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The Role of Hospitable and Inhospitable States in the Process of Refugee Resettlement in the United States

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**“YOU DON’T HAVE TO LIVE LIKE A REFUGEE” - THE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC,
AND SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN THE UNITED
STATES.**

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ABSTRACT

Although the resettlement of refugees is always politically contentious in host countries, the current global refugee crisis has only magnified those contentions. In the United States and in many European countries there has been a strong backlash against the resettlement of refugees particularly those from Muslim majority countries. However, within countries such as the U.S. there are areas of the country that are more anti-refugee than others. The purpose of this paper is to explore the variation in refugee resettlement across the fifty U.S. states from 2002-2010. Refugee resettlement in the U.S. is done in conjunction with the federal government, religious and secular non-profits, and state governments. Some states are far more hospitable to refugee resettlement than others and this paper explores the political, economic and social factors that influence the number of refugees resettled in each state. We find that states with a moralistic political culture resettle the most refugees but more liberal states do not resettle more refugees than conservative states. Also, states with a better quality of life resettle more refugees but so do states with higher poverty rates.

INTRODUCTION

On November 13, 2015, eight European nationals in Paris bombed a national stadium during a football match, attacked civilians in a theater, and shot patrons in nearby cafes and restaurants killing 130 people and injuring 413 (Tharoor, 2015). One of the attackers killed by law enforcement officers was found with a passport linked to a Syrian refugee recently admitted into the European Union (Tharoor, 2015). In response to the Paris attacks, many U.S. states urged limiting Syrian refugee placements, called for an immediate suspension of the refugee program, and initiated state action to curtail refugee placements within their territories (Elias, 2017; Seipel 2015; Tau & Peterson, 2015). Twenty-Nine Republicans and one Democratic governor (Maggie Hassan of New Hampshire) objected to the admission of refugees without an enhanced screening process. Shortly thereafter, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (“ORR”) released a letter admonishing the U.S. states that they “may not categorically deny ORR-funded benefits and services to Syrian refugees” (Fandl, 2017, p. 84).

Several state legislators specifically introduced bills attempting to grant states the right to reject placement of refugees within their borders. Congressman Rick Crawford (R-AR) introduced a bill allowing “any state, through its governor, to reject the placement of refugees within its borders (Refugee Relocation Security Act, 2015). Senator Ted Cruz introduced a bill in Congress seeking to amend the Immigration and Naturalization Act (“INA”) to allow state rejection of refugee resettlement if the Governor certifies to the Director of the ORR that the Director has “failed...to provide adequate assurance that the alien does not present a security risk to the State” (State Refugee Security Act, 2015). Tennessee passed a law allowing it to sue the federal government to prevent the resettlement of any refugee within its territory (S.J.R., 2015). Texas sued the federal government to block the placement of a Syrian family, arguing that the

state was not adequately consulted nor provided enough background information on the placement (*Tex. Health & Human Servs. Comm'n v. United States*, 2015). Finally, then Governor of Indiana and current Vice President Mike Pence tried to prevent state money from going to a private organization, Exodus Refugee Immigration, which had a contract with the state of Indiana for resettling refugees (*Exodus Refugee v. Pence*, 2016).

The hostile actions of Republican governors to the resettlement of refugees in their states raises a more fundamental question of what factors explain the resettlement of refugees within the U.S. states? Refugee resettlement occurs in all 50 states in the U.S. and Washington D.C. with the exception of Wyoming. The process of resettling refugees in the United States is shared between the federal government and nonprofit voluntary agencies (“VOLAGS”). State governments play a secondary role in the resettlement of refugees with some more supportive of the process and working in tandem with the federal government and the VOLAGS while others are more hostile to the process and provide minimal support, if any at all, for the resettlement of refugees within their borders. This paper explores how hospitable or inhospitable U.S. states are to refugee resettlement with the hope of explaining the pattern of refugee resettlement within the U.S.

The rest of the paper will proceed as follows. The next section will detail the U.S. refugee resettlement process. Specifically, it will address how the various federal agencies interact and work with the VOLAGS (both national and local) which together comprise the resettlement process in the U.S. The following section will explore various theoretical explanations for the refugee resettlement patterns in the U.S. focusing on state politics, state economic capacity, and the religious composition along with the level of volunteerism within the

states. The succeeding two sections will contain the hypotheses, data description, and methodology. This will be followed by the results section and finally the conclusion.

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROCESS IN THE UNITED STATES

The refugee process in the U.S. is governed by the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 (“INA”) and the Refugee Act of 1980.¹ The 1980 Refugee Act modified the INA by: (1) providing federal funding for the placement of refugees within local communities; (2) creating the ORR to coordinate the disbursement of federal funds to the states; and, (3) providing transitional funding for the first 18 months of placement and a three-year limit on reimbursable expenses by states (Elias, 2017; Fandl, 2017). Under the 1980 Refugee Act, the President determines how many refugees will be admitted to the United States each year (Elias, 2017; Fandl, 2017; Pritchett, 2017). From 2013 to 2015, the ceiling was set annually at 70,000 but after the Syrian refugee crisis, President Obama increased the quota to 85,000, including 10,000 refugees from Syria for the 2016 fiscal year (Memorandum from Office of the Press Secretary to the Secretary of State, 2016). Conversely, the Trump administration has shown outright hostility to the resettlement of refugees in the United States not only with several iterations of the travel ban prohibiting people from certain countries (refugees or not) from entering the country but also by the fact that the administration is slow-walking refugee admissions—the U.S. admitted only 20,000 refugees for the fiscal year 2018 which is well below the 85,000 resettled in the last fiscal year of the Obama administration (Solis and Limon 2018).

¹The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act (“INA”) defines refugee for domestic law purposes as: “Any person who is outside any country of such person’s nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.”

The resettlement process is complex and involves international organizations, multiple federal government agencies, national and local volunteer organizations both secular and religious, and the variable contributions of state government agencies. Refugee applicants are initially screened and referred to the U.S. by either of three agencies—the international organization United Nations High Commission for Refugees (“UNHCR”), a U.S. embassy, or a nongovernmental organization (Carey, 2015; Elias, 2017; Fandl, 2017). The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (“USCIS”) conducts extensive interviews, background checks, and medical screenings of refugees assigned for relocation to the U.S. (Immigration and Nationality Act, 2016; Pope, 2015). Upon admission to the U.S., refugees are assigned to one of the nine resettlement VOLAGS operating in the U.S.² (Elias, 2017; Forrest & Brown, 2014; Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny, 2011; Zucker, 1982) which then coordinates with local affiliates and state agencies to find appropriate placements within local communities (Capps, et al., 2015; Fandl, 2017; Mott, 2010; Wright, 1981; Zucker 1983). The VOLAG notifies a local community-based organization of the pending refugee arrival (Darrow, 2015; Fandle, 2017). The local organization receives a payment from the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (“PRM”) to arrange “housing, furnishings, food, and clothing” for the refugee (Xi, 2017, p. 1205). Upon arrival of the refugee, the local organization receives funds from the PRM but administered through the state’s VOLAG to “help the refugee obtain employment, receive medical care, and learn English” (Fandle, 2017, p. 94).

²These 9 VOLAGS are: (1) Church World Service; (2) Episcopal Migration Ministries; (3) Ethiopian Community Development Council; (4) Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society; (5) International Rescue Committee; (6) Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service; (7) U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants; (8) United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (Catholic Charities); and (9) World Relief.

The federal government compensates states for the initial costs of refugee placement within their communities (Kennedy, 1981). There are four types of federal refugee resettlement program implemented in the U.S. states: (1) state administered where thirty-two states voluntarily receive federal funds to administer their own ORR-approved State Refugee Resettlement Programs; (2) federally funded public-private partnerships where the states “maintain policy and administrative oversight” but VOLAG locals provide “direct services to the refugees;”³ (3) Wilson-Fish programs that emphasize “early employment and economic self-sufficiency” through incentive bonuses for “early employment” and are implemented in twelve states that withdrew from the federal program—VOLAGS and other nonprofits within these states function as “state-designees” to provide “support for refugees;”⁴ and, (4) no refugee resettlement program whatsoever⁵ (Elias, 2017, pp. 374-375; Pritchett, 2017, pp. 290-293; Xi, 2017, p. 1207).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK UNDERLYING THE REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROCESS

Immigration Federalism and State Role

U.S. Supreme Court jurisprudence is replete with cases affirming the preeminence of the federal government over state and local governments with respect to immigration issues (Bulman-Pozen and Gerken, 2009; Fandl, 2015). Although jurisdiction over immigration matters is traditionally reserved to the nation state, subnational and local governments play an increasing role in controlling or integrating immigrants into local communities (Gulasekaram and

³Federally public-private partnerships operate in Maryland, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Texas.

⁴Wilson-Fish programs are in place in Alabama, Alaska, Colorado, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Nevada, North Dakota, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Vermont.

⁵Wyoming has no refugee resettlement program.

Ramakrishnan, 2012; Gulasekaram and Ramakrishnan, 2013). Varsanyi (2010) explains that local jurisdictions influence immigration by creating policies that are either integrative (“immigrant policies”) or restrictive (“immigration policies”). These policies can be classified into: (1) policies arising from devolution of integration from federal to local governments (e.g., devolution to states of power to determine eligibility for welfare programs); (2) policies arising from devolution of control from central to local governments (e.g., annual immigration quotas and local immigration policing); (3) integrative immigrant policies arising from grassroots (e.g., housing, employment, local welfare); and (4) immigration control policies arising from the grassroots (e.g. penalizing local employers and landlords who hire or rent housing to undocumented residents).

In the U.S., states and local jurisdictions have developed policies that are either integrative, enabling the adaption and assimilation of immigrants and undocumented residents, or promote immigration control to exclude and constrain the rights of undocumented residents (Varsanyi, 2010). An example of an immigrant integrative policy caused by devolution is the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (“PRWORA”) that gives states the powers to determine eligibility for welfare programs, such as the Temporary Aid for Needy Families (“TANF” or cash assistance), food stamps, Supplemental Security Income, and nonemergency Medicaid. The Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act is an immigration control policy caused by devolution. It gives local police the authority to arrest previously deported noncitizen felons. Grassroots immigrant integration policies include: (1) education policies extending in-state tuition rates to undocumented students who can demonstrate state residency; (2) sanctuary cities and limited cooperation ordinances affirming that local authorities will not report the immigration status of those seeking local services to

federal immigration authorities; and, (3) grant of voting rights at the local and state level, including permitting noncitizens to vote in local school board elections. Grassroots immigration control policies include: (1) education policies restricting undocumented citizens from in-state tuition rates; (2) criminalizing the hiring of undocumented workers; (3) prohibiting the use by undocumented residents of a state issued driver's license as a valid form of identification to open bank accounts, rent apartments, and board planes; (3) various local ordinances on housing, trespassing, anti-solicitation; and, (4) restricting access of undocumented residents to state-funded services.

In the context of refugee resettlement as a subfield of the U.S. immigration policy, some legal scholars have advocated for the states to take a more assertive role by identifying in advance locations where refugees and groups of refugees would be accepted and useful (Elias, 2017; Rodriguez, 2008; Xi, 2017). Johnson (2017, p. 229), however, counters that “allowing states to pick and choose among admitted refugees opens the door to local decision-making” based, among others, on “race, religion, education, gender, and sexual orientation.” She argues instead that the U.S. refugee resettlement process is not based on the premise that the refugee could potentially contribute to the state but because “it is the right thing to do,” “refugees are in need,” contiguous nations that offered shelter are “overwhelmed by the demand” and because “we aspire to be a country that carries its share of global burdens” (Johnson, 2017, p. 229).

Despite the dominant role of the Federal government in the resettlement process, there is thus more than ample room for states to influence the process. States can make themselves more or less hospitable to refugee resettlement through a variety of actions and policies that either allow refugees to integrate into the local community or constrain their rights, preventing

assimilation. Our next section looks at how the VOLAGS may consider the hospitableness of a state or locality to refugees as criteria for resettlement.

Organizational Decision-Making: The Role of VOLAGS

The role of VOLAGS in U.S. immigration started as early as World War II (Forrest & Brown, 2014, p. 13; Harrell-Bond 1985; Winkler 1981). As a consequence of Jewish persecution in Russia and Eastern Europe during the Holocaust, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society founded in 1881 relocated many Jewish survivors to the Midwest and East Coast (Morawska, 1995; U.N. Refugee Agency, 2011). Other religious organizations were subsequently created to assist in refugee resettlement (Forrest & Brown, 2014; Wright, 1981).⁶ These religious organizations later became institutionalized in the U.S. refugee resettlement process as the intermediaries between admission to the United States and local resettlement (Brown, Mott, & Malecki, 2007; Forrest & Brown, 2014; Zucker, 1983).

Successful resettlement within the U.S. depends on the ability of VOLAGS to find community based resources such as “local sponsors, financial support, human assistance, community cooperation, and/or cooperative local agencies” (Forrest & Brown, 2014, p. 17). VOLAGS coordinate with local organizations that can: (1) provide specific resources such as language-services programs and economic opportunities for the refugee; (2) maximize use of local private resources such as “ethnic and community organizations;” and, (3) provide necessary services such as “case management, medical treatment, language training, housing placement” (Forrest & Brown, 2014, p. 16). Therefore, a critical factor in refugee resettlement is the “long-

⁶Examples of these religious organizations include: (1) American Committee for Christian German Refugees (1934); (2) Catholic Committee for Refugee Victims of Nazi Persecution (1936); (3) American Fund for Czechoslovak Relief, the Tolstoy Foundation, and the Polish American Immigration and Refugee Committee (after World War II); (4) American Council for Nationalities Service and the World Relief Organization, an associate of the National Association of Evangelicals (1975); and, (5) Young Men’s Christian Association (1979).

standing institutional relationships between national VOLAGS and local agencies” (Forrest & Brown, 2014, p. 18).⁷ Local organizations provide two essential services for refugees —help in securing affordable housing (Darrow, 2015a) and economic opportunities (Darrow, 2015b). Since the majority of federal funding for the resettlement process is for employment support, VOLAGS and local organizations also spend a significant amount of their time supporting refugees in their search for employment (Darrow 2015b).

In addition to the relationships VOLAGS have with local affiliates and organizations, and the services those groups provide, they are also mindful of the role social and ethnic ties can play in the successful resettlement of refugees. Placement in communities with high concentrations of same-ethnic groups can have a positive impact on integration of the newly settled refugees (Bolt, Özüekren, & Phillips, 2009; Sherrell, D'Addario & Hiebert, 2007; Spicer, 2008) through assistance with cultural transition into the new community (Ives, 2007; Miyares, 2010) and help with economic opportunities (Haines, 1996; Kibria, 1994; Mangain & Collins, 2003; Murdie & Ghosh, 2009; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Portes & Stepick, 1985). However, spatial concentration can also negatively impact resources of the community because of the potential to overwhelm local resources and capacity (Leibowitz, 1983; Massey, Durand, & Malone, 2002). In their study of the urban geography of resettlement patterns of refugees, Brown, Mott, & Malecki (2007, p. 57) found three mechanisms as influential: “distance decay” where refugees tended to resettle in localities near the immigrant group’s origin location; “migration chains” where they are resettled near earlier groups of immigrants of the same or similar ethnic group; and, “intermediary actors”

⁷Among the states that resettled the highest number of refugees per capita, for instance: (1) North Dakota sponsored European refugees since the 1940s and Asians since the 1970s through local branches of Lutheran Social Services; (2) Idaho has resettled the Indochinese since the 1970s through the Agency for New Americans, an arm of Episcopal Migration Ministries; and (3) New Hampshire Catholic Charities has since 1980 coordinated with the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program, a field office for the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants.

where nonprofit agencies such as VOLAGS and local affiliates of resettlement agencies direct refugees to particular places. Beaman (2012) examined refugee placements by the International Rescue Committee (“IRC”), finding that once a city was established as a site for refugees from a particular place that city will continue to resettle refugees from that same place although the numbers decline over time. VOLAGS are thus cognizant of placing refugees of the same nationality or ethnicity in the same areas to the extent they can.

Finally, other more general factors for resettlement considered by VOLAGS include “government policy, resource availability, and willingness in a particular community or availability of sponsor agencies or groups” (Forrest & Brown, 2014, p. 16). VOLAGS also take into consideration the political and social environment of a locality when determining the placement of refugees. In summary, there are numerous factors that enter into the organizational decision-making process of the VOLAGS. Along with longstanding ties to local organizations, the availability of economic opportunities and resources (Forrest & Brown, 2014), social networks, and economic conditions (Mott, 2010) appear to be the most important factors for VOLAGS when determining where to resettle refugees.

Partisanship, Political Culture, and Local Capacity

Studies indicate the relationship between partisanship and political ideology and openness to refugee resettlement. A recent study by the Pew Research Center found a sharp partisan and ideological divide in support for refugee resettlement—74% of Democrats said the U.S. had a responsibility to accept refugees in contrast to only 26% of Republicans (Hartig, 2018). Almost all the Governors who expressed reservations about the resettlement of Syrian refugees in their state were Republicans. Political culture may also play a significant role in refugee resettlement because it influences perceptions of and expectations from government

(Elazar, 1984; Fisher, 2016). The U.S. national political culture is an aggregate of three political subcultures that are widespread and pervasive in different parts of the country: moralistic, individualistic, and traditionalistic (Elazar, 1984; Mead, 2004). Each political subculture is strongly tied to specific areas, reflecting the patterns of immigration and migration of people of different ethnic origins, backgrounds, and religions across the country (Elazar, 1984; Fisher, 2016; Mead, 2004).

The moralistic political culture stresses the conception of the commonwealth as the basis for democratic government. Politics is viewed as “one of the greatest activities of humanity in its search for the good society” and government functions for the “betterment of the commonwealth” (Elazar, 1984, p. 117). Politics is centered on the “notion of the public good” and devoted to the “advancement of the public interest” (Elazar, 1984, p. 117). The individualistic political culture conceives politics as a marketplace and perceives the government as strictly utilitarian. The government does not need to be directly concerned “with questions of the good of society” but should handle only those functions demanded by their constituents (Elazar, 1984, p. 115). The utilitarian view of politics espouses limited community intervention in private activities and restricts government action to only primarily economic areas that promote private initiative. Finally, the traditionalistic political culture reflects a pre-commercial attitude that is paternalistic, elitist, and hierarchical (Elazar, 1984). Government functions to preserve the existing social order and political activities are limited to elites who claim legitimacy based on family ties or social position. New programs are initiated only if they serve the interest of the governing elite. Political culture is distinct from political ideology—states with any of the three political subcultures can be either liberal or conservative or a mixture of both (Fisher, 2016). Both Utah and Minnesota, for example, are moralistic states but Utah is

considered a conservative Republican state while Minnesota has consistently been Democratic in its politics (Elazar, 1984).

Elazar's typology of political culture is "as relevant as ever in understanding American politics" (Fisher, 2016, p. 88). Fisher (2016), for instance, found significant differences in public policy preferences among the different subcultures. Among others, he found that individualistic states are most likely to favor reduction of immigration levels while moralistic states are least likely to support reduction of immigration (Fisher, 2016). Dincer and Johnston (2016) similarly found that political subculture remained relevant in contemporary American politics. Their study indicated, for instance, that: (1) political culture accounted for more than a quarter of the variance in prevalence of corruptions issues across all states; (2) moralistic states exhibited the least corruption issues; and, (3) traditionalistic states had more corruption issues than individualistic states (Dincer and Johnston, 2016).

Mead (2004) examined the link between political culture and local state capacity. His study on state implementation of welfare reform and the TANF measured several indicators of successful performance: (1) political performance consisted of indicators measuring policymaking, consensus and availability of resources; (2) administrative performance consisted of indicators measuring commitment, coordination, and capability. Mead (2014) found that moralistic states were the most successful at satisfying the performance criteria, followed by individualistic states, and traditionalistic states scoring last. Moralistic states scored particularly high in measures of consensus and commitment. Moralistic states "were able to form a majority behind reform that stretched behind the legislature" and resolved differences with advocates "who questioned reform" (Mead, 2014, p. 282). Also, administrative bureaucracy in moralistic states were "fully engaged in reform," accepting the goals as their own (Mead, 2014, p. 282).

Mead (2014, p. 285) also ran several regression models on state welfare reform, finding that “moralistic states score 2.7 points higher, and individualistic states 1.6 points higher, than the average of the traditionalistic states.” Although not directly related to refugee resettlement, his study demonstrates the strong association between political culture and state or local capacity. Moralistic states achieved higher degree of consensus among various interest and advocacy groups and showed greater commitment of bureaucracy in implementing welfare programs at the state level.

Aside from political culture, state capacity for refugee resettlement is dependent on the VOLAGS’ linkages and networks with “local ethnic groups” and “local ecumenical groups” and these groups’ capacity, resources, and location (Forrest & Brown, 2014, p. 17). State capacity to resettle refugees depends on local support systems such as local volunteer agencies and organizations contracted by the VOLAGS to facilitate the resettlement process. Local capacity also consists of support from state governments (primarily financial) and broader acceptance of refugees by the local communities and statewide. As mentioned, political culture may similarly be associated with state capacity for refugee resettlement. Moralistic states may achieve greater consensus among local organizations and volunteers in resettling refugees and higher commitment from state bureaucracy in implementing policies that enable integration of refugees.

Theory of State Refugee Resettlement – Hospitable States and Inhospitable States

To summarize, the existing literature provides valuable insights into the refugee resettlement process. *First*, although refugee resettlement is a federal concern, states are expected to implement refugee resettlement policies through coordinating with federal government agencies and VOLAGS. *Second*, placement of refugees is largely dependent on local state capacities, including economic opportunities and the presence of local ecumenical or

secular affiliates of VOLAGS which often rely on community networks of volunteers to assist in resettlement. To a certain extent, the presence of religious organizations or religious residents may facilitate successful placement of refugees within the state because VOLAGS often rely on local volunteers to assist in refugees in providing support such as language services and acculturation. *Third*, refugees are placed and resettled in localities that have immigrants from the same or similar ethnic groups to allow greater integration. *Fourth*, state politics and political culture determines openness to new programs such as refugee resettlement programs that may contribute to the common good. Political culture affects refugee resettlement due to its influence on local state capacities (Mead, 2014). Moralistic and more politically liberal states may be more welcoming of refugees and may thus experience greater resettlements of refugees than non-Moralistic states or more conservative states.

Based on the review of existing literature we propose a theory of state refugee resettlement. A state's capacity to resettle refugees (i.e. the strength of its local support system) is influenced by how hospitable that state is to refugees. In other words, the more hospitable a state is to refugee resettlement the greater the local support system will be for refugee resettlement. Hospitableness to refugee resettlement is determined by various political, economic, and social factors. Table 1 identifies the relevant characteristics of what we call "hospitable" states and "inhospitable." Hospitable states are those who are most welcome to refugee resettlement and inhospitable states are those who are the least welcome. These are ideal types so no actual state may meet all the criteria for each category but rather some states will be closer to one pole than other states. The criteria which define hospitable and inhospitable states are political – partisanship, ideology, and political culture; economic – wages, housing, quality of life, employment opportunities, and poverty rate; and social – level of volunteerism in a state,

and level of religious adherents in a state. This latter category is included because many of the VOLAGS are religious based organizations and their local affiliates rely of their congregants to volunteer to support their resettlement operations.

(Table 1 Here)

Based on this theory we propose the following hypothesis to test regarding refugee resettlement in the 50 states:

H1: More liberal states will resettle more refugees than more conservative states

H2: More Democratic states will resettle more refugees than more Republican states

H3: States with a moralistic political culture will resettle more refugees than states without a moralistic political culture

H4: States with higher wages will resettle more refugees than states with lower wages

H5: States with less expensive housing will resettle more refugees than states with more expensive housing

H6: States with a higher quality of life will resettle more refugees than states with a lower quality of life

H7: States with more employment opportunities will resettle more refugees than states with low employment opportunities

H8: States with lower levels of poverty will resettle more refugees than states with higher levels of poverty

H9: States with high levels of volunteerism will resettle more refugees than states with low levels of volunteerism

H10: States with more religious adherents will resettle more refugees than states with fewer religious adherents

A review of existing literature on refugee resettlement reveals the lack of empirical studies that statistically analyze the patterns of refugee resettlement among states. There are few studies, if at all, that conduct statistical analysis of the state characteristics that determine refugee placement in the U.S. states. Mott (2010) conducted a qualitative analysis of refugee interviews to determine factors affecting resettlement patterns. Several studies examine geospatial patterns of refugee resettlement (Brown, Mott, & Malecki; Forrest & Brown, 2014) while two studies by Darrow conducted qualitative ethnography on local affiliates of VOLAGS (2015a, 2015b). This study contributes to existing literature by conducting a statistical analysis of state characteristics that determine refugee placement and resettlement in the U.S. The study examines the extent to which political factors (e.g. ideology, partisanship, and political culture), economic factors (e.g. wages, housing, quality of life, employment opportunities, and poverty rate), and social factors (e.g. level of volunteerism and number of religious adherents) influence refugee resettlement within the U.S. states.

DATA AND METHODS

To test the above hypotheses, we utilize state level data from 2002 to 2010. We include data for all 50 states over this time period which leaves us with 450 total observations.

Unfortunately, data limitations prevent us from analysis beyond 2010 so we cannot capture the recent anti-refugee sentiment that has appeared in the states since 2015. However, the time period included in this study is sufficient enough to analyze refugee resettlement patterns across the 50 states and within states as the political, economic, and social factors within states change.

We estimate our models using pooled cross-sectional time series regression with panel corrected standard errors and a lagged dependent variable. The concern with time series cross sectional data is heteroscedasticity and autocorrelation (both contemporaneously and serial). Panel corrected standard errors allow for errors that are heteroskedastic and correlated across panels (Beck and Katz 1995). To address potential serial correlation a lagged dependent variable is included. This makes for a more conservative test because the lag usually accounts for a significant amount of the variation (Smith 2004). This variable will also have substantive use in this analysis as well because previous research suggests that once an area has been established as a place for resettlement VOLAGS continue to place refugees there, however, those number decline over time (Beaman 2012). Finally, because the number of refugees resettled in the U.S. as a whole fluctuates significantly each year based on a variety of factors year dummy variables are included in the model. Darrow (2015a) describes the multitude of factors that determine the overall number of refugees admitted to the U.S. year to year. She claims that the “final number of refugees in any given year is determined by a range of factors, including the presence of conflicts around the globe that produce refugees, travel delays because of safety concerns or other processing issues with the government institutions involved in admissions procedures, foreign policy and the strategic use of resettlement, and domestic politics, which are affected by tensions between restrictionists and advocates.” (Darrow 2015a, p. 93)

Dependent Variable

Our dependent variable is number of refugees resettled per 100,000 people in each state. The variable was constructed by dividing the total number of refugees resettled in a state by its population and multiplying that number by 100,000. The refugee data were taken from the Office of Refugee Resettlement’s annual reports to Congress. We utilized the total refugees resettled

per state per 100,000 people variable over simply just using the total number of refugees resettled per state because such a variable controls for the large variation in state populations across the 50 states. Figure 1. presents the number of refugees per 100,000 people per state from 2002 to 2010. In the years under observation here, Minnesota had the single highest number of refugees resettled per 100,000 people with 124 in 2005. Wyoming, which has no state resettlement operation, did not resettle any refugees in this time period.

(Figure 1 Here)

Independent Variables

Our independent variables are divided into three categories – political factors, economic factors, and social factors. With regards to political factors we have three variables: *Ideology*, *Democratic Governor*, and *Political Culture*. *Ideology* is measured using the revised 1960-2013 citizen ideology measure created by Barry et. al. (1998). The measure is 0 to 100 with higher scores indicating a more liberal ideology. *Democratic Governor* is measured as partisan control of the executive branch and is a dichotomous variable with 1 = the governor is a Democrat and 0 = the governor is not a Democrat. The assumption behind including these measures is that more liberal states (as measured by citizen ideology and Democratic control of the executive branch) will be more supportive of resettling refugees in their states. Our variable for *Political Culture* is dichotomous with a 1 for moralistic states and 0 for individualistic and traditionalistic states. We create a dichotomous variable as opposed to keeping the original three categories developed by Elazar (1984) because a preliminary means test suggested a large difference between moralistic

states on the one hand and traditional and individualistic states on the other in terms of the average number of refugees resettled in those states.

With regards to economic factors we have five variables – *Wages*, *Housing*, *Quality of Life*, *Unemployment Rate*, and *Poverty Rate*. All of these measures indicate whether a state has the economic capacity to successfully resettle and integrate large numbers of refugees. Our measure of *Wages* is the state’s minimum wage. We focus on minimum wage as minimum wage jobs are most likely to be the types of jobs newly resettled refugees will be competitive for. Additionally, the ethos of the federal refugee resettlement program is for refugees to achieve self-sufficiency shortly after they arrive in the U.S. and states that offer a higher minimum wage might make a more enticing situation for VOLAGS to resettle refugees in and help them achieve self-sufficiency sooner. State minimum wage data comes from the University of Kentucky’s Center for Poverty Research (2017). The *Housing* variable is an index using sales prices and appraisal data and is the average of four quarterly measures per year. The housing data is taken from Carl Klarner’s “State Economic Data” dataset (2013). The state *Quality of Life* variable aggregates 19 economic indices into one ranking (1-50). We include this as a broad economic measure of state hospitableness to refugee resettlement since the primary objective of the resettlement process is economic self-sufficiency for refugees as soon as possible. The rankings have been inverted to ease interpretation. The ranking was constructed by the website *Ballotpedia* and the data comes from the Correlates of State Policy dataset (Pallay 2013; Jordan & Grossman 2017). Finally, the *Unemployment Rate* is the percentage of a state’s population that is unemployed, and the *Poverty Rate* is calculated as the percentage of a state’s population that lives in poverty. The data for both of these variables also comes from the University of Kentucky’s Center for Poverty Research (2017).

We include four variables for the social factors category – *Volunteerism, Mainline Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish*. *Volunteerism* is a composite measure of a state’s volunteer rate which is the percentage of the state population that volunteers and the volunteer hours per capita which is the average number of hours someone volunteers in that state per capita. Our volunteerism measure is constructed by multiplying these two numbers. The volunteering data comes from the Corporation for National and Community Service (2018)

Our reason for including variables on religious composition of a state is that since the refugee resettlement process in the U.S. is primarily driven by voluntary organizations many of which are religious based we can assume that these organizations utilize local congregations for volunteers and support for the resettlement of refugees. Therefore, we include variables for the number of mainline Protestants in a state, the number of Catholics in a state, and the number of Jews in a state. We specifically focus on these three religious groups because they align with the religious missions of six of the nine VOLAGS responsible for the resettlement of refugees in the states. Church World Service (CWS), Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM), World Relief Corporation (WR), and Lutheran Social Services are all Protestant organizations. We include the measure of the number of mainline Protestants in a state to capture the potential volunteers who may work with organizations to help resettle refugees in their state. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is a Catholic organization so we include the measure of Catholic adherents in a state to capture potential volunteers for this organization. The Hebrew Immigration Aid Society (HIAS) is a Jewish organization and therefore we include a measure of Jewish adherents in a state to account for potential volunteers for this organization and its subsidiaries. For the three religious adherents’ variables, we utilize the Religious Congregations and Membership Study from 2000 and 2010: (1) the measure of *Mainline Protestants* is the

number of mainline Protestants per state per 1,000 people; (2) the measure of *Catholics* is the number of Catholics per state per 1,000 people; and, (3) the measure of *Jewish* is the number of Jews per state per 1,000 people (Jones et. al. 2002; Grammich 2012). The Religious Congregations and Membership Study is conducted once every ten years in conjunction with the census therefore we only have data on religious adherents for 2000 and 2010. To fill in the missing data we utilize linear interpolation.

Finally, we also include a control variable on the type of state refugee program a state runs in conjunction with the Federal government. The idea is that states with their own government run resettlement operation maybe more open to resettlement than states with no program or a privately-run program. *Refugee Program Administration* is a nominal variable with four categories. 0 is for states with no refugee resettlement program (which only includes the state of Wyoming), states that operate a Wilson Fish program are coded as 1, states that operate a public private partnership are coded as 2, and states that have their own state government run refugee resettlement operation are coded as 3. Table 2. presents the summary statistics for each of our variables.

(Table 2 Here)

RESULTS

The results are presented in Table 3. As expected the lagged dependent variable is a strong predictor of state refugee resettlement at time t . This shows that even with the wide fluctuation in the total number of refugees resettled each year this does not change the pattern of resettlement in the states. As for the other results, there is mixed support for our hypothesis. Starting with the political factors, on the one hand, we have clear support for our hypothesis that states with a moralistic political culture will resettle more refugees than states with

individualistic or traditionalistic political culture. The coefficient is strongly positive and significant⁸. The ethos of the moralistic political culture that “we are all in this together” extends to the plight of refugees as well. On the other hand, our additional political variables did not confirm our hypothesis. The signs for both *Ideology* and *Democratic Governor* were in the opposite direction from what was hypothesized and *Ideology* was significant at the .05 level. What this indicates is that more conservative states rather than more liberal states resettled more refugees. This stands in stark contrast to the rhetoric and policy action undertaken by Republican governors in response to the possible resettlement of Syrian refugees in 2016.

(Table 3 Here)

For the variables encompassing economic factors only *Quality of Life* and *Poverty Rate* were statistically significant, however the sign for *Poverty Rate* was not in the hypothesized direction. A positive sign for *Poverty Rate* and statistical significance for both variables seems contradictory since a high quality of life seems inversely related to the poverty rate in a state however both are predictors of more refugee resettlement in a state. A possible explanation for the *Poverty Rate* results could be that the level of poverty in a state is related to the cost of living and perhaps more refugees are resettled in those states because the cost of living is lower. None of the other economic factor variables were statistically significant but the *Wages* variable and the *Unemployment Rate* variable were in the hypothesized direction while the *Housing* variable was not.

None of the social factor variables – *Volunteerism*, *Mainline Protestant*, *Catholic*, and *Jewish* were significant. Additionally, the coefficients for each, with the exception of the *Jewish* variable, were very small indicating they provide little to no explanation for the distribution of

⁸ We use the traditional p values as indicators of statistical significance even though there are questions regarding their utility in studies where state level analysis is concerned (Gill 2001).

refugees across the states. Perhaps more fine grain analysis needs to be conducted in this area and one possible extension could be breaking apart the *Mainline Protestant* variable into specific denominations to see how that might influence the results. Another extension could be to examine the number of religious congregations in a state as opposed to the number of adherents to any particular faith since it is usually the religious congregations that motivate volunteers.

Finally, our results for the *Refugee Program Administration* variable shows that states with no refugee resettlement program resettle far fewer refugees than states with a state run refugee resettlement program (the comparison category). However, only Wyoming does not have any type of refugee resettlement program and therefore resettles almost no refugees. The other 49 states have either a state administered program (which served as the base level comparison category for our analysis), a public private system, and/or a Wilson Fish program which allows for non-governmental agencies to implement the resettlement of refugees in a state. It is interesting that the signs for Wilson Fish and Public/Private are positive indicating those states resettle more refugees than states with a state administered program but the results are not statistically significant.

CONCLUSION

In summary, we found mixed support for our hypothesis. The political culture of a state appears to have a strong impact on the number of refugees that are resettled in each state with moralistic states resettling more refugees than non-moralistic states. However, the ideology of the state in determining the number of refugees resettled was opposite of our expectations with conservative states resettling more refugees. Further work is needed therefore to investigate the more precise role state level ideology and partisanship plays in determining the number of refugees resettled in a state. Economic factors also produced mixed results with states with a

higher quality of life but also with higher poverty rates resettling more refugees. With regards to social factors, the variable measuring the level of volunteerism in a state was not significant nor were the variables measuring the levels of religious adherents in a state. Based on the mixed support for our hypothesis we can also only offer mixed support for our theory of state refugee resettlement which is the more hospitable a state the more refugees will be resettled in that state. Conflicting support for our political and economic factor hypotheses and no support for our social factor hypotheses show that more refinement of the theory and/or more data is necessary to provide further support for our theory. The inclusion of a lagged dependent variable in our model is necessary for the statistical challenges represented when using pooled cross-sectional time series data, but it also provides for a very conservative test of our hypothesis since the lag accounts for a large amount of the variation in the dependent variable (Smith 2004).

Future research on the determinants of state level refugee resettlement in the U.S. should work to tease out more of the role that political, economic, and social factors play in refugee resettlement. Future research should also examine how previous refugee resettlement in a state affects future resettlement. By including a lag of the dependent variable in our study we capture some of this effect but it would be fruitful to see whether refugees from specific countries tend to be resettled in certain states and if that is a determinant for future refugees from those countries to also be resettled in those states. One of the principles the VOLAGS try to operate on is family reunification. Although this does not constitute a majority of refugee resettlement it could prove to influence the distribution of refugees within the U.S. states.

The patterns of refugee resettlement within the U.S. is an understudied phenomenon. This is unfortunate because it is an issue which cuts across a variety of disciplines. There is also a heavy normative component to this research since whether a country like the U.S. should

accept refugees, and how many, is a both a legal and normative issue and is often presented as such. But there is also a strong political component to how and where refugees are resettled that also needs to be considered when trying to understand this topic which makes it a ripe area of study.

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Table 1. Theory of State Refugee Resettlement – Hospitable States and Inhospitable States

	Hospitable States	Inhospitable States
Political	Liberal Democratic Moralistic	Conservative Republican Non-Moralistic
Economic	High Wages Affordable Housing Good Quality of Life Employment Opportunities Low Poverty	Low Wages Expensive Housing Poor Quality of Life Lack of Employment Opportunities High Poverty
Social	High Volunteerism High Religion	Low Volunteerism Low Religion

Table 2. Summary Statistics

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Refugees per 100,000	450	18.76	19.57	0	124.53
Refugees per 100,000 _{t-1}	450	18.84	19.66	0	123.6
Ideology	450	53.32	15.85	8.45	95.97
Democratic Governor	450	0.513	0.5	0	1
Political Culture	450	0.34	0.474	0	1
Wages	450	6.12	1.11	2.65	8.55
Housing	450	3.3	1.09	1.6	7.14
Quality of Life	450	25.37	14.43	1	50
Unemployment Rate	450	5.81	2.03	2.6	13.7
Poverty Rate	450	12.32	3.17	5.4	23.1
Volunteerism	450	11.84	5.74	2.62	45.42
Mainline Protestant	450	95.1	60.59	8.52	335.5
Catholic	450	180.04	111.48	32.78	502.46
Jewish	450	7.96	11.13	0.23	77.81
Ref. Program Admin	450	2.42	0.89	0	3

Table 3. Determinants of State Refugee Resettlement, 2002-2010

Variable	Model 1
Refugees per 100,000 _{t-1}	.821*** (.085)
Ideology	-.064* (.031)
Democratic Governor	-1.10 (.772)
Political Culture	2.17* (.954)
Wages	.940 (.518)
Housing	.258 (.606)
Quality of Life	.114** (.043)
Unemployment Rate	-.745 (.421)
Poverty Rate	.439* (.178)
Volunteerism	.021 (.094)
Mainline Protestant	-.002 (.010)
Catholic	-.004 (.004)
Jewish	.049 (.040)
No State Program	-3.74* (1.69)
Wilson Fish	1.51 (1.10)
Public/Private	.399 (2.45)

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001; Panel Corrected Standard Errors in Parentheses

Figure 1. Number of Refugees per 100,000 People per State, 2002-2010

