

Civilian conflict and internal displacement, dimensions of forced migration in Nepal

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This research investigates circumstances that force people to abandon their homes during civilian conflicts. Every year millions of people leave their homes and become either refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs) as a result of conflict. At the same time, millions of others choose to stay put and risk their lives. Existing literature on international politics tends to conclude that displacement is an obvious consequence of conflict and focuses exclusively on explaining the causes of conflict at the macro level. However, little is known at the individual level about why some people choose to stay while others choose to leave. My research is motivated by this puzzle. Specifically, I ask why some people, even when faced with extreme violence, stay put and risk their lives while others flee?

Prior research on forced migration concludes that people make a choice either to leave or stay even under highly adverse circumstances. Although convincing, this view, based on aggregate cross-national analysis, stops at pointing out that such choices are available. The present study goes beyond the existing literature on forced migration to investigate individual level choices. Which factors determine individuals' decisions to leave or stay put? I employ primary data, collected during the summer and fall of 2008 at the individual level in Nepal, to explore these questions. Evidence suggests that factors beyond the presence of conflict distinguish who flees and who stays put. This article explores various facets of those differences.