

NEW ISSUES IN REFUGEE RESEARCH

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Refugee involvement in political violence: quantitative evidence from 1987-1998

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Introduction: challenging popular misconceptions¹

In the past decade, a few high-profile instances of refugee militarization have encouraged the common assumption of rampant political violence in all refugee camps. In discussing the Great Lakes crisis, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees affirmed that “we are increasingly confronted, not just in this region but worldwide, with the problem of separating refugees from fighters, criminals, or even *genocidaires*.”² Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations concurred: “The safety of refugees has increasingly become a matter of international concern, as has the security of States hosting large refugee populations or having such populations near their borders.”³ Like officials of international humanitarian agencies, scholars also assume that most refugees inevitably become involved in political violence.⁴ In his survey of international military interventions during the 1990s, William Shawcross claims that “in the eighties [the militarization of camps] had been the exception...In the nineties it became commonplace.”⁵

Such assumptions of widespread militarization are not borne out by the facts. Surprisingly, the findings from an examination of available data on refugee-related political violence since 1987 shows that, contrary to popular opinion, violence is *not* increasing. Rather, the characteristics of violence and the groups affected by it have changed. The popularity of the misleading view of a post-Cold War upsurge of refugee militarization demonstrates the need for more systematic study of political violence in refugee populated areas. The real puzzle is why refugee situations, steeped in fear and animosity, so *rarely* lead to violence.

The dominant view of widespread refugee militarization is reinforced by journalists and scholars who focus on a few notorious instances of violence: the presence of genocidal militias among the Rwandan Hutu refugees in eastern Zaire; the US backed Afghan guerillas in Pakistan; the attacks on Cambodian refugees along the Thai border; South African bombing raids against refugees and exiles in neighboring states; Israeli massacres of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. These bloody, high-profile incidents call attention to

¹ For helpful comments and suggestions, I am grateful to David Art, Sara Jane McCaffrey, Daniel Metz, Jessica Piombo and the participants in the Mellon-MIT Program on NGOs and Forced Migration. This project was funded, in part, by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation through a grant to the Center for International Studies, MIT. I also thank UNHCR’s Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit, and especially Jeff Crisp, for assistance and support during this project.

² Sadako Ogata, “Opening Statement” at the Regional Meeting on Refugee Issues in the Great Lakes. Sponsored by the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Kampala, Uganda, May 8-9, 1998.

³ Report of the Secretary-General, “The Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa.” UN Doc. No. A/52/87-S/1998/318. April 13, 1998, par. 53.

⁴ Harto Hakovirta, “The Global Refugee Problem: A Model and Its Application.” *International Political Science Review*, 14, 1 (1993), 46-48.

⁵ William Shawcross, *Deliver Us From Evil: Peacekeepers, Warlords, and a World of Endless Conflict*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 378.

the lack of international protection for refugees, but they also illustrate the security threats posed by refugee flows for both the sending and receiving states.⁶

Studies of notorious cases of violence do not answer several essential questions concerning the extent and intensity of refugee involvement in political violence. Is the phenomenon confined to a few major cases, like Rwanda, Afghanistan, and Cambodia? Or is the problem of refugee-related violence more pervasive? How have the security threats arising from refugee situations changed over time? What regions of the world are most affected? What are the characteristics of sending and receiving states that become involved in conflict due, in part, to refugee flows? Without an understanding of those questions, theories of violence and policies for its remedy cannot advance.

This paper presents time series data in order to analyze the frequency, persistence, intensity, and type of political violence involving refugees.⁷ After defining the terms *political violence* and *militarization*, I explain the categories of violence captured by this dataset. The middle section of the paper presents data for the years 1987 to 1998, comparing among the years and analyzing the overall findings. The paper concludes with the implications suggested by the findings and areas for further research.

Analysis of the data from 1987 to 1998 reveals a number of interesting, and surprising, trends that contradict the conventional wisdom about refugee militarization. Most significant is the drop in the number of refugees affected by political violence since the end of the Cold War—from almost 8 million in 1987 to 4.3 million in 1998, with a dip to 1.7 million in 1997. Confounding the finding of a decrease in violence is the discovery that, although the number of refugees involved declined, the number of receiving states affected by violence shows a slight increase. The difference results from smaller refugee populations becoming involved in political violence. Another surprising finding shows that only a small proportion of receiving states report the occurrence of refugee-related violence each year. In most years, over one hundred states host refugees, yet 95% of all violence usually takes place in fewer than fifteen states. Additionally, the location of the affected receiving states and refugee populations has changed dramatically over the last ten years. Whereas African states accounted for 47% of affected receiving states in 1987, they accounted for 70% and 60% of the states impacted in 1997 and 1998, respectively. The dataset also reveals that the most persistent and intense type of violence is attacks between the sending state and the refugees. The findings suggest that rhetoric about a drastic increase in violence is unfounded, although the phenomenon of refugee-related violence—especially in Africa—is not disappearing.

⁶ The term *sending state* refers to the country from which the refugees fled. *Receiving state* describes the country that hosts the refugees.

⁷ In a forthcoming paper, I am expanding the time series data in order to test hypotheses about the causes of refugee-related violence.

Political violence involving refugees

Political violence, as distinguished from criminal violence, consists of organized violent activity for political goals. Although political *activity* occurs in many, if not most, refugee populated areas, political *violence* involving refugees occurs less often and can range from sporadic riots or beatings to full-fledged war. Incidents of political violence include cross border raids by militias based in or near refugee camps, attacks on the refugee population by the sending state, and military activity by the receiving state targeted against the refugee populated area. Measuring refugee-related violence is obviously not easy, especially when the available data does not provide standardized information. This study differentiates political violence from other types of violence, recognizing that in some cases the motivations for violence are blurred. In categorizing the data, a violent event is included if there is some aspect of political motivation in evidence, even if other motivations are also present.⁸

Political violence often occurs in the context of a militarized refugee population. Militarization describes non-civilian attributes of refugee populated areas, including inflows of weapons, military training and recruitment. Militarization also includes actions of refugees and/or exiles who engage in non-civilian activity outside the refugee camp, yet who depend on assistance from refugees or international organizations.⁹ Refugees or exiles who store arms and train outside the camp, yet return to the camp for food, medical assistance, and family visits, create a militarized refugee population.¹⁰ It follows that demilitarization entails the delinking of the refugee populated area from military actors and military activity and respect by all parties (i.e. refugees, receiving state government, and any external intervenors) for international law relating to the protection of refugees.¹¹

Political violence involving refugees manifests itself in five possible types (see Box 1). The first, and most common outcome, is a violent cross-border attack between the sending state and the refugees.¹² Examples include the repeated bombing raids by South Africa against suspected African National Congress (ANC) refugees in Angola and

⁸ For example, the dataset would not include an act of violence such as an assault or a murder that is described as originating from personal motivations or criminal activity (such as murder for personal gain or from jealousy). If a murder sparked ethnic riots in the camp, the riots would be classified as political violence.

⁹ The term exiles refers to people, including soldiers and war criminals, who left their country of origin but who do not qualify for refugee status. Exiles and refugees may live indistinguishably in camps, as they did in Zaire after the exodus from Rwanda.

¹⁰ For further elaboration, see Sarah Kenyon Lischer, "Militarized Refugee Populations: Humanitarian Challenges in the Former Yugoslavia." *Rosemarie Rogers Working Paper Series*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT, Center for International Studies; August, 1999). Found at: <http://web.mit.edu/cis/www/migration/Lischer3.html>.

¹¹ International law requires the protection of refugees and prohibits refugee participation in destabilizing activity. See the *1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, Chapter 1, General Provisions, Article 1 and the *Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa*, Organization of African Unity, 1969.

¹² The dataset combines the phenomena of attacks by the refugees and attacks against the refugees (for both receiving and sending state categories). Reports of violence often are not specific enough to pinpoint whether attacks on refugees were provoked by military activity in the refugee populated area. If the dataset separated these types of attacks into two categories, the result would likely undercount violence perpetrated by refugees and/or exiles.

Botswana during the 1980s and the Rwandan Hutu militia raids on Rwanda from their bases in the refugee camps of eastern Zaire.¹³ The second type of violence arises due to conflict between the refugees and the receiving state such as the fighting between Palestinian refugees and the Jordanian government which nearly led to civil war in the early 1970s. Third, ethnic or factional violence that erupts among refugees can spread conflict to the receiving state. For example, fighting between rival Burundian Hutu groups in the camps in western Tanzania has threatened Tanzania's security in the 1990s. Fourth, receiving states may fear that the arrival of refugees will spark internal conflict by creating an unstable ethnic balance that encourages a previously oppressed minority to confront the state. During the NATO action in Kosovo, many observers predicted that the presence of thousands of ethnic Albanian refugees in Macedonia could lead to civil war between Slavs and Albanians. The fifth type of violence occurs when refugees serve as catalysts for interstate war or unilateral intervention. For example, the 1994 United States intervention in Haiti occurred, in part, to prevent the arrival of thousands of refugees on Florida's shores.¹⁴

Box 1

Political Violence Involving Refugees

- Attacks between the sending state and the refugees
- Attacks between the receiving state and the refugees
- Ethnic or factional violence among the refugees
- Internal violence within the receiving state
- Interstate war or unilateral intervention

This project uses the concepts of frequency, persistence, intensity, and type to describe political violence involving refugees. The frequency of refugee-related violence describes the number of refugees involved in political violence, in absolute terms and as a proportion of all refugees. Frequency can also be analyzed in sub-categories to determine the regions or time periods most affected by violence. I measure persistence as refugee situations which have experienced political violence during repeated years.¹⁵ The most persistent cases are those which have reported violence for more than half of the twelve years in the dataset. The term intensity refers to the level of the violence, measured by casualty figures and narrative descriptions of the violent incidents. This measure gives an idea of the seriousness of the violence. In describing the type of refugee-related violence,

¹³ For more examples, see E.-E. Mtango, "Military and Armed Attacks on Refugee Camps," In Gil Loescher and Laila Monahan (eds.), *Refugees and International Relations*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 87-121.

¹⁴ Transcript of President Clinton's Radio Address to the Nation, Sept. 17, 1994.

¹⁵ The term "refugee situation" refers to a refugee population from one sending state in one receiving state for a given year, e.g. Ethiopians in Sudan during 1989.

I focus on the five outcomes described above, e.g. attacks between the sending state and the refugees, factional conflict among refugees, etc. Using the measures of frequency, persistence, intensity, and type, a picture of refugee-related violence emerges that alters the conventional wisdom and presents a more nuanced view of refugee involvement in political violence.

Gathering data on refugees and violence

The data for this project comes primarily from three sources that cover the period 1987 to 1998: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Annual Protection Reports, the U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR) *World Refugee Survey*, and *New York Times* abstracts. UNHCR's internal Annual Protection Reports, beginning in 1987, summarize the security and protection problems for each refugee receiving state. The reports consist of narrative answers to survey questions and include responses on security incidents, protection problems, and refugee law in the relevant countries. I supplement the UNHCR data with the US Committee for Refugees' annual publication, *World Refugee Survey*, which provides individual reports for each country. I have also analyzed *New York Times* abstracts from 1987 to 1998 for articles mentioning refugees and violence.

The resulting data tables categorize the universe of refugee populations by receiving state and by national origin of the refugees. This means that, for each year, there exists an observation for each receiving state and within the receiving state a separate observation for all refugee populations (of over 2,000 persons) by country of origin. Each observation notes (where available) the ethnicity of the refugees, the primary living situation (e.g. camps, urban, etc.), and any incidents of political violence. Where possible, the effects of the violence are quantified with casualty statistics. I also categorize the type of violence as one of the five outcomes listed earlier in Box 1. The data does not encompass instances of criminal violence, such as assault, rape, or theft. It also does not address other forms of threat, for example environmental degradation caused by refugee camps. By creating and analyzing these data tables, I am able to describe the frequency, persistence, intensity, and type of political violence involving refugees during the twelve year period, 1987 to 1998. Since this data encompasses both violent and non-violent populations, it does not suffer from the selection biases that occur if one focuses solely on high-profile conflict situations.

Any project that undertakes statistical analysis of refugees will encounter the well-known problems involved in enumerating refugee populations.¹⁶ Refugee experts agree that "all aggregate statistics on refugee flows should be interpreted with care" due to the difficulty of counting these mobile populations and the many incentives to distort the numbers for political reasons.¹⁷ My data uses the population figures provided by USCR in the *World*

¹⁶ Jeff Crisp, "Who Has Counted the Refugees? UNHCR and the Politics of Numbers," *New Issues in Refugee Research*, Working paper no. 12 (Geneva: UNHCR), June 1999.

¹⁷ Myron Weiner, "Bad Neighbors, Bad Neighborhoods: An Inquiry into the Causes of Refugee Flows," *International Security*, (1996), 17.

Refugee Survey. Although these numbers are considered one of the most reliable sources of data, disparities continue to exist in the population statistics put forward by USCR, UNHCR, and refugee receiving states. Thus, this paper does not escape the more general difficulties that plague refugee statistics.

The methodological problems associated with survey data, and especially with survey data that the researcher has not developed and tested herself, also affect the data analysis. I rely on documents from the UNHCR that have been collected over a twelve year period. One cannot claim that these Annual Protection Reports are free of all problems of validity and reliability.¹⁸ Like all survey data, the responses may contain hidden flaws resulting from human error or institutional biases. I have attempted to correct for institutional bias by also analyzing published news reports (*New York Times* abstracts) and independently gathered data from the US Committee for Refugees (the *World Refugee Survey*). This allows for cross-checking and corroborating the data using a variety of sources.¹⁹

Analyzing the data

In order to measure refugee involvement in political violence, I analyze the data along a number of dimensions. The first dimension, frequency, counts the number of refugees involved, both in absolute terms and relative to the total number of refugees. This measure provides some clue to the pervasiveness of the violence, but it does not adequately describe the nature and extent of refugee involvement in political violence. Another measure of the frequency of violent activity is the number of receiving states and refugee groups affected by the violence. Looking at states and refugee groups, in addition to the number of refugees, balances potentially skewed results due to a large, and very violent, refugee population.²⁰ Additionally, one can categorize the violence in terms of regions of the world affected, in order to note any change in the frequency of violence according to region.

The dataset facilitates the measurement of the frequency of political violence for each refugee situation. I define a refugee situation as the number of refugees from the same sending state in one receiving state during a given year, e.g. Liberian refugees in Guinea in 1995. If an incident of political violence occurs during the year that affects Liberian refugees in Guinea, I count that refugee group (Liberians) and that receiving state (Guinea) as affected by violence for that year. With better data, it would be possible to measure exactly the number of violent incidents per year. However, reliable and systematic data does not yet exist to that level of specificity for all states.

¹⁸ See Donald T. Campbell and Julian C. Stanley, *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research*, (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1990), 5-6 and passim and Floyd J. Fowler, Jr., *Survey Research Methods*, (Newbury Park: SAGE Publications, 1993), 69-93.

¹⁹ For example, if a violent incident was reported in the *New York Times*, but not by the USCR or the UNHCR, I would investigate further before including it in the dataset. In most such cases, the newspaper used the word refugee to describe internally displaced persons or migrants. Thus that case of violence would not be included in the dataset.

²⁰ For example, the millions of Afghan refugees in Pakistan who were affected by political violence.

In addition to frequency, the data sheds light on persistence and intensity of violence. In order to measure persistence, I note which states and refugee groups have consistently reported refugee-related violence over the years. Comparing the cases of repeated violence to consistently peaceful refugee situations will lead to a better understanding of the causes of violence.

Unlike, persistence, the intensity of violence presents many measuring difficulties, due to poor reporting of casualty figures and the inherent biases in the data.²¹ The data set includes all incidents of political violence, regardless of intensity—ranging from a single cross-border raid on a camp to a full-scale invasion. For each year, however, it is possible to determine the cases with highest levels of violence by comparing rough casualty figures and the narrative descriptions of the violence. I also categorize the findings according to the five forms of violence listed earlier in Box 1, demonstrating which types of violence occur most often. Readers are invited to reclassify these measures, as more data becomes available.

Despite imperfections in the available data, the results of the analysis provide information on hitherto unmeasured phenomena—the nature and extent of refugee involvement in political violence. The results contradict the conventional wisdom that the end of the Cold War has led to a surge in violence. The findings also illuminate patterns of violence that have been previously overlooked in studies of refugee violence.

Findings: an ambiguous drop in violence

The results of the data analysis clearly demonstrate that—despite public rhetoric to the contrary—the post-Cold War period has not seen a dramatic upsurge in refugee-related violence. The proportion of refugees involved in violence has declined from 60% in 1987 to 32% in 1998, with a sharp drop to 13% in 1997.²² Viewed in absolute terms, the data also shows a decline in involvement in violence (See Chart 1).²³ The number of refugees involved in political violence has dropped from 7,962,393 in 1987 to 4,336,300 in 1998. The average number of affected refugees from 1987 to 1991 was 7.3 million refugees whereas from 1995 to 1998 the average number of affected refugees was 3.2 million.²⁴

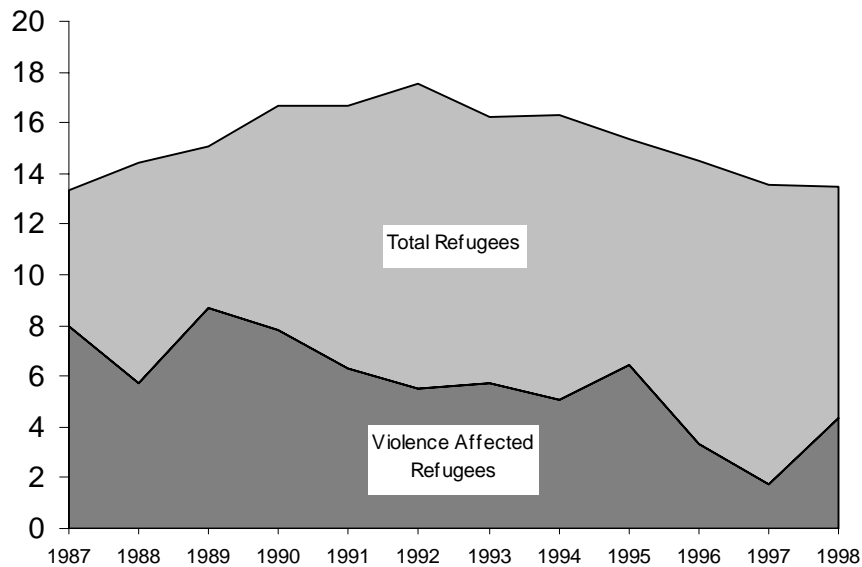
²¹ One likely bias is the under-reporting of refugee attacks against the sending state. Because violence is reported by humanitarian agencies in the refugee populated areas and by the receiving state, less information will be known about violence emanating from refugee populated areas which primarily impacts the sending state. I have tried to correct for that bias by using the *New York Times* as an additional source of information.

²² I count an entire refugee group, for example all Burundian refugees in Tanzania, as involved if an incident of political violence is reported for that year.

²³ The rise from 13% in 1997 to 32% of refugees affected in 1998 is entirely accounted for by the rise in violence affecting Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran (2.6 million people). The violence in 1998 was less intense than that which affected Afghans during the Cold War period, however.

²⁴ This drop is not explained by a reduction in total refugees during the twelve years. The number of total refugees averaged 15.23 million during 1987 to 1991 and 14.2 million during the period 1995 to 1998.

Chart 1
Refugees Involved in Political Violence (in millions)



Viewed in isolation, the drop in refugees affected by violence presents a misleading picture of the overall levels of violence. Surprisingly, despite the remarkable drop in the number of refugees affected, the number of receiving states reporting refugee-related violence has remained generally constant, with a slight increase since the mid-1990s (See Table 1). In both 1987 and 1997, seventeen receiving states were affected by refugee involvement in political violence. The average number of receiving states reporting political violence affecting refugees was 16 states between 1987 and 1991, whereas the same statistic was 18 states between 1995 and 1998.

The trend for sending states shows a similar constancy. Refugee groups from 15 states were affected by political violence in 1987, compared to 13 states in 1998. The number of affected sending states fluctuated between 10 and 18 states, but the trend shows a slight rise in recent years rather than a decline. The average number of states from which affected refugee populations originated was 13 states between 1987 and 1991. The same statistic was 15 states between 1995 and 1998.

Table 1
Receiving States and Refugee Groups Affected by Violence

Year	Receiving States	Refugee Groups
1987	17	15
1988	14	13
1989	21	15
1990	15	12
1991	13	10
1992	14	13
1993	18	14
1994	23	17
1995	19	18
1996	20	16
1997	17	14
1998	15	13

The results indicate that the decline in the number of refugees involved in violence has not resulted in a reduction in the number of states affected. Slightly more receiving states now face the problem of refugee-related violence than during the Cold War. Similarly, a greater number of states are now producing refugees who become affected by political violence than during the Cold War.

By looking more closely at the data, it is possible to understand the seemingly contradictory trends of decreasing levels of violence-affected refugees and increasing numbers of states reporting violence. The precipitous decline in the total number of refugees involved in political violence derives, in large part, from the reduction of hostilities between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan and in the Arab-Israeli conflict (see Chart 2). At their height, in 1987, Afghan and Palestinian refugees together comprised

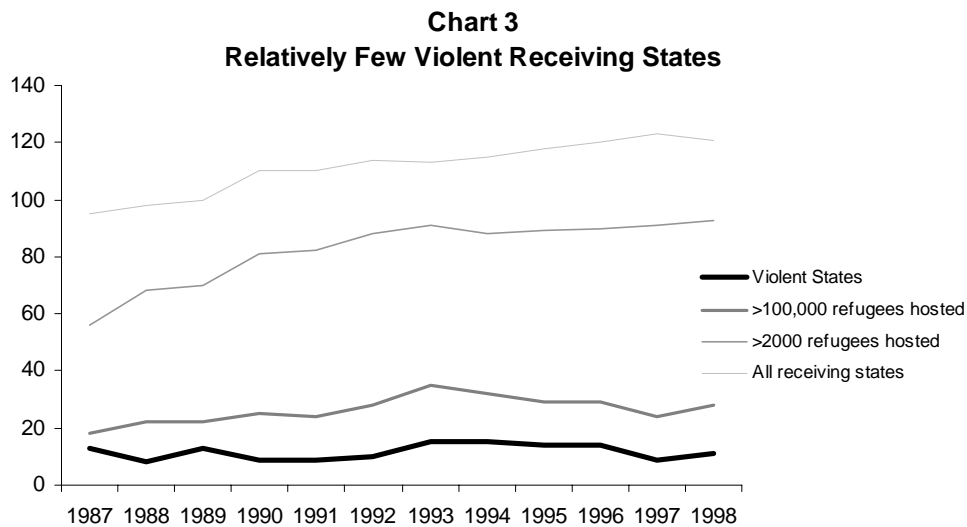
Chart 2
Violence Involving Afghan and Palestinian Refugees



nearly 8 million refugees (over 60% of all refugees for that year). During the late 1980s and early 1990s, intense violence involving those exiles led to much higher statistics on refugee militarization.

Although there has been a slight rise in the number of refugee groups and receiving states affected by violence, this number represents only a small proportion of the total number of refugee groups and receiving states. Most refugee-related violence occurs in a handful of states. Over the twelve year period, 11 receiving states, on average, hosted 97% of the refugees involved in political violence each year (see Chart 3).²⁵ During that period an average of 82 states each year hosted 2,000 or more refugees.

The findings are similar when analyzed according to sending states. For the same period, refugee groups from 12 sending states accounted for 96% of refugees affected by political violence.²⁶ An average of 40 states each year produced 2,000 refugees or more. These statistics demonstrate that a small proportion of receiving states account for nearly all of the refugee-related violence. A slightly larger proportion of sending states produce the vast majority of refugee groups that are affected by political violence.



Persistence of violence

Although usually fewer than 20 receiving states report refugee-related violence each year, a total of 55 receiving states have reported such violence throughout the time span of the dataset. A few of those states report violence nearly every year, but the vast majority experience less persistent violence (see Table 2, Appendix 1). Political violence involving refugees is not endemic, except in a handful of receiving states. Of the 55 affected states,

²⁵ The number of receiving states accounting for over 95% of affected refugees ranged between 9 and 15 for each year.

²⁶ The number of states producing violence-affected refugees ranged from 8 to 16 states over the years.

65% reported violent incidents for fewer than five of the twelve years. Ten receiving states have reported political violence for more than half of the twelve years studied.²⁷

Over the twelve year period, refugee groups from 41 states have been affected by refugee-related political violence, although for each year the number is usually less than 15 groups. Like the receiving states, most refugee groups experience violence intermittently. Of the 41 groups, over half were affected by violence for only one to four of the years under study. About a quarter of the refugee groups (11 of 41) experienced political violence for five to eight years. Only six refugee groups were involved in political violence for more than eight of the twelve years. Refugees from nine states have been affected by political violence for more than half of the twelve year period.²⁸

The patterns of persistent violence confirm other findings about the nature of refugee-related violence. The statistics on frequency showed that a small number of states and refugee groups (about 20% of the total) account for nearly all refugee-related violence. The data on persistence confirms that most states do not experience continuous violence over the years. In persistence, as well as frequency, African states are over-represented, both as receiving states and refugee groups: six of the ten most repeatedly violent receiving states are found in Africa, as well as six of the nine refugee groups. The Palestinian and Afghan refugee situations also figure prominently in the persistently affected list, especially during the late 1980s and early 1990s.²⁹

In assessing the persistence of violence in the 55 affected states and 41 affected refugee groups over the 12 year period, one should remember the unstated category of non-affected states. This category comprises the dozens of states that did not report violence for even one year. Between 1987 and 1998, 156 states hosted refugees, yet only a third of those states experienced refugee-related violence.

Intensity of violence

In addition to the persistence of violence, it is useful to know which of these refugee situations also experienced high level, or intense, violence. Some groups are not repeatedly involved in violence, yet when violence occurs it is extremely bloody. Other groups experience both persistent and intense violence. Some other groups appear more violent, due to ongoing conflict, yet closer examination reveals a relatively low level of intensity in which few deaths occur. From my data set, it is possible to highlight the most violent incidents in order to develop a list of some of the situations with the most intense violence (See Tables 3-5, Appendix 3).

²⁷ See Chart 7, Appendix 2 for a list of states and years affected.

²⁸ See Chart 8, Appendix 2 for a list of refugee groups and years affected.

²⁹ With the exception of Afghan refugees in Iran, who were much less affected by political violence than Afghans in Pakistan.

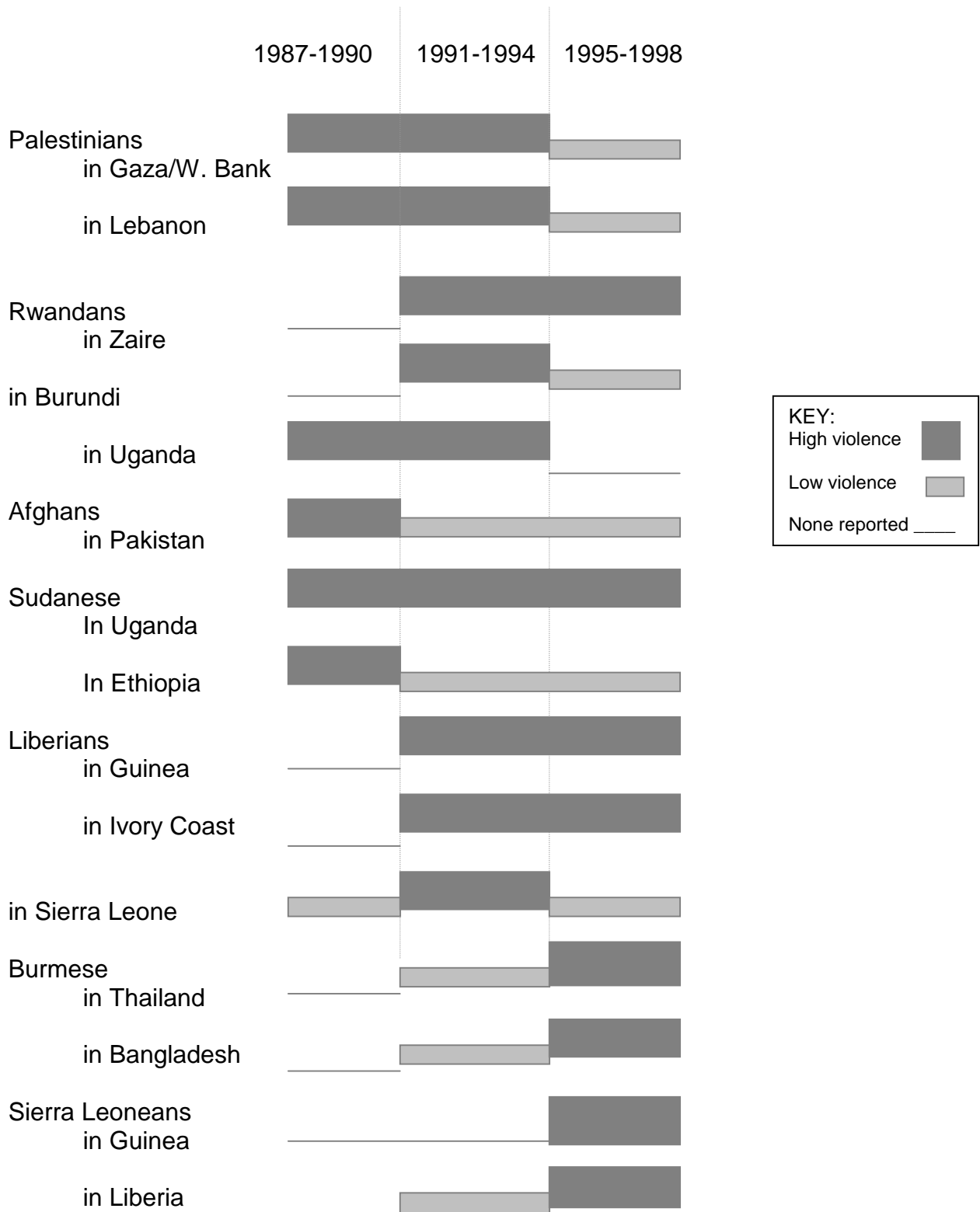
Fifteen refugee situations have experienced both persistent and intense violence over the twelve year period (see Chart 4).³⁰ With the exception of Sudanese refugees in Uganda (who continually experience high levels of violence), most of the refugee situations show variation over time in levels of violence. The seven refugee groups most affected by political violence over the twelve years are: Palestinians, Rwandans, Afghans, Sudanese, Liberians, Burmese, and Sierra Leoneans. In many cases, populations from these countries have experienced violence in multiple receiving states. An additional level of variation—that of non-violent situations—is not included in Chart 4. For example, Rwandan refugees (both Hutu and Tutsi) living in Tanzania do not appear on this chart because their levels of violence have been much lower. While the chart suggests that Rwandans have a high propensity for involvement in violence (in Zaire, Burundi, and Uganda), it helps to understand the causes of that violence, and possible solutions, by including study of the relatively non-violent situation in Tanzania.

One can measure intense violence by the number of incidents within a year and the level of casualties (when given). My analysis treats casualty figures relative to the population, not just as absolute numbers. In assessing statistics on intensity of violence, it is important to remember that the determining the intensity of the violence is somewhat subjective, due to a lack of comparable casualty statistics. I have made rough categorizations of intense violence and present illustrative examples in Appendix 2.

A likely bias in the data is the less complete reporting on attacks by refugees against the sending state. That data is not usually available to humanitarian workers in the receiving state or the receiving state government—the two primary sources of information on refugee violence. This bias probably means, for example, that violence involving Nicaraguan refugees in Honduras is underrepresented due to lack of information about the effect of *contra* attacks against the sending state. It is possible, on a case by case basis, to investigate refugee-related violence that occurs in the sending state. In some cases, humanitarian staff report the allegations made by the sending state of refugee attacks. I have used the *New York Times* reports to counteract somewhat this potential bias in the dataset.

³⁰ Chart 4 represents the refugee situations which have experienced both persistent and intense refugee-related violence for at least one of the three time periods. Persistent violence is defined as the occurrence of refugee-related violence for more than six of the twelve years under study. The most intense violence is measured as the refugee groups in each time period that experience the highest and most sustained conflict (in terms of relative and absolute casualty figures and number of violent incidents per year). The table groups the data into four-year blocks, thus eliminating some variation that may occur from year to year within each block.

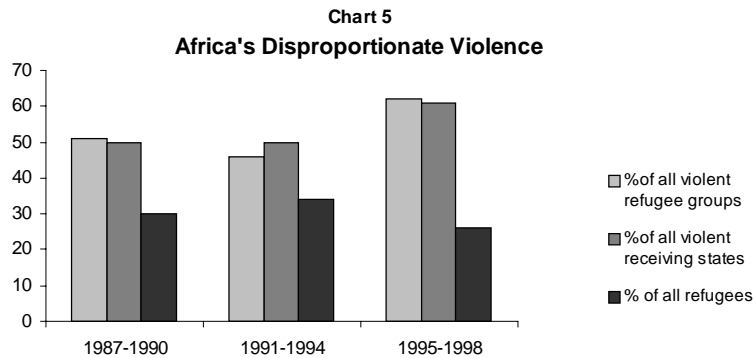
**Chart 4:
Persistent and Intense Refugee-Related Violence**



Africa's disproportionate violence

The receiving states that suffer political violence involving refugees have not stayed constant over the last decade. Most markedly, the proportion of African states has increased. In 1987, 8 of the 17 affected receiving states were in Africa. By 1998, that proportion increased to 9 out of 15 states, representing an increase from 47% to 60% of all receiving states affected. In the first five years of the data set (1987 to 1991), African states accounted for an average of 53% of receiving states affected by violence, whereas the average proportion for 1995 to 1998 is 61%. Looking at the statistics in terms of the national origin of the refugees (i.e. by sending state) tells a similar story.

One might hypothesize that Africa's disproportionate violence arises due to the relatively greater number of refugees on the continent. Surprisingly, however, the high proportion of violence-affected African refugees and states does not correlate with the proportion of refugees hosted in African states. The distribution of refugees and violence is markedly skewed (See Chart 5). Over the twelve year period, refugees in Africa have constituted an average of 27% of all refugees. During that same period, refugees from African states have comprised 53% of all refugees involved in political violence and African receiving states have accounted for 54% of all states reporting violence. The increase in African refugee-related violence has become even more noticeable in the last two years of the dataset. The proportion of African refugees in the world has dropped to 22% whereas the proportion of refugee-related violence that occurs in Africa has risen to between 60 and 70%.



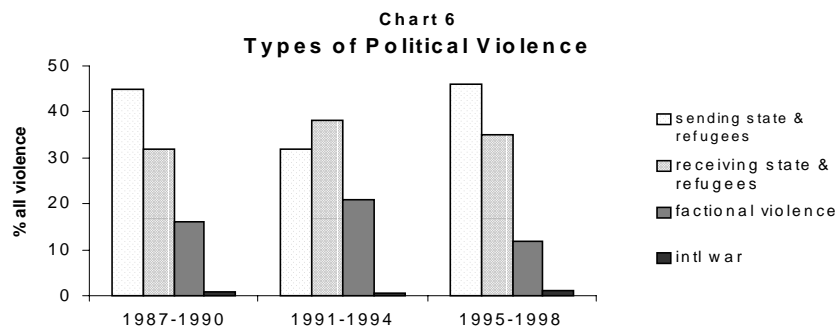
Another possible explanation for the disproportionate refugee-related violence in Africa is that Africa also suffers a disproportionate level of civil and international conflict. Relatively high levels of conflict could explain the greater levels of refugee-related violence but statistics about state involvement in war do not confirm this hypothesis. During the period 1987 to 1998, seventy-two states fought either a civil or international war.³¹ Twenty-seven of those states, 37% of the total, were in Africa. Thus, one finds that the level of refugee-related violence does not correlate with either the percentage of refugees or the percentage of war-prone states in Africa. Further research is needed to explain the disproportionately high levels of refugee-related violence in Africa.

³¹ Statistics taken, in part, from Dan Smith, *The State of War and Peace Atlas* (London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1997), 90-95.

Common types of political violence

In presenting my findings, I have thus far grouped all types of violence together, e.g. attacks between the refugees and the sending state, factional violence, etc. A reclassification of the findings according to the type of violence demonstrates that attacks between the sending state and the refugees occur most often, closely followed by attacks between the receiving state and refugees (See Chart 6). In recent years, attacks between refugees and the sending state have increased as a proportion of all violence. Interstate war and unilateral intervention, although infrequent, have also occurred more often in the last five years of the dataset than the first five years. The category of “increased conflict within the receiving state due to refugees” either occurs infrequently or is not easily captured by reports of refugee violence. I also used a category of “Uncertain/Other” for the small number of incidents in which the reporter could not determine the identity of the attacker.³²

Each type of violence has its own dynamic; the different types are not necessarily comparable. In most cases, attacks between the sending state and the refugees entail the most intense violence, such as bombing and shelling of camps (see Appendix 3).³³ Cross-border invasions, either by the sending state or the refugees, are one of the most extreme forms of violence between the refugees and the sending state, and those most likely to lead to international war. The data shows that violence between the refugees and the sending state usually involves a greater number of casualties and a more sustained period of conflict than any other type of political violence except international war.



In extreme cases, attacks between the sending state and the refugees can lead to international war. Unlike attacks involving only the receiving state and the refugees, attacks involving the sending state present a greater threat to the sovereignty of the receiving state and may be viewed as a national security threat by both the sending and receiving state. For example, attacks between the refugees and the sending state escalated into international war in Central Africa when Rwanda attacked Zaire and the Hutu refugees under the pretext of eliminating the security threat posed by the camps.

³² In some cases, it was not possible to determine the identity of a rebel group that attacked the camps. Uncertainty existed as to whether the group originated in the sending or receiving state. This occurred in a few cases of attacks on Sudanese refugees in northern Uganda.

³³ An exception is violence between Palestinian refugees and the Jordanian and Lebanese governments.

Violence between the refugees and the receiving state often involves police actions or riots between the locals and the refugees. Examples of this include the continuing violence involving Burmese refugees in Bangladesh. The Bangladeshi police and/or military often use violence to encourage repatriation. Local villagers sometimes join in police attacks against the refugees, leading to riots and even more severe police action.

Another type of violence occurs when rebel groups in the receiving state (often supported by the sending state) attack the refugees. This has happened on numerous occasions in northern Uganda where Sudanese-funded groups attacked refugees from southern Sudan. Violence between refugees and the receiving state often erupts when refugees protest their conditions. For example, Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong rioted many times, resulting in scores of deaths, to protest forced return to Vietnam.³⁴

Factional or ethnic violence among refugees is the third most common phenomenon. This often occurs when refugee groups include members of different ethnic groups or competing political parties. The ramifications of factional or ethnic violence include lawlessness in the refugee camps and endangerment of the staff of humanitarian aid groups but does not often spread to engulf the sending and receiving states. One exception would be cases in which a faction or ethnic group has supporters within the receiving state. In that case, violence could lead to a broader civil conflict in the receiving state. In many situations, factional or ethnic violence does not occur in isolation but accompanies one of the other manifestations of violence. Palestinian and Afghan refugees, for example, have experienced sending state, receiving state and factional violence.

International war or unilateral intervention due to refugees occurs rarely. The most recent occurrence was the 1996 invasion of Zaire by Rwanda, which combined civil war, international war, and attacks on refugee camps that killed thousands of Rwandan Hutu. Other refugee-related wars include the 1979 war between Tanzania and Uganda and the 1971-72 war between India and Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan).³⁵

The war involving Zaire and Rwanda presents a different pattern than the earlier refugee-related wars. In this case, the cross-border attacks between the Hutu exiles and the Rwandan government escalated into international war when the sending state invaded the receiving state. In the earlier cases, the receiving state invaded (or intervened in) the sending state in order to reduce a perceived threat. Those wars or interventions can be classified as defensive in nature. By contrast, in eastern Zaire, the sending state (Rwanda) invaded the receiving state because it perceived an opportunity to eliminate the security threat posed by the militant exiles. The war in Congo/Zaire should be seen as a more

³⁴ On these instances of violence, see country reports for Burma, Uganda, and Hong Kong in US Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Survey* (Washington DC), various years.

³⁵ On the Tanzania-Uganda war see, Anthony Clayton, *Frontiersmen: Warfare in Africa Since 1950*. (London: UCL Press, 1999), 104-108. On Bangladesh, see U.S. Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Report, 1972*, (New York: USCR), 6-9.

opportunistic invasion which was designed to take advantage of the collapse of Mobutu's power.³⁶

Arguably, during the Cold War patterns of conflict like the opportunistic interventions in the Great Lakes were contained (or at least controlled) by the interests of the great powers. In spite of American or Soviet support for militant exiles in Afghanistan, Thailand, and southern Africa, those conflicts did not escalate into regional wars. Observers fear that post-Cold War political dynamics could encourage more conflicts like the Congo war, due to the passivity of the Cold War superpowers, as well as the disengagement of former colonial masters. If the Congo war in the Great Lakes represents a new trend in refugee-related violence, then the growth of violence between the refugees and the sending state presents a greater risk of war than it did in the past.

Conclusion: puzzles, surprises, and future research

The findings from this data analysis raise a number of puzzles that require further research.³⁷ The first surprising finding is the reduction, both in absolute and relative terms, of refugee involvement in political violence. This finding contradicts the conventional wisdom of a rise in political violence involving refugees. The decrease in numbers of refugees involved is offset, however, by the slight rise in the number of receiving states and refugee groups affected by political violence. That suggests that refugee-related violence remains as widespread as ever, if not more so. One explanation for the decrease in numbers of refugees affected by political violence is that a small number of violent refugee populations dominated the statistics during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Since the reduction in refugee-related violence among Afghan and Palestinian exiles, the total number of affected refugees has dropped precipitously. Further research is needed to assess the impact of the Afghan and Palestinian refugee situations, as well as suggest alternate explanations for the overall trends in refugee-related violence.

Another important finding is that, in most years, roughly a dozen receiving states and refugee groups account for over 95% of all refugee-related political violence. Around a hundred states receive refugees every year, yet only about a fifth of those states report refugee-related violence. This finding contradicts the conventional wisdom that political violence involving refugees is endemic to most refugee situations. The puzzle for policymakers is identifying which refugee situations are most likely to experience violence. Determining the causes of violence will help predict the likelihood of its outbreak.

³⁶ On the difference between opportunistic invasions and defensive interventions see, Michael E. Brown, "The Causes and Regional Dimensions of Internal Conflict." In Brown (ed.), *The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 596-598.

³⁷ By expanding the large-n dataset, and also analyzing specific cases in depth, I will address the causes of these puzzles in a forthcoming work.

The vast majority of affected receiving states reported violence for only one to four years of the twelve year period. There are a number of explanations for the low level of persistence. In some cases, a violent refugee situation became less violent over time, such as the Palestinian refugees in Jordan. In other cases, low measures of persistence occurred because the refugee situations existed for fewer years. Examples of that phenomenon include the Liberian refugees in Ivory Coast who suffered persistent violence, but who stayed in Ivory Coast for less than six years. The data on persistence also confirms the findings on frequency. Although 55 receiving states reported refugee-related violence for varying numbers of years, 100 receiving states reported no violence at all during the twelve year period. Examining the various levels of persistence—high, medium, low, and none—will help determine the causes of violence.

Analysis of the data identifies fifteen refugee situations which have experienced high levels of both persistence and intensity. Six refugee groups have experienced the most pervasive and high-level violence, scattered among thirteen receiving states (see Chart 4). Considering that over a hundred states on average host refugees each year, this represents a small proportion of all receiving states. Further research on in-depth cases studies is needed to explain the puzzle of so many relatively peaceful refugee situations.

The statistics on frequency, persistence, and intensity bear out the alarming finding that African states and refugees suffer disproportionately from refugee-related violence. Despite the fact that they generally account for less than 30% of all refugees, African refugees comprise over 50% of those involved in political violence. A puzzle for future research is to explain the high levels of violence involving African refugees.

During the Cold War, the superpowers often disregarded (or even actively supported) military activity affecting refugee populated areas because it served their strategic purposes. Now, political leaders in powerful donor countries deplore such activity, freeing the humanitarian agencies to openly acknowledge the problem of violence. Because it occurs in areas that have little strategic significance to the major powers, however, those wealthy states expend few resources to prevent refugee-related violence. For example, only one of 40 member states approached by the United Nations regarding the demilitarization of Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaire volunteered assistance. Due in large part to inadequate security measures and international passivity, the presence of Hutu *Interahamwe* militias among the refugees in eastern Zaire sparked a series of interstate wars in central Africa.³⁸

Although political violence can take many forms, the most common phenomenon is cross-border attacks between the refugees and the sending state. The data reveals that attacks between the sending state and the refugees occur more frequently and with more intensity than other forms of violence. This finding, while not surprising, was previously unknown due to the dearth of systematic study of refugee-related violence. This type of violence presents the greatest risk of escalation into interstate war and thus is more difficult to control than other types. The best means to prevent attacks between the

³⁸ David Shearer, "Africa's Great War," *Survival*, 41, 2 (Summer 1999), 89-106.

refugees and the sending state is a receiving state or external power willing and capable of enforcing international law.

These findings highlight current trends in refugee-related violence and lay the groundwork for studies of the causes of violence. For now, future scenarios offer a mixture of hope and caution. One possibility is that the proportion of refugees involved in political violence will continue to decrease as the great powers lose interest in arming various exile groups. The reduction of great power support for militant refugees combined with a new trend toward international humanitarian intervention could vastly decrease refugee-related violence. However, a paradoxical result of that superpower passivity is that neglect could lead to more situations like eastern Zaire, in which mixed (civilian and non-civilian) populations of exiles engage in military activity unhindered while reaping the benefits of international humanitarian assistance. It is also possible that the lull in great power support for exile groups constitutes a temporary phenomenon. Considering past trends, in which a few large refugee groups (such as Afghans, Palestinians, Rwandans, and Cambodians) experienced persistent and intense violence, one could expect the emergence of similar groups in coming years, for example in conflict-ridden West Africa or the Balkans. Whatever the future trends, the new information described in this paper improves understanding of refugee-related violence, and hopefully will lead to effective policies of violence management and prevention.

Appendix 1

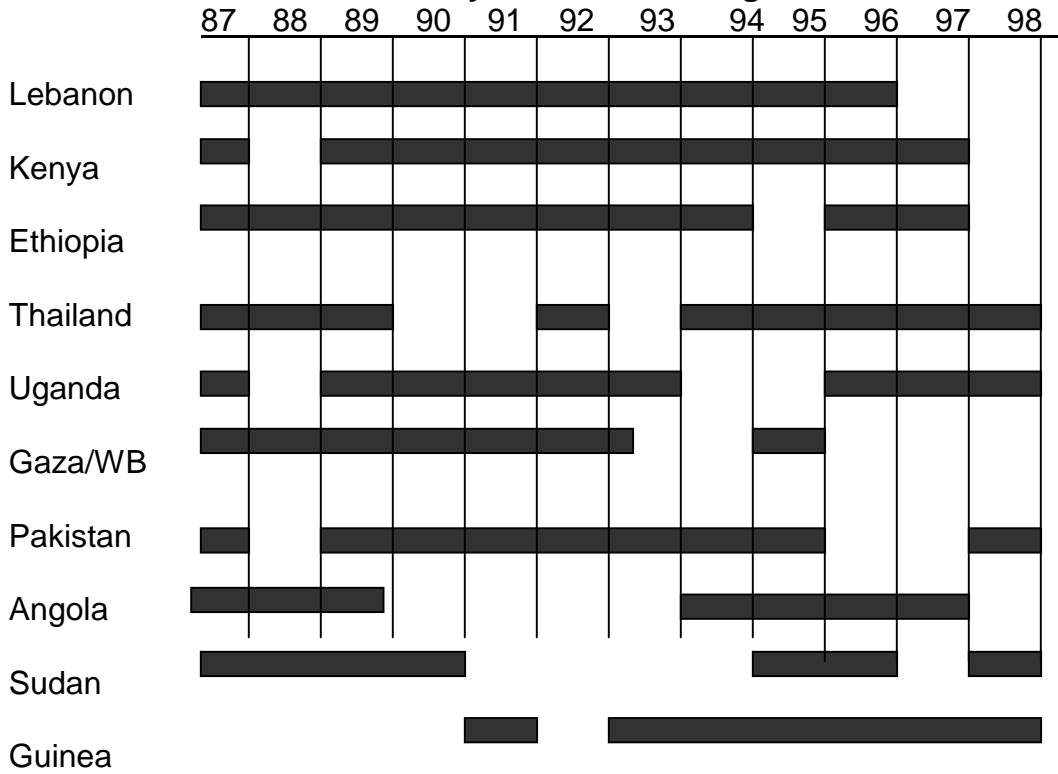
Table 2
Years of Violence Reported—Receiving States

9-12 years	5-8 years	1-4 years
Ethiopia	Angola	Afghanistan
Gaza/West Bank	Bangladesh	Armenia
Kenya	Guinea	Benin
Lebanon	Hong Kong	Botswana
Pakistan	Iran	Burundi
Sudan	Iraq	Cent. African Rep.
Thailand	Liberia	Croatia
Uganda	Rwanda	Djibouti
	Tanzania	Dominican Rep.
	Zaire/DRC	Germany
	Zambia	Guatemala
		Guinea Bissau
		Honduras
		India
		Ivory Coast
		Jordan
		Lesotho
		Malawi
		Malaysia
		Mauritania
		Mexico
		Nepal
		Papua New Guinea
		Saudi Arabia
		Senegal
		Sierra Leone
		Somalia
		Swaziland
		Sweden
		Switzerland
		Syria
		Turkey
		USA
		Yemen
		Yugoslavia

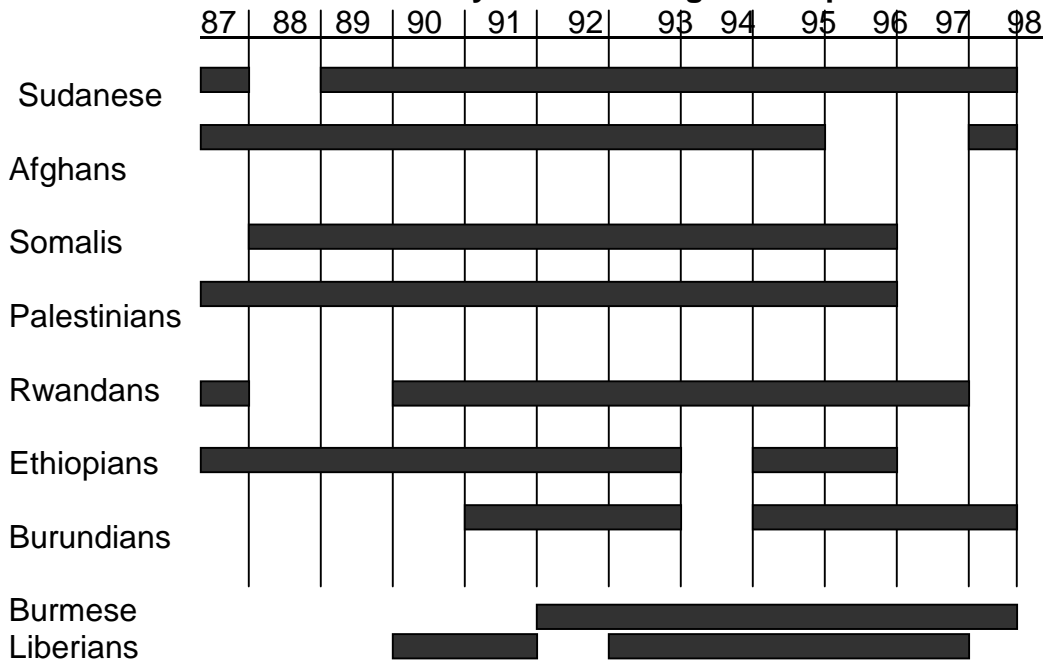
Appendix 2

KEY: Years reporting violence 

**Chart 7:
Persistently Violent Receiving States**



**Chart 8:
Persistently Violent Refugee Groups**



Appendix 3

Tables 3, 4 and 5: Intensely Violent Refugee Situations

1987 to 1990

Refugee Group	Receiving State	Political Violence
Palestinians	Gaza/ West Bank	Intifada; attacks between refugees and Israeli forces
	Lebanon	Israel bombs camps; factional violence between PLO and rivals; attacks between refugees and Lebanese forces.
Afghans	Pakistan	Afghan/Soviet forces shell camps; cross-border attacks by Afghan mujahedin based in camps; factional fighting among refugee/rebel groups.
Sudanese	Uganda	Sudanese rebels in camps. Refugee camp bombed. Cross border attacks between refugees and Sudan.
	Ethiopia	Cross border attacks by SPLA on refugees. Sudanese rebels forcibly recruit refugees. Ethnic riots by locals and refugees near camps.
Rwandans	Uganda	Refugees form an army of 7,000 and invade Rwanda.
Mozambicans	Zambia	Cross-border raids by RENAMO and counter-attacks by Zambian forces.
	Zimbabwe	RENAMO incursions against refugees and locals. Zimbabwe forces retaliate against refugees.

1991 to 1994

Refugee Group	Receiving State	Political Violence
Rwandans	Burundi	Burundian Hutu attack Tutsi refugees after assassination of Burundi's president; Tutsi refugees attack new Hutu refugees; RPF crosses border to attack Hutu refugees.
	Zaire	Ex-army and militias control camps and conduct cross border attacks on Rwanda; conflict between refugees and Zairean forces; factional fighting among refugees.
	Uganda	Refugee army continues invasion of Rwanda;
Palestinians	Gaza/ West Bank	Intifada; attacks between Palestinians and Israeli forces; factional fighting among Palestinians.
	Lebanon	Camps under siege by Lebanese forces; air raids on camps by Israeli forces; factional fighting among Palestinian militias in camps.
Liberians	Sierra Leone	Liberian rebels cross border and attack refugees and locals; local retaliation against refugees
	Ivory Coast	Liberian NPFL rebels attack refugees and locals; militias in camps recruit refugees to fight in Liberia.
	Guinea	ULIMO rebels attack refugees and locals; refugees recruited to join ULIMO and attack Liberia.
Sudanese	Uganda	Sudanese rebels attack camps

1995 to 1998

Refugee Group	Receiving State	Political Violence
Rwandans	Zaire	50,000 former military/militia in camps; military training in camps; cross border attacks on Rwanda; RPF cross border attacks against camps; RPF and Zairean rebels bomb camps; refugees attack Zairean Tutsi; Zaire arms refugees to fight rebels
Sierra Leoneans	Guinea	Sierra Leone rebels attack camps and local villages.
	Liberia	Sierra Leone government shells refugee settlement
Liberians	Ivory Coast	Liberians attack across border; Ivoirians attack refugees in revenge
	Guinea	Liberian rebels attack refugees and locals; reprisal attacks on refugees by Guineans
Burmese	Thailand	Burmese government and dissident rebels attack refugees in dozens of incursions; shelling of camps.
	Bangladesh	Violent clashes between police and militant refugees; factional fighting within camp.
Sudanese	Uganda	Anti-government Ugandan rebels massacre refugees; dozens of rebel attacks on camps; Sudanese rebels active in camps.