Time to Go: Explaining migration timing during conflict

Justin Schon
PhD Candidate, Department of Political Science
Indiana University, Bloomington

Abstract-- How do civilians decide when to leave their homes during conflict? Migration timing can have profound implications for the politics of both origin and destination locations, as floods and trickles of migration can motivate very different kinds of attitudes and public policies. For civilians, it helps reveal which threats are the most salient. This paper uses 179 structured interviews with Syrian refugees in Turkey to investigate this question. Using Cox proportional hazard models, it finds that civilians who perceived that they had wasta—the capability to get out of trouble—tended to leave their homes earlier. This is because perceived wasta reduces the magnitude of perceived threats from selective violence, which is more likely along migration routes, and not indiscriminate violence, which is more likely in residential areas. The likelihood of civilians with perceived wasta to move earlier then increases rural-urban tensions in Syria. Findings contribute to understandings of conflict-induced migration, civil war, and the Syrian conflict specifically.

Introduction

Conflict, especially civil conflict, motivates massive amounts of migration. This migration currently adds up to more than 65 million refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) worldwide. To explain civilian migration behavior during conflict, existing research tends to highlight how armed group violence forces civilians to migrate (Davenport et al., 2003; Adhikari, 2013). Yet, if civilian migration is forced by armed actors, then much of the variation in civilian migration behavior is difficult to explain. Migration timing brings this concern to the forefront (Schon, 2015; Schon, 2016; Melander and Oberg, 2006). If violence automatically causes civilians to leave their homes, then why don't all civilians move at the same time? If the explanation is as simple as the timing of violent events driving migration timing, then why is there variation in migration timing even within the same residential areas?

Answering these questions is far from a trivial task. Variation in civilian migration timing can produce floods or trickles of migration, which have vastly different effects upon both origin and destination locations (Onoma, 2013; Lischer, 2005; Balcells and Steele, 2016). Differences in migration timing across different sectors of society can also aggravate pre-existing societal tensions. To develop an effective explanation for migration timing during conflict, this paper pivots away from existing research that de-emphasizes civilian agency and emphasizes factors like violent events. Instead, the paper places greater emphasis on how civilians form perceptions and expectations about existing and future security threats.

Based on 179 structured interviews conducted with Syrian refugees in Turkey from July-November 2016, the argument in this paper contends that civilians engage in a security calculation to decide whether to leave their home (Schon, 2016). In this calculation, civilians must both perceive sufficient threat in residential areas to want to move and low enough threat along migration routes to believe that migration is feasible. Since threat levels vary over time within conflict, but not necessarily

quickly, civilians who want to migrate must wait until perceived threats along migration routes are low enough for migration to be feasible.

Civilians who make this determination to migrate earlier than others tend to perceive lower security threats sooner along migration routes. Migration routes suffer different kinds of threats than residential areas, since migration routes primarily suffer selective violence at checkpoints and residential areas suffer much more indiscriminate violence (Lombard, 2013; Pottier, 2006; Balcells and Steele, 2016). While there is enduring disagreement over whether some civilians perceive lower security threats due to higher incomes or better connections (Beber et al., 2013; Harpvicken, 2009; Adhikari, 2013), there remains a hypothesis that some civilians feel more protected from security threats than others. In Syria, such perceived protection comes from the perception of having wasta. While wasta has many possible definitions, understandings of wasta tend to agree upon the implication that it provides a higher perception of security (Al-Ramahi, 2008; Barnett et al., 2013; Mann, 2014; Ramady, 2015). Wasta varies in meaning across the Arab World, and even within Syria, but this component of wasta remains constant. Beyond the Arab World, there are a plethora of similar concepts, such as Big Man Politics in sub-Saharan Africa, guanxi in China, and blat in Russia.

When civilians with perceived wasta leave their homes earlier, there are some civilians who develop feelings of resentment. Rural Syrians sometimes believe that the urban Syrians have wasta, and that these Syrians left the country when the revolution went bad. This reinforces a pre-existing rural-urban divide (Chatty, 2010). During the conflict, urban civilians also perceive threats from rural Syrians. They view rural Syrians as sources, and believers, of rumors. Rural Syrians are also seen as more likely to be militia fighters.

This paper proceeds as follows. First, it explores existing research on migration timing. Second, it advances an information-centric explanation of migration behavior that emphasizes civilian perceptions and expectations. Then, it explains how civilian perceptions of wasta increase perceptions of security

from selective violence and not indiscriminate violence. Next, the paper shows how this trend has reinforced existing rural-urban divides in Syrian society. Finally, the paper concludes.

Migration Timing

Studies of migration often focus on the causes of migration over the timing of that migration. This focus prevents a broader understanding of migration patterns. During conflict, the resultant deficit is particularly clear when we consider the relationship between violence and migration. There is a strong and robust finding that violence is positively related to migration (Davenport et al., 2003; Adhikari, 2013; Engel and Ibáñez, 2007). Yet, while this finding is well-documented, there is also a documented concern that analyses of the violence-migration relationship must explain why some violence appears to motivate migration and other violence does not (Schon, 2016).

Existing research on migration timing offers two possible explanations to account for this puzzle. The first explanation asserts that conflict always threatens civilians, so people will move as soon as possible. A selection effect thereby occurs where the people who are most likely to be willing to migrate move early in a conflict. Over time, the people who remain are increasingly unlikely to migrate. This produces high levels of migration at the beginning of a conflict that taper off over time (Melander and Oberg, 2006). The second argues that migration levels fluctuate, with migration increasing when civilians perceive or expect changes in the nature of the conflict (Schon, 2015). Here, early periods in a conflict do not necessarily have the largest migration levels. This paper advances this second explanation because it more directly accounts for the information that civilians are considering and how they are considering that information.

In particular, civilians are concerned about security threats during conflict. Such threats can present dangers to civilians who stay home or to those who migrate. As civilians evaluate these threats, there are three possible actions that they can choose: migration, involuntary immobility, and no

migration. Migration and no migration are conventional categories that refer to whether or not respondents move from one location to another. Involuntary immobility refers to the situation when civilians want to migrate, but they perceive too much danger on possible migration routes for migration to be feasible (Lubkemann, 2008).

These choices are not permanent. Civilians can shift between choices over time. Often, civilians spend time in all three categories, as they begin with no migration, then shift to involuntary immobility, and then shift to migration (Schon, 2015; Schon, 2016). Therefore, civilians who do not move actually fall into two types of people: never-movers and delayed-movers. Never-movers are people that, for various reasons, will refuse to leave their homes no matter how much danger exists. Delayed-movers are people who want to move, but they perceive too much danger on migration routes to migrate. For delayed-movers, when the threat calculation changes in favor of migration, they should engage in migration. Such migration can be referred to as *delayed migration*.

Delayed-movers may just be waiting for transportation, money, or for security conditions to improve (Steinberg, 2015; Rawlence, 2016). During this time period, they are in a state of involuntary immobility (Lubkemann, 2008). If the appropriate conditions to move never materialize, then they remain in that state. Alternatively, they may engage in delayed migration, where they progress from no migration to involuntary immobility to migration. This conception broadens involuntary immobility to include financial and transportation considerations as well as violence (Czaika and Kis-Katos, 2009; Engel and Ibáñez, 2007). Meanwhile, civilians know that they face potentially fatal consequences if they do not move when they should. Their risk can increase dramatically if they move without need or if they do not move when it is necessary. Therefore, civilians need as much accurate information as possible to decide when to move as well as whether to move.

Despite this need for information, civilians rarely obtain information in sufficient quantity or quality to comfortably make their migration-related decisions, including about migration timing

(Schelling, 1981). Such uncertainty magnifies perceived security threats for civilians (Uzonyi, 2014; Schon, 2016). These threats may pose danger to people at home or along migration routes. Therefore, migration timing should be selected based on when threats emerge at home and along migration routes, as well as what the relative perceived threat levels are at home and along migration routes at any given time. Factors that increase perceived relative threat levels at home or decrease perceived relative threat levels along migration routes should motivate civilians to leave their homes sooner. By contrast, factors that decrease perceived relative threat levels at home or increase perceived relative threat levels along migration routes should motivate civilians to leave their homes later.

Under this perspective, variables that measure violence levels should not affect migration timing. Violence levels do not provide information about violence timing on their own. Moreover, even when variables measuring violence timing, such as violent event counts over time, are included in an analysis, they do not necessarily have a significant effect upon migration timing (Schon, 2015).

Instead, it is likely more valuable to disaggregate violence into the violence that facilitates migration and the violence that deters or presents obstacles to migration (Schon, 2016). These two types of violence have opposing effects on migration flows, so it is useful to explicitly test for the effect of both of them. These variables yield the following hypotheses:

H1: As migration obstacles increase, migration should occur later.
H2: As migration facilitators increase, migration should occur earlier.

Wasta

Perceived threat levels can be affected by violence, but a range of economic, social, and demographic factors may also affect perceived threat levels. This is because these other kinds of factors

may affect a person's perceived ability to protect themselves from threats. Civilians often seek out sources of protection during conflict (Harpvicken, 2009). Every society typically has some kind of social mechanism that protects certain civilians, such as guanxi in China, good ol' boy networks in the West, and blat in Russia (Ramady, 2015; Gold and Guthrie, 2002). In the Syrian case, that mechanism is wasta.

Wasta is a concept with many definitions, and it has motivated a wealth of scholarship. A typical definition of wasta defines it as "the phenomenon of using "connections" to find jobs and obtain government services, licenses or degrees that would otherwise be out of reach or would take a long time or effort to obtain" (Ramady, 2015: , p. vii). In political science research, it has most prominently been used to explain voting behavior and governance strategies in the Middle East (Lust, 2009). This paper presents an opportunity to expand considerations of wasta to its role in shaping civilian responses to a highly repressive conflict context.

In this kind of context, no matter how civilians define wasta, they tend to perceive greater security and protection when they perceive that they have wasta. Several Syrian refugees even expressed a belief that wasta can protect people from being arrested. One woman lamented that "If I had had wasta, my husband would not have been arrested" (Respondent T014). Another person recalled, "My friend wanted to file a complaint with the police, but when he went to the police station, the other side paid money and had him arrested" (Respondent T016). One person explained that, "Wasta gives protection for everything. With an uncle in the army, you will go through all checkpoints. You get VIP treatment at the checkpoints. You can also miss work and still have your salary" (Respondent T079). For some civilians, wasta is how they get out of prison:

> We left Syria because my father got arrested. The mokhabarat arrested my father and aunt's husband. They accused us of spreading security information, which was false. They were in jail for one week. We asked someone with wasta to help. They did and were able to get my father and aunt's husband out. At that point, we went to Lebanon because my Dad was so scared. (Respondent T146)

This protective power could even be used as a threat to other people, "People who have wasta, they have protection. It was a tool that only people with wasta can use. Sometimes a person with wasta would threaten that their connection would kill you" (Respondent T155). In another case, a man used wasta to have his accuser arrested for the crime that the accuser had accused him of committing (Respondent T092).

For migration-related decisions, this perception of security could be interpreted as having two possible effects. On the one hand, it could reduce the perceived threat level of migration and lead to earlier migration. On the other hand, it could reduce the perceived threat level of staying home and lead to later migration. Adjudicating between these two possible effects relies upon examining the types of threats that exist during movement as opposed to those staying home. In particular, threats along migration routes primarily consists of selective violence at checkpoints (Schon, 2016), whereas threats at home can vary substantially in their balance of selective or indiscriminate violence (Kalyvas, 2006). In the Syrian context, these threats at home largely began as selective violence, but by 2013 their sources were transforming into indiscriminate violence (Lynch, 2013).

Selective and Indiscriminate Violence in the Syrian Conflict

This paper's focus on the Syrian case highlights the case that is currently producing more refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) than any other country in the world. Syria's conflict began with protests and calls for revolution, but the regime of Bashar Assad implemented a violent crackdown that, rather than quashing dissent, escalated tensions into all-out conflict (Pearlman, 2016). This conflict presents a case that is extremely salient for its high levels of conflict-induced migration. Yet, immense complexity arising from a proliferation of armed actors and varied violence strategies has also created uncertainty and fear that frequently delays or prevents migration (Schon, 2016). Otherwise, even more civilians would likely have left their homes and civilians who did leave may have left earlier.

The Syrian conflict is conventionally understood to have begun on March 15, 2011. While unrest and the organization of dissent had already begun at low levels, this is when the conflict arguably began in earnest (Lister, 2016: p. 12). At first, many civilians expected that Assad's government would implement some reforms and de-escalate tensions. However, Bashar Assad did not provide any such opportunity for peaceful resolution. As Mohammed Khadam, who would later become the secretary of the Union of Syrians Abroad, explained:

> As the Arab Spring started in other countries, I was sure it would reach Syria… but although I was deeply afraid of the brutal reaction the regime could reveal, I thought for some time that Assad would make some reforms and save the country. [However,] after his second speech (in June), I was certain this regime was never going to change its mentality—Assad was pushing the opposition into the battlefield. (Quoted on p. 56 in Lister, 2016)

Early in the conflict, there were many opposition figures with a great deal of optimism. Over the course of 2011 and 2012, the opposition made many gains. International optimism about the possibility for a popular, secular opposition group to take control of Syria rose with the emergence of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in the summer of 2011 (Lynch, 2014). From early 2011 to mid-2012, the prevailing theme was of a fledgling insurgency emerging amidst a harsh government crackdown on dissent (Lister, 2016: p. 5). Many Syrians even insisted on classifying the contention as a revolution, rather than a conflict.

From mid-2012 until roughly mid-2013, the opposition achieved many victories. It also became clear that southern Syria and northern Syria were experiencing very different kinds of conflict. Southern Syria was emerging as a stronghold of the FSA. Northern Syria, on the other hand, was becoming more favorable to Islamist groups such as the al Qaeda-aligned Jabhat al-Nusra. Northern and southern Syria have experienced many changes in their respective conflict dynamics over time, but their trajectories have remained relatively distinct and produced different kinds of conflict environments for civilians.[1]

---

[1] Conversation with member of an NGO called The Day After on August 1, 2016.

Yet, over time, the conflict became increasingly fragmented, and tens of thousands of people became involved in the fighting. One estimate suggests that at least 150,000 people were fighting for as many as 1,500 operationally distinct armed groups by early 2015 (Lister, 2016: p. 2). The Free Syrian Army also revealed itself to be an ineffective and extremely disorganized group. The strains of having its leadership in refugee camps in Turkey and its finances coming from countries with disparate strategic interests, namely Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United States, and some governments in Europe, were simply too much (Lister, 2016: , p. 3). The Assad government also released large numbers of political and Islamist prisoners, several of whom went on to become key leaders in powerful Islamist groups that gave Bashar Assad cover to label the revolution as extremist and a foreign conspiracy (Lister, 2016: p. 51; Gutman, 2016).

These Islamist groups consisted of both Salafist and jihadist groups, and they involved tens of thousands of domestic and foreign fighters. The proliferation of Islamist groups and all of the other armed groups in Syria led to a situation where, based on a September 2015 estimate, at least 30,000 non-Syrians had joined the jihad at some point since 2011 (Lister, 2016: p. 1; Byman, 2016). Salafist groups often allied with jihadist groups in their common Islamism and strategic interests. Groups such as Ahrar al-Sham, Jabhat al-Nusra (now Jabhat Fateh al-Sham after dropping its formal affiliation with Al Qaeda), Jaish al-Islam, and ISIS are all part of this hardline Islamist component of the conflict. Islamist groups tended to have better internal organization and were more effective on the battlefield, thus prompting higher levels of foreign assistance to their groups (Lister, 2016: p. 3).

This component allowed the Assad government to paint the conflict as a war against terrorism. It could then justify harsh counter-terrorism actions. Barrel bombs, cluster munitions, and chemical weapons were frequently used in populated areas. All of these forms of weaponry have been designated as indiscriminate weapons (Czuperski et al., 2017). They cannot be aimed around people with wasta. Moreover, amongst the roughly 1500 armed groups in Syria are dozens of pro-government militias

(Lister, 2016). These militias are often poorly controlled and undisciplined. People with wasta may be able to protect themselves from some militias, but wasta is by no means a reliable source of protection from all militias (Carey et al., 2013; Mitchell, 2004).

Furthermore, conscription into the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) threatened all young men who had not already joined the military or a pro-government militia. Early in the conflict, civilians could use wasta to avoid military service. An account documenting the experience of a former Damascus resident named Hazem illustrates this:

> Hazem rarely had to worry about this [conscription] during the early years of the war, because he could pay off people. In its initial stage, he gave an officer in the Damascus military-recruitment office roughly $100 a month to alert him whenever his name appeared on the list of soldiers who would be called for duty. A second person in the police department would get paid to make sure his name never made it to the pro-regime forces manning the checkpoints, meaning he could continue freely moving around Damascus despite being a draft dodger. (Masi, 2015)

By the end of 2014, wasta could no longer protect people from conscription (Kozak, 2015). This was prompted by a massive loss of military manpower, as the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) fell from a pre-war high of 300,000 soldiers to a 2014 estimate of 150,000-170,00 soldiers (Kozak, 2015). Fear of conscription motivated migration for 14 respondents, including 6 respondents who had perceived that they had wasta in Syria. In the first seven months of 2014, the Syrian Network for Human Rights documented over 5400 arrests for military conscription. These men are often given minimal training, even when they are immediately placed on the frontlines. Crackdowns on young men attempting to avoid military service were particularly severe around Damascus and Syria's heavily Alawite 'central corridor,' which includes Homs, Hamaa, Latakia, and Tartous (Kozak, 2015). These areas have men who may have wasta through money, personal connections, or ethnic connections. Such men should be safe from state violence, but they clearly are not.

Violence along migration routes, on the other hand, is more appropriately classified as selective violence. This violence primarily occurs at checkpoints, where civilians risk arrest, torture, and death. In

contrast to civilian inability to protect themselves from the indiscriminate forms of violence at home,

civilians are able to find ways to protect themselves along migration routes.

Wasta is critical for civilians to protect themselves from checkpoint violence. Some respondents

would travel with members of the government or SAA in order to pass through checkpoints. Sometimes,

connections with the government helped people earn money, as drivers/smugglers[2] used their wasta to

get civilians through checkpoints. This wasta did lead respondents to not trust the drivers/smugglers,

but they also recognized that they needed their services (Respondent T012). One respondent who was

wanted by the regime even paid a man from the mokhabarat (secret police):

> I was wanted by the military, so I paid a mokhabarat man to take me to Hamaa. He used his
> military ID to get us through checkpoints… I went through Hamaa because it was the only way to
> get to Idlib… Hamaa was controlled by the regime… I passed through 9 checkpoints between
> Hamaa and Idlib. (Respondent T116)

Wasta may even allow civilians to avoid showing their ID at checkpoints (Respondent T062). Another

respondent, who had heard that he was wanted by the regime, provided additional details regarding his

own experience:

> The driver was a member of the government, so he didn't need to stop at checkpoints. It was
> getting expensive to go through the checkpoints. The car was expensive as a result. I needed
> wasta to use it. I sold all of my possessions to pay for the car… It costed 1000 lira, which was a
> lot of money… If anybody was wanted by the Syrian regime, he tried to hire this car.
> (Respondent T019)

In another case, one respondent explained that his family intentionally moved early in the day. This

helped them encounter checkpoints with soldiers who were either drunk or asleep, yielding more

relaxed checkpoint experiences. Additionally, the respondent's father is an engineer, so he added an

additional tactic to take advantage of his status and use wasta:

> We went to Beirut from Damascus at the first hour of morning. This allowed us to miss the
> traffic. I went with my mother and father. At the checkpoints, the soldiers were either drunk or
> sleeping at that hour… We heard rumors that if your father is an engineer or doctor, then they
> can use their cards to pass the checkpoints. My father is an engineer, so he did this. At the first

---

[2] Respondents would switch between the words for "driver" and "smuggler," even as they were talking about people performing the same task.

checkpoint, my father tried it even though we did not believe it would work... In fact, it did work. (Respondent T050)

The perception of wasta reduces security threats along migration routes in Syria and not in residential areas because these two types of spaces tend to experience different types of violence. Violence along migration routes tends to occur at checkpoints. Here, fighters manning the checkpoints can be convinced not to use violence. Prominent community members or people with the right connections, for example, often easily pass through checkpoints. This means that violence along migration routes primarily involves selective violence. On the other hand, violence in residential areas is often indiscriminate violence that uses chemical weapons, cluster munitions, barrel bombs, and militias that are difficult to control. Civilians in residential areas being targeted with such indiscriminate violence cannot escape it no matter how prominent, wealthy, or well-connected they are. These insights lead to the following hypothesis:

H3: Civilians with perceived wasta migrate earlier.

Sample Selection

To gather data on civilian migration timing in Syria, I conducted interviews with 179 Syrian refugees in Turkey. These interviews were structured with both open-ended and closed-ended questions, and they typically lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. A few interviews were just over two hours, and one interview lasted over four hours. There was one particularly short interview that lasted about 5 minutes, but that is an outlier. The author was able to meet with a few of the respondents multiple times, thereby providing the opportunity to follow up on some questions and build strong connections with which to increase the reliability of interview responses (Fujii, 2011). Interview methods are summarized in Table 1 below, following the guidelines of Bleich and Pekkanen (2013).

All interviews were structured and conducted with the promise of confidentiality. These interviews were mostly conducted in Arabic with a translator, but some were also conducted in English without a translator. For all interviews, refugees were treated as a vulnerable population. Great care was therefore required to complete interviews in a safe and ethical manner.

Table 1: Interview Methods for Syrians in Turkey

Source of Respondents	Saturation	Length	Recording
Snowball Sampling in Izmir Snowball sampling in Istanbul Students at five universities in Istanbul: Koc, Bogazici, Bilgi, Sehir, and Ozyegin Parents, teachers, and principals at Syrian schools and language academies in the Istanbul neighborhoods of Aksaray, Fatih, Kadikoy, Esenler, Esenyurt, Basaksehir, Zeytinburnu, and Edirnekapi	Saturation was achieved for Sunni Arab Syrians living in Istanbul at the time of research who are secular, young, urban, educated, wealthy, and oppose the Assad government. Substantial variation in age, gender, education level, and wealth were also captured, but not to the point of saturation. Some variation was captured across origin and destination locations.	In-person interviews were usually between 60 and 90 minutes. There was one 5 minute interview as a low outlier. There were two interviews that lasted just over 2 hours and one interview that lasted about 4 hours.	Hand-written notes for 129 interviews. Typed responses on the survey document that was sent by email for 50 interviews.

This focus on Syrian refugees in Turkey lead to the emphasis of a specific subset of Syrian refugees. For starters, consistent with the overwhelming majority of research involving Syrian refugees, the sample primarily includes secular Sunni Arabs who oppose Bashar Assad (Pearlman, 2016). Syrian refugees in Turkey are also part of the group that remained in a country contiguous to Syria. Contiguity often indicates that these refugees were either unable or unwilling to move further. Many respondents stated that they chose to come to Turkey, and stay there, because they want to remain in a Muslim-majority country. While the language barrier of switching from Arabic to Turkish is substantial for many

Syrians, the shared predominant religion often eases the cultural transition. Moreover, Turkey is commonly perceived as one of the few countries actually willing to welcome Syrian refugees.

This role as a refugee-hosting country is relatively new for Turkey. In recent decades, Turkey has primarily been a transit country for migrants moving to Europe (Triandafyllidou and Maroukis, 2012). However, increasingly tough border controls for the European Union (EU) have delayed many migration journeys and transformed many transit countries into host countries for migrants and refugees (De Haas, 2007; Brachet, 2009).

Syrian refugees who have successfully reached Europe or other Western countries such as Canada or the United States have some different characteristics than those who remain in Turkey or other Middle Eastern countries. Most importantly, they tend to be wealthier, more educated, and have better networks (Erdogan, 2016). For Western host countries, this is often intentional. Turkey even attempted to force this dynamic to change in 2015 and 2016, as it attempted to negotiate a deal with the EU that would obligate the EU to accept more refugees with disabilities, criminal records, more poverty, and less education. Its efforts have extended at times to blocking resettlement to the United States for Syrian refugees with high education and skill levels, even after the United States accepted them for resettlement (Kingsley, 2016). These dynamics generated several characteristics of Syrian refugees in Turkey that differentiate them from Syrian refugees in other countries. Efforts to generalize findings from this paper should therefore account for these characteristics.

Variable operationalization

This section will explain how questions from the interviews yield variables for the analysis and present descriptive statistics for those variables. These descriptive statistics demonstrate that there is a diverse sample of respondents that captures variation along all key explanatory variables (Bloch, 2007).

Furthermore, there is wide variation in migration timing, ensuring that the sample captures civilian experiences during all stages of the Syrian conflict from March 2011-July 2016.

The *Armed Group Ties* variable is a count variable. There are 10 armed group line items under consideration, covering major pro-government, secular opposition, the Kurdish opposition group YPG, and Islamist groups. While Syria has hundreds, if not thousands, of armed groups, these 10 line items were selected in order to identify major armed groups and "other" options where respondents could highlight armed groups not specifically identified in the questionnaire. The full question and armed group line items are worded as follows:

Before you left Syria, did you know someone who participated, willingly or unwillingly, in the following organizations?

	Yes	No	Don't Know	Refused
Syrian Government Military				
Shabiha				
National Defense Forces				
Hezbollah				
Other Pro-Government Militias or Armed Groups				
Free Syrian Army				
Nusra Front				
ISIS (Daesh)				
YPG				
Other Group Opposed to Bashar Assad **Name of Group_____**				

The wording of this question merits consideration. In order to prevent respondents from placing themselves at risk, they were not asked whether they themselves had participated in an armed group. Instead, the question uses the language "did you know someone who participated," following the convention of previous conflict research (Weinstein and Humphreys, 2006). At the same time, Syrian refugees come from a context where the security services frequently ask similar kinds of questions (Respondent T002). This motivated the inclusion of an additional qualifier, "willingly or unwillingly." This

qualifier is particularly appropriate for the Syrian context due to the prevalence of forced recruitment (Davison, 2016).

The variable *Wasta* is a dichotomous variable indicating whether the respondent believes that they had wasta when they were inside Syria. Nuances in respondent understandings of wasta were detected by asking respondents how they would define wasta. Respondent definitions of wasta yielded the opportunity to explore the variation in how respondents understood the concept, but they also highlighted the common thread that no matter how respondents defined wasta, they all felt that wasta provided security.

The *Violence Experienced*, *Violence Witnessed*, and *Violence on Family* variables are count variables. *Violence Experienced* has eight line items. *Violence Witnessed* has three line items. *Violence on Family* has four line items. These variables are designed in line with the violence variables in Blattman (2009), which draws from the Survey of War Affected Youth (SWAY). SWAY was a research program in northern Uganda with the goal of understanding the causes and consequences of civil war violence and child soldiering. *Violence on Family* is the same as Blattman's variable, except for a question about whether a family member received a war injury. *Violence Witnessed* also has fewer line items than Blattman's variable. Line items about witnessing gunfire and massacres were removed because they are redundant with other items that were included, specifically witnessing battles and killings. As a general rule, interviews did not involve questions about witnessing rape due to the sensitive nature of the topic. They also did not include a question about the torching of homes because it is much less relevant for Syria than for Uganda. *Violence Experienced* is also similar to Blattman's variable, albeit with slightly different line items. The breakdown of these variables is in the table below.

Table 2: Violence Variables

VARIABLE	LINE ITEM
Violence Experienced	Someone took or destroyed your personal property
	You heard gun fire regularly
	Someone shot bullets at you or your home
	You received a severe beating to the body by someone
	Someone attacked you with a knife or blunt object
	You were kidnapped or detained as a prisoner
	You received a serious physical injury during a battle
	You received a serious physical injury during a bombing
Violence Witnessed	You witnessed a battle between armed groups
	You witnessed beatings or torture of other people
	You witnessed a killing
Violence on Family	A parent was murdered or died violently
	A parent disappeared or was abducted
	Another family member was murdered or died violently
	Another family member disappeared or was abducted

Two migration-specific violence variables are more likely to affect migration timing. These variables are *Obstacles* and *Facilitators*. *Obstacles* captures direct threats to civilians along migration routes. *Facilitators* captures fears of waiting too long to migrate, whether any armed groups generally made movement easier, and whether respondents received any offers of protection during movement. Indicators for both of these variables come after the following prompt to introduce the section in the survey:

> Now I am going to ask you a series of questions about the activities of armed groups along roads, in nearby towns, and at checkpoints or roadblocks. I'm also going to ask you about perceived risks of movement.

Obstacles is an index of six indicators:

> (1) Did the government, rebel groups, organized criminal groups, local protection units, or militias do anything to make your movement harder? ; (2) Did you encounter checkpoints or roadblocks? ; (3) From the time that you began to think about moving until your movement was complete, did you hear about violence on the roads you used? ; (4) From the time that you began to think about moving until your movement was complete, did you encounter violence on the roads you used? ; (5) Before you left your home, did you know anyone who had died while

moving? ; and (6) Before you left your home, did you think that any property you left behind would be seized or looted?

Facilitators is a categorical variable with an index of three dichotomous indicators:

(1) Did the government, rebel groups, organized criminal groups, local protection units, or militias do anything to make your movement easier? ; (2) Did anyone offer you protection as you moved? ; and (3) Before you left your home, did you know anyone who wanted to move, but was killed before they were able to move?

There are also many variables relating to trust, which may affect civilian willingness to take the risk of sharing information and engaging in conflict-induced migration. From SWAY, the variable *Betrayal* is a dichotomous variable indicating whether respondents answered yes to the following war experience: "Someone you know betrayed you and put you at risk of death or injury."

Furthermore, interviews included a variety of generalized and particular trust questions. Social trust uses the World Values Survey question and answer choices, with the modification that it focuses on trusting people in the village or neighborhood only, rather than including the need for prudence as well. The trust component is referred to as *Neighborhood Trust*. The need for prudence component is referred to as *Neighborhood Alert*. Respondents were also asked about their trust in people of the same ethnic or religious group, people of a different ethnic or religious group, shopkeepers (*Trust in Shopkeepers*), government officials, police, doctors and nurses, smugglers, and strangers.

The *Ties to Police* and *Ties to International Company* variables are dichotomous variables. They are line items for the question: "When you were inside Syria before March 2011, did you know someone who worked for…" Here, *Police Ties* refers to "Police" and *Ties to International Company* refers to "International Company like General Motors, Microsoft, or Coca Cola." This question remained general, and respondents were reassured that names and the proximity of the connection, whether they were a close friend or loose acquaintance, did not need to be specified.

Finally, there are several demographic questions. These include whether the respondent was male (*Male*), total monthly income in Syrian pounds (*Total Income*), whether the respondent owned a computer in Syria (*Computer*), whether the respondent was married in Syria (*Married*), and whether the

respondent had completed a bachelor's degree or higher (*College Educated*). Descriptive statistics are presented in the table below.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Continuous and Categorical Variables

Variable	Observations	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Armed Group Ties	158	2.987	2.102	0	9
Violence Experienced	152	2.520	1.409	0	8
Violence Witnessed	153	1.431	1.081	0	3
Violence on Family	153	0.843	0.919	0	4
Neighborhood Trust	174	3.592	1.447	1	5
Neighborhood Alert	174	2.299	1.455	1	5
Total Income (Syrian pounds)	161	39596.270	41619.310	6000	400000
Age	176	31.125	9.682	18	65
Obstacles	161	3.81	1.57	0	6
Facilitators	166	1.03	0.89	0	3

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Binary Variables

Variable	Observations	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency
Wasta	154	53	0.344
Male	178	120	0.674
Married	173	69	0.399
College Educated	176	94	0.534
Betrayal	155	23	0.148
Computer	178	141	0.792
Ties to International Company	168	43	0.256
Ties to Police	168	67	0.399

To measure migration timing, this paper uses the month during which respondents first left their homes in Syria. March 2011 is coded as the first month because that is when the Syrian conflict is conventionally understood to have begun. Respondents exhibit wide variation in their migration timing, ranging from April 2011 until July 2016. The resultant distribution in migration timing is illustrated in the figure below.
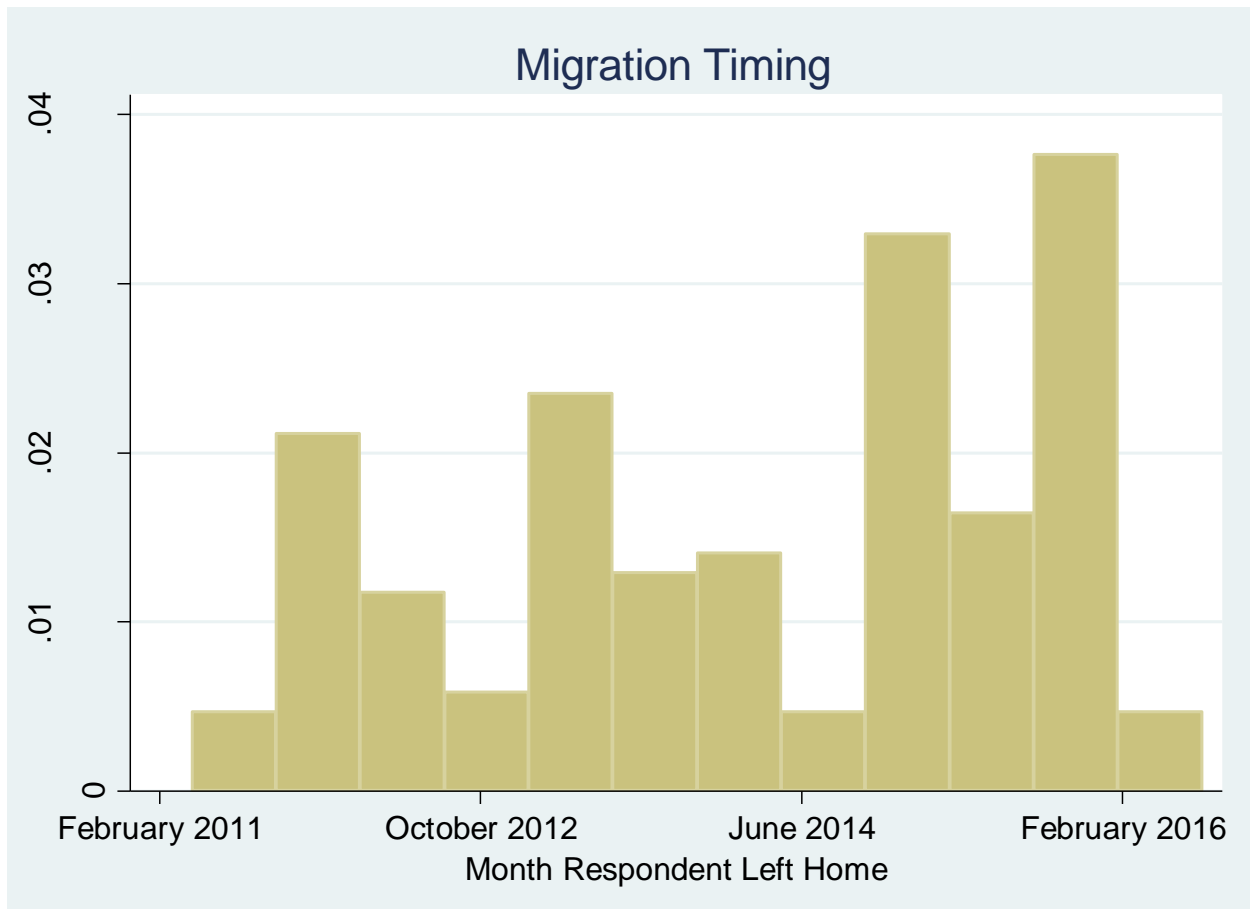
Migration Timing

Survival analysis of migration timing

Hypotheses are tested with Cox proportional hazard models that can directly assess the determinants of migration timing. Due to violations in the proportionality assumption of Cox proportional hazard models (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones, 2004), gender is used as a time-varying covariate. Also, due to the high correlation between age and marital status, these variables are included in separate models.

The table below shows the results of the survival analysis. Since wasta is the only variable that significantly affects migration timing, there is also a figure comparing the survival curves for respondents without perceived wasta against those who do perceive that they had wasta in Syria. These findings do

not support hypotheses H1 or H2, but they do support H3. On average, respondents with perceived

wasta left their homes in July 2013 and respondents without perceived wasta left their homes in July

2014.

Table 3: Cox Proportional Hazard Model Results

	(1)	(2)
Armed Group Ties	-0.0887	-0.0938
	(-1.36)	(-1.45)
Wasta	0.791**	0.859**
	(2.84)	(3.00)
Violence Experienced	-0.0558	-0.0470
	(-0.46)	(-0.39)
Violence Witnessed		
1	0.421	0.391
	(1.27)	(1.18)
2	-0.528	-0.610
	(-1.41)	(-1.66)
3	0.0626	-0.0171
	(0.15)	(-0.04)
Violence on Family		
1	-0.393	-0.341
	(-1.38)	(-1.19)
2	-0.426	-0.282
	(-1.26)	(-0.83)
3	-0.806	-0.636
	(-1.01)	(-0.80)
4	1.098	1.174
	(0.93)	(1.00)
Neighborhood Trust	0.108	0.108
	(0.96)	(0.97)
Neighborhood Alert	0.135	0.135
	(1.33)	(1.35)
Total Income	-0.00000264	-0.00000327
	(-1.10)	(-1.43)
Age	0.0258	
	(1.84)	
College Educated	-0.425	-0.347
	(-1.59)	(-1.34)
Betrayal	-0.595	-0.577
	(-1.43)	(-1.39)
Computer	0.445	0.481
	(1.40)	(1.51)
Ties to International Company	0.0563	-0.0285
	(0.22)	(-0.11)
Ties to Police	-0.0665	-0.0877
	(-0.26)	(-0.34)
Obstacles	-0.0799	-0.0939

	(-0.83)	(-0.95)
Facilitators		
1	-0.391	-0.292
	(-1.08)	(-0.83)
2	0.270	0.354
	(0.62)	(0.81)
3	0.771	0.762
	(1.51)	(1.46)
Married		0.459
		(1.66)
Male	-0.000212	0.00124
	(-0.03)	(0.17)
N	111	111

t statistics in parentheses

="* p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001"

Cox proportional hazards regression

Wasta= NO   Wasta= YES
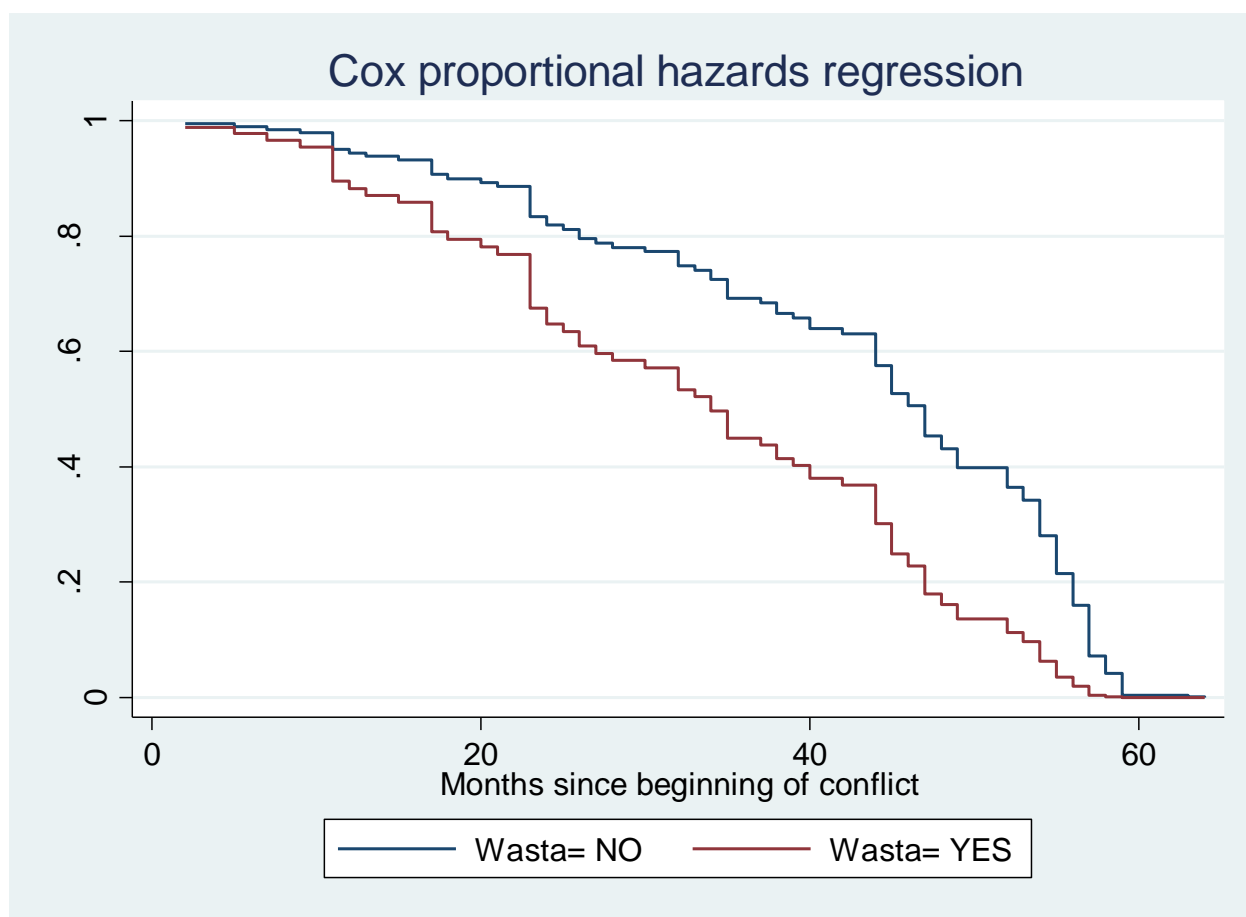
The variables in these survival models do not include geographic variables. However, they should capture the relevant differences between civilians in different parts of Syria. Civilians from more violent areas should have higher measures of *Violence Experienced*, *Violence Witnessed*, and *Violence on Family*. Civilians from urban areas should also be more likely to have higher incomes, ties to international companies, and perceive that they have wasta. Thus, spatial variation in conflict dynamics across Syria should be captured by variables already included in the models.

Variation between Urban, Settled Rural, and Nomadic People

Some respondents claim that the real difference in migration timing is between respondents from rural and urban areas. In this view, people from urban areas left early in the conflict and took all of their money with them. If they did not leave, it was because they supported the government. Subsumed within this perspective is a layer of animosity between civilians from rural and urban areas. Rural respondents sometimes viewed people from urban areas as selfish, cowardly, and disloyal to the cause of opposing the Assad government. One respondent explained:

> There are differences between the rural and urban people of Aleppo. The rural people have less money, are less busy, and they watch the news. They are the ones who want to improve the country. They work with the FSA, Nusra, Daesh, and anybody else who comes… The urban people just want money, so they support the government. They have wasta and want to protect it. (Respondent T010)

Meanwhile, respondents from urban areas sometimes viewed people from rural areas with a condescending disdain. These respondents expressed views of rural people as "simple," dangerous, stupid, gullible, and uneducated (Respondent T002).

Interviews with Syrian Bedouin civilians in Jordan revealed an additional layer of complexity. The Bedouin population in Syria has a nomadic history (Chatty, 2010). Bedouins are not all nomadic now, but they remain a group that is very mobile. Migration is a normal action for Bedouins, particularly those who remain nomadic. They tend to live in peripheral areas with a weak state presence, so checkpoints

are relatively rare and easy for them to avoid. As one respondent stated simply, "As Bedouins, we know the way" (Respondent J031). In this context, perceived wasta is no longer relevant for migration behavior. Broadly, migration is easy for nomadic groups like the Syrian Bedouin.

This distinction prompts a typology of three types of Syrian civilians: urban, settled rural, and nomadic rural. Urban populations have higher incomes and higher likelihoods of perceiving that they have wasta. Settled rural populations have low incomes and low likelihoods of perceiving that they have wasta. Yet, both of these groups face substantial danger when moving during conflict. While the settled rural populations are outside of cities that are filled with checkpoints, they also lack the necessary knowledge of terrain to move through remote areas and avoid checkpoints. Nomadic rural populations, while lacking income and wasta, can move through remote areas and avoid checkpoints with ease. Therefore, while urban and settled rural populations are considering perceived threats at home and along migration routes, nomadic populations are really only concerned with perceived threats at home. Existing research focuses far more on settled than nomadic populations, in most cases justifiably because nomadic lifestyles have become relatively rare. To understand the migration behavior of nomadic populations though, future research must focus specifically on these populations and how their migration-related decisions may differ from settled populations.

Conclusion

This paper shows that migration timing is heavily influenced by civilian perceptions and expectations of security. Violence may play a crucial role, but other factors can influence civilian perceptions of security threats. In particular, the perception that one occupies a social position that can provide protection can reduce perceived security threats. This social position has different names across countries and regions, such as guanxi in China, good ol' boy networks in Western countries, and blat in Russia. In Syria, it is known as wasta.

Yet, one's social position cannot offer protection from all types of security threats. Specifically, it provides protection from selective violence, not indiscriminate violence. This is why respondents who perceived that they had wasta in Syria left their homes one year earlier, on average, than respondents who did not perceive that they had wasta in Syria.

Meanwhile, the paper also reveals that these processes are most applicable for urban and settled rural populations. Nomadic populations follow a different process. Their migration is likely easier because they are further removed from the centers of power for armed groups and can easily avoid checkpoints altogether. This suggests the need to segment migration explanations into different groups based on whether they are settled or nomadic populations. This paper, along with most existing research, is most applicable for settled populations. Groups like the Syrian Bedouins, Somali nomads, and Malian Tuaregs are thereby likely to require fundamentally different sets of explanations than settled populations.

WORKS CITED

Adhikari P. (2013) Conflict-Induced Displacement, Understanding the Causes of Flight. *American Journal of Political Science* 57: 82-89.

Al-Ramahi A. (2008) Wasta in Jordan: A distinct feature of (and benefit for) Middle Eastern society. *Arab Law Quarterly* 22: 35-62.

Balcells L and Steele A. (2016) Warfare, Political Identities, and Displacement in Spain and Colombia. *Political Geography* 51: 15-29.

Barnett A, Yandle B and Naufal G. (2013) Regulation, trust, and cronyism in Middle Eastern societies: The simple economics of "wasta". *The Journal of Socio-Economics* 44: 41-46.

Beber B, Roessler P and Scacco A. (2013) Coping with Partition: Wealth, Security, and Migration in Post-Separation Sudan. *Working Paper*.

Blattman C. (2009) From violence to voting: War and political participation in Uganda. *American Political Science Review* 103: 231-247.

Bleich E and Pekkanen R. (2013) How to report interview data. *Interview research in political science*: 95-116.

Bloch A. (2007) Methodological Challenges for National and Multi-Sited Comparative Survey Research. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 20: 230-247.

Box-Steffensmeier JM and Jones BS. (2004) *Event history modeling: A guide for social scientists*: Cambridge University Press.

Brachet J. (2009) *Migrations Transsahariennes: Vers un Desert Cosmopolite et Morcele (Niger)*: Editions du Croquant.

Byman D. (2016) Understanding the Islamic State—A Review Essay. *International Security* 40: 127-165.

Carey S, Mitchell N and Lowe W. (2013) States, the Security Sector, and the Monopoly of Violence: A New Database on Pro-Government Militias. *Journal of Peace Research* 50.

Chatty D. (2010) The Bedouin in contemporary Syria: the persistence of tribal authority and control. *The Middle East Journal* 64: 29-49.

Czaika M and Kis-Katos K. (2009) Civil Conflict and Displacement: Village-Level Determinants of Forced Migration in Aceh. *Journal of Peace Research* 46: 399-418.

Czuperski M, Itani F, Nimmo B, et al. (2017) *Breaking Aleppo*. Available at: http://www.publications.atlanticcouncil.org/breakingaleppo/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/BreakingAleppo.pdf.

Davenport C, Moore W and Poe S. (2003) Sometimes You Just Have to Leave: Domestic Threats and Forced Migration, 1964-1989. *International Interactions*: 27-55.

Davison J. (2016) *Seeing no future, deserters and draft-dodgers flee Syria*. Available at: http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-army-idUSKCN1001PY?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=New%20Campaign&utm_term=%2ASituation%20Report.

De Haas H. (2007) Morocco's Migration Experience: A Transitional Perspective1. *International Migration* 45: 39-70.

Engel S and Ibáñez AM. (2007) Displacement Due to Violence in Colombia: A Household-Level Analysis. *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 55: 335-365.

Erdogan M. (2016) *Study: Educated Syrians in Europe, illiterate ones in Turkey*. Available at: http://www.dailysabah.com/nation/2016/03/05/study-educated-syrians-in-europe-illiterate-ones-in-turkey.

Fujii LA. (2011) *Killing neighbors: webs of violence in Rwanda*: Cornell University Press.

Gold T and Guthrie D. (2002) *Social connections in China: Institutions, culture, and the changing nature of guanxi*: Cambridge University Press.

Gutman R. (2016) *Assad Henchman: Here's How We Built ISIS*. Available at: http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/12/01/assad-henchman-here-s-how-we-built-isis.html.

Harpvicken KB. (2009) *Social Networks and Migration in Wartime Afghanistan,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kalyvas S. (2006) *The Logic of Violence in Civil War,* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Kingsley P. (2016) *Turkey blocks Syrian refugees from resettlement in the US – for having degrees*. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/19/turkey-syrian-refugees-resettlement-blocked-us-degrees.

Kozak C. (2015) *"An army in all corners": Assad's Campaign Strategy in Syria*. Available at: http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/An%20Army%20in%20All%20Corners%20by%20Chris%20Kozak%201.pdf.

Lischer S. (2005) *Dangerous Sanctuaries: Refugee Camps, Civil War, and the Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid,* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Lister CR. (2016) *The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency*: Oxford University Press.

Lombard L. (2013) Navigational Tools for Central African Roadblocks. *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 36: 157-173.

Lubkemann S. (2008) Involuntary Immobility: On a theoretical invisibility in forced migration studies. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21: 454-475.

Lust E. (2009) Competitive clientelism in the Middle East. *Journal of Democracy* 20: 122-135.

Lynch M. (2013) The Political Science of Syria's War. *The Political Science of Syria's War.* Washington, DC: POMEPS, 3-7.

Lynch M. (2014) *The Arab uprisings explained: New contentious politics in the Middle East*: Columbia University Press.

Mann L. (2014) Wasta! The long-term implications of education expansion and economic liberalisation on politics in Sudan. *Review of African Political Economy* 41: 561-578.

Masi A. (2015) *Syrian Men Conscripted in Bashar Assad's Army Choose Escape Over 'Kill or Be Killed'*. Available at: http://www.ibtimes.com/syrian-men-conscripted-bashar-assads-army-choose-escape-over-kill-or-be-killed-1919724.

Melander E and Oberg M. (2006) Time to go? Duration Dependence in Forced Migration. *International Interactions* 32: 129-152.

Mitchell N. (2004) *Agents of Atrocity: Leaders, Followers and Violation of Human Rights in Civil Wars,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Onoma A. (2013) *Anti-Refugee Violence and African Politics,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pearlman W. (2016) Narratives of Fear in Syria. *Perspectives on Politics* 14: 21-37.

Pottier J. (2006) Roadblock Ethnography: Negotiating Humanitarian Access in Ituri, Eastern DR Congo, 1999-2004. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 76: 151-179.

Ramady M. (2015) *The Political Economy of Wasta: Use and Abuse of Social Capital Networking*: Springer.

Rawlence B. (2016) *City of Thorns: Nine Lives in the World's Largest Refugee Camp,* New York: MacMillan Publishers.

Schelling T. (1981) *The Strategy of Conflict,* Harvard University Press: Cambridge.

Schon J. (2015) Focus on the Forest, Not the Trees: A Changepoint Model of Forced Displacement. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 28: 437-467.

Schon J. (2016) The centrality of checkpoints for civilians during conflict. *Civil Wars* 18: 281-310.

Steinberg J. (2015) *A Man of Good Hope,* New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Triandafyllidou A and Maroukis T. (2012) *Migrant Smuggling: Irregular Migration from Asia and Africa to Europe,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Uzonyi G. (2014) Unpacking the Effects of Genocide and Politicide on Forced Migration. *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 31: 225-243.

Weinstein J and Humphreys M. (2006) Handling and Manhandling Civilians in Civil War. *American Political Science Review* 100: 429-447.