



## *The performative turn in migration diplomacy*

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The concept of migration diplomacy emerged to fill a gap in explaining how states negotiate mobility as a tool of foreign policy. Yet the growing complexity of migration, with its mixed motivations, overlapping regimes, and recurrent crises, has transformed both the substance and the staging of diplomatic practice. This paper examines the performative dimensions of migration diplomacy, focusing on what I term credible fictions: plausible representations of control, generosity, or crisis that generate diplomatic value irrespective of empirical accuracy. As states confront intersecting forms of movement including refugee, labour, and climate alike, they increasingly curate visible signs of strain or responsibility to influence external audiences and secure recognition or resources. Examples range from Tunisia's inflation of migrant numbers to amplify leverage with the European Union to Mexico's staged demonstrations of border enforcement designed to signal alignment with the United States. The paper draws on comparative evidence from the Global South and North alike in arguing that these performances have become integral to how governments navigate complexity by rendering it legible and politically useful. In this account, migration diplomacy emerges as a form of symbolic governance in which visibility produces power.

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