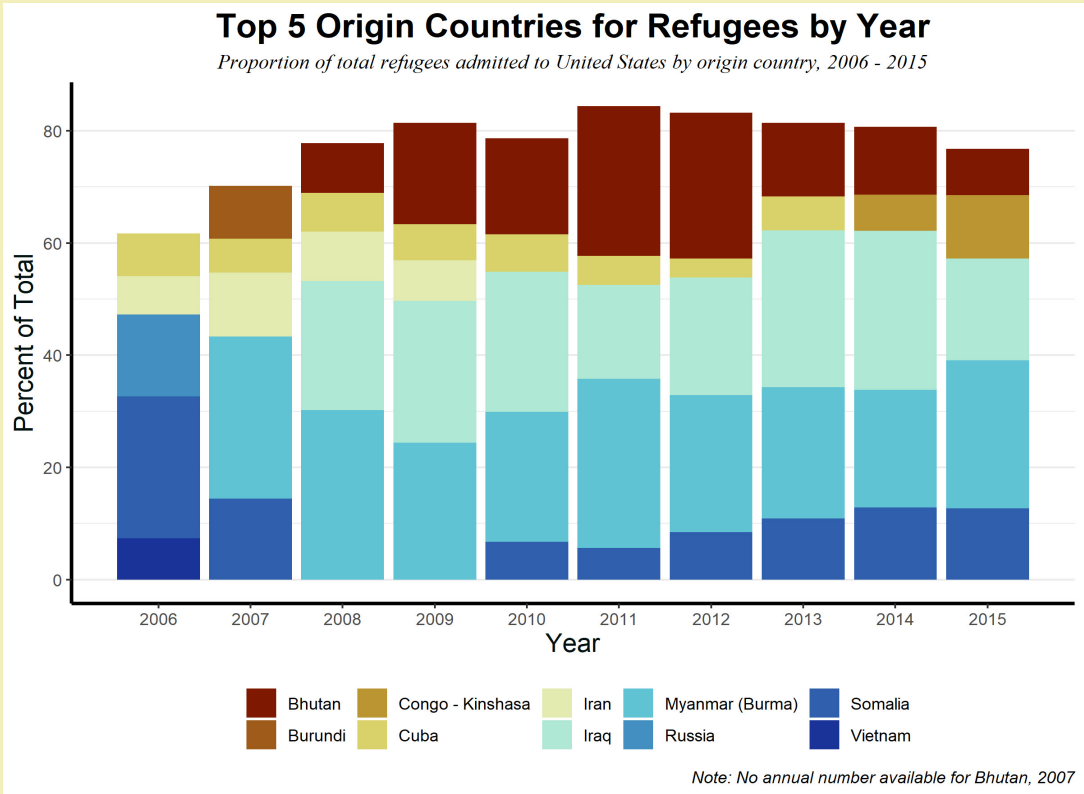


United States Refugee Policy: Priority Classification Goals

How relative changes in global conditions impact refugee admission by country of origin

The demographics of refugee resettlement into the United States are influenced by US policy and the political and social circumstances of foreign countries. The United States sets annual admissions ceilings capping the total number of refugees allowed each year. Priority status is designated to refugee groups based on country of origin and urgency, with both reviewed yearly. The major countries of origin for refugees admitted for resettlement in the U.S change in response to changing global conditions. To analyze changing prioritizations over the period of 2006 to 2015, I found the proportion of all refugees admitted by country each year. I then created a stacked bar plot of the greatest proportions with their associated countries of origin. To aid in visibility and focus on key trends, I limited the results to the greatest five proportions each year.



Proportions of refugees from country of origin, top 5 proportions in given year

Key Takeaways

Reflecting the United States’ prioritization guidelines, the plot exhibits that across the time period, more than 60% of all refugees admitted to the United States in a given year came from just five countries, which grew to 75% or greater in 2008 and peaking at over 84.4% in 2011. In the data, the first 20 largest yearly numbers come from the countries Iraq, Myanmar, and Bhutan, and each emerge in the graph with similar trends. Once each of these 3 countries emerge as one of the top five proportions, they remain there through the end of the time period, representing the three largest proportions in almost every year they are present (Bhutan dropped to the fifth largest in 2015). Beginning in 2007, Myanmar contributed at least 20% of all refugees to the US annually, with peaks of 30.2% in 2008 and 2011. Similar to Myanmar, from 2007 onward, Iraq contributed no less than 16.7%, accounting for nearly 20% or more of all refugees in each of the following years. Bhutan’s emergence in the top five in 2008 can be attributed to an agreement made in 2007 between Nepal and international partners to resettle Bhutanese refugees in Nepal that was implemented by the United States in 2008. While less consistent than Myanmar and Iraq, Bhutan’s proportion of the total follows a general pattern from 2008 through 2015, generally increasing and decreasing from its peak of 26.7% in 2011 at the same rate and beginning and ending at roughly 8%.

While not shown, there is some general consistency among the top ten countries across the decade. We can see from the plot that Cuba and Somalia each occupy the top five in all but one separate two-year period for each. Somalian refugees have been entering the United States in consistently significant proportions from the 1990’s through today due to an ongoing civil war. In 2015, the United States had the fourth largest population of Somalian refugees living abroad after it’s neighboring countries of Kenya, Ethiopia, and Yemen. This is reflected in the plot by the country’s presence in the top five proportions in all years except for 2008 and 2009, when it was pushed to ranks 6 and 7, respectively. While its numbers are fairly consistent with the previous year, Cuba moved to rank 6 in 2014, before falling to rank 10 in 2015 with a quarter of the year’s previous number of entries. This replacement of Cuba with Congo – Kinshasa may be attributed to perceived improved conditions in Cuba by the United States in its yearly reprioritization assessment, as well as worsening safety conditions in Kinshasa.