SO2H1-15 Contention, Conflict, and Climate Change

24/25

Department
  Sociology
Level
  Undergraduate Level 2
Module leader
  Jamie Shenk
Credit value
  15
Module duration
  10 weeks
Assessment
  100% coursework
Study location
  University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

How have changes in the natural environment affected political and social development globally? How have climate change and natural disasters inspired and fueled different forms of social contention from social movements to armed conflict? Can collaboration over environmental issues provide a framework for broader peace? As the world warms, a growing body of evidence has pointed to strong links between climate and conflict in both developed and developing countries.

This module explores changes in the natural environment and the climate crisis through the lens of conflict, security, and peacebuilding, aiming to familiarize students with both academic and policy debates around climate security and development. After an introduction to key theoretical perspectives on climate security and environmental justice, the module explores a range of perspectives and case studies related to contentious politics and the environment, including non-violent resistance, armed environmental conflict, climate security, and climate-induced migration. Throughout the module, we will consider whose voices are represented in these debates—who does security and peace serve?

Module aims

This module aims to explore the relationship between the natural environment and different forms of contentious politics, from social movements to armed conflict. It aims to provide students with a critical introduction to the meaning and evolution of climate security, focusing in particular on debates over human versus military security, and how these different perspectives impact policy debates. The module aims to situate this debate within its broader social, historical, and political context. Through case studies of different environmental conflicts throughout the globe, the module also asks to connect these different understandings of security to different key issues in field.

Key aims:

- Provide an introduction to the range of actions within contentious politics and the relationships between them.
- Provide a critical introduction to the key principles of climate security and how it is has evolved over time.
- Critically assess how climate security is practiced in relation to different issue areas, including water, food and agriculture, natural resource extraction, and migration.
- Critically assess how social scientists form causal claims about climate change and armed conflict.
- Evaluate key policy debates over climate security.
- Identify inequalities in climate security.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

1. Introduction: What is security? What is the environment?
2. Contentious climate politics: from social movements to war
3. The Principles of Environmental Security
4. Climate and Conflict: Does climate change cause war?
5. Non-violent contention and the environment
6. Environmental peacebuilding
7. Food and Agriculture
8. Water
9. Migration

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Illustrate an awareness of how these different approaches to climate security may be applied globally and alternatives.
- Critically analyze the major points of contention in debates over the connection between climate change and armed conflict/non-violent contention.
- Develop skills in applying empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks from academic texts to inform an argument.
- Develop skills in accessing and evaluating relevant literature for seminar discussion,

presentations, independent study, research and essay writing.
- Address the aims and objectives of the module demonstrating close engagement with module materials

Indicative reading list

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.

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

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

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

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):

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 .

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.

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

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

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.

Research element

Students taking this module will need to actively engage with empirical research on the natural environment, social movements, and armed conflict and will need to be able to interpret policy documents and data on environmental changes.

Interdisciplinary

The module draws from sociology, politics, security studies, peace studies, environmental studies, and ecology.

International

The module draws on examples from across the globe, including Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East.

Subject specific skills

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the key principles, and practices of climate security.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the range of actions under contentious politics.
3. Demonstrate and understanding of the evolution of thinking around climate security.
4. Analyze the links between climate shocks and social movement activity/violent contention.
5. Critically assess the contributions of environmental peacebuilding to debates over climate and conflict.
6. Compare and evaluate theories of human and military security.
7. Critically analyze inequalities in climate security.
8. Assess empirical evidence on connections between climate shocks and contentious politics.
9. Demonstrate an understanding of how to apply theoretical debates to empirical case studies.

Transferable skills

- Students will have demonstrated a systematic understanding of key aspects of environmental security and contentious politics, including detailed knowledge, at least some of which is informed by the forefront of peace and conflict research; an ability to deploy techniques of analysis and enquiry within sociology, which enables the student to
o Devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems.
o To describe and comment on contemporary conversations about climate change and key policy debates over conflict and migration more generally.
- The ability to manage their own learning and make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (for example, refereed research articles and/or policy position papers).
- The ability the apply the methods and techniques they have learned to review, consolidate, extend, and apply their knowledge and understanding to initiate and carry out projects.
- The ability to critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data to make judgements and identify a range of solutions to a problem.
- To communicate information, ideas, problems, and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences.
- The qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring: the learning ability needed to undertake appropriate further training of a professional or equivalent nature.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	9 sessions of 1 hour (4%)
Seminars	9 sessions of 1 hour (4%)
Private study	132 hours (57%)
Assessment	80 hours (35%)
Total	230 hours

Private study description

Reading for seminars. Preparation for seminars . Preparation of presentations. Preparation and writing of formative work. Preparation and writing of summative work.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A

Assessment component	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Assessed Essay	100%	80 hours	Yes (extension)

A 3,000-word essay from a list of given questions or a question devised by the student and approved by the module leader.

Reassessment component is the same

Feedback on assessment

Written feedback will be provided on tabula.

Availability

Courses

This module is Optional for:

- Year 2 of USOA-L301 BA in Sociology
- Year 2 of USOA-L314 Undergraduate Sociology and Criminology

This module is Option list D for:

- Year 2 of UHIA-VL13 Undergraduate History and Sociology
- Year 2 of UHIA-VL15 Undergraduate History and Sociology (with a term in Venice)