EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Climate change is likely to cause floods, droughts, and migration in Africa that could trigger political instability. But violent consequences are not inevitable. Domestic political institutions—“constitutional design”—could buffer the impact of climate change by channeling societal stress into non-violent outcomes. This research on Constitutional Design and Conflict Management (CDCM) in Africa explores which institutions are likely to moderate—or exacerbate—the impact of climate change. Seven leading scholars investigate seven African countries to identify how past climate-related and other shocks have been mediated by constitutional design. The project aims to develop policy recommendations to reduce violent conflict in Africa. Specifically, the CDCM research will pinpoint African countries that are especially vulnerable to political instability. It will also identify the political institutions that the U.S. government should promote through its democracy and governance aid programs to minimize the security consequences and human suffering that could result from climate change in Africa.

CLIMATE, CONFLICT, AND CONSTITUTIONS
Recent evidence suggests that climate change could cause violent conflict in Africa. Temperature and rainfall changes and extreme weather events contribute to floods, droughts, and migration flows. These shocks can exacerbate tension between elements of society, including ethnic groups who compete for scarce resources, and may bolster revolutionary tendencies. Increased societal stress threatens to trigger a range of violence, including protests, strikes, riots, declarations of emergencies, coups, revolutions, ethnic cleansing, massacres, and—in the worst cases—civil war and genocide.

The good news is that such violence is not inevitable. African societies have institutions that may buffer shocks, channeling their impact into nonviolent outcomes. The most fundamental of these are domestic political structures, or “constitutional design.”

The Climate Change and African Political Stability (CCAPS) program’s research on Constitutional Design and Conflict Management (CDCM) aims to determine which state institutions in Africa are likely to moderate, or exacerbate, the impact of such shocks on political stability. The research brings together seven of the world’s leading scholars to compare and assess the experience of the last several decades through illustrative African cases. The ultimate goal is to formulate recommendations for U.S. policy to reduce violent conflict in Africa.

AUTHOR
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WHY CONSTITUTIONAL DESIGN?

The links between climate change and violent conflict are more complex than suggested by some popular reporting on the subject that implies a simplistic linear causation, as represented in Figure 1.

In the real world, climate change is only one, and not always the most decisive, influence on societal stress. Constitutional design may affect not only the level of societal stress, but also the propensity of such stress to cause violent conflict. In addition, international aid programs to promote democracy and governance (D&G) may alter constitutional design, affecting its ability to mediate shocks. The resulting causal relationships are more complex, as depicted schematically in Figure 2.

Other ongoing CCAPS research projects explore some of these additional causal relationships, including how climate change and adaptation efforts each affect societal stress, and how D&G aid influences constitutional design. By contrast, the CDCM project focuses on how constitutional design mediates the impact of climate-related and other shocks on societal stress and violent conflict, as detailed below.

Constitutional design may affect both the level of societal stress and the propensity of such stress to cause violent conflict.

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Figure 1. This research aims to move beyond the models of simplistic linear causation shown above and often reflected in reporting on the topic of climate change and violent conflict.

Figure 2. The case studies conducted in this research examine the complex causal relationships between constitutional design, aid programs, climate change, societal stress, and violent conflict.
WHAT WE KNOW

Relevant scholarly literature can be broken into three categories: comparative African studies, comparative global studies, and specific African studies. In the first category, there is one, relatively old, cross-state African statistical study, which suggests that parliamentary systems of proportional representation may reduce conflict in multi-ethnic states. However, the only qualitative comparative studies of the continent, focusing on southern Africa, fail to reach consensus on that question.

In the global study of divided societies, scholars typically characterize constitutional strategies along a spectrum from “integrative” (aiming to erode the political salience of identity groups) to “accommodative” (guaranteeing autonomy or rewards to groups based on identity). But consensus is elusive on the best approach for conflict management.

Arend Lijphart famously advocates the accommodation approach of “consociational” democracy that guarantees each major identity group a share of executive power, some autonomy, proportional representation and benefits, and a veto over fundamental decisions. Donald Horowitz criticizes such arrangements as insufficient to promote cooperation and instead advocates the somewhat more integrative strategy of providing electoral incentives for political candidates to appeal across identity lines, which could erode such divisions over time. Lake and Rothchild criticize the accommodation approach of territorial decentralization on grounds that it is an unstable outcome, destined to devolve into secession or re-integration, often entailing violence. By their reasoning, the integrationist strategy of territorial centralization is the only stable alternative to secessionist dissolution of the state. Recent scholarship suggests that conflict management is best fostered by flexibility of constitutional design over time, a hypothesis that has yet to be tested rigorously.

CDCM’s research strategy is to focus on historical “shocks” in Africa that induced societal stress, in order to examine how constitutional design mediated their impact.

Existing case studies of African countries provide a rich evidentiary base for future scholarship, but to date they lack a common methodology, which is essential to drawing broadly applicable lessons.

A NEW RESEARCH STRATEGY: SHOCKS AND OUTCOMES

A major innovation of CDCM’s research strategy is to focus on historical “shocks” in Africa that induced societal stress, in order to examine how constitutional design mediated their impact. In methodological terms, shocks are the “independent variable” that causes violence (the “dependent variable”), if not buffered adequately by constitutional design (the “condition variable”), as illustrated in Figure 3.

“Shocks” are defined by the project as relatively sudden changes that affect the distribution of resources and power in a country—whether arising from economic, demographic, or...
political dynamics, as shown in Figure 4. Shocks are linked to climate either directly, indirectly, or not at all. Direct climate shocks include floods and droughts. Indirect shocks include migration flows and environmental degradation that may result from climate change. Climate-unrelated shocks include trade shifts, resource windfalls or shortages, and momentous elections or political acts (domestic or foreign).

“Constitutional design” is defined by the project as the formal and informal structures of countrywide governance. This comprises institutions of integration and accommodation—such as election rules, federalism, and guaranteed benefits for identity groups—as shown below in Figure 5. It also includes the separation of powers—that is, provisions for the judiciary, legislature, or opposition to challenge the executive—and transitional justice for states emerging from autocracy or war. Finally, it entails the citizenry’s acceptance of the political institutions as legitimate, and any procedures for modification and interpretation of constitutional design, whether by courts, amendments, or informal pacts. Not included is the historical evolution of

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<th>Shocks Related to Climate:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Drought, flood, and resulting famine</td>
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<td>Rapid environmental degradation</td>
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<td>Immigration, emigration, or internal migration</td>
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<th>Shocks Unrelated to Climate:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Elections</td>
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<td>Land redistribution</td>
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<td>Dramatic changes in “terms of trade”</td>
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<td>Resource windfalls</td>
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<th>Components of Constitutional Design:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Accommodation, such as quotas, vetoes, or autonomy for identity groups</td>
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<td>Integration, typified by a strong presidency</td>
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<td>Election rules, including proportional representation in legislatures and qualified-majority voting by legislatures</td>
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<td>Devolution of authority to sub-national territories</td>
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<td>Mandated transfer payments or other redistribution to sub-national territories</td>
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<tr>
<td>Separation of powers provisions for the judiciary, legislature, and/or opposition to challenge the executive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informal elements of constitutional design, including norms and pacts</td>
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<td>Legitimacy of constitutional design among the populace</td>
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<td>Procedures for modifying and interpreting constitutional design—whether formally by supreme courts or amendments, or informally via deals among parties</td>
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<td>Transitional justice mechanisms</td>
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Figure 4. This research examines both climate-related and other shocks in Africa.

CCDM examines not just climate-related shocks, but all types, for two reasons. First, the dynamics of societal stress, which can trigger violence if not buffered by constitutional design, are similar regardless of whether induced by climate or other factors. For example, an influx of refugees may threaten instability whether triggered by drought in a neighboring country or by war in that country. Second, the project aims to produce findings that will be useful even if climate change proves not to be as significant a problem as currently feared. By exploring shocks unrelated to climate change, the project can thus provide policymakers recommendations to reduce violence in Africa from stresses that are almost certain to occur, such as elections.

Figure 5. This research considers several key components of constitutional design.
political institutions prior to each case study, so that constitutional design is treated as an independent causal variable in our research.

Rather than mechanically assessing each of the above elements, the project’s scholars highlight the aspects of constitutional design that have the greatest mediating role in each case study. Their studies also explore if various elements of constitutional design interact with each other in ways that alter their mediating effect. Shocks may be mediated as well by factors other than constitutional design, including antecedent, proximate, structural, and individual characteristics in each country. Accordingly, the case studies report when such additional factors play an important mediating function, but emphasize the role of constitutional design in accordance with the project’s main research question.

To the extent possible, CDCM aims for detailed insight into the capabilities and limitations of constitutional design to buffer climate-related and other shocks. The project recognizes that such shocks vary along many dimensions, including rate of onset, magnitude, and duration. For example, a flood can arise in a matter of days, whereas desertification might take years or decades. Some political institutions may be capable of buffering a gradually arising shock but not a sudden one, or a short shock but not a prolonged one. Moreover, constitutional design may mediate at different moments along the pathway from shock to violence. Some political institutions might inhibit shocks from leading to ethnic rioting, while others could inhibit a subsequent escalation to full-blown civil war. The case studies highlight such nuanced lessons wherever possible.

The project will identify African countries whose constitutional design is likely to exacerbate the impact of climate-related shocks and magnify risks of violence.

**CASE STUDIES**

The CDCM research examines seven illustrative African countries, exploring how the evolution of constitutional design over time has mediated the following shocks:

- **Burundi (1988 – 2010):** Shocks include large-scale ethnic violence of 1988, subsequent land redistribution, and the migration of internally displaced persons and returning refugees.
- **Ghana (1957 – 2008):** Shocks include two floods in the 1960s, construction of a dam in 1965 that forced the resettlement of many residents, and elections over the last two decades, all while the country transitioned between two constitutions and suffered several military coups.
- **Kenya (1990 – 2010):** Shocks include the collapse of export commodity prices in the early 1990s, two protests during that decade against single-party rule, subsequent international sanctions imposed by donors, the high-profile electoral violence of 2007, and subsequent increases in international pressure, all in the context of five different constitutions.
- **Nigeria (1960 – 2010):** Shocks include an initial economic windfall in the 1960s from discovery of large oil reserves, the resulting environmental degradation that came to prominence in the 1980s, and oil price spikes over the last decade. During these years, Nigeria revised its constitution five times.
- **Senegal (1982 – 2010):** Shocks include the denial of independence for Casamance, subsequent demands by this region for secession, and periodic droughts and floods.
- **Sudan (1983 – 2011):** Shocks include the drought of the 1980s, war-induced famine beginning in 1998, the oil windfall of the last decade, the 2010 elections, and the 2011 secession vote by southern Sudan. During this period, the country had three different constitutions.
- **Zimbabwe (1979 – 2010):** Shocks include state-led ethnic massacres of 1982, land seizures by war veterans over the last decade that triggered the exodus of white farmers, and the regime’s 2008 refusal to accept its defeat in democratic elections.
Some climate-related shocks seem inevitable. The hopeful news is that violence and political instability need not follow.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The CDCM project aims to provide two types of guidance for U.S. policymakers to reduce violent conflict in Africa. First, the project will identify African countries whose constitutional design is likely to exacerbate the impact of climate-related shocks and magnify risks of violence. This will enable the U.S. government to focus its conflict-management efforts on the African countries most vulnerable to political instability from climate change. Second, the project will inform U.S. aid programs for democracy and governance by identifying the political institutions that the U.S. government should promote in Africa to buffer the impact of climate change.

Addressing climate change will certainly require a multi-pronged effort. Mitigation may curtail the buildup of greenhouse gases, and adaptation may reduce some of the physical consequences. Even with the best efforts, however, some climate-related shocks seem inevitable. The hopeful news is that violence and political instability need not follow. By studying African political institutions, and their past role in mediating climate-related and other shocks, the CDCM research aims to minimize the security consequences and human suffering that result from climate change in Africa. The case studies are currently underway and will be released at a public conference in fall 2011.
ENDNOTES

1. For more on the full range of CCAPS research, see http://ccaps.strausscenter.org/research.


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This material is based upon work supported by, or in part by, the U. S. Army Research Laboratory and the U.S. Army Research Office under contract/grant number W911NF-09-1-0077.

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