Compliance without Obligation: Examining State Responses to the Syrian Refugee Crisis
Samuel A. Davidoff-Gore
IR Honors Conference – April 29, 2015
Research Problem

1. Why do states host and protect refugees when they do not have the resources to do so?
2. Why do some states comply with international law without participating in it?

Research Question

Given that Jordan and Lebanon are not parties to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (CSR), what explains their compliance with the CSR with regard to their response to the Syrian refugee crisis?
**Theoretical Significance**

- Integrating bodies of literature and perspectives in International Relations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation and Compliance</th>
<th>Realism</th>
<th>Liberalism</th>
<th>Constructivism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State Responses to Refugees</td>
<td>Coincidence of interest; Coercion; Signaling</td>
<td>Cross issue persuasion</td>
<td>Normative Persuasion; Acculturation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inability to stop refugee flow; Political gain</td>
<td>Temporary short term aid; Institutions facilitate cooperation</td>
<td>Role of UNHCR; Arab identity; Hospitality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Case study
Practical Significance

• Timely
• Effectiveness of CSR
• Refugee Politics in the Arab Middle East

Argument

1. Jordanian and Lebanese compliance is a result of their previous decisions to host Palestinian and Iraqi refugees.

2. Jordan’s compliance may be the result of pan-Arab solidarity and Arab hospitality.

3. Lebanon’s compliance is the result of Lebanon’s prior relationship with Syria and this compliance is mitigated by an ineffective government and security threats.
Methods

• Comparative case study
• Process tracing
• Holistic definition of compliance
• Time Frame

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jordan</th>
<th>Lebanon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1948 Arab-Israeli War</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967 Arab-Israeli War</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988 Disengagement</td>
<td>1991 Post-Civil War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003 Iraqi Refugee Crisis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011 Syrian Refugee Crisis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

• No coherent domestic refugee policies

• Policies towards previous refugee populations shape policies towards Syrian refugees
Findings

• Jordan is more compliant than Lebanon because:
  • Different decisions in 1948
  • Strong, centralized government vs. weak, sectarian government
  • Experience hosting non-Palestinian refugees and working with UNHCR

• No specific IR perspective validated
Implications

• Theory
  • Participation in international law is important, but not essential, to compliance.
  • Prior decisions influence current policies.
  • Case studies allow for more complex analysis.
  • The Arab Middle East should not just be studied as a monolith.

• Practice
  • UNHCR-government cooperation is important.
  • The international refugee regime should universalize regional developments.
  • The CSR should be amended to include Palestinian refugees.
Future Research

• Turkey – participatory, compliant, and hosts Syrian refugees
• Afghanistan and Somalia – outside of the Syrian refugee crisis
• Large-\( n \) study of the CSR
• Other international legal regimes in the Arab Middle East