

Violence, Vulnerability and Migration

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The environmental security literature has generally focused on rural vulnerability to climate change and it has linked rural risks to both violence and migration. This paper branches out from typical environmental security discourse in acknowledging the parameters of urban vulnerability to ecological change and suggesting it is a seriously understudied phenomena. Rural and urban vulnerabilities are not entirely unrelated- internal migration is often suggested as an avenue for rural people to limit the direct effects of climate change on their livelihoods. However, this paper will demonstrate how migration to urban areas creates new vulnerabilities for internal migrants, as urban areas have a myriad of additional vulnerabilities including understudied ecological risks and exposure. Further, new migrants face a markedly higher rate of violence in urban areas: While the relationship between violence and rural vulnerability is both exaggerated and accusatory, urban residents face a higher mean rate of violence and higher intermittent risks during commodity or election crisis, which may be indirectly driven by environmental issues and change.

The major purpose of this paper is to assess whether and to what extent migration processes between rural and urban areas lead to an increase in vulnerability, and particularly in vulnerability to violence, poverty and indirect ecological harm. In the process of doing this, it is necessary to reassess the tenets of the environmental security literature, especially in its focus on rural groups, rural violence and rural perpetrators of violence in scarce periods. The environmental security literature has often assumed that rural-urban migration will lead to conflict and urbanization rates will be untenable and lead to violence. It is argued in this paper that, outside of natural disasters, there are few direct effects of climate change on either rural or urban residents. Instead, the effects of climate changes on rural dwellers are indirect, and largely experienced through economic fluctuations. One of the main coping mechanisms of rural people is migration into urban areas. When moving into African urban areas, many migration assume a myriad of vulnerabilities which are likely to be more detrimental to their livelihoods and well-being: the most-vulnerable in both rural and urban situations deal with numerous factors promoting their exposure to many risks including increased poverty, food insecurity, environmental health, and disease. In particular, they experience a far higher degree of urban political violence than in a typical rural area. The assumption that rural areas are likely to be hotspots of violence due to environmental change has failed to consider that outside of traditionally violent pastoral zones, rural areas are far more peaceful than capitals, secondary and tertiary cities where people meet. Further, the reasons for civic violence in urban areas are tied to inequality, poor governance and poverty. There is no evidence to suggest that the poorest engage in violence, but significantly more evidence to suggest that they are often victims of strategic violence by those less vulnerable. This holds for both urban and rural areas.

This paper continues to assert that the next direction for the environmental security literature is to engage with the indirect effects of ecological change. In doing so, it must acknowledge that environmental change does not occur in a vacuum, and is one of several parameters of risk for individuals, communities and states. While increasingly the environment is dealt as a separate issue, all too often the economic and political realities of the African state are paramount in determining the impact of environmental change. Hence ecological effects are likely to be indirect and recent attempts to determine direct relationships have failed.

Conflict in the developing world is changing: Cities are increasingly critical locations and therefore crucial sites of political engagement and policy intervention. Recent research has highlighted how civil wars events disproportionately occur within strategic urban areas but there is increasing evidence that civic conflict is both increasing and is a mainly urban

phenomenon. This type of political violence refers to a broad array of conflict that tends to take place in cities- gang warfare, criminal/political. It is distinctly urban and occurs in proximity to and in visibility of government (Beall et al 2011). Civic conflict has been generally ignored by the conflict community although, by some measures, it constitutes over half of all recent political violence on the African continent. Civic violence involves groups which are either spontaneous (e.g. rioters) or informal (e.g. militias, gangs, political thugs) organized for a specific political end. In contrast to formal conflict, the object is not to overtake the state, but to react, respond, or restrict political or economic change. The recent riots over food prices, or election competition, are ready examples of such under-researched violence. Despite being low-level, this violence can be widespread and a great danger to the stability of the state: a significantly higher proportion of this violence is against civilians and can be a chronic disruption to civic life. The spatiality of violence has recently received a lot of attention with the availability of disaggregated data. Using such data, it is possible to refine relevant scales and units of analysis to best suit the theoretical questions at hand. The paper does so by comparing urban and rural patterns of low-level violence and its determinants.

Conflict is caused by a myriad of interacting political, economic and environmental issues. Of late, a foremost debate has debated the tenets of the 'environmental security' thesis. This thesis suggests that 1) the environment will have a strong, if not strongest, effect on present and future conflicts between groups; 2) those most affected by negative environmental change are likely to pursue violence. This is most clearly the case in the argument for 'climate conflicts'. The group assumed to be most vulnerable to changes in climate and risk of conflict is the rural poor, who subsist on rainfed agriculture. However, the assumptions of the environmental security literature appear to be out of step with studies in rural/urban vulnerabilities and violence. As this paper shows, rural populations experience climate changes through economic shifts in livelihoods. Because there have been successive environmental issues within African states, rural populations have developed a series of coping mechanisms. One of the main ways to attenuate risk of poverty/ecological change is to foster strong links with urban areas, through migration, informal labour and/or remittances. However, those who do move into urban areas face a range of vulnerabilities, which may put them more at risk to negative environmental changes. Further, they experience a far higher degree of political violence than typical rural areas. The growing literature on urban vulnerability suggests that the urban poor are the most vulnerable to the indirect effects of environmental change, through poor housing, infrastructure, discrimination, commodity crisis, and disease. Further, they face a higher risk of political violence borne from responses to grievance and inequality.

This paper considers the differential direct risk of violence in both urban and rural areas, and provides some basic correlations on urbanization and civic violence. Using specific factors as measures of political, economic and ecological parameters, this paper is able to develop a narrative regarding the likely interactions, direct and indirect effect of each on the propensity of a community to experience violence. In basic ways, it is clear that for a person in the developing world, national factors strongly influence the risk of overall political violence and local factors are responsible to determining whether an individual is likely to be directly affected. By group, non-nomadic rural poor populations are least likely to experience violence, while urban residents are most likely. The relative location and not the level of poverty mainly dictate this. Urban populations are replacing the rural poor as the poorest and have the unstable livelihoods and are most likely to experience the indirect effects of ecological change and the direct effects of political and economic instability. Together these are a lethal mix, but there is more hope for adaptation in urban areas.