoussa (2013), J. Comaroff and J. L. Comaroff (1987), Ferguson (1992), Kopytoff (1987), Onoma (2013), Shack and Skinner (1979), and Sillitoe, Alshawi, and Al-Amir Hassan (2010).

33 Onoma 2013.

34 "Strangers" has multiple meanings in social science (Levine 1977). Strangers can refer to marginalized people, excluded from the full benefits of in-group membership. Minorities, heretics, slaves, untouchable castes, criminals, or pariahs—e.g., executioners—are socially and often physically set apart from the core society (Barth 1969b, p. 31). People in these ostracized categories may live in the same place their whole life and always be strangers there. Alternatively, "stranger" can refer to a newly-arrived person, who might then be further classified as a sojourner, if they intend to leave soon, or a settler, if they plan to stay. Even though some of these strangers may become locals, the role of stranger is an enduring social category that will be occupied by later arrivals. The least common but original usage of "stranger" was to refer to people who are fixtures of a community but socially distinctive thanks to their frequent comings-and-goings. This kind of stranger might hold an especially prestigious role, like a circuit judge. In the same vein is the figure of the "stranger

or unwelcome, short-term visitors or eventual locals. Their defining feature is that they can only ever become locals on the existing locals' terms.

Normal migration politics is locals debating among themselves about how to structure stranger migration in ways that most benefit the locals. People do not necessarily want the same mix or number of newcomers nor do the locals always agree on whether and how strangers can achieve localness. Destabilizing migration politics is the struggle between locals and settlers to define who is local.

Locals, localities, founders, strangers and settlers are archetypes from social processes that predate states, let alone the modern nation-state. In the contemporary world, the state is the arena for claims about localness and debates over how to manage strangers. Being a state's national is a special case of having the status of local. States are the primary sponsors of settlers. Any attempt to refound an order of localness at any geographic scale needs at least the state's passivity and probably its acquiescence. One tension that hums through migration politics is the question of whether the state's administration of localness properly conforms to the norms of locals' rights—norms that the state harnesses and shapes but did not invent.

1.3.1 *Why should locals have place rights?*

Defining locals' rights this vaguely precludes a normative defense of the concept. The world's various norms about who and where is local cannot all be correct; some are flatly incompatible. However, psychology, philosophy and anthropology all offer hints at what is appealing about locals' rights—beyond the human tendency to unconsciously justify the status quo.[35]

Localness is one manifestation of what the philosopher E. F. Cohen (2018) calls "the political value of time." Locals have invested time in a physical place[36] and/or in relationships of care and reciprocity with each other.[37] Humans tend to view themselves as living in communities of loyalty and obligation.[38] People bear a greater responsibility within the group than to people outside it.[39] The sense of greater obligation reflects our tendency to feel more sympathy for concrete rather than abstract targets.[40] Evolutionary psychology points out that having bounds on the feeling of solidarity prevents a mismatch

king," who is invited to lead the locals because they bring valued attributes—e.g., Oedipus becoming king of Thebes after solving the riddle of the sphinx (Honig 2001).

35 Jost and Toorn 2012.

36 Pevnick 2011.

37 Harell, Banting, and Kymlicka 2025; Oorschot 2006.

38 Beitz 1983; C. Wong 2010.

39 Kustov 2021; Magni 2024; Y. Margalit and Solodoch 2022.

40 de Waal 2008; Kustov 2024.

between the size of the community of obligation and the available resources.[41]

The idea of locals' rights is also entirely compatible with believing that the founders were born from the natural features of a place,[42] the caretakers of a natural moral order,[43] chosen by supernatural forces,[44] retrievers of a lost homeland,[45] keepers of the true faith,[46] mighty conquerors,[47] bringers of civilization or industry,[48] or superior racial stock. The only wrinkle I would introduce is that people who believe in a particularly valorized common founder at one geographic level frequently still believe in local/non-local distinctions among themselves at a finer spatial resolution.

There were drafts of this book that called place entitlements something other than "locals' rights." My hesitation was that "local" has a distinctly positive valence. When I argue that the belief in locals' rights is different from nationalism, ethnocentrism or racism, it is not my intention to argue that it is better or more benign.[49] My goal in writing about locals' rights is not to make any points-of-view more or less sympathetic. My goal is to make them clearer.

Treating localness as a status makes several aspects of migration politics more straightforward. In the rest of this introduction, I lay out puzzles and problems in the literature on migration that are helpfully reframed by the realization that we live in a local's world.

1.4 LOCALS ALL THE WAY DOWN

If being local is a status, it can telescope. "One of the definitional features of place is its concentric character: smaller places are incorporated within larger ones."[50] A belief that locals' status rights are normative is a justification for holding on to privileges at infinitely-many levels of localness, even if the levels do not all carry emotional weight. Locals' rights do not contradict out-group antipathy but they do not depend on it.

41 Kristensen, Ohtsuki, and Chisholm 2022.
42 Waterson 1997.
43 Piccolo 2024.
44 E. H. Boone 2000; Kamahele 2008; Murphy and Bledsoe 1987; Packard 1987; Waterson 2002.
45 Shelef 2020; Toft 2005.
46 A. D. Smith 2003.
47 Murphy and Bledsoe 1987; Thomas 2002; Thomson 2002.
48 Corcoran 2018; Murray 2022.
49 I also do not intend for "local" to be a reference to theories of the emancipatory potential of small-scale places (Fischer and Bak Jørgensen 2021, p. 1065), such as the literature on "a right to the city" (Attoh 2011) or D. Massey's (1991) idea of a "global sense of place." Whatever emancipatory potential small-scale localities have, that is not the focus of this book.
50 Lewicka 2011, p. 211.

People with strong national identities can still feel an entitlement to locals' rights. Moscow[51] or Bishkek[52] urbanites can feel they are more entitled to city amenities than internal migrants without considering these cities to be proto-nations deserving self-determination. Conversely, sub-national identities and local affinities do not necessarily undermine the conviction that locals' rights are normative at the level of nations or beyond. If local is a status and not an identity the puzzle of why minorities and marginalized people are not more pro-migration resolves. So does the contrast between people reporting that they feel international identity but acting like nationalists.

In the next two chapters, I challenge the widest gulf in the study of migration politics: nations versus everything else. Nations are the intellectual basis for migration restrictions in international law and much of political philosophy. According to modernization theory, nationalism drove the transition from a world of internal migration controls to international migration controls. Various countries' immigration policies bear the imprints of their different national histories. Individuals, meanwhile, dislike immigration as a function of how nationalist they are, how ethnocentric their ideal nation is, and to the extent that particular immigrants seem unlike the nation. That is all true. However, what about the much stronger claim that runs through the literature on immigration: without nations, would people be indifferent to mobility?

One reason to be skeptical of that claim is that people who are unlikely nationalists do not typically reject the idea of countries limiting immigration. People with weak national identities, members of minority groups, naturalized citizens, people living outside the country of their birth, and people who report no disaffinity for immigrants are all mostly fine with the immigration status quo—that is, a government that limits and curates inflows. A wide-range of people in countries all over the world also mostly agree that nationals have priority rights to scarce resources over immigrants.

Of course, the power of a hegemonic idea like nationalism is that people agree with it reflexively. The critical test is domestic migration. Modernization theory suggests nationalism made discrimination based on localness unacceptable within countries. Contrary to such claims, surveys in Europe and the U.S. show domestic pro-local discrimination is normative to super majorities of people. Classical nationalists who only support discrimination against non-nationals are rare. Most people support locals' rights all the way down.

I also show that support for locals' rights is not a function of weak nationalism. I use information from India, Africa, and Northern Ireland to make this point. In India, groups with very different statuses per official nationalism have similar attitudes about within-

51 Turaeva 2022.

52 M. Flynn, Kosmarskaya, and Sabirova 2014; Hatcher and Thieme 2016.

India discrimination. In 37 Sub-Saharan African countries, people with strong trans-national identities are not unique when it comes to opinions about regional migration. In Northern Ireland, people with opposite beliefs about who the locals are can agree that the locals are entitled to special place benefits.

1.4.1 *Can other locals discriminate?*

Localness as a right sets up the idea that localness is a reciprocal obligation owed to other locals when going abroad. Craig Womack (2006) argues that this norm is a part of Muscogee conceptions of sovereignty, illustrating the concept with a story of a young woman who:

> acts too freely in a distant geography. The irony is that [she], like all humans, must enter other geographies away from home. So the idea is not the stereotypical 'stay at home and listen to the elders' but more along the lines of how to act appropriately, given the inevitability of various departures and returns, and knowing how the rules change on new turf. (173)

I draw attention to this point because, as we will see below, some people endorse the idea that other locals have a right to discriminate against them. In the US, survey takers who are asked to review criteria for state scholarships typically recommend that even states where they do not live should discriminate in favor of in-state residents.

Localness as a reciprocal obligation also provides a natural explanation for why some migration is anti-normative. It is well known that there is special public antipathy for unauthorized migration in many contexts.[53] That pattern may seem obvious but it is somewhat puzzling from the point-of-view of identity. Physical presence is not membership. Unauthorized migrants' marginal status makes them less likely than authorized migrants to make claims on membership, which means they are less of a threat to group homogeneity, not more.[54]

If someone believes access to the benefits of a place requires the locals' consent, unauthorized migration is wrong regardless of its

53 Calavita 2007.

54 Ad hoc explanations for the special antipathy toward unauthorized migration include concern for the equal treatment of would-be migrants (Gelber 2003; C. A. Martin 2021); a belief that unauthorized migration causes other crimes; or the role of elites in demonizing unauthorized movement. The "criminalization of migration" hypothesis argues that labeling migration "illegal" is a rhetorical device that heightens antipathy to migration-related infractions, many of which are civil violations (Franko 2019). Using the term illegal instead of, say, "non-compliant" triggers public hostility because humans like order. One group of scholars has found that such terminology makes no immediate difference in the context of US opinion polling. Americans give the same answers to survey questions that ask about "undocumented," "unauthorized," or "illegal" immigration (Merolla, S. Karthick Ramakrishnan, and Haynes 2013).

political or material consequences. John Howard, prime minister of Australia from 1996 to 2007, captured this sentiment in a campaign line that declared "We decide who comes to this country."[55] From the point of view of entitlement, the distinction between authorized and unauthorized migration is a point of principle.

1.4.2 *Migrants on migration*

Treating local as a status also helps explain why migrants have complicated views of migration policy. Leftwing activists and incumbents have often overestimated how liberal immigrants and their descendants are when it comes to immigration policy. They are typically more liberal than the rest of the population. Just not as liberal as expected. The overestimation reflects the assumption that identity is the main driver of migration attitudes. Therefore, migrants and minorities will hold anti-immigration views only to the extent that they have absorbed the locals' racial prejudices.

By opening up the possibility that local is a social status, we can allow for cross-pressure between the norm of locals' place rights and alienation from a particular group of locals. Most migrants come from places that have localness norms and go to places that have localness norms. Locals' rights are not an exotic institution.

In the US context, for instance, non-US nationals, naturalized US citizens, and minorities racialized as foreign (Latinx and Asian-American US-born citizens) endorse sub-national discrimination at about the same rate as other survey takers. Their ambivalence is directed toward pro-national discrimination.

Racial conservatism does not explain anti-immigrant policy views among minorities and immigrants in the US. Among all US adults—regardless of migration status or race—racial liberalism is positively correlated with endorsing discrimination against domestic migrants in favor of locals. Among US-born Whites, racial liberalism is correlated with less support for discrimination against immigrants. In sharp contrast, racially liberal immigrants and minorities are a little more more likely than racial conservatives in the same categories to favor discrimination in favor of Americans over immigrants.

These results flip the conventional wisdom about a world without ethnic and racial identities on its head. Without nationalism, ethnocentrism, and racism, there would be fewer virulent nativists. But without virulent nativists making migrants, minorities, and racial liberals uneasy, pro-local norms might carry the day.

55 C. A. Martin 2021.

Anti-immigration activists see themselves as standing athwart global demography, with its ever onrushing crush of migrants. Worldwide, 281 million people live outside the country of their birth. That corresponds to 3.6% of the human population, which is the highest rate the UN has recorded since it began collecting comparable data in the 1970s.[56] An even larger number of people will live away from their birthplace for a part of their life. Others are circular migrants, cycling regularly through multiple places.[57] Meanwhile, the number of refugees and internally displaced people has doubled since 1991.[58]

How can there still be local norms in this age of mass mobility and relentless globalization?

Here, again, it is helpful to think about the nested levels of localness simultaneously. First, doing so highlights the ways in which migration patterns are localness-conserving. Migration moves along the pro-local contours of our world's political topography. Despite decades of falling transportation costs, there is a very large gap between international and domestic migration rates that has grown since the 1960s. Domestic migration likewise flows disproportionately along routes that allow migrants to keep more of their status as one of the locals.

A broader concept of localness makes it clear that even at the height of globalization, institutional changes were moving neither uniformly toward nor away from the liberalization of mobility. A well known pattern since the end of WWII is the creation of international treaty areas for labor mobility, like the European Union (EU). There are simultaneously worldwide trends in institutional design that have

56 McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou 2021.

57 "Circular" migration refers to an individual or family moving through a routine circuit of places. "Nomadic" or "transhumant" communities move as a whole, either periodically relocating or making a repeating cycle. Unusual migration in this context means a shift in the group's traditional route or geographic range.
Throughout this book, I use "immigration" and "immigrant" to refer to migration between sovereign countries and "migration" and "migrant" to refer to mobility within or between countries.

58 UNHCR 2022. A "refugee," according to the 1951 Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, is someone who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country." If a refugee is given "asylum" by a host country, that means the country agrees not to return them involuntarily to the country of their nationality. An "asylum-seeker" has crossed an international border and is applying for recognition as a refugee. Involuntary migrants who have not crossed an international border are called "internally displaced people." The terms "internationally displaced people" and "person in need of international protection" refer to all migrants across international borders who are unable to return to their country of nationality due to risks or refusal, including refugees as well as people at risk who do not meet the legal criteria for refugee status. See UNHCR (2025) for complete definitions.

discouraged migration. One is the push for political decentralization.[59] Another is increased codification of community land customs. Trends in governance have not been a steady move toward more liberalization of movement.

1.5.1 *Peasants into Toulousains*

The belief in place rights below the level of the nationstate is meant to have died long before contemporary globalization, though. These ideas were stamped out by nationalist leaders who believed parochial identities threatened their states. The peasants had to be turned into Frenchmen.

Nationalist and administrative states did repress, destroy, and displace localities. However, by thinking of localness as a status it becomes possible to reconcile the strengthening of national identity, the weakening of local identity, and the survival of pro-local norms. The history of state-building shows regimes making themselves relevant by taking control of the administration of locals' rights to community property, natural resources, and, eventually, public services. Even as internal mobility controls were disassembled, regimes balanced the benefits of labor mobility against the role of the state in enforcing local place rights. "Welfare chauvinism"—the belief that services should be rationed in favor of locals[60]—was pioneered domestically. In short, enforcing the norm of locals' rights is part of what made states.

1.5.2 *Why do borders exist?*

If pro-local norms exist within countries, why were restrictions on internal migration disassembled when they were? Why is international migration so much more restricted than domestic mobility? Asking those questions is a way to reevaluate the materialist foundations of migration politics.

Most contemporary regimes, even most autocracies, let internal movement be dictated by demand instead of keeping watch over supply. So why do states insist on controlling international mobility? Economists think we would all be better off if countries adopted a more laissez faire approach, at least with respect to international labor migration. It is canon in economics that migration restrictions are puzzling from a materialist point-of-view: "Why are migration policies getting stricter and stricter in spite of . . . potential gains from migration?"[61] If labor mobility were only liberalized, wages would converge and we would all be wealthier. Only the irrationality of culture can explain why borders even exist.

59 Bhavnani and Lacina 2019.
60 Cook 2024; E. Harris and Römer 2023.
61 Boeri and Brücker 2014, p. 630.

The materialist logic of migration restriction is straightforward. All that is needed is to recognize that labor market protectionism is not the origin of state mobility rules. The story of states controlling mobility begins domestically. Regimes have always had three major goals for mobility controls: secure the regime against rivals, secure the regime's tax base, and, as a distant third, insert the state into the adjudication of locals' place rights. These three considerations—political violence, state finances, and geographic inequality in locals' amenities—explain the decline in states' use of domestic mobility restrictions. The measures that made laissez faire internal migration possible—more seamless state surveillance, changes in state revenue streams, nationalization of the welfare state—do not facilitate international mobility in the same way. States make forays into liberalizing international movement—e.g., visa waiver programs and labor integration treaties—to the extent that they can do this without risk to regime security, taxation, and the enforcement of locals' privileged access to place amenities.

This history should lead us to reevalutate the claim that materialist variables do not explain much about migration politics—i.e., "that there is little accumulated evidence that citizens primarily form attitudes about immigration based on its effects on their personal economic situation."[62] It is true that labor markets do not explain very much about how people feel about immigration. But the materialist logic to public opinion about immigration is not particularly subtle: it is rooted in concerns about security and locals' place amenities. It is unhelpful to think about labor protectionism—a peripheral concern in the history of migration control—as the sum total of what a materialist account of migration politics might be. That is not to say that material considerations will ultimately prove to be the most important causes of anti-migration populism. However, by ignoring place amenities and focusing only on labor markets, migration scholarship has convinced itself that borders are economically puzzling when, in fact, their materialist logic could hardly be more obvious.

The history of state-building features regimes setting themselves up as guarantors of locals' place rights. In that role, governments are supposed to manage the flow of strangers in ways that benefit the locals. What happens if the public doubts the government can or will do so?

1.5.3 *The replacements*

In 2022, Turkey's anti-immigrant Victory Party sponsored a YouTube short called *Silent Invasion*. The scene opens in 2011 at the house of a young couple:

62 Hainmueller and Daniel J Hopkins 2014, p. 227.

> They glance at the anchorman on TV reporting that the first Syrian refugees have crossed the border into Turkey, as they discuss the future of their expected son, whom they want to be a doctor. In the next scene, we flash forward to 3 May 2043, Istanbul. First, we see two Arabic-speaking men chasing a young man in a narrow street. Then we . . . see the older version of the woman. . . . [She] watches [on TV] a Syrian politician celebrating his election success and addressing his fellow citizens, saying his party took 55% of the votes and came to power alone in Turkey. Furthermore, he declares that the official language of the Turkish Republic will be Arabic soon. [Her son is the man who was being chased by Arabic-speakers.] From his story, we learn that he works not as a doctor, but as a cleaner in a hospital where speaking Turkish is not allowed. . . . Arab culture in Turkey has become so dominant that even his Turkish friends are dressed the same as "them," and listen to the same music that "they" listen to.[63]

This propaganda hits on all the fears that go under the heading "replacement." The Turkish locals are at risk of being eclipsed culturally, economically, and politically. In the near future, Arabic music and clothing will be all the rage. Turkish young people will be disappointed in their career aspirations and live in fear of Arab miscreants. An Arab Prime Minister will take power without so much as a Turkish coalition partner. Arabic will be the normative language. In short, Arabs will be the locals.

The film is meant for Turkish people who feel that their place rights include entitlement to cultural and linguistic preeminence. The Victory Party presumably knows it is not winning over anyone who would prefer a cultural fusion future.

With its vision of Istanbul's new locals, *Silent Invasion* also captures the gap between New Right ideology as an intellectual project and anti-immigration politics in practice. The literati-facing side of the far right is a:

> campaign against the elite nature of globalization, arguing that financial and political elites, American hegemony, and the growing influence of the European Union destroy the natural fabric of civil society.[64]

It preaches a "right to difference" in opposition to cosmopolitanism and Samuel Huntington's "Davos Man." The foil is a world where no one is a local. Replacement rhetoric is the populist version of the far right, and does not threaten people with the prospect of a world

63 Türk 2024, 271–2, quotation marks in the original.
64 Zaslove 2008, p. 171.

without locals. There will always be locals. But you might not be one of them.

The Victory Party's vision of replacement dystopia aside, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is the rare head of state who can look back on his Syrian refugee strategy with satisfaction. Turkish society has not been unflinchingly receptive to the Syrian newcomers. However, hosting refugees has been a diplomatic triumph for Erdoğan.[65] In exchange for accepting refugees turned away from the EU, he extracted billions of euros from the EU along with concessions on visas and trade.[66]

That context gives some edge to the Victory Party's film. Given everything that Syrian refugees have done for Erdoğan, would he expel them if some corners of Istanbul started to feel like Little Syria? Or if a few Turkish people were harassed by Arab teenagers? Of course not. Migration policy, like all public policy, never serves everyone's interests or preferences equally. That is the opening for the populist's question: are you the sacrifice the regime is willing to make?

Wealthy democracies are said to be in a crisis of public confidence thanks to immigration. The most extreme manifestations of that lack of trust are conspiracy theories like *Silent Invasion*. Government-backed immigration is a settler project that will push the existing population out of their status as locals, turning them into strangers in their own country. The "Great Replacement" is one version of this theory, credited to Renaud Camus, who argued France was being colonized in reverse by Muslims from former colonies throughout Africa. Replacement narratives often feature masterminds behind the silent invasion: liberals, Muslims, or Zionists.[67] In 2017, the far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD) leaned in to this rhetoric in its election platform:

> The secret sovereign in Germany is a small, powerful political oligarchy that has formed within the existing political parties. . . . This oligarchy holds the levers of state power, political education and informational and media influence over the population. The constant violations of the principles of German statehood culminate in the refugee policy of the federal government of CDU/CSU and SPD.[68]

AfD's reference to multiple parties taps another far right talking point—all political incumbents offer a single, discredited globalist vision of the future. The Austrian Freedom Party's 2024 campaign, for instance, "portrayed its political opponents on the national level – the

65 Tsourapas 2019.

66 Turkey has a geographic limitation on its refugee treaty obligations, so that it "has very few international responsibilities towards the migrants and the de facto refugees the EU wants them to host" (J. J. Jäntti and Klasche 2021, p. 313).

67 Ekman 2022, p. 1131.

68 Translation from Lehmann et al. (2024, np).

[center-right] ÖVP, the Social Democrats (SPÖ), the Greens and the Liberals – as all being part of an *Einheitspartei* or 'single political party' . . . and EU-level actors as either corrupt, fanatical or insane."[69] In the US, conspiracy theorists tend to emphasize the role of immigrants in sustaining left-wing electoral power. Republican Senator Ron Johnson, for example, opined: "[The Biden] administration wants complete open borders. And you have to ask yourself why? Is it really, they want to remake the demographics of America to ensure their —that they stay in power forever?"[70] Similarly, the British National Party's 2010 platform argued that "in pursuit of Labour's globalist ideals, the white working class has been abandoned, replaced and displaced by a new ethnic electoral power base."[71]

1.5.4 *Nativists without borders*

One interesting aspect of these conspiracy theories is that they build on premises that are widely repeated across the political spectrum. Not the evil plot but the unavoidable immigration. Thirty years of popular and academic writing on immigration have argued that people in favor of liberalized immigration just had to wait. Their preferences were inevitable. Thanks to the requirements of economic globalization, international law, client politics, the logistical difficulty of enforcing borders, the aging population of the West, or a pro-immigration bloc of new voters, governments will not or cannot control immigration.

What would a world of nativists without borders look like? In some ways, it would look like nativism in a domestic context. Domestic migration rates far exceed international mobility. The policies that are said to be increasingly impractical for wealthy sovereign states are already off the table for most domestic anti-migration movements. Anti-migration activists who object to domestic mobility typically have no realistic prospects for sovereignty, physical bordering of space, or even control over migration. The supposed future of immigration politics is where domestic migration politics already lives.

I suggest three lessons from domestic anti-migration populism for the study of immigration populism. First, there are many forms of pro-local institutions. Populists can demand something other than walls and deportation if those are not on the menu. Second, it is unlikely that people have a boundless appetite for migration restriction per se. The norm is locals' rights not autarky. Third, I return to the idea that local is a telescoping concept. Migration activists compete to settle questions of localness at the geographic level where they have the strongest political position. For anti-migration populists, that often means trying to move the debate over migration to a relatively homogeneous

69 Miklin 2024, p. 46.
70 Ekman 2022, p. 1132.
71 BNP 2010, p. 22.

regional or national context rather than a smaller, diverse geography where migrants have more sway. The reverse can occur as well, however. Some migrants have latent political power thanks to ties with regional and national regimes. In such cases, pro-migration activists try to draft those allies while their rivals try to keep migration policy more decentralized. Migration activism is often less about drawing a line between local and non-local and more about moving decision making to the geographic level where locals' rights arguments favor the activist's cause.

1.6 PLAN OF THIS BOOK

The next three chapters of this book demonstrate that a belief in locals' rights exists and that it is distinct from nationalism. The next chapter turns to what nationalism can and cannot explain about migration politics. Chapter 3 uses domestic migration as a critical test of whether pro-local norms exist apart from national identities. Chapter 4 turns to how migrants think about place rights.

Chapters 5 to 7 turn to the implications of pro-local norms. Chapter 5 examines migration patterns in light of the pressure to stay local. Chapter 6 considers how locals' rights interacted with historical state building and asks what explains the transition from widespread use of domestic migration controls to states focused on international mobility restrictions. Finally, Chapter 7 compares anti-migration populists in domestic and international settings to better understand what mobility and interconnection will mean for the future of our local's world.