

POL 300: International Climate Change Politics

Forrest Owens

Fall/Winter/Spring Quarter, 20XX

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Office Hours: W 9-11am

Office: Kerr Hall 568

Class Hours: MW 8-9:20am

Classroom: Wellman Hall 109

Course Summary

According to the executive director of the UN Environmental Program (UNEP), Inger Andersen, “Climate change is no longer a future problem, it is a ‘now’ problem”. Yet, governments, markets, and individuals are struggling to both adapt to and mitigate climate change. This course explores how climate change disrupts political society and investigates how governments, economies, and individuals respond both domestically and internationally.

The course is divided into 3 distinct, but closely related sections. The first introduces key ways to think about politics of climate change. We will discuss collective action, distributive conflict, and ethical arguments. The second section will focus on how political and economic institutions both affect and are affected by climate change. The third module will examine various policies to combat climate change.

1 Learning Objectives

1. What is climate change? How do we know that the climate is changing?
2. What aspects of politics and economics make climate change so difficult to address?
3. How does climate change affect developed countries and developing countries differently?
4. How can we effectively address climate change? How would an economist address the problem compared to a political scientist?

Textbooks/Materials

- There are no required materials for purchase for this course. You will notice that some classes require a book chapter. You will find copies of these posted on the Canvas page.

Policy on Late/Missing Assignments

- All late assignments without a legitimate excuse will be graded down 10% of the total points for every day late, including Saturday and Sunday. If an assignment is due on Tuesday and you turn it in on Wednesday, the highest possible grade you can achieve is a 90%. If you turn in the assignment on Thursday, the highest possible grade you can achieve is an 80%, etcetera. If you need to miss an exam or turn in an assignment late due to illness, personal emergency, or other serious circumstances, please contact me as soon as possible.

2 Expectations

- This course is designed to be an upper-level seminar on international climate change politics. This comes with a significant workload as well as an intensive writing requirement. You are expected to engage with the current scholarship surrounding climate change politics and offer credible explanations for why addressing climate change is difficult.

3 Course Requirements

Your grade will be based on the following components: (1) participation (15%), (2) midterm exam (25%), (3) group project (20%), (4) research proposal and annotated bibliography (10%), and (5) final paper (30%). There may be extra credit opportunities, but no guarantees.

3.1 Participation (15%)

- You are expected to participate in class discussions (in a respectful manner).
- I recognize that speaking up in class may make some students nervous. I encourage you to participate as best as you can. Because some students may be less comfortable speaking every class, each class will have a Qualtrics link with a question. You *must* respond to this question before class ends to receive attendance credit
- You may skip 2 classes without any penalty.
- Please email me if you are sick or cannot attend class due to some unforeseen circumstance. You will not be penalized for missing any class due to an excused absence
- After the two permitted absences, each additional unexcused absence will reduce your participation grade by 5 percentage points

3.2 Midterm (25%)

- The midterm will be an in-class, pen-and-paper exam. It will include multiple choice and short-answer questions.
- There will be a review class before the midterm.

3.3 Group Project (20%)

- During the first class you will fill out a questionnaire designed to gauge your specific interests in climate politics and then be placed in a group to give a presentation on this topic at the end of the term.
- In this group project, you will give a short policy-oriented presentation focused on your topic. This presentation must have policy recommendations. For example, if your group is discussing how climate change influences conflict, you must then propose solutions for mitigating these conflicts.
- You must use some data analysis in this assignment. I will be showing examples in R, but you may use other tools if you like (Excel, Python, etc.)
- The goal of this assignment is to learn to critically examine how different actors impact climate change and how climate change impacts them.
- There will be graded progress checks for this assignment to ensure your group is making satisfactory progress
- The rubric and exact length of presentations will be released later in the course.

3.4 Research Proposal and Annotated Bibliography (10%)

- This should be a short document that lays out your research question, what you view as the major scholarly answer(s) to this question, and your empirical strategy for examining this research question. My thinking is that this project could build upon the question or topic you identified for your group presentation, but it would broaden out the topic either in terms of scope or case material (e.g., make the question larger, include another case study, etc). Please reach out in advance if you're not sure you have an appropriate proposal topic.
- A big part of your early research and reading should be focused on defining your research question in a sharp or "crisp" manner and then identifying the scholarly literature that addresses that question. Essentially, you want to have your research question short enough to be explained in an elevator.
- Your research question should address your particular case as well as broader theories.
- This final paper will require data analysis, so you should identify what statistical technique you would like to use and why. Please include your dependent, independent, and control variables. Come see me if you have any questions about this.
- In addition to the proposal, you should include a short annotated bibliography of 6-8 academic articles that you will use in the paper. For each article you should identify its research question, their argument, their conclusion, and how you will use the article in your paper.

3.5 Final Research Paper (30%)

- This final paper will be an original research paper on a topic of your choosing related to international climate change politics. You may pick whichever topic you like, but make

sure it is well focused. For example, investigating whether carbon taxes increase support for right-wing candidates is appropriate. Conversely, investigating whether carbon taxes influence conflict is too broad.

- Your paper will be evaluated by the clarity of your argument, how well you engage with the literature on this topic, and the quality of your data analysis.
- Your final paper should have some data analysis component such as estimating a regression or writing about descriptive statistics.
- The paper must be 12-15 pages long and contain at least 10 academic citations.
- Your final paper is due on the day of our scheduled final exam.
- This paper will be useful as a potential writing sample for graduate schools.
- More information (with a detailed rubric) will be given later in the course.

Grading Scale

- 93–100 = A
- 90–92.99 = A-
- 87–89.99 = B+
- 83–86.99 = B
- 80–82.99 = B-
- 77–79.99 = C+
- 73–76.99 = C
- 70–72.99 = C-
- 67–69.99 = D+
- 63–66.99 = D
- 60–62.99 = D-
- Below 60 = F

Office Hours

Office hours are when I set aside two hours each week to answer any questions you may have. Office hours are also:

- An opportunity to discuss with your instructor any special needs or challenges you face. If possible, talk to your instructor before the quarter starts or at the beginning of the quarter.

- They are for clarifying information and answering questions from class.
- An opportunity to discuss or get feedback about assignments and tests.
- To share any information about extenuating personal circumstances that may affect your learning and class performance.
- They are an opportunity to discuss academic and/or career goals.
- They are a time to discuss potential research or internship opportunities.
- No appointment is necessary.

Course Policies

Contacting Me

I will do my best to answer any email you send within 24 hours. I will respond Monday-Friday 8am-6pm PST. If you don't hear from me after 24 hours, please email me again! If you email me on the weekend I may not be able to respond until Monday.

Academic Integrity and Honesty

Students are required to comply with UC Davis Code of Academic Conduct. You can find this here: <https://ossja.ucdavis.edu/code-academic-conduct>. The use of ChatGPT/AI-assisted writing is also prohibited according to UCD policy. Papers found to have been written using AI-assisted writing tools will be given a zero.

Accommodations

If you require additional accommodations, please let me know within the first two weeks of the quarter, as well as providing me with the appropriate documentation from the University and the Student Disability Center (SDC).

Schedule

3.6 Thinking About Climate Change

Class 1 Course Introduction

What is this course about? Isn't climate change just a science problem, so why should we study it in a political science class?

- Spiliakos, A. 2026. *Tragedy of the Commons: What It Is & 5 Examples*.

Class 2 Methods

Political science is increasingly using quantitative methods to answer questions about our world. This requires a basic understanding of statistics. You will be asked to apply these skills in your group project and final paper.

- EGAP Methods Guides: (methods.egap.org/guides.html). Read at least:
 - “10 Things to Know About Reading a Regression Table”
 - “10 Things to Know About Causal Inference”
 - “10 Strategies for Figuring Out if X Caused Y”
- Quoß, Franziska, and Lukas Rudolph. 2026. “The Hidden Universe of Operationalizing Natural Experiments: Navigating Extreme Weather.” *The Journal of Politics* 88(3): 1186–1201. **pages 1186-1191 only**

Class 3 Climate Science

How do we know the climate is changing? How does this impact our world?

- Hannah Ritchie and Max Roser (2017). “Carbon dioxide and greenhouse gas emissions”. *Our World in Data*.
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2023), *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report—Summary for Policymakers*, pp. 4–18.
- Steffen, Will, et. al. 2015. “The trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration,” in *The Anthropocene Review* 2 (1): 81-98.

Class 4 Climate Ethics

In the grand scheme of things, we individuals are small. Why then should we do anything about climate change? Do we have any obligation to help? What should governments do, if anything?

- Hayward, T. Climate change and ethics. *Nature Clim Change* 2, 843–848 (2012).
- Maniates, Michael F. 2001. “Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?” *Global Environmental Politics* 1(3): 31–52.
- Michael Franczak and Olufemi O Taiwò. “Here’s how to repay developing nations for colonialism – and fight the climate crisis.” *The Guardian*. 14 January 2022.

Class 5 Climate Change as a Collective Action Problem

Why is climate change so difficult to solve? What prevents people from acting? In this class we examine the classic economic argument explaining why climate change action is so hard.

- Ross, Michael L.. “The New Political Economy of Climate Change.” *World Politics* 77 (2025): 155 - 194. **pages 155-165 only**.
- Keohane & Victor. (2016). “Cooperation and discord in global climate policy.” *Nature Climate Change*. 570–575.
- Kennard and Schnakenberg. 2023. “Comment: Global Climate Policy and Collective Action.” *Global Environmental Politics* (Note that this is a response to Aklin and Mildemberger 2020, which is assigned later in the course)

Class 6 Collective Action or Distributive Conflict?

Why is climate change so difficult to solve? Some disagree with the classical collective action argument and instead believe that climate change creates distributional conflicts...what does that mean? How does this argument differ from collective action?

- Ostrom, Elinor. 2015. *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1
- Aklin, Michaël, and Matto Mildenerberger. 2020. "Prisoners of the Wrong Dilemma: Why Distributive Conflict, Not Collective Action, Characterizes the Politics of Climate Change." *Global Environmental Politics* 20(4): 4–27.
- Hovi, Jon, Detlef F. Sprinz, Håkon Sælen, and Arild Underdal. 2019. "The Club Approach: A Gateway to Effective Climate Co-Operation?" *British Journal of Political Science* 49 (3): 1071–96. **Optional Reading**

3.7 The Effect of Climate Change on Politics and Economics

Class 7 Climate Politics in Developed Countries

How does climate change impact developed countries? These countries have the capacity to deal with climate change, so why don't they?

- Bernauer, Thomas. 2013. "Climate Change Politics." *Annual Review of Political Science* 16(1): 421–48.
- Harrison, K., & Sundstrom, L. M. (2007). The comparative politics of climate change. *Global Environmental Politics*, 7(4), 1-18. **Optional Reading**
- Mildenerberger, Matto. 2020. *Carbon Captured: How Business and Labor Control Climate Politics*. Cambridge: MIT Press. **chapter 5 only**

Class 8 Climate Politics in Developing Countries

Climate change is incredibly damaging to developing countries. These countries generally have little capacity to prevent climate change or to adapt to its effects, yet these countries contributed the least towards causing climate change. How does this affect these countries?

- **International Organization for Migration. 2024. "Chapter 7" in World Migration Report.**
- Guy Grossman, Audrey Sacks, Alice Z. Xu. 2026. The Politics of Climate Change in the Developing World. *Annual Review of Political Science* 29:101-126.
- Ahlerup, Pelle, Aksel Sundström, Sverker C. Jagers, and Martin Sjöstedt. 2024. "Climate Shocks, Regional Favoritism and Trust in Leaders: Insights from Droughts in Africa." *World Development* 183: 106751.

Class 9 In-person midterm

Class 10 The Paris Climate Agreement

How did we get to Paris? What makes this agreement different from the climate agreements of the past? Why is the Paris Agreement designed the way it is?

- Falkner, R. (2016), The Paris Agreement and the new logic of international climate politics. *International Affairs*, 92: 1107-1125.
- Rowan, Sam S. 2025. "From Gridlock to Ratchet: Conditional Cooperation on Climate Change." *International Organization* 79(2): 257–80.

- Vanhala, Lisa, and Cecilie Hestbaek. 2016. "Framing Climate Change Loss and Damage in UNFCCC Negotiations." *Global Environmental Politics* 16(4): 111–29. **Optional Reading**

Class 11 International Climate Change Governance Complex

We know that climate change is hard to solve and it likely takes collaboration across countries, but what does this collaboration look like? What makes up the climate regime?

- Clark, R. and Zucker, N. (2024), *Climate Cascades: IOs and the Prioritization of Climate Action*. *American Journal of Political Science*, 68: 1299-1314.
- Keohane, Robert O., and David G. Victor. 2011. "The Regime Complex for Climate Change." *Perspectives on Politics* 9(1): 7–23.
- Bulkeley, Harriet et al. 2012. "Governing Climate Change Transnationally: Assessing the Evidence from a Database of Sixty Initiatives." *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 30(4): 591–612. **Optional Reading**

Class 12 Firms and Industry

How do firms and industries influence climate action? Do they influence climate action at all? How do firms and industries relate to collective action and distributive conflict?

- Kennard, Amanda. 2020. "The Enemy of My Enemy: When Firms Support Climate Change Regulation." *International Organization* 74(2): 187–221.
- Genovese, Federica. 2019. "Sectors, Pollution, and Trade: How Industrial Interests Shape Domestic Positions on Global Climate Agreements." *International Studies Quarterly* 63(4): 819–36.
- Colgan, Jeff D., Jessica F. Green, and Thomas N. Hale. 2021. "Asset Revaluation and the Existential Politics of Climate Change." *International Organization* 75(2): 586–610. **Optional Reading**

Class 13 Climate Change and Violent Conflict

Climate change is limiting resources in some regions, but expanding resources in other regions. What does this mean for countries who no longer have an ample supply of the resources they once had? How does this influence violent conflict?

- Sovacool, Benjamin. 2018. "Bamboo Beating Bandits - Conflict, Inequality, and Vulnerability in the Political Ecology of Climate Change Adaptation in Bangladesh." *World Development* 102:183-194.
- Burke, Marshall B., Edward Miguel, Shanker Satyanath, John A. Dykema, and David B. Lobell. 2009. "Warming Increases the Risk of Civil War in Africa." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 106(49): 20670–74.
- Xie, Xiaolan, Mengmeng Hao, Fangyu Ding, Jürgen Scheffran, Tobias Ide, Jean-François Maystadt, Yushu Qian, et al. 2024. "The Impacts of Climate Change on Violent Conflict Risk: A Review of Causal Pathways." *Environmental Research Communications* 6(11): 112002.

Class 14 Climate Change, Elections, and Public Opinion

Research Proposal and Annotated Bibliography due!

If climate change is affecting so many people, this has to influence how people vote, right? When does it influence votes and when does it not?

- Hoffmann, Roman, Raya Muttarak, Jonas Peisker, and Piero Stanig. 2022. "Climate Change Experiences Raise Environmental Concerns and Promote Green Voting." *Nature Climate Change* 12(2): 148–55.
- Hilbig, Hanno, and Sascha Riaz. 2024. "Natural Disasters and Green Party Support." *The Journal of Politics* 86(1): 241–56.
- Baccini, Leonardo, and Lucas Leemann. 2021. "Do Natural Disasters Help the Environment? How Voters Respond and What That Means." *Political Science Research and Methods* 9(3): 468–84. **Optional Reading**

Class 15 Climate Change and Democratic Response

If climate change is influencing conflict, then this could have dramatic consequences for whether a democracy functions well or not? How does climate change influence democracies?

- Beacham, Austin, Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, and Christina J. Schneider. 2026. "Climate Shocks, Political Conflict, and the Resilience of Democracies." *International Studies Quarterly* 70(2): sqag028.
- Gazmararian, Alexander F., and Helen V. Milner. 2025. "Political Cleavages and Changing Exposure to Global Warming." *Comparative Political Studies* 58(9): 1965–99.

3.8 The Political Sustainability of Climate Policy

Class 16 International Climate Finance

One way we can solve the climate crisis is by using foreign aid. What does this look like? Does the aid actually help? When do countries want to give aid?

- Weiler, Florian, Carola Klöck, and Matthew Dornan. 2018. "Vulnerability, Good Governance, or Donor Interests? The Allocation of Aid for Climate Change Adaptation." *World Development* 104: 65–77.
- Bögner, Alexandra, and Gabriele Spilker. 2026. "EU Climate Aid and Trade Interests: Strategy or Byproduct of Closer Ties?" *World Development* 206: 107469.
- Michaelowa, Axel, and Katharina Michaelowa. 2011. "Coding Error or Statistical Embellishment? The Political Economy of Reporting Climate Aid." *World Development* 39(11): 2010–20. **Optional Reading**

Class 17 Climate Backlash

Some people may not be happy about climate policy. These policies can hurt employment opportunities for some and may raise prices for others. How does climate policy create a backlash?

- Stokes, Leah C. 2016. "Electoral Backlash against Climate Policy: A Natural Experiment on Retrospective Voting and Local Resistance to Public Policy." *American Journal of Political Science* 60(4): 958–74.

- Colantone, Italo, Livio Di Leonardo, Yotam Margalit, and Marco Percoco. 2023. "The Political Consequences of Green Policies: Evidence from Italy." *American Political Science Review*: 1–19.

Class 18 Compensation and Coalition-Building

How can governments prevent a backlash against climate policy? What do these policies look like? Would these policies be similar in a developed country and a developing country?

- Bolet, Diane, Fergus Green, and Mikel Gonzalez-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): 1344–59.
- Kono, Daniel. 2020. "Compensating for the Climate: Unemployment Insurance and Climate Change Votes." *Political Studies* 68(1), 167-186.
- Gaikwad, Genovese, and Dustin Tingley. 2022. "Creating Climate Coalitions: Mass Preferences for Compensating Vulnerability in the World's Two Largest Democracies." *American Political Science Review* 116 (4): 1165–83. **Optional Reading**

Class 19 Presentations

Class 20 Presentations