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Negotiation And Cooperation Along International Rivers: Scarcity, Bargaining Strategies, And Strategic Interaction

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Negotiation And Cooperation Along International Rivers: Scarcity, Bargaining Strategies, And Strategic Interaction

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Often cited in the popular press are predictions of impending ‘water wars’. Increasing water scarcity is often the main rationale for these prophesies. The academic literature has largely discounted such forecasts and has focused instead on understanding how political disputes, conflicts of interest, and occasional militarized skirmishes, over water have culminated. While the study of cooperation over shared water has likewise received significant scrutiny, the link to water scarcity has not. Thus, just as scarcity may be an impetus for dispute between states, it may likewise be the engine for cooperation. Focusing on the cooperative history of international water, epitomized by hundreds of documented water agreements, the paper argues that cooperation is most likely when the resource is neither abundant (when there is no real impetus for cooperation) nor highly scarce (where there is little of the resource to divide among the parties or the degradation too costly to manage). Further delving into the analysis of international water agreements, the paper demonstrates how negotiation is facilitated when important asymmetries ascribed to river riparians are addressed through bargaining strategies and ‘strategic interaction,’ such as the use of incentives.