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2014

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citation for published version (APA)

Bretthauer, J. M. (2014). *Pathways to Peace - Pathways to Conflict: A Qualitative Comparative Analysis of Social, Economic and Political Conditions in Situations of Resource Scarcity*. VU University Amsterdam.

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Does climate change cause conflicts? While the public debate carried by journalists, international organisations and governments supports the notion of “climate wars”, citing examples such as the Darfur conflict, academic research paints a more complex picture. There are strong theoretic arguments linking one aspect of climate change, scarcity of resources, to conflict. However, empirical accounts linking resource scarcity and violent conflict are contradictory with some case studies supporting this link but most quantitative studies finding no or only weak links.

This study argues that the different economic, social and political situations in different countries explain why some countries with low levels of livelihood resources (such as freshwater and arable land) experience conflicts while others do not. Using a fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA), it compares 22 political, economic and social conditions across 30 resource scarce countries. The focus therefore is not on the question if scarcity leads to conflict, but on how conditions such as the level of development, the dependence on exports and oil, the type of regime or adaptive capacities explain peace and conflict in resource scarce countries

The results show that there are three types of resource-scarce countries that experience conflicts: (Neo)patrimonial states, oil-rich states that are poorly integrated into the global economy and least developed states. It also shows that there are two types of resource scarce countries that remain peaceful: Countries that are non-agrarian with even development between groups and countries that are non-agrarian and well-integrated into the global economy with high levels of adaptive capacities. This explains the contradictory results of previous empirical studies and suggests that resource scarcity might contribute to conflict in least developed countries.

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ISBN 978-94-6203-626-0

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PATHWAYS TO PEACE – PATHWAYS TO CONFLICT

A QUALITATIVE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS IN SITUATIONS OF RESOURCE SCARCITY

Judith M. Bretthauer

