



Climate change, and violence in Kenya: the key mediating roles of food insecurity and migration

Professor John O'Loughlin,

Institute of Behavioral Science at the University of Colorado, Boulder, USA

As global temperatures rise, and climate change projections show dramatic impacts on sub-Saharan African countries, the evidence for the struggle over scarce resource is increasingly focused on the experiences of households in local contexts. Large-scale aggregate data analysis has shown that local political conditions and the economic ability of households to cope with scarcity are important factors in predicting the onset and location of violence. What this research cannot show is the motivations and experiences of households in the most vulnerable environments. Studying a variety of ecological and ethnic regions of Kenya, in a sample of locations requires both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Adding climate and environmental change information for the sample points provides the context for this integrative analysis.

Important policy and academic works foresee a massive rise in forced migration and increasing conflict in sub-Saharan Africa as the climate changes. The resource scarcity scenario expects increased competition between armed groups with lowered opportunity costs of engaging in violence and easier recruiting by extremist groups. Food security is central to the debate. Research in the form of large statistical aggregate works, ethnographic accounts in multiple sites and surveys of violence experiences and support for violence does not support the alarmist expectations. In the talk, results from Sub-Saharan African aggregate analyses as well as surveys and field work in multiple sites in Kenya illustrate these public debates and academic disputes.