

# **Conflict, Contention, and Climate Change**

**Hilary Term 2022**

Stanford House Courses

University of Oxford

Jamie L. Shenk

[jamie.shenk@sociology.ox.ac.uk](mailto:jamie.shenk@sociology.ox.ac.uk)

## **Aims and objectives:**

How have changes in the natural environment affected political and environmental development globally? What impacts might climate change have on future development? This course addresses these questions through the lens of conflict, security, and peacebuilding. The course aims to familiarize students with both academic and policy debates around climate security and development. Students should end the course with an understanding of key themes and debates, starting with an introduction to theories of security, contentious politics, and peacebuilding. Students should also be familiar with the difficulty of measurement and possible data bias in climate studies. Students should be able to discuss specific policy issues of food and agriculture, water, and migration and support their arguments with evidence from case studies. Throughout the term, the course will ask students to consider voices are represented in these debates—who does security and development serve?

## **Course Overview:**

- Week 1: What is security? What is the environment?
- Week 2: Environmental security
- Week 3: Climate change and armed conflict
- Week 4: Non-violent contention the environment
- Week 5: Environmental peacebuilding
- Week 6: Food and agriculture
- Week 7: Water
- Week 8: Migration

## **Assignment:**

1. A weekly Oxford-style essay (1000-1500 words, max 2000) responding to one of the questions of the week, due BEFORE class
2. One 3000-word essay due Wednesday of Week 9 at 5pm answering the following prompt: *The impact of climate on conflict and contention is overblown. Discuss.*

**OR**

One 3000-word policy paper evaluating the risk of environmental change exacerbating or causing security risks in a region of your choosing (e.g. Syria, the Northern Triangle, the Sahel, South America) in the short, medium, and long term. Your paper should apply theories we discuss in class and in the readings as well as empirical evidence from your case study region. The policy paper should speak to a target audience of either the United States government or the UN Security Council. ***Please let me know by week 6 if you plan to choose this option so that we can discuss policy writing in tutorial.***

## Grading

- 40% - Final Essay (3000 words)
- 50% - 5 Weekly Essays (you choose which 5 out of the 8 weeks)
- 10% - Preparation, Participation, and Organization

## Weekly Readings and Essay Prompts:

### Week 1: What is Security? What is the Environment?

- Which notion of security is more useful for thinking about the impacts of environmental change—human security or military security?
- Climate change necessitates a reconceptualization of security. Discuss.

Barkawi, Tarak, and Mark Laffey. 2006. "The Postcolonial Moment in Security Studies." *Review of International Studies* 32(2): 329–52.

Detgas, Adrien et al. 2020. *10 Insights on Climate Impacts and Peace*. Berlin: adelphi.  
[https://weatheringrisk.org/sites/default/files/document/10%20Insights%20on%20Climate%20Impacts%20and%20Peace%20Report\\_0.pdf](https://weatheringrisk.org/sites/default/files/document/10%20Insights%20on%20Climate%20Impacts%20and%20Peace%20Report_0.pdf).

Donner, Simon. 2020. "The Ugly History of Climate Determinism Is Still Evident Today." *Scientific American*. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-ugly-history-of-climate-determinism-is-still-evident-today/>.

Johnson, D. L. et al. 1997. "Meanings of Environmental Terms." *Journal of Environmental Quality* 26(3): 581–89.

Paris, Roland. 2001. "Human Security: Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?" *International Security* 26(2): 87–102.

Ullman, Richard H. 1983. "Redefining Security." *International Security* 8(1): 129–53.

Walt, Stephen M. 1991. "The Renaissance of Security Studies." *International Studies Quarterly* 35(2): 211.

### Week 2: Environmental Security

- Is the environment a new security threat?

Anderson, Robert Warren, Noel D. Johnson, and Mark Koyama. 2017. "Jewish Persecutions and Weather Shocks: 1100–1800." *The Economic Journal* 127(602): 924–58.

Deudney, Daniel. 1990. "The Case Against Linking Environmental Degradation and National Security." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* (19): 461–76.

Gleditsch, Nils Petter. 2021. "This Time Is Different! Or Is It? NeoMalthusians and Environmental Optimists in the Age of Climate Change." *Journal of Peace Research* 58(1): 177–85.

Homer-Dixon, Thomas F. 1991. "On the Threshold: Environmental Changes as Causes of Acute Conflict." *International Security* 16(2): 76.

———. 1994. "Environmental Scarcities and Violent Conflict: Evidence from Cases." *International Security* 19(1): 5.

Jia, Ruixue. 2014. "Weather Shocks, Sweet Potatoes and Peasant Revolts in Historical China." *The Economic Journal* 124(575): 92–118.

Levy, Marc A. 1995. "Is the Environment a National Security Issue?" *International Security* 20(2): 35.

### **Week 3: Climate and Conflict**

- How can we explain the disagreement around the effect of climate change on armed conflict?

Buhaug, H. 2010. "Reply to Burke et al.: Bias and Climate War Research." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 107(51): E186–87.

Burke, M. B. et al. 2009. "Warming Increases the Risk of Civil War in Africa." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 106(49): 20670–74.

Hendrix, Cullen S. 2017. "The Streetlight Effect in Climate Change Research on Africa." *Global Environmental Change* 43: 137–47.

Koubi, Vally. 2019. "Climate Change and Conflict." *Annual Review of Political Science* (22): 343–60.

Mach, Katharine J. et al. 2019. "Climate as a Risk Factor for Armed Conflict." *Nature* 571(7764): 193–97.

Salehyan, Idean. 2008. "From Climate Change to Conflict? No Consensus Yet." *Journal of Peace Research* 45(3): 315–26.

Schultz, Kenneth A., and Justin S. Mankin. 2019. "Is Temperature Exogenous? The Impact of Civil Conflict on the Instrumental Climate Record in Sub-Saharan Africa." *American Journal of Political Science* 63(4): 723–39.

### **Week 4: Non-violent Contention and the Environment**

- What impact does the environment have on protest and other non-violent forms of contention?

Coates, Robert, and Jeff Garmany. 2017. "The Ecology of Citizenship: Understanding Vulnerability in Urban Brazil." *International Development Planning Review* 39(1): 37–56.

Hendrix, Cullen S., and Stephan Haggard. 2015. "Global Food Prices, Regime Type, and Urban Unrest in the Developing World." *Journal of Peace Research* 52(2): 143–57.

Javier, Auyero. 2014. "Toxic Waiting: Flammable Shantytown Revisited." In *Cities From Scratch: Poverty and Informality in Urban Latin America*, eds. Javier Auyero, Fischer Brodwyn, McCann Bryan, and Murphy Edward. Chap. 9.

Koubi, Vally, Quynh Nguyen, Gabriele Spilker, and Tobias Böhmelt. 2021. "Environmental Migrants and Social-Movement Participation." *Journal of Peace Research* 58(1): 18–32.

Petrova, Kristina. 2021. "Natural Hazards, Internal Migration and Protests in Bangladesh." *Journal of Peace Research* 58(1): 33–49.

Tilly, Charles, and Sidney G. Tarrow. 2015. *Contentious Politics*. Second edition, fully revised and updated. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Part one. **Start with this reading.**

### **Week 5: Environmental Peacebuilding**

- Environmental peacebuilding solves problems traditional security-based approaches cannot. Discuss.

Cohn, Carol, and Claire Duncanson. 2020. "Women, Peace and Security in a Changing Climate." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 22(5): 742–62.

Conca, Ken, and Geoffrey D. Dabelko, eds. 2003. *Environmental Peacemaking*. Washington, D.C. : Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Center Press ; Johns Hopkins University Press. p. 1-23, 220-234.

Dresse, Anaïs, Itay Fischhendler, Jonas Østergaard Nielsen, and Dimitrios Zikos. 2019. "Environmental Peacebuilding: Towards a Theoretical Framework." *Cooperation and Conflict* 54(1): 99–119.

Gustafsson, Maria-Therese, and Almut Schilling-Vacaflor. 2021. "Indigenous Peoples and Multiscalar Environmental Governance: The Opening and Closure of Participatory Spaces." *Global Environmental Politics*: 1–25.

Ide, Tobias et al. 2021. "The Past and Future(s) of Environmental Peacebuilding." *International Affairs* 97(1): 1–16.

Schrooten, Philip, and Jolan Silkens. 2021. "Environmental Peacebuilding and Civil-Military Engagement in the Sahel: Turning a Threat Multiplier into a Force Multiplier." *Small Wars Journal*. <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/environmental-peacebuilding-and-civil-military-engagement-sahel-turning-threat-multiplier?>

Yoshida, Keina, Hannah Bond, and Helen Kezie-Nwoha. 2021. *Defending the Future: Gender, Conflict, and Environmental Peace*. London: LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security/Gender Action for Peace and Security/the Women's International Peace Centre. <https://www.lse.ac.uk/women-peace-security/publications/Defending-the-Future-Gender-Conflict-and-Environmental-Peace>.

## **Week 6: Food and Agriculture**

- What factors can reduce a country's risk of agriculture-based conflict?

Busby, Joshua, and Nina von Uexkull. 2018. "Climate Shocks and Humanitarian Crises." *Foreign Affairs*.

Caruso, Raul, Ilaria Petrarca, and Roberto Ricciuti. 2016. "Climate Change, Rice Crops, and Violence: Evidence from Indonesia." *Journal of Peace Research* 53(1): 66–83.

Iglesias, A., S. Quiroga, and A. Diz. 2011. "Looking into the Future of Agriculture in a Changing Climate." *European Review of Agricultural Economics* 38(3): 427–47.

International Crisis Group. 2020. *The Central Sahel Scene of New Climate Wars?* Brussels: International Crisis Group. <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/b154-sahel-new-climate-wars.pdf>.

Jones, Benjamin T, Eleonora Mattiacci, and Bear F Braumoeller. 2017. "Food Scarcity and State Vulnerability: Unpacking the Link between Climate Variability and Violent Unrest." *Journal of Peace Research* 54(3): 335–50.

Koren, Ore, and Benjamin E Bagozzi. 2017. "Living off the Land: The Connection between Cropland, Food Security, and Violence against Civilians." *Journal of Peace Research* 54(3): 351–64.

von Uexkull, Nina, Mihai Croicu, Hanne Fjelde, and Halvard Buhaug. 2016. "Civil Conflict Sensitivity to Growing-Season Drought." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113(44): 12391–96.

## **Week 7: Water**

- "The wars of the next century will be about freshwater." Discuss.

Beck, Andrea. 2014. "Drought, Dams, and Survival: Linking Water to Conflict and Cooperation in Syria's Civil War." *International Affairs Forum* 5(1): 11–22.

De Châtel, Francesca. 2014. "The Role of Drought and Climate Change in the Syrian Uprising: Untangling the Triggers of the Revolution." *Middle Eastern Studies* 50(4): 521–35.

De Stefano, Lucia et al. 2012. "Climate Change and the Institutional Resilience of International River Basins." *Journal of Peace Research* 49(1): 193–209.

Dinar, Shlomi. 2009. "Scarcity and Cooperation Along International Rivers." *Global Environmental Politics* 9(1): 109–35.

Jones, Aled. 2017. "Food Security: How Drought and Rising Prices Led to Conflict in Syria." *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/food-security-how-drought-and-rising-prices-led-to-conflict-in-syria-71539>.

Selby, Jan, Omar S. Dahi, Christiane Fröhlich, and Mike Hulme. 2017. "Climate Change and the Syrian Civil War Revisited." *Political Geography* 60: 232–44.

Shidore, Sarang. 2020. *Climate Change and the India-Pakistan Rivalry*. Council on Strategic Risks. Briefer.

Wolleb, Hans Petter, Nils Petter Gleditsch, and Håvard Hegre. 2000. "Shared Rivers and Interstate Conflict." *Political Geography* (19): 971–96.

Brochmann, Marit, and Nils Petter Gleditsch. 2012. "Shared Rivers and Conflict – A Reconsideration." *Political Geography* 31(8): 519–27.

### **Week 8: Migration**

- Instead of a weekly essay, please turn in your final essay outline

Bosetti, Valentina, Cristina Cattaneo, and Giovanni Peri. 2021. "Should They Stay or Should They Go? Climate Migrants and Local Conflicts." *Journal of Economic Geography* 21(4): 619–51.

Bustos, Camila et al. 2021. *Shelter from the Storm: Policy Options to Address Climate Induced Displacement from the Northern Triangle*. Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinical Program, HLS Immigration Project, University Network for Human Rights, Yale Immigrant Justice Project, Yale Environmental Law Association.

Missirian, Anouch, and Wolfram Schlenker. 2017. "Asylum Applications Respond to Temperature Fluctuations." *Science* 358(6370): 1610–14.

Mitchell, Sara McLaughlin, and Elise Pizzi. 2021. "Natural Disasters, Forced Migration, and Conflict: The Importance of Government Policy Responses." *International Studies Review* 23(3): 580–604.

Reuveny, Rafael. 2007. "Climate Change-Induced Migration and Violent Conflict." *Political Geography* 26(6): 656–73.

Sigelmann, Laura. 2019. *The Hidden Driver: Climate Change and Migration in Central America's Northern Triangle*. American Security Project.  
<https://www.americansecurityproject.org/perspective-climate-change-and-migration-in-central-americas-northern-triangle/>.

Werz, Michael, and Laura Conley. 2012. *Climate Change, Migration, and Conflict*. Washington D.C.: Center for American Progress.

### **Additional Resources:**

There are a plethora of other resources on different facets of climate change and security or climate change and development that I would encourage you to consult. A handful of these are listed below:

- This *Foreign Policy* [special report](#) on environment, fragility, and conflict.

- The Woodrow Wilson Center's [New Security Beat](#) blog and the Environmental Change and Security Program [publications](#).
- Climate Security Expert Network [report library](#) for risks by region and policy briefs.
- The Environmental Peacebuilding Association's [library](#) with publications sorted by theme and region.
- Climate Diplomacy's [magazine](#) and [podcast](#) series.
- The International Crisis Group and their [podcast series](#), which [sometimes touches on](#) issues related climate and crisis.
- The [Climate Security Bookshelf](#), compiled by Sharon Burke and Calli Obern of Ecospherics (and formerly of New America)