

**Refugee Admissions and Public Safety:
Are Refugee Settlement Areas More Prone to Crime?**

Catalina Amuedo-Dorantes
San Diego State University
Department of Economics
San Diego CA 92182-4485
Ph: 619-594-1663
Fax: 619-594-5062
camuedod@mail.sdsu.edu

Cynthia Bansak
St. Lawrence University
Department of Economics
Canton, NY 13617
Phone: (315) 229-5428
Fax (315) 229-5819
cbansak@stlawu.edu

Susan Pozo
Western Michigan University
Department of Economics
Kalamazoo, MI 49008
Ph: 269-387-5553
Fax: 269-387-5637
susan.pozo@wmich.edu

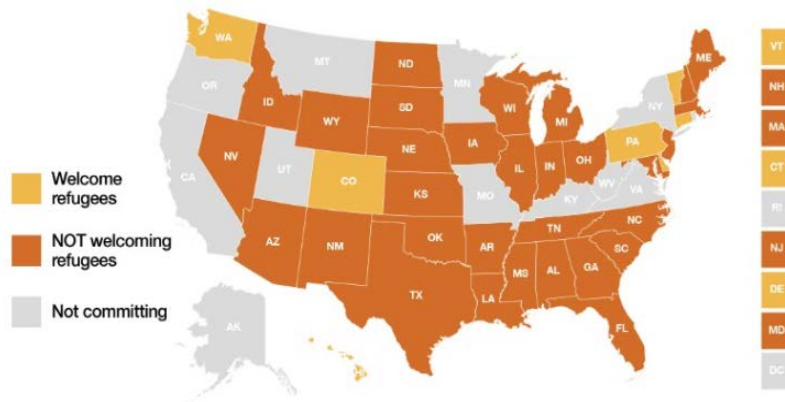
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Extended Abstract

Motivation and Objectives: According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, the number of refugees worldwide reached 14.4 million in 2014. Conflicts, political upheaval, deteriorating security and grinding poverty have contributed to the growing flow of refugees around the world, particularly from the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Most recently, following the five year old civil war, the focus has been on Syria. According to UNHCR (2016) and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (July 2015), the War in Syria has resulted in 4.6 million refugees and 7.6 million internally displaced individuals. These numbers are the largest in decades and have resulted in controversy regarding the long-term implications for refugee-receiving countries (Del Carpio and Wagner 2015).

While the United States had run the largest official resettlement program in the world,¹ it has now fallen behind European and Middle Eastern countries in relative and absolute numbers due to their relative proximity to Syria and their admission policies regarding Syrian refugees. In order to address the Syrian refugee crisis, the United States has reexamined its refugee ceiling to possibly admit additional refugees (Capps and Fix 2105). While welcoming refugees has been phrased in terms of a collective security issue, a number of states have shown resistance to such a mandate (see the map below from: CNN Breaking News 2015). Is there any basis for these fears? Or is wrong doing by a few refugees painting an undeserved reputation on the overall population of refugees? What are the risks of taking more refugees, if any?



In this paper, we exploit variation in the geographic and temporal distribution of refugees across U.S. counties to ascertain whether indeed there is a link between U.S. refugee settlements and victimization incidents. While others have examined the links between refugee-induced supply shocks on labor market outcomes, we believe that our paper is the first to link refugee settlement to possible criminal behavior in the United States.

Data and Methodology: Our data come from various sources. First, we gather data on the county placements of refugees from various origins across the United States from 2006 through

¹ See: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/refugees-us-germany-comparison_us_55f73b32e4b0c2077efbc52e

2016 from the Refugee Processing Center in the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration at the Department of State. Crime data are collected from the Uniform Crime Reporting Program (UCR), administered by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). These are notified offenses that are recorded and made publically available at the ICPSR.² Finally, we use the American Community Survey (ACS), along with various county-level data sources, such as the Bureau of Labor Statistics, to account for socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the cities included in the analysis. We link all three datasets by county and year to assess whether crime rates are associated with refugee settlements. Because of the distinct nature of property and violent crimes, we distinguish between victimizations associated with property offenses (*e.g.* burglary, robbery, theft), and those linked to violent crimes. For each set of victimizations, we estimate the following benchmark model:

$$(1) \quad \Delta Y_{ct} = \alpha + \beta \Delta R_{ct} + \Delta X_{ct} \gamma + \theta_c + \vartheta_t + \theta_c t + \varepsilon_{ct}$$

Our dependent variable (ΔY_{ct}) is the annual change in reported crimes divided by the resident adult population of county c in year t , whereas our primary explanatory variable of interest (ΔR_{ct}) is the change in the number of refugees divided by the resident adult population of county c in year t . In cities with no refugee inflows, R_{ct} is set to zero. The vector X_{ct} includes lagged changes in a number of county-level demographic characteristics (*e.g.* the size of the resident adult population, the share of young adults in the population, the share of elderly, and the share of college-educated individuals) and county-level socio-economic characteristics (*e.g.* average income levels, average poverty levels and unemployment rates, and the share of the population claiming welfare benefits). Finally, to address any unobserved time-invariant characteristics at the county level potentially correlated to victimization and criminal reports, we include county fixed-effects. In these specifications, identification comes from variation within a county over time. To further address macroeconomics shocks, such as the Great Recession that started in 2008 in the United States, we incorporate year fixed-effects. The inclusion of year fixed effects means that only deviations from annual averages are used for identification. Finally, we also include county-specific time trends to capture unobserved time-varying characteristics at the county level possibly driving the incidence of victimization reports.

Equation (1) treats the location of refugees as exogenous. We will address the potentially endogenous location of refugee settlements using an instrumental variable approach that exploits: (1) the temporal variation in socio-economic and political events in refugees' source countries (Angrist and Kugler 2004), as well as (2) the geographic variation in the distribution of migrants from the same country of origin in the United States in years prior given migrants' tendency to locate and be placed together.

Conclusion: Overall, the proposed analysis contributes to our understanding of the link between refugee settlements and victimization incident reports –a crucial element in shaping public attitudes towards refugees and a key component of current immigration policy proposals. Given the ongoing refugee crises around the world, gaining a better understanding of the facts is essential in order to devise immigration policies that address native concerns and avoid the misrepresentation of the refugee phenomenon or political opportunism.

² Go to: <https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/>

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