Global migration crisis
Global Displacement Levels are Unprecedented

Data source: UNHCR population statistics database
Are Refugees Really a ‘National Security’ Threat to America?

How fear has slammed the door on Syrian migrants

MOLLY O’TOOLE AND DEFENSE ONE  OCTOBER 9, 2015

A refugee from the Syrian town of Kobani carries food for breakfast in a camp in Suruc, Turkey. (KAI PFAFFENBACH / REUTERS)
Security Concerns Surround Europe's Refugee Crisis

As the continent struggles to cope, extremism from within and without could grow.

By Paul D. Shinkman, Senior Writer, National Security    Sept. 17, 2015

People receive food in a tent camp for refugees and migrants in Brussels on Sept. 10, 2015.    © GEERT VANDEN WIJNGAERT/AF
Research Question

Does the presence of refugees increase the likelihood of conflict in hosting areas?
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When refugees are geographically concentrated in one region of the country, conflict risk and intensity decrease.
Literature Linking Refugees to Conflict
Larger numbers of refugees from neighboring counties are positively associated with greater likelihood of new conflict (Salehyan and Gleditsch, 2006).
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Refugees can pose challenges to state capacity and political legitimacy (Whitaker, 2002; Onoma, 2013).
But Is This Association Causal?
Interviews with UNHCR Officials
Militarized Refugees and Conflict with Locals are Exceptional

“Cases of refugees causing conflict are the exception, [which] becomes the focus of all the studies, rather than the norm.” – Senior Official at UNHCR Field Information, June 25, 2018.
“Despite all the hysteria of refugees and conflict, refugees account for a small part of the population. This is an eminently manageable problem... [Large refugee populations in places like] Uganda and in Bangladesh, they have been managed without disastrous consequences by governments with much fewer resources”
“UNHCR and aid agencies try to put in place prevention mechanisms... creating informal structures, committees, where the local people like elders and chiefs would meet regularly... Every community has structures. Even the refugee community is not just some amorphous group of people but they have spokespeople, traditional leaders.”
–Senior Official at Division of Programme Support and Management, September 12, 2018.
Our Theory
Consider the Positive Effects of Hosting

Aid and infrastructural development, although primarily intended for refugees, can lead to positive externalities for local communities (Jacobsen, 2002; Maystadt and Duranton, 2018).
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Refugees bring human and physical capital, revitalizing economies (Alix-Garcia et al., 2018; Masterson and Lehmann, 2019).
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Opportunities for the state to develop capacity in peripheral, marginalized areas (Landau, 2008).
**Hypotheses**

**(H1):** Provinces hosting refugee sites are no more likely to experience increased conflict compared to provinces without refugee sites.
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(H2): Provinces hosting refugee sites, conditional on there being no other refugee hosting provinces in the same country-year (i.e. geographically concentrated), can experience a reduction in conflict.
Hypotheses

(H1): Provinces hosting refugee sites are no more likely to experience increased conflict compared to provinces without refugee sites.

(H2): Provinces hosting refugee sites, conditional on there being no other refugee hosting provinces in the same country-year (i.e. geographically concentrated), can experience a reduction in conflict.

(H3): Provinces hosting refugee sites, conditional on there being no other refugee hosting provinces in the same country-year (i.e. geographically concentrated), are more likely to experience increased development.
Data and Methods
Main Variables

Explanatory Variables: Presence of Refugee Sites (Camps and Settlements)

- lat/long coordinates of 2511 refugee sites open 1990–2018
- whether province X hosts a refugee site
- whether province X belongs to country C that hosts a refugee site somewhere else

Outcome Variables: Conflict

- conflict onset and incidence
- number of violent events
- number of battle deaths

Mechanism Variable: Development
Main Variables

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**Mechanism Variable: Development**
- nighttime lights
Within a host country, where do refugees settle? How are locations chosen?
Causal Identification Strategy

Within a host country, where do refugees settle? How are locations chosen?

1. Control for the variables that researchers and experts believe affect refugee settlement and conflict likelihood: distance to border, distance to capital, terrain, population, neighbor’s conflict
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2. Use placebo tests: do future refugee sites affect present-day conflict? If so, bias.
Results
H1 Results: Effect of Refugee Presence on Conflict Outcomes (H1)

Effect of Refugee Presence on Conflict Outcomes (H1)

-5%  -2%  0%  3%  5%
Onset Incidence
Change in Predicted Probability
Actual presence
Placebo presence

Effect of Refugee Presence on Conflict Outcomes (H1)

-0.2  -0.1  0.0  0.1  0.2
Violent Events
Change in Predicted Number (logged)

Effect of Refugee Presence on Conflict Outcomes (H1)

-0.2  -0.1  0.0  0.1  0.2
Battle Deaths
Change in Predicted Number (logged)
H1 Results: Effect of Refugee Presence on Conflict Outcomes (H1)

Effect of Refugee Presence on Conflict Outcomes (H1)

- Change in Predicted Probability
- Change in Predicted Number

- Onset
- Incidence
- Violent Events
- Battle Deaths
H1 Results: Effect of Refugee Presence on Conflict Outcomes (H1)

Effect of Refugee Presence on Conflict Outcomes (H1)
H2 Results: Effect of Concentrated Refugee Presence on Conflict

Effect of Concentrated Refugee Presence (H2a)
H2 Results: Effect of Concentrated Refugee Presence on Conflict

Effect of Concentrated Refugee Presence (H2a)

- Change in Predicted Probability
  - Actual presence
  - Placebo presence

Change in Predicted Number

- Onset Incidence
- Violent Events
- Battle Deaths

- Change in Predicted Number (logged)
H3 Results: Effect of Concentrated Refugee Presence on Nighttime Lights
Conclusion
Conclusion

Contributions

First quantitative global analysis at a subnational level using new geo-referenced data on displacement sites.

No effects of hosting refugees on increased conflict risk or intensity.

When refugees are geographically concentrated, that area can experience more development, decreasing conflict risk.
Conclusion

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No effects of hosting refugees on increased conflict risk or intensity. When refugees are geographically concentrated, that area can experience more development, decreasing conflict risk

Limitations, opportunities for future research

Need characteristics and demographics of refugee sites
Other types of conflict and social unrest
Spatial diffusion
Thank you! Questions?
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