



# **Extreme Climate Events and Conflicts in the G5 Sahel Countries**

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## **Key messages**

- The occurrence and intensity of both extreme climate events and conflicts are increasing in G5 Sahel countries.
- This has led to a contentious debate among scholars about any association between climate events and conflicts.
- The difference in conflicts and climate variables and data sources may explain a large part of the controversy in the literature.

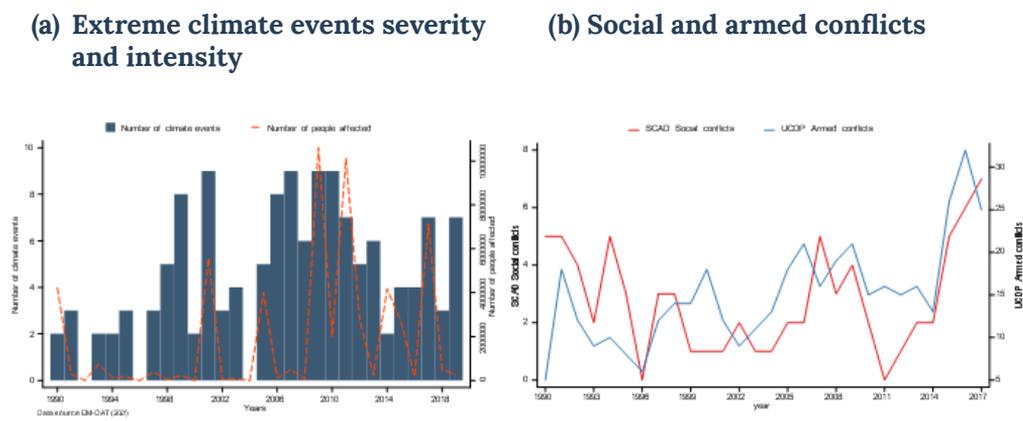
- Extreme climate events increase the risk of social conflicts by 9% the same year 13% the next year.
- Extreme climate events are associated with spontaneous social unrest rather than armed and organized conflicts in the Sahel.

## Context and importance of the problem

Climate change affects population and economic activities dynamic and thereby puts additional pressure on scarce resources. These dynamics have the potential to trigger conflicts or exacerbate the existing ones. According to Homer-Dixon (1999), arid regions in Africa, in particular, are prone to ‘scarcity-induced conflicts’.

This policy brief aims to share insights on climate and conflicts nexus with a specific focus on the G5-Sahel countries. To do so, we use both country and cell level analysis. The G5 Sahel countries are trapped in a complex socio-political environment and multiple factors may contribute to conflicts. Isolating the contribution of each factor is critical to designing and implementing conflict mitigation and peace-building policies. The G5-Sahel country members (Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad) are experiencing both an increase in conflicts and extreme climate events in terms of occurrence, and intensity reinforcing the suspicion about any association. Figure 1 shows the number of extreme climate events and the number of people affected on the one hand (a) and the number of conflicts on the other hand (b). We observe an increase in both events over the last decades.

**Figure 1: Extreme climate events and conflicts in the G5-Sahel**



# Results and implications

## Summary of the evidence

- The difference in conflicts and climate variables and data sources may explain a large part of the disagreement in climate conflicts literature in Africa.
- Extreme climate events increase the risk of social conflicts by 9% the same year 13% the next year. This effect is driven by floods rather than droughts.
- The effect is not significant for armed conflicts resulting in at least 25 battle-related deaths a year. The effect is also found to be direct rather than mediating through economic or institutional factors.
- These results suggest that extreme climate events are associated with spontaneous social unrest rather than armed and organized conflicts in the Sahel.

## Policy recommendations

Three policy recommendations emerge from these findings:

- First, at the regional level, G5 Sahel countries should consider climate change and environmental policy at the core of their stabilization policy. The current organization of the G5 Sahel does not consider the environmental and climate issue.
- Second, people's vulnerability and exposure determine how they are affected by climate change. Climate change's adaptation policies should target vulnerable and exposed populations to limit the effect of extreme climate events.
- Finally, governments may consider developing social safety net policies for affected people.

## Source consulted

Homer-Dixon, T. F. (1999). *Environment, scarcity, and violence*. Princeton University Press.



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