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

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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    | Reading week |
| 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


Optional readings

- Turner, Graham and Cathy Alexander. "Limits to Growth was right. New research shows we're nearing collapse." The Guardian. 2 September (2014). 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


Optional readings

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

Optional readings
- 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

Optional readings
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

Optional reading
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


Optional reading

- Finnegan, Jared J. “Institutions, climate change, and the foundations of long-term policymaking.” *Comparative Political Studies* 55.7 (2022): 1198–1235. 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**

- You will be assigned one of the following:
  - Storrow, Benjamin. “As turbines rise, small-scale fishermen have the most to lose.” *E&E News*. October 14 (2021). [Link](#)

**Optional reading**

- 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

Optional reading
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

Optional reading
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

Optional reading