

FRONTLINE STATES: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF REFUGEE HOSTING (PSCI 2995)

Prof. Guy Grossman

Fall 2026

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Class Hours: Tuesdays 1:45–4:45 p.m.

Class Room: TBD

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Blurb

About seventy percent of the world's refugees are hosted not by wealthy democracies but by low- and middle-income countries. Two thirds are hosted by a country that borders the one they fled. Uganda hosts nearly two million refugees, more than any country in Europe, and grants them the right to work, to move freely, and to farm land. Colombia has absorbed close to three million Venezuelans. Chad, one of the poorest countries on earth, hosts a million and a half people.

Saudi Arabia, thirty-six times richer than Chad, records *four hundred and forty-eight*. That number is real, and it is also a trick. Saudi Arabia has signed neither the 1951 Refugee Convention nor its 1967 Protocol, and it has no domestic asylum law, so almost nobody in the country is legally a refugee. Its own 2022 census counted 449,300 Syrians living there. They are present, they work, and they are not going home; they are simply called something else—guests, or residents on employer-tied permits, which grant the right to work but no protection against being sent back. Whether a displaced person is a “refugee” is not a fact you read off the world. It is a decision a state makes, and it is the first thing this course takes apart.

This is the puzzle that animates the course: **why do the countries least able to bear the costs of hosting end up bearing them—and what happens when they do?**

The obvious answers do not survive contact with the evidence. It is not proximity, and it is not capacity. Kenya and Uganda sit next to the same wars and take in the same people: South Sudanese, Somalis, Congolese. Uganda hosts 1.9 million of them and Kenya hosts 620,000, and Uganda does this on half of Kenya's income per head. Nor are the policies alike. Uganda gives refugees the right to work, freedom of movement, and a plot of land to farm; Kenya confines them to camps and has repeatedly announced that it intends to close them. It is not weakness either,

because granting land and work permits is not what a state does when it has lost control of its borders; it is an expensive choice, deliberately made. And it is not culture or national character, because the same government will treat one group of refugees well and another brutally, in the same year. Explaining refugee policy in the Global South means taking seriously the incentives of host governments, the constraints and resources of the international refugee regime, the politics of citizens who live alongside refugees, and the economic lives of displaced people themselves.

The seminar is organized around questions, not topics. Each week takes a question on which good scholars have reached different answers, and asks why. Do refugees make host communities poorer? Do they bring conflict? Does hosting cost politicians votes? Does humanitarian aid help refugees, or trap them? How does displacement end, and who decides?

These disagreements are rarely what they appear to be. They are seldom two researchers looking at the same evidence and drawing opposite conclusions. Far more often, two competent and honest researchers asked the same question and then went and looked at different things: one counts countries and the other counts provinces; one studies refugees arriving and the other studies a law that lets them work; one has a clean comparison group but cannot see the whole economy, and the other sees the whole economy but has no comparison group. Finding the difference that is doing the work is most of the intellectual labor of this course, and it is a skill that transfers to anything you read afterward.

Some of what we find is uncomfortable. In one week you will read a finding that was published in the discipline's best journal, cited a thousand times, and used by governments to justify closing borders, and you will watch it fall apart because somebody entered a zero into a spreadsheet where they should have written "I don't know." You will be expected to work equally hard on every paper on this syllabus: to look for the weakest link, whether it sits in the theory, in the evidence, or in the leap between them. That includes the papers I wrote. Learning to read this way—applying the same scrutiny to the assigned literature, to my own work, and to your own arguments—is the point of the course.

A political economy approach anchors the course, but we draw throughout on international law, economics, and the sociology of humanitarianism. Much of the reading is very recent empirical research, some of it not yet published. A central aim is to teach you to read such work critically: to see the argument, to see the research design, and to see where the design does not support the argument.

No background in statistics or research methods is assumed. You will not be asked to run anything. You will be asked to understand what a study compared, what it had to assume in order for that comparison to mean anything, and whether you believe it. Where a reading contains technical material, the syllabus tells you what you may skim. There is no examination and nothing to memorize.

Course Requirements

Attendance		10
Active participation		10
Position papers	<i>five</i> (a sixth is optional)	30
Term paper , in five components:		50
Research question memo	<i>Oct 6</i>	5
Annotated bibliography	<i>Oct 20</i>	5
Paper outline	<i>Nov 10</i>	5
In-class presentation	<i>Dec 1</i>	5
Final paper	<i>Dec 17</i>	30
Total		100

There is no examination and nothing to memorize. Everything you are assessed on is either something you said in the room or something you wrote about the readings.

1. Attendance (10%) and active participation (10%)

This is a seminar. It does not work if you have not read the assigned readings, and it does not work if you do not speak in class. Together these are worth a fifth of your grade, and that is deliberate: there are no lectures to fall back on and no exam to cram for. The seminar *is* the course.

Attendance (10%). We meet once a week for thirteen substantive meetings, so a single absence costs you a full week of the course. Two kinds of absence, and the distinction is the whole rule.

An **excused** absence—illness, a family or personal emergency, a religious obligation, an official University commitment, or anything else I approve in advance where possible—carries **no penalty** and does not count against you. Just tell me, by email, as early as you reasonably can. I am not going to demand a doctor's note; I am going to take you at your word, and I expect you not to make me regret that.

An **unexcused** absence is any other absence: you simply did not come, or you asked to be excused for a reason I did not approve. You get **one** of these free, no explanation needed. Each unexcused absence after the first costs **two points**, up to the ten. Arriving very late or leaving early, without reason, counts as half an unexcused absence. Attendance is recorded.

Active participation (10%). This is not measured by volume of talk, and the student who says the most is not the one who scores highest. It is measured by whether your contributions advance the argument: naming what is actually at stake in a disagreement, pressing on an assumption, offering a counter-example, or conceding a point when the evidence goes against you. Coming to a week on which you wrote a position paper and having nothing to say about it will be noticed. So will listening well and building on what someone else said. If you find speaking in seminars genuinely difficult, come see me in the first two weeks and we will find a way that works for you; the point is to contribute to the room's thinking, and there is more than one way to do that.

2. Position papers (30%)

You will write **five** position papers over the semester, on five weeks of your choosing.

An optional sixth. If you wish, you may write a sixth paper, in which case I will grade all six and count your best five. This is entirely your choice and there is no penalty for submitting ‘only’ five position papers. Position papers **are never accepted after the seminar has met**, so the sixth is worth considering as insurance against the week you get sick, or when three midterms land on the same Monday.

Choosing your weeks. Any of the eleven weeks with assigned readings (Weeks 2–9 and 11–13). You will sign up in the first meeting. I will cap each week so that no session has more than four writers and none has none, but otherwise the choice is yours.

A position paper is **750–900 words** and is due **by midnight on the Monday before class**. It is not a summary, and I will not be persuaded that you have read carefully by being told at length what the readings said. Its job is to find the **weakest link** in the week’s material and to press on it. But you have to earn the right to criticize, and that means showing first that you have understood.

Every paper does four things.

1. **State, briefly, what the reading claims and why it matters.** A few sentences, no more: what is the central argument or finding, and what would follow if it were true? This is not the summary I just told you to avoid. It is the setup, and it does two things at once. It shows me you have grasped the paper at its strongest, and it gives your critique something to bite on. A weakness only means something once the reader can see what it is a weakness *in*. Attacking a paper you have not first stated fairly is the most common way these papers go wrong, and it is unpersuasive even when the attack happens to land.
2. **Identify the weakest link.** Where is the argument most vulnerable? It might sit in the *theory* (a concept that does not do the work it claims, a mechanism that is asserted rather than shown). It might sit in the *evidence* (a comparison that does not isolate what the author says it does, a design that cannot see the thing it is looking for). Or—most commonly, and most interestingly—it might sit in the *leap between them*: the evidence is fine, the theory is fine, and the paper claims more than the evidence can carry.
3. **Say why it is weak, and be specific.** “The sample is small” is not an argument. “The design compares households inside a single camp, so it cannot detect anything that happened to the whole camp” is.
4. **Say what would fix it.** What evidence, what comparison, what research design would settle the question or repair the argument? This is the hardest part of the assignment and the most valuable. Being able to say what would change your mind is the difference between having an opinion and doing social science. It is also, not coincidentally, how people find dissertation topics.

Two further requirements. These are not busywork. They are the clearest sign that you did the reading and the thinking yourself, and I look for both when I grade.

- **Point to the exact place the weakness lives.** Name the table, the figure, the equation, or the sentence—"Table 3, column 2," "the identifying assumption stated on page 6," "the last paragraph of section 4." A weakness described in general terms is usually a weakness the writer has not actually located. A weakness with an address is one you found by reading.
- **Connect it to the course.** Tie your critique to something outside the week's own readings: a point raised in an earlier seminar, a finding or a case from another week, or a claim you expect us to argue about in class. The disagreements in this course talk to each other—a design problem you met in one week is often the key to another—and a paper that shows you have noticed is worth more than one that treats the week as an island.

Be ready to defend it out loud. If you wrote a paper for a given week, I may call on you to state its argument and answer challenges to it in seminar. I will not always do this, and I will not warn you when I do, so the only way to be safe is to be ready every week you have written. This is the whole point of writing before we meet, and it is a large part of how the participation grade is earned. A paper you cannot account for in the room is a paper you did not really write.

The weakest link is not always a disagreement. Some weeks the readings genuinely fight, and then your job is to adjudicate: work out precisely where the authors part company, and why. But often they do not fight at all. Sometimes they build on one another, and the interesting question is what they have jointly assumed without noticing. Sometimes they ask different questions and only appear to disagree. Sometimes two papers reach compatible conclusions and the interesting thing is what each one's design makes it *unable to see*. Sometimes the reading is not an argument at all but a description of an institution, and the question is whether the description supports the conclusions people draw from it. All of these are legitimate targets. By contrast, I'm not looking for papers that merely report what the authors said.

Grading. Each paper is worth **6 points** ($5 \times 6 = 30\%$ of the course grade; if you write six, the best five count). Five points are for the argument and one is for the writing.

The argument (5 points):

Check-plus	5	States the argument fairly, finds a weak link that is genuinely load-bearing, explains precisely why it fails, and says what would repair or settle it. The weakness is pinned to an exact address (a named table, figure, equation, or sentence) and is tied to something outside the week's own readings.
Check	4	Identifies a real weakness but describes it loosely, or names it without saying what would fix it, or locates it only in general terms rather than at a specific address, or leaves it unconnected to the rest of the course.
Check-minus	3	Summarizes the readings without pressing on anything, or attacks the paper without first stating it fairly, or objects to something the paper never claimed.
Zero	0	Not submitted.

The writing (1 point). One point, awarded or not, for prose that is clear, correctly proofread, and organized so that a reader can follow the argument on a single pass. This is not a stylistic judgment and it is not about elegance. It is about whether the paper is *readable*: whether the sentences parse, whether the claims arrive in an order that makes sense, and whether it has been read once by its author before being submitted. If I have to work out what you meant, you have not made the argument.

Most papers that do the reading honestly and press on something real will receive a check. A check-plus requires that the weakness you found actually matters—that if you are right, the paper's conclusion is in trouble—and that you have done the two things that make the paper yours: pinned the weakness to an exact address and connected it to the course.

3. Term paper (50%)

You will write a **15–20 page** research paper on a question in the politics of refugee hosting. The paper should be organized around *your* argument, not around a survey of what others have said. It may be conceptual, theoretical, or empirical.

The paper is scaffolded into components, each of which builds toward the final product. All components must be submitted to receive full credit.

- **Research question memo** (5 points). One page, single-spaced. State your research question and explain why it is worth answering—both academically and, if relevant, for policy. If your project focuses on a particular country, region, or population, explain why that case is informative for the question. A good question is one where you can imagine being surprised by the answer. **Due: Tuesday, October 6, 2026.**
- **Annotated bibliography** (5 points). A list of the scholarly sources you plan to use, with a 3–4 sentence annotation for each. Each annotation should state the source's main argument or finding *and* explain how you plan to use it (theory, background, case evidence, or a position you intend to argue against). Sources should be primarily academic, though high-quality reports and journalism may be included. You are expected to go beyond the syllabus. **Due: Tuesday, October 20, 2026.**
- **Paper outline** (5 points). A detailed outline showing how your argument will unfold, section by section. The purpose is to ensure you have a structure, and an argument, before you draft. **Due: Tuesday, November 10, 2026.**
- **In-class presentation** (5 points). On December 1, each student will give a 12–15 minute presentation of their paper: the question, why it matters, the case, and the central argument. If the paper is empirical, describe the design and main findings.
- **Final paper** (30 points). 15–20 pages, double-spaced. **Due: Thursday, December 17, 2026.**

Evaluation criteria (for guidance). I will weigh the clarity and originality of the question; the strength and coherence of the central argument; the extent to which *your* analytical voice comes through rather than a recitation of the literature; the quality of engagement with scholarship (using it, not summarizing it); the appropriate use of evidence; and the organization and clarity of the writing. Different papers will excel along different dimensions.

A note for the empirically ambitious. Papers do not need to contain original data analysis, and a superb paper can be entirely conceptual. But if you want to do something empirical, two public datasets have recently become available and are well suited to undergraduate work:

- The **Dataset of World Refugee and Asylum Policies (DWRAP)**—systematic coding of refugee policy across countries and over time. <https://datanalytics.worldbank.org/dwrap/>
- The **African Refugee Camps Dataset (ARCD)**—the geographic location, operating years, and characteristics of 466 refugee camps in sub-Saharan Africa, 1999–2024.

Either can be combined with publicly available data on conflict (ACLED, UCDP), elections, satellite imagery, or household surveys. Come talk to me early if this interests you.

Logistics

Office Hours

Please sign up using calendly.com/ggros. Office hours are the time I have set aside to focus on you. If you have class during my office hours, email me and we will find another time.

Communication

I will communicate with the class via Canvas and email. Please check the syllabus and Canvas before emailing. I respond to email during regular working hours, typically within 2–3 working days. I do not typically respond in the evenings, on weekends, or on holidays. I do not respond to offensive emails.

Grade policy

- The grade you earn is the grade you receive. Grades are not negotiable, and I do not award points for intentions.
- Every effort will be made to grade fairly, but mistakes happen. If you believe you have been graded in error, submit a written description of the error within three days of receiving the graded work.
- **Late term-paper components** (the research question memo, the annotated bibliography, the outline, and the final paper) are penalized 1/10 of the grade per day, including the day of submission.
- **Position papers work differently: they are not accepted after the seminar has met.** There is no late penalty because there is no late submission. The reason is not administrative. The paper exists to make you arrive with a position, and to let me see where the room stands before I plan the discussion. A paper written after the seminar is not a position paper; it is a record of what other people said. If you miss one, that week simply is not one of your five, which is what the optional sixth is for.

Policy on the use of Generative AI tools

You may use generative AI to brainstorm, to get feedback on a draft you have written, and to copyedit. You may not use it to generate text that you submit as your own, and you may not use it to summarize a reading you have not read. If you use it at all, include a single line at the end of the paper saying what you used and how. That is the whole rule, and I will take you at your word.

The reason is worth more than the rule. This course is about adjudicating claims that you have actually checked. In Week 9 you will watch an influential finding collapse because nobody went back to the underlying data for twenty years. In several weeks, you will find papers that disagree. A language model will describe a paper's findings to you confidently, fluently, and sometimes wrongly; so will a scholar who may overclaim. The skill this course exists to teach is not taking anyone's word for it.

So use the tool if it helps you think. Do not use it to avoid reading, because the reading is not the obstacle to the course. The reading is the course.

Accommodation for students with disabilities

The University of Pennsylvania encourages the full participation of students with disabilities. Students registered with [Student Disabilities Services](#) will be granted appropriate accommodations. Please speak with me early in the semester.

Accommodating tiny children

Tiny children are great. If you are breastfeeding or can't find childcare (or honestly, any other reasonable reason), feel free to bring your baby to class. We'll make it work.

Religious Accommodation

The University accommodates students whose religious obligations conflict with attendance or deadlines. Please notify me in such cases.

Policy on Academic Misconduct

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Cheating and plagiarism will result in a failing grade on the assignment and possibly for the course, per the Student Handbook.

Where do I find the readings?

All required readings are posted on Canvas. Recommended readings are available through the Penn library; where a book is assigned, the relevant chapters are on Canvas as well. You should not need to buy anything.

Required and recommended readings

Each week lists **required readings**—typically four—which everyone is expected to have read before the seminar. **Read them in the order listed:** the sequence is deliberate, and most weeks

are built as an argument that unfolds from one reading to the next. Where a reading contains technical material you may skip or skim, the syllabus says so explicitly. Take those instructions seriously: they are there so you can spend your time on the argument rather than on the standard errors.

Most weeks also list two or three **recommended readings**. These are for students who want to go further on that week's question—for instance, if you are considering it as a term-paper topic. They are *not* required, you will not be examined on them, and seminar discussion will not assume you have read them.

A note on the readings that are mine. A number of the assigned articles are ones I wrote or co-wrote. This is a small field and I have worked in much of it; excluding my own research would mean excluding some of the best available evidence on questions this course exists to ask, which would be a strange kind of modesty.

But it puts you in an awkward position, so let me be direct about it. **You are not expected to agree with me, and you will not be rewarded for doing so.** If you think one of my papers is wrong—that the design does not support the claim, that the case does not travel, that the mechanism is not the one I say it is—then say so, in seminar or in writing. *I will find that far more interesting than agreement, and I will grade it accordingly.* The habit of reading an author's work critically is not suspended because the author is standing at the front of the room.

PART I: THE PUZZLE AND THE REGIME

Week 1 (August 25) — Introductions, and the Scale of the Problem

Plan for the day: Introductions; the syllabus, the assignments, and the AI policy; and then the data on global displacement—who is displaced, who hosts them, and what has changed. We will end by putting the course's central puzzle on the table and finding out how far your intuitions get you. Not very far, is the likely answer, and that is the point.

Learning objectives:

- **The magnitudes:** 118 million forcibly displaced, of whom about 70 million have never crossed a border (i.e., they are internally displaced). The number of refugees globally is about equal to the population of Spain.
- **Who actually hosts:** 70% of refugees are in low- and middle-income countries, and 65% are in a country that borders the one they fled. Low- and lower-middle-income countries host about 40% of the world's refugees on 6.5% of the world's income.
- **Protracted displacement:** 70% of refugees have been displaced five years or more. The system was built for an emergency and is being used to run a permanent condition.

- **Puzzle:** The standard explanations for Southern hosting—proximity, state weakness, and generosity—fail scrutiny. That failure is one of the course’s key puzzles.

Required readings (light—read before the first meeting):

1. UNHCR (2025). *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2024*. Read the executive summary and skim the figures.
 2. World Bank. *World Development Report 2023: Migrants, Refugees, and Societies*, chapter 7 (“Refugees: Managing with a medium-term perspective”), pages TBD.
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Week 2 (September 1) — Who Counts as a Refugee—and Who Decides?

“Refugee” is not a description of a person’s circumstances. It is a **legal status that an official confers**—and until someone with authority applies a criterion to your account and makes a determination, your own declaration is worth nothing. Which criterion gets used, who applies it, and how strictly: none of these is settled strictly by the law. They are political questions. *The same person, with the same story, on the same day, can be a refugee in one country and not in the next.*

This week we read key parts of the International Law — the 1951 Convention alongside the two instruments that actually govern much of the Global South, the 1969 OAU Convention and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration. We then ask, what the category refugee is worth once we understand who controls it. Betts argues the category is too narrow and should be widened. Mourad and Norman argue it is being deliberately hollowed out by the very states and organizations meant to uphold it. Both cannot be the whole story.

Learning objectives:

- In what sense “refugee” is a status conferred rather than a fact about a person—and why that turns the definition into a political question rather than a legal one.
- What the 1951 Convention actually promises, what it leaves out, and how the 1969 OAU Convention and 1984 Cartagena Declaration answer differently.
- Four questions the debate constantly runs together, and why keeping them apart changes what you see: *who counts?* • *who decides?* • *what do they get?* • *who enforces?*
- Whether a strict line between forced and voluntary migration can be drawn reliably, and what it would mean to assess “voluntariness.”
- How to tell a question that argument can settle from one that only evidence can—a distinction the rest of the course runs on.

Required readings:

1. **Primary documents.** *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* (1951), Articles 1 and 33; *OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa* (1969), Article 1; *Cartagena Declaration* (1984), Conclusion 3.

Short. Read them, do not skim. Read the three definitions side by side and mark exactly where they diverge.

2. Sharpe, Marina (2012). "The 1969 African Refugee Convention: Innovations, Misconceptions, and Omissions." *McGill Law Journal* 58(1): 95–147.
The methods lesson: how to read a treaty closely against its reputation. Focus on Parts II (Misconceptions) and III (Omissions); you may skim the treaty-interpretation material in III.C.
3. Betts, Alexander (2013). *Survival Migration: Failed Governance and the Crisis of Displacement*, chapter 1.
The case for widening the definition of refugee.
4. Erdal, Marta Bivand, and Ceri Oeppen (2018). "Forced to Leave? The Discursive and Analytical Significance of Describing Migration as Forced and Voluntary." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44(6): 981–998.
*Forced and voluntary as a **continuum**, not a dichotomy. Come to class able to answer the question: voluntary relative to **what**?*
5. Mourad, Lama, and Kelsey P. Norman (2019). "Transforming Refugees into Migrants: Institutional Change and the Politics of International Protection." *European Journal of International Relations* 26(3): 687–713.
A demanding reading, and the rival to Betts—erosion here is no accident. Give yourself time for it. Focus on the four practices of policy "conversion" and on the empirical cases (Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey); you may skim the historical-institutionalist apparatus.

Recommended:

1. Hamlin, Rebecca (2021). *Crossing: How We Label and React to People on the Move*, chapter 1.
The migrant/refugee binary as a "legal fiction." A complement to Mourad and Norman—notice whose interest a narrow category serves.
2. Crawley, Heaven, and Dimitris Skleparis (2018). "Refugees, Migrants, Neither, Both: Categorical Fetishism and the Politics of Bounding in Europe's 'Migration Crisis'." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44(1): 48–64.
The empirical test of the forced/voluntary line, built from interviews with 215 people who crossed to Greece in 2015. The prose is demanding, but the interviews put real pressure on the dichotomy.
3. FitzGerald, David Scott, and Rawan Arar (2018). "The Sociology of Refugee Migration." *Annual Review of Sociology* 44: 387–406.
A survey of the field. Useful for orienting yourself in this literature, and a good place to start if you are considering a term paper on categories, definitions, or the refugee/migrant distinction.

Week 3 (September 8) — Who Runs the Refugee Regime, and Whose Interests Does It Serve?

The disagreement: Last week we read what the law says. This week we ask who administers it, and with what incentives. UNHCR is charged with protecting refugees, but it is funded almost entirely by voluntary donor contributions and operates only at the pleasure of host governments. This means it is structurally dependent on actors whose behavior it is supposed to constrain. IOM has no protection mandate at all and became a UN agency only in 2016. WFP feeds refugees and

is therefore the agency whose budget cuts they feel first. And the refugee regime's operational default, *the camp*, persists despite decades of evidence against it.

The hard question: is UNHCR a check on host states, or a service provider that makes containment administratively possible? And why, if burden-sharing is the regime's central problem, has no legal instrument (e.g., treaty) ever made it binding?

Learning objectives:

- Who actually administers the refugee regime—UNHCR, IOM, WFP, UNRWA—and how each agency's mandate and funding shape what it can and cannot do.
- The reasons behind UNHCR's relative weakness in relation to host states, and what an organization's budget tells you that its mandate does not.
- Why the camp became the regime's default response, and what the placement of camps might reveal about their purpose.
- Why the costs of hosting fall so unevenly across the world, and whether burden-sharing could ever be made binding.

Required readings:

The first two establish the problem and the institutions built to address it; the last two ask what those institutions can actually do.

1. Betts, Alexander (2011). *Protection by Persuasion: International Cooperation in the Refugee Regime*, **Introduction** (pp. 1–26).

The anchor for the week's puzzle. Betts names the asymmetry between the regime's two norms—asylum is legally robust, burden-sharing is voluntary and unenforceable. Work out what that asymmetry means for a low-income country next door to a war, and watch for his answer, cross-issue persuasion: what an agency with no money and no army can still do.

2. Dini, Sabine, Shoshana Fine, and Antoine Pécoud (2024). "International Organizations and Migration Governance," in *Handbook of Migration and Globalisation*, chapter 3: 42–57.

An overview of the organizations: who they are, what they do, and how they differ. The opening claim is that there is a refugee regime but no migration regime. The framework that follows is that IOs produce narratives and data, offer policy guidance, and provide services on behalf of states. Read the last of those three closely, including what they say about "voluntary" return.

3. Krause, Ulrike (2021). *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp: Gender, Violence, and Coping in Uganda*, **chapter 3** ("Humanitarian Aid and the Camp Landscape").

The regime as experienced by the people inside it, from fieldwork in Kyaka II. Watch for Krause's central concept—refugees as "protection objects"—and the accountability question it opens: when a refugee has a complaint, where does it go?

4. Anti, Sebastian, Colette Salemi, Karishma Silva, Jonathan Rigberg, Sofia Leopold, and Johannes Hoogeveen (2026). "A New Expanded Dataset to Study Refugee Camps in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1999–2024."

The Krause chapter shows one camp from the 'inside'; this article covers 466 of them from 'above'. Read the introduction and the descriptive sections; skim the difference-in-differences application. The key descriptive

result is *where camps sit: near borders, far from provincial capitals, on marginal land. Consider who chose those sites, and to serve whose interests. The pattern is mixed, so resist tidying it into a slogan. The ARCD is public so feel free to play with the data.*

Recommended:

1. Rausis, Frowin, Maud Bachelet, and Philipp Lutz (2024). "UN Refugee Agencies: Vulnerable Funding Structures and a Looming Legitimacy Crisis." *Forced Migration Review* 74.

Three pages. The funding architecture behind everything else: roughly 1% of UNHCR's budget comes from the UN itself. The rest is voluntary, and much of it is earmarked by donors to particular countries and populations. We will discuss the numbers in class.

2. Tsourapas, Gerasimos (2026). "Credible Fictions: How States Stage Refugee Governance for Geopolitical Gain." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 39(1): 22–40.

How host states turn refugees into geopolitical leverage. We will discuss the Tunisian case in class; note the clause that these practices proceed "often with the tacit endorsement of international organizations."

3. Garnier, Adèle (2023). "UNHCR and the Transformation of Global Refugee Governance: The Case of Refugee Resettlement," in *Handbook on the Institutions of Global Migration Governance*, chapter 4: 50–62.

This piece is set to explain why decades of UNHCR effort on resettlement produced a program that now reaches under 1% of the world's refugees. Also on the agency's considerable power over refugees themselves, even as it has almost none over states.

4. Betts, Alexander (2011). *Protection by Persuasion*, chapter 1 ("The International Politics of Refugee Protection").

The theory behind the introduction: refugee protection as a global public good, and why free-riding is the dominant strategy. Useful if you are writing an IR-flavored term paper.

Week 4 (September 15) — Is There Anything Distinctive about Refugee Poverty?

In the 1990s UNHCR ran a poster campaign showing a row of identical LEGO figures: *spot the refugee*. The point was that you could not—refugees "are just like you and me," except that they were forced to flee. It was a decent piece of anti-prejudice messaging. Betts and his co-authors argue it was also **empirically wrong**.

Their claim is that refugees are worse off than *otherwise similar* members of the host community, and that this gap is produced by the experience of displacement itself: through trauma, dispossession, uprootedness, and restricted rights. Borrowing from the economics of poverty traps, they call this **the refugee trap**: a deficit sustained by self-reinforcing constraints, in which being poor today is itself a cause of being poor tomorrow.

Krause, working in the same camps, does not so much dispute their findings as challenge the frame. *Whose comparison?* Betts and his colleagues compare a Congolese refugee in Uganda to her Ugandan neighbor. The refugees Krause interviewed were comparing themselves to the conditions back in the Congo—and by that measure, as one woman put it, life in the camp is "harder...but better than home, because you are not worried about being killed." Krause also

warns that a relentless focus on deprivation reproduces refugees as passive victims, when in fact they are constantly acting: getting by, getting out, getting back at, getting organized.

*We read this week early, before we study host-state policy, deliberately: what states, donors, and refugees do later in this course is only intelligible once you know what constraints refugees are actually operating under. Note also what we are **not** yet doing. This week diagnoses. Later, when we come to hosting policy, work rights, cash transfers, and aid, we will ask which parts of this deficit targeted policy can remove, and which parts it cannot.*

Learning objectives:

- What we mean by a “refugee trap,” and which mechanisms are thought to contribute to it.
- Whether refugee poverty is distinctive, or simply poverty—and what the poverty-trap literature the argument borrows from does and does not settle.
- **The comparison-group problem:** against whom should a refugee’s welfare be measured—her neighbors, or her own past? Neither choice is neutral.
- How much room the “trap” leaves for refugee agency, and whether it is even the right metaphor for a life that involves this much action.

Required readings:

One book and one chapter—but read them against each other. They are answering the same question and they do not agree.

1. Betts, Alexander, Naohiko Omata, Jade Siu, and Olivier Sterck (2026). *The Refugee Trap: The Economics of Displacement*. Cambridge Elements. **Chapters 1–4, then any two of chapters 5–8, then chapter 9.**

The anchor. Skim the technical portions of chapter 4 and focus on the argument; chapters 5–8 are the four mechanisms (trauma, dispossession, uprootedness, rights)—read two closely and skim the others. Come ready to state the “refugee trap” claim in one sentence, and to say what its comparison group is.

2. Krause, Ulrike (2021). *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp*, **chapter 5** (“Coping with the Difficult Life in the Refugee Camp”).

*The challenge to the frame—same camps and region as Betts et al., different question. Read it for the one that reorganizes the week: **who is the right comparison group**, the refugee’s host-community neighbors or her own past?*

Recommended:

1. Rozo, Sandra V., and Guy Grossman (2025). “Refugees and Other Forcibly Displaced Populations.” World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 11123.

A review of roughly 250 studies using experimental or quasi-experimental methods. If you want to know now what the credible evidence says about which interventions improve refugee welfare (work rights, cash transfers, mental health support), the answer is here.

2. Krause, Ulrike (2021). *Difficult Life in a Refugee Camp*, chapter 1 (Introduction).

If chapter 5 interests you, start at the beginning. The book is an ethnography of Kyaka II, a Ugandan camp hosting Congolese refugees.

Week 5 (September 22) — Who Flees, and Where Do They Go?

We tend to picture displacement as an undifferentiated flight from danger: violence arrives, and people run. This is far from the whole story.

Displacement is often *produced deliberately*. Adam Lichtenheld argues that armed actors uproot civilians not only to expel people they do not want, but, more disturbingly, **to work out who those people support**. In northern Uganda, when villagers ignored an order to relocate into government camps, the army was explicit: anybody found in the villages “*would be presumed to be a rebel collaborator and shot.*” Where a civilian flees, on this account, is read as a signal of loyalty, so forcing a population to move is a way to identify it. Hence the title of Lichtenheld’s book, *Guilt by Location*.

Nor is flight simply a reflex. Prakash Adhikari’s survey evidence from Nepal supports what the literature calls a “choice-centered” view: even under grave danger, people *make choices* — and their decisions turn on factors such as economic prospects, terrain, and social networks, not only on violence. Recall the tool from Week 2: the question is never simply “*was it voluntary?*” but “*what were the alternatives?*”

And where they go is not random either. Blair, Grossman, and Weinstein show that forced migrants in the Global South gravitate toward countries with *liberal de jure policies*. This effect that runs through transnational kin, who transmit knowledge of what a destination actually offers.

That last finding sets up a problem for the rest of the course. If policy attracts refugees, then refugee presence in a country is *not independent of* that country’s policy—and every estimate of “the effect of refugees” we encounter in Weeks 8 through 11 has to contend with it.

Learning objectives:

- Why displacement is often a deliberate *strategy* of war rather than an accident of it—and what armed actors are trying to achieve when they move people.
- Who actually flees and who stays, and why the answer is not simply “whoever was in danger.”
- What determines where the displaced go—proximity, networks, and, more surprisingly, policy.
- **The endogeneity problem** this sets up: if policy shapes who arrives, can we ever read the “effect of refugees” off a comparison of countries? Carry this into Weeks 8–11.

Required readings:

The sequence runs from what armed actors do, to what civilians decide, to where they end up.

1. Lichtenheld, Adam G. (2024). *Guilt by Location: Forced Displacement and Population Sorting in Civil Wars*. Cambridge University Press, **chapter 1** (“Weaponizing Displacement in Civil Wars”).

The week’s anchor. Watch for the army’s ultimatum early in the chapter—it holds the whole theory in one sentence. Come to class able to explain what it means to say displacement sorts and identifies rather than expels.

2. Lichtenheld (2024), *Guilt by Location*, **chapter 5** (“Forced Relocation in Uganda”).

*The empirical test of the theory, on six months of fieldwork and interviews with perpetrators **and** victims. Uganda relocated civilians against **some** rebellions but not others; follow how Lichtenheld uses that variation, and how he handles the rival explanations he sets against his own.*

3. Adhikari, Prakash (2013). “Conflict-Induced Displacement: Understanding the Causes of Flight.” *American Journal of Political Science* 57(1): 82–89.

The only individual-level reading of the week. Survey evidence from Nepal on the “choice-centered” view: people decide whether to flee even under serious danger, and the factors that shape that decision.

4. Blair, Christopher W., Guy Grossman, and Jeremy M. Weinstein (2022). “Liberal Displacement Policies Attract Forced Migrants in the Global South.” *American Political Science Review* 116(1): 351–358.

*The finding that sets up the course’s endogeneity problem: policy shapes who arrives. Watch for the **mechanism** that makes it credible—how would a Congolese farmer ever learn what Uganda’s Refugee Act permits?*

Recommended:

1. Lichtenheld (2024), *Guilt by Location*, **chapter 8** (“The Politics of Wartime Displacement”).

*The book’s conclusion. It answers the following question: **why uproot people rather than kill them?** His answer is that displacement lets a state “divide and map the sea” rather than simply drain it.*

2. Lichtenheld (2024), *Guilt by Location*, **chapter 3** (“A Sorting Theory of Strategic Displacement”).

Where the argument is formally derived. We will build much of it together in seminar, so this is genuinely optional.

3. Basu, Sanjukta, and Wendy Pearlman (2017). On Syrian flight decisions.

If you want to read about how the decision to flee is made, in people’s own words. The week is otherwise told in aggregates.

Week 6 (September 29) — Why Do Some Poor States Open Their Borders and Others Close Them?

The disagreement: This is one of the course’s central questions, and the literature does not agree. Is refugee policy in the Global South driven by aid-seeking, ethnic politics, regime type, foreign-policy alignment, or the sheer inability of weak states to control borders?

Two findings should unsettle you. First, **democracies are not reliably more generous than autocracies**—and Betts and Schweers go further, arguing that some of the world’s most liberal refugee policies were built by 1970s dictators for reasons that had nothing to do with liberalism. Call it the **illiberal paradox**. Second, Salehyan and Savun argue that “generosity” is not one thing: **admission and integration are separate dimensions, and they trade off**. States that let more people in tend to give them fewer rights. If that is true, then ranking countries from restrictive to liberal is not unproblematic.

Learning objectives:

- What the Dataset of World Refugee and Asylum Policies (DWRAP) lets us measure—and what a systematic look reveals about how refugee policy has moved over time.
- The competing explanations for why some states open their borders and others close them—aid, security, ethnicity, regime type, international pressure—and how one might adjudicate between them.
- Why admission and integration are different policies, and what is problematic about collapsing them into a single “liberality.”
- Whether liberal refugee laws reliably track liberal politics—and what does it that some of the most generous laws were written by illiberal autocrats.
- The gap between policy on paper and policy in practice (revisiting Week 4).

Required readings:

1. Blair, Christopher W., Guy Grossman, and Jeremy Weinstein (2022). “Forced Displacement and Asylum Policy in the Developing World.” *International Organization* 76(2): 337–378.
The paper behind the DWRAP data, and one side of the week’s central disagreement. Come able to say what drives a state to liberalize on their account, and note the fact most students do not expect: Southern refugee policy has grown more liberal over time, not less.
2. Salehyan, Idean, and Burcu Savun (2024). “Strategic Humanitarianism: Host States and Refugee Policy.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 27: 107–125.
The framework for the week. Focus on the admission/integration distinction, and consider whether it survives contact with the DWRAP data.
3. Hammoud-Gallego, Omar, and Luisa Feline Freier (2023). “Symbolic Refugee Protection: Explaining Latin America’s Liberal Refugee Laws.” *American Political Science Review* 117(2): 454–473.
Read this against the other two. The Latin American case that asks whether a liberal score in a policy dataset measures a performance rather than a practice. What, then, are we explaining when we explain refugee policy?
4. Explore the DWRAP data yourself for 20-30 minutes before class: <https://datanalytics.worldbank.org/dwrap/>. **Come to seminar with one country whose policy trajectory surprised you**, and be ready to say why.

Recommended:

1. Schweers, Julia, and Alexander Betts (2026). “Authoritarian Legacies: How 1970s African Dictators Shaped Contemporary Refugee Policies.” *Third World Quarterly*, online first, 1–21.
The illiberal paradox, in one case. We will discuss it in class; read the paper if you want the historical argument behind it.
2. Natter, Katharina (2018). “Rethinking Immigration Policy Theory Beyond ‘Western Liberal Democracies’.” *Comparative Migration Studies* 6(1): 4.
On why theories of immigration policy built from OECD cases mislead when applied elsewhere.

3. El-Taliawi, Ola G. (2024). *The Politics of Refugee Policy in the Global South*. Lebanon and Jordan case chapters.

One displacement crisis, two opposite responses—Lebanon and Jordan. A useful case for the question of what makes similar states diverge.

Week 7 (October 6) — Why Is the Same State Generous to One Refugee Group and Brutal to Another?

The disagreement: States do not have a single “refugee policy.” The same government often welcomes one nationality and refuses another, at the same moment. Abdelaaty argues this reflects two forces—ethnic affinity between refugees and domestic constituencies, and the state’s foreign-policy relationship with the refugees’ country of origin. She further argues that delegation to UNHCR is a tool states use to manage the resulting contradictions. Is delegation an abdication of responsibility, or a strategy for evading blame?

Learning objectives:

- Why the same state often treats one refugee group generously and another brutally, and why “a country’s refugee policy” is therefore not a single thing.
- The forces that might drive the sorting: ethnic affinity with domestic constituencies, and the state’s foreign-policy relationship with the country refugees came from.
- Why a state might hand key decisions to UNHCR rather than make them itself.
- A rival account to weigh against all this: that differential treatment reflects social hierarchies of race, ethnicity, and religion rather than elite strategy—and how one could tell the two apart.
- Whether favoring “our own” is racism or parochialism, and why the harder question may be who gets to count as “us.”

→ **Research question memo due today.**

Required readings:

1. Abdelaaty, Lamis Elmy (2021). *Discrimination and Delegation: Explaining State Responses to Refugees*. Chapters 1–3.

The theory the week runs on. Come able to state the two key factors that drive how a state treats a group (foreign policy and ethnic politics) and why delegating to UNHCR can be a strategy rather than a surrender of sovereignty.

2. Abdelaaty (2021), *Discrimination and Delegation*, one case chapter of your choice (chapters 4–6).

Read one of these three chapters and come prepared to be the seminar’s expert on it. We will compare across cases in class, so we need each covered.

3. Norman, Kelsey P. (2020). *Reluctant Reception: Refugees, Migration and Governance in the Middle East and North Africa*, chapter 6 (“Differential Treatment by Nationality? Ethnicity, Religion, and Race”).

The rival account. Note the subtitle: Abdelaaty’s framework does not use the term race. Watch the opening—a Cairo taxi driver—and ask whether the sorting is elite strategy or something the state merely ratifies.

4. Abdelaaty, Lamis (2022). “Why Europe Is Welcoming Ukrainian Refugees but Not Syrians.” *The Monkey Cage / Washington Post*, 23 March.

Short. The author of this week’s book applies her own theory to a case that broke while she was writing. Do her selectors line up neatly for Ukraine? Your job is to find where they do and do not. Note also what she does, and does not, say about Viktor Orbán.

Recommended:

1. Tsourapas, Gerasimos (2026). “Credible Fictions: How States Stage Refugee Governance for Geopolitical Gain.” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 39(1): 22–40.

The companion to Abdelaaty: where she asks how states sort refugee groups, he asks why states stage generosity for an audience—and how hard staged compliance can be to tell apart from the real thing.

2. Frese, Simon, et al. (2025). “Stand by Those Who Share Our Values: How Refugees Fleeing the Taliban Improved European Attitudes Toward Refugees.”

*The public-opinion counterpart to the week: Abdelaaty is about what **states** do; this is about what **publics** want. The open question we will not settle—does elite discrimination follow mass preferences, or lead them?*

PART III: WHAT HOSTING DOES TO HOSTS

Week 8 (October 13) — Do Refugees Make Host Communities Poorer?

The disagreement: Intuitively, one might predict that a sudden influx of workers depresses wages and strains public services, and that the poor communities hosting refugees can least afford such influx. A large body of evidence finds something more complicated: refugee arrivals bring aid money, demand for goods, and labor that, at times, complements rather than substitutes for local labor. But both sides of that argument are arguing about an *average*, and the average may be the least interesting thing here. The week’s real question is not necessarily whether hosts gain or lose. It is *which* hosts gain, *which* lose, and why the same influx can benefit one household and be detrimental the one next door.

Learning objectives:

- How to read a null result, and why “no significant effect on average” is not the same as “nobody was affected.”

- Why there may be no single *the* effect of refugees—and why it matters whether a market clears on price or a public service clears on congestion.
- Why “refugees” is a bundled treatment—people arriving *with aid*—and why separating the people from the money is the central difficulty in this literature.
- How the costs of an influx come to fall on some host residents and not others, and what the right to work has to do with where they land.
- Who actually gains and who loses from an influx, and whether “concentrated costs, diffuse benefits” holds up as more than a slogan.
- Whether the choice between cash and in-kind aid is a question about what works better economically, or about something else.

Required readings:

1. Verme, Paolo, and Kirsten Schuettler (2021). “The impact of forced displacement on host communities: A review of the empirical literature in economics.” *Journal of Development Economics* 150: 102606.
Start with the average. 972 estimates, 59 studies, 19 crises. Skim the meta-analysis mechanics. Focus on the pattern of findings, and on who the harm lands on when there is any.
2. Zhou, Yang-Yang, Guy Grossman, and Shuning Ge (2023). “Inclusive refugee-hosting can improve local development and prevent public backlash.” *World Development* 166: 106203.
The confound. Refugees do not arrive alone; they arrive with aid. In Uganda, the host areas with more refugees got more schools, roads, and clinics.
3. Rozo, Sandra V., and Micaela Sviatschi (2021). “Is a Refugee Crisis a Housing Crisis? Only If Housing Supply Is Unresponsive.” *Journal of Development Economics* 148: 102563.
The price. The harm here is conditional—not caused by refugees as such, but by a market that could not respond. Notice who pays and who collects, and what the title concedes.
4. Whitaker, Beth Elise (2002). “Refugees in Western Tanzania: The Distribution of Burdens and Benefits Among Local Hosts.” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 15(4): 339–358.
The variance. Whitaker asks this week’s question by name—not whether hosts on the whole gained, but which did and why—twenty years before the economists did (see Taylor et al., 2016). Try to identify the channels other papers in the week do not report.

Recommended:

1. Rozo, Sandra, and Guy Grossman (2025). “Refugees and Other Forcibly Displaced Populations.” *VoxDevLit* 14(1).
A living review of the 2010–2024 evidence, covering labor markets, public services, and growth. Start here if you want to know what the literature as a body has concluded, and what it has not settled.
2. Etang Ndip, Alvin, Sandra V. Rozo, María José Urbina, and Christina Wieser (2026). “Refugees, Camps, and Host Communities: Evidence from Bangladesh’s Humanitarian Hosting System.” *World Development* 207: 107492.

A third region—Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh—and again the gains are attributed “largely” to the aid operation, not the refugees. Watch the “night lights” measure this literature relies on: ask what else lights up a district when a humanitarian operation arrives, and whether it is measuring local prosperity or the aid itself.

3. Taylor, J. Edward, Mateusz J. Filipinski, Mohamad Alloush, Anubhab Gupta, Ruben Irvin Rojas Valdes, and Ernesto Gonzalez-Estrada (2016). “Economic Impact of Refugees.” *PNAS* 113(27): 7449–7453.

*Five pages. The mechanism is that aid does not merely arrive; it **circulates**—and a cash dollar buys more local income than the dollar itself. Read the in-kind camp against Whitaker: the same collapse of the Tanzanian bean market, recovered two decades later by a different method.*

4. Jacobsen, Karen (2002). “Can Refugees Benefit the State? Refugee Resources and African Statebuilding.” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 40(4): 577–596.

*The channel none of the required readings covers well: the **state**. Refugees bring resources (aid, assets, human capital), and hosting compels a government to extend its administrative grip into border regions it had previously neglected. Hosting, on this account, is state-building. Consider for whom that is good.*

5. Refugees International (2023). “A Forgotten Response and an Uncertain Future: Venezuelans’ Economic Inclusion in Colombia.”

The economists say Colombia’s regularization worked; the field reporting says it plateaued. Status was granted, integration was not pursued. Both may be right.

Week 9 (October 20) — Do Refugees Bring Conflict? (and how would we know?)

The disagreement: This is among the sharpest empirical disagreements in the course, and we will use it to learn how to adjudicate empirical ‘fights’ generally. An influential literature holds that refugee flows spread civil war across borders. Two subsequent papers attack that claim from different directions—one says it is looking in the wrong *place*, the other says it was built on the wrong *numbers*. The second ends by showing that roughly half the published findings on what refugees do to their hosts do not survive contact with corrected data. Then we go to eastern Congo in 1994, where a refugee population that included armed perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide, fed by international aid, helped start a war that killed three million people. So the cross-national claim does not survive scrutiny, and yet in this case refugees plainly did bring war—both are true at once, and the week is about what it takes to hold them together. **This week is methods focused:** we will work out exactly where these designs diverge, what each can and cannot show, and why “the literature says” rarely means what it claims to.

Learning objectives:

- How to run a three-question protocol on any empirical paper—*what is being compared to what, what has to be true for that comparison to isolate the effect, and do I believe it*. This is a key portable skill, and this is the week we build it.
- How the choice of unit of analysis—“country” versus “province”—can decide the answer before any data is seen.

- Where the numbers in a study actually come from, and how much can hinge on choices buried in the data rather than the model.
- Why “we don’t know” is a real answer, and why “the evidence for X is weak” is not the same claim as “not-X.”
- Why the paper you *agree* with deserves exactly as much scrutiny as the one you don’t.
- When “does X cause Y?” is the wrong question, and what a *scope-conditions* answer offers instead.

Required readings:

1. Salehyan, Idean, and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch (2006). “Refugees and the Spread of Civil War.” *International Organization* 60(2): 335–366.

The claim: refugee flows spread conflict across borders. Enormously influential, including on policymakers.

2. Zhou, Yang-Yang, and Andrew Shaver (2021). “Reexamining the Effect of Refugees on Civil Conflict: A Global Subnational Analysis.” *American Political Science Review* 115(4): 1175–1196.

The first of two rebuttals. This one is about where you look: it moves from the country to the province, comparing the province that hosts refugees to the one next door that does not. Read these two as a debate and work out precisely where they part company. That is the assignment. Apply the same scrutiny to Zhou and Shaver that you apply to Salehyan and Gleditsch.

3. Shaver, Andrew, Benjamin Krick, and Judy Blancaflor (2025). “The Causes and Consequences of Refugee Flows: A Contemporary Reanalysis.” *American Political Science Review* 119(1): 526–534.

The third voice. The second attack is about the numbers rather than the place: a reanalysis of the original claim using corrected, contemporary data. Read all three together, and come ready to say what it does to the findings that came before it.

4. Lischer, Sarah Kenyon (2016). *Dangerous Sanctuaries: Refugee Camps, Civil War, and the Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid*, **chapters 1–2**.

The first three readings all point the same way; Lischer complicates that, which is why she is assigned last. She opens in eastern Congo in 1994. Ask how she reframes the question the earlier readings were asking, and why the doubts raised about the quantitative papers do not apply to her argument.

Recommended:

1. Whitaker, Beth Elise (2003). “Refugees and the Spread of Conflict: Contrasting Cases in Central Africa.” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 38(2–3): 211–231.

A direct demonstration of Lischer’s second factor: the same 1994 Rwandan refugees went to two host countries with two very different outcomes, which isolates the host rather than the refugees.

2. Masterson, Daniel, and M. Christian Lehmann (2020). “Refugees, Mobilization, and Humanitarian Aid: Evidence from the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 64(5): 817–843.

A direct test of Lischer’s third factor: does humanitarian aid fuel militancy? The identification is a sharp

discontinuity at a 500-metre altitude cutoff for UNHCR cash eligibility—above the line you get the cash, below it you do not, nothing else changes. A clean design to weigh against the question of whether the cutoff isolates what they claim.

3. Savun, Burcu, and Christian Gineste (2019). “From Protection to Persecution: Threat Environment and Refugee Scapegoating.” *Journal of Peace Research* 56(1): 88–102.

Flips the question: refugees as the targets of violence rather than its source. Read it for what scapegoating does to the direction of the causal arrow this week has assumed.

4. Fisk, Kerstin (2020). “Forced Migration and Political Violence.” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*.

Review article. It is a competent prose map of the literature, written five years before the reanalysis that showed half of that literature does not replicate. Every synthesis of this field predates that discovery. Read it as an artifact.

5. Akbulut-Yüksel, Mevlude, Naci Mocan, Semih Tumen, and Belgi Turan (2024). “The Crime Effect of Refugees.” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 43(2): 472–508.

Listed last on purpose: this week is about violence, not crime. But if the crime question interests you, this is one of the better-identified papers on it (Turkey, 81 provinces, 2006–2016), and there is a position paper in the gap between what it found and what a politician would say it found.

A note on how to read this week. Read them in the order they are listed, and do not read ahead. These four are not four opinions on a topic; they are an argument, and each one is a reply to the one before it. Reading them out of order will spoil it, and you will learn less. In particular, read Salehyan and Gleditsch *sympathetically*. It was published in one of the discipline’s best journals, it persuaded a generation of scholars and policymakers, and the people who wrote it were careful and good at their jobs. You are meant to find it convincing. What happens next is the point.

For each empirical paper, find three things and write them down: (1) the *comparison* the author is making—what is being compared to what; (2) the *identifying assumption*—what has to be true for that comparison to isolate the effect of refugees rather than something else; and (3) whether you believe it. If you can do this reliably, you can read almost any paper in political science, and you will be able to do it by the end of this seminar.

Be equally critical whether or not you like the finding.

→ **Annotated bibliography due today.**

Week 10 (October 27) — GUEST LECTURE — speaker and topic TBD

Prof. Grossman away. Guest speaker to be confirmed. Readings will be posted to Canvas at least two weeks in advance.

Week 11 (November 3) — Does Hosting Cost Politicians Votes?

The disagreement: In Europe, a large body of research links refugee arrivals to gains for the radical right, and the finding is close to consensus. In Uganda, hosting a million South Sudanese appears to have cost the incumbent almost nothing. It is not satisfying theoretically to merely state (the obvious), that the Global South is different. In what way is it different, which differences are consequential, and under what conditions incumbents can avoid an electoral backlash are key teaching points of the week. The papers that find backlash are studying *arrivals*. The papers that find none tend to focus on *policy choice*. That distinction cuts across the North–South divide rather than along it, and once you see it, the literature should feel less contradictory.

Learning objectives:

- Why an *inflow* of refugees and a *policy* of integrating them are different things politically, and why conflating them muddles the question of whether hosting costs votes.
- Which kinds of competition between refugees and hosts actually generate backlash, and which do not.
- Whether compensating host communities changes the politics of hosting, and what would have to be true for it to work.
- Why backlash appears in some places and not others—and what, beyond the refugees themselves, decides it.

Required readings: *The first poses a puzzle, the second and third answer it—once up close and once across a continent—and the fourth shows that the answer is not about Africa.*

1. Dinas, Elias, Konstantinos Matakos, Dimitrios Xeferis, and Dominik Hangartner (2019). “Waking Up the Golden Dawn: Does Exposure to the Refugee Crisis Increase Support for Extreme-Right Parties?” *Political Analysis* 27(2): 244–254.

*The European benchmark. Greek islands that received sudden Syrian arrivals in 2015, versus neighboring islands that did not. Hold onto one detail: the refugees were **transiting** and mostly gone within 48 hours, so there was no competition over jobs, housing, or schools—and backlash happened anyway. The mechanism is the puzzle.*

2. Zhou, Yang-Yang, Naijia Liu, Shuning Ge, and Guy Grossman (2026). “Liberalizing Refugee Hosting Policies without Losing the Vote.” Working paper.

*The Uganda case, up close: a reform that liberalized refugee rights **and** reallocated a share of aid to host communities. Read it against Cavaillé and Ferwerda—the reform expanded the supply of exactly the congestible in-kind goods that generate backlash elsewhere. Notice too what the opposition never did: campaign against refugees. Consider what would have happened if it had. **Start with whether the identifying assumption holds.***

3. Demir, Cansu, Anna Maria Mayda, and Jean-François Maystadt (2025). “The Political Impact of Refugees in Africa.” Working paper.

Read the abstract, the introduction, section 2, the identification strategy, and the main results. You may skim the robustness appendices.

The cross-continent test: the same question across sixteen African countries, so Uganda becomes a case rather than an anecdote. Read the qualifier in the abstract carefully, because it carries the paper—the effect turns

on whether hosting policy is inclusive. Ask how they move “inclusive policy” from hand-wave to measured variable.

4. Hager, Anselm, Hanno Hilbig, and Sascha Riaz (2024). “Refugee Labor Market Access Increases Support for Immigration.” *Comparative Political Studies* 57(5): 749–777.

The same experiment run in Europe—which is why the “Global South is different” explanation is incomplete. Until 2016, refugees in Germany could take a job only if no German wanted it; that August some employment districts abolished the rule and others did not. Watch where the effect concentrates, because that names the mechanism. Germany did not become more like Uganda; it moved the same variable Uganda moved.

Recommended:

1. Rozo, Sandra V., Alejandra Quintana, and María José Urbina (2026). “Electoral Effects of Integrating Forced Migrants: Evidence from a Southern Country.” *World Development* 198: 107190.

Tests the week’s thesis—does integrating migrants move votes?—in the same country and on the same Venezuelans as Rozo and Vargas below, who study arrivals. The pairing holds inflow against policy in one setting. Optional, and class will not assume you have read it.

2. Cavaillé, Charlotte, and Jeremy Ferwerda (2023). “How Distributional Conflict over In-Kind Benefits Generates Support for Far-Right Parties.” *Journal of Politics* 85(1): 19–33.

The theory underneath this week, and the distinction it turns on: cash benefits versus in-kind ones. We will spend ten minutes on it in class whether or not you read it.

3. Rozo, Sandra V., and Juan F. Vargas (2021). “Brothers or Invaders? How Crisis-Driven Migrants Shape Voting Behavior.” *Journal of Development Economics* 150: 102636.

Colombia, and the Global South case that does find backlash. Venezuelan arrivals shift votes from left to right. Read the direction carefully before filing it alongside Greece. The Colombian right was pro-migrant; the right-wing president offered amnesty. The rightward shift reflects a fear of becoming Venezuela, not hostility to Venezuelans. It is an anti-socialism vote, not an anti-immigrant one. Do not confuse the two.

4. Alrababah, Ala, Andreas Beerli, Dominik Hangartner, and Dalston Ward (2025). “The Free Movement of People and the Success of Far-Right Parties: Evidence from Switzerland’s Border Liberalization.” *American Political Science Review*.

The counter-case, and a serious challenge to this week’s optimism. The authors rule out every material explanation they can find and conclude the far right manufactured a grievance where none existed. If that is right, compensation is beside the point, because the grievance need not be real. About labor migrants rather than refugees, which is why it is not required.

PART IV: AID, MONEY, AND THE END OF DISPLACEMENT

Week 12 (November 10) — Does Aid Help Refugees, or Trap Them?

The disagreement: A long-standing critique holds that humanitarian aid creates dependency. It sustains refugees in camps, dulls the incentive to work, and substitutes relief for self-reliance. The policy implication is that aid should be cut and refugees pushed toward the labor market. Since 2023 that proposition has been tested at scale, and not by design: funding collapsed, and agencies responded by cutting rations for most refugee households while protecting a minority. We now know what happened. The answer is not what either side of the argument expected, and it forces a harder question about what refugees actually lack.

Learning objectives:

- What refugee aid actually consists of—the ration, its cash value, cash versus in-kind, and who delivers it—before we argue about whether it helps or harms.
- The dependency critique and the self-reliance agenda: where each comes from, and what each predicts should happen when aid is cut.
- How a collapse in funding became an unplanned natural experiment on the dependency hypothesis, and what we can and cannot learn from it.
- Whether rights are enough on their own, and what the contrast between Uganda and Colombia suggests about what refugees are really short of.

→ **Paper outline due today.**

Required readings:

You cannot evaluate an argument about whether aid traps refugees until you know what refugee aid actually consists of, which is why the primer comes first. The two middle readings study the same policy in two countries, and each one sees something the other cannot.

1. **What humanitarian assistance to refugees actually is.** Primer, posted on Canvas. Four pages.

The architecture before the argument: what refugee aid actually consists of—the ration, cash versus in-kind, who delivers and who pays—and what “prioritization” means, the rationing policy at the center of this week. Come to class able to say what a refugee household in a Ugandan settlement receives in a month.

2. Carvalho, Shelby, Yang-Yang Zhou, Iman Dahr, and Guy Grossman (2026). “Cutting Humanitarian Aid Raises Debt and Lowers Schooling without Building Refugees’ Self-Reliance.” Working paper.

The natural experiment nobody designed: a funding-driven ration cut that fell on some Ugandan refugee households and not others became an unplanned test of the dependency hypothesis. WFP said the cut would support “a broader transition to self-reliance”—test that claim against what the authors find, and notice when in the follow-up the effects appear and what that timing implies about evaluating such policies early.

3. Bruni, Vittorio, and Olivier Sterck (2026). “The Welfare and General Equilibrium Impacts of Aid Cuts.” Working paper, January 2026.

Read the introduction and the results. You may skim the structural model and the technical appendices.

The general-equilibrium view: the same question in a different camp (Kakuma, Kenya), where a cut that hit everyone at once lets the authors trace effects the household-level comparison cannot—not just what happens to families, but what happens to the camp economy. The pointer to carry in: watch how aid turns out to be functioning as more than income, and weigh the welfare cost the authors estimate against what donors saved.

4. Ibáñez, Ana María, Andrés Moya, María Adelaida Ortega, Sandra V. Rozo, and María José Urbina (2025). “Life Out of the Shadows: The Impacts of Regularization Programs on the Lives of Forced Migrants.” *Journal of the European Economic Association* 23(3): 941–982.

Read the introduction, section 2 on the program, section 4 on the empirical strategy, and the main results tables. You may skim the mediation analysis and the fiscal exercise.

The regularization contrast: a different intervention—legal status rather than aid—with a very different result, and a natural experiment as clean as the Uganda cut. Two things to hold onto against the aid papers: how long the measured effects (and the permit) actually last, and whether the gains run through the labor market or through access to services.

Recommended:

1. Mohamud, Mohamed Hassan (2025). “Lack of Accountability, Not Budget Cuts, Is the Real Humanitarian Crisis.” *Disasters* 49(4): e70005.

*Five pages, no data, written from the Refugee-Led Research Hub. Where the required papers argue about the **quantity** of aid, Mohamud argues about its **governance**: the real crisis, on his account, is a system that has never been accountable to the people it serves. A useful counterweight, and a reminder that these can be two different arguments rather than one.*

2. Grześkowiak, Maciej (2024). “When Legal Inclusion Is Not Enough: The ‘Uganda Model’ of Refugee Protection on the Brink of Failure.” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 43(1): 95–112.

The qualitative companion to the aid-cuts paper. Uganda did everything the international community asked: freedom of movement, the right to work, land allocation. Donors funded roughly a quarter of what they had promised. Based on 30 interviews in Kampala, Bidibidi, Imvepi, and Kyaka II. Grześkowiak argues that freedom of movement in Uganda is largely illusory, because the plot and the rations are tied to the settlement, so leaving means forfeiting everything.

3. UNHCR (2025). “On the Brink: The Devastating Toll of Aid Cuts on People Forced to Flee.”

The agency’s own account. Self-interested, and the numbers are still the numbers. Read it against Mohamud.

4. Tsourapas, Gerasimos, and Imad El-Anis (2025). “Instrumentalizing Crisis as Capital: Eco-Humanitarian Rentierism and the Global Politics of Aid.” *International Affairs* 101(6): 2149–2172.

The other side of the aid relationship: not what aid does to refugees, but what refugees do for the states that host them—“refugee rentierism.” It reframes the week’s question: if hosting can be converted into revenue, whose interest is served by displacement ending?

5. Betts, Alexander, Naohiko Omata, Jade Siu, and Olivier Sterck (2026). *The Refugee Trap: The Economics of Displacement*, chapter 9 (“Escaping the Trap”).

The trap argument to revisit in light of the aid-cut evidence—an open question of whether that evidence supports it or undercuts it.

Week 13 (November 17) — How Does Displacement End?

The disagreement: Everyone in the system says they want displacement to end in return. Donors say it, host governments say it, UNHCR says it, and most refugees say it too. It mostly does not happen. Displacement is now overwhelmingly protracted, measured in decades rather than years. And when return does occur it is frequently coerced under a “voluntary” label, and it can produce the very conflict it was supposed to follow.

The week runs as a sequence. We begin with what refugees say they need in order to go home, which turns out not to be what the policy debate assumes. We then ask what states do to the refugees who will not go, and find that they have a playbook which stays formally inside the law. Finally we ask what actually happens when large numbers of people do return, using the one case where a policy shock lets us answer that causally.

This week closes two loops: the design flaw identified in Week 3 (a regime that assigns obligations to whoever the refugee reaches and none to anyone else), and *non-refoulement* from Week 2, the one hard obligation in the regime, which turns out to be evadable without ever being violated.

Learning objectives:

- The three official “durable solutions”—return, local integration, resettlement—and why, for most refugees, none is available.
- What actually determines whether a refugee goes home: is it conditions in the host country, or something about the place they left?
- How a state can pressure refugees to leave without ever formally violating *non-refoulement*—and what that tells us about whether the norm binds at all.
- Whether return can itself be a *cause* of conflict rather than only a sign that peace has come.

Required readings:

They ask three different questions: whether refugees want to return, what states do to those who will not, and what happens when they do. The second and third readings turn out to be about the same policy, seen through different lenses.

1. Alrababa'h, Ala', Daniel Masterson, Marine Casalis, Dominik Hangartner, and Jeremy Weinstein (2023). “The Dynamics of Refugee Return: Syrian Refugees and Their Migration Intentions.” *British Journal of Political Science* 53(4): 1108–1131.

Start with the demand side. What would actually make a Syrian refugee in Lebanon go home? The finding to sit with is the one the authors did not expect and had pre-registered against: conditions in the host country turn out to be nearly irrelevant to the decision. Consider what that implies for the entire policy of making life harder for refugees in order to encourage them to leave.

2. Schwartz, Stephanie (2025). “Refugee Return without Refoulement: Rethinking State Strategies to Evade Asylum Norms.” *International Migration Review*, online first.

*The central reading of the week. The previous paper tells you what refugees need in order to return; this one tells you what states do to the ones who will not. Schwartz's claim is that Global South states have their own way of evading asylum obligations, one that operates at return rather than at the border. Come able to lay out her typology of evasion strategies, and sit with her larger point: that all this effort to stay technically compliant is itself evidence that *non-refoulement* has force.*

3. Blair, Christopher W., David Van Dijcke, and Austin L. Wright (2026). "Refugee Return and Conflict: Evidence from a Natural Experiment." Conditionally accepted, *American Economic Review*.

Read the abstract, the introduction, the results section, and the conclusion. Skip the identification section and the appendix unless you want them.

Now the consequences: what actually happens when large numbers of people return? A 2016 shock in the cash grant paid to Afghan refugees leaving Pakistan lets the authors answer causally, and the effects on conflict fit neither side of the usual argument. Read this against Schwartz and notice what you are looking at: the cash-for-return program she treats as coercion is the same one these authors evaluate as a natural experiment. She asks whether it was legitimate; they ask what it did. The answers do not settle each other.

4. **Syria after Assad**, one short piece, posted on Canvas.

Assad fell in December 2024, and roughly a million Syrians went home in the year that followed. This is the live case, and the reason this week looks different in 2026 than it would have in 2023.

There is no peer-reviewed political science on it yet, so we will do what scholars actually do when a question is new: reason carefully from the evidence that exists. Read it through Schwartz's typology and ask which of her mechanisms you can see operating. Ask also why, if Syria is now safe enough to return to, an IRC survey in late 2025 found that only about a quarter of the Syrians remaining in Jordan and Lebanon intend to follow. The people who left have left. The ones who remain are dug in. Alrababa'h et al. give you the tools to say why.

Recommended:

1. Schwartz, Stephanie (2019). "Home, Again: Refugee Return and Post-Conflict Violence in Burundi." *International Security* 44(2): 110–145.

The canonical statement of why return generates new conflict, and the empirical foundation of her 2025 argument. Returnee versus stayee is itself a political cleavage, and it does not disappear when the war does. Blair et al. find the same thing in Afghanistan by other means.

2. Norman, Kelsey P. (2020). *Reluctant Reception*, chapters 7–8.

The domestic influence of international actors, and the post-2015 Mediterranean paradigm.

3. Betts, Alexander (2011). *Protection by Persuasion*, chapter 2.

The African refugee conferences of the 1980s. Today's compacts have a precedent, and it failed. Worth reading before you conclude that the Global Compact on Refugees is new.

No class November 24 — Thanksgiving

Week 14 (December 1) — Student Paper Presentations

Each student will present their term paper: the question, why it matters, the case, and the argument. 12–15 minutes each, with discussion.

→ **Final papers due Thursday, December 17, 2026.**
