SYRIAN REFUGEES AS WITNESSES TO AN UNCHECKED CIVIL WAR:
The underlying factors causing Syrian displacement to Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq

BACKGROUND
In March 2011 Syrian citizens took to the streets in protest, finally succumbing to the wave-like force of the Arab Spring which spread across the Middle East, Arabian Peninsula, and North Africa starting in 2010. As with the other Arab Spring revolutions, political analysts pointed to a variety of factors as the sparks that started the Syrian uprising. Of these, socioeconomic concerns, including drought and poverty, as well as sentiments of lack of political power among the majority Sunni Muslims, and ongoing human rights abuses committed by the government have been cited frequently. The result has been a conflict with both socioeconomic and sectarian roots that has emerged as a bloody and angry civil war between forces loyal to the Ba’ath government led by Bashar al-Assad, and the Syrian National Coalition, among others. The conflict, which has destroyed homes and neighborhoods, schools and communities, has incited a surge of refugees to Syria’s neighbors—primarily Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq.

The goal of this analysis is to better understand the particular factors that are leading people to seek refuge outside of Syria. Every day hundreds of Syrian refugees cross the border, sometimes through dangerous smuggling routes, trying to make new and more secure homes either in refugee camps or with host families in cities. Organizations like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) are struggling to keep up with this large influx of refugees.

These maps help explain what factors prompt displacement and help humanitarian organizations prepare for the individuals and families that escape their decimated homes in Syria. Additionally, they help highlight the need for more information on the conflict and how it is affecting its neighbors all around.

METHODOLOGY AND ITS LIMITATIONS
The basis of this analysis was a reclassification of raw data into a three-tiered ranking system to identify hotspots within each variable. The eight variables were then summarized through raster calculation into a single map depicting areas of most concern regarding refugee movement. The results are compared to a map that displays the proportion of Syrian refugees taking refuge in each neighboring country. Finally, refugee levels in each country (total and within camps) are classified to indicate the direction of movement. When possible, the data were sampled from March 2013 to preserve consistency and accuracy.

The war in Syria is ongoing and dangerous; few humanitarian organizations or journalists have been able to access the country—leaving a huge deficit of vital information. Most data for this analysis come from regular reports by UNHCR, a report published by the Syria Needs Analysis Project, and statistics from the Violations Documentation Center and Women Under Siege. Some pieces are clearly missing—for example there is no data on IDP settlement in the governorate of Dayr az-Zour—and some may biased, as with reports of sexual violence in Syria (severely underreported).

The variables displayed here were selected to measure specific factors that had been cited by refugees in reports by humanitarian organizations as primary reasons for fleeing their homes in Syria. For example, destruction of hospitals per governorate was selected to illustrate lack of access to health care; internally displaced persons (IDP) demonstrates lack of stability. These measurements are far from perfect and can only be extrapolated so far; yet they represent the current data available on Syria.