

# Scientists offer roadmap for studying link between climate and armed conflict

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People gather around a community well in Mauritania, Africa. A severe drought led to a major food crisis in the region in 2012. Credit: University of Miami

Climate change—from rising temperatures and more severe heavy rain, to drought—is increasing risks for economies, human security, and conflict globally. Scientists at the University of Miami (UM) Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science are leading an effort to better assess the climate-conflict link to help societies manage the

complex risks of increased violence from a changing climate.

The links between [climate](#) and the risk of violent conflict are well studied; however, scientists in varying research disciplines often disagree about the scope and severity of possible [climate change](#) impacts. Some of the open research questions are about the links between climate change and violence, including large-scale [armed conflict](#).

In a new report in *Earth's Future*, a group of scholars, with backgrounds including environmental and political science, geography, and economics, analyze the relationship between climate and organized armed conflict to define crosscutting priorities for future directions of research. In a previous assessment published in 2019 by the group, it was estimated that over the last century between 3-20 percent of organized armed conflict risk has been influenced by climate.

In this new assessment, the scholars suggest that future directions for climate-conflict research include deepening insight on what the links are, when they matter, and how they manifest. They suggest that future research can use data from diverse sources, including satellite and drone imagery, social media, and population surveys.

"Our changing climate poses threats for [human security](#)," said Katharine Mach, an associate professor at the UM Rosenstiel School and lead author of the assessment. "In this commentary perspective, we provide a roadmap for future research that is supportive of appropriate societal responses. The options include deepening our understanding of how climate shapes security and conflict risks, as well as the ways in which research can prioritize ethical, interactive, and ongoing engagement with the many organizations and governments promoting peace and stability in societies."

Changes in Earth's climate are already impacting societies and

economies and will further increase the risks of a range of outcomes, including civil conflict, which is profoundly and enduringly destructive for societies. Comprehensive and transdisciplinary efforts are needed to fully understand the multifaceted links between climate and conflict and appropriate responses by governments and humanitarian assistance organizations.

"This research topic is controversial and contested," said Caroline Kraan, a Ph.D. student in the Abess Graduate Program in Environmental Science and Policy. "We came together to provide a full range of expert views to establish a way forward for research that can serve decision-making needs."

According to the authors, priorities for future directions of research include (1) deepening insight into climate-conflict linkages and conditions under which they manifest, (2) ambitiously integrating research designs, (3) systematically exploring future risks and response options, responsive to ongoing decision-making, and (4) evaluating the effectiveness of interventions to manage climate-[conflict](#) links.

**More information:** Katharine J. Mach et al, Directions for Research on Climate and Conflict, *Earth's Future* (2020). [DOI: 10.1029/2020EF001532](#)

Provided by University of Miami

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