

Assessing Refugee Rights: New Data and Analysis

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Abstract

Why do some states abide by international laws and norms regarding refugee protection, while other routinely violate them? We argue that the rights afforded to refugees depends on not only the characteristics of the receiving country, but also on the sending country, and the relationship between states. Therefore, states may protect certain refugees, but violate the rights of others, depending on their nationality. However, systematic data on host country treatment of refugees by nationality has not been available. In this paper we present new data—based on a supervised machine learning automated coding method of annual reports of the US Committee for Refugees—on the refugee rights and physical integrity rights of refugees by sending-receiving country dyads for countries in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. We present a preliminary analysis of several hypotheses assessing the role of normative commitments to human rights versus strategic state interests, and refugee ethnicity. We find strong evidence that host countries routinely discriminate between various refugee communities.