



# Climate Change and Conflict

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## Background

- The talk is based in my involvement in a World Bank report on the social development implications of climate change in Latin America, and my forthcoming article in *Social Development Issues* (Lyceum Books).
- This presentation will just give you the general points.



## Conclusion

- NIAS and ADI are very important academic institutions for climate change and conflict research.
- Outline:
  - Existing empirical evidence.
  - Suggestions on how to proceed.



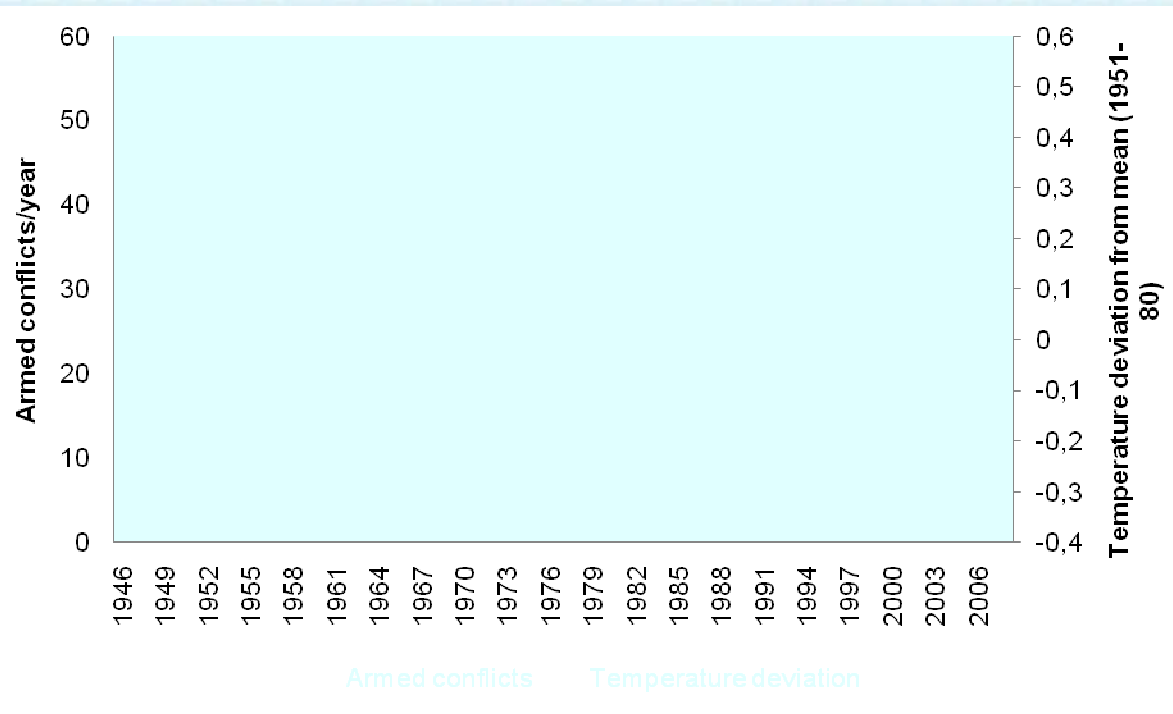
## Existing qualitative studies

- Methodological problems:
  - Purposely selected cases: Coincidence rather than causal processes
  - Excludes cases of increased cooperation
- Despite this:
  - Conflicts involving environmental factors appear to have been intra-state and small in scale.
  - It is difficult to find cases that unequivocally point to environmental degradation as the main driving factor behind conflict.



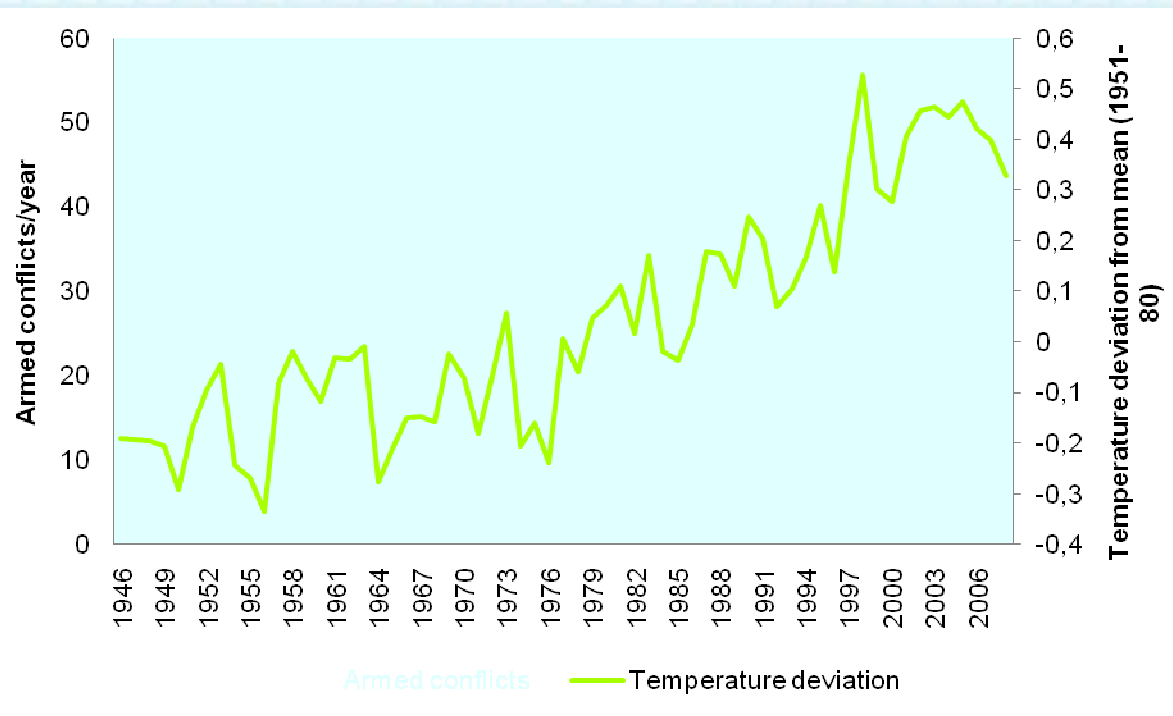
# Existing quantitative studies

- Systematic quantitative research yields even less evidence of a link between climate change and conflict.
- Trends of temperature deviations and occurrence of armed conflicts, 1946-2008



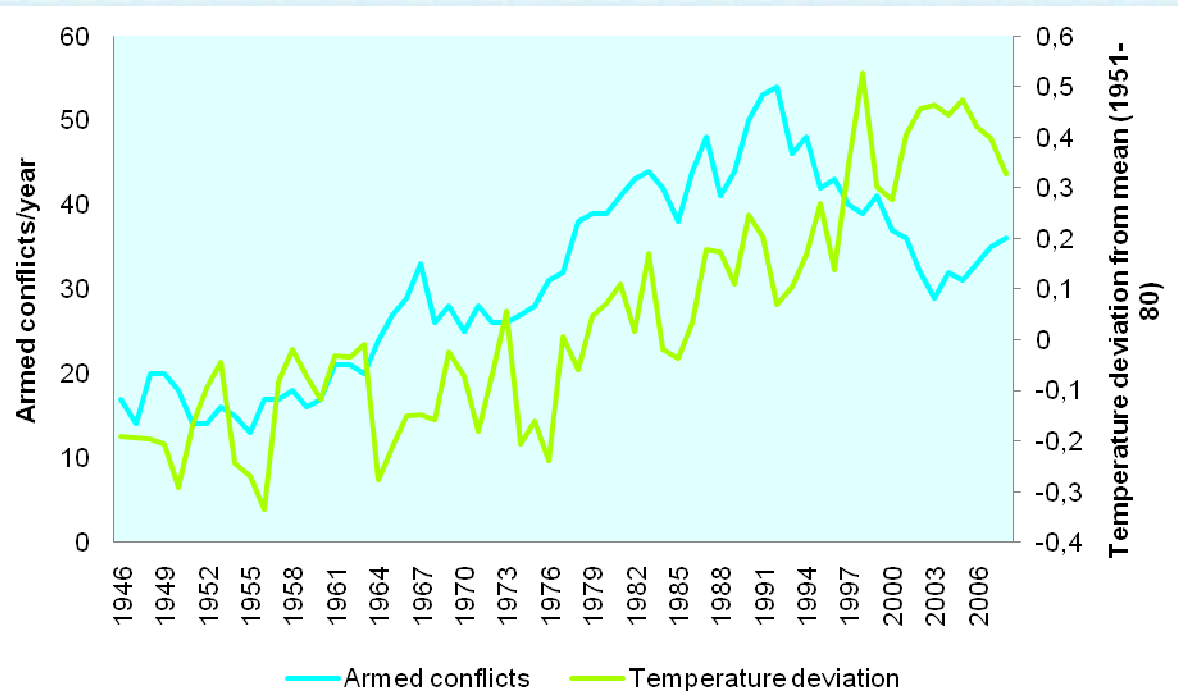
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**So the evidence linking climate change to conflict is not very convincing in many of the existing academic studies!**



## Return to basics!

- Existing studies risk seriously underestimating the impact of climate change on conflict.
- One of the few *iron laws* of the Social Sciences is that a situation of change, regardless of whether the shock is climatic or political, is conducive to conflict.
- Change produces winners and losers, and it introduces opportunities to mobilize groups to contest existing social orders.



## Focal points for future research

- 1) Disaggregation
- 2) Dynamic effects
- 3) Cumulative and threshold effects

*More traditional analysis*

- 4) Opportunities
- 5) Mobilization
- 6) Non-violent conflicts & violence

*Change of direction*



## 4) Opportunities

- Future impacts of global warming on conflicts are likely to be triggered as much by changes in opportunities as by changes in scarcities.
- Some of the most elaborate cross-country studies of conflict conclude that proxies for opportunity do well at explaining conflict, while most proxies for scarcities turn out to be less significant.
- For instance, the studies have shown that having a dispersed population, or having a mountainous terrain, appear to increase the risk of conflict, since these two factors work to the advantage of rebel groups that are capable of operating beyond the government's reach.
- The effects of climate change could mimic these variables by undermining state logistics, making the terrain impassable, or dispersing vulnerable populations.



## 5) Political mobilization

- Existing studies fail to take into account that the *perception* of climate change is changing.
- Natural disasters that used to be blamed on nature are now increasingly blamed on humankind.
- It is difficult to mobilize against Mother Nature— but easier to mobilize against someone who can be held accountable for the disasters.
- Cleavage between the poor (who bear the brunt of the adverse consequences of climate change) and the wealthy (who are mainly responsible for global warming) locally, nationally, and globally,
- Discourse: Uganda's president calls climate change “an act of aggression from the Western World” and a Namibian UN-diplomat calls climate change “low-intensity biological and chemical warfare”



## 6) Non-violent conflicts

- Conflict resolution does not take the form of a dichotomous outcome that is either violent (bad) or peaceful (good).
- Power and coercion can be exercised in a multidimensional way that might or might not include violence.
- Conflicts over environmental resources have the potential to turn violent, but even if they do not, they might lead to suboptimal situation of distrusts, lack of cooperation, marginalization of certain groups, and unproductive rent-seeking behavior.

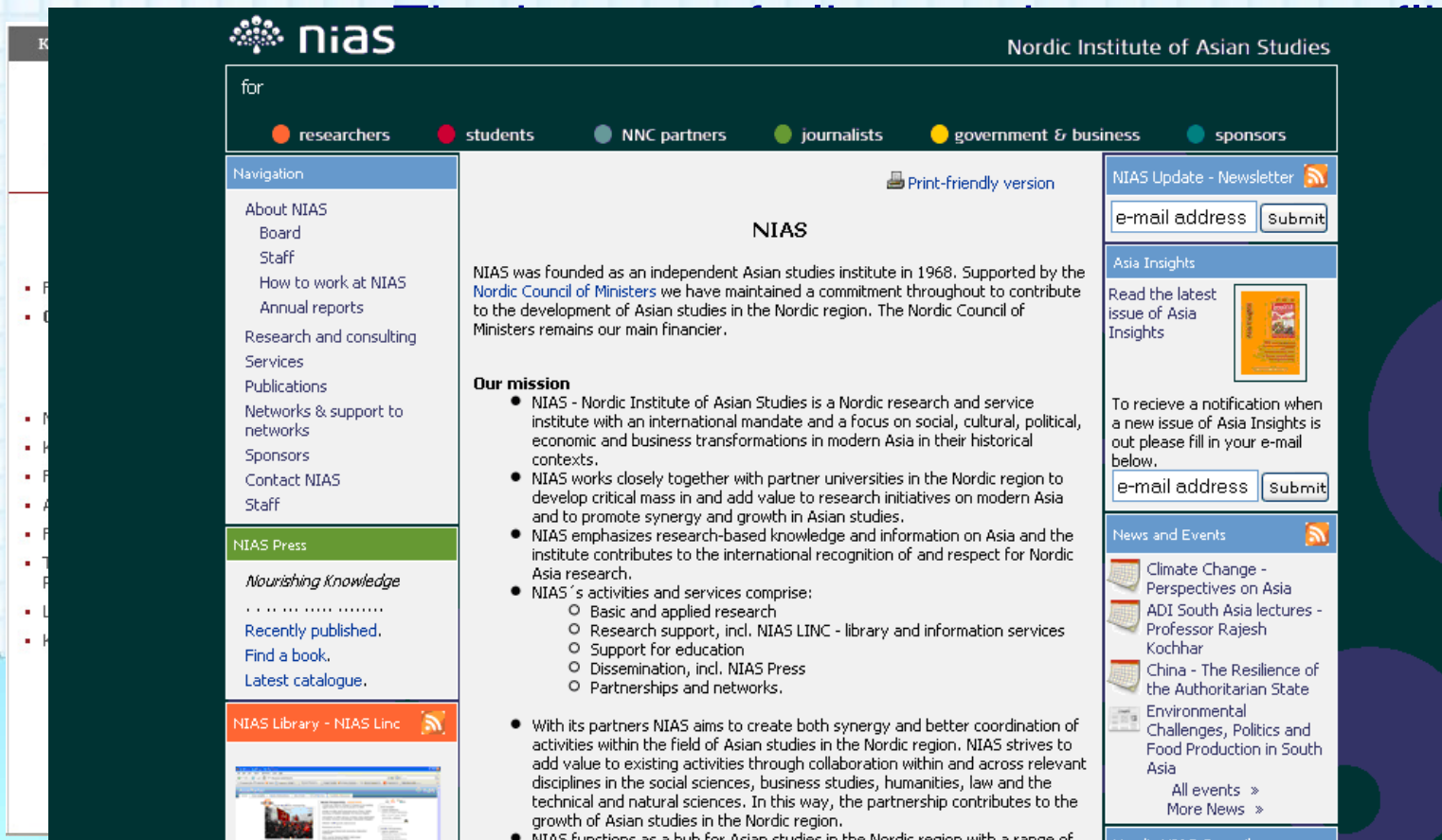


## 6) (cont'd) Day-to-day violence

- Climate change might also have adverse impacts on violence in small communal or household settings.
- This type of unstructured violence without any clear link to conflicts appears widespread.
- Climate change (by transforming livelihoods and social structures) could spur social violence in non-conflict situations.
- Research shows how rapid socioeconomic changes might have destabilizing effects not only on societies but also within families, leading to an increased risk of domestic violence.



# In conclusion



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