Does hosting refugees affect the onset of social unrest in Africa?

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Abstract

The past decade has been named both the decade of forced migration and the decade of protests. Previous research finds a link between refugee arrivals, polarisation and anti-immigrant resistance. However, this research has largely been conducted in contexts with lower levels of forced migration, such as in Europe. 85% of all refugees are hosted in developing countries, and 1/3 live in Africa. Using data on protest events and refugee locations in Africa, this paper addresses the following research question: Does forced migration increase the likelihood of social unrest onset in Africa? While forced displacement is often a result of violent conflict, rapid demographic changes are expected to trigger events of unrest, especially in urban settings. Further, various factors trigger unrest differently. This paper is one of the first to empirically test this question in the Global South. The findings contribute to the literature on host community responses to forced migration and give new insights on how migration and unrest interacts in the Global South.

Introduction

The past decade has been named both the decade of forced migration and the decade of protests. Existing research connects forced migration and social unrest separately to instability caused by for example changes in employment, political instability and rapid demographic changes, which are all factors that can destabilise a political system. The political atmosphere in the Global North in recent years has portrayed increases in polarisation, right-wing opposition and support for anti-immigrant parties (Caiani, 2019; Postelnicescu, 2016), and there has been increases in events of violence directed towards refugees in Germany (Benček & Strasheim, 2016). Refugees are often seen as destabilising forces in the literature and political rhetoric (Zhou & Shaver, 2021). However, most migration takes place in the Global South where there is much less coverage of attitudes toward refugees. By the end of 2020, 86% of the 82.4 million forcibly displaced people lived in developing countries (UNHCR, 2020). Aside from some examples (Ruiz & Vargas-Silva, 2016; Tatah et al., 2016), there is little systematic research on the effects of migration on host communities in the Global South, and apart from Østby (2016) no one has examined if increased forced mobility has affected the frequency of events of social unrest. Does hosting refugees affect the onset of social unrest in Africa?

Involuntary change of residence caused by conflict, environmental disasters or political instability is often put forth as a motivation to restrict crossing of borders and access to work permits in Western countries. A **refugee** is legally defined as someone who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of her or his nationality and is unable, or due to such fear, unwilling to avail him- or herself of the protection of that country" (Article 1, The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees). A **migrant** is defined in a more inclusivist way by the IOM as "any person who is moving or has moved across and international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is" (IOM as stated in Carling, 2021). In this paper, the focus is on **forced migrants** which refers to those compelled to flee their homes and seek refuge elsewhere (De Haas et al., 2020).[1]

Recent research also detects increases in national identification in border areas of Tanzania in response to increases in refugee arrivals (Zhou, n.d.), which suggests that citizens in understudied areas may connect with similar attitudes though it has previously not been seen in relation to anti-migrant

[1] Disaggregating between different types of refugees is limited by the access to detailed data, and the analysis will follow the operationalisation of forced migration as done by the creators of the dataset (here Geo-Refugee 2.0 by Fisk (2021)). I will refer to forced migrant, forcibly displaced and refugee interchangeably.

mobilisations. By **social unrest onset**, I refer to events of instability that is often, but not solely, nonviolent, involves more than one person, can be spontaneous or organised, has an identifiable goal and can exist for just one hour or several years. It is understood as an umbrella term for resistance tactics, such as civil resistance, social movements, communal violence, protests, riots, demonstrations and so on. There is not one definition that will capture all types of unrest, but in this study I follow Smith's (2015, pp. 3–4) definition of socio-political unrest as (non-)violent protest methods that are "outside the range of institutionalised conflict resolution techniques," which can be described as politically disruptive collective action that involves events such as "labour strikes, student protests, electoral demonstrations and violence, and communal conflict" (Smith, 2015, p. 5). Collective action or contentious politics refer to coordinated resistance towards something of government or institutional structure and is connected to the mobilisation of multiple people (Tilly, 1978). It is often a series of events and can take several forms, but it is rooted in civil society.

This paper examines the research question through a theoretical framework of hypothesising that hosting refugees, especially in the short run, fosters an increase in unrest events across African countries, given that motivation and opportunity is present. Further, this is expected to be prominent especially when a new refugee settlement is established or if the proportion of refugees increases by a significant amount from one year to the other. The presence of a refugee camp in itself is therefore not necessarily expected to be the determining factor for onset of social unrest. Lastly, mobilisation requires a population to mobilise from, and therefore urban areas are expected to more frequently have events of social unrest instead of rural areas. The expectations are tested (not here, though) with geocoded data on refugee camps and settlements from Geo-Refugee 2.0/UNHCR demographics data and events of unrest from SCAD. Currently waiting for the updated data from Geo-Refugee (2000-2019) and working to understand the datastructure of geodata in R. Analysis and results TBA.

In order to evaluate the generalisability of the forced migration-social unrest nexus, a systematic quantitative research design is needed. The outcome of the research contributes to the production of research-based knowledge on the mechanisms of social unrest and forced migration, thus it is of academic interest. Further, stability is important to promote development in the Global South, and understanding which mechanisms lead to conflict and which do not is relevant for designing effective policies.

Literature review

Previous research has examined how refugees can be perpetrators or combatants in war (Salehyan & Gleditsch, 2006), where conflict diffusion across borders correlates with refugee locations. However, newer

publications that disaggregate refugee locations on the subnational level (Zhou & Shaver, 2021) and provide more information on the demographics of the refugee settlements (Fisk, 2014) do not find similar correlations between hosting refugees and the occurrence of armed conflict, emphasising that "a link between refugees and armed conflict in host countries should not be overgeneralized" (Fisk, 2014, p. 270).

Attitudes toward refugees among the host population in the Global South is still in the early phases of large-N research. There are some surveys conducted in neighbouring countries to Syria on how the population responds to hosting refugees. In Lebanon, Ghosn, Braithwaite and Chu (2019) argue that the attitudes among the host population reflects their own personal experiences with conflict, and find that it is whether the individual respondents have had contact with Syrians that affect their attitudes the most (those with contact are more positively inclined to hire a refugee, support hosting refugees etc.). In Jordan, humanitarian and cultural factors give a higher indication of attitudes towards refugees than economic concerns (Alrababa'h et al., 2021).[2] Whereas xenophobia towards migrants is often seen as a northern phenomenon, there has been several instances of xenophobic violence towards migrants in countries such as South Africa and India (Crush & Ramachandran, 2010). In 2008, more than seventy immigrants were killed in anti-migration riots in South Africa, displacing thousands more, and there has been several attacks since then (Harris et al., 2018). In Harris et al.'s study, they argue that South-South and South-North migration have different determinants of anti-immigrant sentiments.

Social unrest in South Africa is not only related to xenophobic violence, unrest is often a result of resource scarcity such as food insecurity (Abbs, 2020; Rudolfsen, 2020; Smith, 2014). When prices of commodities change, it is associated with more unrest due to increased grievances and lack of response from the government. Further, where Rudolfsen's research examines urban unrest, Gizelis, Pickering and Urdal find that peri-urban areas, meaning areas outside the immediate urban centres but still not categorised as rural, experience relatively more unrest than pure urban or rural areas (Gizelis et al., 2021). These are areas which often have high levels of ethnically mixed in-migration, but their analysis does not examine migration as a cause for unrest. Relations between refugees and host populations in Africa have on most occasions not involved systematic generalised violence against refugees by local populations (Onoma, 2013).

Few studies have examined the effects of hosting refugees on social unrest onset in the Global South. There is increasing interest in understanding how Western host communities' attitudes are affected by the presence of victims of forced displacement, however, most people who are forced to seek refuge elsewhere are either displaced within their home country or reside in close proximity to their country of

[2] Could also integrate Ruiz and Vargas-Silva (2016) and (Alix-Garcia et al., 2018; Alix-Garcia & Saah, 2010)+++

origin. Apart from Østby's study of urban unrest and rural-to-urban migration (Østby, 2016), there is surprisingly few who have addressed similar questions as presented here. In the following section, I present a theoretical framework on why we should expect forced displacement to affect social unrest onset in Africa.

- Literature review paper on immigration and political instability? Systematic?

Theoretical framework

Opportunity and motivation

Why do people engage in events of unrest in the first place? The first argument builds on theory of opportunity and motivation as explanations for civil war, which is further connected to why we should expect to see discontent arising in communities that are hosting refugees. Works that influence the logic presented here are Fisk (2014) and Zhou and Shaver (2021), but the dependent variable is social unrest instead of armed conflict. Fisk's argument builds on greater attention to demographic differences within refugee settlements whereas Zhou and Shaver's global analysis is a response to Salehyan and Gleditsch (2006).

Motivation as an explanation for why people mobilise to engage in events of unrest relates to the theory of relative deprivation. Relative deprivation is used as an explanation for the motivation behind engaging in collective action, where tension occurs when there is a discrepancy between the ought and the is of collective value satisfaction (Gurr, 1971, pp. 23–24). Relative deprivation contributes to the building of a narrative target which potentially results in civil conflict. Areas with significant challenges in terms of development, economic prosperity and food shortages are assumed to be affected by inflows of migrants that either need to compete for the same scarce resources or are provided with food- and housing-related aid. When a refugee-hosting community is dissatisfied with their standard of living, it is likely to search for someone to blame for their grievances. In turn, people who experience relative deprivation are, according to the ideological model of scapegoating, more willing to act against a minority group that is perceived as cold and competent by discriminating against them in various fields of economic and social life (Bilewicz & Krzeminski, 2010).[3] Findings suggest that this occurs at the individual-level, but also stronger support for group-based or horizontal inequalities as a motivator for engaging in social unrest (Cederman et al., 2011; Østby, 2008, 2013).

[3] Also relates to Zhou's (n.d.) research in Tanzania.

Violence, however, is costly and it thus requires opportunity to engage in such activities. Lowering the costs of participating in unrest is crucial for ensuring a pool to mobilise actors from for increased success. In these instances, nonviolent conflict is often put forth as a strategic solution to collective action problems, where avoiding violent tactics lowers participation costs by not risking hurt to participants to the same extent, does not require military training and invites people of all genders, ages and social classes to join (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011). Information access is another barrier to mobilisation (Denny & Walter, 2014). Refugees might strengthen the motivation and capability of would-be rebels in the host by increasing the available conflict-inducing resources, including militant ideology, recruits and weapons brought in from the sending country. Or refugees may exacerbate local-level grievances by generating 'negative externalities' by increasing competition for jobs and other resources, spread disease, and/or degrade the environment (Fisk, 2014, p. 258).

Events of social or political unrest are related to opportunities for collective action and the experience of grievances. The presence of grievances and the political opportunities to channel these grievances together shape the occurrence of contention. In areas where resources are scarce and allocation of these resources is poor, it increases the probability of unrest. The theoretical link between physical geography and armed conflict is based on the motivation and opportunity conferred by each of these factors: geography motivates fighting via the material or strategic value of a location and also shapes the opportunity for rebellion (Fisk 2014, p. 257). Refugees are a byproduct of insecurity across borders, and like conflict, refugee populations are geographically clustered within countries.

Frustration creates aggression, aggression is displaced toward relatively weak and defenceless minority groups and the displayed hostility is justified and rationalised by prejudiced attitudes, stereotypical beliefs and so on. Further, if the local or national government does not visibly do anything to respond to stated grievances, the probability for the host community to turn to social unrest increases when facing increases in in-migration to said area. On the other hand, in countries that are less developed, which would be a large proportion of African countries, day-to-day struggles are likely to overshadow the group differences and increase costs of participating in demonstrations and protests against migrant presence. Factors influencing whether host populations attack refugees or not: whether some refugees get involved in major opposition movements against the host state and whether refugees settle in an area that privileges residence or indigeneity in the allocation of rights (Onoma, 2013, p. 5).

I argue that, following the findings that hosting refugees does not significantly lead to increased numbers of violent events (Fisk, 2014), it can instead increase the probability of social unrest onset. Violence is costly, and hosting refugees in areas where resources are scarce and competition for these

resources is already high may in turn support motivation for engaging in events of unrest directed towards refugees. The first hypothesis is therefore:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Forced migrant arrivals increase the probability for social unrest onset in Africa

Demography changes

The second expectation relates to the proportion refugee-to-host following the creation of a refugee settlement or a rapid change in the total number of refugees from one year to the next. This is further connected to the type of policies that exist in the host country toward immigration. The expectations following this argument relates to motivation for engaging in social unrest among the host community.

When an area experiences sudden changes such as increased migration levels, it increases the likelihood of instability due to, again, competition over resources, employment opportunities or housing. In Tanzania, the border region in the north-western part of the country saw significant changes in the size of refugee population during 2015. The Kigoma region hosted mostly Congolese refugees until the influx of more than 230,000 Burundians from April 2015, and community focus groups followed by a regionally representative survey in this area see increased sense of national identity among the host population as well as increases in perceived fears and feelings of resource resentment (Zhou, n.d.). This finding differs from findings in Lebanon, where locals are found to be more positive towards hosting refugees after some local-refugee interaction (Ghosn et al., 2019). Refugees in Tanzania are, however, settled in camps without interaction with the local community, which may affect these attitudes.

As a host community faces challenges to the established demographic structure, it will take time to integrate the new structure. Sudden and significant demographic changes increases instability. A sidenote to this argument is that a society that is composed of "a multitude of ethnic actors" there should be "higher coordination costs, as groups need to cooperate to become effective challengers" (Forsberg, 2008, p. 285). To examine this I need information on the creation of a new refugee settlement/camp or change in "stock" of refugees within a country in from one year to another.

Recent findings suggest focusing on peri-urban areas instead of urban centres (Gizelis et al., 2021). This could also relate to migration as higher urban population growth may strain the provision of public services in urban area, heighten competition over scarce urban land and increase the chances of urban social unrest – urban population growth is associated with increased unrest in peri-urban areas. High population growth rates are strongly associated with more unrest in peri-urban areas, while in the primary urban centres the grid population growth rate is negatively associated with unrest.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Areas that rapidly change ratio forced migrant-host population is more likely to witness increases in the occurrence of events of unrest

Rural versus urban

This argument is connected to the opportunity argument for social unrest onset following forced migration.

Urban areas usually have higher living standards than less populous areas. There are more employment opportunities in cities and the urban population is less self-sufficient in terms of food access and housing, and so urban workers are likely more affected by increased competition for resources as they are more concerned with ensuring income to pay rent and buy food compared to rural workers that have different access to food and housing prices. Despite higher living standards, economic growth does not mean prosperity for all, and inequality can trigger political radicalisation and unrest (Østby, 2016). Rural-urban migrants are likely to experience economic marginalisation and relative deprivation, increasing their awareness of their own situation and, hence, the potential for political radicalisation. Urban crime and violence, for example, is generally not spontaneous in the world's largest cities – social exclusion and inequality can trigger these outcomes (Brennan, 1999). These inequalities can create grievances that encourage a motivation to participate in unrest, especially when forced migrant arrivals are perceived as threatening to access to resources such as housing or employment in areas where the urban population feels that their grievances are not addressed by the authorities.

In a study from 2016, Østby investigates the effects of internal migration on events of urban social disorder in 34 cities in Africa and Asia between 1989 and 2006. Her statistical analysis does not find an effect on the level of rural-urban migration on the frequency of political disorder, which is in line with the general conclusion that it is not urbanisation in itself that fosters social urban disturbance. Urdal (2005) does not find that rapid urban population growth makes countries more war-prone; high urban population growth is not associated with patterns of (largely urban) riots across Indian regions (Urdal, 2008); and using a global sample of the largest cities, high population growth rates are not associated with either nonviolent nor violent political unrest (Buhaug & Urdal, 2013). A recent article shifts the focus from urban unrest to *peri*-urban unrest, where "peri-urban" refers to areas with both rural and urban characteristics and proximate to, often surrounding, urban areas (Gizelis et al., 2021). Population growth in peri-urban areas only, not in urban cores, is associated with increased unrest, which suggests that it is worth looking into social unrest rather than just armed conflict as urbanisation is found associated with less rural armed violence and more urban social unrest (Gizelis et al., 2021). Peri-urban areas more likely to be under-serviced, under-governed,

under-regulated and poor, and a policy implication is that improved political governance and provision of public services could support urban sustainability.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Urban areas are more likely to experience social unrest events following arrivals of forced migrants than rural areas.

Summary of hypotheses

Table 1 presents a summary of the hypotheses that is tested in this paper.

Observable implications		Empirical tests
H1	Forced migrant arrivals increase the probability of social unrest onset in Africa	
H2	Areas that rapidly change ratio forced migrant-host population is more likely to lead to social unrest	
H3	Urban areas are more likely to experience social unrest events following arrivals of forced migrants than rural areas	

How I eventually want to present and visualise the data! ↓

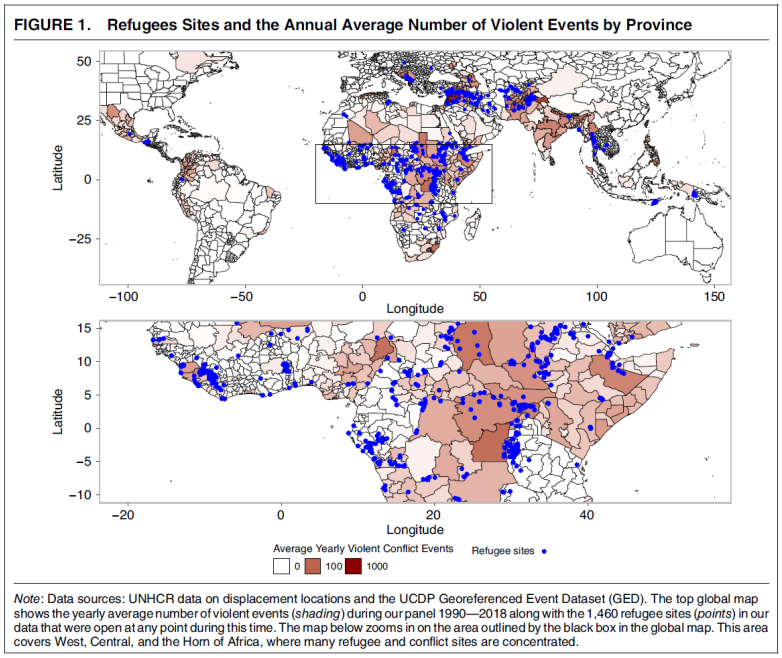

Figure 1 From Zhou & Shaver (2021).

Research design

Empirical strategy

The research question will be tested using a quantitative research design. I will construct a dataset that combines event data on unrest from the Social Conflict Analysis Database (SCAD, Salehyan et al., 2012) and data on refugee camps and settlements from the Geo-Refugee 2.0 dataset (Fisk, 2017) across all African countries from 2000 to 2017. The unit of analysis is the country-year (and eventually first-order administrative unit-year). The adm0 and adm1 units come from the GADM project (the Database of Global Administrative Areas). Since there is limited research on correlations between hosting refugees and social unrest onset, the analysis will explore potential countrywide trends before examining subnational trends (it is less certain if smaller admin units will have an effect, but to test H3 it is necessary to move from the national to the local level). Clusters of where unrest events occur, social conflicts that are less intense than wars since wars are causes of sending refugees. Geocoded data on refugee camps and settlements and event data on protest events. Using geolocated data, I will observe events of unrest at time *t* and lag the main explanatory variables on refugee settlements (first *t*-1, interesting to include additional time lags to see if unrest is more likely to occur for example as an immediate response).

Explanatory variables: Presence of refugee sites, number of refugees…

Data on the presence of refugee camps and settlements and the number of refugees from year to year come from the Geo-Refugee 2.0 dataset (Fisk, 2017). The refugee location data provides information on the geographical locations, population sizes and accommodation types of refugees and people in refugee-like situations throughout Africa. Geo-Refugee assigns administrative unit names and geographic coordinates to refugee camps/centres, and locations hosting dispersed (self-settled) refugees. Data comes directly from the UNHCR. The updated version of the data has unit on both the first-level administrative unit (province, region or state) and second-level administrative unit. The UNHCR began systematically collecting information on the locations and demographic compositions of refugee populations in 2000, and the data spans from 2000 up to 2019. The data is currently being updated and I am waiting on receiving the coded countries for the 2.0 version of the data (version 1.0 only spans 2000-2010).

To perform the analysis I plan, I need data on (1) the presence of a camp/settlement (binary and geocoded) and (2) the number of refugees and especially if this changes from year to year.[4]

[4] Not sure if the number of refugees in a camp/settlement is reported on a monthly or yearly basis, and if they are reported at different times of the year. Will therefore examine changes from year to year, not within a year.

Outcome variable: social unrest onset

Variables on social unrest onset come from the Social Conflict Analysis Database (SCAD, Salehyan et al., 2012). Social conflicts refer to events such as protests, riots, strikes, inter-communal conflict, government violence against civilians and so on. SCAD contains detailed information on events of social conflicts from 1990 to 2017, and is here subset to African countries from 2000 to 2017. This will be a binary measure of whether a country and an administrative unit-year experienced an event of social unrest, combining unrest types from the categorical variable *etype* (dropping variables related to pro-government or government initiated protests), coded as 1 if and event took place and 0 if there is no event. Something about a lagged effect, where the SCAD events have to come after the location of refugee settlement start in time (lag with 1, 5 and 10 years maybe). Effects are expected to be intense to begin with, then stabilize over time?

I will also include a measure of number of events before and after a refugee camp/settlement was established within an administrative unit to see if unrest intensified (difference-in-difference).

Distance measure between unrest location and refugee location?

Testing the argument

Ways of testing the argument:

- Latent unrest versus actual unrest, analysis of willingness to use violence
- If they've actually used violence (Afrobarometer variable)
- Regression discontinuity design (in some countries)
- Differences-in-differences
- Latent aggression level: low threshold for using violence? Or different? Attitude variable, political trust
- Start with country-level and look for patterns, systematic? And then start digging: Is it in the same area? Can aggregate to…
- Other outcomes
- Contextual conditions (trust, governance, economic situation)
- Opportunity and motivation has to be present for demography
- Treatment, outcomes, fixed effects
- Causal identification

Controls

- Refugee policies, how is aid distributed? How is the camp/settlement organised?
- Refugee integration may dampen the conflict-inducing, negative impacts of refugees felt by host communities.
- Endogeneity and selection effects
- Distance to nearest border, distance to capital city, distance to nearest urban area
- Economic development, GDP per capita and population
- Use Afrobarometer variables for the available countries to see changes in attitudes? Such as trust levels, willingness to join others to request government action, attend demonstration or protest march, satisfaction with democracy…

Results, Discussion and Conclusion

Despite "traditional African hospitality" (Onoma, 2013) put forth as a reason why mobilisation against migrants is less expected in the context of study, it is likely that refugees experience proportionally higher levels of discrimination than host population and that everyday resistance through acts of discrimination is more likely to affect refugees than the local population. Access to data on everyday acts of violence nonexisting, which can suggest that doing fieldwork in some form can present insight on the everyday struggles of migrants in Africa.

Where to go from here?

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