

The Politics and Policy of Climate Change and Sustainability

GV4L2

2022 Michaelmas Term

Lecture: 10.00–11.00, Tuesdays, PAN.2.01

Seminar: 15.30–17.00, Tuesdays, OLD.1.29

Instructor: Michael Lerner

CBG 4.21

m.h.lerner@lse.ac.uk

Office hours: TBD

Schedule appointments on the LSE Student Hub

Course Description

This course introduces students to the political dynamics underlying environmental governance and investigates how politics and policy shape the pace of sustainable transitions, attempts to mitigate climate change, and the struggle to adapt to a more uncertain climate.

The course provides a survey of core and emerging topics in environmental politics, including climate obstruction, environmental authoritarianism, and the governance of geoengineering. A unifying theme of the course will be its frequent attention to the political economy of climate (in)action. The course will also offer foundational instruction in research design and the use of the comparative method to describe and explain variation in environmental politics. This course focuses primarily, but not exclusively, on domestic environmental politics in advanced industrialized democracies.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- **Unpack** the political problems posed by climate change and their implications for climate and sustainability policy
- **Construct** and apply comparative research designs for evaluating causal claims
- **Summarize** the political dynamics that drive variation in climate and natural resource governance
- **Diagnose** the political economy of support and opposition to specific climate change and sustainability policies
- **Prescribe** and justify policy interventions to accelerate sustainability transitions

Course structure

The course is listed as an optional paper for the MSc in Public Policy and Administration, MSc in Public Administration and Government, MSc in Regulation, MSc in Comparative Politics, and MSc in Environment and Development. It consists of ten seminars and ten lectures in Michaelmas Term.

The first three weeks of the course focus on the conceptual foundation for climate politics, exploring different understandings of climate change, obstacles to climate action, and ways in

which policy interventions can accelerate sustainability transitions. The following weeks center on advocacy for and against climate action, climate policymaking across political institutions and regimes, and considerations of trade-offs and spillovers in climate and sustainability policy. We end the course with a consideration of five ongoing and emerging issues in climate policy.

Preparation for each session

To prepare for the seminars, it is essential to read all of the required readings. The required readings for each week consist of a mix of academic and popular press articles. In addition to the required readings, there is a list of optional readings that students may choose to read to further develop their knowledge of the topic.

Assessment

Students will be required to write two comparative blog posts (one of which is assessed) and an assessed research paper. The assessed blog post counts for 20% of the final mark and the assessed research paper counts for 80% of the final mark. Students must also submit an unassessed research paper to aid the learning process.

The comparative blog posts consist of a comparison of two institutions or policies that illustrate or challenge theories from the required readings of the current week. In addition to other marking criteria (see Department of Government MSc marking criteria), the effective use of empirical examples is highly valued. Each blog post must be 750 words in length and submitted by 5 pm the night before the lecture. Students will submit two blog posts in total, one during the first five weeks of the term and one during the last five weeks of the term. At the end of the term, students will select one of their two blog posts to be assessed. Students will receive brief feedback on both blog posts prior to selecting their best work for summative assessment. Students must submit at least one blog post. Students who fail to submit any blog posts will be awarded a Zero Incomplete for the course and cannot be awarded the degree until they submit the work at resit.

For the assessed research paper, students will produce a policy report. Students will select an industrial sector and jurisdiction of their choice (e.g., steel production in Sweden, rare earth mining in Bolivia) and 1) diagnose the role of politics and policy in shaping the pattern and current trajectory of resource use and 2) identify and critically assess possible policy interventions to accelerate transitions to sustainability. Successful analyses will combine the substantive and methodological content of the course with country- and sector-specific knowledge to produce feasible, strategically plausible, and meaningful strategies for moving toward sustainable and climate-compatible economic production. The report will be 3000 words in length and is due on the first day of the January exam period.

Students will also be required to submit a formative (unassessed) detailed outline of at least 3 pages in length describing their plans for the policy report. The outline will consist of an abstract and main facts, claims, quotes, figures, and citations for each section and subsection. The outline will be due at the end of Week 6.

Late submissions of assessed work will be penalized as per Department of Government policy (5% for every 24hrs, up to 5 days). The essay deadline will only be extended under exceptional circumstances, such as documented family or medical emergencies. Students experiencing such

circumstances must submit an extension request form. Details on late submissions and the extension request form can be found at <https://www.lse.ac.uk/social-policy/Current-Students/Assessment-Coursework-and-Examinations>.

Key Dates and Deadlines

- 24 February 2023: Formative outline due at 5.00 pm
- 31 March 2023: Submit one of two comparative blog posts for assessment by 5.00 pm
- 2 May 2023: Assessed research paper due by 5.00 pm

Course Schedule

Week 1	The many causes of climate change (OL)
Week 2	Switching paradigms: Toward sustainable development (OL)
Week 3	Accelerating transitions to sustainability
Week 4	The climate obstruction movement
Week 5	Professional and grassroots environmental advocacy
Week 6	<i>Reading week</i>
Week 7	Climate policymaking across political parties, institutions, and regimes
Week 8	Navigating trade-offs and spillovers in climate change and sustainability policy
Week 9	The politics of energy subsidies and carbon pricing
Week 10	Grand gestures or grandstanding? Net-zero commitments and ESG investing
Week 11	Geoengineering: Break glass in case of emergency?

(OL) There will be two additional lectures on methodology posted online in the first two weeks. The content of these lectures will introduce students to 1) concepts and measurement in political science and 2) research design.

Week 1: The many causes of climate change

Why is climate change (still) happening? How “big” of a problem is it? We will place the climate change in the broader context of unsustainable resource use, consider perspectives on the causes of climate change, and examine the roots of climate inaction.

Required readings

- Stoddard, Isak et al. “Three decades of climate mitigation: Why haven’t we bent the global emissions curve?” *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 46 (2021): 653-689. [Link](#)
- Watkins, Michael D. and Bazerman, Max H. “Predictable surprises: The disasters you should have seen coming.” *Harvard Business Review*. April (2003). [Link](#)
- Harford, Tim and Andrew Wright. “That turn to Pascagoula.” *Cautionary Tales with Tim Harford*. Podcast. July 10 (2020). [Link](#)

Optional readings

- Tollefson, Jeff. “The hard truths of climate change—by the numbers.” *Nature*. September 18 (2019). [Link](#)
- Turner, Graham and Cathy Alexander. "Limits to Growth was right. New research shows we're nearing collapse." *The Guardian*. 2 September (2014). [Link](#)
- Carter, Neil. “The environment as a policy problem.” in *The Politics of the Environment: Ideas, Activism, Policy*. Cambridge University Press (2018). Chapter 7. [Link](#)
- Bernauer, Thomas. "Climate change politics." *Annual Review of Political Science* 16 (2013): 421–448. [Link](#)
- Beiser-McGrath, Liam F. 2022. “COVID-19 led to a decline in climate and environmental concern: evidence from UK panel data.” *Climatic Change* 174.3–4 (2022). [Link](#)

Week 2: Switching paradigms: Toward sustainable development

What is carbon lock-in? Is sustainable development a viable alternative or just an excuse for business-as-usual? We will discuss climate action from a systems thinking perspective, considering the dynamics of carbon lock-in and tipping points in the effort to transition toward sustainability.

Required readings

- Seto, Karen C., et al. “Carbon lock-in: Types, causes, and policy implications.” *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 41 (2016): 425-452. [Link](#)
- Carter, Neil. “Sustainable Development, Ecological Modernisation and Green Growth.” in *The Politics of the Environment: Ideas, Activism, Policy*. Cambridge University Press (2018). Chapter 8. [Link](#)
- Kirshnan, Mekala et al. “The net-zero transition: What it would cost, what it could bring.” McKinsey Global Institute. January (2022). [Link](#)

Optional readings

- Beisner, Beatrix E., Daniel T Haydon, and Kim Cuddington. “Alternative stable states in ecology.” *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 1.7 (2003): 376–382. [Link](#)
- Bernstein, Steven, and Matthew Hoffmann. “Climate politics, metaphors and the fractal carbon trap.” *Nature Climate Change* 9.12 (2019): 919-925. [Link](#)
- Westley, Frances et al. “Tipping toward sustainability: Emerging pathways of transformation.” *AMBIO* 40.7 (2011): 762–780. [Link](#)
- Lélé, Sharachandra M. “Sustainable Development: A critical review.” *World Development* 19.6 (1991): 607–621. [Link](#)
- Hall, Peter A. “Policy paradigms, social learning, and the state: The case of economic policymaking in Britain.” *Comparative Politics* 25.3 (1993): 275–296. [Link](#)

Week 3: Accelerating transitions to sustainability

What strategies are there for accelerating the transition to sustainability? Why do some strategies succeed when others fail? We will discuss interventions for sustainability transitions, the role of commitment and sequencing, and potential failure points along the way.

Required readings

- Levin, K., Cashore, B., Bernstein, S. & Auld, G. Overcoming the tragedy of super wicked problems: constraining our future selves to ameliorate global climate change. *Policy Sciences*. 45.2 (2012): 123–152. [Link](#)
- Pahle, M. et al. Sequencing to ratchet up climate policy stringency. *Nature Climate Change* 8.10 (2018): 861–867. [Link](#)
- Farmer, J. D. et al. Sensitive intervention points in the post-carbon transition. *Science* 364. 6436 (2019): 132–134. [Link](#)

Optional readings

- Meadows, Donella. “Leverage points: Places to intervene in a system.” The Sustainability Institute (1999). [Link](#)
- Parris, Thomas M., and Robert W. Kates. “Characterizing a sustainability transition: Goals, targets, trends, and driving forces.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 100.14 (2003): 8068-8073. [Link](#)
- Kates, Robert W., and Thomas M. Parris. “Long-term trends and a sustainability transition.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 100.14 (2003): 8062-8067. [Link](#)
- Nohrstedt, Daniel. "When do disasters spark transformative policy change and why?" *Policy and Politics* 50.3 (2022): 425-441. [Link](#)

Week 4: The climate obstruction movement

Who opposes climate action, and why? We discuss the actors in the climate obstruction movement, their motivations and responses to climate policy proposals, and what governments can do to overcome this opposition.

Required readings

- Upin, Catherine. *Climate of Doubt* (film). PBS Frontline (2012): Episode 21. [Link](#) [[YouTube Link](#)]
- Meckling, Jonas, and Jonas Nahm. “Strategic state capacity: How states counter opposition to climate policy.” *Comparative Political Studies* 55.3 (2021): 493–523. [Link](#)
- Colgan, Jeff D., Jessica F. Green, and Thomas N. Hale. “Asset revaluation and the existential politics of climate change.” *International Organization* 75.2 (2021): 586-610. [Link](#)

Optional readings

- Brulle, Robert J. and Riley E. Dunlap. “A sociological view of the effort to obstruct action on climate change.” *Footnotes* 49.3 (2021). [Link](#)
- Meckling, Jonas. “Oppose, support, or hedge? Distributional effects, regulatory pressure, and business strategy in environmental politics.” *Global Environmental Politics* 15.2 (2015): 19–37. [Link](#)
- Kennard, Amanda. “The enemy of my enemy: When firms support climate change regulation.” *International Organization* 74.2 (2020): 187–221. [Link](#)
- Cory, Jared, Michael Lerner, and Iain Osgood. “Supply chain linkages and the extended carbon coalition.” *American Journal of Political Science* 65.1 (2021): 69–87. [Link](#)
- Lerner, Michael and Iain Osgood. “Across the boards: Explaining firm support for climate policy.” *British Journal of Political Science* (2022). [Link](#)

Week 5: Professional and grassroots environmental advocacy

Who is pushing for climate action, and how? We will discuss the role and function of environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the strengths and weaknesses of different advocacy strategies and tactics, and consider the relationship between grassroots and professional environmental advocates.

Required reading

- Carter, Neil. “Environmental groups.” in *The Politics of the Environment: Ideas, Activism, Policy*. Cambridge University Press (2018). Chapter 6. [Link](#)
- Hoberg, George. *The Resistance Dilemma: Place-Based Movements and the Climate Crisis*. The MIT Press (2021). Chapter 1. [Link](#)
- Pacheco-Vega, Raul, and Amanda Murdie. “When do environmental NGOs work? A test of the conditional effectiveness of environmental advocacy.” *Environmental Politics* 30.1–2 (2020): 180–201. [Link](#)

Optional reading

- Hadden, Jennifer. *Networks in Contention: The Divisive Politics of Climate Change*. Cambridge University Press (2015). Chapter 1. [Link](#)
- Longhofer, Wesley et al. “NGOs, INGOs, and environmental policy reform, 1970–2010.” *Social Forces* 94.4 (2016): 1743–1768. [Link](#)
- Speece, Darren Frederick. *Defending Giants: The Redwood Wars and the Transformation of American Environmental Politics*. University of Washington Press (2017). Introduction. [Link](#)
- Sarah S. Stroup, Wendy H. Wong. *The Authority Trap*. Cornell University Press (2017). Chapter 1. [Link](#)
- Zhuang, Hao, John A. Zinda, and James P. Lassoie. “‘Crouching Tiger, Hidden Power’: A 25-year Strategic Advocacy Voyage of an Environmental NGO in China.” *The Journal of Environment & Development* 31.4 (2022): 331–351. [Link](#)

Week 6: Reading week (no class)

Week 7: Climate policymaking across political parties, institutions, and regimes

How do political institutions affect resources, capacity, and political will for climate action? We will discuss the role of parties, elections and corporatism, perspectives on authoritarian environmentalism, and strategies for leveraging institutions for sustainability.

Required reading

- von Stein, Jana. “Democracy, autocracy, and everything in between: How domestic institutions affect environmental protection.” *British Journal of Political Science* 52.1 (2020): 339–357. [Link](#)
- Meckling, Jonas et al. “Why nations lead or lag in energy transitions.” *Science* 378.6615 (2022): 31–33. [Link](#)
- Carter, Neil. “Party politics and the environment.” in *The Politics of the Environment: Ideas, Activism, Policy*. Cambridge University Press (2018). Chapter 5. [Link](#)

Optional reading

- Finnegan, Jared J. “Institutions, climate change, and the foundations of long-term policymaking.” *Comparative Political Studies* 55.7 (2022): 1198–1235. [Link](#)
- Healy, Andrew, and Neil Malhotra. “Myopic voters and natural disaster policy.” *American Political Science Review* 103.3 (2009): 387–406. [Link](#)
- Dubash, Navroz K. et al. “National climate institutions complement targets and policies.” *Science* 374.6568 (2021): 690–693. [Link](#)
- Beeson, Mark. “Coming to terms with the authoritarian alternative: The implications and motivations of China’s environmental policies.” *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies* 5.1 (2018): 34–46. [Link](#)
- Gilley, Bruce. “Authoritarian environmentalism and China’s response to climate change.” *Environmental Politics* 21.2 (2012): 287–307. [Link](#)
- Lo, Kevin. “How authoritarian is the environmental governance of China?” *Environmental Science & Policy* 54 (2015): 152-159. [Link](#)
- Doyle, Timothy, and Adam Simpson. “Traversing more than speed bumps: Green politics under authoritarian regimes in Burma and Iran.” *Environmental Politics* 15.5 (2006): 750–767. [Link](#)

Week 8: Navigating trade-offs and spillovers in climate change and sustainability policy

How does climate action in one jurisdiction affect decisions and outcomes elsewhere? Which factors accelerate the spread of pro-environmental policies and which minimize undesirable spillovers across jurisdictions and sectors? We will discuss the role of interdependence, telecoupling, and trade-offs in climate and sustainability policy.

Required reading

- Liu, Jianguo, et al. “Framing sustainability in a telecoupled world.” *Ecology and Society* 18.2 (2013). [Link](#)
- Meckling, Jonas. “Governing renewables: Policy feedback in a global energy transition.” *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 37.2 (2018): 317–338. [Link](#)
- You will be assigned one of the following:
 - Fuchs, Richard, Calum Brown, and Mark Rounsevell. “Europe’s Green Deal offshores environmental damage to other nations.” *Nature* 586 (2020): 671-673. [Link](#)
 - Urbina, Ian. “Fish farming is feeding the globe. What’s the cost for locals?” *New Yorker*. March 1 (2021). [Link](#)
 - Fault Lines. “Conflicted: The fight over Congo’s minerals.” Al Jazeera English. Video. March 3 (2016). [Link](#)
 - Storrow, Benjamin. “As turbines rise, small-scale fishermen have the most to lose.” *E&E News*. October 14 (2021). [Link](#)

Optional reading

- Baldwin, Elizabeth, Sanya Carley, and Sean Nicholson-Crotty. “Why do countries emulate each other’s policies? A global study of renewable energy policy diffusion.” *World Development* 120 (2019): 29-45. [Link](#)
- Green, Fergus. “Anti-fossil fuel norms.” *Climatic Change* 150.1–2 (2018): 103–116. [Link](#)
- Sommerer, Thomas, and Sijeong Lim. “The environmental state as a model for the world? An analysis of policy repertoires in 37 countries.” *Environmental Politics* 25.1 (2015): 92–115. [Link](#)
- Perkins, Richard, and Eric Neumayer. “Does the ‘California effect’ operate across borders? Trading- and investing-up in automobile emission standards.” *Journal of European Public Policy* 19.2 (2012): 217–237. [Link](#)
- Nguyen, Quynh, and Edmund Malesky. 2021. “Fish or steel? New evidence on the environment-economy trade-off in developing Vietnam.” *World Development* 147: 105603. [Link](#)
- Downing, Andrea S. et al. “When the whole is less than the sum of all parts – Tracking global-level impacts of national sustainability initiatives.” *Global Environmental Change* 69 (2021): 102306. [Link](#)

Week 9: The politics of energy subsidies and carbon pricing

Why do governments still subsidize fossil fuels? How much can be expected from proposals to price greenhouse gas emissions? We will discuss the logics of energy subsidies and strategies for addressing equity, durability, and stringency in carbon pricing schemes.

Required reading

- Breetz, Hanna, Matto Mildemberger, and Leah Stokes. “The political logics of clean energy transitions.” *Business and Politics* 20.4 (2018): 492-522. [Link](#)
- Rabe, Barry G. *Can We Price Carbon?* MIT Press (2018). Chapter 3. [Link](#)
- Secretary of State for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy. *Powering Our Net Zero Future*. Government of the United Kingdom. Energy White Paper (2020). Introduction and Chapter 2. [Link](#)

Optional reading

- Stokes, Leah C. *Short Circuiting Policy: Interest Groups and the Battle over Clean Energy and Climate Policy in the American States*. Oxford University Press (2020). Chapter 1. [Link](#)
- Timperley, Jocelyn. “Why fossil fuel subsidies are so hard to kill.” *Nature*. October 20 (2021). [Link](#)
- Green, Jessica F. “Does carbon pricing reduce emissions? A review of ex-post analyses.” *Environmental Research Letters* 16.4 (2021): 43004. [Link](#)
- Mahdavi, Paasha, Cesar B. Martinez-Alvarez, and Michael L. Ross. “Why do governments tax or subsidize fossil fuels?” *The Journal of Politics* 84.4 (2022): 2123–2139. [Link](#)

Week 10: Grand gestures or grandstanding? Net-zero commitments and ESG investing

What makes a commitment to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions credible? Will commitments to divest from environmentally-irresponsible firms make a meaningful difference? We will discuss the peril and promise of net-zero commitments and the debate over ESG (environmental, social, and governance) investing.

Required reading

- Fankhauser, Sam et al. “The meaning of net zero and how to get it right.” *Nature Climate Change* 12.1 (2022): 15–21. [Link](#)
- Piu, Stefano. 2020. *ESG Investing: What does the Research Say?* Man Institute. Technical Report. [Link](#)
- Lilliston, Ben. *Behind the Curtain of the JBS Net Zero Pledge*. Institute for Agriculture & Trade Policy (IATP). October 21 (2021). [Link](#)

Optional reading

- Green, Jessica et al. “Transition, hedge, or resist? Understanding political and economic behavior toward decarbonization in the oil and gas industry.” *Review of International Political Economy* (2021): 1–28. [Link](#)
- Rogelj, Joeri, et al. “Net-zero emissions targets are vague: three ways to fix.” *Nature* 591.7850 (2021): 365-368. [Link](#)
- Lewis, Simon. “The climate crisis can’t be solved by carbon accounting tricks.” *The Guardian*. March 3 (2021). [Link](#)
- Marsh, Alastair. “Banks try quiet quitting on net zero.” *Bloomberg* October 14 (2022). [Link](#)
- Mackintosh, James. “Why the sustainable investment craze is flawed.” *The Wall Street Journal* January 23 (2022). [Link](#)
- Ameli, Nadia, Sumit Kothari and Michael Grubb. “Misplaced expectations from climate disclosure initiatives.” *Nature Climate Change* 11 (2021): 917-924. [Link](#)
- Katz-Rosene, Ryan M. and Peter Andrée. “Corporate social responsibility.” *The EcoPolitics Podcast*. Podcast. Season 1, Episodes 13 and 14. [Guests Rory McAlpine and Hamish van der Ven] [[Link to Episode 13](#)] [[Link to Episode 14](#)]

Week 11: Geoengineering: Break glass in case of emergency?

What role could and should carbon capture play in climate action? How does the prospect of geoengineering affect other efforts to mitigate climate change and unsustainable resource use? We will discuss the contribution and limits of carbon capture and carbon offsets, as well as the potential consequences of more vigorous approaches to geoengineering.

Required reading

- Rayner, Steve, et al. “The Oxford principles.” *Climatic Change* 121.3 (2013): 499-512. [Link](#)
- Muffett, Carroll and Steven Feit. “Fuel to the fire: How geoengineering threatens to entrench fossil fuels and accelerate the climate crisis.” *The Center for International Environmental Law* (2019). [Link](#)
- Joppa, Lucas et al. “Microsoft’s million-tonne CO₂-removal purchase – lessons for net zero.” *Nature* 597 (2021). [Link](#)

Optional reading

- Johnson, Jeff. “Capturing carbon: Can it save us?” *Chemical & Engineering News*. 97.8 (2019). [Link](#)
- Wagner, Gernot. “We need to talk about geoengineering.” *Project Syndicate*. September 22 (2021). [Link](#)
- Dunleavy, Haley. “An indigenous group’s objection to geoengineering spurs a debate about social justice in climate science.” *Inside Climate News*. July 7 (2021). [Link](#)
- Sapinski, J.P., H.J. Buck, and A. Malm. 2020. *Has It Come to This?: The Promises and Perils of Geoengineering on the Brink*. Rutgers University Press. [Link](#)
- Morgan, Abi. “These trees are not what they seem.” *Bloomberg Storylines*. Film. April 20 (2021). [Link](#)