
PLSC 2138
International Environmental Politics
Monday, 1:30-3:20 PM

Course Overview

How do states respond to climate change? Who are the winners and losers resulting from climate change? How do states cooperate to address climate change and how does climate change affect international cooperation more broadly? When and why does climate change lead to conflict? This course will adopt a social scientific approach to answer these questions, relying on the most recent academic and policy papers. This course has three parts. First, we will briefly consider how domestic actors consider climate change. Second, we will consider core issues such as climate treaties, trade, and conflict. Finally, we will focus on additional narrower climate-related issues such as cap & trade, fisheries, and deforestation.

Instructor

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Requirements and Grading

The reading assignments will total about 3 articles per week. To incentivize reading and class discussion, there will be a total of four in-class “pop quizzes”. These will be short and are designed to be doable by anyone who has done the reading.

- Class Participation (20%): I expect that each seminar meeting you will come prepared to discuss the assigned readings. Active class participation will be valued - meaningful participation that contributes to a collective understanding will be rewarded. Discussion questions will be sent out three days before class.
- Pop quizzes (10%, 2.5% each): No pop quiz will be given **until week 3** of the course. Week two will have an ungraded “mock quiz” to give students a sense of the preparation required. Thereafter, any random of the four following weeks can have a pop-quiz.

- Class Presentation (20%): Each student will have a 15 minute presentation on an environmental topic relevant to the week in which they are presenting. I will provide a list of international environmental agreements, conventions, and other international environmental related topics to choose from. The presentation should describe the institution or agreement, describe the relevant actors, how the treaty is enforced, who are perceived to be the major actors who pushed for the agreement and why, and evaluate the program's success or failure and evaluate them. Students will know the date of their presentation and the topic by week 2. Your preferences will be accounted for.
- Final Paper: Topic Selection, Question (5%), due by Friday, February 13th at 5pm.
- Final Paper: Rough Draft (10%), due by class time, March 23rd.
- Final Paper (35%): Final Version, due the last day of the semester.

Final Paper

You must write a 15-20 page final paper. There are two options for this paper:

- State of the literature: Pick a topic and identify the relevant academic papers and books that deal with that topic. I will then ask you to synthesize that literature. Describe how that literature has evolved over time. How have the major questions changed or evolved in response to new evidence? What do you think has been satisfactorily answered. What questions do you think remain to be answered?
- Research Paper: Identify a question that identifies puzzling strategic behavior or variation. Do your best to try and answer that question using all the means at your disposal.

Academic Integrity

Students should be familiar with the University's policies on academic integrity and disciplinary action, as cheating will be dealt with severely. Your final papers must be your own. In addition, any words, ideas, or data that you borrow from other people and include in your work must be properly documented. Failure to do either of these things is plagiarism.

You may not use AI to generate any ideas or writing. You can use AI to proof-read or edit something that you have already written, though you must note that you have made use of AI for these purposes. You may also use AI as a more intelligent search engine.

Conduct in the Classroom

Our goal as a learning community is to create a safe environment that fosters open and honest dialogue. We are all expected to contribute to creating a respectful, welcoming, and inclusive environment. To this end, classroom discussions should always be conducted in

a way that shows honor, respect, and dignity to all members of the class. Moreover, disagreements should be pursued without personal attack and aggression, and instead, should be handled with grace and care. This will allow for rigorous intellectual engagement and a more fruitful learning experience for all.

Technology in the Classroom

The use of laptops, phones, and tablets in the classroom is not permitted without prior permission. The general expectation is that students will use paper copies of the readings.

Class Schedule

The syllabus below lists the required readings for each week. Please note that I reserve the right to make minor changes to the syllabus, as I get a sense of your interests and what works and doesn't for the group.

Part I: Introduction

Week 1: Introduction and Course Overview (Jan 12th)

Required Readings:

- The Carbon Cycle. <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/features/CarbonCycle>
- Wallace-Wells, David. 2022. "Beyond Catastrophe: A New Climate Reality Is Coming Into View." *The New York Times Magazine*, October 26. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/10/26/magazine/climate-change-warming-world.html>
- Bret Stephens. 2022. "Yes, Greenland's Ice is Melting, But..." *The New York Times*, October 26. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/10/28/opinion/climate-change-bret-stephens.html>

Week 2: Who Cares about the Environment? (Jan 23rd)

Required Readings:

- Richard Clark and Noah Zucker (2024). "Climate Cascades: IOs and the Prioritization of Climate Action". *American Journal of Political Science* 68.4, pp. 1299–1314
- Sabrina B. Arias and Christopher W. Blair (2024). "In the Eye of the Storm: Hurricanes, Climate Migration, and Climate Attitudes". *American Political Science Review* 118.4, pp. 1593–1613
- Alexander F. Gazmararian and Helen V. Milner (2025). "Political Cleavages and Changing Exposure to Global Warming". *Comparative Political Studies* 58.9, pp. 1965–1999

Week 3: Firms and Asset Owners (Jan 26th)

Required readings:

- Amanda Kennard (2020). “The Enemy of My Enemy: When Firms Support Climate Change Regulation”. *International Organization* 74.2, pp. 187–221
- Rebecca L. Perlman (2020). “For Safety or Profit? How Science Serves the Strategic Interests of Private Actors”. *American Journal of Political Science* 64.2, pp. 293–308
- Jeff D. Colgan, Jessica F. Green, and Thomas N. Hale (2021). “Asset Revaluation and the Existential Politics of Climate Change”. *International Organization* 75.2, pp. 586–610

Part II: Core Topics

Week 4: The Climate Regime Complex (Feb 2nd)

Required readings:

- Robert O. Keohane and David G. Victor (2011). “The Regime Complex for Climate Change”. *Perspectives on Politics* 9.1, pp. 7–23
- Detlef Sprinz and Tapani Vaahtoranta (1994). “The interest-based explanation of international environmental policy”. *International Organization* 48.1, pp. 77–105
- Erin R. Graham and Alexandria Serdaru (2020). “Power, Control, and the Logic of Substitution in Institutional Design: The Case of International Climate Finance”. *International Organization* 74.4, pp. 671–706

Week 5: Climate Agreements I (Feb 9th)

Required readings:

- Michaël Aklin and Matto Mildenberger (2020). “Prisoners of the Wrong Dilemma: Why Distributive Conflict, Not Collective Action, Characterizes the Politics of Climate Change”. *Global Environmental Politics* 20.4, pp. 4–27
- Amanda Kennard and Keith E. Schnakenberg (2023). “Comment: Global Climate Policy and Collective Action”. *Global Environmental Politics* 23.1, pp. 133–144
- Robert Falkner (2016). “The Paris Agreement and the new logic of international climate politics”. *International Affairs* 92.5, pp. 1107–1125

Week 6: Climate Agreements II (Feb 16th)

Required readings:

- Thomas Bernauer et al. (2013). “Is there a “Depth versus Participation” dilemma in international cooperation?” *The Review of International Organizations* 8.4, pp. 477–497
- Marco Battaglini and Bård Harstad (2020). “The Political Economy of Weak Treaties”. *Journal of Political Economy* 128.2, pp. 544–590
- Don Casler, Richard Clark, and Noah Zucker (2024). “Do Pledges Bind? The Mass Politics of International Climate Targets”. *Working Paper*

Week 7: International Trade (Feb 23rd)

- Aseem Prakash and Matthew Potoski (2006). “Racing to the Bottom? Trade, Environmental Governance, and ISO 14001”. *American Journal of Political Science* 50.2, pp. 350–364
- Clara Brandi et al. (2020). “Do environmental provisions in trade agreements make exports from developing countries greener?” *World Development* 129, p. 104899

Week 8: Climate and Conflict (March 2nd)

- Sylvain Chassang and Gerard Padró i Miquel (2009). “Economic Shocks and Civil War”. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 4.3, pp. 211–228
- Vally Koubi (2019). “Climate Change and Conflict”. *Annual Review of Political Science* 22, pp. 343–360
- Eoin F McGuirk and Nathan Nunn (2025). “Transhumant Pastoralism, Climate Change, and Conflict in Africa”. *The Review of Economic Studies* 92.1, pp. 404–441

Week 9: Cap and Trade (March 23rd)

Required Reading:

- Jonas Meckling. (2011). *Carbon Coalitions: Business, Climate Politics, and the Rise of Emissions Trading*. MIT Press. Chapter 3.
- Richard Schmalensee and Robert N. Stavins (2017). “Lessons Learned from Three Decades of Experience with Cap and Trade”. *Review of Environmental Economics and Policy* 11.1, pp. 59–79

Week 10: Common Pool Resources and Fishing (March 30th)

Required Readings:

- Jeremy B. C. Jackson et al. (2001). “Historical Overfishing and the Recent Collapse of Coastal Ecosystems”. *Science* 293.5530, pp. 629–637
- Elinor Ostrom (2008). “The Challenge of Common-Pool Resources”. *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development* 50.4, pp. 8–21
- Sverrir Steinsson (2016). “The Cod Wars: a re-analysis”. *European Security* 25.2, pp. 256–275
- Ethan Kapstein et al. (2023). *The Fish That Ate an Agreement: How Migrating Mackerel Undermine International Fisheries Cooperation*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Week 11: Deforestation (April 6th)

Required Readings:

- Alice Xu (2020). *The Political Origins of Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon, 2000-2012*. SSRN Scholarly Paper
- Luke Sanford (2023). “Democratization, Elections, and Public Goods: The Evidence from Deforestation”. *American Journal of Political Science* 67.3, pp. 748–763

Week 12: Oil and Energy (April 13th)

Required Readings:

- Diane Bolet, Fergus Green, and Mikel González-Eguino (2024). “How to Get Coal Country to Vote for Climate Policy: The Effect of a “Just Transition Agreement” on Spanish Election Results”. *American Political Science Review* 118.3, pp. 1344–1359
- Erik Voeten (2025). “The Energy Transition and Support for the Radical Right: Evidence from the Netherlands”. *Comparative Political Studies* 58.2, pp. 394–428
- “The damage to the world economy from the Iran war will be severe but uneven” (2026). *The Economist* <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2026/03/12/the-damage-to-the-world-economy-from-the-iran-war-will-be-severe-but-uneven>
- “The case against energy bail-outs” (2026). *The Economist* <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2026/03/26/the-case-against-energy-bail-outs>

Week 13: North-South Conflict (April 20th)

Required Readings:

- Mark T. Buntaine and Lauren Prather (2018). “Preferences for Domestic Action Over International Transfers in Global Climate Policy”. *Journal of Experimental Political Science* 5.2, pp. 73–87
- Ross Mittiga (2022). “Political Legitimacy, Authoritarianism, and Climate Change”. *American Political Science Review* 116.3, pp. 998–1011