Climate Change, Natural Resources, and Pathways to Conflict

Coordinator

Megan Becker, School of International Relations
Co-PI, Security and Political Economy (SPEC) Lab

Summary

What, if any, is the connection between resources and conflict? Many journalistic accounts assume resource scarcity caused by climactic change leads to conflict and that resource abundance from natural resources also does; researchers, however, have not reached a consensus on these matters. In fact, they believe that the connection is strongly conditioned by other factors: type of climactic change, whether it is change itself or uncertainty over future changes, the political institutions of a country and the policies they pursue, and the extent to which these issues mobilize citizens in response. Understanding these issues is critical to the education of global citizens and can inform future policies at domestic and international levels.

Finding solutions to the impacts of environmental change is a Wicked Problem, unlikely to be achieved within the context of a single academic discipline. Interdisciplinary collaboration is vital to the enterprise and a natural fit for polymathic pursuit. Natural scientists can help us understand the long- and short-term trends underlying environmental change; social scientists, the ways in which both individuals and organizations respond to these challenges; humanities scholars, the broader historical and social context and ethical dilemmas associated with societal responses. But understanding is not the end, but rather a starting point for education and action. Using the toolkits of communications, interactive technologies, and the arts can help us inform communities and stakeholders in a compelling manner that inspires action.

This Collaboratory will bring together students from disparate fields to produce a multimedia website that allows visitors to:

1. Review current research findings on climate, resources and conflict;
2. Explore quantitative data on trends related to climate change, environmental degradation, natural resource extraction and social and violent conflict;
3. Read case studies from across the globe in which environmentally-motivated conflict has occurred;
4. Watch a three-minute animated explainer video;
5. Engage in an interactive game that puts them in the position of either policymaker or citizen activist, asking them to make decisions about what to do when faced with these environmental crises.
While all students should apply, we are looking for at least one or two students with particular skills in communications (journalism, marketing); data visualization using R or Python; GIS or working with geo-coded data; Photoshop; animation; video production; web design; game design.

**Meeting Times**

This collaboratory will meet each Wednesday from 2:00pm – 3:30pm throughout Fall 2019. The Spring 2020 schedule will be determined in consultation with participating students.