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DATE: November 30, 2015
SUBJECT: Syrian Refugee Placement

BACKGROUND

World War II caused millions of people living in Europe to leave their homes to find safety from the violence and persecution.¹ During this time, refugee resettlement was a partnership process between the federal government and voluntary organizations. However, the refugee crisis was exceeding the boundaries of private resources and government support became expected and “assumed.”² The Displaced Persons Act of 1948 brought “expansive resettlement efforts” and stopped the requirement for refugees to be sponsored by financially able individuals.³ Through this act, humanitarian agencies became the “sponsors” of refugees and provided for their needs upon arrival.⁴

The United States then became proactive in refugee resettlement after World War II and in response to other refugee crises that occurred in Cuba, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe in the years following.⁵ Humanitarian agencies were the key players in the resettlement process for the refugees. There was not a formal process until the Refugee Act of 1980; up until then, the United States admitted refugees on an ad hoc basis.⁶

The Refugee Act of 1980 established the refugee resettlement program and created assistance programs to help refugees adjust smoothly to life in the United States.⁷ The refugee resettlement program standardized the process, assigned specific roles to Federal agencies, and defined the asylum process for noncitizens that are physically present in the United States or at a land border or port of entry.⁸ It also connected U.S. law with the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.⁹ The Act was a milestone for the United States as it represented the country coinciding with the international community. Since 1980, the country has resettled almost three million refugees and gave political asylum to more than 400,000 people.¹⁰

THE REFUGEE PROCESS

The resettlement process is run by three federal agencies: the State Department, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Department of Health and Human Services.¹¹ Refugees go through background checks run by the Department of Homeland Security before arriving in the

¹ Brown & Scribner, 2014

² Brown & Scribner, 2014

³ Brown & Scribner, 2014

⁴ Brown & Scribner, 2014

⁵ Brown & Scribner, 2014

⁶ Brown & Scribner, 2014

⁷ Brown & Scribner, 2014

⁸ Kerwin, 2015

⁹ Kerwin, 2015

¹⁰ Kerwin, 2015

¹¹ Welsh, 2015

United States.¹² The UN refugee agency, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), sends refugee referrals to DHS, and then DHS employers travel to the country where a refugee candidate is staying to give detailed interviews, ensuring the individual fits the criteria for a refugee and is not a security threat to the United States.¹³ In addition to the government, refugees are also processed by nine national resettlement nonprofits: these nonprofits meet each week with the State Department to determine how the refugees will be distributed.¹⁴ In 2015, the top refugee-receiving states were Texas and California.¹⁵ Other states that receive large numbers of refugees are New York, Arizona, Michigan, and Ohio.¹⁶

Refugees are sent all over the country, but the most common reason for a refugee to be sent to a specific place is a personal or family connection.¹⁷ Although nationality of origin is not a factor, the country tries to help refugees establish “support networks” so the refugees have a better chance of a successful transition to life in the United States.¹⁸ Upon arrival, each refugee receives a stipend of about \$1,000 to cover his or her first three months in the United States.¹⁹ Refugees are not placed in special housing, and local resettlement organizations help refugees find affordable apartments that are in the open market.²⁰ After three months, they are responsible for paying rent like normal tenants and are free to move elsewhere.²¹ Refugees sometimes chose to move to where they have a community of people from their country or that speak the same language.²²

THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

Since the start of the Syrian civil war five years ago, millions of Syrians have been affected.²³ 12 million Syrians have left everything behind and fled to nearby countries to escape the violence.²⁴ 1.9 million refugees moved to Turkey, 250,000 are in Iraq, 1.1 million are in Lebanon, 630,000 are in Jordan, and 103,700 live in camps near the northern border of Syria.²⁵ Many of these refugees live in conditions where it is crowded and unsanitary.²⁶

Responding to the refugee crisis, the Obama administration proposed to take Syrian refugees with specific goals each fiscal year. The United States will take 70,000 in 2015, 85,000 in 2016, and 100,000 in 2017.²⁷ The number of Syrian refugees resettled in the United States has grown greatly since 2012: from 31 in 2012 to 1,682 in 2015.²⁸

¹² Welsh, 2015

¹³ Welsh, 2015

¹⁴ Welsh, 2015

¹⁵ Zong & Batalova, 2015

¹⁶ Zong & Batalova, 2015

¹⁷ Welsh, 2015

¹⁸ Welsh, 2015

¹⁹ Welsh, 2015

²⁰ Welsh, 2015

²¹ Welsh, 2015

²² Welsh, 2015

²³ Omer, 2015

²⁴ World Vision Staff. 2015

²⁵ World Vision Staff. 2015

²⁶ World Vision Staff. 2015

²⁷ Zong & Batalova, 2015

²⁸ Zong & Batalova, 2015

However, after the Paris attacks on November 13, 2015, fear arose among American citizens and sentiment has changed towards the country's policy with refugees.²⁹ A survey was distributed among a sample of 1,002 adults and 53 percent stated the United States should stop letting Syrian refugees resettlement within the country.³⁰ Syrian refugees feel the United States is no longer prepared to welcome them, with numerous governors now stating they would not accept Syrian refugees to their states because "we cannot let terrorists take advantage of our compassion."³¹ Although the Syrian refugees already here escaped fears from the war, many are now developing new fears: they fear they will be sent out if the government decides to act against refugees in response to the Paris attacks.³²

GIS ANALYSIS

The Issue

GIS is a great tool for people placement. It is important know where vacant housing is located and what communities surround the vacant housing. Since the United States has been a resettlement destination for refugees for many years, the important data is not about whether we have enough vacant housing. The important information is whether the vacant housing is around communities that would be beneficial for refugees especially now that so many citizens and leaders are against refugees due to the Paris attacks.

The Data

Census data was used to find vacant housing available, Syrian populations, Naturalized and Noncitizen populations, and communities with education levels. Refugee resettlement agencies try to place refugees in communities where they will have the best chance to transition into a normal life in the United States. Therefore, Syrian population data was acquired. Ethnic communities make great networks, and often resettlement agencies place refugees around communities where they already have connections. Although national origin is not an important factor when placing refugees, the chances of having a connection in a Syrian populated county is greater than a county with little to no Syrians.

For similar reasoning, naturalized citizens and noncitizen populations were chosen because immigrants are more accepting of other immigrants. Citizens are fearful because of the Paris attacks, but those who are foreign-born or not citizens are more likely to have compassion towards the Syrian refugees.

Education level was also used because education is very important to Syrians. However, only populations with bachelor degrees or higher were analyzed because the other education levels were too inconclusive. Since the war began, children have been squished into small, unsanitary spaces for school or some children have missed so much school.³³ Syrian children need more than just basic necessities; as many as two-thirds are not getting any education.³⁴ Between two

²⁹ Talev, 2015

³⁰ Talev, 2015

³¹ Hennessy-Fiske, Mai-Duc, & Glionna, 2015

³² Hennessy-Fiske, Mai-Duc, & Glionna, 2015

³³ West, 2014

³⁴ West, 2014

million and three million children are not attending school due to the war.³⁵ These children need safe and protective communities where they can become children again and resume some sense of normal.³⁶ It would be beneficial for the refugees to be placed in communities where individuals and families are educated. Those who are educated are more likely to think education is important and live in communities where education is ample. Job availability was not used for analysis because refugees do not need a job until after six months of residence, and resettlement agencies have the resources to find refugee jobs after placement.³⁷

Data Sources

The county and state shapefiles were downloaded from the Census Bureau 2015 Tiger Line Shapefile website. They were used as boundary lines. Vacant housing was downloaded from American Fact Finder 2014. Vacant housing was joined to the county shapefile and used as the third layer as a base to compare Syrian population and Education levels in the country. Syrian population and Education levels were joined to the county shapefile as separate layers. The county polygons shapefile table had to be modified because the joining fields were different; the one in the county shapefile was text instead of numeric. A new numeric field was created and calculated which allowed for successful joins for all data tables from American Fact Finder. The biggest limitation for the data is time frame. It would have been better for policy if all data tables were from 2015. The most recent data table for Syrian population was 2010, and 2014 for vacant housing and education level.

Layer Methodology

Using Vacant housing as the “base”, Syrian population was added as the next layer to see whether Syrian populations are in communities where vacant housing is available. The same process was used for noncitizens, naturalized citizens, and education levels: high school degree holders, some college or associate, and bachelor degree holders. Each category was compared to Vacant housing, because the first important issue for refugee resettlement is finding a place to live. Each refugee is subject to the open market when it comes to residence, and before refugees can work, they must live in the country for six months.

Findings

On a visual level, referring to Appendix 1, ideal refugee resettlement areas are located in southern California, southwest Arizona, southern Florida, and the northeast area due to the large amount of vacant housing. After adding the Syrian population layer to the vacant housing map, the data shows many of the Syrian populations are located in these.³⁸ However, it was surprising to see a large number of Syrians in the northeast versus southern California since California appears to have more housing available. One possible explanation is cost of living; California is an expensive state and rent is not cheap. Comparing the Syrian population analysis to Noncitizen population, the result was not conclusive. Noncitizens are heavily concentrated on the southwest, southeast, and northeast.³⁹ There is no pattern that matches the previous categories, and there is no area that is more heavily concentrated. Naturalized citizens, on the other hand, have clear

³⁵ World Vision Staff, 2015

³⁶ Omer, 2015

³⁷ US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants: FAQs, 2015

³⁸ Appendix 2

³⁹ Appendix 3

concentrations in northern California, southern California, southern Florida, and the northeast.⁴⁰ Referring to Appendix 5, education was also a little inconclusive. Although education is heavily concentrated on the east coast, it is pretty spread out across the east.

After a visual analysis, a quantitative analysis was done: a “refugee friendly” score was assigned per county under each category. A new field was created in the county shapefile, and under each category, counties scores were calculated. Counties were assigned a score between one and five, one being the lowest and five the highest. Each score was based off the ranges of each category, located on each legend. The lowest range received a score of one and the highest received a score of five. In all categories, counties were given a zero if no data was found for the category. Then the categorical (vacant housing, Syrian population, naturalized citizens, noncitizens, education) scores were added together for a “refugee friendly” score.

The top five counties are Los Angeles County, Kings County, Miami-Dade County, Broward County, Cook County, and Orange County, labeled on the map in Appendix 6. The counties with the highest scores of 23 are Los Angeles County in California and Kings County in New York. The county with the second highest score of 22 is Miami-Dade, located in southern Florida. The last slots with scores of 20 are Broward County in southern Florida, Cook County in northern Illinois, and Orange County in California.

CONCLUSION

With a visual analysis, the best area to place Syrian refugees is in the northeast. There is a higher concentration of Syrians that would give the refugees connections for networks. There are more noncitizens and naturalized citizens, which would provide more open and accepting communities. There is also higher concentration of bachelor degree holders, which leads to communities where education is important.

With a quantitative analysis, the best area to place Syrian refugees is in Los Angeles County of California and Kings County of New York. Orange County, also located in California and next to Los Angeles County, had the third highest score for best place for Syrian refugee resettlement. Broward and Miami-Dade County are also ideal for refugee resettlement in southern Florida. The visual analysis was slightly supported by the quantitative analysis: Kings County had the highest score and is located in the northeast region. Southern California and southern Florida were not a surprise based on the visual analysis as well. Surprisingly, Cook County scored high on refugee friendliness.

After analysis, the map of Syrian refugee resettlement in the United States was referred. The visual conclusion matches with current policy; many Syrian refugees have resettled in the northeast. The quantitative conclusion also matches with current policy. Los Angeles County, Kings County, Miami-Dade County, Broward County, Cook County, and Orange County had the highest scores, and on the resettlement map, large numbers of Syrians already resettled in these areas.⁴¹ The most surprising element was the significant number of Syrian refugees placed around the Great Lakes area, from Kentucky and above. Cook County scored high and was anticipated, but the larger area around it did not show promising results in the analysis.

⁴⁰ Appendix 4

⁴¹ Appendix 7

The noncitizens and naturalized citizens data does not provide a detailed list of specific ethnic or national groups in these areas. It is possible that these groups of people living in the northeast are not as open as some immigrant groups. It is also possible that these groups of people have a negative history with the Syrians that would create a hostile environment for the refugees. The same goes for language. The Syrian population data and the noncitizens and naturalized citizens' data did not list languages spoken. It is possible these groups only speak English, which may be a challenge for Syrian refugees when they arrive. However, it may also be motivational for Syrian refugees to be around communities that speak only English. To transition into life in America, English would be beneficial. For all categories, it is still cautious to assume communities would be open due to similarities. There is unknown history and unknown resources that cannot be controlled.

Another limitation is the use of county data. Counties may not be the smallest level of analysis best fit for refugee placement. City placement would have been a better. However, city data was unavailable on a country level, and it was too difficult to just pick and choose specific cities. County level was the smallest level with data that was uniformly found across the United States. It would have been ideal to find city data, but the resources were limited.

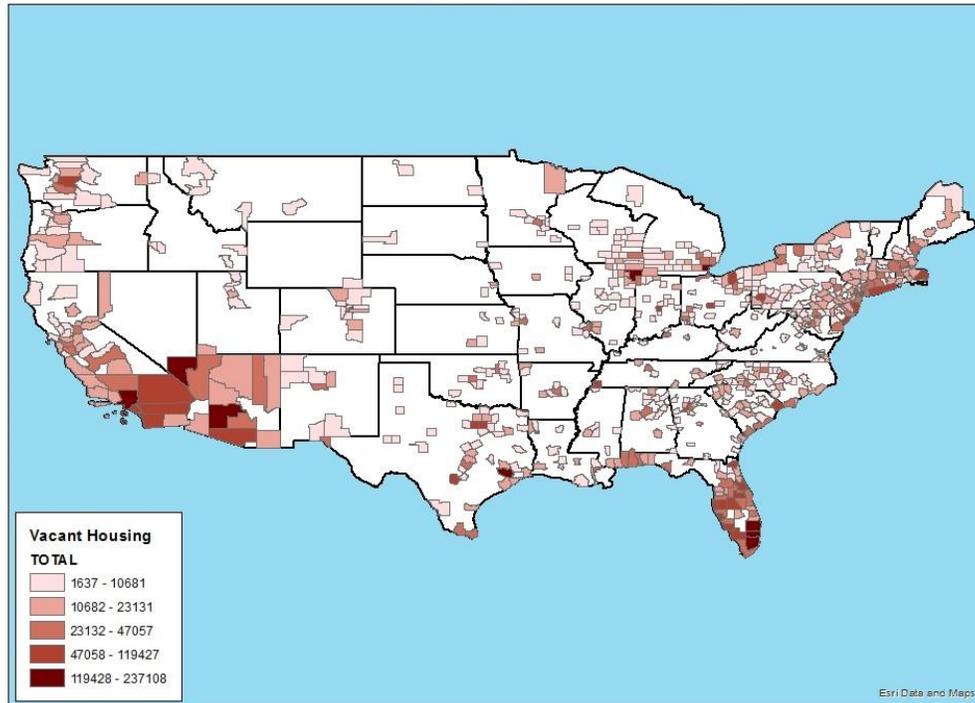
However, with the United States' history with refugees, the GIS analysis and where Syrian refugees are already resettled, there is optimism to the conclusion. The best county for Syrian refugee resettlement is Kings County. The next best options are Los Angeles County, Kings County, Miami-Dade County, Broward County, and Orange County, labeled on the map in Appendix 6.

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Appendix 1

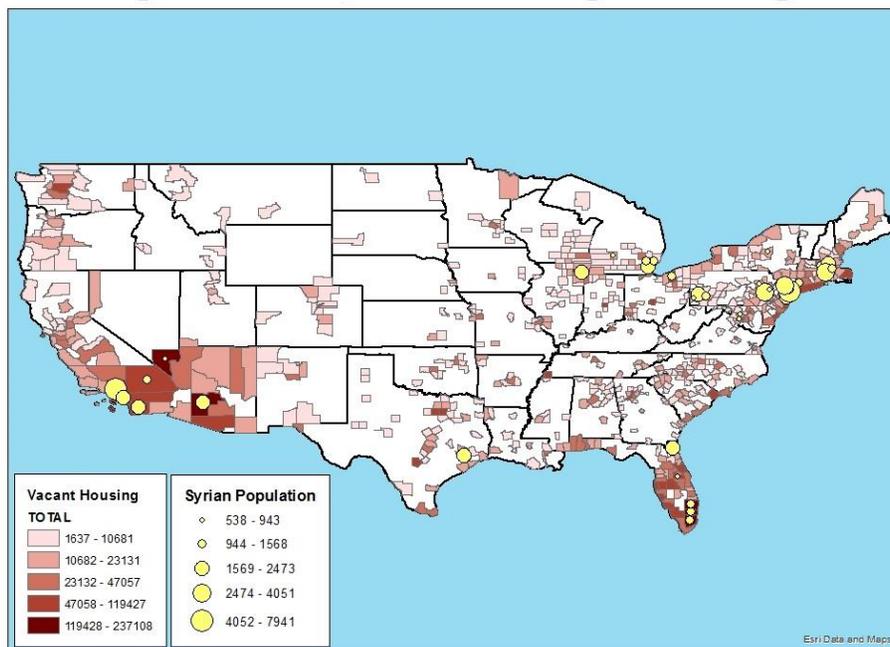
Vacant Housing by County in 2014



Data Source: American Fact Finder 2014

Appendix 2

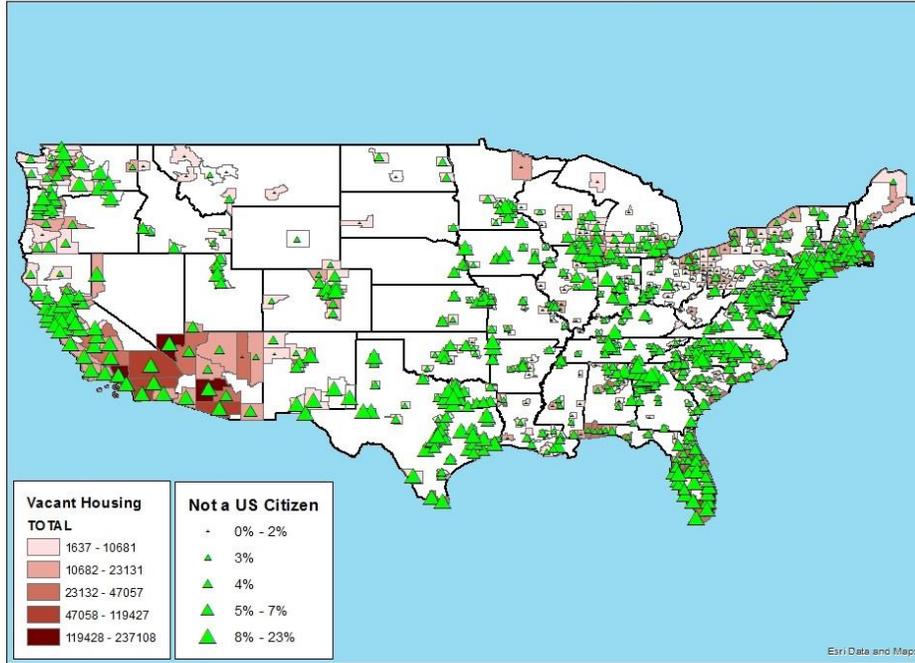
Syrian Population by County



Data Source: American Fact Finder 2014

Appendix 3

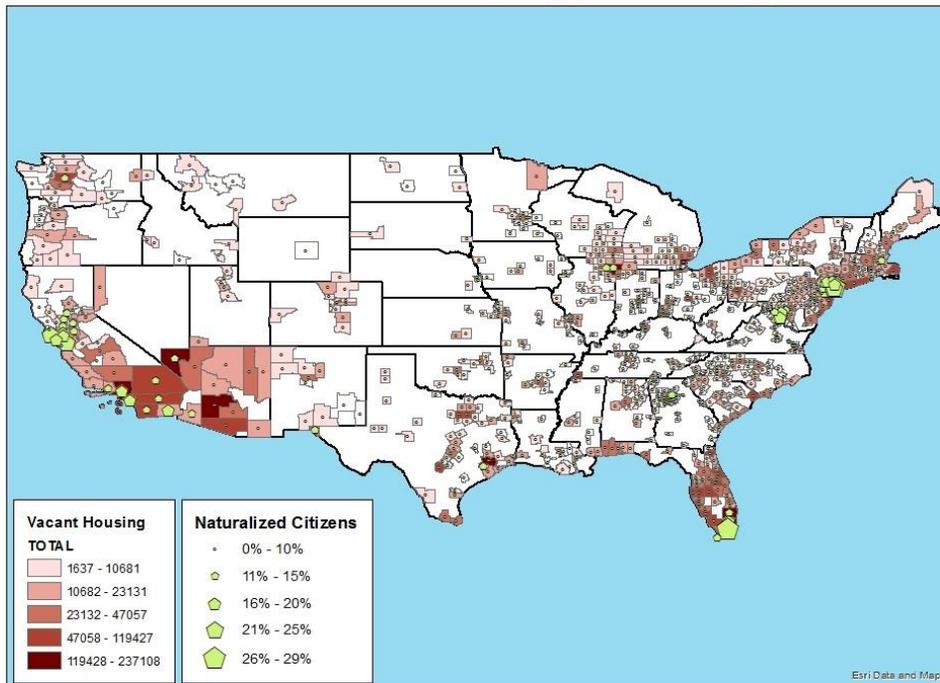
Noncitizens by County in 2014



Data Source: American Fact Finder 2014

Appendix 4

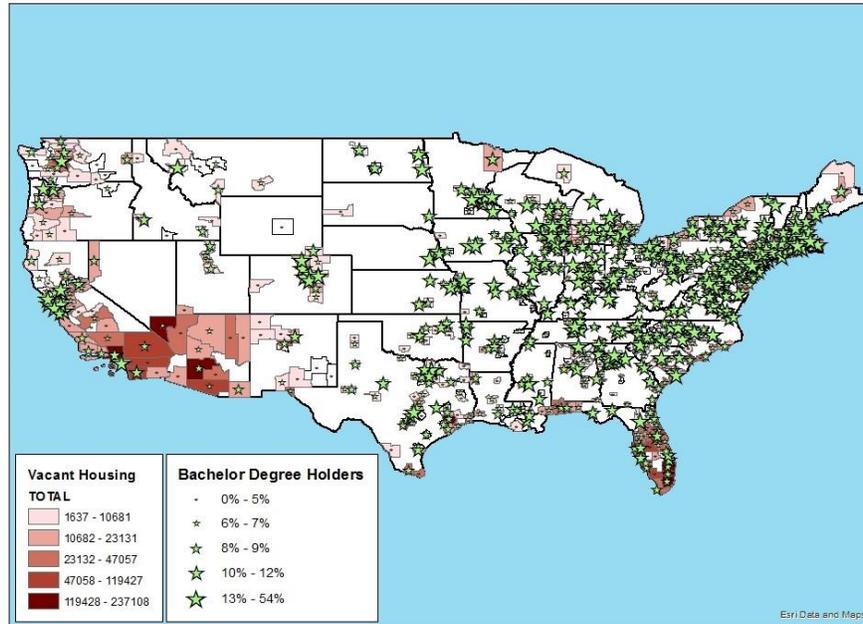
Naturalized Citizens by County in 2014



Data Source: American Fact Finder 2014

Appendix 5

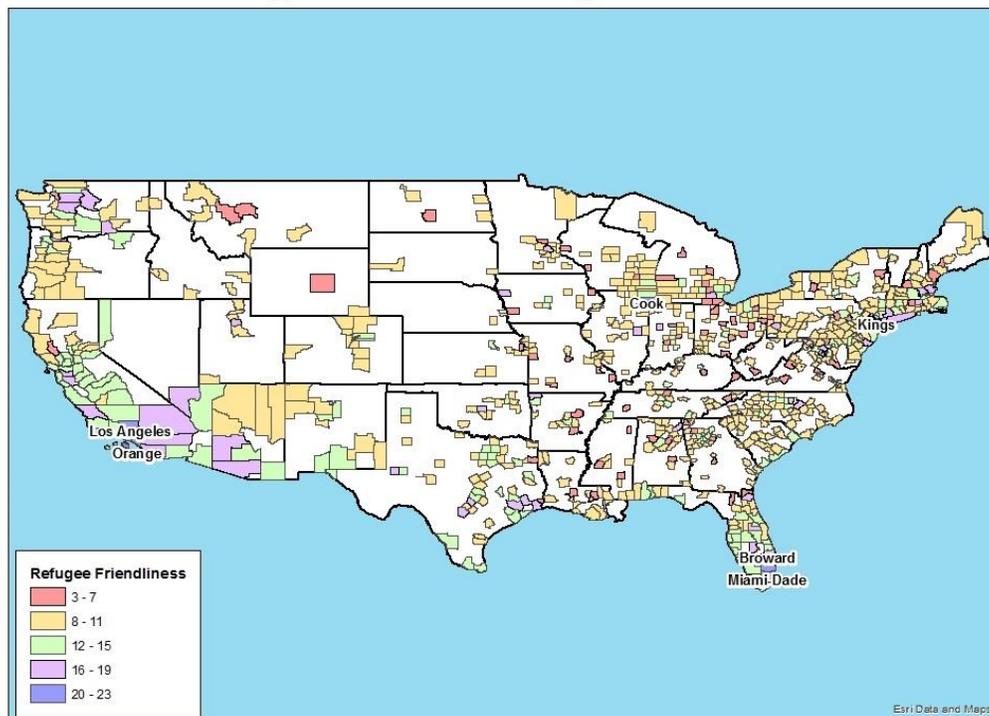
Bachelors or Higher by County in 2014



Data Source: American Fact Finder 2014

Appendix 6

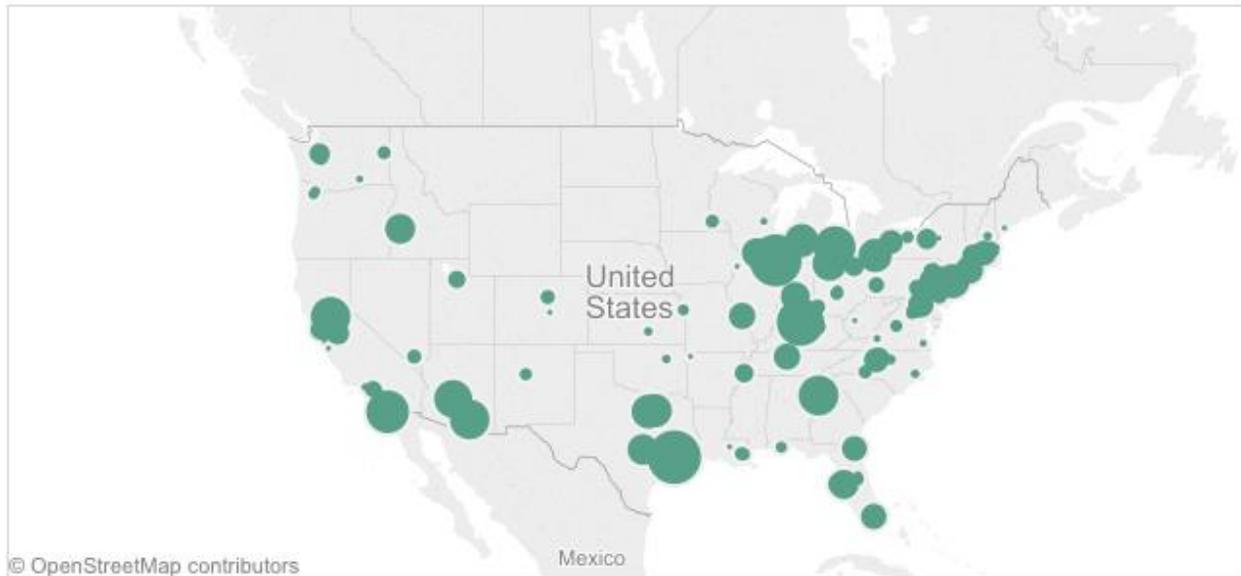
Refugee Friendly Counties



Data Source: American Fact Finder 2014

Appendix 7

Where Syrian Refugees Are Resettled



*Map taken from:

Welsh, T. (2015, November 20). 8 Facts About the U.S. Program to Resettle Syrian Refugees. Retrieved November 21, 2015, from <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015/11/20/8-facts-about-the-us-program-to-resettle-syrian-refugees>