

The Tempest Within: Reconciling Disagreements on Climate-Conflict Links for Security Practitioners

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Abstract

How dire are the security implications of climate change? Research findings on the relationship between climate and conflict are diverse and contested, leaving policymakers of various types uncertain about productive ways to integrate climate into risk assessments and action plans. This talk reflects on the benefits of inclusive, rather than confrontational, approaches to reconciling scholarly and scientific disagreements. Using a recent expert elicitation-based, consensus-building exercise as a positive case study (Mach et al. 2019), this talk demonstrates how academic communities can make their work both more legible and representative when engaging with policy practitioners.

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Reconciling Disagreements on Climate-Conflict Links

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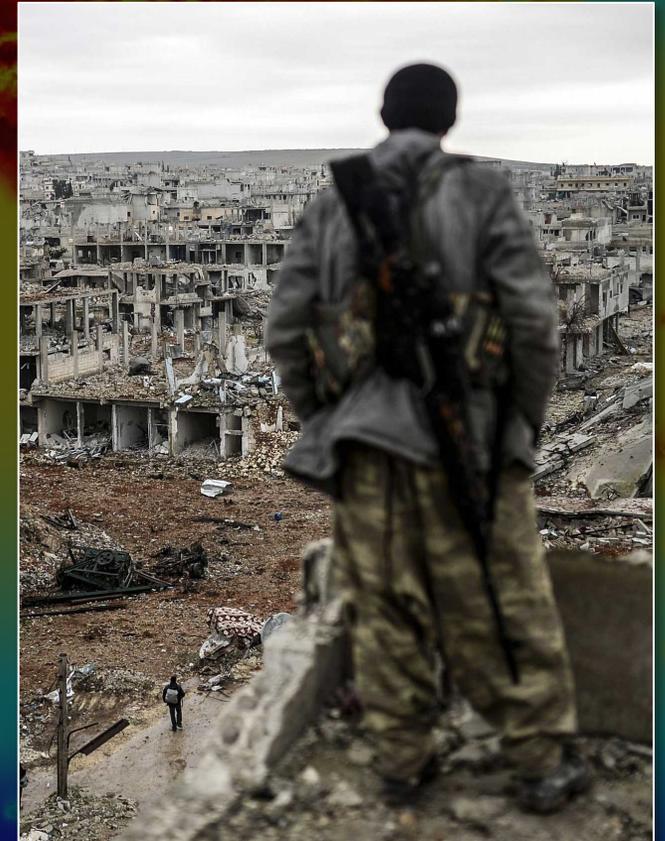
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Motivation: Significant policymaker interest in climate-conflict linkages fueled by emblematic cases (Darfur, Syria); conflicting scholarly evidence contributes to policymaker confusion, illegibility, and inaction

Problem: Adversarial scientific discourse incentivizes clear, unambiguous positions and accentuation of areas of disagreement; promotes practitioner confusion, overstatement of disagreement and understatement of consensus, and disengagement/policy stasis

Solution: Use of integrative discourse to identify areas of consensus and disagreement in a broad state of knowledge, rather than via scholarly debate; promotes legible findings and clarifies reasons for continuing disagreement

Method: Discussion of recent expert elicitation exercise (Mach et al. 2019, Nature) to compare/contrast models of scientific discourse; discuss barriers to practitioner engagement



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Elicitation: main results identify modest historical impacts, much larger impacts under plausible future scenarios (4°C), small impact relative to other known drivers

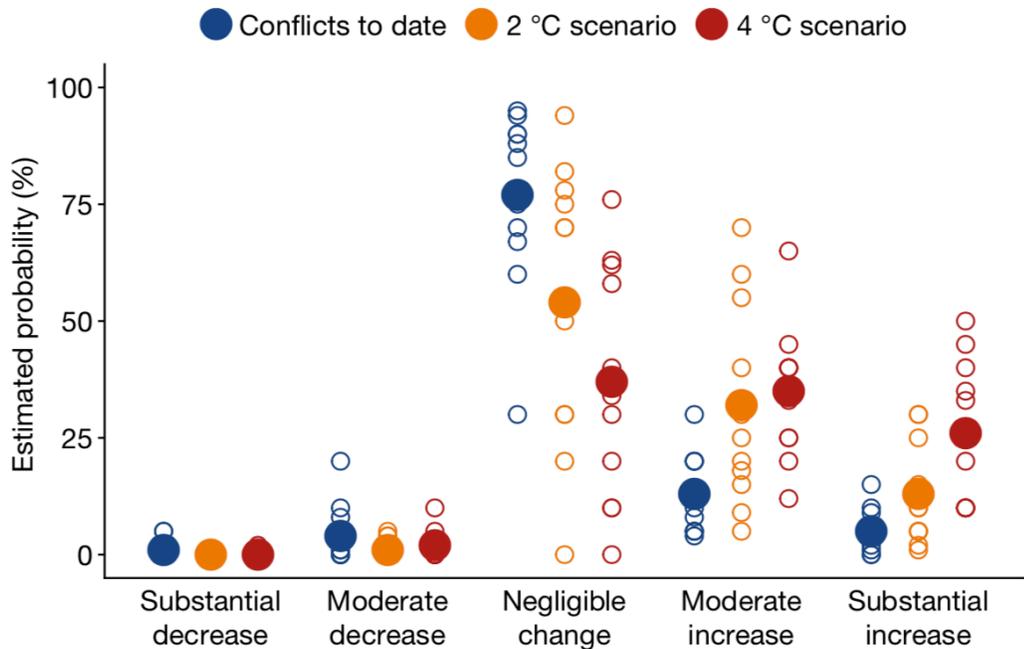


Fig. 2 | Estimated changes in the relationship between climate and conflict risk under increasing climate change. For three scenarios, each expert estimated the likelihood that climate leads to negligible, moderate or substantial changes in conflict risk. For violent conflicts to date (blue), probability estimates indicate how frequently climate variability and change have led to the specified changes in conflict risk. For the approximately 2°C (orange) and approximately 4°C (red) warming scenarios, probability estimates indicate potential changes in conflict risk compared to the current climate. For these hypothetical 2°C and 4°C scenarios, each expert considered associated effects of climate change for current societies, assuming current levels of, for example, socioeconomic development, population and government capacity. Open circles, individual estimates; filled circles, mean across experts.

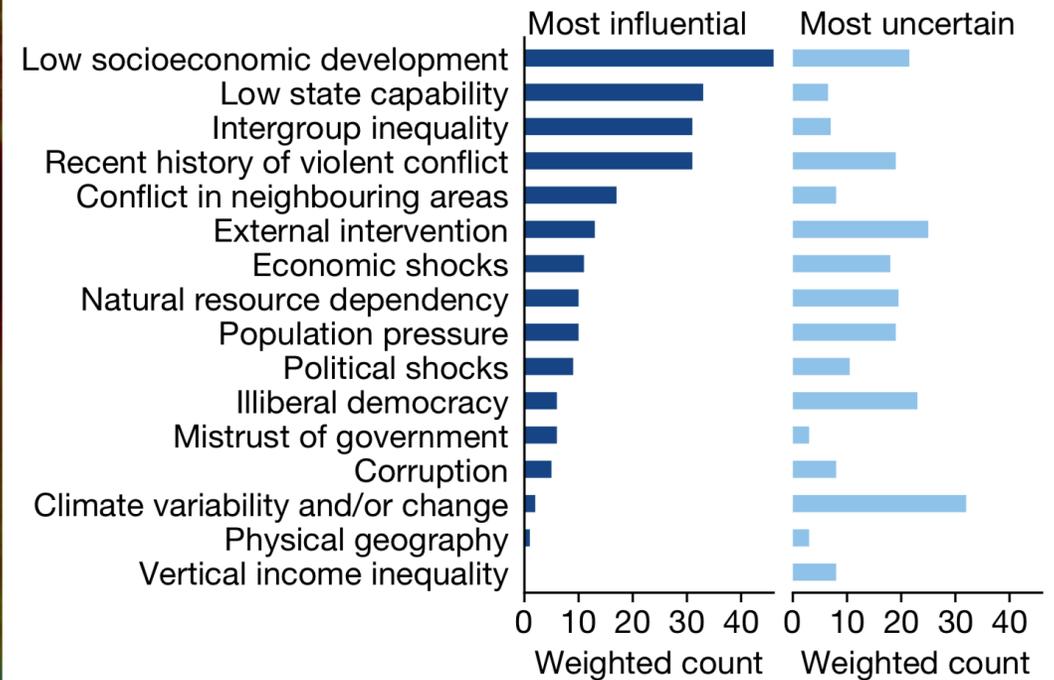


Fig. 3 | Factors that drive conflict risk and their relationship to climate in experiences to date. a, Rankings of causal factors that influence conflict risk the most. Each expert individually ranked six causal factors that have influenced violent conflict the most to date and then ranked six causal factors for which there is the most uncertainty about their influence. Aggregated weighted rankings of the causal factors are indicated: a factor ranked first in the listing of an expert is assigned a value of 6, through to a value of 1 for a factor ranked sixth. b, c, The relationship between factors

Conclusions

Relevance: Academic-national security partnerships entail interface of communities with different modes of discourse, different expectations about how to characterize agreement and uncertainty; partnerships requires acclimation by both communities

Broader Impacts: Scientific engagement with policymakers and practitioners requires understanding how our discourse “reads” to these audiences and general public; elicitation exercises and integrative techniques (IPCC) provide cues for how to better inform decision makers

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