

Working Paper #10

**Refugee-Related Political Violence:
When? Where? How Much?**

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Abstract

Lack of information about the nature and extent of refugee involvement in political violence has long hindered researchers and policymakers. This paper presents new time series data in order to analyze the frequency, persistence, intensity, and type of political violence involving refugees for the years 1987 to 1998. The analysis reveals a number of interesting, and surprising, trends that contradict the conventional wisdom about refugee militarization. Overall, while absolute numbers of refugees involved in political violence have decreased, the number of states affected remains constant. The difference results from smaller refugee populations becoming involved in political violence. Another significant finding contradicts the assumption that political violence affects most refugee areas. In fact, very few refugee situations experience political violence. In most years, over one hundred states host refugees, yet 95% of all refugee-related violence usually takes place, on average, in fewer than fifteen states. The findings from this dataset reveal trends in refugee-related violence and change the terms of the current discourse on refugees and political violence.

Refugee-Related Political Violence: When? Where? How Much?

Sarah Kenyon Lischer¹

I. Challenging Popular Misconceptions

Since the mid-1990s, a few high-profile instances of refugee militarization have encouraged the common assumption that rampant and increasing political violence affects most refugee camps. In discussing the Great Lakes refugee 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. 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.”⁴

The dominant view of widespread refugee militarization is reinforced by journalists and scholars who generalize from 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; the massacres of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Such violence has led to the supposition of “an apparent growth in the number of armed attacks on refugee camps and settlements.”⁵

¹ This study was supported by a generous grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. For helpful comments and suggestions, I am grateful to David Art, Kelly Greenhill, Charles Keely, Sara Jane McCaffrey, Daniel Metz, Jessica Piombo, Barry Posen, Monica Toft and the participants in the Mellon-MIT Program on NGOs and Forced Migration. I also thank UNHCR’s Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit, and especially Jeff Crisp, for assistance and support during this project. An earlier version of this paper appeared in the UNHCR working paper series, *New Issues in Refugee Research* (July 2000).

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. See also, United Nations, Security Council. “Report of the Secretary-General on Protection for Humanitarian Assistance to Refugees and Others in Conflict Situations.” S/1998/883. New York, Sept. 22, 1998, par. 2.

⁴ William Shawcross, *Deliver Us From Evil: Peacekeepers, Warlords, and a World of Endless Conflict*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 378. See also Harto Hakovirta, “The Global Refugee Problem: A Model and Its Application.” *International Political Science Review*, 14, 1 (1993), 46-48.

⁵ Jeff Crisp, “UNHCR and Refugee Security: A Discussion Paper,” Distributed at the MIT/UNHCR Workshop on Security in Refugee Populated Areas, October 29-30, 1999, 1.

The conventional wisdom expressed above is not based on empirical facts but on perceptions. These perceptions are wrong. Until now, there has been no systematic analysis of refugee-related violence that could determine if the phenomenon was rising or falling and how it changed over time. Studies of notorious cases of violence do not answer several essential questions concerning 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?⁶ Without an understanding of those questions, theories of violence and policies for its remedy cannot advance.

This paper presents new time series data in order to analyze the frequency, persistence, intensity, and type of political violence involving refugees for the years 1987 to 1998. The analysis reveals a number of interesting, and surprising, trends that contradict the conventional wisdom about refugee militarization. Overall, while absolute numbers of refugees involved in political violence have decreased, the number of states affected remains constant. The difference results from smaller refugee populations becoming involved in political violence.⁷ Another significant finding contradicts the assumption that political violence affects most refugee areas. In fact, very few refugee situations experience political violence. In most years, over one hundred states host refugees, yet 95% of all refugee-related violence takes place, on average, in fewer than fifteen states.

These findings do not negate the concern expressed by policy makers and scholars about refugee related violence, but the systematic analysis does redirect the focus of concern. The main difference between 1980s and the 1990s is that post-Cold War refugee-related violence was not condoned by a great power (i.e., the United States or Soviet Union). This disengagement partly results from the increasing proportion of refugee-related violence in Africa—a region that the United States, in particular, does not view as a vital national security interest. Thus, post-Cold War refugee militants usually lack superpower patrons and are therefore less controllable. These changing patterns of violence over time have increased threats to regional stability, to aid workers' safety, and often to Western security interests.

The following pages explain the construction of the data set and present the results of the analysis. The next section defines essential terms and explains the categories of violence captured by the data set. The middle section of the paper presents the results for the twelve years (1987 to 1998), comparing among the years and analyzing overall findings. The paper concludes with the implications of the findings for understanding the causes of violence and predicting future conflict.

II. Measuring Refugee-Related Violence

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

⁷ The Cold War figures are so high due to a few large and violent populations, such as the 3 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

This project presents information on refugee-related violence along four dimensions: frequency, persistence, intensity, and type. The frequency of refugee-related violence describes the number of refugees involved in political violence for a given year, in absolute terms and as a proportion of all refugees. Another measure of the frequency of violent activity is the number of receiving and sending states affected by the violence.⁸ Looking at sending and receiving states, in addition to the number of refugees, balances potentially skewed results due to a large, and very violent, refugee situation. A “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. All refugees in that situation (e.g. all Ethiopians in Sudan during 1989) are counted as involved in political violence if an incident is reported for that year. Frequency can also be analyzed in sub-categories to determine the regions or time periods most affected by violence.

In addition to frequency, the data shed light on persistence and intensity of violence. Persistence is measured as refugee situations that repeatedly experience political violence over time. The most persistent cases are those that 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. Unlike, persistence, the intensity of violence presents many measurement difficulties, as a result of poor reporting of casualty figures and inherent biases in the data.⁹ The dataset 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.

In describing the type of refugee-related violence, the analysis focuses on the five outcomes described in the next section of the paper. These are: attacks between the sending state and the refugees, attacks between the receiving state and the refugees, factional conflict among refugees, internal violence within the receiving state, interstate war or unilateral intervention. 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. Readers are invited to reclassify these measures as more data becomes available.

The data for this project come 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

⁸ A receiving state is counted as affected if an incident of political violence is reported for that refugee situation. The sending state is counted as involved in refugee-related violence if an incident is reported that includes a refugee population from the sending state.

⁹ 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 that primarily has an impact on the sending state. Using the *New York Times* as an additional source of information helps correct for that potential bias.

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. The UNHCR data are supplemented by the US Committee for Refugees' annual publication, *World Refugee Survey*, which provides individual reports for each country. The study 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 (e.g. Guatemalans in Mexico in 1989). 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. The type of violence is categorized according to one of the five outcomes listed in Box 1. The data do not encompass instances of criminal violence, such as assault, rape, or theft. They also do not address other forms of threat, for example environmental degradation caused by refugee camps. Since these data encompass both violent and non-violent populations, they do 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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ The data for this study used the population figures provided by USCR in the *World Refugee Survey*. Although this volume is considered one of the most reliable sources of data available, disparities continue to exist in the population statistics put forward by USCR, UNHCR, and refugee receiving states. Thus, this dataset cannot escape the more general difficulties that plague refugee statistics.

The methodological problems associated with survey data also affect the data analysis. This study relies on documents from 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.¹² Like all survey data, the responses may contain hidden flaws resulting from human error or institutional biases. The study has 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

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ Myron Weiner, "Bad Neighbors, Bad Neighborhoods: An Inquiry into the Causes of Refugee Flows," *International Security*, (1996), 17.

¹² 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.

variety of sources.¹³ 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.

III. Trends in Refugee-Related Violence

The data presented here add new dimensions to the discourse about refugees and security and contradict current conceptions of refugee-related violence. One important addition to the discourse on refugee-related violence is the categorization of types of violence. Most current studies and policies treat refugee-related violence indiscriminately. Until now, there was no systematic information on which types of violence occurred more often and with what degree of lethality. The dataset confirms that violence between the sending state and the refugees occurs more often than the other types. More importantly, attacks between the sending state and refugees tend to be more persistent, intense, and more likely to lead to international war.

In adding new dimensions to current debates, the findings correct common misperceptions that distort popular understanding of refugee-related violence. The first misconception is that the level of refugee-related violence has increased dramatically since the end of the Cold War. It has not. The number of refugees involved in political violence has declined by half over the twelve year period, from 8 million to 4 million refugees. This drop is not due to any overall improvement in refugee security, but mostly reflects the decline in violence among the Afghan and Palestinian situations.

More significant than any numeric change after the Cold War is the alteration in the political context of the violence. The end of the superpower conflict has meant that major donors did not sanction the violence (for the most part), thus aid workers have faced increased security risks even though overall levels of violence have not risen. In particular, a greater proportion of refugee-related violence now occurs in Africa, which receives much less security assistance from the West than other regions (e.g. the Balkans).

A second misconception is that violence is rampant in nearly all refugee situations. It is not. Nearly all refugee-related violence affects an average of only 15 refugee situations each year. Most refugee camps do not experience political violence, although other forms of violence and insecurity may exist. The essential puzzle raised by this finding is how scores of refugee situations manage to remain relatively peaceful.

A. Common and Dangerous Types of Refugee-Related Violence

¹³ For example, if a violent incident were reported in the *New York Times*, but not by the USCR or the UNHCR, it was investigated further before being included 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.

The new data presented here capture information about refugee-related political violence.¹⁴ Political violence, as distinguished from criminal violence, consists of organized violent activity for political goals. 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.¹⁵ Examples include the repeated bombing raids by South Africa against suspected African National Congress (ANC) refugees in Angola and Botswana during the 1980s and the Rwandan Hutu militia raids on Rwanda from their bases in the refugee camps of eastern Zaire.¹⁶ 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.

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

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 war in Kosovo, many observers predicted that the presence of thousands of ethnic Albanian refugees in Macedonia could lead to civil war between Slavs

¹⁴The data set does not measure criminal violence, but does recognize 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. 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.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ 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.

and Albanians. The fifth type of violence occurs when refugees become 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.¹⁷

Each type of violence has its own dynamic; the different types are not necessarily comparable.¹⁸ Attacks between the sending state and refugees occur most often, closely followed by attacks between the receiving state and refugees (See Chart 1). In the later years of the dataset, attacks between refugees and the sending state increased as a proportion of all violence. Interstate war and unilateral intervention, although infrequent, also occurred more often in the last five years of the dataset than the first five years. The category of "internal violence within the receiving state" either occurs infrequently or is not easily captured by reports of refugee violence. A category of "Uncertain/Other" is used for the small number of incidents in which the reporter could not determine the identity of the attacker.¹⁹

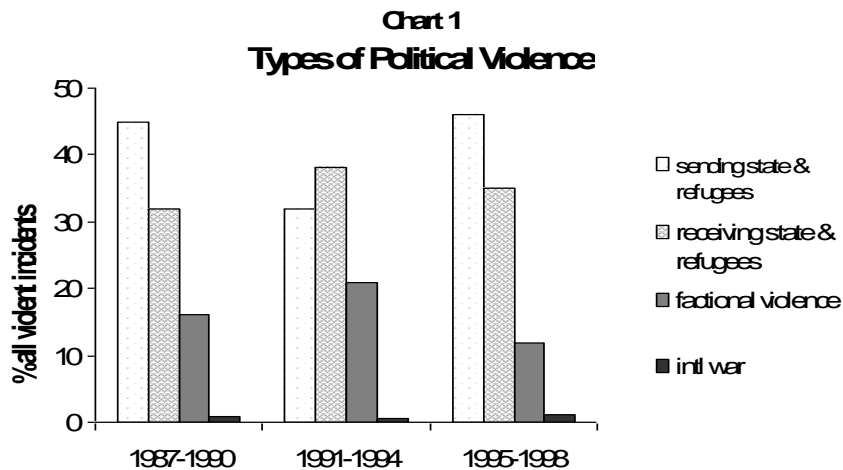
In most cases, attacks between the sending state and the refugees entail the most intense violence, such as bombing and shelling of camps (see Appendix 3).²⁰ This finding, while not surprising, was previously unknown due to the dearth of systematic study of refugee-related violence. Cross-border invasion, either by the sending state or refugees, is the most extreme form of violence between the refugees and the sending state, and is most likely to pull the receiving state into an 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 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. The data show 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.

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

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ An exception is violence between Palestinian refugees and the Jordanian and Lebanese receiving states.



Violence between refugees and the receiving state often involves police actions or riots between locals and 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 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 refugees. This has occurred numerous times in northern Uganda, where Sudanese-funded groups attacked southern Sudanese refugees. 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.²¹

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. Factional violence is not likely 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. Afghan refugees in Pakistan, for example, experienced conflicts with the sending state, the receiving state and among refugee factions.

International war or unilateral intervention because of 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

²¹ 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.

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).²²

The war involving Zaire and Rwanda presents a different pattern from that of 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 more as an opportunistic invasion that was designed to take advantage of the collapse of President Mobutu's regime.²³

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, given 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 refugees and the sending state presents a greater risk of war than it did in the past.

B. Frequent Refugee-Related 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 declined from 60% in 1987 to 32% in 1998, with a sharp drop to 13% in 1997 (See Chart 2).²⁴ Viewed in absolute terms, the data also show a decline in involvement in violence (See Chart 3). The number of refugees involved in political violence has dropped from nearly 8 million in 1987 to 4.3 million in 1998.²⁵

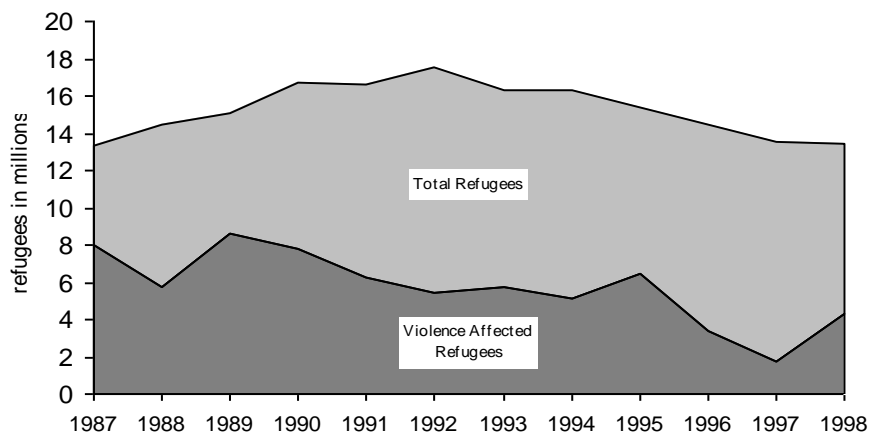
²² On the Tanzania-Uganda war see, Anthony Clayton, *Frontiersmen: Warfare in Africa Since 1950*. (London: UCL Press, 1999), 104-108. On Bangladesh, see U.S. Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Report, 1972*, (New York: USCR), 6-9.

²³ 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.

²⁴ 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.

²⁵ This drop is not explained by a significant 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 3
Refugees Involved in Political Violence



Viewed in isolation, the drop in refugees affected by violence presents a misleading picture of the overall trends. Surprisingly, the number of receiving and sending states involved in refugee-related violence did not decrease, and even experienced a slight increase on average in the last six years of the dataset (See Table 1). In the first half of the dataset (1987 to 1992), an average of 16 receiving states reported refugee-related violence each year, whereas the same statistic was 19 states in the second half of the dataset (1993 to 1998). The trend for sending states shows a similar constancy with the number of affected sending states fluctuating between 10 and 18 states. The average number of sending states involved per year in the first half of the dataset (1987 to 1992) was 13 states. The same statistic was 15 states between 1993 and 1998. However, since 1995, there has been a decline in the number of sending states affected from 18 to 13. These results indicate that the decline in the number of refugees involved in violence has not resulted in a significant reduction in the number of states affected.

Table 1

>2,000 refugees hosted

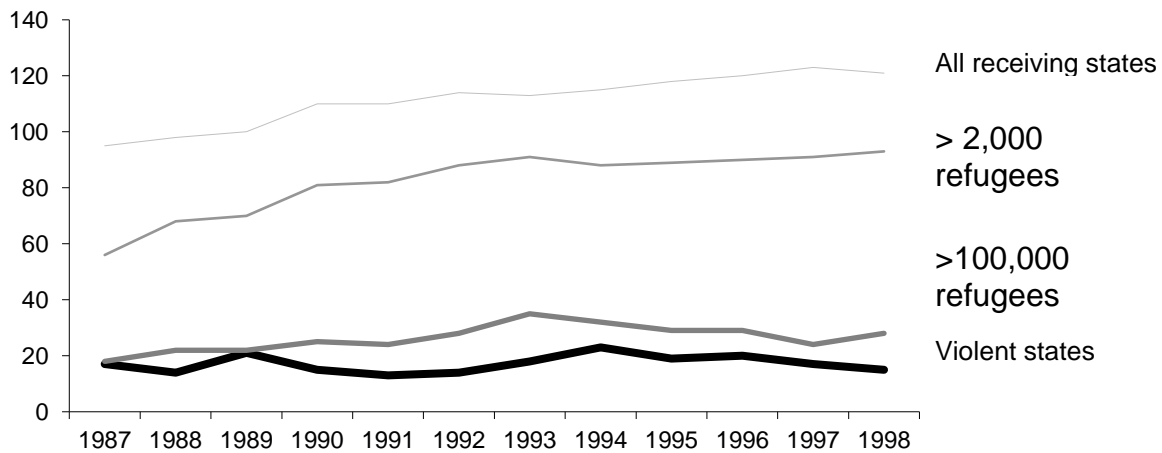
Refugee Situations Involved in Political Violence

Year	#Receiving States Involved	#Sending States Involved
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 most surprising fact to emerge from the analysis is how few states actually experience refugee related-violence. Most refugee-related violence occurs in only 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 4).²⁶ 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 only 12 sending states accounted for 96% of refugees affected by political violence.²⁷ An average of 40 states each year produced 2,000 refugees or more. These statistics demonstrate that a small proportion of sending and receiving states account for nearly all of the refugee-related violence.

Chart 4
Relatively Few Violence Affected Receiving States



The relative constancy of the number of states affected by refugee-related violence seems to clash with the dramatic reduction in the proportion of all refugees involved in political violence. By looking more closely at the data, one finds that the precipitous decline in the total number of violence-affected refugees derives, in large part, from the reduction of hostilities between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan and in the Arab-Israeli conflict (see Chart 5). At their height, in 1987, Afghan and Palestinian refugees together

²⁶ The number of receiving states accounting for over 95% of affected refugees ranged between 9 and 15 for each year.

²⁷ The number of affected sending states ranged from 8 to 16 states over the years.

comprised nearly 8 million refugees (over 60% of all refugees for that year). During the late 1980s and early 1990s, intense violence involving those refugees led to much higher statistics on refugee militarization. Removing those two situations shows a different pattern of violence, which peaked between 1994 and 1997 (see Chart 6).

Chart 5
Violence Involving Afghan and Palestinian Refugees

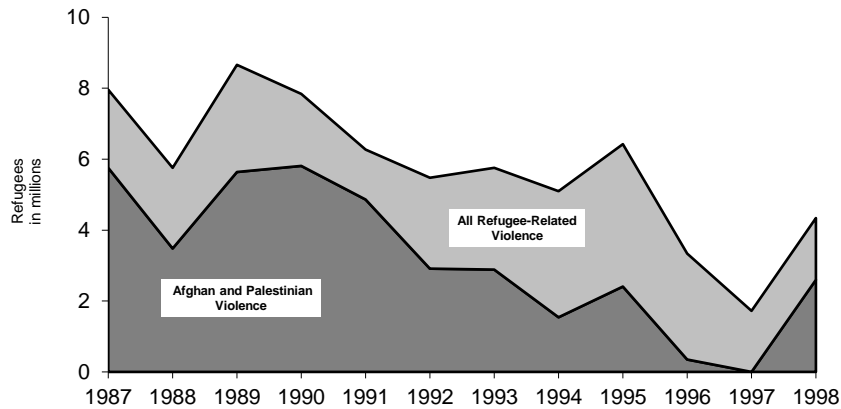
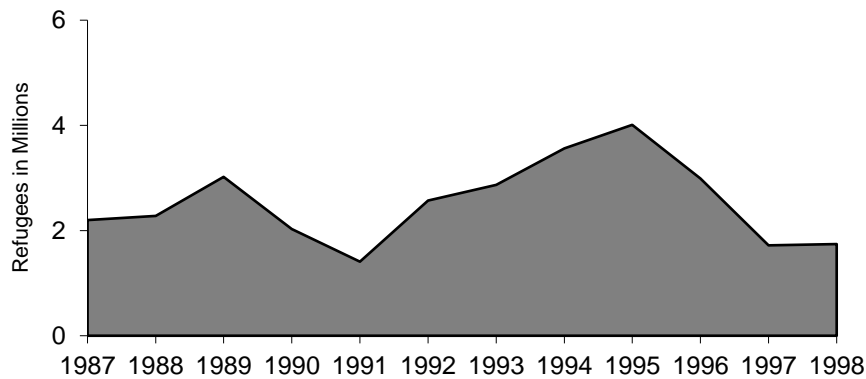


Chart 6
Refugee-Related Violence (minus Afghans & Palestinians)



C. Persistent Violence

Political violence involving refugees is not endemic, except in a handful of receiving and sending states. 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 of receiving states report refugee-related violence

for only one to four years (see Table 2, Appendix 1). Only 8 of the 55 receiving states reported political violence for more than eight of the twelve years studied.²⁸

Over the twelve year period, 41 sending states have produced refugees affected by political violence, although for each year the number is usually fewer than 15 states. Like the receiving states, most sending states report intermittent violence. Of the 41 states, over half were affected by violence for only one to four of the years under study. Only nine of the 41 sending states were involved in refugee-related violence for more than six of the twelve years.²⁹

There are a number of explanations for this low level of persistence. In some cases, a violent refugee situation became less violent over time, such as in the case of 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 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 (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. 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. In persistence, as well as frequency, African states are over-represented; six of the ten most repeatedly violent receiving states are found in Africa, as well as six of the nine sending states. The Palestinian and Afghan refugee situations also figure prominently in the persistently affected list, especially during the late 1980s and early 1990s.³⁰

D. Intense Violence

In addition to the persistence of violence, it is useful to know which refugee situations 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. Still other groups appear more violent, due to ongoing conflict, yet closer examination reveals a relatively low level of intensity in which few deaths occur. Using this data set, it is possible to highlight the situations with the most intense violence (See Tables 3-5, Appendix 3).

²⁸ See Chart 9, Appendix 2 for a list of receiving states and years affected.

²⁹ See Chart 10, Appendix 2 for a list of sending states and years affected.

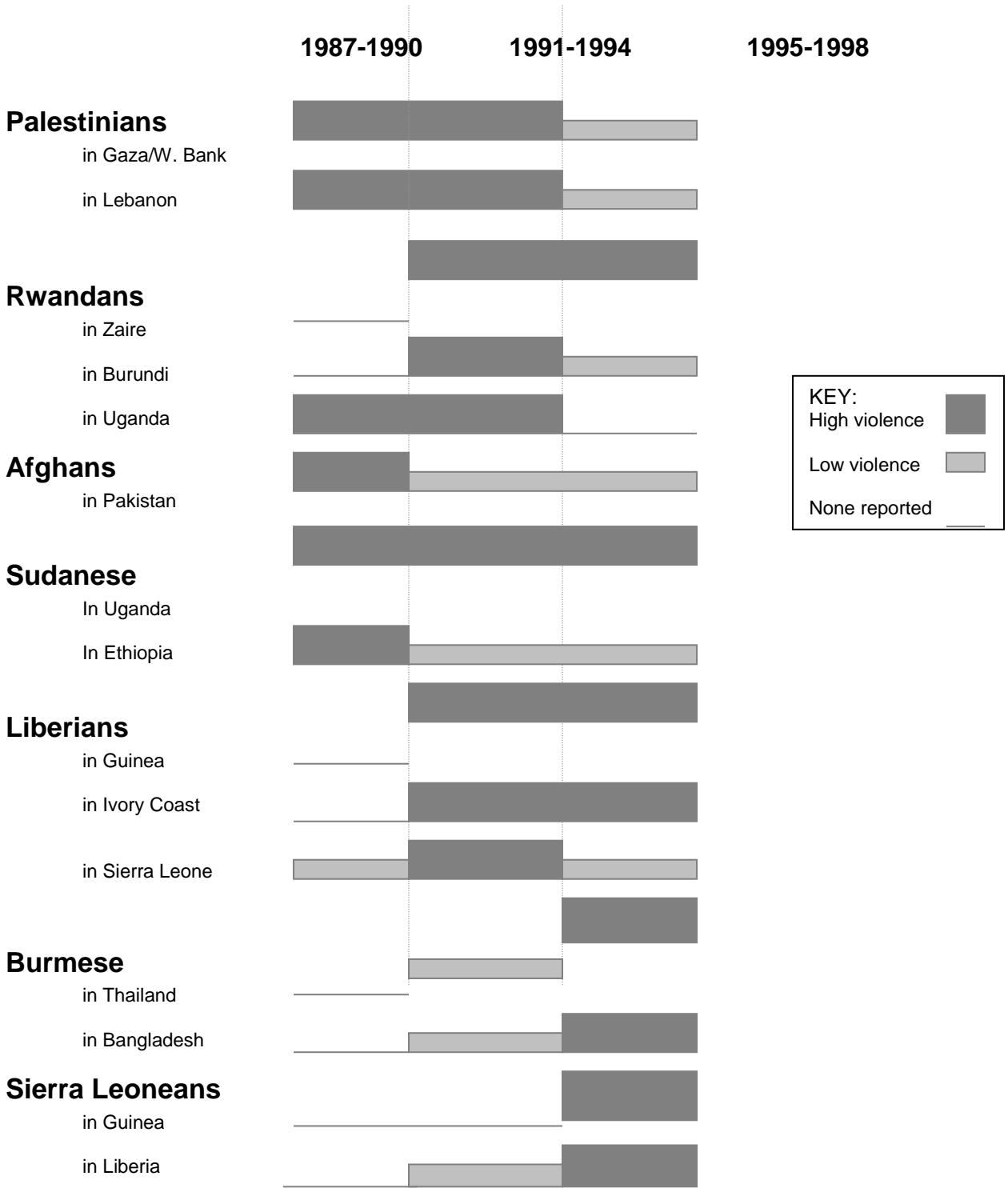
³⁰ With the exception of the two million Afghan refugees in Iran, who were much less involved in political violence than Afghans in Pakistan.

Assessing statistics on intensity of violence is somewhat subjective, due to a lack of comparable casualty statistics. One can measure intense violence by the number of incidents within a year and the level of casualties (when given). The analysis here treats casualty figures relative to the population, not just as absolute numbers. Rough categorizations of intense violence and illustrative examples appear in Appendix 3.

Fifteen refugee situations have experienced both persistent and intense violence over the twelve year period (see Chart 7).³¹ 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 7. 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.

³¹ Chart 7 represents the refugee situations that 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 situations 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 chart groups the data into four-year blocks, thus eliminating some variation that may occur from year to year within each block.

Chart 7: Persistent and Intense Refugee-Related Violence

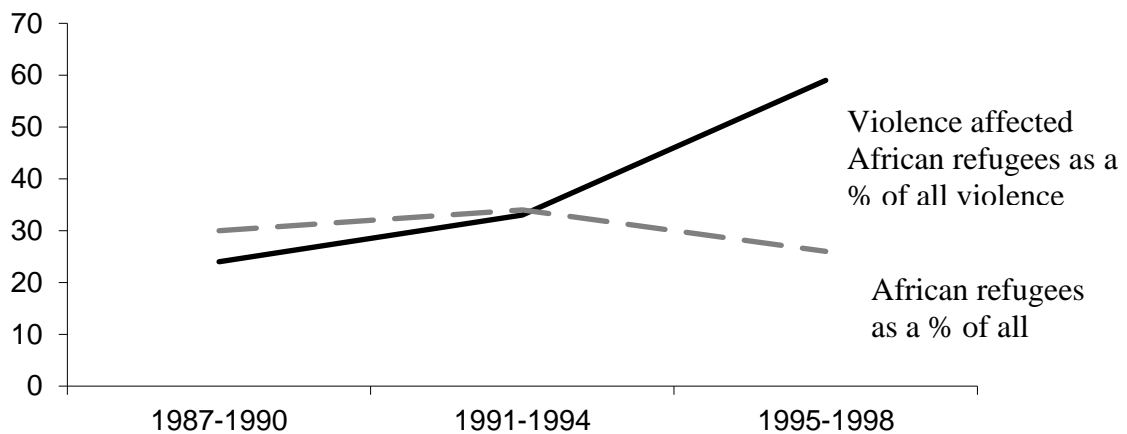


E. Africa's Disproportionate Violence

When examining the above chart (Chart 7), it is immediately noticeable that ten of the fifteen most persistent and intense situations occurred in Africa. A closer look at the regional distribution of violence reveals an increase in the proportion of African states reporting refugee-related violence between 1987 and 1998. In the first 8 years of the dataset (1987 to 1994), the proportion of receiving states in Africa (36%) nearly matched the proportion of violence-affected receiving states in Africa (40%). From 1994 to 1998, however, the percent of affected receiving states increased to 53% whereas the percent of all receiving states in Africa dropped to 31%. This has led to a disproportionate number of African receiving states that report refugee-related violence.

One might hypothesize that Africa's disproportionate violence arises because of the relatively greater number of refugees on the continent; if Africa has more refugees than other regions, one would expect more refugee-related violence in Africa. Surprisingly, however, as Africa's proportion of the world's refugees has decreased over time, Africa's proportion of the world's refugee-related violence has increased. The distribution of refugees and violence became markedly skewed between 1995 and 1998 (See Chart 8). In the last four years of the dataset, the proportion of African refugees in the world dropped to 26% whereas the proportion of refugee-related violence involving African refugee populations rose to 59% for the same period.

Chart 8
Disproportionate Refugee-Related Violence in Africa



The disproportionate violence in Africa raises puzzles for policy makers and scholars. The phenomenon indicates that perhaps something about African refugee situations differs from other regions and makes African situations more violence-prone. An alternate explanation is that the increase in African violence merely reflects the decrease in the Afghan and Palestinian refugee-related violence. A third explanation argues that refugee-related violence occurs because Africa's refugee crises receive far less humanitarian aid, per capita, and less diplomatic and military attention than many European or Asian crises. Further papers in this project will examine the effects of

humanitarian assistance and international political and/or military intervention on refugee-related violence. The results of this analysis will shed light on the trend of increasing violence in African refugee situations.

IV. Implications

The new data presented here change the terms of the discourse on refugees and political violence. Policy makers and scholars have no excuse to continue speaking in vague terms about the rising threat of armed refugees or the ubiquity of attacks against refugees. The scope of refugee-related violence is much clearer now. About 30% of refugee groups became involved in political violence, as of 1998. This represents a marked decrease since 1987, not an increase. Roughly 15 receiving states account for nearly all of the refugee-related violence that occurs in a given year. The vast majority of refugee sending and receiving states do not become involved in political violence. African states experienced a disproportionate level of refugee-related violence in the later years of the dataset. The most common, and lethal, type of violence is attacks between the sending state and refugees.

The findings from this dataset reveal current trends in refugee-related violence, but cannot predict the future. For now, a number of potential 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 superpower disengagement is that neglect could lead to more situations like eastern Zaire, in which militant refugees engage in military activity unhindered while reaping the benefits of international humanitarian assistance. When it occurs in areas that have little strategic significance to the major powers, wealthy states will expend few resources to prevent refugee-related violence. In the mid-1990's, the United Nations Secretary General approached 40 member states for help in demilitarizing Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaire. Only one state volunteered troops.

It is also possible that the lull in great power support for refugee 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. In addition, recently dormant situations, such as the Palestinian and Afghan crises, are not fading away but appear to be re-igniting. Since fall 2000, the Palestinian refugee situation has once again contributed to an alarming increase in refugee-related violence. Since September 2001, the Afghan situation in Pakistan also seems increasingly unstable. The arrival of new refugees from the American war and the radicalization of the existing two million refugees could spark renewed violence.

Further analysis is needed to more accurately predict and prevent refugee involvement in political violence. However, whatever the future trends, the new information described in this paper improves understanding of refugee-related violence, and serves as a building block for further research on the spread of civil war.

Appendix 1

Table 2

Years of Violence Reported—Receiving States

9-12 years	5-8 years	1-4 years
1. Ethiopia	1. Angola	1. Afghanistan
2. Gaza/West Bank	2. BANGLADESH	2. Armenia
3. Kenya	3. Guinea	3. Benin
4. Lebanon	4. Hong Kong	4. Botswana
5. Pakistan	5. Iran	5. Burundi
6. Sudan	6. Iraq	6. Cent. African Rep.
7. Thailand	7. Liberia	7. Croatia
8. Uganda	8. Rwanda	8. Djibouti
	9. Tanzania	9. Dominican Rep.
	10. Zaire/DRC	10. Germany
	11. Zambia	11. Guatemala
		12. Guinea Bissau
		13. Honduras
		14. India
		15. Ivory Coast
		16. Jordan
		17. Lesotho
		18. Malawi
		19. Malaysia
		20. Mauritania
		21. Mexico
		22. Nepal
		23. Papua New Guinea
		24. Saudi Arabia
		25. Senegal
		26. Sierra Leone
		27. Somalia
		28. Swaziland
		29. Sweden
		30. Switzerland

31. Syria
32. Turkey
33. USA
34. Yemen
35. Yugoslavia
36. Zimbabwe

Tables 3, 4 and 5: Intensely Violent Refugee Situations

1987 to 1990

Refugee Group	Receiving State	Political Violence
Palestinians	Gaza/ West Bank	<i>Intifada</i> ; 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	<i>Intifada</i> ; 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.