

# Water diplomacy: linking water and peace

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World Water Day 2024 – 22.3.2024



**A?** Aalto University  
School of Engineering

# Why water diplomacy?

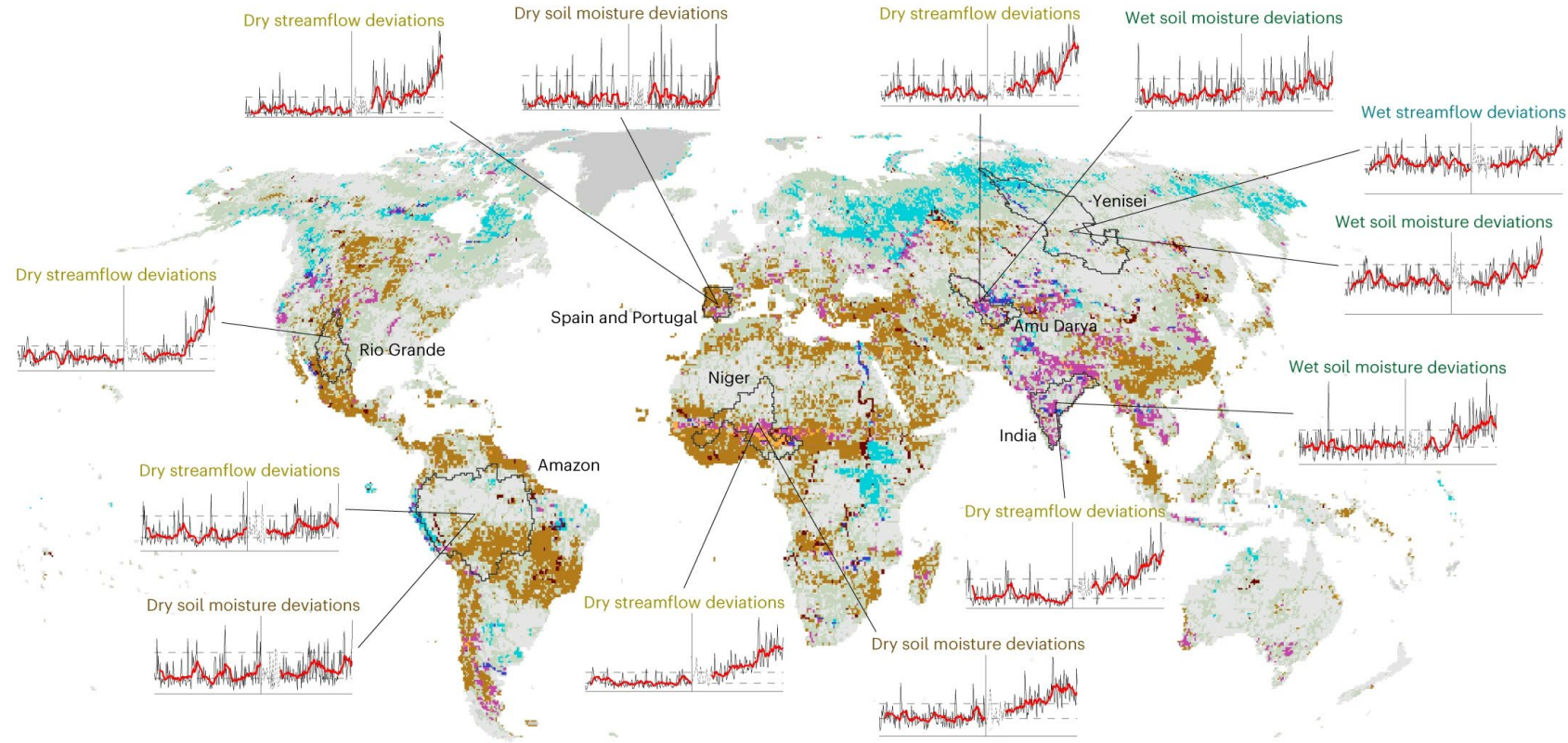
First view: through water (and neoliberalism)

- 1) Transboundary waters face increasing **pressures**: create tensions between riparian countries
- 2) **Cooperation** on transboundary waters have strong institutional basis, but not always enough
  - Water diplomacy as an **additional approach** combining
    - i) water-focused cooperation and
    - ii) politically-focused diplomacy & peace mediation

“Water as a medium to peace and security”  
Foreign Minister Elina Valtonen earlier in this seminar

# Planetary boundary for **freshwater change** transgressed

Porkka, Virkki et al 2024 in Nature Water:  
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s44221-024-00208-7>



“substantial shift from pre-industrial streamflow and soil moisture reference conditions to **persistently increasing change**”

“Most of the world’s population live in water-insecure countries”

UNU-INWEH 2023

Combined increases in local deviation frequency (1976–2005 compared with 1691–1860)

Percentage of land area with local deviations (% of region area)

- Ensemble median ( $n = 23$  or  $n = 15$ )
- 10-Year moving mean
- Median and upper end of pre-industrial variability

Streamflow change		Soil moisture change		Parallel changes	Other combination of local deviation frequency increases
Dry	Wet	Dry	Wet		
■ ++		■ ++		} Parallel changes	■ Increase only in the frequency of local streamflow or soil moisture deviations
■ ++	■ ++	■ ++	■ ++		
■ ++		■ ++		} Conflicting changes	■ No increases in local deviation frequency
■ ++	■ ++	■ ++	■ ++		
■ ++		■ ++	■ ++		
					■ Ice

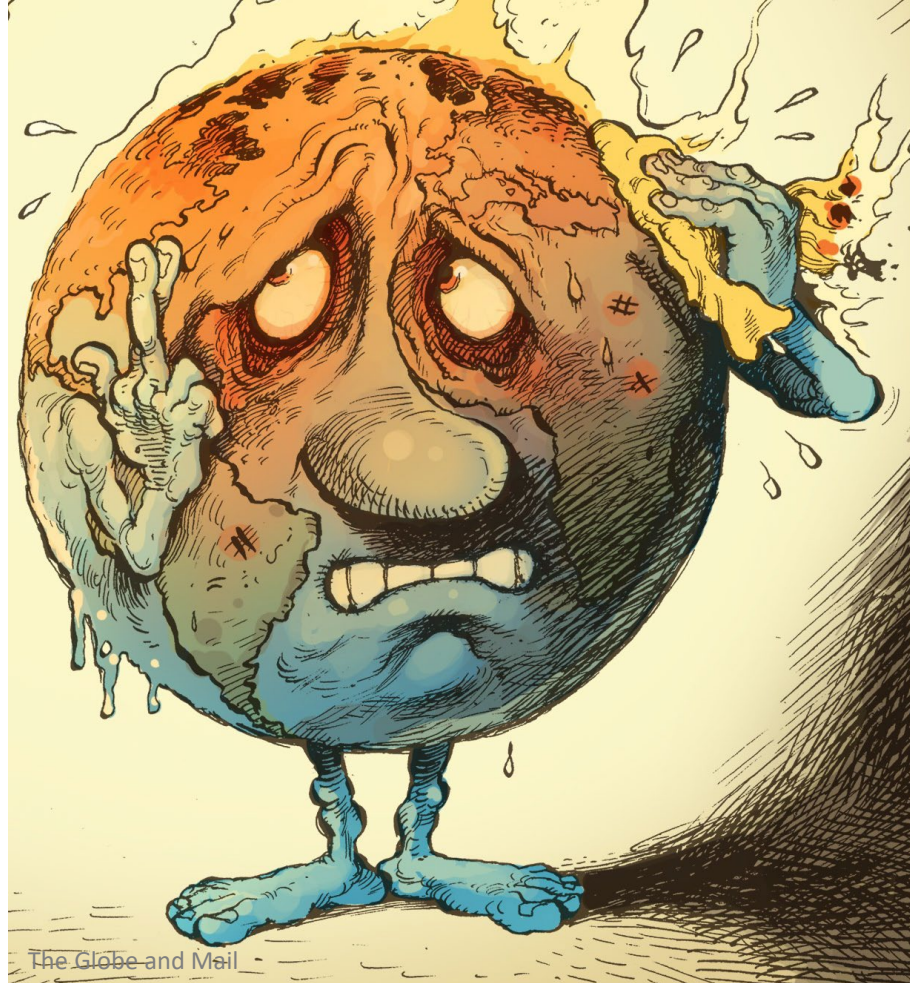
# Why water diplomacy?

Second view: through diplomacy (and neorealism)

- 1) International relations face increasing **pressures**: create tensions between countries & country blocs
- 2) Increasing **disregard of multilateral cooperation** emphasises national interests and securitization
  - Shared waters can also become political battleground: water diplomacy as the **only feasible way** forward

“Geopolitical landscape is under change”  
Foreign Minister Elina Valtonen earlier in this seminar

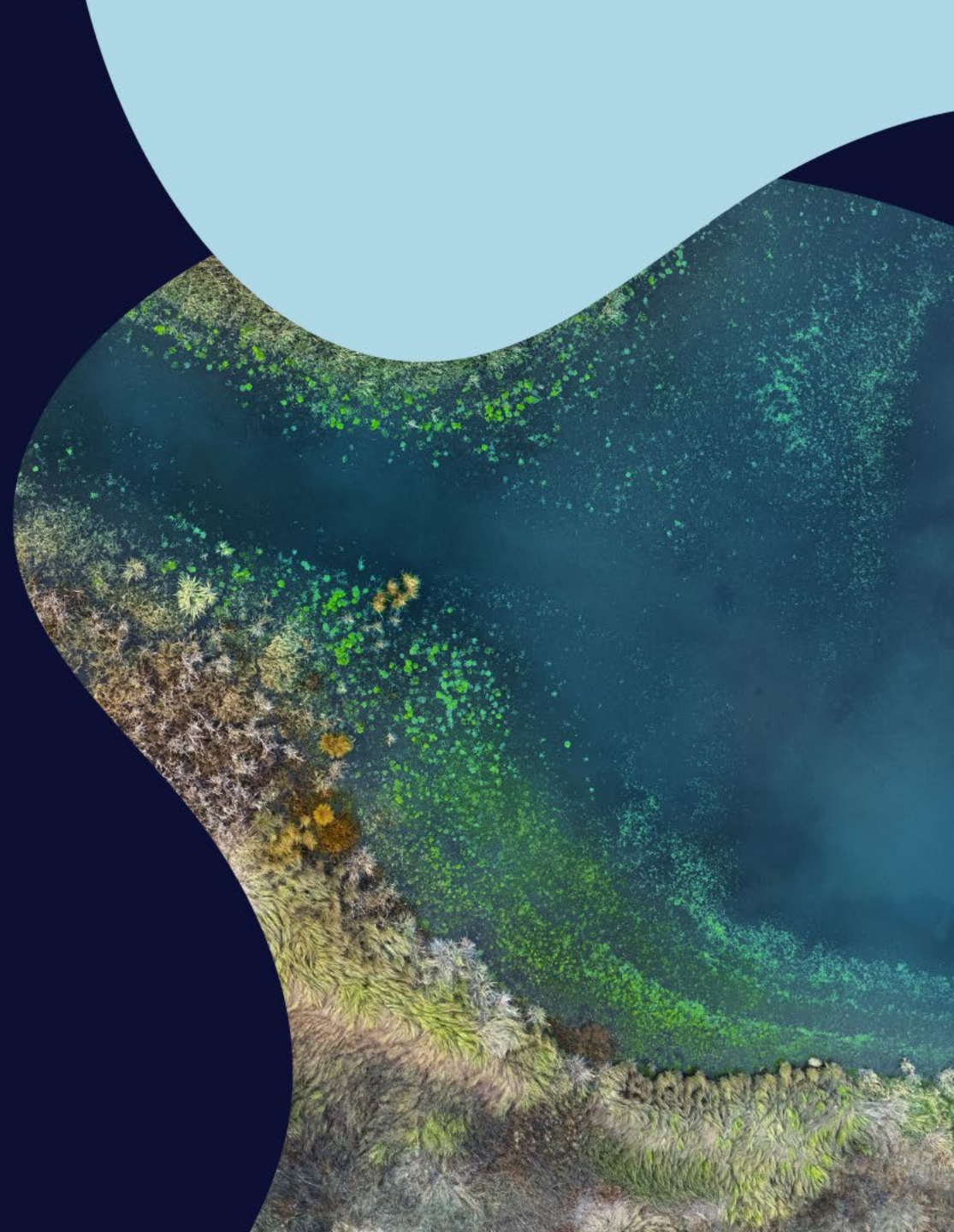
# Planetary boundary for **political cooperation** transgressed?



Substantial shift from early-2000s political cooperation conditions to **persistently increasing disregard of multilateralism**

Both views emphasise that we need more

# Water diplomacy



# Water diplomacy

“the deliberative political processes and practices of preventing, mitigating, and resolving disputes over transboundary water resources and developing joint water governance arrangements by applying foreign policy means, embedded in bi- and/or multilateral relations beyond the water sector and taking place at different tracks and levels”

Sehring et al. 2022: [https://brill.com/view/journals/dipl/4/2/article-p200\\_003.xml](https://brill.com/view/journals/dipl/4/2/article-p200_003.xml)

”a dynamic **politically-oriented** process

...that aims to prevent, mitigate, and resolve  
**water-related tensions** (in shared waters)

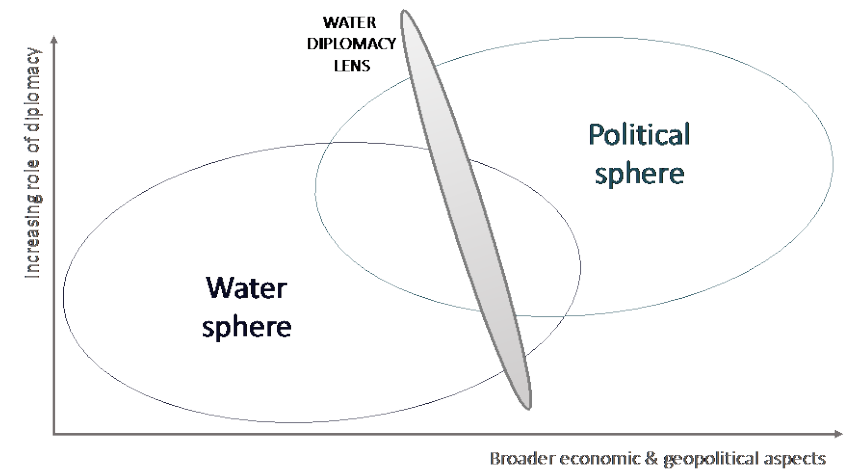
...by making **simultaneous use** of diplomatic tools,  
water-related know-how and cooperation mechanisms

...across **multiple diplomacy tracks**”

Keskinen et al. 2021:

<http://bit.ly/waterdiplomacypaths>

# Water diplomacy



**Aim:** mitigate water-related tensions (+ to facilitate cooperation)

**Focus:** political + beyond water (energy, agriculture, trade)

**Contexts:** many, but typically transboundary waters

**Actors:** diplomats, peace mediators with water experts

→ Across multiple diplomacy tracks

Ultimately about (international) relations building



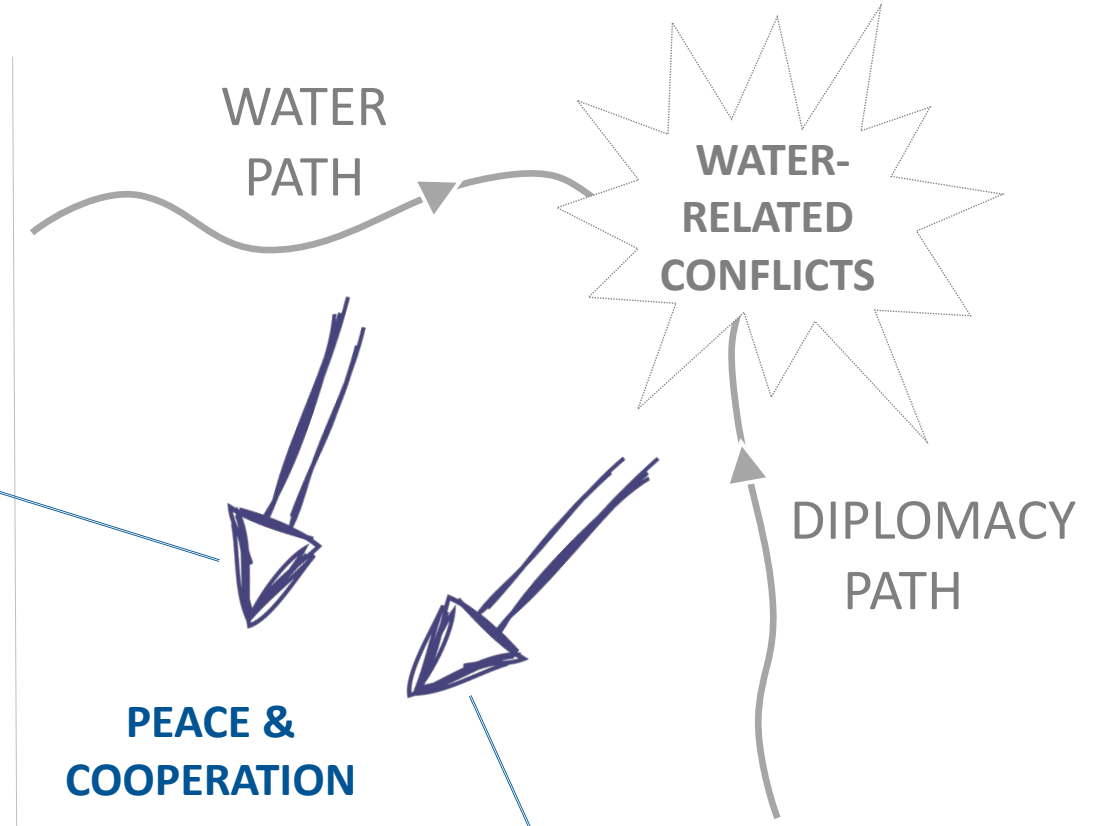
# Water / diplomacy paths

Water diplomacy is a process with both water and diplomacy aspects: paths approach one way to emphasise this

Keskinen et al. 2021:  
<http://bit.ly/waterdiplomacypaths>

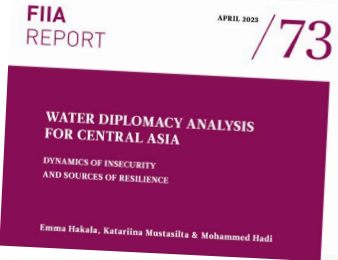
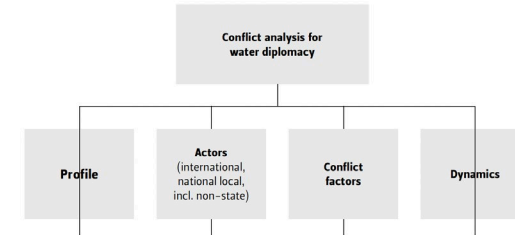
Water-related tensions  
 "water to politics"

Water-focused actions  
 Bringing water-related know-how and institutions into political processes



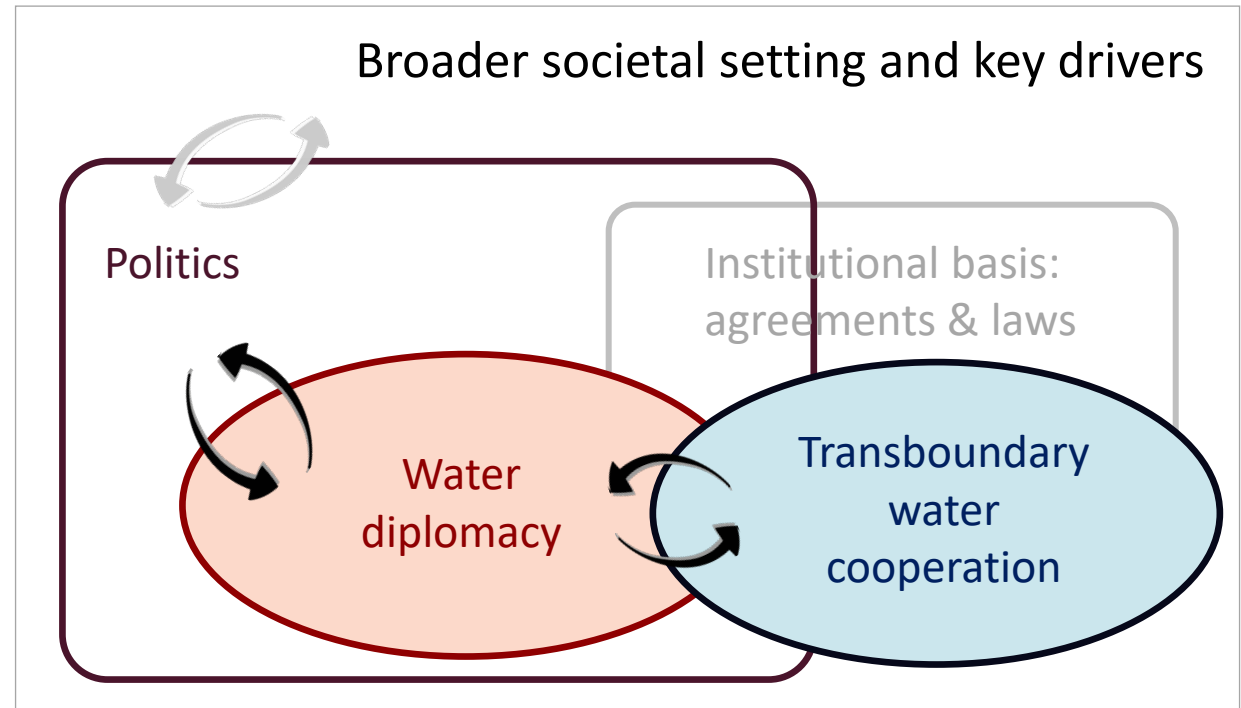
Diplomacy-focused actions  
 Utilising diplomatic and peace mediation tools for shared waters

Political tensions  
 "politics to water"



# Linking water diplomacy and transboundary water cooperation

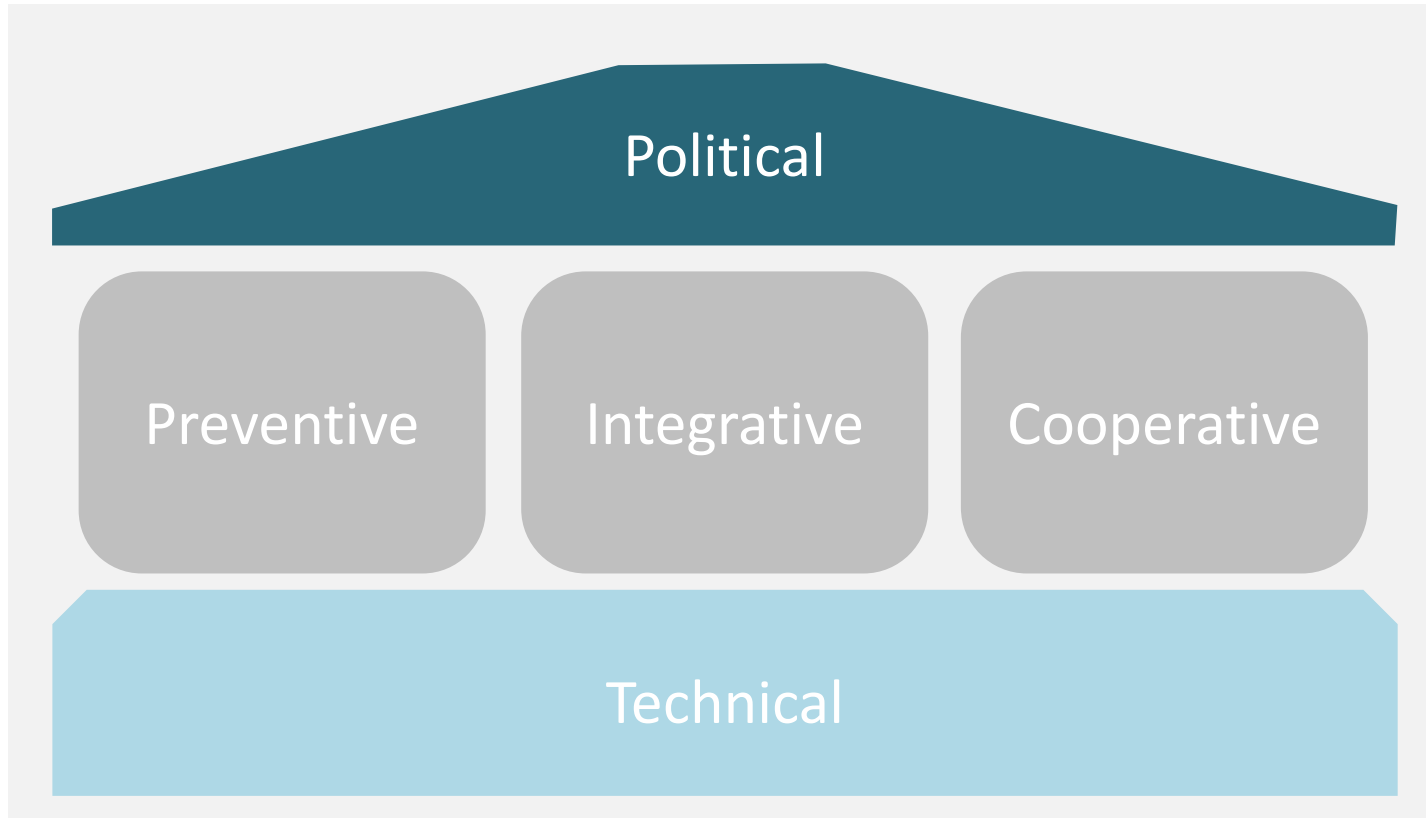
These two ultimately complementary concepts: their relations also change over time



*TRANSBOUNDARY WATER INTERACTIONS*

# Water diplomacy: several aspects

Water diplomacy



Water cooperation

Water diplomacy aspects	Examples of related key approaches, frameworks and mechanisms
<b>POLITICAL:</b> Inherently political process that goes far beyond water per se; part of wider diplomatic setting and geopolitics	The most strongly political track: critical hydrogeopolitics; geopolitics; foreign policy; regional cooperation
<b>PREVENTIVE:</b> Peace mediation and conflict prevention	Preventive diplomacy; peace mediation and peace building; conflict resolution
<b>INTEGRATIVE:</b> Connecting multiple forms and levels of institutions and stakeholders and the different types of knowledge	Multi-track Diplomacy; Integrative Diplomacy; Integrated Water Resources Management; knowledge co-production
<b>COOPERATIVE:</b> Cooperation and good governance to promote reasonable and equitable water use	Cooperative arrangements; benefit-sharing approaches; international agreements on shared waters; sustainability
<b>TECHNICAL:</b> providing an information basis for the diplomacy about water, related resources and the environment	The most strongly technical track: Information on hydrology, water quantity, quality and timing; knowledge production and products such as hydrological models and impact assessments.

Keskinen et al. 2021:

<http://bit.ly/waterdiplomacypaths>

# How water diplomacy?

- 1) Utilise **both** water cooperation and diplomacy + peace mediation expertise
- 2) Take **multiactor** approach: state actors critical, but other diplomacy tracks and processes facilitate
- 3) Consider critical dimensions in **relations-building** conflict-resolution and peace mediation  
→ About the process – and trust

# Plenty of activities, stay tuned!

Water Diplomacy Handbook out soon!

<https://waterdiplomacyhandbook.com>

World Water Week in August 2024 on these themes

<https://www.worldwaterweek.org>

Water diplomacy project coordinated by Syke

<https://www.syke.fi/projects/waterdiplomacy>

We at Aalto University working on these themes, too

**THANK YOU!**

**Water diplomacy:  
linking water  
and peace**

Marko Keskinen, Aalto University, Finland

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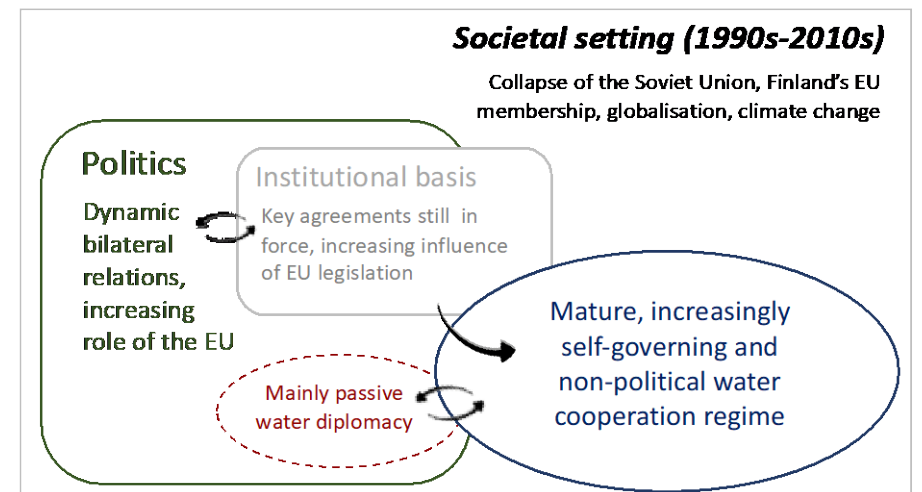
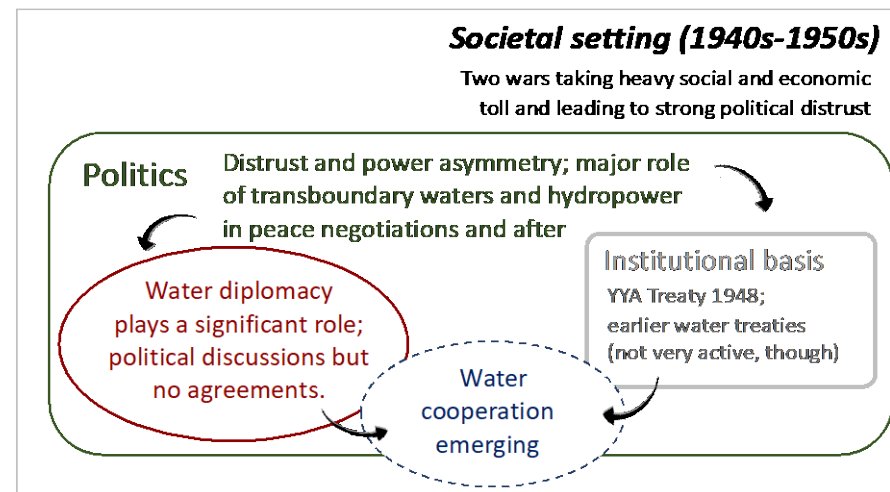
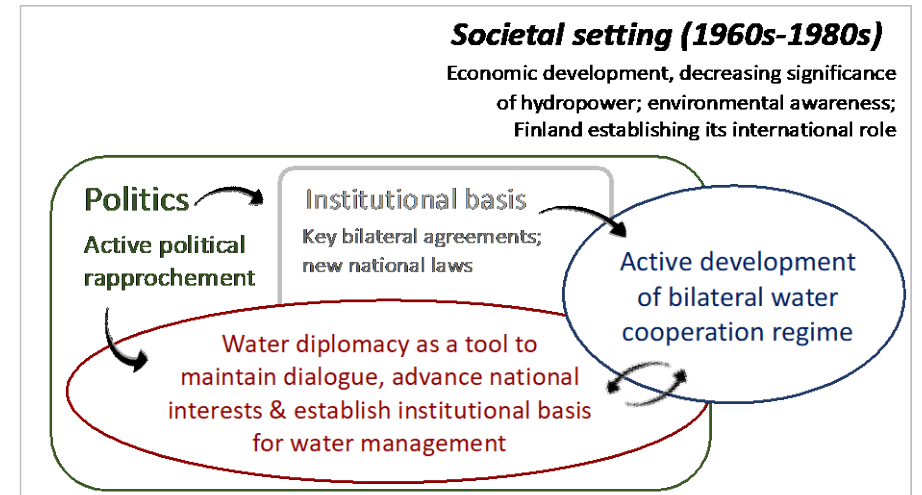
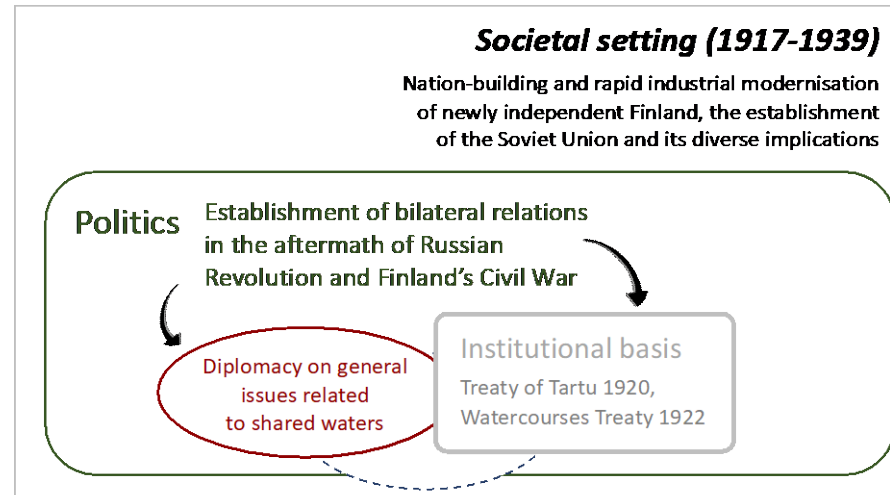


**ADDITIONAL SLIDES**

	<b>Transboundary Water Cooperation</b>	<b>Water Diplomacy</b>
<b>PHYSICAL BASIS</b>	Waterbody and its catchment, typically a shared river basin	Regional, based on state borders
<b>LEGAL BASIS</b>	Relatively clear and water-focused: UN Water Conventions and possible regional water agreements	Same as with TWC, plus relevant international treaties and norms + possible regional agreements
<b>KEY GOVERNMENTAL ACTORS &amp; STRUCTURES</b>	Intergovernmental river basin commissions and water-related government agencies	Foreign ministries and regional (economic) cooperation organisations, with a link to TWC actors
<b>KEY COOPERATIVE PROCESSES</b>	Water use and allocation, including (joint) monitoring, impact assessment & planning	Political and economic negotiations on (and beyond) shared waters;
<b>MAIN ASSUMPTION</b>	Willingness for cooperation (despite differences) under a given mandate; joint benefits from a shared waterbody	A compromise between different interaction strategies, building on national interests and sovereignty
<b>THE AIM</b>	Interaction on shared waters as a facilitator for political goals, such as peace, development and security (nationally and regionally)	



# Linking water diplomacy and transboundary water cooperation



# Transboundary freshwaters

## SURFACE WATERS

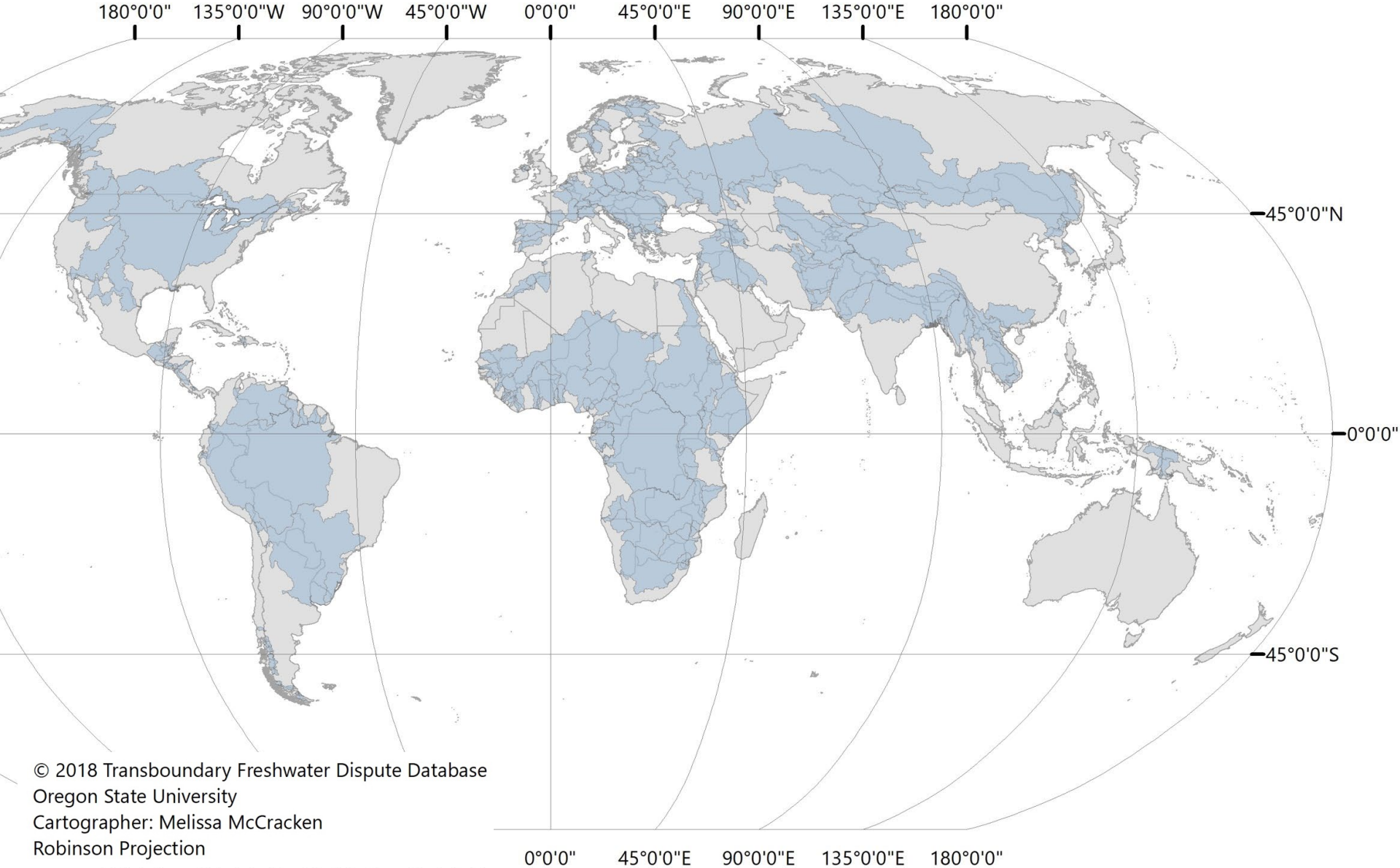
There are around 310 transboundary river & lake basins globally  
→ Cover over 40% of population, around 47% of its land surface, almost 60% of global water flow and around 150 countries

*McCracken & Wolf 2019*

## GROUNDWATER

Most large aquifers are transboundary:  
not as visible, but getting increasing emphasis

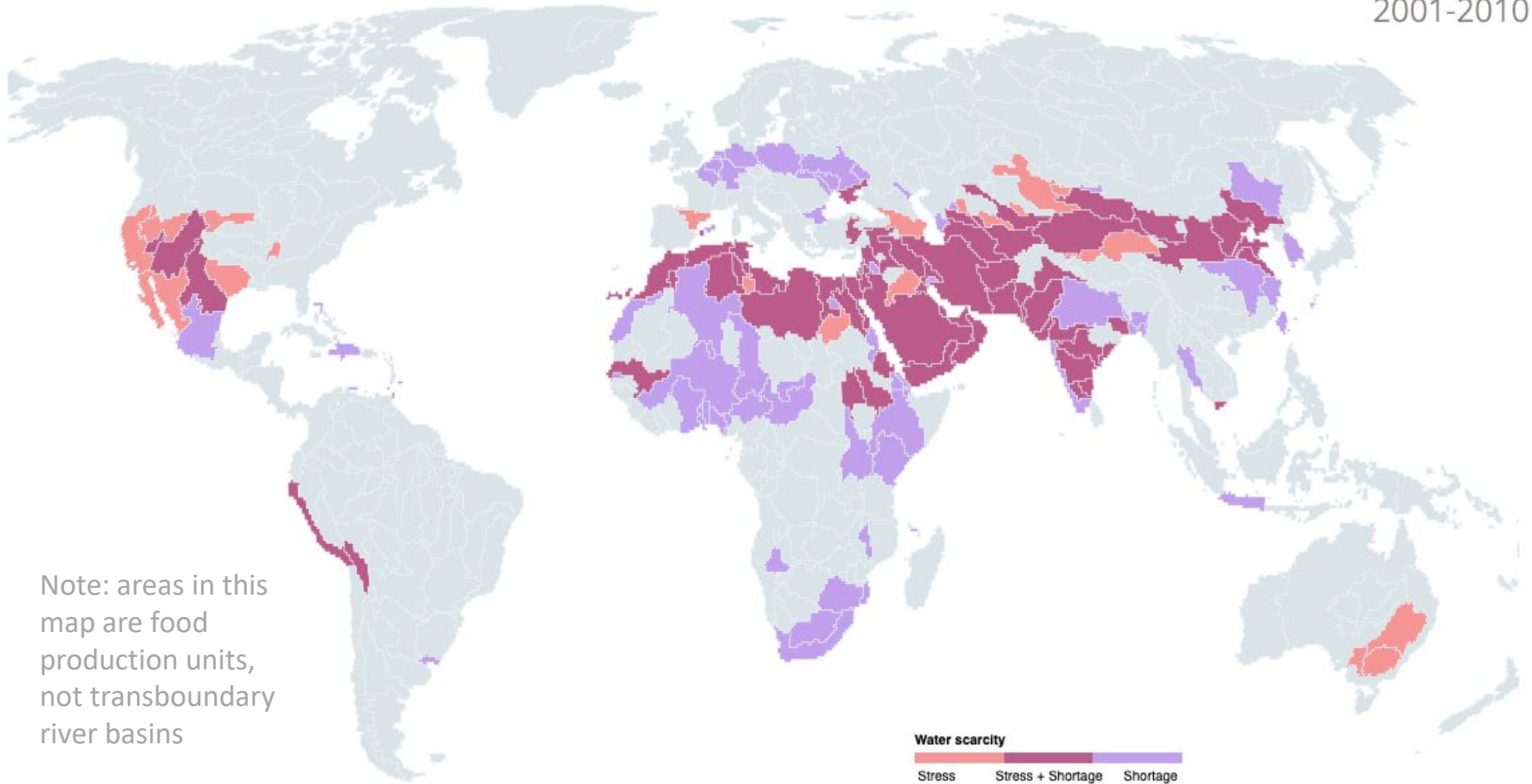
# International River Basins of the World



© 2018 Transboundary Freshwater Dispute Database  
Oregon State University  
Cartographer: Melissa McCracken  
Robinson Projection



## Global population living in water scarcity



**Water scarcity** increasing, creating challenges for water use

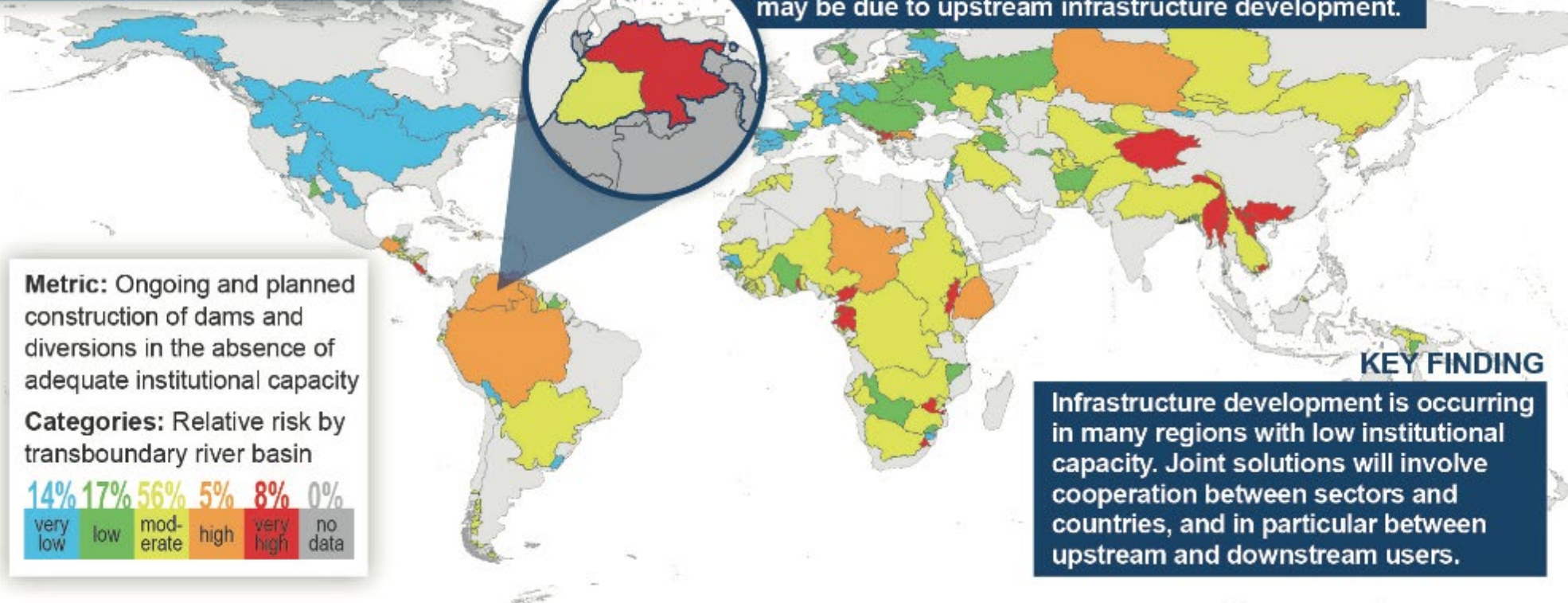
Water scarcity consists of

- water shortage** (low water availability per capita) and
- water stress** (high consumption relative to water availability).

Source: <https://waterscarcityatlas.org>

## HYDROPOLITICAL TENSION

BCU level results identify portions of basins where risks may be due to upstream infrastructure development.

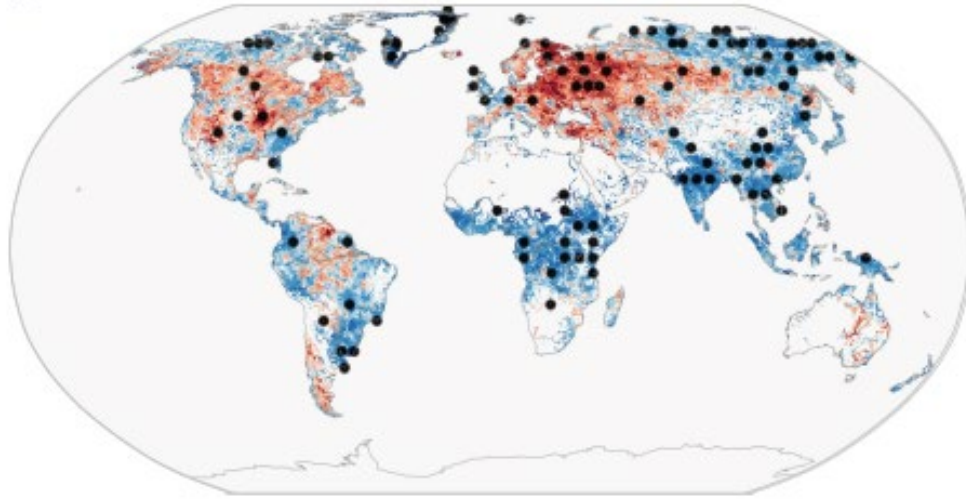


**Infrastructure development**  
(e.g. hydro-power dams)

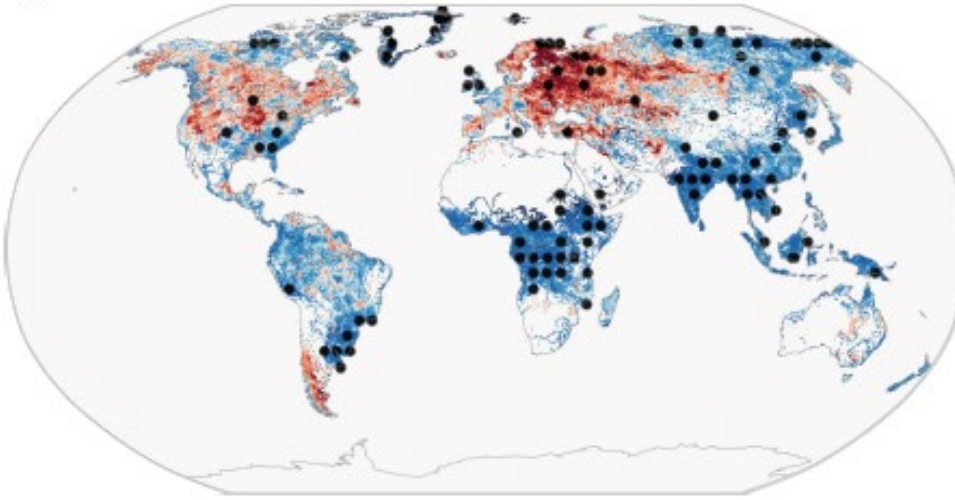
→ Important for development, yet can cause negative impacts and tensions

Projected changes in river flooding Changes in 2071–2100 relative to 1970–2000

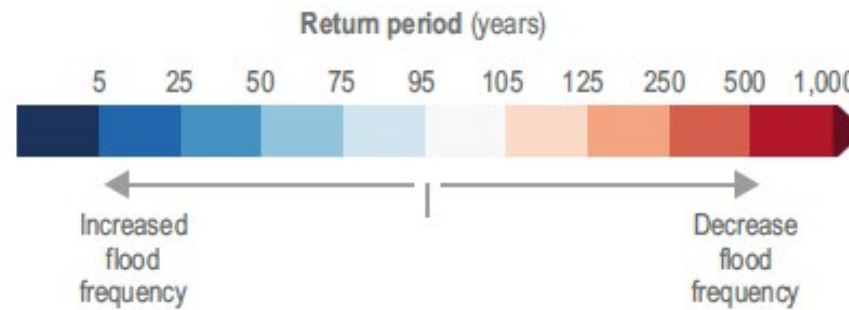
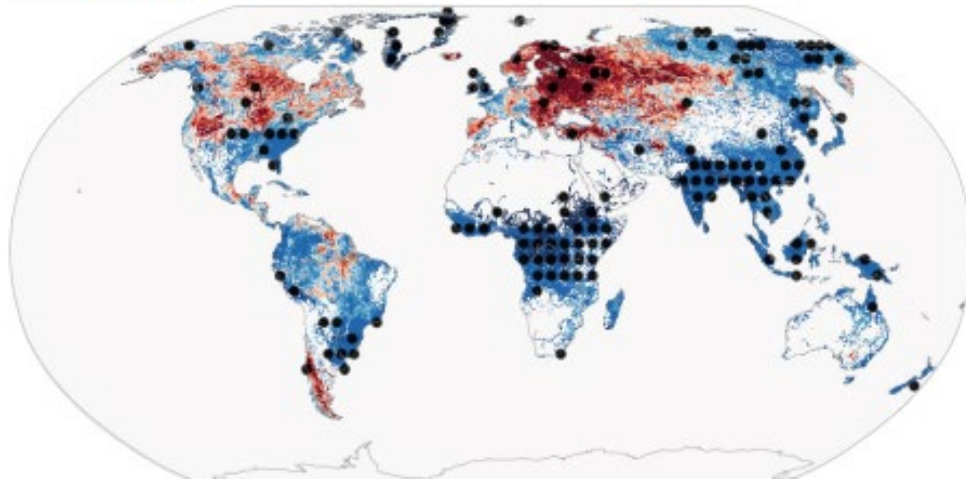
(a) SSP1-2.6



(b) SSP2-4.5



(c) SSP5-8.5



High model agreement

Climate change increases uncertainty and water-related risks

→ Extreme weather events such as floods and droughts

