

Project proposal for the Swiss Network for International Studies

Refugee Flows and Transnational Ethnic Linkages

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Executive Summary

One of the most significant external effects of civil war is massive population dislocations and refugee flows across national boundaries. Those fleeing conflict and instability are rightly viewed as victims of persecution and war, requiring humanitarian aid, relief supplies and host-country protection. Yet, it would be incorrect to simply depict refugees as passive victims—rather than important actors—in the conflict dynamic. Several scholars have noted that refugee communities are often associated with security risks for the host and home countries, particularly if they are mobilized by militant groups. Others have found that refugee flows are one mechanism by which conflicts spread across regions.

These effects remain poorly understood, however. One of the most plausible links between cross-border refugee flows and the spread of conflict has to do with the impact of migration flows on the ethnic balance of host countries. Cultural similarity may facilitate refugee integration, but refugee flows can also foster tensions among ethnic groups. However, there is a lack of systematic data on the ethnic composition of refugee flows, making it difficult to test these claims. Existing datasets, available from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, list refugee host and asylum countries, along with aggregate refugee counts. However, information on refugee ethnicity, religion, language use, etc, is not currently available.

We propose the creation of two datasets, which will help improve research on the migration-conflict connection. The first is a global dataset which contains information on the primary ethnic group(s) of refugee flows between states, at the aggregate country-dyad level. The second dataset will offer a geographically disaggregated view of these flows, listing refugee point of origin in the sending country and point of settlement in the receiving country. These projects will require extensive data collection efforts in conjunction with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which collects census data on refugee camps.

These projects will be based in Zürich and Geneva, with input from international collaborators. The Zürich team will collect the global refugee data using secondary materials, NGO documents, and news reports. The Geneva team will work closely with relevant UNHCR offices to collect the geographically disaggregated data. The project will result in at least two research papers, dissertation projects, and publically-available data for the academic and policy communities.

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Project Rationale

Civil wars and insurgencies have important implications for neighboring states and for the international community as a whole. Previous research has demonstrated that a civil conflict in a neighboring state contributes to the spread of public health problems, economic disruptions, refugee flows, and that wars in one's neighbors lead to a significantly higher risk of local conflict (Davenport, Moore, Poe 2003; Ghobarah, Huth, and Russett 2003; Hegre and Sambanis 2006; Sandler and Murdoch 2004). Therefore, certain regions of the world such as West Africa and the Middle East, experience the overlapping problems of authoritarianism, poverty, and war. This regional conflict clustering suggests that the 'closed-polity' approach to the study of civil war—which treats countries as independent units of observation—is highly misleading; scholars and policy makers must also consider the broader regional context in which these wars occur (Lake and Rothchild 1998). Nonetheless, many of the most prominent studies of civil conflict to date (e.g. Collier and Hoeffler 2004, Fearon and Laitin 2003) fail to incorporate indicators of the regional environment in their analyses, focusing instead on domestic conditions such as the availability of natural resources and difficult terrain which facilitates rebel sanctuaries.

One of the most significant external effects of civil war is massive population dislocations and refugee flows across national boundaries. These flows have the potential to be massive. For instance, over two million Afghan refugees resided in both Iran and Pakistan; the conflicts in Rwanda displaced millions; and current conflicts in Iraq and the Darfur region of Sudan have sent large waves of refugees to neighboring countries. Normally, these refugee flows are depicted as humanitarian crises in popular media accounts and by non-governmental

organizations. Those fleeing conflict and instability are rightly viewed as victims of persecution and war, requiring humanitarian aid, relief supplies and host-country protection. Yet, it would be incorrect to simply depict refugees as passive victims—rather than important actors—in the conflict dynamic.

Beyond these humanitarian concerns, a growing body of evidence suggests that refugee flows have important security implications for sending countries, host countries, and for relations between states (see Lischer 2005; Salehyan 2007; Weiner 1992). Because of grievances against their sending state, dismal camp conditions offering little prospect for a meaningful livelihood, and their position beyond the repressive capabilities of the sending state, refugee camps are often a prime source of recruits and resources for rebel organizations. These ‘refugee warrior’ communities have been documented in several cases, including Afghan refugees in Pakistan, Nicaraguan refugees in Honduras, and Bosnian refugees in neighboring states (Lischer 2005; Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo 1989). Quantitative evidence has demonstrated that refugees in neighbors have a significant effect on the prolongation of civil wars in the sending country (Salehyan 2007). These security risks have long been acknowledged by aid agencies (see UNHCR 2006, Ch. 3), although international organizations and NGOs are poorly equipped to address security concerns without considerable assistance from the host country and powerful donor states.

Refugee communities sometimes also contribute to security risks in their *host* countries. Salehyan and Gleditsch (2006) argue that refugee flows facilitate the spread of arms, ideologies, and organizational structures conducive to violence. Refugees extend rebel social networks across space through their own geographic mobility, as well as by establishing links, sharing information, and providing resources to domestic actors with compatible aims. They demonstrate, through rigorous statistical analysis, that hosting refugees from neighboring states has a large impact on the likelihood of a domestic civil conflict. They conclude that refugee flows are one mechanism contributing to the spread of conflict across regions.

Nonetheless, several questions remain unanswered. First, not all refugee inflows contribute to local conflicts. Indeed, according to the Salehyan and Gleditsch study, while hosting refugees from neighbors triples the observed frequency of armed conflict in countries of asylum, the majority of refugee hosts do not experience civil war or significant political instability. Clearly, additional information is needed to explain why some refugee inflows lead

to violence while others do not. Secondly, many of the proposed causal mechanisms leading from a refugee influx to armed conflict have not been tested explicitly. Refugees could lead to domestic instability through their own militant activities, through negative effects on the domestic economy, or by changing the demographic profile of the host community. Hence, our research question is what the conditions are under which refugee influxes into a host country increase the likelihood of conflict onset in the host country.

One of the most plausible links between cross-border refugee flows and the spread of conflict has to do with the impact of migration flows on the ethnic balance of host countries. Many civil wars are fought along ethnic cleavages (Cederman and Girardin 2007; Sambanis 2001), and it is highly likely that the concomitant refugee exodus has a decidedly ethnic character.¹ However, it is also the case that several ethnic groups span national boundaries, and so, many refugee communities have ethnic kinship ties with one or more local groups (Cederman, Girardin and Gleditsch 2009). Such kinship ties can facilitate refugee integration by lowering language and cultural barriers, facilitating communication, and mitigating xenophobic fears. However, refugees may create severe tensions in receiving areas if they are seen as culturally unwelcome “foreigners”, and in particular, if relations among domestic ethnic groups are already tense and refugees tilt the established ethnic balance of power. For instance, following the Rwandan genocide and government takeover by the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front, millions of Hutu refugees fled the country. The sudden influx of Hutu refugees in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (then Zaire) severely affected relations between Congolese Hutus, Tutsis, and other ethnic groups. Thus, refugee inflows may be especially problematic if they exacerbate pre-existing, local ethnic animosities and conflicts. From this we derive our main tentative hypothesis:

H1: Influxes of refugees that affect significantly the ethnic balance in the host country increase the likelihood of conflict onset².

¹ Drawing on Weber (1978, 385-398), we define ethnicity as any subjectively experienced sense of commonality based on the belief in common ancestry and shared culture. Different markers may be used to indicate such shared ancestry and culture: common language, similar phenotypical features, adherence to the same faith, and so on (see also Wimmer 2008).

² This main hypothesis will be our starting point for our empirical research. We expect that variations might appear depending on the regional makeup of a host country (i.e. changes in the ethnic balance nationally, regionally, and locally), and that further theoretical developments during the project will generate additional hypotheses.

This being said, there is a lack of systematic data on the ethnic composition of refugee flows, making it difficult to test these claims across a large number of cases. Existing datasets, available from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, list refugee host and asylum countries, along with aggregate refugee counts. However, information on refugee ethnicity, religion, language use, etc, is not currently available. This lack of data impedes research on the potential links between refugees and conflict, as well as effective policy responses that may mitigate potential security risks. We propose a significant new data collection project to overcome this current gap.

Specifically, we propose the creation of two related datasets (see appendix). The first is a global dataset, which, for all cases of flows between countries covering the years from 1990 to present, indicates whether or not the refugee population is predominantly of one ethnicity, and if so, list this group. This dataset will focus on aggregate trends, and flows between countries as a whole. The second dataset will, for selected cases where reliable information is available, pinpoint the exact geographic point(s) of origin of refugees (e.g. town, village) and the point(s) of settlement in the host country (e.g. refugee camps, urban resettlement sites). This dataset will require significant archival research, access to refugee camp registration information (where publically available), and qualitative readings of ethnographic studies. We observe that conflicts and refugee communities are not uniformly distributed across a country's territory, but that some regions within states face larger impacts than others.

Given the geographic component of this dataset, we will rely on Geographic Information Systems (GIS) techniques to record the relevant data on refugee origin and resettlement patterns and to combine it with already available disaggregated information on the geographic distribution of ethnic groups and conflict locations. In this endeavour we will rely on the expertise of Alain Dubois (University of Geneva) who is a recognized expert of GIS. He will supervise this important aspect of our data collection effort. In addition, given his research interest in sustainable development, he will also develop in conjunction with the Geneva-based research assistant an aspect related to refugee flows, namely its impact on resource scarcity and its consequences for conflicts. Having recourse to these GIS techniques will allow us to understand how conflicts diffuse (or fail to) across and within countries. Given the high accessibility of geographically displayed data we intend to provide this information to the public

through a user-friendly web interface. We will rely in this again on the expertise of Alain Dubois but also on the in-house expertise of the ETH Zurich team.

Following constructivist principles, our databases will allow ethnic groups to vary over time (see Wimmer, Cederman and Min 2009). However, such dynamic coding does not suffice to capture the full extent to which migration processes constitutes ethnicity. Since Barth's (1970) classical approach to boundary foundation, we know that ethnic boundaries are socially constructed rather than representing reified units. In other words, migratory flows both confirm and transform political boundaries, as illustrated by Brubaker's (1992) important study of citizenship and immigration in Europe. Another limitation of our datasets is that they will focus on ethnic groups for tractability reasons. However, groups are aggregates that do not act on their own but rather through representatives and organizations (Brubaker 2004). To the extent that it is at all possible, we will attempt to collect data on the latter sorts of units, but we expect that our quantitative data collection will also have to be complemented with more data-intensive techniques such as process tracing focusing on specific cases. This will provide a firmer foundation for causal inference and allow us to treat ethnic identities and boundaries as being truly endogenous (Cederman 2002; Wimmer 2008).

The data will lead to at least two peer-reviewed research articles, as well as published dissertation projects. The first article will focus on the global analysis of refugee flows, and assess at the global level whether our main hypotheses finds support in the empirical analyses. To do so we will combine the global data with data on ethnic conflicts drawn from the Uppsala/PRIO ACD-dataset (Gledisch et al 2002), which will be complemented by additional data collected by the three project leaders. The second article will analyze the disaggregated dataset and test the more fine-grained hypotheses (e.g., does our hypothesis only hold for changes in the local or regional power-balance among ethnic groups) about migration dynamics and ethnic conflict. In addition, this disaggregated dataset will also allow us to assess in more detail the causal mechanisms that lie behind our main hypothesis (and those that will be developed in the course of the research project). Finally, the project is also designed to give the impetus to one (or two) dissertation projects dealing with the relationship between refugee flows and ethnic violence.

Given our expertise and prior research endeavors, we believe that we are well-positioned to engage in such a project. Professors Cederman, Hug, Salehyan and Mr. Dubois, have been

involved in several highly-successful research projects and data-collection efforts relating to these themes (see CV's in appendix). We are a team of internationally-recognized scholars who have previously conducted research on refugee flows, civil war, ethnic power relationships, geographically disaggregated conflict analysis, and ethnic settlement patterns. In addition, we are part of a larger, international research network (Geographic Representations of War, or GROW-Net) which is funded by an ECRP grant from the European Science Foundation³—with partners at the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo and the University of Essex—which employs techniques such as statistical analysis, qualitative case studies, GIS, and computational modeling, to understand geographic patterns and regularities in conflict, including at the sub-national and trans-national levels. One of our GROW-Net partners, Dr. Halvard Buhaug at PRIO, intends to actively collaborate with our project by collecting data on refugee flows. Our contacts with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Professor Hug's institutional base in Geneva facilitate our research and data collection strategies, as well as provide access to the international policy and refugee protection community. We are especially interested in communicating our findings and sharing our data with refugee protection and assistance agencies, as we are strongly committed to improving humanitarian and security conditions for refugee and their hosts.

Research Strategy

This project will employ two research assistants (RA), supervised by our researchers in Zürich and Geneva. The first RA will be based in Zürich and will be responsible for collecting information for the global refugee dataset. Refugee host and asylum countries, along with the number of refugees, are information that is already available through the UNHCR. To this data, additional information on refugee ethnicity will be added. The RA will read conflict histories, newspaper reports, documents from the UNHCR and human rights NGOs, and secondary literature to determine the primary ethnicity of the refugee flow. If other ethnic groups are also represented in large numbers, this information will be added as well. Because data on refugees and the literature on conflict are typically better for recent years, refugee flows since 1990 will be the primary focus, although we may decide to extend the temporal domain at a later date.

³ See <http://www.esf.org/activities/eurocores/programmes/ecrp/awarded-projects-ecrp-ii.html>.

Most of this contextual information can be accessed online. However, when needed, the RA may travel to Geneva to access UNHCR documents and interview key personnel to collect additional information.

The second RA will be based in Geneva and will focus on the geographically disaggregated refugee data. Some of this data information is available through UNHCR and NGO field reports, newspaper sources, and ethnographic studies. For selected countries, the UNHCR has information on refugee camp locations and other settlement destinations in the host country. However, much of this data is not currently available in a standardized format, which can be easily imported into a GIS framework. We will work closely with the UNHCR in Geneva to access publicly-available information, including refugee census and registration data, to determine refugee places of origin. Interviews with current and former field officers and aid workers may also be required. These interviews will be conducted by our Geneva-based team, or through telephone interviews by other members in the research group.

Both data sources will be integrated into standard statistical packages and will be made ready for analysis by GIS software such as ArcGIS. For the geographically disaggregated dataset, this will require significant time and effort to ensure that the country observations are comparable to one another and that detailed maps are available. This will also be integrated with existing datasets on ethnic settlement patterns and conflict areas.

We anticipate that the collection of the raw data will take two RA's and our senior research team approximately 12-18 months to complete. An additional 6-8 months will be required for running robustness checks on the reliability of our data, integrating our data sources with other information on conflict and ethnicity, as well as developing research projects. We also anticipate a workshop at the end of the term to present our data and preliminary findings, as well as elicit feedback from researchers and representatives from INGOs and NGOs.

Tasks and Outputs

Zürich team: Professor Lars-Erik Cederman + one research assistant. This team will be responsible for the global dataset.

Geneva team: Professor Simon Hug, Alain Dubois + one research assistant. This team will be responsible for the geographically disaggregated dataset.

U.S. researcher: Professor Idean Salehyan. Dr. Salehyan will assist in directing the research assistants, help with all aspects of the data collection, and will manage the statistical database.

Milestones

- September 2009. Project initiation, hiring of personnel.
Research assistants will prepare themselves by reading up on the literature, establish the necessary contacts with the UNHCR and prepare an inventory of available data.
- January 2010. Visit to Switzerland by Prof. Salehyan. Project coordination and update.
Based on the reports of the research assistants the exact data collection design will be defined and the Geneva-based student will start training (if necessary) in GIS under the supervision of Mr. Dubois. Research assistants will at the end time prepare a first draft of their doctoral research proposal (required after the first year in the doctoral programs of both ETH Zurich and the University of Geneva)
- Summer 2010. Research visit to UNHCR by Prof. Salehyan.
Research assistants finalize their research proposals and continue their data collection work.
- September 2010. Completion of the first version of the global dataset.
Zurich-based research assistant circulates global dataset and schedules revisions, cleaning etc. Geneva-based research assistant presents a complete data collection for one country/region to assess the resource requirements for the disaggregated dataset. In addition the research assistants submit their research proposals.
- January 2011. Project meeting with all three research groups.
Zurich-based research assistant provides initial empirical analyses and plausibility checks based on the global dataset. The final guiding principles for the disaggregated dataset are adopted based on the preparatory work of the Geneva-based research assistant.
- May 2011. Completion of the first version of the disaggregated dataset.

Geneva-based research assistant starts data-cleaning effort also in collaboration with personnel at UNHCR and area-experts, while the Zurich-based research assistant continues his/her preliminary analyses.

Summer 2011. Integration of the two datasets within the context of other conflict datasets and mapping software. Preliminary analysis and data validation.

September 2011. Data release at an international workshop organized in Geneva. Presentation of first draft of research papers.

External partners

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva.

Prof. Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, University of Essex, UK (GROW-Net Partner)

Dr. Halvard Buhaug, PRIO, Oslo, Norway (GROW-Net Partner)

Prof. Andreas Wimmer, University of California, Los Angeles

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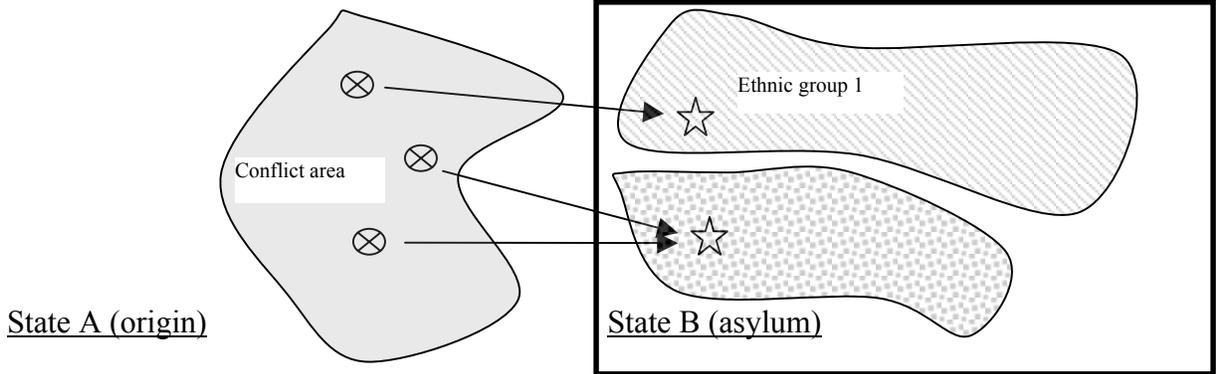
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Appendix A: Sample Data Structures

A. Global Refugee Data.

Origin	Host	Year	Number	Primary Ethnicity
Azerbaijan	Armenia	1993	328,000	Armenian
Azerbaijan	Armenia	1994	299,000	Armenian
.
Tanzania	Rwanda	1995	547,976	Hutu
.
Somalia	Kenya	1998	164,657	Somali

B. Geographically Disaggregated Data.



Refugee place of origin

Refugee camp/settlement